



THE  
COMTE  
DE LA  
MUETTE

BY BERNARD CAPES

PR  
H415  
C72  
A6  
1898

CORNELL  
UNIVERSITY  
LIBRARY



FROM

W. C. Andrae





Cornell University  
Library

The original of this book is in  
the Cornell University Library.

There are no known copyright restrictions in  
the United States on the use of the text.

<http://www.archive.org/details/cu31924013453398>

ADVENTURES  
OF THE  
COMTE DE LA MUETTE  
DURING THE  
REIGN OF TERROR

BY  
BERNARD CAPES



NEW YORK  
DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY

1898



Gift:  
Prof. W. C. Andrae  
27 April, 1942

~~4135~~  
~~D17~~

*Copyright, 1897-1898,*  
BY BERNARD CAPES.

. A725932

University Press:  
JOHN WILSON AND SON, CAMBRIDGE, U. S. A.

TO

R. C.

BEST COUNSELLOR AND HELPMATE.





## CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE WAXWORKS . . . . .	1
II. CITOYENNE CARINNE . . . . .	23
III. THE FOOTPAD . . . . .	38
IV. DES PIERRETTES . . . . .	61
V. LA GRAND' BÊTE . . . . .	75
VI. THE HERD OF SWINE . . . . .	97
VII. THE CHEVALIER DU GUET . . . . .	115
VIII. QUATREMAINS-QUATREPATTES . . . . .	131
IX. THE WILD DOGS . . . . .	151
X. THE AFFAIR OF THE CANDLES . . . . .	165
XI. PYRAMUS AND THISBE . . . . .	183
XII. THE MOUSE-TRAP . . . . .	201
XIII. THE RED CART . . . . .	219
XIV. THE QUARRIES OF MONT-ROUGE . . . . .	243
XV. THE SALAD COURSE . . . . .	273



# The Comte de la Muette

## I

### THE WAXWORKS

ONE morning I awoke in La Bourbe and looked across at Deputy Bertrand as he lay sprawled over his truckle-bed, his black hair like a girl's scattered on the pillow, his eyelids glued to his flushed cheeks, his face, all blossoming with dissipation, set into the expression of one who is sure of nothing but of his own present surrender to nothingness. Beside him were his clothes, flung upon a chair, the tri-colour sash, emblematic stole of his confused ritual, embracing all; and, on a nail in the wall over his head was his preposterous hat, the little *carte de civisme* stuck in its band.

Casimir Bertrand (one time Casimir Bertrand de Pompignan) I had known and been friendly with at Le Plessis. Later he had imbibed theories; had become successively a Lameth, a Feuillant, a Jacobin, — a constitutionalist, a moderate, an extremist; had spouted in the Faubourgs and overflowed in sectional committee-rooms; had finally been elected to represent a corner of the States-

General. I had known him for a pious prig, a coxcomb, a reckless *bon-vivant*. He was always sincere and never consistent; and now at last, in the crisis of his engaging *sans-culottism*, he had persuaded me, a proscribed royalist, to take an advantage of his friendship by lodging with him. Then it was that the driving-force behind his character was revealed to me. It was militant hedonism. Like Mirabeau, he was a strange compound of energy and voluptuousness. He turned altogether on the nerves of excitement. He was like a clock lacking its pendulum, and he would crowd a dozen rounds of the dial into the space of a single hour. Such souls, racing ahead of their judgment, illustrate well the fable of the Hare and the Tortoise; and necessarily they run themselves down prematurely. Casimir was an epicure, with a palate that could joyfully accommodate itself to black bread and garlic; a sensualist, with the power to fly at a word from a hot-bed of pleasure to a dusty desert of debate. Undoubtedly in him (did I make him the mirror to my conscience), and in a certain Crépin, with whom I came subsequently to lodge, and who was of the type only a step lower in the art of self-indulgence, I had an opportunity to see reflected a very serious canker in the national constitution.

Now he opened his eyes as I gazed on him, and shut them again immediately. It was not his habit to be a slug-a-bed, and I recognised that his sleep was feigned. The days of his political influence were each pregnant of astonishing possibilities to

him, and he was too finished an epicure to indulge himself with more than the recuperative measure of slumber,—frothed, perhaps, with a bead of æsthetic enjoyment in the long minute of waiting.

“Casimir!” I called softly; but he pretended not to hear me.

“What, my friend! the sun is shining, and the eggs of the old serpent of pleasure will be hatching in every kennel.”

He opened his eyes at that, fixed and unwinking; but he made no attempt to rise.

“Let them crack the shells and wriggle out,” he said. “I have a fancy they will be a poisonous brood, and that La Bourbe is pleasantly remote from their centres of incubation.”

“Timorous! I would not lose a thrill in this orgy of liberty.”

“But if you lost ——?” he checked himself, pursed his lips, and nodded his head on the pillow.

“Jean-Louis, I saw the Sieur Julien carried to the scaffold last night. He went foaming and raving of a plot in the prisons to release the aristocrats in their thousands upon us. There is an adder to reproduce itself throughout the city! Truly, as you say, the kennels will swarm with it.”

“And many will be bitten? My friend, my friend, there is some dark knowledge in that astute head of yours. And shall I cower at home when my kind are in peril?”

“My faith! we all cower in bed.”

“But I am going out.”

“Be advised!” (He struggled quickly up on

his elbow. His face bore a clammy look in the sunlight.) "Be advised and lie close in your form — like a hare, Jean-Louis — like a hare that hears the distant beaters crying on the dogs. Twitch no whisker and prick not an ear. Take solace of your covert and lie close and scratch yourself, and thank God you have a nail for every flea-bite."

"What ails thee of this day then, morose?"

"What ails this Paris? Why, the Prussians are in Verdun, and the aristocrats must be forestalled."

"But how, Deputy?"

"I do not know. I fear, that is all."

"Well, there lies your sash, — the talisman to such puerile emotions."

"Return to bed, Jean-Louis. It is unwise to venture abroad in a thunderstorm."

"It is unwise to shelter beneath a tree."

"But not a roof-tree. Oh, thou fool! did'st thou not close thine eyes last night on a city fermenting like a pan of dough?"

"Et cette alarme universelle  
Est l'ouvrage d'un moucheron."

"But go your way!" he cried, and scrambled out of bed.

He walked to the little wash-stand with an embarrassed air, and set to preparing our morning cup of chocolate from the mill that stood thereon.

"After all," he said, when the fragrant froth sputtered about his nostrils; "the proper period to any exquisite sensation is death. I dread no termination but that put to an hour of abstinence.

To die with the wine in one's throat and the dagger in one's back — what could kings wish for better?"

He handed me my cup, and sipped enjoyingly at his own.

"I am representative of a constituency," he said, "yet a better judge of wine than of men. The palate and the heart are associated in a common bond. That I would decree the basis of the new religion. 'Tears of Christ!' — it is a vintage I would make Tallien and Manuel and Billaud de Varennes drunk on every day."

He laughed in an agitated manner, and glanced at me over the rim of his cup.

"Go your way, Jean-Louis," he repeated; "and pardon me if I call it the right mule one. But you will walk it, for I know you. And eat your fill of the sweet thistle-flowers before the thorns shall stab your gullet and take all relish from the feast."

"Casimir!" I cried in some black wonder — "this is all the language of a villain or an hysteric —!"

I paused, stared at his twitching face, took up my hat quietly, and left the room.

. . . . .  
A little frost on a foot, or a little blood. What is the significance of either? Once the *bimbelotiers* of the Palais Royal used to manufacture cards of Noël, very pretty and sparkling with rime. That was before the apotheosis of the "Third (or butterfly) State;" and many a time, during the winter of '84, I have seen poor vagrants of the chosen

brood, unwitting yet of the scarlet wings developing underneath their rugged hides, ponder over the fanciful emblems in the shop windows, and then look down with wonder at their own cracked and bleeding toes. To whom, then, could the frost appeal in this dainty guise? Not surely to those who must walk with bare feet? It is all the point of view, said the philosophers. But, they added, blood is warm, and it is well to wear socks of it if you can get no other. Put these on and look again, and you will see differently.

Not just yet, perhaps; and in the meantime the king empties his private purse to buy wood for the freezing people. This will warm them into loyalty while it lasts; and they crawl out of their icy burrows, or gather up their broken limbs on the snow beds, — whereinto they have been ground by the sleds and chariots of the wealthy that rush without warning down the muffled streets, — to build monuments of snow to the glory of their rulers. Then by-and-by these great obelisks melt, and add their quota to the thaw that is overwhelming what the frost has spared.

The red socks! Now, on this wild Sunday of September, when the monuments that bore the names of the good king and queen are collapsed and run away some eight years, the tocsin is pealing with a clamour of triumph from the steeples; for at last the solution of the riddle has been vouchsafed to the "Third State," and it knows that to acquire the right point of view it must wear socks, not of its own blood but of that of the aris-



tocrats, to whom the emblems of Noël were made to appeal.

. . . . .  
All day I felt the pulse of the people, quickening, quickening, — an added five beats to every hour, — with wonder, rage, and, at last, terror maniacal. Paris was threatened; hard-wrung freedom was tottering to its fall.

This Paris was a vessel of wrath on treacherous waters, manned by revolted slaves; the crew under hatches; encompassed by enemies on every side. What remained but to clear the decks for action? — every hero to his post at the vast bulwarks; every son-of-a-sea-cook to remain and poniard the prisoners lest they club their manacles and take their captors in the rear.

At two o'clock the tocsin pealed, — the signal to prepare for the fray. From its first blaring stroke I ceased, it seemed, to be myself. I waived my individuality, and became as much a conscript of the rising tide of passion as a high-perched stone that the wave at last reaches and drags down with the shingle becomes a condition of the general uproar. I made, indeed, no subscription to this fanatical heat of emotion; I was simply involved in it, — to go with it, and perish of it, perhaps, but never to succumb to its disordered sophistries or yield my free soul to its influence. Possibly I had a wild idea, in the midst of sinister forebodings, that a few such as I, scattered here and there, might leaven the ugly mass. But I do not know. Hemmed in by wrath and terror,

thought casts its buoys and sinks into very fathomless depths.

From the Place de Grève, along Pelletier Quay; across the Ponts au Change and St. Michel; westwards by the Rue St. André des Arcs, where a little diversion was caused by a street-singer at whom the crowd took offence, in that he, being an insignificant buffoon, did pelt it with its classic pretentiousness, wagging his coat-tails in contempt thereof ("A bas, Pitou!" they shrieked; "we will dock thee of thy sting and put thee to buzz in a stone bottle!" — and they had him unfrocked in a twinkling and hoisted for punishment); round, with a curve to the south, into the Rue de Bussi; thence, again westwards, along the street of St. Marguerite; finally, weathering the sinister cape of the Abbaye St. Germain, northwards into the Rue St. Benoit and up to the yard entrance of the very prison itself, — such was the long course by which I was borne, in the midst of clamour, hate, and revilings, some dreadful early scenes in the panorama of the Revolution unfolded before my eyes, — scenes crudely limned by crude street artists, splashed and boltered with crimson, horrible for the ghastly applause they evoked.

I saw and I was helpless, — the block about the carriages of the nonjurants; the desperate stroke at the *sans-culotte* that cut the knot of indecision; the crashing panels, the flying and flung priests. One damnable with a sabre split a bald head, that came wavering in my direction, like a melon, and the brains flew like its seeds. I shut my eyes and

thought, Mercy is in right ratio with the hardness of the blow. Strike deep, poor gutter-snipes, if you must strike at all!

Then began the "severe justice of the people."

. . . . .

What was I, poor philosophic *misérable*, but a germ of those germs in that great artery of blood that the revolted system was endeavouring to expel. I saw numbers of my kind thrown forth and mangled in the midst of horrors unspeakable; I was borne helpless to the heart, and was rejected to fly shuddering to remote veins of the prison's circulation, only to return by an irresistible attraction to the central terror. More than once my mad expostulations brought me into perilous notice.

"You have hard wrongs to avenge!" I shrieked; "but at least the form of pleading has been granted you!"

"And these!" cried the killers. "Blood of God! is not Bastille Maillard within there checking the tally of the accursed? Aristocrat art thou!"

They bounded from me to a fresh victim thrust that moment from the door. She came dazed into the flare of the torches, — a white face with umber hair tumbled all about it. Two gloat-ing hounds took her under the arm-pits; a third —

*Ciel! pour tant de rigueur, de quoi suis-je coupable?*

. . . . .

I do not know whither my wanderings tended, or what space of time was covered by them. Sooner or later I was always back at the Abbaye, glutting my soul with assurance of its own wreck, helpless, despite my loathing of it, to resist the attraction. What horror absorbs the moth as it circles round the flame, I thought in those recurrent moments I could understand.

Once, when I returned, an unwonted silence reigned about the place. A few vampire figures, restless, phantasmal, flitted hither and thither in the neighbourhood of the reeking shambles. But the slaughterers and the red ladies of St. Michel were retired, during an interval in the examination, for refreshment. I heard the shrill buzz of their voices all down the Rue St. Benoit and from the wine and lemonade shops opposite the very gates by which I stood.

I looked into the fearful yard. My God! the dead, it seemed, were phosphorescent with the rottenness of an ancient system! Here, there, on all sides they broke the darkness with blots of light like hideous glow-worms,—their hundred white faces the reflectors of as many lamps.

“But it is a brave illumination!” gurgled a voice at my ear.

I glanced aside in loathing. A little old woman, whose lungs barked at every breath, stood near me. She laughed as if she would shake herself into touchwood.

“A brave illumination!” she wheezed,—“the inspiration of the girl La Lune. She was dedi-

cated to the Holy Mother; and her skirt! Oh, *mon Dieu!* but it was of the azure of heaven, and now it is purple as a strangled face; and it slaps on her ankles. But by-and-by she must seek purification, for she is dedicated to the holy Virgin."

"She placed these lamps?"

"She led her sisters to the committee that sits there." (She pointed a gnarled finger. To one side of the dreadful quadrangle a dull glow came melancholy through some tall windows.) "She complained that ladies who would fain enjoy the show were prevented by the darkness. Then to each dead aristocrat they put a lamp. That was a fine courtesy. It is not often one sees such goods brought to market."

A wild cloud of shapes came rushing upon us with brandished weapons and a demon skirl of voices. I thought at first that I must be the object of their fury; but they passed us by, cursing and gesticulating, and drove something amongst them up the yard, and stopped and made a ring about it on the bloody stones. What was it? I had a glimpse of two petrified faces as the little mob swept by, and a queer constriction seized my heart. Then, all in a moment, I was following, crying in my soul that here was something tangible for my abased humanity to lay hold of—some excuse to indulge a passion of self-sacrifice—some claim to a lump of ice at my feet and a lamp at my head. The dead were so calm, the living so besotted. A miserly theft, I thought, to take

another's blood when one's own gluts one's arteries to suffocation.

I looked over the shoulders of the outermost of the group. What horrible cantrip of Fortune had consigned this old barren weed of a man, this white exotic of a girl, to a merciless handling by these demons? The two were in walking dress, and not in the *déshabille* of prisoners. There was a lull in the systematic progress of the butchery. Here, it would seem, was an *entr'acte* designed only to relieve the tedium of waiting.

A half-dozen harpies held the girl. There was a stain of red on her ripe young lip, for I think one of the beasts had struck her; but her face was stubborn with pride. In front of all the old wizened man, who had been released, ran to and fro in an agony of obsequious terror.

"Yes, yes," he quavered, "'t is a luminous sight — an admirable show! They lie like the fallen sticks of rockets, glimmering a dying spark. Is it not so, Carinne? Little cabbage, is it not so?"

He implored her with his feverish eyes.

"They are martyrs!" cried the girl; "and you are a coward!"

"No, no!" he wailed, and wrung his hands; and "My God! she will murder me!" he shrieked.

Suddenly he saw, darted through the ring of ruffians, and caught the breast of my coat with both his hands.

"Monsieur! you have nobility in your face! Tell these good souls that I am a furious patriot and

a good citizen. Monsieur, Monsieur! We walk abroad — we are involved, unwitting, in the *mêlée*. The girl denounces all for pigs and murderers, and, naturally, those who hear take umbrage and force us hither.”

His dry lips vibrated; he danced up and down like a gnat on a window-pane. All the time the women were volubly chattering and the men cursing and pulling. They desired, it seemed, a prologue to the second act of the tragedy; and that was bad art. But then they were as drunk as one could wish.

“Thou art nice and dainty, *citoyenne!*” they shrieked. “See here — thou shalt be *vivandière* to the brave army of avengers! Tap her an aristocratic heart and fill her a canteen that all may drink!”

The beastly proposal was not too gross for the occasion. A man lurched forward with a jeering oath, and I — I sprang to the front too, and took the hound by his gulping throat. There came a great noise about me; I did not relax my hold, and some one rushed into our midst.

“What do you here?” he cried harshly (Casimir’s voice). “Death of God! have you orders to insult and threaten peaceable citizens who walk abroad to see the illuminations?”

With a fierce sweep of his arms he cleared all away in front of him. The act, the gesture, brought him to my side.

“Go — escape!” he whispered frantically. “This, here, I will attend to.”

“You knew, then?” I gasped out; and he fell back from me.

But I released my hold and stood panting. I was at the moment no whit in love with life, but I dreaded by the least stubbornness to precipitate the catastrophe that threatened that half-fainting girl. Her Casimir gave his arm to in a peremptory manner. She clung to him, and he led her stumbling across the yard, the little whimpering pinch-fist scuttling in their wake. The mob spat curses after them, but — this *intermezzo* being no part of its programme — it respected the Deputy’s insignia of office so far as to allow him his perquisite.

Then, with a howl of fury, it turned upon me —

“Accursed! thou dost well to dispute the people’s will!”

“See his fine monseigneur hands, washed white in a bath of milk, while the peasants drank rotten water!”

“He will think to cow us with a look. He cannot disabuse himself of the tradition. Down with the dog of an aristocrat!”

“But if he is Brunswick’s courier, — Brunswick that would dine in Paris on the boiling hearts of patriots!”

I was backing slowly towards the gate as they followed reviling me. What would you? I could not help others; I would take my own destinies in hand. Here, in deadly personal peril, I felt my feet on the good earth once more, and found restoration of my reason in a violence of action.



There was no assistance possible. Paris this night was a menagerie, in which all beasts of prey and of burden were released from restraint to resolve for themselves the question of survival.

In a moment I turned and fled, and half-a-dozen came screaming after me. I gained the gate in advance, and sped down the Rue St. Benoit. One man, lurching from a wineshop, cut at me aimlessly with a notched and bloody sabre; but I evaded him with ease, and he fell into the midst of the pursuers, retarding them a little. I reached the southwest angle of the prison, where the *Place* split up, like the blown corner of a flag, into many little crooked ribbons of streets, and amongst these I dived, racing haphazard, while the red-socks thudded in my wake and my heart in my ribs. Suddenly, turning a corner, I saw the narrow mouth of an alley gape to my left. Into it I went, like a touched worm into its hole, and, swallowed by the blackness, stood still. The feet pounded by; but, sooner or later, I knew the dogs must nose back to pick up the lost scent. Then they would have me nicely in a little *cul de sac*, like a badger in a tub.

I leaned my shoulder — to the wall, as I thought; but the wall gave to my pressure, and I stumbled and went through it with a sliding run, while something flapped to, grievously scoring my shins in its passing. I was on my feet in an instant, however, and then I saw that I had broken, by way of a swing-door, into a little dusty lobby, to one side of which was a wicket and pay-place, and thence a

flight of wooden stairs ran aloft to some chamber from which flowed down a feeble radiance of light.

I pushed through the wicket (not a soul was in the place, it seemed) and went softly and rapidly up the stairs. At the top I came upon a sight that at first astounded, then inspired me.

I was in one of those *salles de spectacle* that were at that time as numerous in Paris as were political clubs, — a wide, low room, with an open platform at its further end for musicians, and, round three of its walls, a roped-in enclosure for figures in wax-work. It was these boweless dolls that caused me my start, and in which I immediately saw my one little chance of salvation.

I went down the row gingerly, on tiptoe. A horn lantern, slung over the stair-head, was the only light vouchsafed this thronged assembly of dummies. Its rays danced weakly in corners, and lent some of the waxen faces a spurious life. A ticket was before each *figure de cire*, — generally, as I hurriedly gathered, a quite indispensable adjunct. I had my desperate plan; but perhaps I was too particular to select my complete double. Here a button, the cut of a collar, were the pregnant conditions of history. The clothes made the man, and Mirabeau had written "Le Tartufe" on the strength of a flowing wig. I saw Necker personating our unhappy monarch in that fatal Phrygian cap that was like the glowing peak of a volcano; stuttering Desmoulins waving a painted twig, his lips inappropriately inseparable; the English Pitt, with a nose blown to a point; Vol-

taire; Rousseau; Beaumarchais — many of the notabilities and notorieties of our own times — and before the last I stopped suddenly.

I would not for the world insult the author of "Figaro;" but it was my distinction to be without any; and in a waxwork the ticket makes the man.

Pierre Augustin was represented pointing a Republican moral — in dress a *pseudo petit-maitre* — at his feet a broken watch. One recalls the incident — at Versailles — when a grand seigneur requests the exhorologist to correct his timepiece for him. "Monsieur, my hand shakes." "*Laissez donc, monsieur!* you belittle your professional skill." Beaumarchais flings the watch on the floor. "*Voilà, monsieur!* it is as I said!"

Now I saw my hope in this figure, and (it was all a matter of moments with me) whipped it up in my arms and ran with it to the end of the platform. A flounce of baize hung therefrom to the floor, and into the hollow revealed by the lifting of this I shot the invertebrate dummy, and then scuttled back to the ropes to take its place.

There were sounds as I did so, — a noise below that petrified me in the position I assumed. My heart seemed to burr like the winding-wheel of a mechanical doll. I pray M. Beaumarchais to forgive me that travesty of a dignified reproof.

A step — that of a single individual — came bounding up the stair. My face was turned in its direction. I tried to look and yet keep my eyes fixed. The dull flapping light seconded my dissemblance; but the occasion braced me like a

tonic, and I was determined to strike, if need were, with all the force of the pugnacious wit I represented.

Suddenly I saw a white, fearful countenance come over the stair-head, — shoulders, legs, a complete form. It was that of an ugly stunted man of fifty, whose knees shook, whose cheeks quivered like a blanc-mange. He ran hither and thither, sobbing and muttering to himself.

“Quick, quick! who? — Mirabeau? A brave thought, a magnificent thought! My God! will they fathom it? I have his brow — his scornful air of insistence. My God, my God! — that I should sink to be one of my own puppets!”

Astounded, I realised the truth. This poltroon — the very proprietor of the show — was in my own actual case, and had hit upon a like way out of his predicament. I saw him seize and trundle the ridiculous presentment of M. Mirabeau to the room end, and then fling it hurriedly down and kick it — the insolent jackass! — under the curtain. I saw him run back and pose himself — with a fatuous vanity even in his terror — as that massive autocrat of the Assembly; and then, with a clap and a roar, I heard at last the hounds of pursuit break covert below and come yelling up the stairs.

I do not think I shook; yet it seemed impossible that they could pass me by. There were one or two amongst them I thought I recognised as Carinne’s captors; but they were all hideous, frantic shapes, elf-locked, malodorous, bestial, and

drunk with blood. They uttered discordant cries as they came scrambling into the room; and by a flickering at the nape of his neck I could see that my fellow-sufferer was unable to control the throaty rising of his agitation. Suddenly a horrible silence befell. One of the intruders, a powerful young ruffian of a malignant jesting humour, put his comrades back and silenced them with an arm. His bloodshot eyes were fascinating poor Mirabeau; slowly he raised a finger and pointed it at the creature. The bubbles seemed to fly up the latter's neck as if his heart were turning into water. It was a terrible moment—then, all at once, the whole room echoed with demon laughter.

“Mother of Christ! what cunning!”

“But, my God! he is a fine libel on the king of patriots!”

“See! the works have not run down. He twitches yet from his last performance!”

“He makes himself a show to the people. He shall be given a lamp in the yard of the Abbaye.”

The figure fell upon its knees with a choking shriek.

“Messieurs! I acted upon my first instinct of preservation! I had no thought, I swear it, to insult the great or to question the majesty of the people. Messieurs, I detest aristocrats and applaud your method of dealing with them. *Merci! merci!* I am a poor exhibitor of waxworks; an excellent patriot and a servant of the public.”

“But that is true!” cried a voice from the stairs. “This is little Tictac, that helped to dec-

orate Louis Capet's chariot with the cockade on the day of the Hôtel de Ville."

The mob grunted over this advocate.

"But he helped a prisoner to escape."

(Was there another, then, in the same plight as myself?)

"Messieurs! he asked the way of me, as any stranger might!"

"*Malepeste!* if thou tell'st us so! But thou hast dared to personate a God!"

"Messieurs, he lent his countenance to me, as ever to the unfortunate."

The answer raised a roar of approbation.

"*Comme il est fin!* take thy goose-skin! and yet we must tax thee somehow."

"Let us destroy this show that he has profaned!"

My heart seemed to shrink into itself. I suffered — I suffered; but fortunately for a few moments only.

With the words on his lips, the fellow that had spoken slashed with his sabre, over the kneeling showman's head, amongst the staring effigies. The whistle of his weapon made me blink. What did it matter? — the end must come now.

It was not as I foresaw. The waxen head spun into the air — the figure toppled against that standing next to it — that against its neighbour — its neighbour against me. I saw what was my cue, and went down in my turn, stiffly, with a dusty flop, twisting to my side as I fell, and hoping that him I was bowling over in due order was rich in padding. Nevertheless I was horribly bruised.

There was a howl of laughter.

“*Mon Dieu!* but five at a blow!” cried the executioner. “This is better than the one to fifty yonder!” and he came running to read the names of those he had overturned.

“Necker! it is right that he should be pictured fallen. Pitt — Beaumarchais! ha, ha, little toad! where are those patriot muskets? in your breeches-pocket? but I will cut them out!”

Now I gave up all for lost. He stepped back to get his distance — there came a crash by the stairway, and the room was plunged in darkness. One of the mob had swung up his weapon over a figure, and had knocked out the lantern with a back-handed blow.

It is the little incidents of life that are prolific as insects. The situation resolved itself into clamour and laughter and a boisterous groping of the company down the black stairway. In a minute the place was silent and deserted.

I lay still, as yet awaiting developments. I could not forget that M. Tictac, as a pronounced patriot, might not honour my confidence. For my escape, it must have been as I supposed. Another victim, eluding the murderers, had drawn them off my scent, and the showman had effected yet a second cross-current. He was indeed fortunate to have kept a whole skin.

Presently I heard him softly stirring and moaning to himself.

“*Misérable!* to have dishonoured my *rôle!* Would *he* have succumbed thus to an accident?

But I am like him — yes, I am like him, for all they may say.”

Their mockery was the wormwood in his cup. He dragged himself to his feet by-and-by, and felt his way across the room to recover his abused idol. Then I would delay no longer. I rose, stepped rapidly to the stair-head, and descended to the street. He heard me, — as I knew by the terrified cessation of his breathing, — and thought me, perhaps, a laggard member of his late company. Anyhow he neither moved nor spoke.

The killers were at their work again. The agonised yells of the victims followed and maddened me. But I was secure from further pursuit, save by the dogs of conscious helplessness.

And one of these kept barking at my heel: “Carinne, that you were impotent to defend! What has become of the child?”



## II

## CITOYENNE CARINNE

IT was my unhappiness in the black springtime of the "Terror" to see my old light acquaintance, the Abbé Michau, jogging on his way to the Place de la Bastille. I pitied him greatly. He had pursued Pleasure so fruitlessly all his days; and into this fatal quagmire had the elusive flame at length conducted him. He sat on the rail of the tumbril — a depressed, puzzled look on his face — between innocence and depravity. Both were going the same road as himself, — the harmless white girl and the besotted priest, who shrunk in terror from giving her the absolution she asked, — and poor Charles divided them.

He was not ever of Fortune's favourites. He would make too fine an art of Epicurism, and he sinned so by rule as to be almost virtuous. I remember him with a half-dozen little axioms of his own concocting, that were after all only morality misapplied: "To know how to forget oneself is to be graduate in the school of pleasure." "Self-consciousness is always a wasp in the peach." "The art of enjoyment is the art of selection." On such as these he founded his creed of conduct; and that procured him nothing but a

barren series of disappointments. He was never successful but in extricating himself from mishaps. The *ravissantes* he sighed after played with and insulted him — though they could never debase his spirit. The dishes he designed lacked the last little secret of perfection. He abhorred untidiness, yet it was a condition of his existence; and he could not carry off any situation without looking like a thief. One further turn of the wheel, and he would have been a saint in a monastery.

I can recall him with some tenderness, and his confident maxims with amusement. That “art of selection” of his I found never so applicable as to the choice of one’s Revolutionary landlord. It was Michau’s *logeur*, I understand, who caused the poor Abbé to be arrested and brought before the tribunal miscalled of Liberty, where the advocacy of the chivalrous Chauveau de la Garde was sufficient only to procure him the last grace of an unproductive appeal. It was the atrocity with whom latterly I lodged who brought me to *my* final pass.

In truth, as the letters of apartments were largely recruited from the *valetaille* of *émigrés*, the need of caution in choosing amongst them was very real. M. le Marquis could not take flight in a panic without scattering some of his fine feathers, — fortunately, indeed, for him sometimes, for they were as sops thrown to the pursuing wolves while he sped on. Then, down would grovel public accusers, police, and committee-men to snap at the fragments; and amongst them Bon Jean, Mon-

sieur's *valet de pied*, would secure his share, perhaps, and set up house with it in one of the meaner faubourgs, and trade profitably therein upon the fears of his lodgers.

Simon Mignard was the last who had the honour to entertain me; and to that horrible little grotesque did I owe my subsequent lodgment in La Petite Force. It was a bad choice, and, with my experience, an unpardonable; but I was taken with a certain humour in the creature that put me off my judgment.

For generally, indeed, this faculty of humour I found to be antipathetic to revolution. It was to be looked upon as a mark of social degeneration. The brute "thrown back" to his primordial state is an animal that takes himself with the most laughterless gravity. He resumes himself corrupt, so to speak, as one resumes the endurance of office full of the rebellious grievance of a holiday. He returns to the primary indulgence of instinct with a debased appetite, and that sense of humour does not accompany him. This is why his prejudices have the force of convictions.

"Citizen Simon," I said one day, "I would put it to you — if revolutionists would reconstitute society by purging the world of the abnormal, should they not offer themselves the first holocausts to their theories?"

"Hey?" he cried, peering over his glasses. His eye-slits were like half-healed wounds; his face was all covered with a grey down, as if he were some old vessel of wrath the Revolution had

produced from its mustiest blood-bin in the cellars where its passions were formerly wont to ferment.

“Hey?” he cried. “But explain, Citizen Thibaut.”

“Why, obviously a primal simplicity cannot be taught by those who, by their own showing, are an essential condition of degeneration.”

“You think so, my friend? But is it not he who has hunted with the wolves can best advise the lamb whither not to stray? Set a thief to catch a thief, but not innocence to lead innocence.”

“We are all so disinterested, eh? We must kill to purify — so long as *we* remain the executioners.”

“The physicians! the physicians! Some day we shall provide the tonic.”

“At this rate the physicians will have to drink it themselves.”

“Meaning the patients will fail us? Rest content. They will last our time. The ills in the constitution of France are many. For the resurrection — *sang Dieu!*” he cried, with a wry face, “but that is no part of *our* programme!”

Indeed, it was not of his. He was actuated by no passion but the blood-sucker’s. One day he showed me a clumsy model guillotine, a foot high, of his own contriving. The axe was a fragment of table-knife sunk in a finger of lead, and with it he would operate upon a gruesome little doll he had with an adjustable neck. Snip! the blade fell and the head, and a spout of crimson gushed forth and stained the floor.

"That is a waste of good wine," said I.

His face puckered like a toad's eyelids.

"Is it not?" he chuckled, "of the brand drunk by the patriot Citoyenne Sombreuil."

"Blood!"

"*Vois-tu!*" he cried, with a little shriek of laughter. "It is hollow. Often I fill it from the tap in the Place de la Bastille. My faith, what a fountain! I love it like Dantzic brandy." Then it was I found his humour a little excessive to my taste; and I severed my connection with him. He might lie; obviously he did, in fact, about the blood; but one's sympathies could not embrace so stupid a falsehood. Promptly he denounced me to his section. I had given him the courteous "you," said he, and amongst my effects was a box of the interdicted hair-powder.

But it is of my earlier landlord, Jacques Crépin, who for a time influenced my fortunes quite admirably, that I desire here to speak.

Upon this rascal I happened on the evening of Lepelletier St. Fargeau's murder in Février's Coffee-house. It was the interminable week of the votings on the king's sentence. During the course of it I had many times visited the Hall of Convention, had stayed awhile to watch the slow chain of Deputies hitching over the Tribune, with their dreary chant, "La Mort," that was like the response to an endless litany of fatality intoned by the ushers; had heard the future Dictator, spectacled, marmoset-faced, irrepressible in oratory, drone his sour dithyrambics where a word would

have sufficed; had fallen half asleep over the phantom scene, and had imagined myself at the Comédie Française during a performance of "Les Victimes Cloîtrées,"—a dreamy fancy to which the incessant sound of feet on boards, high up in the "Mountain" quarter, the reverberating clap of doors, the wide patter of voices and tinkle of laughter from bedizened *chères amies*, pricking down the *ayes* and *noes* upon scented cards, the shriller brabble of Mère Duchesse aloft with her priestesses of the Salpêtrière, and the intermittent melodramatic drawl of the actors moving across the stage gave colour and coherence.

By then, I think, I was come to be graduate in Michau's school of Pleasure. It was impressed upon me that to think of myself was a little to foretaste my probable martyrdom. It was philosophy more congenial to read in the serene patriot Thibaut a disinterested sheep fattening on the grass about the *abattoir*. My title was a plague-spot to cover; little but the dust of my patrimony remained; I had long disabused my mind of the dogma that manliness is necessarily a triumphant force in the world.

Yet, a month before, I had been conscious of a little run of pity, that was like a sloughing of the old wound of nobility. It was to see the figure of him I had called Sire heavily seated in that same *Salle de Mandé*, his attire, appropriately, a drab surtout—the colour of new-turned mould—his powdered hair blotted with a tonsure where he had leaned his weary head back for rest, that lost

look on his ineffectual face: "Messieurs! this strange indignity! But doubtless the saints will explain to me of what I am accused."

Bah! have I not learned the "Rights of Man," and seen them illustrated, too, on those days of the "Severe Justice of the People"? The worse the decomposition below, the thicker will be the scum that rises to the top. But there the wholesome air shall deodorise it by-and-by, and the waters of life be sweet to the taste again — for a time. And in the meanwhile I browse by the *abattoir*.

On that Saturday evening, the last of the voting, I dined with distinction at Février's in the Palais Royal. I could still afford, morally and materially, this little practice of self-indulgence; for they had not yet begun to make bread of dried pease, and many of the ardent Deputies themselves were admirable connoisseurs in meat and wine.

While I was sitting — the whole place being in a ferment of scurry and babble — a couple, who awakened my curious interest, entered and took a vacant table next to mine. A withered old man it was and a young girl, who sauntered with ample grace in his wake.

The first came down the room, prying hither and thither, bowless and bent like a note of interrogation. He was buttoned up to the throat in a lank dark-green surtout, and his plain hat was tilted back from his forehead, so as to show his

eyebrows, each lifted and lost in the creases of a dozen arched wrinkles, and the papery lids beneath them bulging and half closed. His face was all run into grey sharpness, but a conciliatory smile was a habit of his lips. He carried his hands behind his back as if they were manacled there.

The girl who followed was in features and complexion cold and beautiful. Her eyes were stone-grey under well-marked brows; her forehead rounded from her nose like a kitten's; the curls that escaped from beneath her furred hood were of a rich walnut brown. She had that colourless serenity in her face that is like snow over perfumed flowers. Gazing on such, one longs to set one's heart to the chill and melt it and see the blossoms break.

Now I had at once recognised in this couple the sustainers of the principal rôles in a certain September tragedy *entr'acte*. In these times of feverish movement the manner in which Casimir had secured their escape was indeed an old story with me; yet, seeing them again under these vastly improved circumstances, and remembering in what way I had sought to assist them, my heart was moved beyond its present custom to a feeling of sympathetic comradeship with one, at least, of the two.

The old man chose his table.

"Sit down, wench," said he. "My faith! we must dine, though crowns fall."

She took her seat with a little peevish sigh.



"Though the stars fell in the street like hail, you would dine," she said.

He cocked his head sideways.

"They have fallen, my Carinne. The ruin of them litters the Temple."

She said doggedly, "*Vive le roi!*" under her breath.

"My God!" he whispered, and called the waiter.

He eyed her askance and nervously as the man came. Some distraught admiration seemed to mingle with his apprehension of her. She sat languid and indifferent, and even closed her eyes, with a little disdainful smile, as he leaned down to her and ran his finger eagerly over the various items of the bill of fare.

"Ostend oysters, carp fried in milk, sweetbread patty — that is good. Ragout of the kidneys and combs of cocks — that is very good — Carinne, see! the ragout! Holy saints, but my pocket! Slice of calf's head, turtle fashion — girl, are you listening? Be reckless. Take of all if you will. I bid thee — thy little uncle, *ma mie*. Slice of — Carinne, this is better than the cabbages and fried eggs of *des Pierrettes*. I will not care — I will not. Though I have to cut down trees to meet it, the palate shall have its holiday. Slice of — *mon Dieu*, Carinne! I ate of it once before in this very house. It melts like the manna of the Israelites. It does not surfeit, but it forms an easy bed for the repose of ecstasies more acute."

The girl broke in with a little high-flung laugh.

“Not trees, but a forest,” she said. “There — choose for me. I am indifferent.”

“Indifferent! indifferent? — Oh, undeserving of the fine gifts of the gods!”

He turned to the waiter, his eyes still devouring the *carte*, his lips silently busy with its contents. Presently he gave his order, sat down, and remained fixedly gnawing a finger, his face set half in enjoying contemplation, half in a baffled aggravation of selection.

In only one other direction did the couple appear to arouse curiosity. The great nerve of the town was all charged with a leaping electricity, and citizens, staid enough ordinarily, ate now and drank under an excitement they could barely control.

But, over against me, at a little distance, were two men seated at a table; and of these one seemed to take a like interest with mine in my neighbours.

This individual, unmoved, apparently, by the general ferment, had finished his dinner and sat sipping his *Médoc* luxuriously. He was a pimple-faced man, well-nourished and sensual-looking, but with an air of tolerant geniality about him. Ugly as Danton, he had yet a single redeeming ornament in the shape of a quantity of rich auburn hair that fell from his head in natural curls. Though his condition was plain to me, and I saw that the restaurateur treated him with obsequious deference, he appeared more self-complacent than self-sufficient, and as if he were rather accustomed to

indulge than abuse his position. For I recognised in him the president of some sectional committee, and that by the little plaque, printed small with the Rights of Man, that hung as a pendant from his tri-colour neck-ribbon.

Of the other at the table I took but little notice, save to remark that he devoured his meal with the air of a man to whom good digestion is no essential condition of politics.

Now, of a sudden, Jacques Crépin of the pendant lowered his legs, took up his bottle and glass, and, to my extreme surprise, crossed the room to my table and sat down by me.

He did not speak at first, being engaged in watching our neighbours, before whom were placed at the moment the dishes of the uncle's selection.

Mademoiselle Carinne gave a little *Ouf!* over hers.

"But what is this?" she said.

"It is a pig's foot *à la* St. Menehould, Carinne. Such a dish, *mon joulou!*"

The old rascal had taken advantage of her insensibility to procure her one of the cheapest entries on the list.

She pushed it from her with an exclamation of disgust.

"Fie, then!" she cried. "The very hoof of a filthy swine! Wouldst thou have me make my hunger a footstool to a pig? Take it away. I will not touch it!"

He protested, voluble and shamefaced. She would not listen. Out of mere wilfulness she now

selected the most expensive item of the *menu*, — a partridge stewed in wine. He seemed like to cry; but she persisted and gained her point.

“We shall be ruined!” he cried, inconsistently enough. “For a month after our return we shall have to live on bread and boiled nettles.”

“In December, *mon oncle*? Then I am imperious for white wine of Mont Raché.”

The old fellow almost shrieked.

“Carinne! Eight francs the bottle! Consider, my niece. I shall die in Ste. Pélagie!”

The new-comer turned to me with a grin.

“Did’st ever hear the like?” said he.

I nodded gravely. I was not then all inured to impertinence.

“He lacks the art of selection,” I said coldly, thinking of Michau.

He showed himself good-humouredly conscious of my manner. He leaned towards me and murmured carelessly, —

“There, of a truth, speaks Monseigneur le Comte de la Muette.”

I reached for my glass and sipped from it; but I have no doubt my hand shook.

“The citizen does not recognise me?”

“No, by my faith.”

“I am Jacques Crépin; and formerly I served where I now dine.”

I glanced at him. Some faint remembrance of the fellow woke in me.

“M. le Comte,” he went on, in the same low voice, “once rewarded me with a handsome vail

for some trifling service. It was the lucky *louis-d'or* of my fortunes. Here was a little of the means; the Revolution was my opportunity. Now the masters serve the waiters. I devour with my teeth what I once devoured with my eyes. You see me president of a section; but, *pardieu!* I have no quarrel with aristocrats of a fastidious palate. It was the contemplation of such educated me to a right humour in gastronomy. I am indebted to monsieur for many a delicate hint in selection."

Again I thought of the poor Michau.

"I am honoured," I said. "And so, M. Crépin, this is the goal of your high republicanism?"

"My faith!" he said, with a generous chuckle, "I acknowledge it. I have existed forty years that I may live one—perhaps no more. To drink and to eat and to love *en prince*—I have the capacity for it and the will. I have nursed my constitution on broken scraps. This *fesse-Mathieu* here offends me. Had I a fortune, I would fling it away on a single desired dish if necessary. We have waived the right to think of the morrow. But, how is monsieur known?"

"They call me Citizen Thibaut."

"Citizen Thibaut, I drink to our better acquaintance. This *Médoc*—I have not grudged it you in former years. Your refined appreciation of it has many a time glorified to me my supper of stale fragments. But for you, maybe, I had not learned the secret of its fragrance. To my past master in epicurism I gulp a grateful toast."

He was as good as his word.

"Citizen Crépin," I said, "where do you live?"

"Rue de Jouy, St. Antoine," he answered.

"I seek a convenient landlord. Will you accommodate me?"

"With all my heart."

I heard the *vieillard* at the next table gobble and choke. I turned my head to look, sprang to my feet, and my glass crashed on the boards.

In that instant the room had leaped into uproar — for something immediate, swift, and terrible had happened. It was this:

The fast-eating man at the table opposite, having finished his dinner, was risen to pay his bill. He stood with impatient hand outstretched as Février fumbled in his pocket for the change; and at the moment a fellow, thickset, stubble-bearded, dressed in a blouse and faded cloak, strode up the room and paused by him.

"Are you Deputy Lepelletier?" said he.

The diner turned and nodded.

"You have voted in this affair of the king?"

"*Mais oui*," said the other — "for death."

"*Scélérat — prends ça !*" and with the word he whipped a long blade from under his cloak and passed it into the body of the deputy. I saw the flash and heard the piteous bleat, as also, I swear, the sound of the flesh sucking to the steel.

Février snatched at the murderer, and was spun to the floor like a skittle. I saw startled figures rise, chairs and tables totter, and the one bounding amongst them. He got clear away.

Then, as the mob closed about the fallen, moan-

ing shape, I turned with an instinct of horror to view of my neighbours.

The old gourmet had flung himself back in his chair, his face twisted from the sight; but made-moiselle still picked daintily at her partridge.

## III

## THE FOOTPAD

EARLY in June of the year '93 I left Paris in company with M. Crépin. At that time in the flower of his somewhat mediocre fortunes, he had been intrusted with a mission which was entirely after his own heart. He was to represent the Executive, in fact, in a "sequestrating" tour through Limosin and Guienne, — or rather through the new-found departments that had deposed those ancient territories, — and his interest had procured me a post as his clerk or assistant. What duties this embraced perhaps the Government would have found it as difficult to specify as their sub-agent; but, after all, Jacques Bonhomme emancipated was excessively conservative in the matter of his retention of the system of complimentary sinecures. For myself, I looked upon my appointment as the simple means to postpone an inevitable denunciation.

Crépin and I had by then ceased to fraternise. I could never quite learn to adapt my sympathies to a certain *mauvais ton* that underlay in him all the sensitiveness of the voluptuary. Also, perhaps, I was beginning a little to resent the humourless methods of a destiny that had not the wit, it



seemed, to rebuke my innate luxuriousness but by affecting a concern to accommodate me with house-fellows of my own kidney. We parted on the best of terms; and he none the less attended to my interests and, as far as possible, to my safety. To the end, I think, he retained an admiration for the superior quality of my epigastrium; and when his opportunity came to do me a service, he never failed to remind me of his indebtedness to my fastidious *gourmandise*.

We left the city, travelling *en roi*, on a fine blowing afternoon. We had our roomy carriage, with four well-blooded horses, and a postilion to each pair. An escort of four patriots, moreover, mounted, armed, and generally drunk, accompanied us to enforce the letter of the law. We went out by the suburb of Pasi, starting from the Pavillon-Liberté, close by the Thuilleries, — where Crépin received his papers of administration, — and whipping along the river-bank by way of the Port aux Pierres. Close by the gates the carriage gave a thudding jolt, and drew up suddenly to an accompaniment of noise like the screaming of a swollen axle.

I started up in my corner.

“What is it?” I exclaimed; but three men, risen at that moment from a bench under some chestnut-trees, engaged my surprised attention. They made at the postilions, it seemed, and the face of him that was foremost twitched with a rage of nervous resentment. Their hats had been laid beside them in the shade, and I noticed that

as this individual sprang to his feet, the powder leapt from his head as if a musket-ball had struck it. For he was very sprucely groomed, every hair currycombed to run parallel with its fellows; and there was a fastidious neatness about his appearance that was like the peevish delicacy of an invalid.

Such, indeed, he was, from more than one point of view; for he was no other than M. Robespierre himself, dressed in the fine blue coat he was studying to make historical, and exhibiting the weak extremes of his nature in presence of a run-over dog.

“But this is infamous!” I heard him shrill, in a strained wavering voice. “Thus to shock our humanity and our nerves!”

He ran to the carriage window in uncontrollable excitement. He bustled with his shaking speech so that it was hardly audible.

“What mischief produces itself that you tear through the streets like brigands? Messieurs — messieurs! but I say you have no right — citizens, do you hear?”

Crépin, dismayed, muttered something about authority. The other snapped at the word and worried it.

“Authority! there is none in this city to be careless of innocent lives. Authority! who excuses himself to me — to the Republic by assuming a licence to murder under its ægis — yes, murder, I say? You would adopt the prerogatives of aristocrats — you are an aristocrat — Tachereau! St. Just!”

He was beside himself. His lean hands picked at the window-frame. All the time the poor cur in the road was screeching, and the sound seemed to jar him out of his self-control. One of his companions stepped up to him, put a hand upon his arm, and drew him away. Quite a little mob had gathered about us.

*"Reculez les chevaux !"* said this person to the postilions. "Complete what you have begun."

The horses backed the carriage once, and drew forward again, stilling the cries. Personally I should have preferred alighting during the operation. Robespierre ran to the trees and put his palms to his ears, doubling himself up as if he had the toothache. The other came to the window once more.

This was the "Apocalyptic!" of the Assembly, its most admirable type of fanaticism. Dark and immovable as a Nubian archer in a wall painting, he might have been represented for ever holding the taut string and the arrow that should whistle to its mark. He was young, a mere boy — melancholy, olive-skinned, beautiful in his way. Cold, incorruptible, merciless, nevertheless, he — this St. Just — was yet that one of the ultra-revolutionists I could find it in me to regard admiringly. Of all, he alone acted up to the last letter of his creed of purification. Of all, he alone was willing to do a long life's reaping without wage, without even that posthumous consideration of a niche in the "Pantheon of history." Like the figure of Time on a clock, he was part and parcel of the scythe

with which he wrought. He must move when the hour came — cutting right and left — and with the last stroke of inspiration he must stop until the wheels of being should bring him to the front once more. Truly, he was not great, but, quite possibly, necessary; and as such one could not but exclaim over his faultless mechanism. He sacrificed his life to his cause, long before it was demanded of him, and in the end flung himself to the axe as to a kindred spirit with which his structural and destructive genius was quite in sympathy. One must acknowledge that he made a consistent practice of that which is the true art of reform — to know whom to exclude from one's system. Only, he was a little too drastic in his exclusion; and that came from a lack of *ton*. For your fanatic sees a reactionary in every one whose mouth opens for what reason soever but to applaud his methods; and the sneers which his sensitiveness regards as levelled at himself, he puts to the account of treason against his policy.

“Citizen Crépin,” he said (for he had already identified my companion), “for the future, if you must ride rough-shod, I would recommend you to make the meanest your first consideration.”

“But, citizen, it was no fault of mine.”

“You have a voice to control, I presume?” — he stepped back and waved his hand. “*Allez-vous promener!*” — and the carriage jerked forward.

I shot a glance at the other as we passed. He was retired from the scene, and he seemed endeavouring to control the agitation into which he

had been betrayed; but he looked evilly from under his jumping eyelids at us as we went by.

We travelled cautiously until we were gone a long gunshot from the city walls, and then Crépin put his head out of the window and cursed on the postilions furiously.

“*Savant sacré!*” he cried, sinking back on the seat; “we are whipt and rebuked like schoolboys. Is a Republic a seminary for street curs? They should hoist Reason in a balloon if she is to travel. That St. Just — he will make it indictable to crack a flea on one’s thumb-nail.”

“What were they doing in that quarter of the town?”

“How should I know, Citizen Thibaut? Spinning webs under the trees, maybe, to catch unwary flies. They and others spend much of each day in the suburbs. It is the custom of attorneys, as it is of story-writers, to hatch their plots in green nooks. They brood for a week that they may speak for an hour. Robespierre comes to Pasi and Auteuil for inspiration. Couthon goes every day to Neuilly for bagatelle. My faith, but how these advocates make morality unattractive! A dozen lawyers amongst the elect would produce a second revolt of the angels. That is why the devil is loath to recall them.”

“To recall them?”

“They are his ambassadors, monsieur, and it is his trouble that they are for ever being handed their passports to quit such soil as he would be represented on. Then they return to him for fresh

instructions; but they will not understand that human passions are not to be controlled by rule of thumb."

"Or sounded by depth of plumb, Crépin; and, upon my word, you are a fine bailiff to your masters."

Now, I have no wish to detail the processes of our monotonous journey into the south-westerly departments, whereto — that is to say, to the borders of Dordogne — it took us eight days to travel. We had our excitements, our vexations, our adventures even; but these were by the way, and without bearing on what I have set myself to relate.

One evening as we were lazily rolling along an empty country road, making for the little walled town of Coutras, where the fourth Henry was known to his credit once upon a time, a trace snapped, leading to more damage and a little confusion amongst the horses. I alighted in a hurry — Crépin, whose veins were congested with Bordeaux, slumbering profoundly on in his corner — and finding that the accident must cause us some small delay, strolled back along the road we had come by, for it looked beautiful in perspective. Our escort, I may say, affecting ignorance of our mishap, had rattled on into the dusk.

It was a night for love, or fairies, or any of those little gracious interchanges of soul that France had nothing the art to conceive in those years. The wind, that had toyed all day with flowers, was

sweet with a languorous and desirable playfulness; a ripening girl moon sat low on a causeway of mist, embroidering a banner of cloud that blew from her hands; the floating hills were hung with blots of woodland, and to peer into the trance of sky was to catch a star here and there like a note of music.

I turned an elbow of the road and strolled to a little bridge spanning a brook that I had noticed some minutes earlier in passing. Leaning over the parapet, I saw the water swell to a miniature pond as it approached the arch — a shallow ferry designed to cool the fetlocks of weary horses. The whole was a mirror of placidity. It flowed like a white oil, reflecting in intenser accent the fading vault above, so that one seemed to be looking down upon a subterranean dawn — and, “It is there and thus,” I murmured, “the little people begin their day.”

There were rushes fringing the brook-edge, as I knew only by their sharp reversed pictures in the blanched water-glass, and a leaning stake in mid-stream repeated itself blackly that the hairy goblins below might have something to scratch themselves on; and then this fancy did so possess me that, when a bat dipt to the surface and rose again, its reality and not its shadow seemed to flee into the depths. At last a nightingale sang from a little copse hard by, completing my bewitchment — and so my thralldom to dreams was nearly made everlasting. For, it appeared, a man had come softly out of the woods behind me, while I

hung over the parapet, and was stealing towards me on tiptoe with clubbed bludgeon.

It was a stag-beetle that saved my life — where-out of might be snatched many little rags of reflections; for it shot whizzing and booming past my ear and startled me to a sudden sideway jump. The fellow was almost on my back at the moment, and could not check his impetus. He came crack against the low wall, his club span out of his fist, and he himself clutched, failed, and went over with a mighty splash into the water underneath.

The ludicrous *dénouement* gave me time to collect my faculties. I was at no loss for an immediate solution of the incident. The highways, in those glorious days of fraternity, were infested with footpads, and no further than five miles out of Paris we had had trouble with them. Doubtless this rascal, the carriage being out of sight, had taken me for a solitary pedestrian.

I looked over the parapet, feeling myself master of the situation, though I had no weapon upon me. My assailant was gathering his long limbs together in the shallow pool. The water dragged the hair over his eyes and ran in a stream from his bristling chin. Suddenly he saw, drew a pistol, and clicked it at me. It was a futile and desperate action, and calculated only to confirm my estimate of his character.

“*Ventrebleu* and the devil!” he shouted. “Make way for me, sir!”

I waved my hand, right and left of the ferry.



Should he emerge either way, I could easily forestall him.

"You have your choice of roads," I said politely.

He recognised his difficulty, and turned as if to wade up stream and escape by the fields. His fourth step brought him into deep water, out of which he floundered snorting.

"Try under the bridge," I said. "It is the right passage for rats."

He cursed me volubly.

"Well, we are one to one," said he in sudden decision, and came splashing out on the Coutras side.

The moment he climbed up the bank I closed with him. He was fairly handicapped by his liquid load, and out of breath and of conceit with his luck besides. He aimed a blow at me with his pistol-butt, but I easily avoided it and let him topple his length again, — assisting him, in fact, — but this time in the dust. Then I sat on him, and threatened his head with a great stone.

"*Pouf!*" said he, panting. "I protest I am no adept at this business."

"Is it your only one?" said I.

"At this date, yes."

"So, — you have been an honest man? And what more can a patriot boast of?"

I whistled and called to my companions. My prisoner looked amazed.

"You are not alone!" he exclaimed.

"By no means. My escort is round the curve of the road there."

He seemed to collapse under me.

"*Merci, monsieur!*" he muttered, "*merci!*"

"What, in these days!"

He dared his chance of the stone, and began to struggle violently. I doubt if I could have held him long if Crépin and one of the postilions had not come running up to my shout. A few words were enough to explain the situation, and we conducted the fellow to the carriage and strapped him upon one of the horses in a way compromising to his dignity. And so he became of our party when we moved on once more.

. . . . .

Coutras clacks with mills and is musical with weirs. The spirit of the warlike king yet informs its old umber walls and toppling houses. I found it a place so fragrant with antique and with natural beauties that my heart wept over the present human degeneracy that vulgarised it. It lies amongst the last distant swells, as it were, of the great billows of the Auvergne mountains, before those swells have rolled themselves to waste in the sombre flats of the Landes. It is the hill-slope garden on the fringe of the moor; the resting-place of the sea and the high-rock winds; the hostelry where these meet and embrace and people the vineyards with baby breezes. It has grown old listening under its great chestnuts to the sweet thunder of the Isle and the Dronne. Its peasants, pagan in their instinct for beauty, train their vines up the elm and walnut trees, that in autumn they may dance under a dropping rain of grapes.

At the same time I am bound to confess that their wine suffers for the sake of this picturesqueness.

Now, as we entered it by moonlight, it was a panic town, restless, scurrying, lurid. The new spirit ran vile and naked in its venerable streets; the air was poisonous with the breath of *ça ira*. For, since we left Paris, this had happened. The Girondists were fallen and hunted men, and Tallien and Ysabeau were at La Réole, preparing for a descent on Bordeaux. We learned it all at the gate, and also that the spies and agents of these scoundrels were everywhere abroad, nosing after the escaped deputies, bullying, torturing, and denouncing.

“It would appear we are forestalled,” said Crépin, drily. “M. Thibaut, have you a mind to rake over dead ashes? Well, I have heard of the white wine of Bergerac. At least I will taste that before I go to bed.”

We drove up to the Golden Lion, whither our scamps had preceded us. Patriots hooted our prisoner as we clattered through the streets, or whipped at him with their ramrods. The decent citizens fled before us, and white-faced girls peeped from behind the white curtains of their little bed-chambers, crushing the dimity against their swelling bosoms. Oh! we were great people, I can assure you.

At the hostelry — a high, mud-coloured building, with window-places fringed with stone, and its hill of a roof fretted thick as a dove-cote with

dormer casements — they brought to our carriage a poor weeping maid.

“*La demoiselle des pleurs*,” said Bonnet-rouge, with a grin.

“Eh?” said Crépin.

“The *aubergiste*, citizen.”

Crépin looked at the poor creature with disfavour. Certainly she was very plain, though quite young, and her homely face was blowzed with tears.

“Why do you cry then, little fool?”

“Monsieur, they have taken my father to La Réole.”

“He will return, if innocent.”

“Alas! no, monsieur.”

“What! you would discredit the impartiality of the Republic?”

He stepped from the carriage, and took her by the shoulder.

“He will return, if innocent, I say; and would the law had enlarged him before we arrived! You are in charge here, *citoyenne*?”

“But yes, monsieur.”

“A thousand devils! — and disorganised, I’ll swear; no fire in the kitchen, no food in the larder.”

“Monsieur is in error. I go at once to serve the first monsieur of our best.”

“The first, — *sacré!* is that also forestalled? But who is this first?”

“The same as monsieur.”

“And dost thou know who *I* am?”

“Alas, monsieur! You come and go, and you are all great and imperious. But I would not with a word offend monsieur.”

“Listen, girl.” (A crowd stood about. He spoke for the benefit of all.) “I am a high officer of the Republic, *en mission* to rout out the disaffected and to enforce the law. Go, and say to this citizen that, with his permission, I will join him.”

Our rogues were unstrapping the footpad from the horse as he spoke. As they tumbled him, half silly with his jolting and with the blows he had received, upon his feet, the *aubergiste* gave a faint cry. Crépin caught her as she retreated, and twisted her about once more.

“You know this *Chevalier de la Coupe*?”

“Monsieur, I—how can I say? So many drink wine with us.”

He looked at her sternly a moment, then pushed her from him.

“For supper, the best in the house!” he called after her, and turned to arrange for the disposition of his men and their prisoner.

By-and-by the *aubergiste* came to conduct us to table. As we went thither, Crépin stopped, took the girl by the chin, and looked into her wet inflamed eyes. If the prospect of good fare exhilarated him, I will say, also, for his credit that I believe he had a kindly nature.

“For the future,” he said, “be discreet and make a study to command your nerves. In these days one must look on life through the little window of the *lunette*.”

We found our forestaller (who, by the way, had returned no answer to Crépin's polite message) established in the eating-room when we entered it. He was a coarse, blotched ruffian, thick and overbearing, and he stared at us insolently as he lay sprawled over a couple of chairs.

"So, thou wouldst share my supper?" he cried, in a rumbling, vibrant voice. "Lie down under the table, citizen, and thou shalt have a big plate of scraps when once my belly is satisfied."

Crépin paused near the threshold. I tingled with secret laughter to watch the bludgeoning of these two parvenus. But my respected chief had the advantage of an acquired courtesy.

"You honour me beyond my expectations," he said. "But, if I were to break the dish over the citizen's face, the scraps would fall the sooner."

The other scrambled to his feet with a furious grimace.

"*Canaille!*" he shouted (it was curious that I never heard an upstart but would apply this term in a quarrel to those of his own kidney) — "Scum! pigwash! Do you know my name, my office, my reputation? God's blood! I've a mind to have you roasted in a fat hog's skin and served for the first course!"

Crépin walked up to the bully very coolly. *M. le Représentant* had plenty of courage in the ordinary affairs of life.

"Do I know who you are?" he said. "Why, I take you for one of those curs that are whipt on to do the dirty work of the people's ministers.

And do you know who I am, citizen spy? I hold my commission direct from the Committee of Safety, with full authority of sequestration and requisition, and no tittle of responsibility to your masters at La Réole. If you interfere with the processes of my office, I shall have something additional to say in my report to the chiefs of my department, whom your highness may recognise by the names of Billaud-Varenes and Collot-d'Herbois; if you insult me personally, I shall thrash you with a dog-whip."

The creature was but a huge wind-bag. I never saw one collapse so suddenly. Crépin, it is true, had some fearful names to conjure by.

"*M. le Représentant*," said the former, in a fallen, flabby voice, "I have no desire to oppose or embarrass you. We need not clash if I am circumspect. For the rest, accept my apologies for the heat I was betrayed into through inadvertence. We have to be so careful with strangers."

He bowed clumsily. His neck was choked with a great cravat; a huge sabre clanked on the floor beside him as he moved. He was a very ugly piece of goods, and he bore his humiliation with secret fury, I could perceive — the more so as the *aubergiste* brought in the first of the dishes during the height of the dispute.

Crépin permitted himself to be something mollified by the sight of supper. He complimented the girl on her promptitude. The poor creature may have been no heroine; but she was a seductive cook. We had *potage*, most excellent, an *en-*

*trée* of chestnut-meal *ramequins*, roasted kid stuffed with *truffes de Périgord* and served with sweet wine-sauce. Also a magnificent brand of Bergerac was in evidence.

Under the influence of these generous things our table-fellow's insolence a little revived; but now he would rally me as the safer butt.

"The citizen is dainty with his food." (The fellow himself had lapped and sucked like a pig.)

"I owe it to the cook," said I, serenely.

"A debt of love. Thou shalt pay it her presently when the lights are out."

"You are an ill-conditioned hog," said I.

He sprang, toppling, to his feet.

"Mother of God!" he stuttered hoarsely; "this goes too far, this —"

He caught Crépin's eye and subsided again, muttering. We were all pretty warm with liquor; but my superior officer was grown benignant under its influence.

"For shame, citizens!" he said blandly, "to put a coarse accent to this heavenly bouquet."

He had bettered me in the philosophy of the palate. I confess it at once.

The other (his name, we came to know, was Lacombe — a name of infamous notoriety in the Bordeaux business) leaned over to me presently — when Crépin was gone from the room a moment to give a direction — with hell glinting out of his eyes.

"*M. le Représentant's* fellow," said he; "I bow



to authority, but I kick authority's dog in the ribs if the cur molests me."

"I don't doubt it. It is probably the measure of your courage."

He nodded pregnantly.

"The resurrection of France shall be in discretion. That is the real courage to those whose overbearing impulse is to strike. We are discreet, and we watch, and we evolve by degrees the whole alphabet of espionage. Let us call A the language of the hands. These the frost of poverty will stunt, the rack of labour will warp and disjoint. There is your sign of a citizen of the people. Monsieur has very pretty fingers and pink nails."

"By the same token a corded fist should prove one to be a hangman. Monsieur has a knot for every knuckle."

He nodded again. His calmness was more deadly than his wrath.

"You spit your insults over the shoulder of your master. You think yourself secure in your office. But there is an order of repartee unknown to patriots, for it was hatched in the hotbeds of Versailles."

He fell back in his chair — still eyeing me — with a grunt; then suddenly leaned forward again.

"The alphabet," he said, "of which B shall be designated the penetration of disguises. Coach-drivers, colporteurs, pedlars — oh, one may happen upon the cloven hoof amongst them all."

I laughed, with a fine affectation of contempt. This mummy at the feast —

There was a sound in the room. I turned my head. The little *aubergiste* stood at the door, weeping and wringing her hands.

“Monsieur!” she cried, “do not let it be done!”

I rose and went to the child.

“Tell me,” I said, “what is it?”

“Monsieur, the poor man that you captured! they are torturing him in the yard.”

I pointed with my hand to a window. Without, all during our meal, had been a confused clatter of voices and the lurid smoke of torches rising about the glass.

“Yes,” she sobbed, quite overcome. “It is not right, monsieur. It will bring a curse upon the place.”

I ran from the room, my blood on fire. Whatever his offence to me, I had sooner let the rascal go than that he should fall into the hands of drunken patriots.

The yard was a paved space scooped from the rear of the house. A well with a windlass pierced it about the middle, and round the low wall of this were seated a dozen red-bonnets, our own four prominent, shouting and quarrelling and voluble as parrots. Broken bottles strewed the ground, and here and there a torch was stuck into the chinks of the stones, informing all with a jumping glare of red.

I pushed past two or three frightened onlookers, and rushed out into the open.

"Where is he?" I cried in a heat. "What the devil! am I not to pass judgment on my own?"

A moment's silence fell. The faces of all were turned up to me, scowling and furious. In the pause a pitiful voice came booming and wailing up from the very bowels of the well itself.

"*Merci!* messieurs, *merci!* and I will conduct you to the treasure!"

I wore a sword, and I drew it and sprang to the well-mouth.

"God in heaven!" I cried, "what are you doing with him down there?"

Several had risen by this, and were set at me, snarling like dogs.

"The man is forfeit to the law!" they yelped.

"That is for the law to decide."

"The people are the law. We sit here to condemn him while he cools his heels."

"Send monsieur to fetch his friend up!" cried Lacombe's voice over their heads. "He will be dainty to wash his white fingers after a meal!"

There were cries of "Aristocrat!" Possibly they would have put the brute's suggestion into effect—for a tipsy patriot has no bowels—had not Crépin at that moment run into the yard. I informed him of the situation in a word, as he joined me by the wellside.

"Haul up the man!" he said coolly and peremptorily. His office procured him some respect and more fear. Our fellows had no stomach but to obey, and they came to the windlass, muttering,

and wound their victim up to the surface. He was a pitiable sight when he reached it. They had trussed him to the rope with a savagery to which his swollen joints bore witness, and, with a refinement of cruelty, had cut the bucket from under his feet, that the full weight of his body should hang without support. In this condition they had then lowered him up to his neck in the black water.

He fell, when released, a sodden moaning heap on the stones.

“And what was to be the end?” asked Crépin.

“Citizen *Représentant*, we could not decide; yet a show of hands was in favour of singeing over a slow fire. Grace of God! but it would seem the accused has forestalled the jury.”

He had not, however.

“Give him brandy,” said Crépin; “and bring him to the shed yonder, when recovered, for the *procès verbal*.”

He took my arm, and we went off together to the place designated,—an outbuilding half full of fagots. On the way he beckoned the crying *aubergiste*, who had followed him into the yard, to attend us.

“For the present the man is saved,” he said to her when we were alone. “Now, what is your interest in the rascal?”

“Monsieur, he was an honest man once.”

“Of the neighbourhood?”

She looked up at him with her little imploring red eyes.

"Come," he said; "I owe you the debt of a grateful digestion."

"Of the château," she said faintly.

"What château?"

"Des Pierrettes, monsieur."

Crépin, as I, I could see, was beating his brains for some memory connected with the name.

"In Février's *café!*" I said suddenly. Should it prove the same, for the third time destiny seemed bringing me into touch with a lady of this history.

"Ah!" he said. "But it is not on my list. In what direction does it lie, girl?"

"Monsieur, two leagues away, off the Libourne road by the lane of the Marron Cornu."

"And who inhabits it?"

The poor girl looked infinitely distressed.

"It is M. de Lâge and his niece. You will not make me the instrument to harm them, monsieur. They are patriots, I will swear. Monsieur, monsieur!"

"Silence, girl! What are you to question the methods of the Republic? It is a good recommendation at least that they commission a footpad to patrol the neighbourhood."

"It is none of their doing. Oh, monsieur, will you not believe me? He was an honest servant of theirs till this religion of Reason drove him to the crooked path. And he has been dismissed this twelvemonth."

"Harkee, wench! If I read you right, you are well quit of a scoundrel."

She fell to sobbing and clucking over that again;

and in the midst of her outburst the half-revived felon was hustled into the shed.

The poor broken and collapsed creature fell at Crépin's feet and moaned for mercy.

"Give me a day of life," he snuffled abjectly, "and I will lead you to the treasure."

One of the guard pecked at his ribs with his boot.

"*Pomme de chou!*" he grunted, "have you no other song to sing but that?"

But Crépin was looking extremely grave and virtuous.

"The prisoner is in no state to be examined," he said. "Place him under lock and key, with food and drink; and I will put him to the question later."

## IV

## DES PIERRETTES

“*Nous y voici !*”

The carriage pulled back with a jerk, so that the prisoner Michel, who sat opposite us, was almost thrown into our laps. One of our grimy escort appeared at the window.

“Dog of a thief!” he growled. “Is this the turning?”

The other *sacréé* below his breath and nodded sullenly. A vast chestnut (the thick of its butt must have been thirty feet in circumference) stood at the entrance to a narrow lane. Turning, with a worrying of wheels, down the latter, we continued our journey.

Southwards from Coutras we had broken into a plat of country very wild and sterile; but now we were amongst trees again — oak, chestnut, and walnut — that thronged the damp hollows and flung themselves over the low hills in irresistible battalions.

Suddenly Michel bent forward and touched my companion’s knee menacingly. The rascal was near restored to himself, and his lowering eyes were full of gloom.

“The treasure, monsieur,” he said; “is that the condition of my liberty?”

“I have said — discover it to me and thou shalt go free.”

“But I, monsieur, I also must make a condition.”

Crépin stared. The man bent still more earnestly forward.

“Mademoiselle Carinne —”

“The niece of De Lâge —?”

“She must be considered — respected. I will not have her insulted with a look.”

“What now, Michel?”

“Oh, monsieur! you may do as you will with the old, hard man; but her — her —”

“And is it for the lady’s sake thou hast forborne hitherto to appropriate this treasure, the hiding-place of which thou wilt buy thy life by revealing?”

“It is so. I have driven a desperate trade, starving often with this knowledge in my breast.”

“But why?”

“How can I tell? I have known her from a child. Once she struck me that I killed a cheeping wolf-cub she had brought from the snow; and then she was sorry and kissed the little stupid bruise; and I swore my arm should rot before it lost the will to protect her.”

“I will do my best.”

“But that is not enough. My God! if I were to sacrifice mademoiselle’s *dot* without purpose!”

“The purpose is thy life.”

“That were nothing were she dishonoured.”

I put in a serene word —



“Yet it seems you would condemn her to poverty to save your skin?”

“That is different. I should have life; and life means many things,—the power, possibly, to influence her fortunes; at least the wash of wine again in one’s dusty throat.”

“Michel,” I said, “I must applaud you for a capital rogue.”

He stared at me sombrely, muttered, “*Je suis ce que je suis*,” and sank back in his corner.

We were running between dark hedges at the time. Suddenly we came among farm-buildings, a thronging dilapidated group. The byres mouldered on their props; the flat stones of the roofs had flaked generations of rubbish upon the weedy ground beneath.

Crépin rubbed his hands.

“It is well,” he said. “This without doubt is a skinflint.”

We turned a corner and passed the entrance to a ruined drive. Here the tall iron gates, swinging upon massive posts of rubble-stone, had been recently, it seemed, torn from their moorings of grass and knotted bindweed, for the ground was scarred and the lower bars of metal hung with rags of drooping green. Crépin’s features underwent another change at the sight.

“But what is this?” he muttered. “Something unaccustomed — some scare — some panic?”

He looked with sudden fury at the prisoner.

“If he has got wind of our coming — has escaped with ——”

He broke off, showing his teeth and grinding his hands together. At the moment we came in view of the château.

It was an old grey house — built of the same material as the gate-pillars — with a high-pitched roof and little corner *tourelles*. Once, presumably, a possession of importance, decay and neglect had now beggared it beyond description. Yet within and without were evidences of that vulgar miserly spirit that seeks by inadequate tinkering to deceive with half-measures. The tangled grass of the lawn was cut only where its untidiness would have been most in evidence, and its litter left where it fell. Triton blew his conch from a fine fountain basin near the middle of the plot; but the shell, threatening to break away, had been fastened to the sea-god's lips with a ligament of twine that was knotted round the head. A crippled bench was propped with a stone; a shattered ball-capital at the entrance-door held together with a loop of wire. What restoration that was visible was all in this vein of ludicrous economy.

But not a sign of life was about, — no footstep in the grounds, no face at any window. To all appearance the place was desolate.

We drew up at the broken stone porch. The door was already flung wide, and we entered, with all the usual insolent clatter of "fraternity," an echoing hall. Here, as elsewhere, were dust and decay, — inconsequent patching and the same tawdry affectation of repair. A shallow flight of stairs, broad and oaken, led straight up to a little

low gallery that bisected the hall like a transom. Up these steps we scuttled, the escort driving the prisoner amongst them, and came to a corridor from which a number of closed doors shut off the living rooms of the house.

Suddenly Crépin put up his hand and motioned us to silence. From one of the invisible chambers, some distance down the corridor, rose and fell, like wind in a key-hole, a little blasphemous complaining voice.

“In the sober moonlight of my days!” we made it out to cry — “after scaling the rough peaks of self-denial, thus to be tilted over into the depths again by a lying Providence!”

There followed some shrill storming of nouns and epithets; then a pause, out of which the voice snapped once more, —

“I hear you, you scum of ditches — you stinking offal of the Faubourgs — you publicans ennobled of a shortsighted Saviour! — Come back and finish your work, and I will spit poison on you that you shall follow me to the hell — to the hell, I say —”

The furious dragging of a chair mangled the sentence; then came a jarring thump and a further shrieking of oaths. With one impulse we made for the door, threw it open, and burst into the room. In the midst of a lofty chamber lay a little man struggling on the floor, a pretty heavy *prie-dieu*, to which he had been bound with his arms behind his back, jerking and bobbing above him with his every kick.

“*Mais c'est une tortue!*” cried one of the crew, with a howl of laughter.

The tortoise twisted up its face, disfigured with passion. It was the face, without doubt, of the little *fesse-Mathieu* of Février's restaurant.

The room in which he lay was of good proportions, but furnished meagrely, and informed with the same spirit of graceless economy as was apparent without. For the dark ancient panels of its walls had been smeared with some light grey wash, and an attempt made to decorate them with plaster wreaths and festoons in the Louis Quinze style. The work, however, had been left unfinished, and, so far as it went, was crude and amateurish to a degree. Obviously, here was an example of that species of niggard that will try to cheat a dozen trades by wringing the gist of all out of one poor factotum.

But Crépin stood with corrugated forehead; for there were other signs in the room than those of parsimony, — signs in plenty, in fact, that he had been forestalled in his quest. Chairs and tables were overturned, a bureau was smashed almost to pieces, great rents appeared in the paneling of the walls, where search had been instituted, one would judge, for secret depositories.

A savage oath exploded from *M. le Représentant's* lips.

“That spy — that swaggerer — that Lacombe!” he muttered, looking at me. “He was vanished this morning — he and his ragged tail — when we rose. He got scent, without doubt, and has played

outrider to my mission of search. If it is so; if he has found and removed — my God! but for all his Tallien and the Committee of Bordeaux he shall dance — he shall dance!”

He turned furiously to his men.

“Put the rascal upright,” he bellowed.

A couple of them lifted and spun the chair to its legs, so that the old man's skull jerked against the head-rail with a clack like that of a mill-hopper. He did not seem to notice the blow. His eyes, ever since they had alighted on this new influx of brigands, had been set like a fish's — wondering and unwinking. Now they slowly travelled, taking in Crépin, Citizen Thibaut, the escort, until they stopped — actually, it appeared, with a click — at Michel. His mouth puckered, and, like a ring blown by a smoker, a wavering “O!” issued from it.

“Your *ci-devant* servant?” said Crépin, grimly.

The old man nodded his head.

“Michel. But, yes — it is Michel.”

“Thou owest him compensation for that long tyranny of service.”

“I owe him nothing.”

“And me, citizen? Dost thou remember the Abbaye St. Germain and the killings of September?”

I struck in with the question. I was willing, I think, for the girl's sake, to identify myself with a past incident.

He looked at me bitterly, but with no recognition in his eyes.

"I deplore the cursed fortune," he cried in grief, "that preserved me but for this!"

"How now, old fool!" said Crépin, with impatience. "Thou shalt go free when Michel has revealed to me thy secret place of hoarding."

M. de Lâge gave the crying snarl of a wolf.

"Let him go—the ingrate and the traitor! What, Michel! dost thou mangle the hand that gave thee soft litter for thy couch and honest bread for thy belly? Look, Michel!—the white garlands on the walls there! Dost thou remember how thou wrought'st them to pleasure thy mistress—to win her from the depression she suffered in the sombre oak and its long history of gloom? There they cling unfinished,—thy solemn rebuke, Michel. Thy attachment to her was the one reality, thou wouldst say, in a world of shadows, and yet the blatant fanfare of those shadows was all that was needed to win thee from the reality. And what is the price of thy kiss, Judas?"

The man hung his head.

"Not your life, monsieur," he muttered.

"Nay; but only that which makes my life endurable. And the forfeit—what is that?"

"*My* life, monsieur."

De Lâge drew in his breath with a cruel sound.

"*Hélas!*" he cried. "You will have to pay the penalty! the faithful servant will have to pay the penalty!"

Crépin uttered an exclamation and strode forward.

"You have been stripped?" said he.

“Of all, monsieur, of all. There have been others here before you this morning, — fine *sans-culotte* preachers of equality and the gospel of distribution, whose practice, nevertheless, is to enrich the poor at the expense of the wealthy. They were brave fellows by their own showing; yet they must truss me here before they dared brandish the fruits of their robbery before my eyes!”

Suddenly he was straining and screaming in his bonds, his face like a map of some inhuman territory of the passions, branched with veins for rivers of blood.

“Free me that I may kill some one!” he shrieked. “I am mad to groove my fingers in flesh! The time for concessions is past. I was as wax in their hands till they unearched my plate, my coins, my riches. Now, now —”

He was indeed beyond himself, a better man — or devil — in his despair than the money-conscious craven who had palpitated over that little “*Vive le Roi!*” once upon a time.

Crépin regarded the struggling creature with harsh contempt. This plebeian soul also was translated, but not to his moral promotion. It was evident he had enlarged the scope of his anticipations greatly in view of his prisoner's promise; and his disappointment brought the spotted side of him uppermost.

“Take the dog,” he cried in a hoarse voice (signifying Michel by a gesture), “and whip him to the lair! At least we will look to see if the wolves have left a bone or two for our picking.”

"*M. le Représentant*," I ventured to say, "be just to consider that the prisoner is by all rights my prisoner. Anyhow he has stuck to his side of the bargain. Let me hold you in fairness responsible for his safe-conduct."

He turned upon me like a teased bullock.

"In fairness!" he cried — "in fairness! But you presume, citizen, on your position."

He looked as if he could have struck me; all the beast in the man was prominent. Then he gave the order to march, and I found myself left alone with the little grotesque in the chair.

I was hot and indignant; but the passion of the other seemed to have exploded itself into a rain of emotion. His dry cheeks quivered; the tears ran down them like moisture on an old wall.

"Monsieur," I said softly, "I know not whether to applaud or upbraid you. And where is *Made-moiselle Carinne*?"

He seemed quite broken in a moment — neither to resent or to be surprised at my mention of the girl's name.

"She is fled," he whimpered — "the little graceless cabbage is fled."

"To safety, I hope?"

"To the devil, for all I care."

"Monsieur, I hold your wretchedness an excuse, even if you have been careless of——"

He caught me up, staring at me woefully.

"Careless? but, my God! I have pampered and maintained her ever since her brown head was a



crutch to my fingers; and this is how she repays me."

"What has she done?"

"She has condemned me to beggary for a prudish sentiment — me, in my old forlorn age. From the first I saw that the test might come — that she might be called upon to employ the privileges of her sex on my behalf. Free-thought, free-love! Bah! What are they but a self-adaptation to the ever-changing conditions of life? The spirit need not subscribe to such mere necessities of being; and a little gratitude at least was due to me. She has none, and for that may God strike her dead!"

"What has she done?"

"Done!" (His voice rose to a shriek again.) "But, what has she not? — That scoundrel Lacombe would have exchanged me my riches — my pitiful show of tankards that he had unearthed — for her favour. She would not; she refused to go with him; she reviled and cursed me — me that had been her bulwark against poverty."

"You would have sold her honour for your brazen pots?"

"Gold and silver, monsieur; and it was only a question of temporary accommodation. In a few months she might have returned and all would have been well again. But honour — bah! it will survive a chin-chuck better than loss of wealth. But she would not. She escaped from us by a lying ruse, and they sought her far and near without avail. At the last they robbed and maltreated

me, and for that may hell seize them and fester in their bones!"

"And in thine, thou pestilence!"

My fury and my contempt joined with a clap, like detonating acids.

"Lie there and rot!" I shouted, and so flung out of the room.

My heart blazed. That white girl — that Carinne. I could recall her face, could picture her in her loneliness arraigned before Lacombe and his *sans-culottes* and his reptile prisoner — defying them all. With some vague instinct of search directing my fury, I hurried through room after room of the empty house. Each was like its neighbour, vulgarised, scantily furnished, disfigured by the search that had been conducted therein. Once I broke into the girl's own bed-chamber (it was hers, I will swear, by token of little feminine fancies consistent with the character I had gifted her withal) and cursed the beasts who had evidently made it the rallying-point of their brutal jesting. But this, obviously, must be the last place in which to seek her, and I quickly left it.

Not a soul did I happen upon. Of whomsoever the household had consisted, no single individual but the old villain in the chair was remained to brazen out the situation.

At last I made my way into the grounds once more, issuing from the rear of the building into a patch of dense woodland that flowed up to within fifty yards of the walls. I heard voices, and, plunging down a moist track amongst the trees, came

immediately in view of my party returning to the house. Then I saw there were two women conducted in its midst, and my throat jumped and I ran forward.

At least my sudden apprehension was comforted. These crying wenches were of the working class — comely domestics by their appearance.

Crépin stayed them all when he came up to me. The ugly look had not left his face — was intensified on it, in fact. He stared at me, haughty and lowering at once, and was altogether a very offensive creature.

“Has Citizen Thibaut any further exception to take to my methods of procedure?” he said ironically.

I looked at him, but did not reply.

“Because,” he went on, “perhaps his permission should be asked that these pretty citizenesses accompany me in my carriage?”

“*Mais non, monsieur — par pitié, mais non!*” cried one of the wenches in a sobbing voice.

He bent down to her — a sicklily self-revealed animal.

“Hush, *ma petite!*” he said. “We of the Republic do not ask; we take. Thou shalt have a brighter gown than ever De Lâge furnished for thy shapely limbs.”

She stopped crying, and seemed to listen at that. He came erect again, with a smile on his face and his lips licking together, and regarded me defiantly.

“The Citizen Representative can please him-

self," I said coldly, and pushed past them all and walked on. Crépin turned to look after me, gave a peculiar cynical laugh, and cried, "*En avant!*" to his party.

I was to read the significance of his attitude in a moment, — to read it in the dead form of Michel hanging from a tree.

I rushed back along the path and caught the others as they issued from the wood. Crépin heard me coming, bade his men on to the house, and returned a pace or two to meet me. His mood asserted, he was something inclined, I suppose, to a resumption of the better terms between us. At any rate his expression now was a mixture of embarrassment and a little apprehension. But I spoke to him very staidly and quietly, —

"M. Crépin, it dawns upon me that I am slow to learn the methods of the new morality, and that I shall never justify your choice of a secretary."

"You are going to leave me."

"There will be the more room in the coach for monsieur's harem."

I made him a low bow and went off amongst the trees. He called after me — there was some real regret in his voice — "But you will come to harm! be wise! — monsieur!"

I paid no heed; and the thickets received and buried me.

## V

## LA GRAND' BÊTE

MY rupture with Crépin was the preface to a period of my life, the details of which I could never but doubtfully piece together in my mind. During this period I lived, but how I supported existence is a problem that it is beyond my power to solve. I have an indistinct memory of wandering amongst trees — always amongst trees; in light and darkness; in drought and in dew; of scaring and being scared by snakes, that rustled from me over patches of dead leaves; of swallowing, in desperate phases of hunger, berries and forest fruits, of whose properties I was as ignorant as of their names.

And, throughout, the strange thought dwelt with me, warm and insistent, that I was the champion elect of that white Carinne with whom I had never so much as exchanged a word. To me she was the Una of these fathomless green depths — the virgin who had carried her maidenhood and her pride to the Republic of the woods, where security and an equal condition were the right of all.

This fanciful image possessed a singular fascination for me. It glimmered behind trees; it peered through the thick interlace of branches; I heard the paddle of its feet in mossy rills, or the low song of its voice rising from some shadow prostrate

in beds of fern. No doubt fatigue and hunger and that sense of a long responsibility repudiated came to work a melodious madness in my brain. For days, loitering aimlessly under its spell, I was happy — happier, I believe, than I had ever been hitherto. I had become a thing apart from mankind — a faun — a reversion to the near soulless type, but with the germ of spirit budding in me.

It was a desire to avoid a certain horror dangling over a track that had at first driven me into the thickets, and so lost me my way. The memory of a blot of shadow, on the sunny grass underneath that same horror, that swayed sluggishly, like the disc of a pendulum, as the body swayed above, got into my waking thoughts and haunted them. I wished to put a world-wide interval between myself and the blot — though I had seen monstrosities enough of late, God knows. But, in the silent woods, under that enchanted fancy of my relapse to primitive conditions, a loathing of the dead man, such as Cain might have felt, sickened all my veins. I was done with violence — astonished that its employment could ever have entered into the systems of such a defenceless race as man.

But also I knew that to me, moving no longer under the ægis of authority, the towns and the resorts of men were become quagmires for my uncertain feet. I was three hundred miles from Paris; all my neighbourhood was dominated by Revolutionary Committees; my chance of escape, did once that black cuttle-fish of the "Terror" touch me with a tentacle, a finger-snap would

express. My hitherto immunity was due, indeed, to the offices of certain friends, and a little, perhaps, to my constitutional tendency to allow circumstances to shape my personality as they listed. Resigned to the remotest possibilities, my absence of affectation was in a sense my safeguard.

Here, however, far from the centre of operations, that which, under certain conditions, had proved my protection, would avail me nothing. A sober nonchalance, an easy manner, would be the very thyrus to whip these coarse provincial hinds to madness. And, finding in my new emancipation — or intellectual decadence — an ecstasy I had not known before, I was very tender of my life, and had no longer that old power of indifference in me to the processes of fatality.

How long this state of exaltation lasted I do not know; but I know it came to me all in a moment that I must eat or die. It was the reflection of my own face, I think, in a little pool of water, that wrought in me this first dull recrudescence of reason. The wild countenance of a maniac stared up at me. Its hollow jaws bristled like the withered husks of a chestnut; its lips were black with the juice of berries; an animal *abandon* slept in the pupils of its eyes. Ah! it was better that reason should triumph over circumstance than that the soul should subscribe tamely to its own disinheritance.

All in an instant I had set off running through the wood. That privilege of man, to dare and to fail, I would not abrogate for all the green retreats of nature.

For hours, it seemed to me, I hurried onwards. My heart sobbed in my chest; my breath was like a knotted cord under my shirt. At last, quite suddenly, blue sky came at me through the trunks, and I broke from the dense covert into a field of maize, and found myself looking down a half mile of sloping arable land upon a large town of ancient houses, whereof at the gate opposite me the tri-colour mounted guard on the height of a sombre tower.

Now, in view of this, my purpose somewhat wavering, I sat me down in the thick of the corn and set to wondering how I could act for the best. I had assignats in my pocket, and a little money, yet there could be no dealings for me in the open market. Thinking of my appearance, I knew that by my own act I had yielded myself to the condition of a hunted creature.

All the afternoon I crouched in patches of the higher stalks, peeping down upon the town that, spreading up a gentle slope in the nearer distance, lay mapped before my eyes. Sometimes desperate in my hunger, I would snatch a head of the standing grain; but to chew and swallow more than would just blunt the edge of my suffering would be, I knew, to invite a worser torture. The sun beat on my head; my throat was caked with drought. At last I could endure it no longer, but retreated once more into the wood and waited for the shadows to lengthen.

It was early evening when I ventured into the field again and looked down. The falling sunlight



smote the town with fire from the west, so that its walls and turrets seemed to melt in the glare and run into long pools of shadow. But here and there wan ribbons of streets, or patches of open places, broke up the sombreness — in vivid contrast with it — and seemed to swarm, alone of all the dappled area, with crawling shapes.

Of these blotches of whiteness, one flashed and scintillated at a certain point, from some cause I could not at first fathom. Now white, now red, it stretched across the fields a rayed beam that dazzled my wood-haunted eyes with the witchery of its brightness.

But presently I saw the open patch whence it issued grow dark with a press of figures. It was as if a cloth had been pulled over a dead face; and all in a moment the strange flash fell and rose again, — like a hawk that has caught a life in its talons, — and a second time swooped and mounted, clustered with red rays, — and a third time and a fourth; but by then I had interpreted the writing on the wall, and it was the "*Mene, mene,*" written on the bright blade of the guillotine by the finger of the setting sun.

A very strange and quiet pity flowed in my veins as I looked. Here was I resting amidst the tranquillity of a golden harvest, watching that other harvest being gathered in. Could it be possible that any point of my picture expressed other than the glowing serenity that was necessary to the composition? I felt as if, in the intervals of the flashing, each next victim must be stepping

forward with a happy consciousness of the part he was to play in the design. Then suddenly I threw myself on my face, and crushed my palms against my mouth that I might not shriek curses on the inexorable beauty of the heavens above me.

I did not look again, or rise from my covert till dark was drooping over the hillside. But, with the first full radiance of moonrise, I got to my feet, feeling dazed and light-headed, and went straight off in an easterly direction. My plan was to circumambulate, at a safe distance, the walls (that could enclose no possibility of help to me in my distress), and seek relief of my hunger in some hamlet (less emancipated) on their further side. If the town was Libourne, as I believed it to be, then I knew the village of St. Émilion to lie but a single league to the southeast of it.

Walking as in a dream, I came out suddenly into the highroad, and saw the moon-drenched whiteness of it flow down to the very closed gates far below me. Its track was a desolate tide on which no life was moving; for nowadays the rural population was mostly drifted or driven into the seething market-places of the Revolution. Now, my imagination pictured this cold and silent highway a softly tumultuous stream — a welded torrent of phantoms, mingling and pushing and hurrying, in the midst of noiseless laughter, to beat on the town gates and cry out murmuringly that a “suspect” was fording a channel of its upper reaches.

This fright, this fancy (one would hardly credit it), brought the sweat out under my clothes. But

it was to be succeeded by a worse. For, as I looked, the boiling wash of moonlight was a road again, and there came up its footsteps rhythmically clanking and unearthly — and others and yet others, till the whole night was quick with their approach. And, as the footfalls neared me, they ceased abruptly, and there followed the sound of an axe ringing down in wooden grooves; and then I knew that the victims of the evening, ghastly and impalpable, were come to gaze upon the man who had indulged his soul, even for a moment, with the enchantment of a prospect whose accent was their agony.

Now, assuredly, my reason was in a parlous state — when, with a whoop that broke the spell, an owl swept above me and fled eastwards down the sky; and I answered to its call, and crossed the road and plunged into fields again, and ran and stumbled and went blindly on once more until I had to pause for breath.

At last I heard the rumbling wash of water, and paused a stone's-throw from a river-bank; and here a weight of terror seemed to fall from me to mark how wan and sad the real stream looked, and how human in comparison with that other demon current of my imagining. From its bosom a cluster of yards and masts stood up against the sky; and by that I knew that I was come upon the Dordogne where it opened out into a port for the once busy town of Libourne, and that if ever caution was necessary to me it was necessary now.

I looked to my right. A furlong off the ram-

part of the walls swept black and menacing; and over them, close at hand now, the silent yoke of the guillotine rose into the moonlight. It must have been perched upon some high ground within; and there it stood motionless, its jaws locked in slumber. Could it be the same monster I had watched flashing, scarlet and furious, from the hill-side? Now, the ravening of its gluttony was satisfied; Jacques Bourreau had wiped its slobbered lips clean with a napkin. Sullenly satiate, propped against the sky, straddling its gaunt legs over the empty trough at its feet, it slept with lidless eyes that seemed to gloat upon me in a hideous trance.

Bah! Now all this is not Jean-Louis Sebastien de Crancé, nor even Citizen Thibaut. It is, in truth, the half-conscious delirium of a brain swimming a little with hunger and thirst and fatigue; and I must cut myself adrift from the hysterical retrospection.

I hurried towards the river, running obliquely to the southeast. If I could once win to clean water, I was prepared, in my desperation, to attempt to swim to the opposite bank. Stumbling, and sometimes wallowing, I made my way up a sludgy shore and suddenly came to a little creek or cove where a boat lay moored to a post. Close by, a wooden shanty, set in a small common garden with benches, like the Guinguettes of Paris, rattled to its very walls with boisterous disputation, while the shadows of men tossing wine-cups danced on its one window-blind. I unhitched the painter of the boat, pushed the prow from the bank, and, as the little

craft swung out into the channel, scrambled softly on board and felt for the sculls in a panic. When I had once grasped and tilted these into the rowlocks, I breathed a great sigh of relief and pulled hurriedly round the stern of a swinging vessel into the cool-running waters of the Dordogne.

It was not until I had made more than half the passage to the further side that I would venture to pause a moment to assuage my cruel thirst. Then, resting on my oars, I dipped in my hat and drank again and again, until my whole system seemed to flow with moisture like a rush. At last, clapping my sopped hat on my head, I was preparing to resume my work, when I uttered a low exclamation of astonishment, and sat transfixed. For something moved in the stern-sheets of the boat; and immediately, putting aside a cloak under which it appeared he had lain asleep, a child sat up on the bottom boards.

Now, my heart seemed to tilt like a top-heavy thing. Must this hateful necessity be mine, then — to silence, for my own safety, this baby of six or seven, this little comical *poupon* with the round cropt head and ridiculous small shirt?

He stared at me, rubbed the sleep from his eyes, and suddenly began to whimper.

"*Heu ! heu !*" he cried in the cheeping voice of a duckling, "*la Grand' Bête !*"

He took me for the mythical monster of the peasants, whose power of assumption of any form is in ratio with the corrective ingenuity of nurses and mothers.

"Yes," I said, my brain leaping to an idea; "I am *la Grand' Bête*, and if you make a noise I shall devour you."

His eyes were like full brown agates; his chin puckered to his lower lip; but he crushed his little fists against his chest to stay the coming outcry. My face relaxed as I looked at him.

"*La Grand' Bête* is kind to the little ones that obey him. Can you use these sculls?"

"*Mais, oui*," he whispered, with a soft sob; "I am the pretty little waterman."

"Very well. Now, little waterman, I shall land at the bank over there, and then you can take the sculls and pull the boat across to the cove again. But you must be very silent and secret about having gone with *la Grand' Bête* over the river, or he will come to your bedside in the night and devour you."

I had been rowing gently as I talked, and now the nose of the skiff grounded easily under a low bank. I shipped the sculls, reached forward and took the rogue in my arms.

"Oh! but *la Grand' Bête* loves the good children. Be a discreet little waterman, and thou shalt find a gold louis under thy pillow this very day month."

I kissed him, and, turning, caught at the knots of grass and hauled myself up the bank. It was a clumsy disembarkation for a god, perhaps, but my late comrade did not appear to be shaken in his faith. I stopped and looked back at him when I had run a few yards from the river. He was

paddling vigorously away, with a professional air, and the moonlight was shattered on his scull-blades into a rain of diamonds. Suddenly a patrol-boat was pulled up the river across his bows, and I half turned to fly, my heart in my mouth.

"Hullo, hullo, Jacksprat!" cried a rough voice. "What dost thou here at this hour?"

"They were noisy in the *auberge*," answered the childish treble, "and I could not sleep."

I went on my way with a smile. To have used the boat and cast it adrift would not have prospered me so well as did this accident. Yet I felt a shame of meanness to hear the little thing taking its lying cue from me, lie to the men, and I wished I had not clinched my purchase of his silence with that promise of a louis d'or.

Pushing boldly across a wide moon-dappled margin of grass, so thronged with trees as to afford one good cover, I came out suddenly into a field-track running southwards, and along this I sped at a fast pace. But presently, seeing figures mounting towards me from the dip of a flying slope, I dived into a belt of corn that ran on my left between the track and the skirt of a dense wood, and lay close among the stalks waiting for the travellers to pass. This, however, to my chagrin, they did not; but, when they were come right over against me, they stopped, very disputative and voluble in a breathless manner, and lashed one another with knotty thongs of patriotism.

"But who wants virtue or moderation in a Commonwealth?"

“Dost not thou?”

“I?—I want heads—a head for every cobblestone in the Rue St. Jacques. I would walk on the brains of self-seekers. This Roland——”

“He wore strings in his shoes to rebuke the vanity of the Veto——”

“And to indulge his own. Head of a cabbage! thou wouldst weep over the orator though he condemned thy belly to starvation. What! shall I satisfy my hunger with a thesis on the beauty of self-denial, because, like a drum, it has a full sound!”

“Be sure I do not defend him; but has he not practised what he taught?”

“Of a certainty, and is double-damned thereby. For know that these austere moralists have found their opportunity to indulge a hobby—not to avenge a people. What do *we* want with abstinence who have practised it all our lives? What do we want with interminable phrases on the sublimity of duty?”

“But, thou wilt not understand that political economy——”

“Bah! I know it for the economy of words—that delicious *terminer les débats* of the jury that rolls another lying mouth into the basket and makes a body the less to feed. But I tell thee, with every fall of the axe I feel myself shifting a place nearer the rich joints at the top of the feast.”

“Liberty——”

“That I desire is the free indulgence of my



appetites. Now would not Roland and Vergniaud and their crew shave me nicely for that sentiment? Therefore I love to hunt them down."

*À vieux chat jeune souris.* How indeed could these old grimalkins, grown toothless under tyranny, digest this tough problem of virtue for its own sake? Their food must be minced for them.

I never saw their faces; but I guessed them, by a certain croaking in their speech, to be worn with years and suffering. Presently, to my disgust, they had out their pipes and a flask of cognac and sat themselves down against the edge of the corn for a mild carouse. I waited on and on, listening to their snuffing talk, till I grew sick with the monotony of it and the cramp of my position. They were, I gathered, informers employed by Tallien in his search for those escaped Deputies who were believed to be in hiding in the neighbourhood.

At last I could stand it no longer. Move I must, for all the risk it entailed. I set to work, very cautiously, a foot at a time, wriggling on my belly through the corn. They took no notice, each being voluble to assert his opinions against the other. Presently, making towards the wood, I found the field to dip downwards to its skirt, so that I was enabled to raise myself to a crouching position and increase my pace. The relief was immense; I was running as the tree-trunks came near and opened out to me.

Now, I was so weary that I thought I must sleep awhile before I proceeded. I was pushing

through the last few yards of the stalks when a guttural snarl arrested me. Immediately, right in my path, a head was protruded from the corn, and a bristled snout, slaving in the moonlight, was lifted at me. I stood a moment transfixed — a long moment, it appeared to me. The ridiculous fancy occurred to me that the yellow eyes glaring into mine would go on dilating till presently I should find myself embedded in their midst, like a prawn in aspic. Then, with a feeling of indescribable politeness in my heart, I turned aside to make a *détour* into the wood, stepping on tiptoe as if I were leaving a sick-room. Once amongst the trees, I penetrated the darkness rapidly to the depth of a hundred yards, not venturing to look behind me, and, indeed, only before in search of some reasonable branch or fork where I might rest in safety. Wolves! I had not taken these into my calculations in the glowing solstice of summer, and it gave me something a shock to think of what I had possibly escaped during my unguarded nights in the forest.

At length I found the place I sought — a little natural chair of branches high enough to be out of the reach of wild beasts, yet the ascent thereto easy. I climbed to it, notched myself in securely, and, my hunger somewhat comforted by the water I had drunk, fell almost immediately into a delicious stupor.

I awoke quite suddenly, yet with a smooth, swift leap to consciousness. The angle of moonlight was now shifted to an oblique one, so that no

rays entered direct; and the space beneath me was sunk into profound darkness. For some moments I lay in a happy trance, dully appreciative of the indistinct shapes that encompassed me, of the smell of living green bark near my face, of the stars embroidered into a woof of twigs overhead. But presently, gazing down, a queer little phenomenon of light fixed my attention, indifferently at first, then with an increase of wonder. This spot of pink radiance waxed and waned and waxed and waned, with a steady recurrence, on the butt of a great tree, twenty yards away. At first it was of a strong rosy tint, but little by little it faded till it was a mere phosphorescent blot; and then, while I was flogging my brains to think what it could be, of a sudden it seemed to fly down to the noise of a little grunting explosion, and break into a shower of scarlet sparks.

At that I was betrayed into a squiggle of laughter; for my phenomenon had in the flash resolved itself into nothing more mysterious than the glow from the pipe of a man seated silently smoking, with his head thrown back against the tree-foot.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed in a surprised voice, but with nothing of fear in it; and I congratulated myself at least that the voice struck a different note to that of either of M. Tallien's informers. Nevertheless, I had been a fool, and I judged it the wise policy to slide from my perch and join my unseen companion. He made me out, I am sure, long before I did him; yet he never moved or showed sign of apprehension.

"Good evening, Jacques," said I.

"Good morrow, rather, Jacques squirrel," he answered.

"Is it so?"

"It is so."

"You prefer the burrow, it seems, and I the branch."

"No doubt we are not birds of a feather."

"Why, truly, I seek Deputies," I said, in a sudden inspiration.

"And I my fortune," he answered serenely.

"We travel by the same road, then. Have you a fragment of bread on you, comrade?"

"If I had a loaf thou shouldst go wanting a crumb of it."

"And why, citizen?"

"I do not love spies."

I fetched a grimace over my miscarried ruse.

"Then wilt thou never make thy fortune in France," I said.

He gave a harsh laugh.

"*You* will prevent me for that word, citizen."

I curled myself up under the tree.

"I will wait for the dawn and read thee thy fortune," I said, "and charge thee nothing for it but a kick to help thee on thy way."

He laughed again at that.

"Thou provest thyself an ass," said he, and re-filled and lit his pipe and smoked on silently.

I lay awake near him, because, churl as he appeared, I felt the advantage of any human companionship in these beast-haunted thickets.

At last the light of dawn penetrated a little to where we rested, and when it was broad enough to distinguish objects by, I rolled upon my elbow and scrutinised my companion closely.

“Good morrow, then, burner of charcoal.”

He turned to me, a leering smile suspended on his lips.

“*Comment ?*” said he.

“But I am a palmist, my friend, as you observe.”

He looked at his stunted and blackened fists.

“Ah! *si fait vraiment.* That is to tell my past condition of poverty, not my fortune.”

“The rest shall come. Observe my fitness for my post. You are from the forests of Nontron.”

He started and stared.

“Truly I have no love for spies,” he muttered, dismayed.

It was my turn to laugh. I had hazarded a bold guess. That he was from the woods rather than from the Landes his gift of seeing through the darkness convinced me. Then, if from the woods, why not from that part of the province where they stretched thickest and most meet for his trade?

“Now,” said I, “for what follows. It comes to your ears that Guienne is hatching a fine breed of maggots from the carcasses of dead aristocrats; that there is a feast of rich fragments toward. You will have your share; you will eat of these aristocrats that have so long fed on you. That is a very natural resolve. But, in a Republic of maggots, as in all other communities, there is

always a proportion of the brood that will fatten unduly at the expense of its fellows. These despots by constitution appropriate the most succulent parts; they wax thick and strong, and, finally, they alone of the swarm hatch out into flies, while the rest perish undeveloped."

"It is a cursed parable," he said sullenly. "I do not comprehend you."

"I speak of the people, my friend — of whom you are not one that will fatten."

"And why, and why?"

"You have scruples. You decry at the outset the methods of this select clique of the Republic that has the instinct to prosper. If I congratulate you on the possession of a conscience, I must deplore in anticipation the sacrifice of yet another martyr to that truism which history repeats as often as men forget it."

"What truism, sayst thou?"

"That swinish Fortune will love the lusty bully that drains her, though the bulk of the litter starve."

He spat savagely on the ground.

"I do not comprehend," he muttered again.

"Well," I said, "at least let us hope there is an especial Paradise reserved for the undeveloped maggots."

He rose and stood brooding a moment; then looked away from me and cried morosely, "Get up!"

To my astonishment, from a sort of cradle of roots to the further side of the tree, a young girl

scrambled to her feet at his call, and stood yawning and eyeing me loweringly.

"Your daughter?" said I.

"Yes," he answered, "she is my daughter. What then?"

I jumped up in some suppressed excitement.

"I recall my words," I said. "You have a chance, after all, down there in Bordeaux. And now I see that it is a thief that fears a spy."

I pointed at the wench. She was dressed ridiculously, inappropriately, in a silk gown of a past fashion, but rich in quality, and decorated with a collar of point-lace. Out of this her dirty countenance, thatched with a villainous mop of hair, stuck grotesquely; and the skirt of the dress had been roughly caught up to disencumber her bare feet.

The man stamped on the ground.

"I do not fear you!" he cried furiously, "and I am no thief!"

I laughed derisively.

"But it is true!" he shouted. "A young lady we met in the woods of Coutras would exchange it for Nannette's *jupon*; and why the devil should we deny her?"

My heart gave a sudden swerve.

"What was she like, this lady?" I said.

The fellow glanced sulkily askance at me.

"Does not the spy know?" he said.

"Perhaps he does. Say this demoiselle was slender and of a reasonable height; that she had brown hair, and grey eyes under dark brows; that

her face was of a cold, transparent whiteness; that she spoke with a certain soft huskiness in her voice."

He cried under his breath, with a note of fright, "The devil is in this man!"

I laughed and took off my hat and made the two a bow.

"To your quick advancement in Bordeaux!" I said.

He stared a moment, seemed to hesitate; then, roughly summoning the girl to follow him, strode off through the wood. The moment they were out of sight I sat down again to ponder.

Was it true, then, that these peasants had met Carinne — that they had helped her to a disguise — for what purpose? She must have been in the woods whilst I was there — accursed destiny that kept us apart! At least I must return to them at once and seek her.

I broke into a queer embarrassed fit of laughter.

What self-ordained mission was this? What was my interest in the girl, or how would she not resent, perhaps, the insolence of my interference? She had no claim upon my protection or I upon her favour.

Very well and very well — but I was going to seek her, nevertheless. Such queer little threads of irresponsible adventure pulled me in these days.

But, at first, for my hunger. It was a great voice in an empty house. It would not be refused or put off with a feast of sentiment. Eat I must, if it was only of a hunk of sour pease-bread.



Suddenly I thought of that bestial apparition at the woodskirt. There had been a liquid "yong" in its snarl, as if it could not forbear the action of gluttonous jaws even while they were setting at an intruder. Perhaps the remains of a goat——!

I started running towards the point at which, I believed, I had entered amongst the trees. Very shortly I emerged into the open, and saw the corn-field shimmering violet before me in the dawn. I beat up and down amongst the standing grain, and all in a moment came upon that I sought. A goat it might have been (or a scapegoat bearing the sins of the people) for anything human in its appearance. Yet it was the body of a man that lay before me in the midst of a trampled crib of stalks — but featureless, half-devoured — a seething abomination.

Now, in the placid aftermath of my fortunes, I can very easily shudder over that thought of the straits to which hunger will drive one. Then, I only know that through all the abhorrence with which I regarded the hideous remains, the sight of an untouched satchel flung upon the ground beside them thrilled me with hope. I stooped, had it in my hands, unbuckled it with shaking fingers. It was full to choking of bread and raisins and a little flask of cognac. Probably the poor wretch had not thought it worth his while to satisfy the needs of an existence he was about to put an end to. For the horn handle of a knife, the blade of which was hidden in the decaying heart of the creature, stood out slackly from a hoop of ribs.

I withdrew into the wood, and without a scruple attacked the provisions. It was a dry and withered feast; yet I had been fastidiously critical of many a *service aux repas* at Versailles that gave me not a tithé of the pleasure I now enjoyed. And at the last I drank to the white Ariane whose Thésée I then and there proclaimed myself to be.

## VI

## THE HERD OF SWINE

I WAS back in the woods of Pierrettes, my precious satchel, still but two-thirds emptied, slung about my shoulders, my clothes wrinkled dry from their sopping in the waters of the Dordogne. All that day of my finding of the food had I lain concealed in the woods; but, with the fall of dusk, I made my way, by a long *détour*, to the riverbank, and crossed the stream swimming and in safety. And now was I again *la Grand' Bête*, seeking to trace in the scent of trodden violets the path by which my white Carinne had vanished.

That night I passed, warned by experience, in the branches of a tree. With dawn of the following day I was on foot again, striking northwards by the sun, and stretching over the encumbered miles with all the speed I could accomplish. I had a thought in my breast, and good fortune enabled me to put it to the proof. For, somewhere about four o'clock, as I judged, I emerged into a woodland track that I felt convinced was the one made detestable by a dangling body; and sure enough I came of a sudden to the fatal tree, and was aware of a cut slack of rope hanging from a branch thereof, though the corpse itself was removed.

Now, it behoved me to proceed with caution, which I did; yet none so successfully but that I came plump out of the mouth of the green passage upon M. de Lâge himself, and saw and was seen by him in a single moment. Therefore I had nothing for it but to brazen out the situation.

He showed no disturbance at my approach, nor, indeed, did he take any notice of me; but he crept hither and thither, with lack-lustre eyes, gathering nettles. I went up to him, suppressing my repugnance of the miserable creature.

“Is mademoiselle returned?” I said outright.

He stopped in his picking, and leered up at me vaguely. He seemed utterly broken and forlorn.

“She will not return,” he said; and resumed his task. I stood some moments watching him. Suddenly he clasped his hands plaintively together and looked me again in the face.

“Why did she go at all?” he said. “Can monsieur tell me, for I forget?”

He put his fingers aimlessly, like an infant, to his head.

“I had a pride in her. She was beautiful and self-willed. *Mon Dieu!* but she would make me laugh or tremble, the rogue. Well, she is gone.”

Could it be that his every memory of his villainy was lost with his cherished tankards?

“What a love was mine!” he murmured. “I would have denied her nothing — in reason; and she has deserted me.”

“Monsieur,” I said, “do you remember me?”

"You, you!" he cried angrily — "what do I know or care about this Orson that springs upon me from the green? You need to be shaved and washed, monsieur."

"Undoubtedly; if monsieur would provide me with the means?"

He gave me a quick, inquisitive look.

"You have a queer accent for a patriot. Well, well — it is no concern of mine."

Again he resumed his task, again to pause in it.

"Do you seek a service? I hear it is the case with many."

"I seek food and a lodging for the night."

"Eh! but can you pay for them?"

"In reason — certainly, in reason."

"So, then? — should Georgette bring a generous basketful — bah!" he cried suddenly, stamping irritably on the ground — "I offer you my poor hospitality, monsieur, and" (the leer came into his eyes again) — "should monsieur feel any scruple, a veil left on the mantelpiece for the servants will doubtless satisfy it."

But he had no servant left to him, it would seem. When, by-and-by, he ushered me, with apish ceremony, into his house, I found the place desolate and forlorn as we had left it.

"I have reduced my following," he said, "since my niece withdrew herself from my protection. What does a single bachelor want with an army of locusts to devour him?"

He showed me into a little bare room on the

second floor, with nothing worthy of remark in it but an ill-furnished bedstead, and a baneful picture on the wall that I learnt was a portrait of Carinne by herself.

"It is a little of a travesty," said De Lâge. "She looked in a mirror, and painted as she saw herself therein — crooked, like a stick dipt under water. But she was clever, for all she insisted that this was a faithful likeness."

I believe there were tears on his face as he left me. What a riddle was the creature! There is a blind spot in every eye, it is said — and the eyes are the windows of the soul.

He had supplied me with soap and water and a razor, and these I found almost as grateful to my wants as the satchel had been. When I was something restored to cleanliness, I descended to the corridor below and, attracted by a sound of movement, entered one of the rooms that opened therefrom.

Within, a young woman was engaged in laying one end of a carved oak table with a white napkin. She looked round as I advanced, stared, gave a twitter of terror, and, retreating to the wall, put an arm up, with the elbow pointed at me, as if I were something horrible in her sight.

I had a sharp intuition; for this, I saw, was the little *aubergiste* of the "Golden Lion."

"You think me responsible for the poor rogue's hanging?" I said.

She whispered, "Yes," with a pitiful attempt to summon her indignation to this ordeal of fear.

I went up to her and spoke gently, while she shrunk from me.

“Georgette, my child, it is not so. You must take that on my honour, for I am a gentleman, Georgette, in disguise.”

“In disguise?” she whispered, with trembling lips; but her eyes wondered.

“Truly, little girl; I am a wanderer now, and proscribed because I would not lend myself to thy Michel’s punishment.”

“Oh!” she sobbed, “but it was cruel. And the Republic destroys its own children, m’sieu’.”

“Thy father ——?”

“Ah! he, at least, is back, if still under surveillance; otherwise I should not be enabled to come daily to minister to the needs of this poor lonely old man.”

“Now thou art a good soul, thou little *aubergiste*. And thy ministrations are meat to him, I perceive.”

“Hush, m’sieu’! but if he were to hear? He asks no questions, he accepts all like a child. He would die of shame were he to learn that he owes his dinner to the gratitude of m’sieu’ his father’s dependant.”

“Is he so sensitive? Thou great little Georgette! And mademoiselle — she does not return?”

She shook her head.

“Tell me where she is, child; for I believe you know.”

“Oh!” she murmured, obviously in great distress, “m’sieu’ must not ask me.”

I took her hands and drew her towards me.

"Look in my eyes and tell me what you see there."

She glanced up scared and entreating.

"But, is it cruelty, false faith, the curish soul of the liar and informer?"

"No, no, m'sieu'."

"Then is it not, rather, the honour of a gentleman, the chivalry that would help and protect a defenceless woman cast adrift in this fearful land of blood and licence?"

I gave her my title.

"Now," I said, "you can cast me to the axe with a word. And where is Mademoiselle Carinne, Georgette?"

She still hesitated. I could see the little womanly soul of her tossing on a lake of tears.

"At least," I said, "she will not return hither?"

"She will never return — oh, monseigneur! she will never return; and it is not for me to say why."

I released her hands.

"Well," I said, "I would have helped her and have cared for her, Georgette; but you will not let me."

She broke forth at once at that, her arms held out and her eyes swimming.

"I will tell you, monseigneur — all that I know; and God forgive me if I do wrong!"

"And me, Georgette, and wither me with His vengeance."

"I will tell you, monseigneur. That night —



that night after the terror, she spent in the woods, and all the next day she hid there, moving towards Coutras. I would go often to the Château to take to M. de Lâge the money for our weekly bill of faggots, and — and for other reasons; and now she watched for me and waylaid me and told me all. Oh, m'sieu'! she was incensed — and it was not for me to judge; but M. de Lâge is a wise man, and perhaps there is a wisdom that makes too little account of the scruples of our sex.”

“She would not return to him? Well!”

“She would beg or starve sooner, she said; and she would begin by asking a little food of me. Oh, m'sieu', but the sad proud demoiselle! My heart wept to hear her so humble to the peasant girl to whom she had been good and gracious always in the old days of peace.”

“That is well. And where is she?”

“I cannot tell you, m'sieu'. Ah, pardon! She but waited for the night, when I could bring her food — all that would keep and that she could carry — and then she started on foot for the mountains of Gatine.”

“Now, *mon Dieu!* they must be twenty leagues away.”

“Twenty-five, m'sieu', by La Roche Chalais and Mareuil. But she would avoid the towns, and journey by way of the woods and the harsh desolate country. Mother of God! but it makes me weep to think of her white face and her tender feet in those frightful solitudes.”

“It is madness!”

“But indeed, m’sieu’. And, though the towns gather all to them and the country is depopulated, there may be savages still left here and there — swineherds, charcoal-burners, to whom that libertine Lacombe ——”

“Silence, girl! And you would have denied her a protector!”

“She bound me to silence, m’sieu’, lest her uncle should send in pursuit.”

“It is madness — it is madness. And what does she go to seek in the mountains?”

“Ah! m’sieu’, I know not — unless it is some haven of rest where the footstep of man is never heard.”

“Now, Georgette, will you meet me to-night where you met her, and bring me food — for which I will pay you — and point me out the way that Mademoiselle Carinne took at parting? I have a mind to journey to the mountains, also, and to go by the harsh country and to start in the dark. Will you, Georgette?”

“Pray the good God,” she said, “that it is not all a *jeu de l’oie*” — and at that moment we heard De Lâge feebly mounting the stairway.

He entered the room and accosted me with a sort of sly courtesy that greatly confounded me. Associations connected with my reappearance, perhaps, had kindled the slow fuse of his memory; but the flame would burn fitfully and in a wrong direction; and, indeed, I think the shock of his loss (of the tankards) had quite unhinged his mind.

“Shall we fall to?” he said. “This is not Paris; yet our good country Grisels can canvass the favour of a hungry man.”

He gave a ridiculous little laugh.

“And what have we here, girl?” he said.

“M’sieu’, it is a pasty of young partridges.”

His palate was not dulled with his wits. It foretasted the delicacy and his eyes moistened. He lingered regretfully over the wedge he cut for me.

“Be generous, monsieur,” he cried, with an enjoying chuckle, “and own that you have been served none better at Véry’s. Oh, but I know my Paris! I was there so late as September of last year, and again, on business connected with my estate, during the month of the king’s trial.”

He blenched over some sudden half-memory; but the sight of Georgette carrying my platter to me restored him to the business of the table.

“I know my Paris!” he cried again. “I have taken kidneys with champagne at La Rapée’s; sheep’s feet at la Buvette du Palais; oysters at Rocher de Cançale. Ho-ho! but does monsieur know the Rocher?”

“*Venite ad me omnes qui stomacho laboratis, et ego restaurabo vos!*” I said, quoting a well-known inscription over an eating-house.

He gave a sharp little squeak.

“Eh! but monsieur has the right etymology of the *restaurateur*; he is a man of taste and of delicacy. This poor burgundy” (he clawed up his glass) — “it might have been Clos Vougeot de

Tourton if monsieur had not been so stringent in his sequestration."

He favoured me with a leer — very arch and very anxious. I could only stare. Evidently he took me, in his wandering mind, for some other than that I was. I was to be enlightened in a moment.

It was when Georgette had left the room and we were alone. The falling sunlight came through a curtain of vine-leaves about the window, and reddened his old mad face. He bent forward, looking at me eagerly.

"Hush, monsieur! The plate — the tankards — the christening-cups! You will let me have them back? My God! there was a cross, in niello, of the twelfth century. It will bring you nothing in the markets of the Vandals. Monsieur, monsieur! I accept your terms — hot terms, brave terms for a bold wooer. But you must not seek to carry her with a high hand. She knows herself, and her pride and her beauty. Hush! I can tell you where she lies hidden. She crouches under a rosebush in the garden, and as the petals fall, they have covered and concealed her."

Now I understood. He was again, in his lost soul, staking Carinne against his forfeited pots. He took me for Lacombe.

I jumped to my feet.

. . . . .  
And now began my second period of wandering; but under conditions infinitely more trying

than the first. Keeping to the dense woods by day, and traversing the highways only by night, I had hitherto escaped that which was to prove the cruellest usurer of my vigour—the merciless blazing sun. Here, as I travelled by desolate broomy wastes; by arid hills, from which any knob of rock projecting was hot as the handle of an oven; by choking woods and endless winding valleys,—I would sometimes ask myself in amazement what could be the nature of the infatuation that for its own sake would elect to endure these sufferings. I had not spoken to the girl. I was not authorised to champion her cause. Strangest of all, the lack of womanly sensitiveness she had displayed under the very ordeal of Le Fargeau's dying groans had not prepossessed me in her favour. Yet, slowly was I making, and would continue to make, my way to these mountains of Limousin, in the dreamy hope of happening upon a self-willed and rather heartless young woman, who—if we *were* to come together—would probably resent my intrusion as an affront. Truly an eccentric quest.

Well—I was unaccountable to myself, and of no account to others. Maybe that last is the explanation. My world of conventions was dead, and I lived—as I have already said—a post-humous life. Through it, no doubt, I was drawn by shadows—attracted by the unexplainable—blown by any wind of irresponsibility. This anarchy at least opened out strange vistas of romance to the imaginative soul. It is odd to

live apart from, and independent of, the voice of duty. That state shall seldom occur; but, when it does, to experience it is something to feel the marvel of dematerialisation.

Depleted of human life; savage in its loneliness; blistered and flaked by the sun, the country through which I travelled was yet beautiful to a degree. Of food — by means of eking out my little supply with chestnuts and wild berries — I had a poor sufficiency; but thirst tortured me often and greatly. I moved slowly, threshing the land, as it were, for traces of an ignis-fatuus that still fled before me in fancy. And I had my frights and perils — one adventure, also; but that I shall not in this connection relate.

Once, high up on the ridge of a valley, I saw a poor wretch, his arms bound behind him, hurrying forward under escort of a guard. It was evening, soft and tranquil. A cluster of mountain peaks swam in the long distance; the horizon was barred with a grate of glowing clouds. Therethrough, it seemed, the consumed sun had fallen into white ashes of mist; but the cooling furnace of the sky, to the walls of which a single star clung like an unextinguished spark, was yet rosy with heat; and against the rose the hillside and the figures that crowned it were silhouetted in a sharp deep purple. How beautiful and how voiceless! The figure fell, and his scream came down to me like a bat's cheep as the soldiers prodded him to rise with their bayonets. Then I cursed the Goths that had spoiled me my picture.

Another time, lying concealed in a little hanging copse above a gorge, I heard bleating below me and the rainy patter of feet, and peered forth to see a flock of goats being driven down the valley. They were shepherded by three or four "requisition" men, as they were called — patriot louts whose business it was to beat up the desolated country for those herds of sheep or swine that had run wild for lack of owners. Their unexpected appearance was a little lesson in caution to me, for I had enjoyed so long an immunity from interference as to have grown careless of showing myself in the most exposed districts.

On two occasions only was I troubled by wolves. The first was on a morning of lassitude and fatigue, when water had failed me for many hours. I was resting, on a heath-covered slope, within a rocky cave or lair in the hillside. For long the sky wraiths had been loading cloud upon cloud, till the gathered steam of the earth, finding no outlet, seemed to scald one's body. Then, in a moment, such a storm crashed down as I had never before experienced. Each slam of thunder amongst the rocks was like a port of hell flung open; the lightning, slashing through the hail, seemed to melt and run in a marrowy-white flood that palpitated as it settled down on the heather. But the hail! the fury of this artillery of ice — its noise, and the frenzy of the Carmagnole it danced! I was fortunate to be under a solid roof; and when at last the north wind, bristling

with blades, charged down the valley like the Duke of Saxony's Horse at Fontenoy, I thought the earth must have slipped its course and swerved into everlasting winter.

Suddenly the mouth of the *ressui* was blotted by a couple of shaggy forms. They came pelting up — their tails hooked like carriage-brakes to their bellies, their eyes blazing fear — and, seeing me within, jerked to a rigid halt, while the stones drummed on their hides. The next moment, cowed out of all considerations of caste, they had slunk by me and were huddled, my very sinister familiars, at the extreme end of the cave.

Oh, but this was the devil of an embarrassment! I had sat out sermons that stabbed me below the belt at every second lunge; I had had accepted offers of gallantry that I had never made; I had ridiculed the work of an anonymous author to his face. Here, however, was a situation that it seemed beyond my power of *finesse* to acquit myself of with *aplomb*. In point of fact, the moment the storm slackened, I slipped out — conscious of the strange fancy that bristles were growing on my thighs — and, descending hurriedly to the valley, climbed a tree. It was only then (so base is human nature) that I waived the pretence that the wolf is a noble animal.

But my second experience was a more finished one. Then I tasted the full flavour of fright, and almost returned the compliment of a feast to my company. I was padding, towards evening, over a woodland lawn, when from a hollow at the foot



of a great chestnut-tree a rumbling snarl issuing vibrated on the strings of my sensibilities, and I saw three or four very ugly snouts project themselves from the blackness. I went steadily by and steadily continued my way, which without doubt was the discerning policy to pursue. But impulse will push behind as well as fly before reason, and presently that which affects the nerves of motion did so frantically hustle me at the rear as to set me off running at the top of my speed. Then the folly of my behaviour was made manifest to me, for, glancing over my shoulder as I sped, I saw that no fewer than five fierce brutes were come out of their lair at the sound, and were beginning to slink in my wake.

I gave a yell that would have fetched Charon from the other side of the Styx. My feet seemed to dance on air; I threatened to outstrip my own breath. Still the patter behind me swelled into a race, and I found myself ghastlily petting a thought as to the length of a wolf's eye-tooth and the first feel of it clamped into one's flesh. Now, of a sudden, the wood opened out, and I saw before me the butt of a decayed tree, and, on its further side, a little reedy pond shining livid under a rampart of green that hedged off the sunset. At the water I drove, in a lost hope that the pursuit would check itself at its margin, and, in my blind onset, dashed against a branch of the dead tree and fell half stunned into the pool beyond. Still an inspiring conscious-

ness of my peril enabled me to scramble further, splashing and choking, until I was perhaps twenty yards from the shore; and then, in shallow water, I sat down, my head just above the surface, and caught at my sliding faculties and laughed. Immediately I was myself again, and the secure and wondering spectator of a very Walpurgis dance that was enacting for my benefit on the bank.

The five wolves appeared, indeed, to be skipping in pure amazement, like the mountains of Judæa; but they howled in tribulation, like the gate of Palestina. They leapt and ran hither and thither; they bit at the air, at their flanks, at their feet; they raked their heads with their paws and rolled on the ground in knots. At last I read the riddle in a tiny moted cloud that whirled above them. In dashing against the rotten branch I had, it seemed, upset a hornets' nest built in the old tooth of the tree, and the garrison had sallied forth to cover my retreat.

Oh, but the braves! I raised a little pæan to them on the spot, but I took care not to shout it. Suddenly the beasts turned tail and went yelling back into the wood. I did not rise at once. I left the victors time to congratulate themselves and to settle down. And at last I was too diffident to pester them with my gratitude, and I waded sheer across the pool (that was nowhere more than three feet deep) and landed on its further side.

. . . . .

One day I came upon Carinne!

That is the high note of this droning chant of retrospection.

I was walking aimlessly, the hot thirst upon me once more, when I came out from amongst trees into a sort of forest amphitheatre of considerable extent, whose base, like the kick in a bottle, was a round hill, pretty high, and scattered sparsely with chestnut-trees. I climbed the slopes toilsomly, and getting a view of things from near the summit, saw that to the north the circumference of green was broken by the gates of a hazy valley. It was as beautiful a place as I had ever happened on; but its most gladdening corner to me was that whence a little brook looped out of the forest skirt, like a timid child coaxed from its mother's apron, and pattering a few yards, fled back again to shelter.

Now I would take it all in before I descended, postponing the cool ecstasy like an epicure. I mounted to the top and, peering between the chestnut trunks down the further slopes, uttered an exclamation of surprise. A herd of swine was peacefully feeding against the fringe of the wood, and, even as I looked, one of them, a mottled porkling, crashed through a little rug of branches spread upon the ground and vanished into Tartarus. Immediately his dismal screeches rebuked the skies, and, at the sound, a girl came running out of the wood, and kneeling above the fatal breach, clasped her hands over her eyes and turned away her face — a very Niobe of pigs. Seeing her thus,

I descended to her assistance; but, lost in her grief, it seemed, she did not hear me until I was close upon her. Then suddenly she glanced up startled, — and her eyes were the cold eyes of Carinne.

## VII

## THE CHEVALIER DU GUET

THE eyes of Mademoiselle de Lâge were a merciless grey; her face was gold-white, like a dying maple-leaf. She wore no cap on her tumbled hair, and a coarse umber-coloured *jupon* was her prominent article of attire. I knew her at once, nevertheless, though her cheeks were a little fallen and her under-lids dashed with violet. She stared at me as she knelt; but she made no sign that she was afraid.

“Mademoiselle is in tribulation?”

“You need not speak a swineherd so fair,” she said.

“But I honour pork with all my heart.”

She rose to her feet. She seemed to hesitate. But she never took her eyes off me.

“Whence do you come?” she said, in her soft, deliberate voice.

“From the woods — from the wastes — from anywhere. I am proscribed and in hiding. I am hungry, also — and mademoiselle will give me to eat?”

“Why do you call me ‘mademoiselle’? Do you not see I am a swineherd?”

The little pig still screeched fitfully underground.

"Oh!" she cried, in sudden anguish. "Kill it, monsieur, if you know the way, and let us dine!"

I was pleased with that "us."

"I have no technical knowledge," I said. "But let us see. It is injured?"

"*Mon Dieu!* I hope not. I had so longed to taste meat once more, and I had heard of pitfalls. There was a hole in the ground. I covered it over with branches, that one of these might step thereon and tumble in and be killed. But when I heard his cries I was sorry."

"That was a bold thought for a swineherd. And how would you tell your tale, with one devoured; or get the little pig out of the pit; or skin and dismember and cook it when hauled to the surface?"

"All that I had not considered."

"But you desired to eat pork? And what would you say now to a pig's foot *à la* St. Menehould?"

The jest bubbled out of me; I could not withhold it. Her mind was as quick as her speech was measured.

"Ah!" she cried, "but I remember. And you were in Février's, monsieur?"

"At the table next to yours."

"*C'est une chose étrange, n'est-ce pas?*"

She gave a little scornful shift to her shoulders.

"It is all nothing in these mad days. The question is, monsieur, if you can put the little beast out of his pain?"

I looked into the pit. Two beady eyes, withdrawn into a fat neck, peered up at me.

“The hole is not six feet deep, mademoiselle. His pain is all upon his nerves.”

She gave a whimper of relief. Then her face fell cold again.

“It follows that we must forego our dinner. Will monsieur release the victim of my gluttony?”

I jumped into the hole — hoisted out the small squeaker — returned to the surface.

“*Bon jour*, monsieur!” said Carinne.

“You will dismiss me hungry, mademoiselle?”

“What claim have you upon me?”

“The claim of fraternity, citoyenne.”

She uttered a little laugh of high disdain.

“Well, rob me,” she said, “and prove yourself a true Republican.”

“I would steal nothing from you but your favour.”

“It is all bestowed on these animals. Take him you have rescued and make yourself my debtor and go.”

“Mademoiselle, is this to be, when I have spent days — nay, I know not how many — of hunger and thirst and weariness in the desperate pursuit of one to whom I had vowed to offer those services of protection she lacked elsewhere?”

Her pale eyes wondered at me.

“Do you speak of the swineherd, monsieur?” she said.

“I speak of Mademoiselle de Lâge.”

“She is very secure and in good company. And whence comes your knowledge of, or interest in, her?”

“ Shall I tell you the story? ”

“ Nay,” she said, with a sudden swerve to indifference; “ but how does it concern me? ”

“ Your uncle, mademoiselle! ”

“ I have none that I own.”

I was silent. She looked away from me, tapping a foot on the ground. It was all a fight between her bitterness and her pride. With a woman the first conquers.

“ Tell me,” she said in a moment, turning upon me, “ do you come from him? ”

“ I come from him.”

“ Commissioned to beg me to return? ”

“ No, mademoiselle. Nor would I insult you with such a message.”

“ I can dispense with your interest in me, sir.”

Again she averted her face. Decidedly she required some knowing. By-and-by she spoke again, without looking round and more gently —

“ How does M. de Lâge bear the loss of — the loss of his treasures? ”

“ He is, I fear, demented by it.”

She gave a bad little laugh.

“ One who would sell his honour should at least keep his wits. Well, monsieur, I have nothing with which to reward your service of runner, so —— ”

“ A meal and a drink of water will repay me, mademoiselle.”

“ You can help yourself. Do you think I keep a larder in the forest? ”



"But you eat?"

"My table is spread under the chestnut-trees and over the bushes. I leave its selection to my friends yonder. Sometimes they will present me with a truffle for feast-days."

I regarded the proud child with some quaintness of pity. This repelling manner was doubtless a mask over much unhappiness.

"I have still something left in my satchel," I said. "Will mademoiselle honour me by sharing it?"

The light jumped in her eyes.

"I do not know," she said. "What is its nature?"

"Only some raisins and a little hard bread."

"But bread, monsieur! That I have not tasted for long. We will go to the brook-side and sit down."

"And the herd?"

"They will not wander. When they come to a fruitful ground they stay there till it is stripped."

She led the way round the hill to the little gushing stream and seated herself on a green stone. I would not even slake my thirst until I had spread my store on her lap. Then I lay down at her feet, like a dog, and waited for the fragments she could spare. She ate with relish, and took little notice of me. But presently she paused, in astonishment at herself.

"I am eating up your dinner!" she cried.

"It gives me more pleasure to watch than to share with you."

"Oh, fie!" she exclaimed. "But am I not a true swineherd?"

She handed me the satchel.

"It is all yours, mademoiselle."

"Eat!" she said peremptorily. "I will not touch another mouthful."

She leaned an elbow on her knee and her chin upon her knuckles while I devoured what remained. Her eyes dreamed into the thronging tree-trunks. I thought the real softness of her soul was beginning to quicken like a February narcissus.

"But how I long for meat!" she said suddenly.

I laughed.

"If mademoiselle will retain me in her service, I will make shift to provide her with a dish of pork."

She turned and looked at me.

"Is it true you have sought me out? I have no knowledge of your face."

"It will not, like mademoiselle's, impress itself on the imagination. I have seen you, by chance, twice before, mademoiselle, and therefore it follows, in the logic of gallantry, that I am here."

She drew herself up at that word I was foolish enough to utter.

"I perceive, monsieur, that you hold the licence of your tongue a recommendation to my service. Is this another message with the delivery of which you would not insult me?"

"Nay, mademoiselle, I spoke the common fashion of more trivial times than these; and I ask

your pardon. It is to save you from the possibility of insult that I have wandered and starved these many days."

She looked at me very gravely.

"I foresee no danger in these solitudes. I am sorry, monsieur; but I cannot accept your service."

She rose to her feet and I to mine.

"Mademoiselle," I cried, "be wise to reconsider the question! A delicate and high-born lady, solitary and defenceless amongst these barbarous hills! But I myself, on my journey hither, have encountered more than one perilous rogue!"

She shook her head.

"I take it as I find it. Besides, I have always a covert into which I can slip on menace of a storm."

"But this is madness!"

"By monsieur's account that is the present condition of our family," she said frigidly.

"See, mademoiselle — I ask nothing but that I may remain near you, to help and protect, your guard and your servant in one."

She made as if to go.

"You fatigue me, monsieur. It is not the part of a gentleman to impose his company where it is not desired. You will not remain by my consent."

"Then I shall remain nevertheless!" I cried a little angrily. "I must not allow mademoiselle to constitute herself the victim to a false sentiment."

She left me without another word, going off to

her pigs; and I flung myself down again in a pet by the brookside.

. . . . .

All that afternoon and evening I wandered about in the neighbourhood of the little hill. I was hot and angry — after a humorous fashion — with myself rather than with Carinne. If I had chosen to invest my self-imposed knight-errantry with a purely fictitious order of merit, I could hardly blame the girl for declining to recognise its title to respect. At the same time, while I assured myself I detested her, I could not refrain from constantly speculating as to the nature of her present reflections. Was she still haughtily indignant at my insistence, or inclined to secret heart-searchings in the matter of her rather cavalier rejection of my services? Like a child, I wished her, I think, to be a little sorry, a little unaccountably sad over the memory of the stranger who had come and gone like a sunbeam shot through the melancholy of her days. I wished her to have reason to regret her unceremonious treatment of me. I did *not* wish her to overlook my visit altogether — and this, it would appear, was just what she was doing.

For, when I once, somewhere about the fall of dusk, climbed softly to the top of the hillock to get view of her, perchance, from ambush, I was positively incensed to hear her voice coming up to me in a little placid song or chant that was in itself an earnest of her indifference and serenity. She sat against a tree at the foot of the slope, and all about her, uncouthly dumped on the fallen

mast, were a score of drowsy pigs. She sang to them like Circe, while they twitched lazy ears or snapped their little springs of tails; and the sunset poured from the furnace-mouth of the valley and made her pale face glorious.

Now she did her beauty more justice by voice than by brush, though in each art she was supremely artless; but there was a note of nature in the first that was like the winter song of a robin. And presently she trilled a little childish *chansonnette* of the peasants that touched me because I had some memory of it: —

The little bonne, Marie  
*(A moi, mon poupon !)*,  
 Spoke to her doll so wee  
*(A moi, mon poupon !)* :  
 “Hush, little son, sweet thing!  
 But wouldst thou be a king?”  
*(A moi, mon poupon !)*

“Thy sceptre grows in the mere”  
*(A moi, mon poupon !)* :  
 “Thy crown in the blossoming brere”  
*(A moi, mon poupon !)*.  
 “For orb a grape shall stand  
 Clutched in thy tiny hand”  
*(A moi, mon poupon !)*.

A rose she pinned at his side  
*(A moi, mon poupon !)*,  
 And one to each foot she tied  
*(A moi, mon poupon !)* ;  
 His cot she lined with rue,  
 And she named him her *Jésus*  
*(A moi, mon poupon !)*.

I lay amongst the branches that night, with the memory of the low, sweet voice and the strange picture in my brain. And, as I tossed, literally, on my timber couch, a weirder fancy would come to me of the elfish swineherd sleeping within her charmed circle of hogs, — fearless and secure, — mingling her soft expression of rest with their truculent breathings.

I was up (or rather down) early; washed in the brook; breakfasted fastidiously off beech-nuts. Then, quite undecided as to my course of action, I loitered awhile amongst the trees, and finally came round by the hill once more, and dwelt upon a thought to climb it and investigate. But, as I stood in uncertainty, a shrill cry came to my ears. It rang startlingly in that voiceless pit of green, and I hurried at my topmost speed round the base of the mound, and came suddenly upon a sight that met me like a blow.

Two savages, each with an arm of the girl brutally seized, were shouldering the poor swineherd towards the trees. She cried and struggled, disputing every step; the pigs streamed curiously in the wake of the group. There was an obvious, ugly inference to be drawn from the sight, and I made no compromise with my discretion. I just rushed through the herd and charged straight at one of the ruffians.

He was aware of me — they both were — before I reached him. They twisted their heads about, and the one I made for dropped his hold of Carinne and jumped to meet my onset, while the other

hooted, "*O-he! bran de lui!*" and tightened his grip of the girl. I saw only that my assailant was a powerful, coarse *bonnet-rouge*, little-eyed, hairy as Attila. The next instant I had dived, caught one of his ankles, and given his furious impetus an upward direction. He went over me in a parabola, like a ball sprung from a trap, and I heard his ribs thud on the ground. But I had no time to give him my further attention, for, seeing his comrade's discomfiture, the second rascal came at me.

And now I was like to pay dearly for my temerity, for, though I was lithe and active enough, I had not that of substance on my bones to withstand the pounding of a couple of enraged and sanguinary giants. The poor Carinne had sunk, for the moment unnerved, upon the ground. I prayed God she had a knife to use on herself for a last resource. No doubt the ruffian I had thrown would take me in the rear in a moment. The other was bearing down upon me like a bullock. Suddenly, when come almost within my reach, he jerked himself to so quick a halt that his heels cut grooves in the mast. I saw his eyes dilate and glare beyond me, and on the instant a single vibrant scream, like the shrill neigh of a horse, rose from the ground at my back. It was the cue for an immediate quarrelling clamour, fierce and gluttonous, such as one hears when a bucket of wash is emptied into a sty; and if it was lifted again, bodiless and inhuman, it might not reach through the uproar.

I had turned to look — and away again in in-

finite horror. Upon the half-stunned wretch, as he lay prostrate on his back, an old ravening boar of the herd had flung itself in fury, and with one bestial clinch of its teeth and jerk of its powerful neck had torn out the very apple of the man's throat. And there atop of his victim the huge brute sprawled, tossing its head and squeaking furiously; while the rest of the herd, smitten with the beast-lust, ran hither and thither, approaching, snuffing, retreating, and, through all, never ceasing in their guttural outcry.

Now in a moment came a pause in the tumult, and I read in my opponent's eyes, as distinctly as though they were mirrors, that the triumphant brute behind me was showing itself alert with consciousness of the living prey that yet offered itself in reversion. I saw in the man's face amazement resolve itself into sick terror; he slipped back into its sheath the *couteau-poignard* he had half drawn. "*Adieu-va!*" I shouted at him, advancing — and on the word he wheeled about and pounded off amongst the trees as if the devil were at his heels.

When I ran to Mademoiselle de Lâge, she was regaining in a dazed manner her feet and her faculties.

"I must lift you — I must help you!" I cried. "Ah! do not look, but come away! My God, what peril, when the beast in man is made manifest to the beast in the beast!"

I put my right arm about her under hers. To touch the very stringy texture of the *jupon* with



my hand was to find my heart queerly lodged in my finger-tips. She came quietly with me a few paces; then suddenly she wrenched herself free, and, turning her back upon me, fumbled in her bosom.

“Monsieur,” she said on a little faint key, from the covert of her hair (*Bon Dieu!* that admirable low huskiness in her voice that made of her every utterance a caress!), “Monsieur, he was the old brave of my little troop. I called him my *Chevalier du Guet*. It was inhuman — yes, it was inhuman; but he struck for his lady and rescued her. Wilt thou not be my ambassador to decorate him for a last token of gratitude?”

Heaven! the magnificence of her fancy! She had taken from her shoulders her scapular, together with a little heart of chalcedonyx that hung therefrom. This latter she detached and handed to me.

“Loop it to his ear, if thou darest,” said she.

I went quite gravely to do her bidding. What a *farceur* of circumstance was I become! But my breast overflowed with deference as I approached the great pig. He had rolled from his victim and stood a little apart, evilly humouring with his chaps a certain recollection. He eyed me with wickedness as I advanced, and his obsequious following, something subsided from their hysteria, seemed awaiting their cue. I would not allow myself a second's indecision. I walked straight up to him — “Monsieur,” I said, “*avec l'égard le plus profond*” — and flung the string over his ear.

Alas! the ingrate! As I retreated he threw down his head, dislodged the trinket, smelt at and swallowed it.

The eyes in Carinne's yet shocked face looked a pale inquiry when I returned to her.

"Mademoiselle," I said, "the honour would appear entirely to his taste."

She nodded seriously.

"It is well," she whispered; "and I hope none will rob him."

"He shall be turned inside out first," I said stoutly; and at that she nodded again, and bid me to a hurried retreat.

We may have walked a mile, or even two, in a solemn silence before my comrade was fain to stop, in the heart of a woodland glen, and throw herself exhausted on a bank. Then she looked up at me, her fatigued eyes struggling yet with defiance.

"Why do you not upbraid me?" she said. "Why do you not say 'I told you so'?"

"Because it does not occur to me."

"Ah! you would make a fine virtue of forbearance; you would be the patient ass to my vanity, would you not, monsieur?"

"I would let mademoiselle ride me rough-shod till I fell dead."

"And so leave me the living monument to your nobility. But it is not generous, monsieur, thus to rebuke me with silence."

"I did not intend to ——"

"And, after all, it was the hog that struck most effectively."

"And that is conceded, mademoiselle; and the hog is generously decorated."

She mused up at me rebelliously.

"I do not even know your name."

"It is Citizen Thibaut."

"Citizen —" (she made a wry mouth of it).

"Then, if I can find the wherewithal to reward your gallantry, citizen, will you leave me to myself?"

"Mademoiselle, if only I could believe none other would impose himself on that sweet duet!"

She shrugged her shoulders fretfully.

"Monsieur, monsieur, you assume a father's privilege. Has my misfortune placed me beyond the pale of courtesy? or has a swineherd no title to the considerations of decency?"

"Nay, mademoiselle; it is that your beauty and your proud innocence make so many appeals to both."

My obstinacy seemed a goad to her anger.

"You exaggerate the importance of your service," she cried. "Either of those great strong men could have crushed you like an old nut——"

She seemed to struggle a moment with herself — without avail.

"For you are very little," she added.

I felt myself turn pale. I made her a most profound bow.

"I will leave mademoiselle," I said gravely, "to the only company she can do justice to."

"My own?" she asked. I did not answer, and I turned from her quivering all through. I had

gone but a few paces when her voice came after me.

“Monsieur, I am dying of hunger!”

*Mon Dieu!* What a speech to grapple at the soul! I hurried hither and thither, plucking her a meal from the earth, from the bushes. My heart bled with a double wound.

Presently I stood before her, stern and silent. Her face, hidden in her hands, was averted from me. Suddenly she looked up.

“The little pod holds the fattest pea,” she said, and burst into tears.

*Petite pluie abat grand vent.*

She was very sweet and humble to me by-and-by. She made me the *amende honorable* by calling my heart too great for my body. And at last said she ——

“I take you for my knight, monsieur — to honour and protect, to bear with and respect me ——” and I kissed her brown hand in allegiance.

## VIII

## QUATREMAINS-QUATREPATTES

“MADemoisELLE, what do you weave?”

She sat at the entrance to her sleeping-place — a hole under the radiated roots of an ancient oak-tree. We had happened upon the shelter in our league-long flight. It was one of those burrows — those *logettes* into which past generations of the hunted and proscribed had sunk like moles. Many of our forests are honeycombed with them. Over the opening to this, once concealed by a cunning mat of weeds and branches, the roots had contrived a more enduring cover. Within, to walls and floor, yet clung the remnants of brushwood with which long ago the den had been lined.

Carinne was deftly busy over a queer contrivance — a sort of fencing mask that she plaited from thin tendrils of a binding-weed.

“Monsieur on his high perch at night will suffer from the mosquitoes?”

“Has mademoiselle reason to think so?”

“As I think I can tell when a little ape carries a nut in his pouch.”

“Alas! but how cynical of romance are the tiny blood-suckers! They fly on a chromatic scale, mademoiselle. Often I try to comfort myself with the fancy that I am listening to the very distant

humming of church bells; and then comes a tiny prick, and something seems to rise from my heart to my face, and to blossom thereon. No doubt it is the flowers of fancy budding. And is the weed-bonnet for me?"

"I shall not want it in my burrow."

This gave me exquisite gratification, which survived the many inconveniences to which I was put by the bonnet falling off at night, and my having to descend to recover it. But it soon appeared that the least whim of this fascinating child was to be my law.

And yet what a dear lawless existence! I do not know what termination to it we foresaw. Sooner or later the cold must drive me from my nightly cradle; sooner or later the good fruits of the earth must wither. In the meantime we were *grillon* and *cigale*; we stored not, neither did we labour; but we chatted, and we wandered, and we drew the marrow of every tender berry, and gnawed the rind of every tough, without making faces.

And we quarrelled — *mon Dieu!* but how we quarrelled! Scarce a day passed without dispute, and this in the end it was that resolved the situation for us. For truly my comrade was as full of moods and whimsies as the wind — one moment a curious sweet woman; the next, and on the prick of confidence, a pillar of salt. Yet, even as such, she herself was ever the savour to the insults she made me swallow.

By then I was a little awakening, I think, to a

consciousness that was half fright, half ecstasy. Let me not misrepresent my meaning. I held the honour of Mademoiselle de Lâge in high reverence; yet (and *therefore*, also, *bien entendu*) I could not but acknowledge to myself that in the depth of my heart was sprouting a desire for a more particular understanding between us. This very self-confession at last was like a terrifying surrender of independence — of irresponsibility — of all that sweet store of philosophy I had made it my practice to hive against the winter of old age. I saw my tranquillity yielded to a disturbing sense of duty. I felt my feet and my body stung by a thousand thorns as I turned into the narrow road of self-abnegation. No more for me should gleam the rosy garland and the wine-cup exhaling joy; but rather the olive from the branch should stimulate my palate to caudle, and the priest sanctify my salt of life out of all flavour.

*Aïe, Aïe!* and what then? Why, I was forgetting that as a lady puts the deduction before the argument, and cultivates her intuitive perceptions by reading the *dénoûment* of a romance after the first chapter, so she will have decided upon the direction of that last gift of herself while pinning her favours upon the coats of a dozen successive hopefuls. I might humour or tease my fancy over the presumptive flavour of that draught of matrimony, while all the time Mademoiselle de Lâge of Pierrettes held my person and my citizenship in frank contempt. Decidedly I was eating my chicken in the egg.

Still, the very fearless susceptibility of the child, her beauty and her wilfulness, were so many flames to feed that fire of passion that the strange nature of our comradeship had first kindled in my breast. And so always before my mind's eye I kept, or tried to keep, the picture of the Chevalier Bayard and the Spanish ladies of Brescia.

. . . . .

One day, in our wanderings, we came out suddenly upon a track of highroad that, sweeping from us round a foreshore of desolate hills, seemed, like a coast-current, to set some gaunt pines at a little distance swaying as if they were the masts of ships. By then, as I gather, we must have travelled as far north as Chalus, and were come into regions that, by reason of their elevation, were somewhat colder and moister than the sunny slopes we had quitted. Perhaps it was this change of atmosphere that chilled our odd but never too ardent relations one with the other; perhaps it was that Carinne, as I, was at length taking alarm over the ambiguity of our position. In any case we fell out and apart, and so followed some harsh experiences to the pair of us.

Now we backed from the public way in fright, and, concealing ourselves once more amongst the trees, sat down, and were for a long space silent. The interval was a pregnant one to me, inasmuch as I was labouring with a resolve that had been forming for days in my breast. And at last I spoke —

“Carinne, we have been much at cross-purposes of late.”



"Have we, M. Thibaut? But perhaps it is in the order of things."

"And that is to say that the plebeian Thibaut and the patrician De Lâge cannot meet on a common plane?"

"You must not put words in my mouth."

"Ah, if I might!"

"What then? It will soothe my *ennui* to hear."

"Not for the moment. Tell me, mademoiselle, would you renew this comradeship were we to escape, and meet in the aftertime under better conditions of security?"

"Oh, monsieur! and would you have me wander hand in hand with you through the gardens of the Thuilleries? or invite you to sleep upon the tester of my bed? or open my mouth like a young bird at the fruit-stalls, that you might pop in raspberries?"

"Unkind! I would have you meet me by chance; I would see your eyes open to a light of pleasure; I would have you come gladly to me and take my fingers in yours and say: 'This is he that was my good friend when I needed one.'"

"I will remember. And then all will clap their hands and cry 'Bravo!' will they not? and I shall feel a little excitement. '*Qu'y a-t-il*, Jacko!' I shall say. 'Show the company some of the pretty tricks you played in the woods.'"

I was silent.

"And are those the words you would put in my mouth, monsieur?" said Carinne.

"I referred to the present," I answered coldly;

“and, as you take it so, I will speak in your person as I would have you speak. ‘Jean-Louis,’ you say: ‘I am, like all sweet women, an agglomerate of truths and inconsistencies; yet I am not, in the midst of my wilfulness, insensible to the suffering my caprice of misunderstanding puts you to; and, in face of the equivocal character of our intercourse, I will forego the blindness that is a privilege of my sex. Speak boldly, then, what lies in your heart.’”

As I spoke in some trepidation, Carinne’s face grew enigmatical with hardness and a little pallor, and she looked steadily away from me.

“I thank you,” she said softly, “for that word ‘equivocal.’ But please to remember, monsieur, that this ‘*intercourse*’ is none of my seeking.”

“You choose to misapprehend me.”

“Oh! it is not possible,” she cried, turning sharply upon me. “You take advantage of my condescension and of the wicked licence of the times. Have you sought, by this elaborate process, to entrap me into a confession of dependence upon you? Why” (she measured me scornfully with her eyes), “I think I look over and beyond you, monsieur.”

“Now,” I said, stung beyond endurance by her words, “I pronounce you, mademoiselle, the most soulless, as you are the most beautiful woman I have ever encountered. I thought I loved you with that reverence that would subscribe to the very conditions that Rachel imposed upon Jacob. I see I was mistaken, and that I

would have bartered my gold for a baser metal. And now, also, I see, mademoiselle, that the callousness you displayed in presence of the murdered Lepelletier, which I had fain fancied was a paralysis of nerve, was due in effect to nothing less vulgar than an unfeeling heart!"

She stared at me in amazement, it seemed. I was for the moment carried quite beyond myself.

"I will leave you," I cried, "to your better reflections; or, at least, to your better judgment. This Thibaut will walk off the high fever of his presumption, and return presently, your faithful and obedient servant."

I turned, fuming, upon my heel and strode off amongst the trees. I had not gone a dozen paces when her voice stayed me. I twisted myself about.

"Do not lift your head so high, monsieur," she said, "or you will run it against a mushroom and hurt yourself."

. . . . .  
 Insolent — cruel — fascinating! For what had I indulged this mood of quixotry — for what permitted this intolerable child to gall my sides with her disdain? Would it have been thus had I condescended to drive her coquetry to bay with that toothless dog of my rank? Ah! I believed so; and that only made the sting of her contempt the more poisonous. It was my person that could not suffice; and truly there is no bribe to a woman's favour like an extra inch of weediness. She is the escapement of the heart; but the reason she will

never move till she acquire a sense of proportion. She was designed but to put man out of conceit with himself, and I think she was not formed of his rib but of his spleen. Therefore the tap-root of her nature is grievance, from which her every leaf and flower and knot and canker takes its sustenance of misconstruction. She may bloom very fair and sweet; but then so does the dulcamara, and to taste either is dangerous.

Thinking these thoughts, I postponed my return to the little glade where I had left Carinne. She should believe me gone for good and all, I vowed, and so should she suffer the first pangs of desertion. Then, though she wished to make me feel small, no giant should figure so great in her eyes as the moderate Thibaut.

At last, in the early glow of evening, the unquenchable yearning in my heart would brook no longer delay. Half-shamefaced, half-stubborn, I retraced my steps to the glen that held my all of aggravation and of desire.

She was not there. She never came to it more. For long I would not realise the truth. I waited, and hoped, and often circumambulated the spot where she had rested, hurrying over a greater or less circumference according to my distance from the centre. I called—I entreated—perhaps in the darkness of night I wept. It was all of no avail. She had vanished without leaving a trace, wilfully and resentfully, and had thus decided to reward my long service of devotion.

When—after lingering about the spot for two

nights and two days, drugging a dying hope with the philtre of its own brewing — I at length knew myself convicted of despair, a great bitterness awoke in my breast that I should have thus permitted myself to be used and fooled and rejected.

“She is not worthy of this vast of concern!” I cried. “I will forget her, and resume myself, and be again the irresponsible maggot contributing to the decay of a worm-eaten system. To taste disenchantment! After all, that is not to drink the sea!”

But it was to eat of its fruit of ashes; and I was to carry a burden with me that I might not forego. This in my subsequent wanderings made my steps drag heavily, as if always I bore in the breast of my coat the leaden image of an angel. But, nevertheless, I could muster a pride to my aid in moments of a very desperate lassitude of the soul.

With the opening of October I was still a solitary “rogue,” ostracised from my herded kind. I had wandered so far north as that I saw Paris (the ultimate goal, I felt, of my weary feet) to swim distinguishable in the misty ken of my mind. Therefrom always seemed to emanate a deadly but dulcet atmosphere, the attraction of which must sooner or later overpower me. Sometimes in the night I could have thought I heard the city’s swarming voices jangling to me down the steeper roads of wind; sometimes the keystone of the Conciergerie would figure to me as the lodestone to all shattered barques tossing helplessly on a

shoreless waste. For I was sick to the heart of loneliness ; sick of the brute evasion of my race ; sick of my perilous immunity from all the burning processes of that frantic drama of my times. And so I trudged ever with my face set to the north, and the hum of the witches' cauldron, whose broth was compound of all heroism and all savagery, singing phantomly in my ears.

And to this direction yet another consideration induced me. With the approach of chillier weather the wild wood-life of the wilder provinces asserted itself, and assumed a more menacing aspect. The abolition of the game laws had brought about, indeed, an amazing increase in the number of wolves and foxes ; and what with these on one side and sans-culottism on the other, I had often latterly felt myself walking between the devil and the deep sea. Then, once upon a time, I was joined by an odd roguish wayfellow, the obliquity of whose moral vision I overlooked for the sake of his company ; and through him was my burden of self-dependence a little lightened.

I had sunk asleep one afternoon in a copse neighbouring on the royal village of Cléry. Autumn is all a siesta in that mild and beautiful district. Waking, I felt the sunlight on my eyes like a damp warm sponge ; and so with my lids gratefully closed I fell a-musing.

"To think," I murmured, "that the twang of a beetle's bowstring at my ear on the old bridge outside Coutras should have been the key-note to all this devil's dance of mine !"

I thought I heard a faint rustle somewhere at hand — a squirrel or coney. I paid no attention to it; but indulged my mood of introspection. By-and-by a step came towards me, advancing boldly amongst the trees from a distance. It approached, reached, stopped over against me. I opened my eyes as I lay, my arms under my head, and placidly surveyed the new-comer. He stood looking down upon me, his fingers heaped upon the black crutch of his *bâton*, and when he saw me awake he nodded his head in a lively manner.

“The occasion is opportune,” he said, in a quick, biting voice.

His lower jaw projected, showing a straight row of little even teeth — like palings to keep his speech within bounds. The brightness of his half-seen eyes belied the indolence of their lids. He wore a jacket of sheepskin, wool outwards; and a leathern bag, stuffed with printed broadsides, hung from his shoulder by a length of scarlet tape. On his head was a three-cornered hat, fantastically caught up with ribbons, and his legs and feet were encased respectively in fine black hose and the neat pumps with buckles known as *pantoufles de Palais*.

“*Comment ?*” said I, without moving.

“The citizen has slept?”

“Most tranquilly.”

“The citizen has dreamt?”

“Without doubt. And he is awake.”

He made a comprehensive gesture with his stick and his hands.

“But I interpret dreams,” said he — “and at one price. I will unravel you the visions of a politician or expound himself to Jack Hodge for the common charge of fifty centimes.”

He bent his head towards me with an affectation of scrutiny.

“I perceive the citizen does not credit me,” he said.

“And so his eyes rebuke his scepticism, interpreter of dreams,” said I; “for thou hast rightly construed their meaning.”

“Ah!” he murmured, raising himself and drawing in his breath. “But I find it simple to convince the most incredulous.”

“You do?”

“Yes,” he cried, clapping his chest; “for know that thou speak’st with Quatremains-Quatrepattes himself!”

He dwelt on the pause that followed; collapsed from it; regarded me, it seemed, in astonishment.

“Thou hast not heard of me?”

“Again the interpreter of dreams justifies himself.”

He looked away from me, in a high manner of abstraction.

“And this is for the sunshine of fame to throw one’s shadow over half the world!” said he.

“Maybe thy fame is at its meridian, citizen, and thy shadow consequently a little fat blot at thy feet?”

He turned to me again.

“Oh yes,” he cried sarcastically. “I am Quatre-



mains-Quatrepattes, and some outside the beaten track know my name, perhaps. But possibly the citizen has never heard even of Jean Cazotte?"

"On the contrary; I have seen and spoken with him."

"*Par exemple!* The man was a charlatan. He could foretell everything but his own guillotining last year. And yet thou art ignorant — well, well!"

He threw up his hands in deprecation; then came and sat down on the grass beside me.

"*Cela m'est égal*, M. Quatremaims-Quatrepattes," said I.

"Ah!" he said; "but I will convince thee at once. Describe to me thy dream."

"I dreamt I wrestled with an angel and was overthrown."

"Thy mistress has quarrelled with and rejected thee."

"An obvious deduction. Yet I will assure you she is no angel."

"Canst thou say so? But we are all of the seed of Lucifer. Proceed."

"I dreamt how a great march grew out of a single accident of sound."

Here I was watchful of him, and I saw some relish twitch his lips. He assumed an air of tense introspection, groping with his soul, like a fakir, amongst the reflex images thrown upon the backs of his eyeballs.

"I hear a note," he said presently, as if speaking to himself — "one vibrant accent like the clipt song of a bullet. Is it struck from an instrument

or from any resounding vessel? It comes down the wind—it clangs—it passes. Nay—it signifies only that some winged insect has fled by the ear of a solitary traveller resting on an ancient bridge; yet from that little bugle-sound shall the traveller learn to date the processes of a long and fruitless journey.”

I broke into a great laugh.

“Most excellent!” I cried. “Thou hast an ingenuity of adaptation that should make thy fortune—even at the very low rate of fifty centimes the job.”

His eyebrows lifted at me.

“Why, M. Quatremaings-Quatrepatte — M. Jacquemart,” said I — “I knew thee listening to me just now; and I heard thee steal away and come again. It is easy to construe with the key in one’s hand.”

He was no whit abashed.

“*Cela m’est égal*,” he said serenely, echoing my words. “But I can foretell one’s future, nevertheless, very exactly.”

“Why, so can I, if I am not to be called upon to verify my statements.”

He looked suddenly in my face.

“Thou art a disguised aristocrat.”

“Better and better. But are we not all such to ourselves? The soul is excessively exclusive.”

“You will not consider I have earned my fee?” said he.

“Fifty times over, my friend. Will you take it in a promissory note?”

"Ah!" he cried pleasantly. "I perceive I have sown in barren soil."

"Again you justify yourself. Yet should I be a very thicket were all the berries I have swallowed of late to germinate in me."

"Is that so?" said he. "But I have been a scapegoat myself ——" and thereat this extraordinary person pressed upon me some food he had with him with an ample and courtly grace.

"This shall yield a better crop than my prophesying," he said, watching me as I munched.

"Of a surety," I answered; "the full harvest of my gratitude."

He pondered at me.

"I wish I could convince thee," he said.

"Wherefore? Is not the evil sufficient for the day in this distracted land? Why should one want to probe the future?"

"Because forewarned is forearmed."

"Oh, little Quatremains-Quatrepattes! Dost thou not perceive the paradox? How can destiny be altered by foreknowledge? If you interpret that I am to be guillotined, and I profit by the statement to evade such a catastrophe, how is not your prophecy stultified?"

"Why, I have no creed of predestination. The lords of life and death are not inexorable. Sometimes, like M. St. Meard, one may buy his reprieve of them with a jest. Above all, they hate the sour fatalist whose subscription to his own faith is a gloomy affectation."

"Well; I think I love thee a little."

He looked at me with a smile.

“Come with me, then. I long to give thee proof. Dost thou need a safeguard? Thou shalt run under my wing — *ça et là* — to Paris if thou wilt. I am popular with all. If necessity drives, thou shalt figure as my Jack-pudding. What! thou mayst even play up to the part. Thou hast slept in the mire; but ‘many a ragged colt makes a good horse.’”

I laughed.

“Why not?” I said. “For I have played the tragic to empty houses till I am tired.”

Quatremains-Quatrepattes and his merry-Andrew gambolled through a score of villages on their road to Paris. I found the rascal hugely popular, as he had boasted he was, and a most excellent convoy to my humble craft, so perilously sailing under false colours. He was subtle, shrewd, seasonable, — of the species whose opportunity is accident; and perhaps no greater tribute could be paid to his deftness than this — that he never once exposed himself to detection by me in a question of moral fraud. “*Ton génie à la main crochue,*” I would say to him, chuckling; but he would only respond with a rebuking silence.

Early he handed over the bag of broadsides — the revolutionary songs and ballads (some, it must be confessed, abominably coarse) — to my care, that so he himself might assume a lofty indifference to the meaner processes of his business. This delighted me. It was like a new rattling game

to me to hawk my commodities amongst the crowd; to jest and laugh with my fellows once more under cover of the droll I represented. Shortly, I think, I became as popular as Quatremains himself; and over this, though he loved me as a valuable auxiliary, he began to look a little sober by-and-by, as if he dreaded I should joke the weightier part of his commerce out of all respect.

*His* popularity was chiefly with the village wenches. They would gather about him at the fountains, and pay their sous open-eyed to be expounded; or singly they would withdraw him into nooks or private places if the case was serious.

"Citizen seer," says Margot, "I dreamed I fell and was wounded."

"That is good, little minette. Thou wilt pay me five sous for a fond lover."

"Citizen seer, I dreamed I was eating of a great egg."

"And thou shalt shortly beget a male child that shall bring thee honour."

"How now, old Jackalent!"

There rises a shrill cackle of laughter.

"*Fi donc, Margot! On te le rendra de bonne heure!*"

To submit the commerce of love to the test of a little dream-manual he carried about with him, that was Quatremains' system. This key (it was in manuscript) interpreted on a couple of hundred, or more, words, from *Abel* to *Wounds*; but affairs of the heart predominated through the whole alphabet of nonsense. He would coach himself

continually from it in secret; but indeed a small wit and a trifle of invention were all that was needed. Now and again I would rally him on this petty taxing of credulity.

"How now!" he would answer. "Art thou not yet convinced?"

"By what, thou most surprising Quatremains-Quatrepattes?"

"For example, did I not foretell that Mère Grignon, whose husband was guillotined, would be brought to bed of a child with the mark of the *lunette* on its throat; and were not my words verified the same night?"

"But who knows that some one may not have bribed the nurse to score the neck of the newborn with whipcord."

"*Tête-bleu!* Should I hold good my reputation and pay this nurse, think'st thou, out of five sous?"

But the rascal had other strings to his bow, all twanging to the same tune *de folles amours* — charms, fortune-telling, palmistry: so many lines under the thumb, so many children; a shorter first joint to the little than to its neighbour finger, the wife to rule the roast; a mole on the nose, success in intrigues; a mole on the breast, sincerity of affection. Then, too, he would tell nativities, cast horoscopes, quarter the planets for you like an orange or like the fruit of his imagination. There is a late picture of him often before me as he sat in the market-place of Essonnes, a little village that lies almost within view of the

towers of Paris. A half-dozen blooming daughters of the Revolution stood about him, their hands under their aprons for warmth; for it was pretty late in November, and in fact the eve of St. Catherine's feast.

"Now," said Quatremains, "there are seven of ye, and that is the sure number; for there must not be more than seven nor fewer than three; and be certain ye are quick to my directions." (He jingled softly in his fists the copper harvest of his gathering.) "Are all of ye virgins?" he cried. "If the charm fails, she who is not will be accountable to the others." (He scanned their hot faces like a very Torquemada of the true faith.) "To-morrow, then," he said, "let each wear inside her bosom all day a sprig of myrtle. At night, assemble together privately in a room, and, as the clock strikes eleven, take ye each your twig and fold it in tissue-paper, having first kindled charcoal in a chafing-dish. Thereonto throw nine hairs from the head, and a little moon-paring of every toe and finger nail, as also some frankincense, with the fragrant vapour arising from which ye shall fumigate each her packet. Now, go to your beds, and with the stroke of midnight compose yourselves to slumber, the envelope under the head, and, so ye have not failed to keep silence from first to last, each shall assuredly be made conversant in dream with her future husband."

Oh, wonderful nature of woman, thus, in a starving France, to throw sous into a pool for the sport of vanity!

. . . . .

Quatremains smuggled me into Paris, and there, for we had no further use of one another, our connection ceased. Thenceforwards I must live on my wits — other than those he had taxed — and on the little pieces of money that remained to me for feast-days. The struggle was a short one. I had not been a fortnight in the city when the blow that I had so long foreseen fell upon me. One day I was arrested and carried to La Force. That, perhaps, was as well; for my personal estate was dwindled to a few livres, and I knew no rag-picker that would be likely to extend to me his patronage and protection.



## IX

## THE WILD DOGS

IT was on a night of middle Vendémiaire in the year two (to affect the whimsical jargon of the *sans-culottes*) that I issued from my burrow with an intrepidity that was nothing more nor less than a congestion of the sensibilities. Fear at that time having fed upon itself till all was devoured was converted in very many to a humorous stoicism that only lacked to be great because it could not boast a splendid isolation. "Suspect of being suspect" — Citizen Chaumette's last slash at the hamstrings of hope — had converted all men of humane character to that religion of self-containment that can alone spiritually exalt above the caprices of the emotions. Thousands, in a moment, through extreme of fear became fearless; hence no man of them could claim a signal inspiration of courage, but only that subscription to the terms of it which unnatural conditions had rendered necessary to all believers in the ultimate ethical triumph of the human race.

I do not mean to say that I was tired of life, but simply that it came to me at once that I must not hold that test of moral independence at the mercy of any temporal tyranny whatsoever. Indeed, I was still so far in love with existence physically, as to neglect no precaution that was calculated

to contribute to the present prolonging of it. I wore my frieze night-cap, carmagnole, sabots, and black shag spencer with all the assumption I could muster of being to the shoddy born. I had long learned the art of slurring a sigh into a cough or expectoration. I could curse the stolid spectres of the tumbrils so as to deceive all but the recording angel, and, possibly, Citizen Robespierre.

Nevertheless, with me, as with others, precaution seemed but a condition of the recklessness whose calculations never extended beyond the immediate day or hour. We lived posthumous lives, so to speak, and would hardly have resented it, should an arbitrary period have been put to our revisiting of the "glimpses of the moon."

On this night, then, of early September (as I will prefer calling it) I issued from my burrow, calm under the intolerable tyranny of circumstance. Desiring to reconstruct myself on the principle of an older independence, I was mentally discussing the illogic of a system of purgation that was seeking to solve the problem of existence by emptying the world, when I became aware that my preoccupied ramblings had brought me into the very presence of that sombre engine that was the concrete expression of so much and such detestable false reasoning. In effect, and to speak without circumbendibus, I found myself to have wandered into the Faubourg St. Antoine—into the place of execution, and to have checked my steps only at the very foot of the guillotine.

It was close upon midnight, and, overhead, very wild and broken weather. But the deeps of atmosphere, with the city for their ocean bed, as it were, lay profoundly undisturbed by the surface turmoil above; and in the tranquil *Place*, for all the upper flurry, one could hear oneself breathe and think.

I could have done this with the more composure, had not another sound, the import of which I was a little late in recognising, crept into my hearing with a full accompaniment of dismay. This sound was like licking or lapping, very bestial and unclean, and when I came to interpret it, it woke in me a horrible nausea. For all at once I knew that, hidden in that dreadful conduit that strong citizens of late had dug from the *Place St. Antoine* to the river, to carry away the ponded blood of the executed, the wild dogs of Paris were slaking their wolfish thirst. I could hear their filthy gutturing and the scrape of their lazy tongues on the soil, and my heart went cold, for latterly, and since they had taken to hunting in packs, these ravenous brutes had assailed and devoured more than one belated citizen whom they had scented traversing the *Champs Élysées*, or other lonely space; and I was aware a plan for their extermination was even now under discussion by the Committee of Public Safety.

Now, to fling scorn to the axe in that city of terror was to boast only that one had adjusted oneself to a necessity that did not imply an affectation of indifference to the fangs of wild beasts—

for such, indeed, they were. So, a suicide, who goes to cast himself headlong into the river, may run in a panic from a falling beam, and be consistent, too; for his compact is with death — not mutilation.

Be that as it may, I know that for the moment terror so snapped at my heel that, under the very teeth of it, I leaped up the scaffold steps — with the wild idea of swarming to the beam above the knife and thence defying my pursuers, should they nose and bay me seated there at refuge — and stood with a white desperate face, scarcely daring to pant out the constriction of my lungs.

There followed no sound of concentrated movement; but only that stealthy licking went on, with the occasional splash of brute feet in a bloody mire; and gradually my turbulent pulses slowed, and I thought myself a fool for my pains in advertising my presence on a platform of such deadly prominence.

Still, not a soul seemed to be abroad. As I trod the fateful quarter ten minutes earlier, the last squalid roysterers had staggered from the wine-shops — the last gleams of light been shut upon the emptied streets. I was alone with the dogs and the guillotine.

Tiptoeing very gently, very softly, I was preparing to descend the steps once more, when I drew back with a muttered exclamation, and stood staring down upon an apparition that, speeding at that moment into the *Place*, paused within ten paces of the scaffold on which I stood.

Above the scudding clouds was a moon that pulsed a weak intermittent radiance through the worn places of the drift. Its light was always more suggested than revealed; but it was sufficient to denote that the apparition was that of a very pale young woman — a simple child she looked, whose eyes, nevertheless, wore that common expression of the dramatic intensity of her times.

She stood an instant, tense as Corday, her fingers bent to her lips; her background a frowzy wall with the legend *Propriété Nationale* scrawled on it in white chalk. Significant to the inference, the cap of scarlet wool was drawn down upon her young *blondes* curls — the gold of the coveted perukes.

Suddenly she made a little movement, and in the same instant gave out a whistle clear and soft.

Yes, it was she from whom it proceeded; and I shuddered. There below me in the ditch were the dogs; here before me was this fearless child.

For myself, even in the presence of this angel, I dared scarcely stir. It was unnatural; it was preposterous — came a scramble and a rush; and there, issued from the filthy sewer, was a huge boar-hound, that fawned on the little citizenne, and yelped (under her breath) like a thing of human understanding.

She cried softly, "Down, Radegonde!" and patted the monster's head with a pretty manner of endearment.

"Ah!" she murmured, "hast thou broken thy faith with thy hunger? Traitor! — but I will ask no questions. Here are thy comfits. My sweet, remember thy pedigree and thy mistress."

She thrust a handful of sugar-plums into the great jaws. I could hear the hound crunching them in her teeth.

What was I to do? — what warning to give? This child — this frail wind-flower of the night — the guillotine would have devoured her at a snap, and laughed over the tit-bit! But I, and the nameless gluttons of the ditch!

They were there — part at least of one of those packs (recruited by gradual degrees from the desolated homes of the proscribed — of *émigrés*) that now were swollen to such formidable proportions as to have become a menace and a nightly terror. The dogs were there, and should they scent this tender quarry, what power was in a single faithful hound to defend her against a half hundred, perhaps, of her fellows.

Sweating with apprehension, I stole down the steps. She was even then preparing to retreat hurriedly as she had come. Her lips were pressed to the beast's wrinkled head. The sound of her footstep might have precipitated the catastrophe I dreaded.

"Citoyenne! citoyenne!" I whispered in an anguished voice.

She looked up, scared and white in a moment. The dog gave a rolling growl.

"Radegonde!" she murmured, in a faint warning tone.

The brute stood alert, her hair bristling.

"Bid her away!" I entreated. "You are in danger."

She neither answered nor moved.

"See, I am in earnest!" I cried, loud as I durst. "The wild dogs are below there."

"Radegonde!" she murmured again.

"Ah, mademoiselle! What are two rows of teeth against a hundred? Send her away, I implore you, and accept my escort out of this danger."

"My faith!" she said at last, in a queer little moving voice, "it may be as the citizen says; but I think dogs are safer than men."

I urged my prayer. The beauty and courage of the child filled my heart with a sort of rapturous despair.

"God witness I am speaking for your safety alone! Will this prevail with you? I am the Comte de la Murette. I exchange you that confidence for a little that you may place in me. I lay my life in your hands, and I beg the charge of yours in return."

I could hear her breathing deep where she stood. Suddenly she bent and spoke to her companion.

"To the secret place, Radegonde—and tomorrow again for thy *confiture*, thou bad glutton. Kiss thy Nanette, my baby; and, oh, Radegonde! not what falls from the table of Sainte Guillotine!"

She stood erect, and held up a solemn finger. The hound slunk away, like a human thing ashamed; showed her teeth at me as she passed, and disappeared in the shadows of the scaffold.

I took a hurried step forward. Near at hand the pure loveliness of this citizenne was, against its surroundings, like a flower floating on blood.

She smiled, and looked me earnestly in the face. We were but phantoms to one another in that

moony twilight; but in those fearful times men had learned to adapt their eyesight to the second plague of darkness.

"Is it true?" she said softly. "Monsieur le Comte, it must be long since you have received a curtsey."

She dropped me one there, bending to her own prettiness like a rose; and then she gave a little low laugh. Truly that city of Paris saw some strange meetings in the year of terror.

"I, too," she said, "was born of the *noblesse*. That is a secret, monsieur, to set against yours."

I could but answer, with some concern—

"Mademoiselle, these confessions, if meet for the holy saint yonder, are little for the ears of the devil's advocates. I entreat let us be walking, or those in the ditch may anticipate upon us his benediction."

"*Ma foi!*" she said, "it is true. Come, then!"

We went off together, stealing from the square like thieves. Presently, when I could breathe with a half relief, "You will not go to-morrow?" I said.

"To feed Radegonde! Ah, monsieur! I would not for the whole world lose the little sweet-tooth her goodies. Each of us has only the other to love in all this cruel city."

"So, my child! And they have taken the rest?"

"Monsieur, my father was the rest. He went on the seventeenth Fructidor; and since, my veins do not run blood, I think, but only ice-water, that melts from my heart and returns to freeze again."

I sighed.

"Nay," she said, "for I can laugh, as you see."



“And the dog, my poor child?”

“She ran under the tumbril, and bit at the heels of the horses. She would not leave him, monsieur; and still — and still she haunts the place. I go to her, — when all the city is silent I go to her, if I can escape, and take her the sweetmeats that she loves. What of that? It is only a little while and my turn must come, and then Radegonde will be alone. My hair, monsieur will observe, is the right colour for the perukes.”

She stayed me with a touch.

“I am arrived. A thousand thanks for your escort, Monsieur le Comte.”

We were by a low casement with a ledge before it — an easy climb from the street. She pushed the lattice open, showing me it was unbolted from within.

“She thinks me fast and asleep,” she said. “Some day soon, perhaps, but not yet.”

I did not ask her who *she* was. I seemed all mazed in a silent dream of pity.

“It is quite simple,” she said, “when no cavalier is by to look. Will the citizen turn his head?”

She was up in an instant, and stepping softly into the room beyond, leaned out towards me. On the moment an evil thing grew out of the shadow of a buttress close by, and a wicked insolent face looked into mine with a grin.

“A sweet good-night to Monsieur le Comte,” it said, and vanished.

Shocked and astounded, I stood rooted to the spot. But there came a sudden low voice in my ear —

“Quick, quick! have you no knife? You must follow!”

I had taken but a single uncertain step, when, from a little way down the street we had traversed, there cut into the night a sharp attenuated howl; and, in a moment, on the passing of it, a chorus of hideous notes swept upon me standing there in indecision.

“My God!” I cried — “the dogs!”

She made a sound like a plover. I scrambled to the ledge and dropped into the room beyond. There in the dark she clutched and clung to me. For though the cry had been bestial, there had seemed to answer to it something mortal — an echo — a human scream of very dreadful fear, — there came a rush of feet like a wind, and, with ashy faces, we looked forth.

They had him — that evil thing. An instant we saw his sick white face thrown up like a stone in the midst of a writhing sea; and the jangle was hellish. Then I closed the lattice, and pressed her face to my breast.

He had run from us to his doom, which meeting, he had fled back in his terror to make us the ghastly sport he had designed should be his.

How long we stood thus I know not. The noise outside was unnameable, and I closed her ears with her hair, with my hands — nay, I say it with a passionate shame, with my lips. She sobbed a little and moaned; but she clung to me, and I could feel the beating of her heart. We had heard windows thrown open down the street

— one or two on the floors above us. I had no heed or care for any danger. I was wrapt in a fearful ecstasy.

By-and-by she lifted her face. Then the noise had ceased for some time, and a profound silence reigned about us.

“Ah!” she said, in a faint reeling voice. “Radegonde was there; I saw her!”

“Mademoiselle — the noble creature — she hath won us a respite.”

Her breath caught in the darkness.

“Yes,” she said. “There is a peruke that must wait.”

Suddenly she backed from me, and put the hair from her eyes.

“If you dare, monsieur, it necessitates that we make our adieux.”

“Au revoir, citoyenne. It must be that, indeed.”

She held out her hand, that was like a rose petal. I put my lips to it and lingered.

“Monsieur, monsieur!” she entreated.

The next moment I was in the street.

. . . . .  
Who was my little citoyenne? Ah! I shall never know. The terror gripped us, and these things passed. Incidents that would make the passion of sober times, the spirit of revolution dismisses with a shrug. To die in those days was such a vulgar complaint.

But I saw her once more, and then when my heart nestled to her image and my veins throbbed to her remembered touch.

I was strolling, on the morning following my strange experience, in the neighbourhood of the Champs Élysées, when I was aware of a great press of people all making in the direction of that open ground.

“What arrives, then, citizen?” I cried to one who paused for breath near me.

He gasped, the little morose. To ask any question that showed one ignorant of the latest caprice of the Executive was almost to be “suspect.”

“Has not the citizen heard? The Committee of Safety has decreed the destruction of the dogs.”

“The dogs?”

“Sacred Blood!” he cried. “Is it not time, when they take, as it is said they did last night, a good friend of the Republic to supper?”

He ran on, and I followed. All about the Champs Élysées was a tumultuous crowd, and posted within were two battalions of the National Guard, their blue uniforms resplendent, their flintlocks shining in their hands. They, the soldiers, surrounded the area, save towards the Rue Royale, where a gap occurred; and on this gap all eyes were fixed.

Scarcely was I come on the scene when on every side a laughing hubbub arose. The dogs were being driven in, at first by twos and threes, but presently in great numbers at a time. For hours, I was told, had half the *gamins* of Paris been beating the coverts and hallooing their quarry to the toils.

At length, when many hundreds were accumulated in the free space, the soldiers closed in and

drove the skulking brutes through the gap towards the Place Royale. And there they made a battue of it, shooting them down by the score.

With difficulty I made my way round to the *Place*, the better to view the sport. The poor trapped *fripsons* ran hither and thither, crying, yelping—some fawning on their executioners, some begging to the bullets, as if these were crusts thrown to them. And my heart woke to pity; for was I not witnessing the destruction of my good friends?

The noise—the volleying, the howling, the shrieking of the *canaille*—was indescribable.

Suddenly my pulses gave a leap. I knew her—Radegonde. She was driven into the fire and stood at bay, bristling.

“Nanette!” cried a quick acid voice; “Nanette—imbecile—my God!”

It all passed in an instant. There, starting from the crowd, was the figure of a tall sour-featured woman, the tiny tricolor bow in her scarlet cap; there was the thin excited musketeer, his piece to his shoulder; there was my *citoyenne* flung upon the ground, her arms about the neck of the hound.

Whether his aim was true or false, who can tell? He shot her through her dog, and his sergeant brained him. And in due course his sergeant was invited for his reward to look through the little window.

These were a straw or two in the torrent of the revolution.

It was Citizen Gaspardin who accepted the contract to remove the carcasses (some three thousand of them) that encumbered the Place Royale as a result of this drastic measure. However, his eye being bigger than his stomach, as the saying is, he found himself short of means adequate to his task, and so applied for the royal equipages to help him out of his difficulty. And these the Assembly, entering into the joke, was moved to lend him; and the dead dogs, hearsed in gilt and gingerbread as full as they could pack, made a rare procession of it through Paris, thereby pointing half-a-dozen morals that it is not worth while at this date to insist on.

I saw the show pass amidst laughter and clapping of hands; and I saw Radegonde, as I thought, her head lolling from the roof of the stateliest coach of all. But her place should have been on the seat of honour.

And the citoyenne, the dark window, the ripping sound in the street, and that bosom bursting to mine in agony? Episodes, my friend — mere travelling sparks in dead ashes, that glowed an instant and vanished. The times bristled with such. Love and hate, and all the kaleidoscope of passion — pouf! a sigh shook the tube, and form and colour were changed.

But — but — but — ah! I was glad thenceforth not to shudder for my heart when a *blonde perruque* went by me.

## X

## THE AFFAIR OF THE CANDLES

GARDEL — one of the most eminent and amusing rascals of my experience — is inextricably associated with my memories of the prison of the Little Force. He had been runner to the Marquis de Kersey; and that his vanity would by no means deny, though it should procure his conviction ten times over. He was vivacious, and at all expedients as ingenious as he was practical; and, while he was with us, the common-room of La Force was a theatre of varieties.

By a curious irony of circumstance, it fell to Madame, his former *châtelaine*, to second his extravagances. For he was her fellow-prisoner; and, out of all that motley, kaleidoscopic assemblage, an only representative of the traditions of her past. She indulged him, indeed, as if she would say, "In him, *mes amis*, you see exemplified the gaieties that I was born to patronise and applaud."

She was a small, faded woman, of thirty-five or so — one of those colourless aristocrats who, lying under no particular ban, were reserved to complete the tale of any *fournée* that lacked the necessary number of loaves. It is humiliating to be guillotined because fifty-nine are not sixty. But that, in the end, was her fate.

I recall her the first evening of my incarceration, when I was permitted to descend, rather late, to the *salle de récréation* of the proscribed. She was seated, with other ladies, at the long table. The music of their voices rippled under the vaulted ceiling. They worked, these dear creatures — the decree depriving prisoners of all implements and equipments not yet being formulated. Madame la Marquise stitched proverbs into a sampler in red silk. She looked, perhaps, a morsel slatternly for a *grande dame*, and her fine lace was torn. But the sampler must not be neglected, for all that. Since the days she had played at “Proverbs” (how often?) in the old paternal château, her little philosophy of life had been all maxims misapplied. Her sampler was as eloquent to her as was their knitting to the ladies in the *Place du Trône*. Endowed with so noble a fund of sentiments, how could they accuse her of inhumanity? I think she had a design to plead “sampler” before Fouquier Tinville by-and-by.

I had an opportunity presently to examine her work. “*À laver la tête d’un Maure on perd sa lessive.*” She had just finished it — in Roman characters, too, as a concession to the Directory. It was a problem-axiom the Executive had resolved unanswerably — as I was bound to tell her.

“*Comment?*” she asked, with a little sideling perk of her head, like a robin.

“Can madame doubt? It requests the black things to sneeze once into the basket; and, behold! the difficulty is surmounted.”



“*Fi donc!*” she cried, and stole me a curious glance. Was I delirious with the Revolution fever?

“Of what do they accuse you, my friend?” she said kindly, by-and-by.

“A grave offence, surely. There is little hope for me. I gave a citizen ‘you’ instead of ‘thou.’”

“So? But how men are thoughtless! Alas!” (She treated me to a little proverb again.) “‘The sleeping cat needs not to be aroused.’”

This was late in the evening, a little before the “lock-up” hour was arrived.

Earlier, as I had entered, she lifted her eyebrows to Gardel, who stood, her *chevalier d’honneur*, behind her chair. The man advanced at once, with infinite courtesy, and bade me welcome, entirely in the grand manner, to the society of La Force.

“I have the honour to represent madame. This kiss I impress upon monsieur’s hand is to be returned.”

The ladies laughed. I advanced gravely and saluted the Marquise.

“I restore it, like a medal blessed of the holy father, sanctified a hundredfold,” I said.

There was a mignonne seated near who was critical of my gallantry.

“But monsieur is enamoured of his own lips,” she said in a little voice.

“Cruel!” I cried. “What should I mean but that I breathed into it all that I have of reverence for beauty? If the citoyenne ——”

There was a general cry — “A fine! a fine!”

The hateful word was interdicted under a penalty.

"I pay it!" I said, and stooped and kissed the fair cheek.

Its owner flushed and looked a little vexed, for all the general merriment.

"Monsieur cheapens his own commodities," she said.

"Ah, mademoiselle! I know the best investments for my heart. I am a very merchant of love. If you keep my embrace, I am well advertised. If you return it, I am well enriched."

The idea was enough. Gardel invented a new game from it on the spot. In a moment half the company was rustling and chattering and romping about the room.

M. Damézague's "*Que ferons-nous demain matin?*" — that should have been this vivacious Gardel's epitaph. He could not be monotonous; he could not be unoriginal; he could not rest anywhere — not even in his grave. It was curious to see how he deluded la Marquise into the belief that she was his superior.

Indeed, these prisons afforded strange illustration of what I may call the process of natural adjustments. Accidents of origin deprived of all significance, one could select without any difficulty the souls to whom a free Constitution would have ensured intellectual prominence. I take Gardel as an instance. Confined within arbitrary limits under the old *régime*, his personality here discovered itself masterful. His resourcefulness, his intelligence, overcrowded us all, irresistibly leaping

to their right sphere of action. He had a little learning even; but that was no condition of his emancipation. Also, he was not wanting in that sort of courage with which one had not condescended hitherto to accredit lackeys. No doubt in those days one was rebuked by many discoveries.

Yet another possession of his endeared him to all *misérables* in this casual ward of the guillotine. He had a mellow baritone voice, and a *répertoire* of playful and tender little folk-songs. Clélie (it was she I had kissed; I never knew her by any other name) would accompany him on the harp, till her head drooped and the *poudre maréchale* from her hair would glitter red on the strings — not to speak of other gentle dew that was less artificial.

Then she would look up, with a pitiful mouth of deprecation. “*La paix, pour Dieu, la paix!*” she would murmur. “My very harp weeps to hear thee.”

The pathos of his songs was not in their application. Perhaps he was quit of worse grievances than those the Revolution presented to him. Perhaps he was happier proscribed than enslaved. At any rate he never fitted music to modern circumstance. His subjects were sweet, archaic — the mythology of the woods and pastures. It was in their allusions to a withered spring-time that the sadness lay. For, believe me, we were all Punchinellos, grimacing lest the terror of tears should overwhelm us.

There was a *chansonnette* of his, the opening words of which ran somewhat as follows: —

“ Oh, beautiful apple-tree!  
 Heavy with flowers  
 As my heart with love!  
 As a little wind serveth  
 To scatter thy blossom,  
 So a young lover only  
 Is needed to ravish  
 The heart from my bosom.”

This might be typical of all. We convinced ourselves that we caught in them echoes of a once familiar innocence, and we wept over our lost Eden. Truly the indulging of introspection is the opportunity of the imagination.

To many brave souls Gardel's peasant ballads were the requiem.

“ Passez, la Dormette,  
 Passez par chez nous ! ”

and so comes the rascal Cabochon, our gaoler, with his lowering *huissiers*, and the “ Evening Gazette ” in his hand.

“ So-and-so, and So-and-so, and So-and-so, to the Conciergerie.”

Then, if the runner had been singing, would succeed some little emotions of parting — moist wistful eyes, and the echo of sobs going down the corridor.

Yet, more often, Cabochon would interrupt a romp, to which the condemned would supplement a jocund exit.

“ *Adieu, messieurs ! adieu ! adieu !* We cannot

keep our countenances longer. We kneel to Sanson, who shall shrive us — Sanson, the Abbé, the exquisite, in whose presence we all lose our heads!”

And so the wild hair and feverish eyes vanish.

But it is of Gardel and the Marquise I speak. While many went and many took their places, these two survived for a time. To the new, as to the old, the rogue was unflagging in his attentions. His every respite inspired him with fresh audacity; from each condemned he seemed to take a certain toll of animation.

Presently Madame and her emancipated servant, with Clélie and I, would make a nightly habit of it to join forces in a bout of “Quadrille.” We appropriated an upper corner of the long table, and (for the oil lamps on the walls were dismally inadequate) we had our four wax candles all regular — but in Burgundy bottles for sconces. A fifth bottle, with no candle, but charged with the ruddier light that illuminates the heart, was a usual accompaniment.

We chattered famously, and on many subjects. Hope a little rallied, maybe, as each night brought Cabochon with a list innocent of our names.

Also we had our eccentricities, that grew dignified by custom. If, in the game, “*Roi rendu*” was called, we paid, not with a fish, but with a hair plucked from the head. It made Clélie cry; but not all from loyalty. So, if the King of Hearts triumphed, its owner drank “*rubis sur l’ongle*,” emptying his glass and tapping the edge of it three times on his left thumb-nail.

Now, I am to tell you of the black evening that at the last broke up our coterie — of the frantic *abandon* of the scene, and the tragedy of farce with which it closed.

On that afternoon Gardel sparkled beyond his wont. He made the air electric with animation. The company was vociferous for a romp, but at present we four sat idly talkative over the disused cards.

“M. Gardel, you remind me of a gnat-maggot.”

“How, sir?” says Gardel.

“It is without offence. Once, as a boy, I kept a tub of gold-fish. In this the eggs of the little insect would be found to germinate. I used to watch the tiny water-dragons come to the surface to take the air through their tails — my faith! but that was comically like the France of to-day. Now touch the water with the finger, and *pouf!* there they were all scurried to the bottom in a panic, not to rise again till assured of safety.”

“That is not my way,” says Gardel.

“Wait, my friend. By-and-by, nearing their transformation, these mites plump out and lose their gravity. Then, if one frights them, they try to wriggle down; their buoyancy resists. They may sink five — six inches. It is no good. Up they come again, like bubbles in champagne, to burst on the surface presently and fly away.”

“And shall I fly, monsieur?”

“To the stars, my brave Gardel. But is it not so? One cannot drive you down for long.”

“To-night, M. Thibaut” (such was my name in the prison register) — “to-night, I confess, I am

like a 'Montgolfier.' I rise, I expand. I am full of thoughts too great for utterance. My transformation must be near."

The Marquise gave a little cry:

"*Je ne puis pas me passer de vous, François!*"

The servant — the master — looked kindly into the faded eyes.

"I will come back and be with you in spirit," he said.

"No, no!" she cried volubly. "It is old-wives' tales — the vapourings of poets and mystics. Of all these murdered thousands, which haunts the murderers?"

I gazed in astonishment. This passive *douillette*, with the torn lace! I had never known her assert herself yet but through the mouth of her henchman.

"Oh yes!" she went on shrilly, nodding her head. "Death, death, death! But, if the dead return, this Paris should be a city of ghosts."

"Perhaps it is," said Gardel.

"Fie, then!" she cried. "You forget your place; you presume upon my condescension. It is insolent so to put me to school. '*Ma demeure sera bientôt le néant.*' It was Danton — yes, Danton — who said that. He was a devil, but he could speak truth."

Suddenly she checked herself and gave a little artificial titter. She was not transfigured, but debased. A jealous scepticism was revealed in every line of her features.

"And what is death to M. Gardel?" she said ironically.

“It is an interruption, madame.”

She burst forth again excitedly:

“But Danton saw further than thee, thou fool, who, like a crab, lookest not whither thou art going, and wilt run upon a blind wall while thine eyes devour the landscape sidelong. I will not have it. I do not desire any continuance. My faith is the faith of eyes and ears and lips. Man’s necessities die with him; and, living, mine are for thy strong arm, François, and for thy fruitful service. My God! what we pass through! And then for a hereafter of horrible retrospection! No, no. It is infamous to suggest, foolish to insist on it.”

“But, for all that, I do,” said Gardel, steadily.

He took her outburst quite coolly — answered her with gaiety even.

I cried “*Malepeste!*” under my breath. And, indeed, my amazement was justified. For who would have dreamed that this little colourless drabble-tail had one sentiment in her that amounted to a conviction? Madame Placide an atheist! And what was there of dark and secret in her past history that drove her to this desire of extinction?

At Gardel’s answer she fell back in her chair with defiant eyes and again that little artificial laugh. In the noisy talk of the room we four sat and spoke apart.

“*Malappris!*” she said. “You shall justify yourself of that boldness. Come back to me, if you go first, and I will believe.”



“Agreed!” he cried. “And for the sign, madame?”

She thought; and answered with the grateful womanliness that redeemed her —

“Do me a little service — something, anything — and I shall know it is you.”

The candles were burned halfway down in their bottles. He rose and one by one blew them out.

“*Voilà!*” he cried gaily. “To save your pocket!”

So the little scene ended.

“M. Gardel,” I said to him presently, “you come (you will pardon me) of the makers of the Revolution. I am curious to learn your experience of the premonitory symptoms of that disease to which at last you have fallen a victim.”

“Monsieur! ‘A nod is as good as a wink to a blind horse.’ It is an early remembrance with me how my father cursed me that I passed my eighth year, and so was liable to the salt-tax. My faith! I do not blame him. Things were hard enough. But it was unreasonable to beat me because I could not stop the march of Time. Yet we had not then learned to worship Reason.”

“The Moloch that devours her children!”

“So it appears. But there were signs and omens for long years before. I am of the territory of Berri, monsieur; and there all we learned to read was between the lines. I will tell you that I heard — for I was in service at the time” (he bowed with infinite complaisance to his Marquise) — “how, all during the chill, dark spring that pre-

ceded the September Massacres, *Les laveuses de la nuit* were busy at their washing."

"And who are they, my friend?"

"Strange, inhuman women, monsieur, who wash in the moonlight by lonely tarns. And while they wash they wail."

"Wash? But what?"

"Some say the winding-sheets of those who are to die during the year."

La Marquise broke into shrill laughter.

"Poor, poor imbecile!" she cried. "Thy credulity would make but one gulp of a gravestone. You must know these things are not, my friend. I tell thee so — I, thy mistress. Miserable! have you nothing in your life that not mountains of eternity could crush out the memory of?"

Again she checked herself.

"It is the one virtue of the Revolution to have decreed annihilation."

A deputation approached us. She jumped to her feet, her pale eyes flickering.

"But, yes!" she cried, "a game, a game! I acquit myself of these follies. It is present life I desire. Messieurs, what is it to be? To the front, François!"

The man responded at a leap. The veins of all received the infection of his wild humour. In a moment, chattering and pushing and giggling, we were to take our places for "*Shadow Buff*."

We had no sheet. The dirty drab of the wall must suffice. A stool was placed for the guesser — not yet appointed; and la Marquise's four candles,

relighted, were placed on the table over against it, in a receding row like a procession of acolytes. Between the candles and the back of the guesser the company was to pass one by one for identification by means of the shadows cast on the wall.

“Who shall take the stool?”

The clamour echoed up to the vaulted stonework of the roof—and died. Cabochon’s evil face was visible at the grille.

He saw what we were at; the dull brute was sopped with drink and bestially amiable. His key grated in the door and he stood before us, his bodyguard supporting him, the fatal list in his hand.

“Ah!” he said, “but ‘*Shadow Buff*’ again? It is well timed. Yet I could name some citizen shadows without sitting on the stool.”

His voice guttered like a candle. It seemed to run into greasy drops.

A wild inspiration seized me.

“*Voilà, citoyen!*” I cried. “You shall join us. You shall take your victims from the wall!”

In a moment I had snatched the dirty rag of paper out of his hand, and had retreated with it a few paces. I had an instant to glance down the list before he slouched at me in sodden anger. My heart gave a queer little somersault and came upright again.

“*Sang Dieu!*” he growled thickly. “You do well to jest. Give me the paper, or I’ll brain you with my keys!”

I dropped laughing upon the stool, and held the

list between and under my knees. With an oath he fell upon me. The company applauded it all with a frenzy of mad mirth and frolic.

The struggle was brief. He rose directly, puffing and cursing, the paper in his hand.

I affected a crestfallen good-humour.

"You might have let us have our game out," I protested.

With his recovered authority in his hand, the rascal condescended to some facetious tolerance.

"So!" he said; "you play a good part. They should have you for King George in 'Le Dernier Jugement des Rois.' But rest content. You shall appear on a notable stage yet, and before an audience more appreciative than that of the Théâtre de la République."

"And I shall know how to bow my thanks, citizen."

"Ah!" he crowed. "I love thee! Thou shalt have thy game and sit here; and I will pick from the flock as thou numberest its tale."

It fell in with the reckless, dreadful humour of the times. I would have withdrawn from the cruel jest, but it was the company of *misérables* that prevented me.

Who should go first? There was a little hesitation and reluctance.

"Come, hurry!" cried Cabochon, "or I must do my own guessing!"

Suddenly a shadow glided past upon the wall.

"No, no!" I muttered.

"Name it, name it!" chuckled the gaoler. The

grinning *sans-culottes* at the door echoed his demand vociferously.

"Gardel!" I murmured faintly. The leading spirit had, characteristically, been the first to enter the breach.

"Good," croaked Cabochon, referring to his list. "Citizen shadow, you are marked for judgment."

I rose hurriedly from the stool.

"I will no more of it!" I cried.

"What!—already? My faith! a nerveless judge."

Instantly a figure pressed forward and took my place.

"Pass, pass, good people!" it cried, "and *I* will call the tale!"

She sat there—the Marquise—her lips set in an acrid smile. Neither look nor word did she address to her forfeited servant.

Another shadow passed.

"Darviane!" she cried shrilly.

"*Encore bien,*" roared Cabochon amidst shrieks of laughter. My God, what laughter!

Milet, De Mérode, Fontenay—she named them all. They took their places by the door, skipping—half-hysterical.

D'Aubiers, Monville—I cannot recall a moiety of them. It was a destructive list. Clélie also was in it—poor Clélie, the frail, I fear, but with the big heart. I fancied I noticed a harder ring in Madame's voice as she identified her.

I stood stupidly in the background. Presently I heard Cabochon.

"Enough! enough! The virtuous citizens would forestall the Executive."

He numbered up his list rapidly, counted his prisoners. They tallied.

"To be repeated to-morrow," he said. "It is good sport. But the guessers, it seems, remain."

He treated us to a grin and a clumsy bow, gave the order to form, and carried off his new batch to the baking.

As the door clanged upon them I gave a deep gasp. I could not believe in the reality of my respite.

For the thinned company the reaction had set in immediately; women were flung prostrate, on the table, over the benches, wailing out their desperate loss and misery.

Madame made her way to me. The strange smile had not left her mouth.

"You were on the list. I saw it in your face."

"I was at the bottom — the very last."

"But how —?"

"As Cabochon struggled with me, I turned my name down and tore it off."

"But the number?"

"It tallied. It was enough for him."

"They must find it out — to-morrow, when the prisoners are arraigned."

"Probably. And in the meantime we will drink to our poor Gardel's acquittal."

"No," she said, shrinking back, with an extraordinary look. "If I wish him well, I wish him eternal forgetfulness."

It was the evening of the day succeeding. Shorn of our partners in "Quadrille," Madame and I had been playing "Piquet."

We were only two, but the four lights flickered in their bottles.

La Marquise de Kerco had been musing. Suddenly she looked up. Her eyes were full of an inhuman mockery.

"The candles!" she said, with a little laugh. "We are no longer using them. To save my pocket, François!"

*Pouf!* a candle went out — another, another, another; between each the fraction of time occupied by something unseen moving round systematically.

I started to my feet with a suppressed cry.

One or two sitting near us complained of this churlish economy of wax. They imagined I was the culprit.

"Madame!" I muttered. "Look! she is indisposed!"

Her face was white and dreadful, like a skull. Hearing my voice she sat up.

"So! He has been guillotined!" she said.

She articulated with difficulty, swallowing and panting without stop.

"M. Thibaut, it is true, then, they say! But it was he made me kill the child. He has more need to forget than I. Is it not appalling? If I tell them now how I have learnt to fear, they will surely spare me. I cannot subscribe to their

doctrines — that Club of the Cordeliers. If I tell them so — Danton being gone — ”

Her voice tailed off into a hurry of pitiful sobs and cries. I welcomed the entrance of Cabochon with his list.

Her name was first on it.

As we stood arisen, dreading some hideous scene, she fell silent quite suddenly, got to her feet, and walked to the door with a face of stone.

“Death is an interruption.”

“*Ma demeure sera bientôt le néant.*”

Which could one hope for her, pondering only that delirious outcry from her lips?

Possibly, indeed, she had been mad from first to last.

I had time to collect my thoughts, for — from whatever cause — Citizen Tinville had, it appeared, overlooked me.



## XI

## PYRAMUS AND THISBE

I WAS taking exercise one forenoon in the yard of the prison. It was the last black "Prairial" of the "Terror" — the month, like the girl La Lune, once dedicate to Mary — and its blue eyes curiously scrutinised, as Cleopatra's of old, the processes amongst us slaves of that poison that is called despair.

As for myself, I yet a little consorted with Hope — the fond clinging mistress I had dreaded to find banished with the rest of the dear creatures whose company had long now been denied us; — for five months had passed since my incarceration, and I was still, it seemed, forgotten.

I trod the flags — fifty paces hither and thither. Going one way, I had always before my eyes the frowzy stone rampart and barred windows of the prison. Going the other, an execrable statue of M. Rousseau — surmounting an altar to Liberty, the very cement of which was marbled with the blood of the massacres — closed my perspective. To my either hand was a lofty wall — the first giving upon the gaolers' quarters; the second dividing the men's yard from that in which the women were permitted to walk; and a foul open sewer, tunnelled

through the latter about its middle, traversed the entire area, and offered the only means by which the sexes could now communicate with each other.

“M. Thibaut,” said a voice at my ear; and a gentleman, detaching himself from the aimless and loitering crowd of prisoners, adapted his pace to mine and went with me to and fro.

I knew this oddity—M. the Admiral de St. Prest—though he had no recognition of me. That, however, was small wonder. By this time I was worse than a *sans-culotte*, by so much as that my bareness was suggested rather than revealed. My face was sunk away from my eyes, like soft limestone from a couple of ammonites; my ribs were loose hoops on a decayed cask; laughter rattled in my stomach like a pea in a whistle. Besides, I had come, I think, to be a little jealous of my title to neglect, for I had made that my grievance against Fate.

Nevertheless, M. de St. Prest and I had been slightly acquainted once upon a time, and it had grieved me to see this red month marked by the advent in La Force of the dubious old fop.

He had been a macaroni of Louis XV.'s Court, and the ancient *rôle* he had never learnt to forego. The poor puppies of circumstance—the fops of a more recent date, to whom the particular cut of a lapel would figure as the standard of reason—bayed him in the prison as they would have bayed him in the streets. To them, with their high top-boots *à l'Anglaise*, poor St. Prest's spotted breeches

and knee-ribbons were a source of profound amusement. To them, affecting the huskiness of speech of certain rude islanders (my very good friends), his mincing falsetto was a perpetual incitement to laughter. Swaggering with their cudgels that they called "constitutions," they would strike from under him the elaborate tasselled staff on which he leaned; tossing their matted manes, they would profess to find something exquisitely exhilarating in the complicated *toupet* that embraced and belittled his lean physiognomy. I held them all poor apes; yet, I confess, it was a ridiculous and pathetic sight, this posturing of an old wrecked man in the tatters of a bygone generation; and it gave me shame to see him lift his plate of a hat to me with a little stick, as the fashion was in his younger days.

"M. Thibaut," he said, falling into step with me, "these young bloods" (he signified with his cane a group that had been baiting him) — "they worry me, monsieur. *Mort de ma vie!* what manners! what a presence! It shall need a butcher's steel to bring their wits to an edge!"

"Oh, monsieur," said I — "have you not the self-confidence to despise personalities? The fool hath but a narrow world of conventions, and everything outside it is to him abnormal. His head is a drumstick to produce hollow sounds within a blank little area. For my part, I never hear one holding the great up to ridicule without thinking, There is wasted a good stone-cutter of epitaphs."

"*Eh bien*, monsieur! but I have been accus-

tomed to leave the study of philosophy to my lackeys."

He spoke in a lofty manner, waving his hand at me; and he took snuff from a battered wooden box, and flipped his fingers to his thumb afterwards as if he were scattering largesse of fragrance.

"So, you have a royal contempt of personalities?" he said, with a little amused tolerance.

"Why," said I — "I am not to be put out of conceit with myself because an ass brays at me."

"Or out of countenance, monsieur?"

"Oh, M. de St. Prest! That would be to lose my head on small provocation. Besides, one must admit the point of view. M. Gamache there surveys the world over the edge of a great stock; you, monsieur, regard it with your chin propped upon a fine fichu. No doubt Sanson thinks a wooden cravat *comme il faut*; and I — *fichtre!* I cry in my character of patriot: 'There is nothing like the collar of a carmagnole to keep one's neck in place!' Truly, M. l'Amiral, I for one am not touchy about my appearance."

His old eyes blinked out a diluted irony.

"And that is very natural," he said; "but then, *mort de ma vie!* you are a philosopher — like him there."

He pointed to the statue of Rousseau. The libellous block wrought in him, it seemed, a mood of piping retrospection.

"I saw the rascal once," he said, — "a mean, common little man, in a round wig. He was without air or presence. It was at the theatre. The

piece was one of M. de Sauvigny's, and he sat in the author's box, a *loge grillée*. That was a concession to his diffidence; but his diffidence had been too much consulted, it seemed. He would have the grate opened, and then the house recognised and applauded him, and finally forgot him for the *Persifleur*. He was very angry at that, I believe. We heard it lost the author his friendship. He accused him of having made a show of him, and — *Mort de ma vie!* that is to be a philosopher."

He ogled and bowed to a stout kindly-looking woman who, coming from the gaoler's quarters, passed us at the moment. It was Madame Beau, the keeper of La Force — the only one there in authority whose sense of humanity had not gone by the board. A ruffianly warder, leading a great wolf-hound, preceded her. She nodded to us brightly and stopped —

"Ah, M. Thibaut! but soon we shall call you the father of La Force."

"As you are its mother, madame."

"Poor children. But, after all, if one considers it as a club —"

"True; where one may feast like Belshazzar. Yet, I find, one may have a surfeit of putrid herrings, even though one is to die on the morrow."

Madame shrugged her shoulders.

"Ah, bah! the stuff is supplied by contract. I am not to blame, my little fellows. Yet some of you manage better." (She pointed to the retreating hound.) "*Voilà le délinquant!* He was caught

red-handed — discussing the bribe of a sheep's trotter; and his sentence is five hours in a cell."

She nodded again and jingled her keys.

"But, yes," she said, "consider it as a club —" and off she went across the yard.

"A club? Oh, *mon Dieu!*" murmured St. Prest.

"Well," said I, "I am inclined to fall in with the idea. What livelier places of sojourn are there, in these days of gravity and decorum, than the prisons?"

He pursed his lips and wagged his old head like a mandarin.

"At least," he said leeringly, "she is a fine figure of a woman. She dates, like myself, from the era of the *Bien-aimé*, when women knew how to walk and to hold themselves; and to reveal themselves, too. *Oh, je m'entends bien!* I have been entertained in the *Parc aux cerfs*, M. Thibaut."

I could certainly believe it. This effete old carpet-admiral! Had he ever smelt salt water? I could understand, perhaps, that he had crossed in the packet to the land of fogs. But now he was to exhibit himself to me in a more honourable aspect — to confess the man under the powder and the rubbish.

We stood close by where the wall was pierced by the running sewer. The whole yard was alive with laughter and babble; and now and again one would leave a friend or party of triflers and, kneeling down over the infected sink, would call some name through the opening. Then, summoned to the other side, Lucille, poor *ange déchu*,

would exchange a few earnest pitiful words with husband or brother or lover, and her tears, perhaps, would fall into the gushing drain and sanctify its abomination to him. Was not that for love to justify itself in the eyes of the most unnatural misogynist?

Now there came up to the trap a pale little fellow — the merest child. It was little Foucaud, the son of Madame Kolly. This poor lad must be held a man (God save him!) when misfortune overtook his family; but the scoundrels had the grace to consign his younger brother to the company of his mother on the woman's side. And here, through this sink opening, the two babes would converse in their sad little trebles two or three times a day.

“How now, my man?” said St. Prest; for the boy stood wistfully watching us, his hands picking together and his throat swelling. Then all at once he was weeping.

The old fop gently patted the heaving shoulders.

“Oh, monsieur,” said the youngster, in a hoarse little voice, “the cold of the stones is in my throat and on my chest.”

“What then, child! That is not to be guillotined.”

“But I cannot cry out so that he shall hear me; and if we do not talk I know nothing.”

In a paroxysm of agitation he threw himself down by the sewer.

“Lolo, Lolo!” he tried to call; but his voice would not obey his will.

And then M. de St. Prest did a thing, the self-sacrificing quality of which shall be known in full, perhaps, only to the angels. He took the lad under the arms and, lifting him away, himself knelt down in all his nicety by the sink, and put his mouth to the opening.

"The little Foucaud," he piped, "desires to see his brother!"

Presently he looked up.

"He is here, child."

"Oh, monsieur! will you explain that I cannot speak, and ask him how is *maman*?"

The message was given. I heard the poor little voice answer through the wall: "*Maman* sends her love to you. She has not wept so much the last night, and she has been sleeping a little. It is Lolo, who loves you well, that tells you this."

I assisted St. Prest to rise.

"I will ask the honour," I said, "of dusting M. l'Amiral's coat for him."

. . . . .  
That same afternoon, as I was again, during the hour of exercise, standing near the sewer, of a sudden I heard a most heart-rending voice calling from the other side of the wall.

"Messieurs! messieurs!" it cried. "Will no one send to me my darling?"

I dropped upon my knees (I give all honour to M. de St. Prest), and, with a shudder of nausea, lowered my face to the opening.

"Who speaks?" I said. "I am at madame's service."



The voice caught in a sob.

"*Je vous rends grâce* — whoever you are, I thank you from my heart. It is my little Foucaud, my dearest, that must come to his *maman*, and quickly."

I answered that I would summon him, and I rose to my feet. I had no difficulty in finding the boy. He came, white-faced and wondering, and knelt down.

"*Maman, maman* — canst thou hear me? My throat is a little hoarse, *maman*."

"Oh, my baby, my little son! Thou wilt be sweet and tender with Lolo in the happy days that are coming. And thou wilt never forget *maman* — say it, say it, lest her heart should break."

God of mercy! Who was I to stand and listen to these pitiful confidences! I drew aside, watchful only of the boy lest his grief and terror should drive him mad. In a moment a white hand, laden with a dark thick coil of hair, was thrust through the opening. It was all the unhappy woman could leave her darling to remember her by. No glimpse of her face — no touch of her lips on his. From the dark into the dark she must go, and his very memory of her should be associated with the most dreadful period of his life. When they came for her in another instant, I heard the agony of her soul find vent in a single cry: "My lambs, alone amongst the wolves!"

Kind Madame Beau was there beside me.

"Lift him up," she whispered. "He will be motherless in an hour."

As I stooped to take the sobbing and hysterical child in my arms, I heard a voice speak low on the other side of the wall —

“It is only an interruption, madame.”

Gardel’s words — but the speaker!

I stumbled with my burden — recovered myself, and consigned the boy to the good soul that awaited him. Then hurriedly I leaned down again, and hurriedly cried, “Carinne! Carinne!”

There was no answer. Probably the speaker had retreated when the wretched Madame Kolly was withdrawn from the wall. I called again. I dwelt over the noxious gutter in excitement and anguish until I was convinced it was useless to remain. Was it this, then? that out of all the voices of France one voice could set my heart vibrating like a glass vessel that responds only to the striking of its single sympathetic note? I had thought to depose this idol of an hour from its shrine; I had cried shame upon myself for ever submitting my independence to the tyranny of a woman, and here a half-dozen words from her addressed to a stranger had reinfected me with the fever of desire.

I got out a scrap of paper and wrote thereon, “*Jacob to Rachel. Jean-Louis is still in the service of Mademoiselle de Lâge.*”

I found a fragment of stick, notched the paper into the end of it, and gingerly passed my billet through the hole in the wall. On the instant a great voice uttered a malediction behind me,

and I was jerked roughly down upon the flags. My end of the stick dropped into the gutter and wedged itself in slime. I looked up. Above me were Cabochon and a yellow-faced rascal. This last wore a sword by his side and on his head a high-crowned hat stuffed with plumes. I had seen him before — Maillard, l'Abbaye Maillard, a hound with a keen enough scent for blood to make himself a lusty living. He and his colleague Héron would often come to La Force to count their victims before following them to the scaffold.

"Plots — plots!" he muttered, shaking his head tolerantly, as if he were rebuking a child. "See to it, Citizen Cabochon."

The gaoler fetched back the stick. The paper, however, was gone from the end of it.

"It will be in the sewer," said Maillard, quietly.

Cabochon had no scruples. He groped with his fingers.

"It is not here," he said after a time, eyeing me and very malignant.

"Well," said the other, "who is this fellow?"

"*Mordi*, Citizen President; he is a forgotten jackass that eats his head off in the revolutionary stable."

"*Vraiment?* Then, it follows, his head must fall into the revolutionary manger."

He nodded pleasantly twice or thrice; then turned and, beckoning Cabochon to walk by him, strode away.

I sat in particular cogitation against the wall. For the present, it seemed, I enjoyed a distinction

that was not attractive to my fellow-prisoners; and I was left religiously to myself.

"Now," said I aloud, "I have grown such a beard that at last the national barber must take me in hand."

"M. Jean-Louis," said a voice the other side of the trap, "will you keep me kneeling here for ever?"

I started and flung myself face downwards with a cry of joy. My heart swelled in a moment so that it drove the tears up to my eyes.

"Carinne!" I cried, choking and half-sobbing; "is it thou indeed?"

"Creep through the little hole," she said, "and thou shalt see."

I laughed and I cried in a single breath.

"Say what thou wilt, *ma fillette*. Yes, I will call thee as I choose. Didst thou hear but now? I think it is a dying man that speaks to thee. Carinne, say after all you keep a place in your heart for the little odd Thibaut."

"Insidious! thou wouldst seek to devour the whole, like a little worm in a gall."

"To hear your voice again! We are always shadows to one another now. As a shadow I swear that I love you dearly. Oh, *ma mie, ma mie*, I love you so dearly. And why were you cruel to leave me for that small gust of temper I soon repented of? Carinne! My God! she is gone away!"

"I am here, little Thibaut."

"There is a sound in your voice. Oh, this savage, unyielding wall! I will kiss it a foot above

the trap. Will you do the same on the other side?"

"Monsieur forgets himself, I think."

"He is light-headed with joy. But he never forgets Mademoiselle de Lâge — not though she punished him grievously for an indifferent offence in the forests of Chalus."

"Jean-Louis, listen well to this: I was abducted."

"My God! by whom?"

"By a vile citizen Representative journeying to Paris."

"By a ——"

"I had emerged from the trees after you left me and was sitting very passionate by the road, when he passed with his escort and discovered me."

I kneeled voiceless as if I were stunned.

"What would you!" said Carinne. "There was no Thibaut at hand to throw him to the pigs. He forced me to go with him, and ——"

I vented a groan that quite rumbled in the gutter; and at that her voice came through the hole a little changed —

"Monsieur has a delicate faith in what he professes to love."

I beat my hands on the wall. I cried upon Heaven in my agony to let me reach through this inexorable veil of stone.

"You talked once of the wicked licence of the times. How could I know, oh, *ma mie!* And now all my heart is melting with love and rapture."

"But I had a knife, Jean-Louis. Well, but he was courteous to me; and at that I told him who

I was — no jill-flirt, but an unhappy waif of fortune. Now, *mon Dieu!* — it turned out that this was the very man that had come *en mission* to Pierrettes.”

“Lacombe?”

“No — a creature of the name of Crépin —”

I uttered a cry.

“Crépin! It was he that carried thee away?”

“Truly; and who has, for my obduracy, consigned me to prison. Ever since, little Thibaut, ever since — now at Les Carmes; now in the Rue de Sèvres; at last, no later than yesterday, to this ‘extraordinary question’ of La Force.”

“Now thou art a sweet-souled Carinne! Send me something of thine through the evil passage that I may mumble it with my lips. Carinne, listen” — and I told her the story of my connection with the villain.

“I would wring his neck if they would spare mine,” I said. “But, alas! I fear I am doomed, Carinne.”

She had from me all the details in brief of my captivity. *Mon Dieu!* but it was ecstasy, this dessert to my long feast of neglect. At the end she was silent a space; then she said very low —

“He communicates with me; but I never answer. Now I will do so, and perhaps thou shalt not die.”

“Carinne.”

“Hush, thou small citizen! The time is up; we must talk no longer.”

I breathed all my heart out in a sigh of farewell. I thought she had already gone, when suddenly she spoke again —

“Jean-Louis, Jean-Louis, do you hear?”

“Yes.”

“I would have thee just the height for thine eyes to look into mine.”

“Carinne! And what should they read there?”

Again there was a pause, again I thought she had gone; and then once more her voice came to me —

“Little Thibaut, I *did* kiss the wall a foot above the trap.”

. . . . .  
“Madame Beau,” said I, “when you shall be nearing old age — that is to say, when your present years double themselves — it is very certain that your lines will fall in pleasant places.”

“And where will they be?” said she.

“Where, but round your fine eyes and the dimples of your mouth!”

She cried, “*Oh, qu’il est malin!*” and tapped my shoulder archly with a great key she held in her hand.

“And what is the favour you design to ask of me?” she said.

“Firstly, your permission to me to dedicate some verses to you,” said I. “After that, that you will procure me the immediate delivery of this little tube of paper.”

“To whom is it addressed?”

“To one Crépin, who lives in the Rue de Jouy, St. Antoine.”

“*Croyez m'en!*” she cried. “Do you not see I have dropped my key?”

Then, as I stooped to pick up the instrument which she had let fall on the pavement, “Slip the little paper into the barrel!” she muttered.

I did so; and these were the words I had written on it:—

“I am imprisoned in La Force for any reason or none. It concerns me only in that I am thereby debarred from vindicating upon your body the honour of Mademoiselle de Lâge. If it gives you any shame to hear that towards this victim of your base persecution, I, your one-time comrade, entertain and have long entertained sentiments of the most profound regard, prevail with yourself, I beseech you, to procure the enlargement of a lady whose only crimes— as things are judged nowadays— are her innocence and her beauty.

“JEAN LOUIS THIBAUT.”

. . . . .

Of all the degradations to which we in the prison were subjected, none equalled that that was a common condition of our nightly herding. Then— so early as eight o'clock during the darker months— would appear the foul Cabochon— with his satellites and three or four brace of hounds— to drive us like cattle to our sleeping-pens. Bayed into the corridors, from which our cells opened, we must answer to our names bawled out by a crapulous turnkey, who held in his jerking hands, and consulted with his clouded eyes, a list that at



his soberest he could only half decipher. He calls a name — probably of one that has already paid the penalty. There is no answer. The ruffian bullies and curses, while the survivors explain the matter to him. He sulkily acquiesces; shouts the tally once more, regardless of the hiatus — of course only to repeat the error. Amidst a storm of menaces we are all ordered out of our rooms, and this again and yet again, perhaps, until the beast satisfies himself or is satisfied that none is skulking, and that nothing is in error but his own drunken vision. Then at last the dogs are withdrawn, the innumerable doors clanged to and barred, and we are left, sealed within a fetid atmosphere, to salve our wounded dignity as we can with the balm of spiritual self-possession.

But now, on this particular evening, conscious of something in my breast that overcrowded the passionless voice of philosophy, I felt myself uplifted and translated — an essence impressionable to no influence that was meaner than divine.

“And who knows,” I said to myself, as we were summoned from the yard, “but that Quatremaings-Quatrepattes might have pronounced Carinne to be the bright star in my horoscope?”

“Not so fast, citizen,” growled Cabochon, who stood, list in hand, at the door.

“Rest content,” said I, “I am never in a hurry.”

“*Par exemple!* you grow a little rusty, perhaps, for a notable actor. It is well then that you have an engagement at last.”

“To perform? And where, M. Cabochon?”

“In the Palais de Justice. That is a theatre with a fine box, citizen; and the verdict of those that sit in it is generally favourable — to the public.”

## XII

## THE MOUSE-TRAP

WAS I so very small? I had the honour of a tumbril all to myself on my journey to the Conciergerie, and I swear that I could have thought I filled it. But Mademoiselle de Lâge was the pretty white heifer that had caused me to puff out my sides in emulation of her large nobility — me, yes, of whom she would have said, as the bull of the frog, “*Il n'était pas gros en tout comme un œuf.*” Now I was travelling probably to my grave; yet the exaltation of that interview still dwelt with me, and I thought often of some words that had once been uttered by a certain Casimir Bertrand: “To die with the wine in one's throat and the dagger in one's back! What could kings wish for better?”

We came down upon the sullen prison by way of the Pont au Change and the Quay d'Horloge, and drew up at a door on the river-side. I saw a couple of turrets, with nightcap roofs, stretch themselves, as if yawning, above me. I saw in a wide angle of the gloomy block of buildings, where the bridge discharged itself upon the quay, a vast heap of newly thrown-up soil where some excavations were being conducted; and from the mound a sort of crane or scaffold, sinisterly suggestive of

a guillotine surmounting a trench dug for its dead, stood out against a falling crimson sky. The river hummed in its course; above a green spot on the embankment wall a cloud of dancing midges seemed to boil upwards like steam from a caldron. Everything suggested to me the *mise en scène* of a rehearsing tragedy, and then promptly I was haled, like an inanimate "property," into the under-stage of that dark "theatre of varieties."

Messieurs the gaolers, it appeared, were at their supper, and would not for the moment be bothered with me. A gush of light and a violent voice issued from a door to one side of a stony vestibule: "Run the rascal into La Souricière, and be damned to him!"

Théreat I was hurried, by the "blue" that was responsible for my transfer, and an understrapper with the keys, by way of a gloomy course — up and down — through doorways clinched with monstrous bolts — under vaulted stone roofs where spiders, blinded by the lamp glare, shrank back into crevices, and where all the mildew of desolation sprouted in a poisonous fungus — along passages deeply quarried, it seemed, into the very foundations of despair; and at last they stopped, thrust me forward, and a door clapped to behind me with a slam of thunder.

I stood a moment where I was and caught at my bewildered faculties. It took me, indeed, but a moment to possess myself of them. In those days one had acquired a habit of wearing one's wits unsheathed in one's belt. Then I fell to

admiring the quite unwonted brilliancy of the illumination that pervaded the cell. It was a particularly small chamber — perhaps ten feet by eight or so — and consequently the single lighted candle, held in a cleft stick the butt of which was thrust into a chink in the stones, irradiated it to its uttermost corner. The furniture was artless in its simplicity — a tub, a broken pitcher of water, and two heaps of foul straw. But so abominable a stench filled the place that no doubt there was room for little else.

Now, from one of the straw beds, the figure of a man — my sole comrade to be, it would appear — rose up as I stirred, and stood with its back and the palms of its hands pressed against the wall. Remaining thus motionless, the shadows blue in its gaunt cheeks, and little husks of wheat caught in its dusty hair, it fixed me with eyes like staring pebbles.

“*Défense d’entrer!*” it snapped out suddenly, and shut its mouth like a gin.

“Oh, monsieur!” said I, “no going out, rather, for the mouse in the trap.”

He lifted one of his arms at right angles to his body, and let it drop again to his side.

“Behold!” he cried, “the peril! Hadst thou been closer thy head had fallen!”

“But thine,” said I. “Hast thou not already lost it?”

“Oh, early in the struggle, monsieur! Oh, very early! And then my soul passed into the inanimate instrument of death and made it animate.”

“What! thou art the guillotine itself?”

“Look at me, then! Is it not obvious that I am that infernal engine, nor less that I am informed with the *ego* that once was my victim and is now my familiar — being myself, in effect?”

“*Pardieu!* this is worse than the game of ‘Proverbs.’ It rests with thy *ego*, then, to put a period to this orgy of blood.”

He gave forth a loud wailing cry.

“I am a demon, prejudged and predestined, and the saint of the Place du Trône is possessed with me.”

“A saint, possessed!”

He wrung his hands insanely.

“Oh!” he cried — “but is it not a fate to which damnation were Paradise! For me, the gentle Aubriot, who in my material form had shrunk from killing a fly — for me to thus deluge an unhappy land with the blood of martyrs! But I have threshed my conscience with a knotted discipline, and I know — yes, monsieur, I know — what gained me my punishment. A cripple once begged of me a poor two sous. I hesitated, in that I had but the one coin on me, and my nostrils yearned for snuff. I hesitated, and the devil tripped up my feet. I gave the man the piece and asked him a sou in change. For so petty a trifle did I barter my salvation. But heaven was not to be deceived, and its vengeance followed me like a snake through the grass. Ah!” (he jumped erect), “but the blade fell within an ace of thy shoulder!”

This was disquieting enough, in all truth. Yet I took comfort from the thought that the madman could avail himself of no more murderous weapon than his hands.

"Now, M. Guillotin," said I, "observe that it is characteristic of you to lie quiescent when you are put away for the night."

"*Nenni, nenni, nenni!*" he answered. "That may have been before the hideous apotheosis of the instrument. Now, possessed as I am, I slash and cut at whoever comes in my way."

*Mon Dieu!* but this was a wearisome lunatic! and I longed very ardently to be left peacefully to my own reflections. I came forward with a show of extreme fortitude.

"This demon of yourself," I said — "you wish it to be exorcised, that the soil of France may grow green again?"

A fine self-sacrificial rapture illumined his wild face.

"Let me be hurled into the bottomless pit," he cried, "that so the Millennium may rise in the east like an August sun!"

"Now," said I, "I will commune with my soul during the night, that perchance it may be revealed to me how the guillotine may guillotine itself."

To my surprise the ridiculous bait took, and the poor wretch sunk down upon his straw and uttered no further word. Crossing the cell to come to my own heap, my foot struck against an iron ring that projected from a flag. For an in-

stant a mad hope flamed up in me, only to as immediately die down. Was it probable that the "Mouse-trap" — into which, I knew, it was the custom to put newly arrived prisoners before their overhauling by the turnkeys and "scenting" by the dogs of the guard — would be furnished with a door of exit as of entrance? Nevertheless, I stooped and tugged at the ring to see what should be revealed in the lifting of the stone. It, the latter, seemed a ponderous slab. I raised one end of it a foot or so with difficulty, and, propping it with the pitcher, looked to see what was underneath. A shallow trough or excavation — that was all; probably a mere pit into which to sweep the scourings of the cell. Leaving it open, I flung myself down upon the mat of straw, and gave myself up to a melancholy ecstasy of reflection.

The maniac crouched in his corner. So long as the light lasted I was conscious of his eyes fixed in a steady bright stare upon the lifted stone. There seemed something in its position that fascinated him. Then, with a dropping splutter, the candle sank upon itself and was extinguished suddenly; and straightway we were embedded in a block of gloom.

Very soon I was asleep. Ease and sensation, drink and food — how strangely in those days one's soul had learned to withdraw itself from its instinctive attachments; to hover apart, as it were, from that clumsy expression of its desires that is the body with its appetites; and to accept at last,



as radically irreclaimable, that same body so grievously misinformed with animism. Now I could surrender to forgetfulness, and that with little effort, all the load of emotion and anxiety with which a savage destiny sought to overwhelm me. Nor did this argue a brutish insensibility on my part; but only a lifting of idealism to spheres that offered a more tranquil and serener field for meditation.

Once during the night a single drawn sound, like the pipe of wind in a keyhole, roused me to a half-recovery of my faculties. I had been dreaming of Carinne and of the little pig that fell into the pit, and, associating the phantom cry with the voluble ghosts of my brain, I smiled and fled again to the heights.

The noise of heavily grating bolts woke me at length to the iron realities of a day that might be my last on earth. I felt on my face the wind of the dungeon door as it was driven back.

"Follow me, Aubriot!" grunted an indifferent voice in the opening.

Lacking a response of any sort, the speaker, who had not even put himself to the trouble of entering the cell, cried out gutturally and ironically —

"*Holà hé, holà hé, Citizen Aubriot Guillotin!* thou art called to operate on thyself! *Mordi, mordi, mordi!* dost thou hear? thou art invited to commit suicide that France may regenerate itself of thee!"

I raised my head. A burly form, topped by a great hairy face, blocked the doorway. I made it

out by the little light that filtered through a high-up grating above me.

"*Mille démons!*" shouted the turnkey suddenly, "what is this?"

He came pounding into the cell, paused, and lifted his hands like a benedictory priest. "*Mille démons!*" he whispered again, with his jaw dropped.

I had jumped to my feet.

"*Pardieu!* Mr. Gaoler!" said I; "the guillotine, it appears, has anticipated upon itself that law of which it is the final expression. The rest of us you will of necessity acquit."

I looked down, half-dazed; but I recalled the odd sound that had awakened me in the night. Here, then, was the explanation of it—in this swollen and collapsed form, whose head, it seemed, was plunged beneath the floor, as if it had dived for Tartarus and had stuck at the shoulders.

"He has guillotined himself with a vengeance," I exclaimed.

"But how?" said the turnkey, stupidly.

"But thus, it is obvious: by propping the slab end on the pitcher; by lying down with his neck over the brink of the trough; by upsetting the vessel with a sweep of his arm as he lay. *Mon Dieu!* see how he sprouts from the chink like a horrible dead polypus! This is no mouse-trap, but a gin to catch human vermin!"

"It was not to be foreseen," muttered the man, a little scared. "Who would have fancied a madman to be in earnest!"

“And that remark,” said I, “comes oddly from the lips of a patriot.”

He questioned me with his eyes in a surly manner.

“Bah!” I cried; “are not Robespierre, Couthon, St. Just in earnest? are not you in earnest? and do you not all put your heads into traps? But I beg you to take me out of La Souricière.”

He had recovered his composure while I spoke.

“Come, then,” he said; “thou art wanted down below. And as to that rascal — *Mordi!*” he chuckled, “he has run into a *cul-de-sac* on his way to hell; but at any rate he has saved the axe an extra notch to its edge.”

On the threshold of the room he stopped me and looked into my face.

“How much for a *billet?*” said he.

“You have one for me?”

“That depends.”

“But doubtless you have been paid to deliver it.”

“And doubtless thou wilt pay to receive it.”

“Oh, *mon Dieu!*” said I; “but these vails! And patriots, I see, are not so far removed from the lackeys they despise.”

“*Pardi!*” said the bulky man. “Listen to the fox preaching to the hens! But I will lay odds that in another twelve hours thou wilt be stripped of something besides thy purse. What matter, then! thou wilt have thy crown of glory to carry to the Lombard-house.”

I gave him what was left to me.

"Now," said I; and he put a scrap of paper into my hand.

I unfolded it in the dim light and read these words, hurriedly scrawled thereon in a hand unknown to me: "*Play, if nothing else avails, the hidden treasures of Pierrettes.*"

"Follow me, Thibaut," said the gaoler.

As might feel a martyr, who, with a toy knife in his hand, is driven to face the lions, so felt I on my way to the Tribunal with that fragment of paper thrust into my breast. At one moment I could have cried out on the travesty of kindness that could thus seek to prolong my agony by providing me with an inadequate weapon; at another I was reminded how one might balance oneself in a difficult place with a prop no stronger than one's own little finger. Yet this thin shaft of light cutting into desperate gloom had disquieted me strangely. Foreseeing, and prepared stoically to meet the inevitable, I had even — before the *billet* was placed in my hands — felt a certain curiosity to witness — though as an accused — the methods of procedure of a Court that was as yet only known to me through the infamy of its reputation. Now, however, caught back to earth with a rope of straw, I trembled over the very thought of the ordeal to which I was invited.

Coming, at the end of melancholy vaulted passages, to a flight of stone steps leading up to a door, I was suddenly conscious of a droning murmur like that of hived bees. The gaoler, in the

act of running the key into the lock, beckoned me to mount to him, and, thus possessed of me, caught me under the arm-pit.

“Play thy card, then, like a gambler!” said he.

“What!” I exclaimed in astonishment.

“Ah, bah!” he growled; “didst thou think delicacy kept me from reading the message? But, fear not. Thou art too little a gudgeon for my playing” — and he swung open the door. Immediately the hiss and patter of voices swept upon me like rain. That, and the broad glare of daylight after so much darkness, confused me for a moment. The next I woke to the consciousness that at last my foot was on the precipice path — the gangway for the passage of the pre-damned into the Salle de la Liberté — the *arête* of the “Montagne,” it might be called, seeing how it served that extreme faction for a ridge most perilous to its enemies to walk on.

This gangway skirted a wooden barricade that cut the hall at about a third of its length. To my left, as I advanced, I caught glimpse over the partition of the dismal black plumes on the hats of the judges, as they bobbed in juxtaposition of evil under a canopy of green cloth. To my right, loosely filling the body of the hall, was the public; and here my extreme insignificance as a prisoner was negatively impressed upon me by the indifference of those whom I almost brushed in passing, for scarce a *poissarde* of them all deigned to notice the little gudgeon as he wriggled on the national hook. Then in a moment my conductor twisted

me through an opening cut in the barricade, and I was delivered over to the Tribunal.

A certain drumming in my ears, a certain mist before my eyes, resolved themselves into a very set manner of attention. The stark, whitewashed walls seemed spotted with a plague of yellow faces — to my left a throng of mean blotches, the obsequious counsel for the defence ; to my front the President and judges, in number three, like skulls decked with hearse-plumes ; to my right the jury, a very Pandora-box of goblins, the lid left off, the evil countenances swarming over the edge. All seemed to my excited imagination to be faces and nothing else — drab, dirty, and malignant — ugly motes set against the staring white of the walls, dancing fantastically in the white daybeams that poured down from the high windows. Yet that I sought for most I could not at first distinguish, — not until the owner of it stood erect by a little table — placed to one side and a little forward of the judicial dais — over which he had been leaning. Then I recognised him instantly — Tinville, the Devil's Advocate, the blood-boltered vampire — and from that moment he was the court to me, judge, jury, and counsel, and his dark face swam only in my vision like a gout of bile.

Now, I tell you, that so dramatic was this Assembly by reason of the deadliness of purpose that characterised it, that one, though a prisoner, almost resented the flippant coxcomby of the three sightless busts standing on brackets above the bench. For these — Brutus, Marat, St. Fargeau

(his gods quit the indignant Roman of responsibility for entertaining such company) — being jauntily decorated with a red bonnet apiece and a frowzy cockade of the tricolour, jarred hopelessly in the context, and made of the bloodiest tragedy a mere clownish extravaganza. And, behold! of this extravaganza Fouquier-Tinville, when he gave reins to his humour, discovered himself to be the very Sannio — the rude powerful buffoon, with a wit only for indecency.

Yet he did not at a first glance figure altogether unprepossessing. Livid-skinned though he was, with a low forehead, which his hair, brushed back and stiffly hooked at its ends, seemed to claw about the middle like a black talon, there was yet little in his countenance that bespoke an active malignancy. His large eyes had that look of good-humoured weariness in them that, superficially, one is apt to associate with unvindictive long-sufferingness. His brows, black also and thick, were set in the habitual lift of suspense and inquiry. His whole expression was that of an anxious dwelling upon the prisoner's words, lest the prisoner should incriminate himself; and it was only when one marked the tigerish steadiness of his gaze and the *sooty* projection of his under-lip over a strongly cleft chin that one realised how the humour of the man lay all upon the evil side. For the rest — as each detail of his personality was hammered into me by my pulses — his black clothes had accommodated themselves to his every ungainly habit of movement, his limp shirt was caught up about his neck with a

cravat like a rag of dowlas, and over his shoulders hung a broad national ribbon ending in a silver medallion, with the one word *Loi* imprinted on it like a Judas kiss.

Thus the man, as he stood scrutinising me after an abstracted fashion, his left arm bent, the hand of it knuckled upon the table, the Lachesis thumb of it — flattened from long kneading of the yarn of life — striding over a form of indictment.

The atmosphere of the court was frowzy as that of a wine-shop in the early hours of morning. It repelled the freshness of the latter and communicated its influence to public and tribunal alike. Over all hung a slackness and a peevish unconcern as to business. Bench and bar yawned, and exchanged spiritless commonplaces of speech. True enough, a gudgeon was an indifferent fish with which to start the traffic of the day.

At length the Public Accuser slightly turned and nodded his head.

“*Maitre Greffier*,” said he, in quite a noiseless little voice, “acquaint us of the charge, I desire thee, against this *patte-pelu*.”

*Nom de Dieu!* here was a fine *coup d'archet* to the overture. My heart drummed very effectively in response.

A little black-martin of a fellow, with long coat-tails and glasses to his eyes, stood up by the notaries' table and handled a slip of paper. Everywhere the murmur of Tinville's voice had brought the court to attention. I listened to the *greffier* with all my ears.



“Act of Accusation,” he read out brassily, “against Jean-Louis Sebastien de Crancé, *ci-devant* Comte de la Muette, and since calling himself the Citizen Jean-Louis Thibaut.”

Very well, and very well — I was discovered, then; through whose agency, if not through Jacques Crépin’s, I had no care to learn. The wonder to me was that, known and served as I had been, I should have enjoyed so long an immunity from proscription as an aristocrat. But I accused Crépin — and wrongfully, I believe — in my heart.

“Hath rendered himself answerable to the law of the 17th Brumaire,” went on the *greffier*, mechanically, “in that he, an *émigré*, hath ventured himself in the streets of Paris in disguise, and ——”

The Public Accuser waved him impatiently to a stop. There fell a dumb silence.

“One pellet out of a charge is enough to kill a rat,” said he, quietly; then in an instant his voice changed to harsh and terrible, and he bellowed at me —

“What answer to that, Monsieur *r-r-r-rat*, Monsieur *ratatouille*?”

The change of manner was so astounding that I jumped as at the shock of a battery. Then a hot flush came to my face, and with it a dreadful impulse to strike this insolent on the mouth. I folded my arms and gave him back glare for glare.

“Simply, monsieur,” I said, “that it is not within reason to accuse me of returning to what I have never quitted.”

“Paris?”

“The soil of France.”

“That shall not avail thee!” he thundered. “What right hast thou to the soil that thou and thine have manured with the sacred blood of the people?”

“Oh, monsieur!” I began — “but if you will convert my very refutation —”

He over-roared me as I spoke. He was breathing himself, at my expense, for the more serious business of the day. Positively I was being used as a mere punching-bag on which this “bruiser” (*comme on dit à l'Anglaise*) might exercise his muscles.

“Silence!” he shouted; “I know of what I speak! thou walk'st on a bog, where to extricate the right foot is to engulf the left. Emigrant art thou — titular at least by force of thy accursed rank; and, if that is not enough, thou hast plotted in prison with others that are known.”

I smiled, awaiting details of the absurd accusation. I had formed, it was evident, no proper conception of this court of summary jurisdiction. The President leaned over his desk at the moment and spoke with Tinville, proffering the latter his snuff-box. They exchanged some words, a pantomime of gesticulation to me. As they nodded apart, however, I caught a single wafted sentence: “We will whip her like the Méricourt if she is obstinate.”

To what vile and secret little history was this the key! To me it only signified that, while I had fancied them discussing a point of my case, the two

were passing confidences on a totally alien matter. At last I felt very small; and that would have pleased Carinne.

“But, at any rate,” I thought, “the charge against me must now assume some definite form.”

He, that dark *bouche de fer* of the Terror, stared at me gloomily, as if he had expected to find me already removed. Then suddenly he flung down upon the table the paper he had in his hand, and cried automatically, as if in a certain absence of mind, “I demand this man of the law to which he is forfeit.”

God in heaven! And so my trial was ended. They had not even allotted me one from the litter of mongrel counsel that, sitting there like begging curs, dared never, when retained, score a point in favour of a client lest the hags and the brats should hale them off to the lamp-irons. This certainly was Justice paralysed down one whole side.

I heard a single little cry lift itself from the hall behind me and the clucking of the *tricoteuses*. I felt it was all hopeless, but I clutched at the last desperate chance as the President turned to address (in three words) the jury.

“*M. l'Accusateur Public*,” I said hurriedly, “I am constrained to tell you that I have in my possession that which may induce you to consider the advisability of a remand.”

The fellow stared dumfounded at me, as if I had thrown my cap in his face. The President hung on his charge.

“Oh!” said the former, with an ironical nicety

of tone — “and what is the nature of this magnificent evidence?”

I had out my scrap of paper, folded like a *billet-doux*.

“If the citizen will condescend to cast his eye on this?” I said.

He considered a minute. Curiosity ever fights in the bully with arrogance. At length he made a sign to a *gendarme* to bring him that on which, it seemed, my life depended.

Every moment while he dwelt on the words was like the oozing of a drop of blood to me. I had in a flash judged it best to make him sole confidant with me in the contents of the paper, that so his private cupidity might be excited, and he not be driven by necessity to play the *rôle* of the incorruptible. The instant he looked up my whole heart expanded.

“The prisoner,” he said, “acquits his conscience of a matter affecting the State. I must call upon you, *M. le Président*, to grant for the present a remand.”

Oh, *mon Dieu!* but the shamelessness of this avarice! I believe the scoundrel would have blushed to be discovered in nothing but an act of mercy.

“The prisoner is remanded to close confinement in the Convent of St. Pélagie,” were the words that dismissed me from the court; and I swear Fouquier-Tinville’s large eyes followed me quite lovingly as I was marched away.

## XIII

## THE RED CART

AT so early an hour was my trial (in the personal and suffering sense) brought to a conclusion, that midday was not yet struck when my guards delivered me over to the authorities at St. Pélagie — a one-time *communauté de filles* in the faubourg of St. Victor, and since appropriated ostensibly to the incarceration of debtors. My arrival, by grace of Fortune, was most happily timed; and, indeed, the persistency with which throughout the long period of my difficulties this capricious *coureuse* amongst goddesses converted for my benefit accident into opportuneness offered some excuse to me for remaining in conceit with myself.

Now I was taken in charge by a single turnkey — the others being occupied with their dinner — and conducted by him to the gaoler's room to undergo that *rapiotage*, or stripping for concealed properties, the general abuse of which — especially where women were in question — was a scandal even in those days of shameless brutality.

As he pushed me into the little ill-lighted chamber and closed the door hurriedly upon us, I noticed that the man's hands shook, and that his face was clammy with a leaden perspiration. He made no offer to overhaul me; but, instead,

he clutched me by the elbow and looked in a half-scared, half-triumphant manner into my face.

“Pay attention,” he said, in a quick, forced whisper. “Thy arrival accommodates itself to circumstance — most admirably, citizen, it accommodates itself. I, that was to expect, am here alone to receive thee. It is far better so than that I should be driven to visit thee in thy cell.”

“I foresee a call upon my gratitude,” I said, steadily regarding him. “That is at your service, citizen gaoler, when you shall condescend to enlighten me as to its direction.”

“I want none of it,” he replied. “It is my own to another that procures thee this favour.”

“What other, and what favour?”

“As to the first — *en bon français*, I will not tell thee. For the second — behold it!”

With the words, he whipt out from under his blouse a thin, strong file, a little vessel of oil, and a dab of some blue coloured mastic in paper — and these he pressed upon me.

“Hide them about thy person — hide them!” he muttered, in a fearful voice; “and take all that I shall say in a breath!”

He glanced over his shoulder at the closed door. He was a blotched and flaccid creature, with the staring dry hair of the tippler, but with very human eyes. His fingers closed upon my arm as if for support to their trembling.

“Cell thirteen — on the first floor,” he said; “that is whither I shall convey thee. Ask no questions. Hast thou them all tight? — *Allez-*

*vous en, mon ami!* A nod is as good as a wink to a blind horse."

"But ——"

"Ah! thou must needs be talking! Cement with the putty, then, and rub the filings over the marks."

"I was not born yesterday. It is not *that* I would know."

"S-st! At nine by the convent clock, be ready to drop silently into the cart that shall pass beneath thy window. Never mind what thou hit'st on. A falling man does not despise a dung-hill."

I hesitated, seeking to read this patriot's soul. Was this all a snare to clinch my damnation? Pooh! if I had ever fancied Tinville hunted for the shadow of a pretext, this morning's experience should have disabused me of the fallacy.

"Who commissions thee?" I said.

"One to whom I owe a measure of gratitude."

"But not I?"

"From this time — yes."

He pushed at me to go before him.

"At least," I said, "acquaint me if it is the same that sent the letter."

"I know nothing of any letter. *San' Dieu!* I begin to regret my complaisance. This fellow will strangle us all with his long tongue."

"But, for thyself, my friend?"

"Oh! *nom de Dieu!* I have no fear, if thou wilt be discreet — and grateful."

"And this tool — and the *rapiotage!*"

"Listen then! The thief that follows a thief

finds little by the road. We are under no obligation to search a prisoner remanded from another prison."

Impulsively I wrung the hand of the dear sententious; I looked into his eyes.

"The Goddess of Reason disown thee!" I said. "Thou shalt never be acolyte to a harlot! — and I — if all goes well, I will remember. And what is thy name, good fellow?"

"*M. un tel*," said he, and added, "bah! shall not thy ignorance of it be in a measure our safeguard?"

"True," said I. "And take me away, then. I cannot get to work too soon."

He opened the door, peeped out, and beckoned me.

"All is well," he whispered. "The coast is clear."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Nothing would appear to more graphically illustrate the moral influence of the 'Terror' than that common submission to a force that was rather implied than expressed. Now it seems a matter for marvel how a great many thousands of capable men, having nothing to hope from the intolerable tyranny that was massing them in a number of professed slaughter-houses, should not only have attempted no organised retaliation, but should, by unstiffening their necks (in a very heroic fashion, be it said) to be the footstools to a few monstrous bullies, have tacitly allowed the righteousness of a system that was destroying them to go by implication. Escapes from durance were, comparatively speaking, rare; resistance to authority scarcely ever carried beyond the personal and peevish limit. Yet it is a fact that many of the innumerable prisons — of which, from my own observation, I may instance St. Pélagie — were quite inadequately guarded, and generally, indeed, open to any visitor who was prepared to 'tip' for the privilege of entry." — Extracted from an unpublished chapter of the Count's Reminiscences.



As he drove me with harsh gestures across a yard, a turnkey standing at a door and twirling a toothpick in his mouth, hailed him strenuously.

“What perquisites, then, comrade?”

“Bah!” cried my fellow; “I have not looked. He is a bone of Cabochon’s picking.”

. . . . .

With what a conflict of emotions I set to work — tentatively at first; then, seeing how noiselessly the file ran in its oiled groove, with a concentration of vigour — upon the bars of my window, it is not difficult to imagine. So hard I wrought that for hours I scarce gave heed to my growling hunger or attention to my surroundings. As to the latter, indeed, I was by this time sensibly inured to the conditions of confinement, and found little in my cell when I came to examine it to distinguish it from others I had inhabited. A bench, a pitcher, a flattened mess of straw; here and there about the stone flags marks as if some frantic beast had sought to undermine himself a passage to freedom; here and there, engraved with a nail or the tooth of a comb on the plaster coating of the walls, ciphers, initials, passionate appeals to heaven or blasphemous indecencies unnameable; in one spot a forlorn cry: “*Liberté, quand cesseras-tu d’être un vain mot!*” in another, in feminine characters, the poor little utterance: “*On nous dit que nous sortirons demain,*” made so pathetic by the later supplement underscored, “*Vain espoir!*” — with all these, or their like, was I grievously fam-

iliar — resigned, not hardened to them, I am sure.

The window at which I stood looked across a little-frequented passage — the Puit d’Ermite — upon a blank wall; and was terminated with a pretty broad sill of stone that screened my operations from casual wayfarers in the street below. Once, peering forth as I could, with my face pressed to the bars, I found myself to be situated so indifferent high as that, free of the grate, I might drop to the pavement without incurring risk of severer damage than a fractured leg or ankle, perhaps. Obviously, every point had been considered in this trifling matter of my escape. By whom? By him that had put me that pawn up my sleeve in the Palais de Justice? Well, the pawn had checked the king, it appeared; and now it must content me to continue the game with a handkerchief over my eyes like the great M. Philidor.

By two o’clock, having cut through a couple of the bars close by their junction with the sill, so that a vigorous pull at both would open a passage for me large enough to squeeze through, I was absorbed in the careful process of cementing and concealing the evidences of my work when I heard a sound behind me and twisted myself about with a choke of terror. But it was my friendly gaoler, come with a trencher of broken scraps for the famished animal in the cage.

“*Corps de Christ!*” he muttered, his face white and scared — “but here is an admirable precau-

tion! what if I had been Fouquier-Tinville himself, then?"

"You made no noise."

"*Par exemple!* I can shoot a hundredweight of bolts, it seems, so as not to wake a weasel. I made no noise to deaf ears. But, for thyself, monsieur — He that would stéal corn must be careful his sack has no holes in it. And now I'll wager thou'st dusted thy glittering filings out into the sunbeams, and a sentry, with pistols and a long musket, pacing the cobbles down there!"

"*Soyez tranquille!* I have all here in my pocket."

He put down the platter, shrugged his shoulders, and came on tiptoe to the window.

"Well, it is excellent," he whispered grudgingly — "if only thy caution matched thy skill."

Then he came close up to me.

"I have news," he muttered. "All is in preparation. It needs only that thou play'st thy part silently and surely. A moment's decision and the game is thine."

"But, the sentry, say'st thou?"

"He will be withdrawn. What, is it not the eve of the *Décadi*?<sup>1</sup> To-night, the wine-shops; to-morrow, full suburbs and an empty Paris, but for thee the Public Accuser with his questions."

"And why should he not visit me to-day?"

"Rest assured. He hath a double baking to occupy him."

A noise sounded in the corridor. The man

<sup>1</sup> The Revolutionary Sabbath. — ED.

put his finger to his lips, pointed significantly at the remainder litter about the sill, stole to the door, jangled his keys viciously and bellowed at me: "Thou shalt have that or nothing! *Saint Sacrement*, but the dainty bellies of these upstarts!" — and off he went, slamming the door after him, and grumbling till he was out of hearing.

"Excellent nameless one!" I cried to myself; and so, having most scrupulously removed every trace of my work, I fell, while attacking with appetite the meal left for me, into a sort of luminous meditation upon the alluring prospect half opened out to my vision.

"And whence, in the name of 'God,' I marvelled, "issues this unknown influence that thus exerts itself on my behalf; and by what process of gratitude can my gaoler, in these days of a general repudiation of obligations, have attached himself to a cause that, on the face of it, seems a purely quixotic one?"

Then, "Oh, merciful Heaven!" I thought, "can it be possible that set in the far haze of a narrow vista of hope, an image — to whose wistful absorption into the Paradise of dreams I have sought to discipline myself — yet yearns to and beckons me from the standpoint of its own material sweetness? I see the smile on its mouth, the lift of its arms; I hear the little cry of welcome wafted to me. My God, the cry!"

All in an instant some shock of association seemed to stun my brain. The cry — the single

cry that had issued upon my condemnation in the hall of Justice! Had it not been the very echo of that I had once heard uttered by a poor swine-herd fallen into the hands of savages?

I got to my feet in agitation. Now, suddenly it was borne to me that from the moment of issue of that little incisive wail a formless wonder had been germinating in my soul. Carinne present at my trial! — no, no, it was impossible — unless —

“Citizen, the patriots in this corridor send thee greeting.”

I started as if a bullet had flown past my ear. The voice seemed to come from the next cell. I swept the cobwebs from my forehead.

“A thousand thanks!” I cried.

“They have dreamt that the ass cursed the thorough-bred for the niceness of his palate,” went on the voice, “and most heartily they comiserate thee.”

There followed a faint receding sound like laughter and the clapping of hands. I had no idea what to say; but the voice relieved me of the embarrassment.

“May I ask the citizen’s name?”

“I am the Comte de la Mulette.”

“*Allons donc!*” — and the information, it seemed, was passed from cell to cell.

“Monsieur,” then came the voice, “we of the Community of the Eremites of St. Pélagie offer thee our most sympathetic welcome, and invite thee to enrol thyself a member of our Society.

Permit me, the President, by name Marino, to have the honour of proposing thee for election."

"By all means. And what excludes, Monsieur le Président?"

"*D'une haleine* (I mention it to monsieur as a matter of form), to have been a false witness or a forger of assignats."

"Then am I eligible?"

"Surely, monsieur. How could one conceive it otherwise! And it remains only to ask—again as a matter of form—thy profession, thy abode, and the cause of thy arrest."

"Very well. My profession is one of attachment to a beautiful lady; I live, I dare to believe, in her heart; and, for my arrest, it was because, in these days of equality, I sought to remain master of myself."

My answer was passed down the line. It elicited, I have the gratification to confess, a full measure of applause.

"I have the honour to inform M. le Comte," said the President, "that he is duly elected to the privileges of the Society. I send him a fraternal embrace."

My inclination jumped with the humour of the thing. It was thus that these unfortunates, condemned to solitary confinement, had conceived a method of relieving the deadly tedium of their lot. Thus they passed to one another straws of information gleaned from turnkeys or from prisoners newly arrived. And in order to the confusion of any guard that might overhear them, they studied,

in their inter-communications, to speak figuratively, to convey a fact through a fable, or, at the least, to refer their statements to dreams that they had dreamt. At the same time they formed a Society rigidly exclusive. Admitted rascals, imprisoned in the corridor, they would by no means condescend to notice. I had an example of this once during the afternoon, when the whole place echoed with phantom merriment over a jest uttered by a member.

"M. le Comte!" cried a voice from the opposite row: "I could tell thee a better tale than that."

Before the speaker could follow up his words, the President hammered at my wall.

"I beseech thee do not answer the fellow," he said. "It is a rogue that was suborned in the most pitiful case of the St. Amaranthe."

"Monsieur, monsieur!" exclaimed the accused; "it is a slander and a lie. And how wouldst thou pick thy words with thy shoulder bubbling and hissing under the branding-iron?"

"As I would pick nettles," I said.

"I beseech thee!" cried again my neighbour the President, in a warning voice, "this man can boast no claim to thy attention."

The poor rascal cried out: "It is inhuman! I perish for a word of sympathy!"

I would have given it him; but his protests were laughed into silence. He yelled in furious retort. His rage was over-crowded, and drifted into sullessness.

"I dreamt I belaboured a drum," said the President; "and it burst under my hands."

Truly I did not regret the distraction this whimsical Society afforded me. Left to myself, the fever of my mind would have corroded my very reason, I think. To have been condemned to face those hours of tension indescribable, with no company but that of my own thoughts, would have proved such an ordeal as, I felt, would have gone far to render me nerveless at the critical moment. So, responding to the dig of circumstance in my ribs, I abandoned myself to frolic, and almost, in the end, lapsed into the other extreme of hysteria.

But, about five o'clock, closing in from the far end of the corridor, a swift ominous silence succeeded the jangle; and I was immediately aware of heavy footsteps treading the cemented floor of the passage, and, following upon these, the harsh snap of locks and the rumbling of a deep voice —

"Follow me, De la Chatière."

The words were the signal for a shrilling chorus of sounds, — whoops, cat-calls, verberant renderings of a whole farmyard of demoniac animals.

"*Miau, miau, Émile!* Thou art caught in thine own springe!"

"They will ask thee one of thy nine lives, Émile!"

"Ah — bah! if he pleads as he reasons, upside-down, they will only cut off his feet."

"Plead thy poor sick virtue, Émile!"



“No, no! that were one *coup de tête* that shall procure him another.”

“What need to lie when the truth will serve! Plead thy lost virtue, Émile, and the jury will love thee.”

“*Taisez-vous, donc!*” roared a gaoler. He was answered by a shriek of laughter. In the midst of the noise I heard the door of my neighbouring cell flung open and Marino summoned forth. As the party retreated: “M. le Président, M. le Président!” shouted a voice — “Art thou going without a word? But do not, I beseech thee, in the pride of thy promotion neglect to nominate thy successor!”

“Lamarelle, then,” answered the poor fellow, in a voice that he tried vainly to control.

He was led away. The babble boiled over and simmered down. In a very few moments a tense quiet had succeeded the uproar. This — due partly to the reaction from excitement, partly to the fact that gaolers were loitering at hand — wrought in me presently a mood of overbearing depression. I durst give no rein to my hopes or to my apprehensions, lest, getting the bit between their teeth, they should fairly run away with my reason. The prospect of another four hours of this mindless inaction — hours of which every second seemed to be marked off by the tick of a nerve — was a deplorable one, indeed.

I tramped ceaselessly to and fro in my cage, humming to myself and assuming the habit of a philosophy that fitted me about as well as Danton’s

breeches would have done. I grimaced to my own reflections like a coquette to her mirror. I suffered from my affectation of self-containment as severely as though I were a tight-laced *femme à la mode* weeping to hear a tale of pity. The convent clock, moving somewhere with a thunderous click as if it were the very *doyen* of death-watches, chimed the dusk upon me in reluctant quarters. Ghostly emanations seemed to rise from the stones of my cell, sorrowful shapes of the lost and the hopeless to lean sobbing in its corners. Sometimes I could have fancied I heard a thin scratching on the walls about me, as if the returned spectres of despair were blindly tracing with a finger the characters they had themselves engraved thereon; sometimes, as I wheeled to view of the dull square of the window, a formless shadow, set against it, would appear to drop hurriedly and fold upon itself like a bat. By the time, at last, that, despite my resolves, I was worked up to a state of agitation quite pitiful, some little relief of distraction was afforded me by the entrance into my cell of a stranger turnkey, with some coarse food on a plate in his one hand, and, in the other, a great can of water, from which he replenished my pitcher. During the half minute he was with me a shag beast of a dog kept guard at the door.

"Fall to, then," growled the man; "if thou hast the stomach for anything less dainty than fat pullets and butter."

In effect, I had none for anything; yet I thought it the sensible policy to take up the

plate, when the fellow was withdrawn, and munch away the drawling minutes lest I should spend them in eating out my heart.

Other than this rascal no soul came near me. I had had, it seemed, my full warning — my complete instructions. Yet, lacking reassurance during this long trial of suspense, I came to feel as if all affecting my escape must be a chimera — a fancy bred of the delirium that precedes death.

Well, as my friendly *huissier* might have said, Time flies, however strong the head-wind; and at length the quarters clanged themselves into that one of them that was the prelude to my most momentous adventure. And immediately thereon (God absolve me for the inconsistency!) a frantic revulsion of feeling set in, so that I would have given all but my chance of escape to postpone the act of it indefinite hours. Now I heard the throb of the seconds with a terror that was like an acute accent to my agony of suspense. It grew — it waxed monstrous and intolerable. I must lose myself in some physical exertion if I would preserve my reason.

Suddenly a nightmare thought faced me. What if, when the time came, the cut bars should remain stubborn to my efforts to bend them! What if I had neglected to completely sever either or both, and that, while I madly wrought to remedy my error, the moment should pass and with it the means to my deliverance!

Sweating, panting, in a new reaction to the frenzy for liberty, I sprang to the window, gripped

the bars, and, with all my force, dragged them towards me. They parted at the cuts and yielded readily. A sideway push to each, and there would freedom gape at me.

In the very instant of settling my shoulder to the charge, I was aware of a sound at my cell door—the cautious groping of wards in a lock. With a suppressed gasp I came round, with my back to the tell-tale grating, and stood like a discovered murderer.

A lance of dull light split the blackness perpendicularly.

“Open again when I tap,” said a little voice—that cracked like thunder in my brain, nevertheless,—and the light closed upon itself.

God of all irony!—the little voice—the little dulcet undertone that had cried *patte-pelu* upon me in the hall of Justice! So the turnkey had miscalculated or had been misinformed, and M. l’Accusateur Public would not postpone the verbal satisfaction of his cupidity to the *Décadi*. *Le limier rencontré*; I was bayed into a corner, and my wit must measure itself against a double row of teeth.

For an instant a mad resentment against Fate for the infernal wantonness of its cruelty blazed up in my breast, so that I could scarce restrain myself from bounding upon my enemy with yells of fury. Then reason—set, contained and determined—was restored to me, and I stood taut as a bow-string and as vicious.

A moment or two passed in silence. I could

make out a dusky undefined heap by the door. "In the dark all cats are grey."

At length: "Who is there?" I said quietly.

The figure advanced a pace or two.

"Speak small, my friend," it said, "as if thou wert the very voice of conscience."

This time there was no doubt. I ground my teeth as I answered: "Of *thy* conscience, monsieur? Then should I thunder in thy ears like a bursting shell."

"What is this!" said he, taking a backward step.

On my honour I could not have told him. I felt only to myself that if this man baulked me of my liberty I should kill him with my hands. But doubtless indignation was my bad counsellor.

"How!" he muttered, with a menacing devil in his voice. "Does the fool know me?"

I broke into wicked laughter.

"Hear the unconscious humorist!" I cried—and the cry seemed to reel in my throat; for on the instant, dull and fateful, clanged the first note of the hour.

Now God knows what had urged me to this insanity of defiance, when it was obvious that my best hope lay in throwing a sop of lies to my Cerberus. God knows, I say; and to Him I leave the explanation. Yet, having fallen upon this course, I can assert that not once during the day had I felt in such good savour with myself.

He came forward again with a raging malediction.

"Thy pledge!" he hissed; "the paper — the treasure! God's name! dost thou know who it is thou triflest with?"

I heard the rumble of wheels over the stones down below. My very soul seemed to rock as if it were launched on waves of air. The wheels stopped.

"Listen," I said, in a last desperation. "It was a ruse, a lie to gain time. I know of no treasure, nor, if I did, would I acquaint thee of its hiding-place."

A terrible silence succeeded. I stood with clinched hands. Had I heard the cart move away again I should have thrown myself upon this demon and sought to strangle him. Then, "Oh, my God! oh, my God!" he said twice, in a dreadful strained voice, and that was all.

Suddenly he made a swift movement towards me. I stood rigid, still with my back to the damning grate; but, come within a foot of me, he as suddenly wheeled and went to the door.

"Open, Gamache," he whispered, like a man winded, and tapped on the oak: "open — I have something to say to thee."

In another moment I was alone. I turned, and in a frenzy of haste drove the bars right and left with all my force. Like a veritable ape of destiny I leapt to the sill and looked down. A white face stared up at me. The owner of it was already in the act of gathering his reins together. I heard a soft tremulous *ouf!* issue from his lips, and on the breath of it I dropped and alighted

with a thud upon something that squelched beneath my weight. As I got to my knees, he on the driving-board was already whipping his horses to a canter.

"Quick, quick!" he said. "Come up and sit here beside me."

I managed to do so, though the cargo we carried gave perilous foothold.

Then at once I turned and regarded my preserver.

"Saints in heaven!" I whispered, "Crépin!"

He was a very *sans-culotte*, and his face and eyebrows were darkened. But I knew him.

"Well," he said; "I am no rogue of a Talma to act a part. But what, in God's name, delayed thee?"

"Fouquier-Tinville."

His jaw dropped at me.

"*Si fait vraiment*," I said, and gave him the facts.

He shivered as I spoke. The instant I was done, "Get under the canvas!" said he, in a terrible voice. "There will be hue-and-cry, and if I am followed, we are both lost. Get under the canvas, and endure what thou canst not cure!"

My God! the frightfulness of that journey! of the company I lay with! We drove, as I gathered, by the less-frequented streets, and reached the barrier of St. Jacques by way of the Rue de Biron. Here, for the first time, we were stopped.

"*Halte là!*" bawled a tipsy voice. "What goods to declare, friend?"

"Content thyself," I heard Crépin answer. "They bear the Government mark."

"How, then, carrier?"

"Peep under the cart-tail, and thou shalt see."

The gendarme lifted a corner of the canvas with his sword-point. A wedge of light entered, and amazed my panic-stricken eyes.

"*Il est bon là!*" chuckled the fellow, and withdrew his sword. He had noticed nothing of me; but, as we whipped to a start, he made a playful cut at the canvas with his weapon. The blade touched my thigh, inflicting a slight flesh-wound, and I could not forbear a spasmodic jerk of pain. At this he cried out, "*Holà hé!* here is a dead frog that kicks!" and came scuttling after us. Now I gave myself up for lost; but at the moment a frolicsome comrade hooked the runner's ankle with a stick, and brought the man heavily to the ground. There followed a shout; a curse of fury, and — Fortune, it appeared, had again intervened on my behalf.

Silence succeeded, for all but the long monotonous jolting and pitching over savage ground. At length Crépin pulled up his horses, and, leaning back from his seat, tossed open a flap of the canvas.

"Come, then," he said in a queer voice. "We have won clear by the grace of Heaven."

I wallowed, faint and nauseated, from my horrible refuge. Sick, and in pain of mind and



body, I crept to a seat beside my companion. We were on a dark and desolate waste. A little moon lay low in the sky. Behind us the *enceinte* of the city twinkled with goblin lights.

"And these?" I said weakly, signifying our dreadful load. "Whither dost thou carry them, Crépin?"

"Whither I carry thee, Monsieur le Comte — to the quarries under the Plain of Mont Rouge."

"To unconsecrated ground?"

"What would you? The yards are glutted. The Madeleine bulges like a pie-crust. At last by force of necessity we consecrate this, the natural cemetery of the city, dug by itself, to the city's patron saint, La Guillotine."

· · · · ·  
 "Tell me, my preserver and, as God shall quit thee, also my friend — you received my letter?"

"Else, why art thou here?"

"But thou hast done me an incalculable wrong!"

"And an incalculable benefit. Oh, monsieur, do I not atone?"

"To me, yes."

"Let that pass, then. But, even there, I would not have thee underrate my service. Have I not, to save thee, annihilated time; called in a debt of gratitude that I kept in reversion for my own needs; suborned the very hangman's carter that I might help thee in thy extremity?"

"And all this is due to thee?"

"Assuredly — and for what reason? Because, in total ignorance of thy claim to it, I took a fancy

to a sweet face. Now I think you will acknowledge, M. le Comte, that the Revolution, for all its excesses, is capable of producing a gentleman of honour who knows how to make reparation."

"Truly, this is no small thing that you have done."

"Truly I think thou might'st apply superlatives to it, without extravagance. To outwit and balk the Public Accuser — the cat-fish of the Committee of Safety — *Dame !* is there a hole in all Paris too small to admit his tentacles? But I tell thee, monsieur, I am already in the prison of my own holy namesake."

"I would kiss thy hands, but ——"

"What now?"

"My letter referred to other than myself."

He turned and, I thought, looked at me oddly.

"In these days, what safer refuge for a woman than prison," he said, "provided she hath a friend at Court? Understand, monsieur, I have found Mademoiselle de Lâge respectable lodgings, that is all."

"Where you hold her as Lovelace held the estimable Clarisse. Crépin, I cannot accept my life on these terms."

The words jerked on my lips as the waggon was brought to a stand with a suddenness that made the harness rattle. A tall figure, that seemed to have sprung out of the earth, stood at the horses' heads.

"Gusman," said my companion, quietly, "this is Citizen Thibaut, whom you are to conduct to the secret lodging. Hurry, then, Thibaut."

I got with some difficulty to the ground.

"And you?" said I.

"I go yet a mile to deliver my goods. We will discuss this matter further, *bien entendu*, on my return."

He flogged his cattle to an immediate canter, leaving me in all bewilderment alone with the stranger. On every side about us, it seemed, stretched a melancholy waste—a natural graveyard sown with uncouth slabs of stone. The wind swayed the grasses, as if they were foam on black water; the tide of night murmured in innumerable gulfs of darkness.

"Come, then!" muttered the figure, and seized my hand.

We walked twenty cautious paces. I felt the clutch of brambles at my clothes. Suddenly he put his arm about me, and, as we moved, forcibly bent down my head and shoulders. At once I was conscious of a confined atmosphere—damp, earthy, indescribable. It thickened—grew closer and infinitely closer as we advanced.

Now I could walk upright; but my left shoulder rasped ever against solid rock. The blackness of utter negation was terrible; the cabined air an oppression that one almost felt it possible to lift from one's head like an iron morion. For miles, I could have fancied, we thridded this infernal tunnel before the least little blur of light spread itself like salve on my aching vision.

Then suddenly, like a midnight glowworm, the blur revealed itself, a fair luminous anther of fire

in a nest of rays — and was a taper burning on the wall of a narrow chamber or excavation set in the heart of the bed-stone.

“*Voilà ton ressui!*” exclaimed my sardonic guide; and, without another word, he turned and left me.

I stood a moment confounded; then, with a shrug of my shoulders, walked into the little cellar and paused again in astonishment. From a stone ledge, on which it had been lying, it seemed, prostrate, a figure lifted itself and, standing with its back to me, swept the long hair from its eyes.

I stared, I choked, I held out my arms as if in supplication.

“*Mon Dieu, mon Dieu!*” I cried — “if it is not Carinne, let me die!”

## XIV

## THE QUARRIES OF MONT-ROUGE

SHE turned, the dear figure. I heard her breath catch as she leaned forward and gazed at me. Her hair was all tumbled abroad; her sweet scared eyes looked out of a thicket of it like little frightened birds from a copse. She took a hurried step or two in my direction, then cried, "*C'est un coup du ciel!*" and threw up her hands and pressed them to her face.

I dropped my yearning arms. A needle of ice pierced my heart.

"A judgment of heaven?" I cried sorrowfully.

The sound of my voice seemed like the very stroke of a thyrsus on her shoulders. She broke into an agitated walk — pacing to and fro in front of me — wringing her hands and clasping them thus to her temples. Her shadow fled before or after her like a coaxing child.

Suddenly, to my amazement, she darted upon me, and seized and shook me in a little fury of passion.

"*Prends cela, prends cela, prends cela!*" she cried; and then as suddenly she released me, and ran back to her ledge, and flung herself face-downwards thereon, sobbing as if her heart would break.

Shocked and astounded beyond measure, I followed and stood over her.

"Mademoiselle de Lâge," I said miserably — "of what am I guilty?"

"Of everything — of nothing! Perhaps it is I that am to blame!" she cried in a muffled voice.

"What have I done?"

She sat up, weeping, and pressed the pain from her forehead.

"Oh, monsieur! it is not a little thing to pass twelve hours in the most terrible loneliness — in the most terrible anxiety!"

"I do not understand."

"You do not, indeed — the feelings of others — the wisdom of discretion."

"Mademoiselle!" I exclaimed, in all patience.

She sat, with her palms resting upon the ledge. She looked up at me defiantly, though she yet fought with her sobs.

"It was doubtless a fine thing in your eyes this morning," she said, "to throw scorn to that wretch who could have destroyed you with a word."

I felt my breath come quickly.

"That wretch!" I whispered — "this morning?"

"It was what I said, monsieur, — the *loup-garou* of the Salle de la Liberté. But where one attaches any responsibility to life, one should learn to distinguish between bravado and courage."

I think I must have turned very pale, for a sudden concern came into her face.

"Mademoiselle," I said, "will persist in giving

me the best reason for holding life cheaply — that I cannot, it seems, find favour with her.”

“Was it, then, monsieur, that you yourself were your only consideration?”

“Oh! give me at least the indulgence,” I cried, “to retort upon an insolent that insults me.”

“*Grand Dieu!*” she said mockingly; “but what a perverted heroism! And must a man’s duty be always first towards his dignity, and afterwards, a long way ——”

She broke off, panting, and tapping her foot on the ground. I looked at her, all mazed and dumfounded.

“And afterwards?” I repeated. She would not continue. A little silence succeeded.

“Mademoiselle,” I said at length sadly — “let me speak out what is in my heart, and have done with it. That little cry of pity and of protest that I heard uttered this morning when sentence was demanded upon me in the Palais de Justice, and that I must needs now associate with this new dear knowledge of your freedom — if I have put upon it an unwarrantable construction, something beyond the mere expression of a woman’s sympathy with the unfortunate — you will, I am sure, extend that sympathy to my blindness, the realisation of which must in itself prove my heavy punishment. If, also, I have dared to translate the anxiety you have by your own showing suffered, here in this savage burrow, into a sentiment more profound than that of simple concern for an old-time comrade, you will spare my presumption,

will you not, the bitterness of a rebuke? It shall not be needed, believe me. My very love——”

She interrupted me, rising to her feet white and peremptory.

“Not for me, monsieur — not for me! And, for *my* associations — they shall never be of that word with deceit!”

“Deceit!”

“But is it not so? Have you not approached my confidence in a false guise, under a false name? Oh!” (she stamped her foot again) “cannot you see how my condescension to the Citizen Thibaut is stultified by this new knowledge of his rank? how to favour now what I had hitherto held at arm’s-length would be to place myself in the worst regard of snobbishness!”

“No, mademoiselle — I confess that I cannot; — but then I journeyed hither in the National hearse.”

“I do not understand.”

“Why, only that there one finds a ragpicker’s head clapt upon a monseigneur’s neck in the fraternity that is decreed to level all distinctions. What is the advantage of a name, then, when one is denied a tomb-stone?”

“Ah!” she cried, “you seek to disarm me with levity. I recognise your habit of tolerant contempt for the mental equipment of my sex. It does not become you, monsieur; — but what does it matter! I know already your opinion of me, and how compound it is of disdain and disgust. I am soulless and cruel and capricious — perhaps



ill-favoured also; but there, I think, you pronounce me inoffensive or something less. But I would have you say, monsieur — what was Lepelletier to me? I should have sickened, rather, to break bread with my uncle — whom heaven induce to the shame of repentance! And I was ill that night, so that even you might have softened in your judgment of me.”

I stood amazed at the vehemence of her speech, at the rapidity of inconsequence with which she pelted me with any chance missile that came to her hand. It was evident the poor child was overwrought to a degree; and I was fixed helpless between my passionate desire to reassure and comfort her and my sense of her repudiation of my right to do so. Now, it happened that, where words would have availed little, a mute appeal — the manner of which it was beyond my power to control — was to serve the best purposes of reconciliation. For suddenly, as I dwelt bewildered upon the wet flashing of Carinne’s eyes, emotion and fatigue, coupled with the sick pain of my wound, so wrought upon me that the vault went reeling and I with it. I heard her cry out; felt her clutch me, and then there was sense for little but exhaustion in my drugged brain.

“I am on the floor, Carinne?”

“On the floor, *mon ami*.”

“I am not so little a weight, you see. You tried to support me to the bench and failed — for I know.”

"But you were a dead-weight."

"Not dead yet, *chattemite*. Only I think I am dying."

"No, no, little Thibaut! *À Dieu ne plaise!* You will not be so wicked. And what makes you think so?"

"I am so near heaven."

"Do you mean me? But I burn."

"Kiss me, then, and give me of your fire."

"But, if you were to recover?"

"I would return it."

"It is infamous. You presume upon my tenderness, that is all for your cruel wound. Yet I do not think you are much hurt."

"Not now, with your hand upon my heart. Tell me, Carinne — it was Jacques Crépin that brought you here?"

"That had me conveyed hither by his deputy, Gusman. It was this morning, after your trial. He had had me released from prison — *le pécheur pénitent*. God had moved him to remorse, it seemed, and some unknown — perhaps one that had overheard us in La Force — to knowledge of our friendship, — yours and mine. He procured me my passport; accompanied me beyond the barrier d'Enfer; committed me to the keeping of this deadman of the quarries. He swore he would play his life against yours — would win you to me here or perish in the attempt. Judge then, you, of my waiting torture — my anguish of expectation in this solitude!"

"Would win me to you! And you desired this

thing? *Oh, ma mie, ma mie!* how, then, could you welcome me as you did?"

"I do not know."

"And deny and abuse me and give me such pain?"

"I do not know."

"For you love me very dearly . . . Carinne, I am dying!"

"I do not believe you. That trick shall not serve a second time."

. . . . .

"And what are we to do now, Carinne?"

"Thou must be asking thyself that question," said a voice — Crépin's — that clanged suddenly in the vaulted labyrinth. The man himself stood looking down upon us. Beside him the gaunt figure of my guide held aloft a flambeau that talked with a resinous sputter. Its flare reddened the auburn curls of the Sectional President and informed his dissolute face with a radiance that was like an inner consciousness of nobility.

"My task ends here," he said quietly. "And shall we cry quits, M. le Comte?"

I lay on the floor, my head in Carinne's lap.

"Citizen Crépin," I said, "thou hast acquitted thyself like a gentleman and a man of courage. I would not wish, for thy sake, that the risk had been less; I would not, for ours, know that it hath involved thee in the toils."

"We are all in the toils nowadays," said he; "and happy the lion that can find a mouse for his friend. To the extent of my power I have done;

yet, I warn thee, thou art not out of the wood. If the weasel wakes to the manner of his outwitting, not a river of blood shall divert him from the scent till he has run thee down — thee, and me also. Oh! I desire thee, do not misapprehend the importance of my service.”

Carinne looked up. She made an involuntary gesture with her hands. This dear child, in her sweet surrender, became the archetype of womanhood.

“Monsieur,” she said softly, “you have stood aside so honourably, you have made us so greatly your debtors, that you will not now stultify your own self-sacrifice by imposing upon us a heritage of remorse? If you are in such danger, why not remain here with us?”

He did not answer for some moments; but he shook his head very slightly as he gazed down on us.

“As to life,” he said presently, “my compact is with the senses. There is a higher ideal to reach to, no doubt; but, *Mordi!* I confess, for myself I cannot feel the epicure and play the ascetic. To continue in love with virtue, one must take it only, like opium, in occasional doses. An habitual indulgence in it degrades the picturesque of its own early evoking. Perhaps it should be ethically grateful to me to remain here to contemplate the fruit of my generosity ripening for another’s picking. Perhaps the guillotine is awaiting me in Paris. Well, mademoiselle, of the two evils I prefer the latter. Here, to feed

on my own self-righteousness would be to starve at the end of a day; there, the glory of doing, of directing, of enjoying, will soon woo me from memory of a sentiment that was no more part of my real self than the mistletoe is part of the harsh trunk it beautifies. For death, I do not fear it, if it will come to me passionately, like a mistress."

"Monsieur!"

"Ah, mademoiselle! believe me that I can offer no higher testimony to your worth than the assurance that I have for six months lost myself in you!"

I looked at this ex-waiter in marvel. His dishes could never have shown a finer polish than his manners. Moreover, in what intervals of supplying food to others had he sat himself down to his own feast of reason? One was accustomed in those days to hear coal-heavers discussing Diderot, but not in the language of Diderot. I gazed on his face and thought I saw in it a neutral ground, whereon a beast and an angel hobnobbed in the intervals of combat.

Beside him the torch-bearer — silent, melancholy, astringent — held his brand aloft motionless, as if his arm were a scone of iron.

"You are hurt, monsieur?" said Crépin, suddenly referring to me.

"It is nothing, — a bite, a scratch; an excuse for a pillow."

"Ah!" (he fetched a flask from his pocket and uncorked it) "this is ethereal cream of mint — a

liqueur I affect, in that it reminds me of lambs, and innocence — and shepherdesses. Let us pledge one another, like good friends, at parting. And it will confirm thy cure, monsieur, so happily begun.”

“Mademoiselle?” he said pleadingly, and offered it to Carinne.

She touched it with her lips — I, more effectively, with mine. Crépin cried “*Trinquons!*” and, taking a lusty pull, handed the flask to Gusman, who drained it.

“Now,” said he, “we are united by a bond the sweetest in the world — the sympathy of the palate. We have made of ourselves a little rosary of wine beads.”

He put his hand lightly on Gusman’s shoulder.

“This austerity,” he said — “this Bailly of the Municipality of the dead — I have purchased ye his favour with the one bribe to which he is susceptible. Kings might offer him their crowns; easy maids their honour. They should no more draw him from his reserve than Alexander drew Diogenes from his tub. But there is a *séductrice* to his integrity, and the name of it is right Hollands. My faith! I would not swear *my* fidelity to such a frowzy mistress; but taste is a matter of temperament. Is it not so, Jacques?”

“While the keg lasts, I will hold the safety of thy friends in pawn to thee.”

So replied the spectral figure — a voice, a phantom — the very enigma of this charnel city of echoes.

The liqueur had revived and comforted me amazingly. I raised myself on my elbow.

"Ah!" I cried, "if good intentions could find favour with thee, I would make thy keg a kilderkin, Citizen Gusman!"

The figure stood mute, like a man of bronze. Crépin laughed recklessly.

"He is the fast warden of these old catacombs," he said — "the undying worm and sole master of their intricacies. Himself hath tunnelled them under the ground, I believe, like the tan-yard grub that bores into poplar-trees. Silence and secrecy are his familiars; but, I tell thee, monsieur, he will absorb Hollands till he drips with it as the roofs of his own quarries drip with water. The keg once drained, and — if thou renew'st it not — he will sell thee for a single measure of schnapps. Is it not so, Jacques?"

"It is so," said the figure, in a deep, indifferent voice.

Crépin laughed again, then suddenly turned grave, and leaned down towards me.

"Harkee, M. le Comte!" he said, "is thy pocket well lined?"

"With good intentions, M. le Président."

He nodded and, fetching a little bag of skin out of his breast, forced it into my hand.

"It is all I can spare," he said; "and with that I must acquit my conscience of the matter."

"If ever I live to repay thee, good fellow —"

"Ah, bah, monsieur! I owe thee for the Médoc. And now — escape if thou seest the way

open. This strange creature will be thy bond-slave while the keg runs. Afterwards — *eh bien ! C'est à toi la balle.* For food, thou must do as others here — take toll of the country carts as they journey to the barriers. They will not provide thee with sweetbreads in wine; but — well, monsieur, there are fifty ways, after all, of cooking a cabbage.”

I rose, with difficulty, to my feet. Carinne, still seated on the floor, held her hand in mine. Something like a gentle quinsy in my throat embarrassed my speech.

“Good citizen —” I muttered.

Crépin made a gesture with his hand and backed in a hurry.

“I desire no expression of gratitude,” he said loudly.

“Good citizen,” I repeated, “thou wouldst not rebuke our selfishness by denying us, thy most faithful debtors, the privilege claimed by even a minor actor in this escapade?”

“Of whom dost thou speak?”

“Of a turnkey at St. Pélagie’s.”

“*Mordi !* I drenched him once for the colic — that is all. The fool fancied he had swallowed an eft that was devouring his entrails.”

He cried “*Portez-vous bien !*” and a quick emotion, as of physical pain, flickered over his face like a breath of air over hot coals. Carinne was on her feet in a moment, had gone swiftly to him, and had taken his hand.

“Monsieur,” she said, in a wet voice, “it is



true that honour, like sweet vines, may shoot from beds of corruption. God forbid that I pass judgment on that which influences the ways of men; but only—but only, monsieur, I hope you may live very long, and may take comfort from the thought of the insignificance of the subject of your so great sacrifice.”

She drooped her dear head. The other looked at her with an intense gaze.

“But, nevertheless,” he said quietly, “it was the letter of M. le Comte, of my honoured father Epicurus, that moved me to the sacrifice. That is great, as you say. I never realised how great till this moment. Yet—ah, mademoiselle! I would not sanctify it out of the category of human passions by pretending that I was induced to it by any sentiment of self-renunciation. Thyself should not have persuaded me to spare thee—nor anything less, may be, than an appeal from my preceptor in the metaphysics of the senses. I take no shame to say so. I am not a traitor to my creed; and it would offend me to be called a puritan.”

He put the girl's hand gently away from him.

“Still,” he said, “I may not deem myself worthy to touch this flower with my lips.”

And at that he turned and went from us, summoning Gusman to accompany him, and crying as he vanished, “Good luck and forgetfulness to all!”

So disappeared from our lives this singular man, who persisted to the very last in lashing me

with the thong of my own twisting. We never saw him again; once only we heard of him.

As the flash of the retreating torch glimmered into attenuation, Carinne returned to me and sat down at my side.

"Little Thibaut," she said softly, "he designed me so great a wrong that I know not where to place him in my memory."

"With the abortive children of thy fancy, Carinne; amongst the thoughts that are ignorant of the good in themselves."

She sighed.

"And so it was thou wast his informer as to our friendship? And why didst thou write, Jean-Louis?"

"To urge him, by our one-time intimacy, to cease his persecution of a beautiful and most innocent lady."

"I did not know, I did not know!" she cried; and suddenly her arms were round my neck, and I lay in a nest of love.

"Oh! I am glad to be pretty, for the sake of the little Thibaut, that saved me from barbarous men, and from myself, and, alas! from my uncle! Little Thibaut, did I hurt when I beat thee? Beat me, then, till I cry with the pain."

She sobbed and laughed and held my face against her bosom. In the midst, the candle on the wall dropped like a meteor, and instantly we were immured in a very crypt of darkness.

She cried in a terrified voice: "Oh, *mon Dieu!* hold me, or I sink!" and committed herself shuddering to my embrace.

The blackness was blind, horrible, beyond reason. We could only shut our eyes and whisper to one another, expecting and hoping for Gusman's return. But he came no more that night, and by-and-by Carinne slept in my arms.

The glare of torch-light on my face brought me to my senses. That sombre deadman, as Carinne called him, stood above us — visionless, without movement, it seemed — a lurid genii presented in a swirling drift of smoke. He might never have moved from the spot since we had last seen him there.

“Why dost thou wake us, good friend?” said I. “Hast thou a midnight service for the dead here?”

“It is high morning,” said he, in a voice like a funeral bell.

“Morning!”

I sat up in amazement. Truly I had not thought of it. We had slept the clock round; but there was no day in this hideous and melancholy underworld.

I looked down at my companion. She had slipped from my hold of her and lay across my knees. Her hair curled low on her forehead; her eyelids were misted with a faint blue shadow, like the sheaths of hyacinth buds before they open; her lips were a little parted as Love had left them. *Mon Dieu!* there is no sight so tender and so pathetic as that of a fair child asleep; and what was Carinne but a child!

In an access of emotion I bent and softly touched the lips with mine. This infant, so brave and so forlorn, whose head should have been pillowed on flowers, whose attendants should have been the lady fairies!

"She is very pretty," said the deadman.

"Ha, ha!" I cried. "Hast thou found it out? There shall spring a blossom for thee yet, old Gusman, in this lifeless city of thine!"

He twirled his torch for the first time, so that it spouted fire like a hand-grenade.

"Blossoms!" he barked. "But thou shalt know I have my garden walks down here — bowers of mildew, parterres of fine rank funguses, royal worms even, that have battened for centuries on the seed of men."

He crooked his knees, so that he might stare into my face.

"Not altogether a city of the dead," said he.

"Is it peopled with ghosts, then?"

"Very thickly, without doubt. Thou shalt see them swarm like maggots in its streets."

I shrugged my shoulders. The creature stood erect once more, and made a comprehensive gesture.

"This?" he said, — "you must not judge by this. It is the Holy of Holies, to which none has access but the High Priest of the Catacombs — and such as he favours."

"And what, in a rude age, keeps it sacred?"

He swept his torch right and left.

"Look, then!" said he.

We lay in a vaulted chamber hewn out of the rock. On all sides I fancied I caught dim vision of the mouths of innumerable low tunnels that exhaled a mist of profound night.

“Knowledge!” exclaimed the fearful man; “the age-long lore of one that hath learnt his every footstep in this maze of oubliettes. There are beaten tracks here and there. Here and there a fool has been known to leave them. It may be days or weeks before I happen across his body — the eyes slipping forward of their lids, his mouth puckered out of shape from sucking and gnawing at the knuckles of his hands.”

“It is terrible! And none comes hither but thou?”

“I, and the beasts of blood that must not be denied. When they hunt, I lead; therefore it is well to win my favour.”

Carinne hurriedly raised herself. She threw her arms about me.

“Oh, my husband!” she cried, “take me where I may see the sweet daylight, if only for a moment!”

I had thought the poor child slept.

“Hush!” I murmured. “Citizen Gusman is going to show us his township!”

. . . . .  
By interminable corridors, so intricate that one would have thought their excavators must have lain down to die, each at the limit of his boring, from sheer despair of ever finding their way to the open again, we followed the flare of the torch,

our eyes smarting in its smoke, our arms most fervently linked, Carinne's to mine, in inseparable devotion. Now and again I would hear my poor little friend whisper, "Light, light!" as if her very heart were starving; and then I would draw her face to mine and cry confidently, "It is coming, *ma mie!*" Still, on we went over the uneven ground, thridding an endless labyrinth of death, oppressed, weighed upon, hustled by inhuman walls, breathing and exhaling the thin black fluid that is the atmosphere of the disembodied.

Sometimes, as if it crouched beneath a stroke, the flame of the torch would dip and shrink under a current of gas, then leap jocund again when the peril was swept by; sometimes the tinkle of falling water would gladden our ears as with a memory of ancient happiness; and, passing on, in a moment we should be bedewed with spray, and catch a glimpse, in the glare, of a very dropping well of fire. At length at the turning of a corridor, Gusman called us to a halt.

He hollowed his left hand to his mouth:

"*Holà—làee—eh—h—h!*" he yelled, like a very *lutin*.

"*Là—là—là—là—làee—eh—làee—eh—làee—eh!*" was hooted and jangled back in a tumbling torrent of sound, that seemed to issue from the throat of a passage facing us and to shake the very roofs with merriment. Involuntarily we shrunk against the wall as if to allow space to the impetuous rush we foresaw. *Mon Dieu*, the strange

illusion! Only the swarming imps of echoes, summoned to the Master call, came hurrying forth, leaping and falling over one another, fighting and struggling, clanging with reverberant laughter, distributing themselves, disappearing down this or that corridor, shouting over their shoulders as they fled — faint, fainter — till silence settled down once more like water in the wake of a vessel.

Gusman slewed his head about — cockt as it had been to the outcry — to view of us.

“They are lively to-day,” he said, with an unearthly distortion of his features.

“The echoes?”

“*C'est cela, citoyen.* So men entitle them. No doubt it is human to think to put terror out of countenance by miscalling it.”

“How, then?”

He beckoned us to follow; plunged into the very funnel mouth that had vomited the eerie babble; led us swiftly by a winding passage, and stopped.

“Behold!” said he, flashing his torch to and fro over the surface of a roughly piled and cemented wall that seemed to close the entrance to a vast recess.

“Behold!” said he, sweeping the flame to the ground at the wall-foot.

We saw a skull or two; a few scattered bones. An indescribable brassy odour assailed our nostrils. The stones shone with an oily exudation.

“What company lies here, citizen?”

“A brave one, by my faith — a whole cemetery *en bloc*. *Comment diable!* shall they have fitted themselves each with his own by the day of Judgment! They pretend to sleep, piecemeal as they were bundled in; but utter so little as a whisper down there, and they will begin to stir and to talk. Then if thou shout'st, as I did — my God, what a clamour in reply! But one would have thought they had protested enough already.”

“In what manner?”

“Ask the killers of September, thou. They are held honest men, I believe.”

“It is enough,” said I. “Lead on, Citizen Gusman, and find us a glint of light, in the name of God!”

I glanced, with a shudder, at Carinne. Thank heaven! she had not, it appeared, understood. So here, in one dreadful lime-cemented heap, were massed the victims of those unspeakable days! I remembered the Abbaye and the blood-mark on the lip of Mademoiselle de Lâge; and I held the girl to my side, as we walked, with a pressure that was convulsive.

Again the torch danced before us, and again we followed; and yet again the deadman called us to a stop and whirled his half-devoured brand.

“Observe well,” said he; “for it is in this quarter ye must sojourn, and here seek refuge when warning comes.”

This time a very hill of skulls and ribs and shanks — a lifeless crater — a Monte Testaccio of broken vessels that had once contained the wine



of life. The heap filled a wide recess and rose twenty feet to the roof.

"The contribution of 'Les Innocens,'" said Gusman, as if he were some spectral minister of affairs announcing in the Convention of the dead a Sectional subscription.

He pointed to a little closet of stone, like a friar's cell, that pierced the wall to one side of the heap.

"Behold your hermitage!" said he.

Carinne, clinging to me, cried, "No, no!" in a weeping voice.

"*Eh bien!*" said the creature, indifferently; "you can take or leave, as you will."

"We will take, citizen."

"Look, then!" (he gripped my arm and haled me to the mound) "and note what I do."

There was a point — roughly undistinguishable from the rest — where a welded mass of calcareous bone and rubbish lay upon the litter. This was, in effect, a door in one piece, with an infant's skull for handle and concealed hinges of gut to one side to prevent its slipping out of place. Removed, it revealed a black mouth opening into an inner vacancy.

"Underneath lies a great box or kennel of wood," said Gusman, "with a manhole cut in its side; and round and over the box the stuff is piled. At the very word of warning, creep in and close the entrance. It is like enough ye will need it."

"And here we are to stay?"

"That is according to your inclination."

"But, *Mor' Dieu*, my friend! if thou wert to forget or overlook us entombed in this oubliette?"

"*Soyez content*. I might forget thou wert lacking food; but never that the Citizen President gave thee a purse."

"But ——"

"Tst, tst! Wouldst thou explore further my city of shadows? Here the wild quarries merge into the catacombs. Hence, a little space, thou wilt find company and to spare;—light, also, if mademoiselle wills."

The poor child uttered a heart-moving sigh.

"Come, then," said Gusman, with a shrug of his shoulders.

He preceded us the length of a single corridor, low and narrow—a mere human mole-run. All throughout it the rock seemed to grip us, the air to draw like wire into our lungs. And then, suddenly, we were come to a parapet of stone that cut our path like a whitewashed hoarding. For through a fissure in the plain above it a wedge of light entered—a very wise virgin with her lamp shining like snow!—and under the beam we stopped, and gazed upwards, and could not gaze enough.

But, for Carinne—she was translated! She laughed; she murmured; she made as if she caught the sweet wash like water in her hands and bathed her face with it.

"And now I am ready," said she.

Then we scaled the wall, jumping to a lower

terrace of rock: and thereafter ran the corridor again, descending, but now of ample enough width and showing a design of masonry at intervals, and sometimes great stone supports to the roof where houses lay above. And in a moment our path swept into a monstrous field of bones—confused, myriad, piled up like slag about a pit-mouth; and we thriddled our way therethrough along a dusty gully, and emerged at once into a high vaulted cavern and the view of living things.

Living things! —*Grand Dieu!* the bats of the living Terror. They peered from holes and alcoves; they mowed and chattered; they shook their sooty locks at us and hailed Gusman in the jargon of the underworld. Thieves and rogues and cowards—here they swarmed in the warrens of despair, the very sacristans of devil-worship, the unclean acolytes of the desecrated rock-chapels, whose books of the Gospel were long since torn for fuel.

Out of one pestilent cavern, wherein I caught glimpse of an altar faced with an arabesque of cemented bones, something like a dusky ape, that clung with both hands to a staff for support, came mouthing and gesticulating at us.

“Bread, bread!” it mumbled, working its black jaws; and it made an aimless pick at Carinne’s skirt.

“There is for thee, then!” thundered Gusman; and he flapped his torch into the thing’s face. The animal vented a hideous cry and shuffled

back into its hole, shedding sparks on its way as if it smouldered like an old rag.

“Oh, *mon ami!*” whispered Carinne, in a febrile voice — “better the den by the skulls than this!”

The deadman gave an acrid grin.

“*À la bonne heure,*” said he. “Doubtless hunger pinches. Come back, then; and I will open my wallet and thou shalt thy purse.”

Early in the afternoon — so far as in that rayless desolation one could judge it to be — there broke upon our eyes the flutter of an advancing light, upon our ears the quick secret patter of hurrying steps. These ran up to the very opening of our lair and stopped.

“*Hide!*” said the deadman’s voice, “I hear them call me to the search! Hide!” and, without another word, he retreated as he had come.

Carinne uttered a little shuddering “Oh!” She took my head between her hands and kissed my lips, the admirable child. Then we emerged from our den (the ghostliest glimmer reached us from some distant corner, where, no doubt, Gushman had left a light burning), and stole swiftly to the mound-foot. I felt about for the infant’s skull (the position of which I had intensely remarked), and in a moment found it and laid bare the aperture.

“Dive, little rabbit,” said I.

“I am within, Jean-Louis.”

I followed, feet first, and with my toes just

touching bottom, reached out and pulled the trap upon us. Then, with a feeling as if I were wrenching off a blouse over my shoulders, I let myself back into the hole — upon a carpet of muffling dust — and *ma bonne amie* caught at me and we stood to hear our own hearts beating. Like the thick throb of a clock in an under-room — thus, I swear, our pulses sounded to us in that black and horrible stillness. The box had, it appeared, been very compactly built in at the first — and before the superincumbent litter of rubbish had been discharged over and around it — with the strongest bones, for that these were calculated to endure, without shifting, the onset of one hurriedly concealing himself; yet this necessary precaution went near to stultifying itself by so helping to exclude the air as to make breathing a labour to one confined within. Fortunately, however, no long strain upon our endurance was demanded of us.

Now the hunters came upon us so silently, that there, in our ghastly prison, a spray of light, scattered through the chinks of the trap, was our first intimation of their presence. Then, as we maddened to see the glint withdrawn, a low voice came to our ears.

“Stop, then! What is this?”

“The dust of the Innocents, citizen.” (Gusman’s voice.)

“It is with the dust of the depraved in breeding fat maggots, is it not?”

“Aye, so long as they can find flesh food.”

“But what if such food were concealed herein? That little *babouin* of St. Pélagie — *peste!* a big thigh-bone would afford him cover.”

I felt my hand carried to Carinne’s lips in the darkness.

Gusman kicked at the mound with his sabot.

“Close litter,” said he. “A man would suffocate that burrowed into it.”

“Is that so? Rake me over that big lump yonder — *voilà!* — with the little skull sticking from it.”

I felt my heart turn like a mountebank — felt Carinne stoop suddenly and rise with something huddled in her hands. The astonishing child had, unknown to me, preconceived a plan and was prepared with it on the very flash of emergency. She leant past me, swift and perfectly silent, and immediately the little spars of light about the trap went out, it seemed. If in moving she made the smallest sound, it was opportunely covered by the ragged cough that issued at the moment from Gusman’s throat.

“*Dépêches-toi!*” said the authoritative voice. “That projecting patch, citizen — turn it for me!”

“There is nothing here.”

“But, there, I say! No, no! *Mille tonnerres,* — I will come myself, then!”

I heard Gusman’s breath vibrant outside the trap; heard him hastily raise the covering an inch or two, with an affectation of labouring perplexity. I set my teeth; I “saw red,” like flecks of blood;

I waited for the grunt of triumph that should announce the discovery of the hole.

"It is as I told thee," said the deadman; "there is nothing."

I caught a note of strangeness in his voice, a suppressed marvel that communicated itself to me. The sweat broke out on my forehead.

"H'mph!" muttered the inquisitor; and I heard him step back.

Suddenly he cried, "*En avant, plus avant!* To thy remotest boundaries, citizen warden! We will run the little rascal to earth yet!"

The light faded from our ken; the footsteps retreated. I passed a shaking hand over my eyes; I could not believe in the reality of our escape.

At length, unable any longer to endure the silence, I caught at Carinne in the blackness.

"Little angel," I said, "in God's name, what didst thou do?"

She bowed her sweet face to my neck.

"Only this, Jean-Louis. I had noticed that my poor ragged skirt was much of the colour of this heap; and so I slipped it off and stuffed it into the hole."

. . . . .  
We dwelt an hour in our horrible retreat, from time to time cautiously lifting the trap a finger's-breadth for air. At the end, Gusman reappeared with his torch and summoned us to our release. He looked at Carinne, as St. Hildephonsus might have gazed on the Blessed Virgin.

"It was magnificent," he said. "I saw at

once. Thou hast saved me no less than thyself. That I will remember, *citoyenne*, when the opportunity serves."

On the third day our deadman came to us with a copy of the "Moniteur" in his hand. He pointed silently to a name in the list of the latest executed. Carinne turned to me with pitiful eyes.

"*Ah, le pauvre Crépin!*" I cried, in great emotion. "What can one hope but that death came to him passionately, as he desired!"

"Citizen Gusman, we are resolved. We must go forth, if it is only to perish. We can endure this damning gloom no longer."

He looked down on us as we sat, this genii of the torch. His face was always framed to our vision in a lurid wreath, was the sport of any draught that swayed the leaping fire. Submitted to daylight, his features might have resolved themselves into expressionlessness and immobility. To us they were ever shifting, fantastic, possessed with the very devils of the underworld.

"Well," he said at length — "I owe the citizenship a debt of gratitude; but — *sang Dieu!* after all, I might repudiate it when the keg threatened to suck dry. I am myself only when I am not myself. That would be a paradox in the world above there, eh? At least the moment is opportune. They hunt counter for thee, Thibaut. For the wench — she is not in their minds, nor associated in any manner with thee. That lends itself



to an artifice. The idea tickles me. *Sang Dieu!* Yes, I will supply thee with a passport to Calais. Wait!"

He went from us. We knew better than to interrupt or question him; but we held together during his absence and whispered our hopes. In less than half an hour he returned to us, some papers grasped in his hand.

"Observe," said he. "It is not often, after a harvest of death, that the *glaneurs* of the Municipality overlook a stalk; yet now and again one will come to me. Citizen Tithon Riouffe, it appears, meditated a descent upon *la maudite Angleterre*. He had his papers, signed and countersigned, for himself, and for his wife Sabine, moreover. It is lucky for you that he proved a rascal, for they shaved him nevertheless. What Barrère had granted, St. Just rendered nugatory. But, if they took his head, they left him his passports, and those I found in his secret pocket."

He broke off, with a quick exclamation, and peered down at me, holding the torch to my face.

"Mother of God!" he cried — "I will swear there is something a likeness here! I have a mind to fetch the head and set it to thine, cheek by jowl! *Hé bien, comment, la petite babiôle* — that disturbs her! Well, well — take and use the papers, then, and, with discretion, ye shall win free!"

Carinne caught at the rough hand of our preserver and kissed it.

"Monsieur, thou art a deadman angel!" she cried; and broke into a little fit of weeping.

His lids fell. I saw his throat working. He examined his hand as if he thought something had stung it.

"Yes, she is very pretty," he muttered. "I think I would give my life for her."

Then he added vaguely: "*Chou pour chou*—I will take it out in Hollands."

## XV

## THE SALAD COURSE

CIToyEN TITHON RIOUFFE *et femme* had yet to experience the most extraordinary instance of that favouritism, by an after-display of which, towards those whom she has smitten without subduing, Fortune proclaims herself the least supernatural of goddesses. Truly, they had never thrown into the lottery of events with a faint heart; and now a first prize was to be the reward of their untiring persistency.

Possibly, indeed, the papers of recommendation might have sufficed of themselves; yet that they would have carried us (having regard to our moulting condition, poor cage-worn sparrows! and the necessary slowness of our advance) in safety to the coast, I most strenuously doubt.

Dear God! the souging of the May wind, the whisper of the grasses, the liquid flutter of the stars, that were like lights reflected in a lake! The hour of ten saw us lifted to the plain in body — to the heavens in spirit. For freedom, we were flying from the land of liberty; for life, from the advocates of the Rights of Man. We sobbed and we embraced.

“Some day,” we cried to Gusman, “we will come back and roll thee under a hogshead of

schnapps!" — and then we set our faces to the north, and our teeth to a long task of endurance — one no less, indeed, than a sixty-league tramp up the half of the Isle de France and the whole of Picardie. Well, at least, as in the old days, we should walk together, with only the little rogue that laughs at locksmiths riding sedan between us.

It was our design to skirt, at a reasonable distance, the east walls of the city, and to strike at Pantin, going by way of Gentilly and Bercy — the road to Meaux. Thence we would make, by a northwesterly course, the Amiens highway; and so, with full hearts and purses tight-belted for their hunger, for the pathetically distant sea.

And all this we did, though not as we had foreseen. We toiled onwards in the dark throughout that first sweet night of liberty. For seven hours we tramped without resting; and then, ten miles north of the walls, we lay down under the lee of a skilling, and, rolled in one another's arms, slept for four hours like moles.

. . . . .

I woke to the prick of rain upon my face. Before my half-conscious eyes a hectic spot faded and went wan in a grey miasma like death. It was the sun — the cheek of the virgin day, grown chill in a premature decline.

I sat up. From the southwest, like the breath of the fatal city pursuing us, a melancholy draft of cloud flowed and spread itself, making for the northern horizon. It wreathed in driving swirls

and ripples, as if it were the very surface of a stream that ran above us; and, indeed almost before we were moved to a full wakefulness, we were as sopt as though we lay under water.

A swampy day it was to be. The drops soon fell so thickly that heaven seemed shut from us by a skylight of blurred glass. The interval from cloud to earth was like a glaze upon the superficies of a fire-baked sphere. The starved clammy fields shone livid; the highway ran, literally; the poplars that skirted it were mere leafy piles in a lagoon. Then the wind rose, shouldering us forward and bombarding us from the rear in recurrent volleys, till I, at least, felt like a fugitive saurian escaping from the Deluge with my wet tail between my legs.

I looked at my comrade, the delicate gallant lady. Her hair was whipped about her face, her skirt about her ankles. The red cap on her head, with which Gusman had provided her, hung over like the comb of a vanquished cockerel. She was not vanquished, however. Her white teeth clicked a little with the cold; but when she became conscious of my gaze, she returned it with an ardour of the sweetest drollery.

“*Enfin, mon p'tit Thibaut,*” she said; “I prefer Liberty in her chilly moods, though she make a *noyade* of us.”

“It is almost come to that. With a brave effort, it seems, we might rise to the clouds by our own buoyancy. Take a long breath, Carinne. Canst thou swim?”

She laughed and stopped a moment and took me by the hands.

"I should be able to," she said; "I feel so like a fish, or a lizard, whose skin is a little loose on his body. Am I not a dreadful sight, Jean-Louis?"

"Thou art never anything but beautiful in my eyes."

"Fie, then, fie, then! cannot I see myself in them? Very small and very ugly, Jean-Louis — an imp of black waters."

"And I see babies in thine, Carinne. That is what the peasants call them. And I never loved my own image so well as now. It has a little blue sky to itself to spite the reality. It is a fairy peeping from a flower. *Ma mie*, and art thou so very cold and hungry?"

"Truly, my teeth go on munching the air for lack of anything better."

"It is pitiful. We must brave the next town or village to procure food. There are no berries here, Carinne; no little conies to catch in a springle of withe and spit for roasting on an old sabre; and if there were, we must not stop to catch them."

"It is true we must eat, then. The plunge has to be made — for liberty or death. *Formez vos bataillons!* Advance, M. le Comte, with thy heart jumping to the hilt of thy sword!"

She cried out merrily. She was my own, my property, the soul of my confidence; yet I could have cheered her in the face of a multitude as (God forgive the comparison!) the mob cheered

the *guenipe* Théroigne when she entered the Bastille.

So, once more we drove and were driven forward; and presently, six miles north of St. Denis, down we came, with stout courage, I hope, upon the village of Écouen, and into immediate touch with that fortune that counselled us so amiably in the crisis of our affairs.

Yet at the outset this *capricieuse* essayed to terrify us out of all assurance of self-confidence, and was the coquette to give us a bad quarter of an hour before she smiled on our suit. For, at the very barrier occurred a *contre-temps* that, but for its happy adaptation by us to circumstance, threatened to put a short end to our fugitive romance.

We assumed a breezy deportment, under the raking scrutiny of five or six patriot savages — mere arrogant *péagers*, down whose dirty faces the rain trickled sluggishly like oil. Foul straw was stuffed into their clogs; over their shoulders, nipped with a skewer at the neck, were flung frowzy squares of sacking, in the hanging corners of which they held the flint-locks of their pieces for dryness' sake. By the door of the village taxing-house, that stood hard by the barrier, a ferret-faced postillion — the only man of them all in boots — lounged, replaiting the lash of his whip and drawing the string through his mouth.

“Graceless weather, citizens!” said I.

A squinting *bonnet-rouge* damned me for *un âne ennuyant*.

“Keep thy breath,” said he, “for what is less

obvious ;” and he surlily demanded the production of our papers.

“ A good patriot,” growled another, “ walks with his face to Paris.”

“ So many of them have their heads turned, it is true,” whispered Carinne.

The squinting man wedged his eyes upon her.

“ What is that ?” he said sharply — “ some *mot de ralliement* ? Be careful, my friends ! I have the gift to look straight into the hearts of traitors ! ”

It was patent, however, that he deceived himself. He snatched the papers rudely from me and coned them all at cross-purposes.

“ *Sacré corps !* ” he snapped — “ what is thy accursed name ? ”

“ It is plain to read, citizen.”

“ For a mincing aristocrat, yes. But, for us — we read only between the lines.”

“ Read on them, then, the names of Citizen Tithon Riouffe and wife.”

The indolent postillion spat the string from his lips, looked up suddenly, and came swiftly to the barrier.

“ How ? ” said he, “ what name ? ”

I repeated the words, with a little quaver in my voice. The man cockt his head evilly, his eyes gone into slits.

“ Oh, *le bon Dieu !* ” he cried in acrid tones, “ but the assurance of this ragged juggler ! ”

Carinne caught nervously at my hand.

“ I do not understand the citizen,” said I, in my truculent voice.



“But I think, yes.”

“That that is not the name on the passport?”

“I know nothing of the passport. I know that thou art not Riouffe, and it is enough.”

Squint-eyes croaked joyously.

“Come!” he said; “here is a sop to the weather.”

As for me, I could have whipped Gusman for his talk of a fortuitous resemblance.

“I am Riouffe,” said I, stubbornly, “whatever thou may'st think.”

“Well, it is said,” cried the postillion. He chirped shrilly, like a ferret. “And, if thou art Riouffe, thou art a damned aristocrat; and how art thou the better for that?”

“Bah!” I exclaimed. “What dost thou know of me, pig of a stable-boy?”

“Of thee, nothing. Of Riouffe, enough to say that thou art not he.”

“Explain, citizen!” growled a curt-spoken patriot, spitting on the ground for full-stop.

“*Mes amis*,” cried the deplorable rogue. “Myself, I conveyed the Citizen Tithon Riouffe to Paris in company with the Englishman. The Englishman, within the fifteen days, returns alone. He breaks his journey here, as you know, to breakfast at the ‘Anchor.’ But, for Riouffe — I heard he was arrested.”

Grace of God! here was a concatenation of mishaps — as luckless a *rencontre* as Fate ever conceived of cruelty. My heart turned grey. The beastly triumphant faces of the guard swam in my vision like spectres of delirium. Nevertheless, I

think, I preserved my reason sufficiently to assume a *sang-froid* that was rather of the nature of a fever.

“The question is,” said I, coolly, “not as to whether this lout is a fool or a liar, but as to whether or no my papers are in order. You will please to observe by whom they are franked.” (I remembered, in a flash, the deadman’s statement.) “The name of the Citizen Deputy, who assured me a safe-conduct *to* Paris, being on this return passport, should be a sufficient guarantee that his good offices did not end with my arrival. I may have been arrested and I may have been released. It is not well, my friends, to pit the word of a horse-boy against that of a member of the Committee of Public Safety.”

My high manner of assurance had its effect. The faces lowered into some expression of chagrin and perplexity. And then what must I do but spoil the effect of all by a childishly exuberant anti-climax.

“I will grant,” said I, “that a change in the habit of one’s dress may confuse a keener head-piece than a jockey’s. What then! I arrive from England; I return from Paris—there is the explanation. Moreover, in these days of equality one must economise for the common good, and, rather than miss my return seat in the Englishman’s carriage and have to charter another, I follow in his track, when I find he is already started, in the hope to overtake him. And now you would delay us here while he stretches longer leagues between us!”

Carinne gave a little soft whimper. The postillion capered where he stood.

"*Mes amis!*" he cried, "he speaks well! It needs only to confront him with the Englishman to prove him an impostor."

*Misérable!* What folly had I expressed! It had not been sufficiently flogged into my dull brain that the islander was here, now, in the village! I had obtusely fancied myself safe in claiming knowledge of him, while my secure policy was to have blustered out the situation as another and independent Riouffe. That course I had now made impossible. I could have driven my teeth through my tongue with vexation. Carinne touched my hand pitifully. It almost made my heart overflow. "Thus," I said by-and-by to her, "the condemned forgives his executioner," and — "Ah, little Thibaut," she whispered, "but you do not know how big you looked."

. . . . .  
For the moment they could not find the Englishman. He had finished his breakfast and wandered afield. That was a brief respite; but nothing it seemed to avail in the end.

In the meantime they marched us into the taxing-house, where at a table sat a commissary of a strange figure. I had blundered desperately; yet here, I flatter myself, I turned my faculty for construing character to the account of retrieving my own.

In Citizen Tristan I read — and quite rightly, as events showed — a decent burgher aggrandised —

not against his will, but against the entire lack of one. His face was shaped, and something coloured, like a great autumn pear. It was narrow at the forehead, with restless, ineffective eyes, and it dropped to a monstrous chin—a self-protective evolution in the era Sainte Guillotine. Obviously he had studied to save his neck by surrounding it with a rampart of fat. For the rest he was very squat and ungainly; and he kept shifting the papers on his desk rather than look at us.

“Here is a man,” thought I, “who has been promoted because in all his life he has never learned to call anything his own.”

Our guard presented us arrogantly; the wizened post-boy laid his charge volubly.

“Call your witness,” said I, in a pet. “The case lies in a nutshell.”

My words made an impression, no doubt, though they were uttered in mere hopeless bravado.

“But, it seems he cannot be found,” protested the commissary, plaintively.

“Then,” I urged, “it is bad law to detain us.”

“You are detained on suspicion.”

“Of not being ourselves? Oh, monsieur——!”

He took me up peevishly.

“Eh, eh! *voilà ce que c'est!* Monsieur to me? Art thou not an aristocrat, then?”

I answered pregnantly: “The question in itself is a reflection upon him that signed this passport.”

He looked about him like a trapped creature, dumbly entreating the Fates for succour. It was my plain policy to harp upon the strings of his nerves.

"Well," said I, "a citizen commissary, I perceive, must have the courage of his opinions; and I can only hope thine will acquit thee when the reckoning is called."

He shifted in his chair; he spluttered little deprecatory interjections under his breath; he shot small furtive glances at his truculent following. Finally he bade all but us two out of the room, and the guard to their post at the barrier. The moment they were withdrawn grumbling, he opened upon me with a poor assumption of bluster —

"Thou art very big with words; but here I am clearly within my rights."

"Are not my papers in order, then?"

"It would at least appear so."

His lids rose and fell. Patently his self-possession was an insecure tenure.

"Citizen," I said, shaking my finger at him, "since when hast thou learned to set thy will in opposition to that of Barrère?"

"*Oh, nom de Dieu!*" he whimpered, in great distress; and rose and trundled up and down the room. "I oppose nobody. I am a most unhappy being, condemned by vile circumstance to give the perpetual lie to my conscience."

"It is an ignoble rôle," said I; "and quite futile of itself."

He paused suddenly opposite me. His fat lips were shaking; his eyes blinked a nerveless anxiety.

"I contradict nobody," he cried; and added

afflictedly: "I suppose, if you are Riouffe, you are Riouffe, I suppose."

"It all lies in that," said I.

"Then," he cried feebly — "what the devil do you want of me?"

I could have laughed in his poor gross face.

"What, indeed," said I. "My account with you will come later. You will be prepared then, no doubt, to justify this detention. For me, there remains Barrère."

"No, no!" he cried; "I desire only to steer wide of quicksands. You may guess, monsieur, how I am governed. This *fripou* takes my fellows by the ears. He gives you the lie, and you return it in his teeth. What am I to say or think or do?"

"Is it for me to advise a commissary?"

He rumbled his limp hair desperately as he walked.

"You will not help me! You drive me to distraction!"

He stopped again.

"Are you Riouffe?" he cried.

"You have my passport, monsieur."

"Yes, yes, I know!" he exclaimed in a frenzy; "but — Mother of God, monsieur! do you not comprehend the post-boy to swear you are not the Englishman's Riouffe?"

"Confront me, then, with the Englishman."

"He cannot be found."

I shrugged my shoulders.

"I can only recall monsieur's attention," said

I, "to the fact that certain citizens, travelling under safe-conduct of a member of the Committee of Safety, and with their papers in indisputable order, are suffering a detention sufficiently unwarrantable to produce the gravest results."

The commissary snatched up his hat and ran to the door.

"Go thy ways!" he cried. "Myself, I will conduct you through the village. For the rest, when the Englishman is found, and if he denies thee ——"

He did not finish the sentence. In a moment we were all in the rainy street. My accuser was vanished from the neighbourhood of the barrier. A single patriot only was in evidence. This man made a feint of bringing his musket to the charge.

"*Qui va là ?*" he grunted. "*Est-ce qu'il se sauve, ce cochon !*"

Fear lent the commissary anger.

"To thy post!" he shouted. "Am I to be made answerable to every dog that barks!"

Red-bonnet fell back muttering. We hurried forward, splashing over the streaming cobbles. The street, by luck of weather, was entirely deserted. Only a horseless *limonière*, standing at the porch of the village inn, gave earnest of some prospective interest.

Suddenly I felt Carinne's little clutch on my arm.

"The Englishman!" she whispered, in a gasp.

My teeth clicked rigid. I saw, ahead of us, a tall careless figure lounge into the open and stop

over against the door of the carriage. At the same moment inspiration came to the commissary. His gaze was introspective. He had not yet noticed the direction of ours. He slapped his hand to his thigh as he hurried forward.

"*Mon Dieu!*" cried he, "it is simple. Why did I not think of it sooner? Prove, then, thy knowledge of this Englishman by giving me his name!"

With the very words I set off running. A startled cry, to which I paid no heed, pursued me.

"I hold a hostage! I hold a hostage!" screamed the commissary; and immediately, as I understood, nipped Carinne by the elbow.

But by then I was come up with the stranger. He turned and received me straddle-legged, his eyes full of a passionless alertness. I lost not an instant.

"Monsieur," I panted, "we are fugitive aristocrats. In the name of God, help us!"

I could have adored him for his reception of this astounding appeal. He never moved a muscle.

"*Tout droit!*" said he; "but give us the tip!"

"Riouffe is dead" (his eyelids twitched at that) — "I have his passports. I am Riouffe — and this is madame, my wife."

Simultaneously, in the instant of my speaking, the frantic commissary brought up Carinne, and, to a metallic clang of hoofs, our fateful post-boy issued from the inn-yard in charge of his cattle. For a moment the situation was absolutely com-



plete and dramatic, — the agonised suitor proposing; the humorous and heroic *nonchalant* disposing; the petrified jockey, right; the hostage *chevalière* in the grasp of the heavy villain, left. Then all converged to the central interest, and destroyed the admirable effectiveness of the tableau.

“Goddam milor’ the Englishman!” shrieked the commissary; “he does not know thy name!”

The stranger put out a hand as he stood, and clapped me on the shoulder so that I winced.

“Riouffe!” he cried, in a very bantering voice — “not know his friend Jack Comely!” (“*ne savoir pas son ami Jack Comely — pook!*”)

“That he will swear to, my Jack,” said I.

The commissary released Carinne, and fell back gasping.

“*Pardon! les bras m’entombent!*” he muttered, in dismayed tones, and went as white and mottled as a leg of raw mutton.

But the stranger advanced to Carinne, with a blush and a gallant bow.

“Madame,” said he, “I cannot sufficiently curse my impatience for having cut you out of a stage. It was an error. *Entrez, s’il vous plait.*”

He spoke execrable French, the angel! It was enough that we all understood him. We climbed into the *limonière*; the stranger followed, and the door was slammed to. The landlord, with a hussy or so, gaped at the inn-door. The post-boy, making himself infinitesimally small to the commissary, limbered up his cattle — three horses

abreast. One of these he mounted, as if it were a nightmare. In a moment he was towelling his beasts to a gallop, to escape, one would think, the very embarrassment he carried with him. From time to time he turned in his saddle, and presented a scared face to our view.

"Well?" said the stranger, looking at us with a smile.

He was a fair-faced young man, bold-mouthed, and ripe with self-assurance. His dress was of the English fashion — straight-crowned beaver hat, with the band buckled in front, green tabinet kerchief, claret-coloured coat tight-buttoned — altogether a figure very spruce and clean, like a *piqueur d'écurie*.

I regarded him in solemn amazement. The whole rapid incident had been of a nature to make me doubt whether I was awake or dreaming.

"*Ma mie*," said Carinne, reproachfully; "Milor awaits your explanation."

I rose a little and bowed.

"Monsieur," said I, stupidly, "we are Jorinde and Joringel."

. . . . .

Sir Comely, a fine scapegrace, had journeyed to Paris out of curiosity to witness a guillotining. With him, in the packet, crossed Monsieur Tithon Riouffe, an *émigré* returning, under safe-conduct of the ineffective Barrère, to snatch his wife from the whirlpool. The two gentlemen met, hobnobbed, and shared a four-wheeled carriage as far as the tragic city, whence (as agreed between them) on a

certain day of the fifteen, during which the vehicle remained at the *Remise* at their disposition, they — accompanied, it was to be hoped, by madame — were to return in it to Calais. The day arrived; M. Riouffe failed to keep his appointment. The other awaited him, so long as a certain urgency of affairs permitted. At length — his own safety being a little menaced — he was driven to start on the return journey alone.

All this we learned of him, and he of us the broad outline of our story. A full confidence was the only policy possible to our dilemma. He honoured it *en prince*.

He was quite admirably concerned to hear of the fate of his fellow-traveller — *le malheureux chevreuil*! he called him. The extraordinary concatenation of chances that had substituted us for that other two did not, however, appear to strike him particularly. But he “strapped his vitalities!” (that is, as we understood it, “lashed himself into merriment”), in the insular manner, very often and very loudly, over this chance presented to him of hoodwinking the authorities.

“It’s rich, it’s royal, it’s rare!” he cried, “thus to double under the nose of the old cull of a big-wig, and to be sport in the next county while he’s hunting for a gate through the quickset. I pledge you my honour, monsieur, to see the two of you through with this; but, egad! you must draw upon my portymanteau at the next post if you are to win clear!”

*Grâces au Ciel* for the merry brave! It was like

endeavouring to read inscriptions in the Catacombs to interpret his speech; but one phrase he had trippingly, and that in itself was a complete index to his character —

“*Je ne me mouche pas du pied*” — I know better than to blow my nose with my feet.

And now, if for nothing else, I loved him for his boyish, shy, but most considerate attitude towards Carinne.

. . . . .  
 And thus was our escape accomplished. Winged with our passports, and cheered to the finish by the assurance of this gay and breezy islander, we came to the coast on a memorable afternoon, and bade adieu for ever to the family despotism of Fraternity.

. . . . .  
 “Tell me, *ma belle épousee* — for five days (the guests, the property, the *protégés* — what thou wilt — of this Sir Comely, this excellent Philippe le Bel) we have shut our eyes, here in this immeasurable London, to our necessitous condition and the prospect that faces us. Carinne, *mon enfant*, it is right now to discuss the means by which we are to live.”

“I have thought of it, little Thibaut. I will paint portraits.”

I started.

“Oh!” I cried, “I am very hungry! Let us signalise this last consumption of the poor Crépin’s purse by a feast of elegance. Be assured his ghost will call the grace.”

We entered an inn, opportunely near the spot whither we had wandered. It was in an important part of the town, close by the lion-surmounted palace of some monseigneur; and coaches and berlines discharged themselves in frequent succession in its yard. We walked into the *salle à manger*, sat down, and endeavoured to make our wishes known to the waiter. The room was fairly empty, but a party of half-a-dozen young "bloods"—*hommes de bonne compagnie*—sitting at a neighbouring table, seemed moved with a certain curiosity about us, and by-and-by one of these rose, crossed over, and, addressing me in very good French, asked if he could be of service in interpreting my desires—"For," says he, with a smile, "I perceive that monsieur is from over the Channel."

"Alas, monsieur!" I answered. "We are, indeed, of that foundered vessel, *La Ville de Paris*, the worthless wreckage of which every tide washes up on your coasts."

Some compliments passed, and he withdrew to join his companions. A little whispering was exchanged amongst them, and then suddenly our dandy arose and approached us once more, with infinite complaisance.

"Monsieur," he said, "I cannot, I find, convince my friends of the extent to which your nation excels in the art of making salads. Would you do us the favour to mix one for us?"

I hesitated.

"It is one of thy accomplishments," said Madame la Comtesse, at a hazard.

It was, indeed, though she could not have known it; or that Brillat-Savarin himself had once acknowledged me to be his master in the art.

"I shall be charmed," I said.

I called for oil, wine, vinegar, sweet fruits, the sauces of soy and ketchup, caviare, truffles, anchovies, meat gravy, and the yolks of eggs. I had a proportion and a place for each; and while I broke the lettuces, my company sat watching, and engaged me in some pretty intimate conversation, asking many questions about Paris, my former and present conditions, and even my place of abode.

I answered good-humouredly on account of my dear Philippe, who was of the very complexion and moral of these frank rascals; and presently they pronounced my salad such a dish as Vitellius had never conceived; and, from their table, they drank to its author and to the beautiful eyes of Madame la Comtesse.

It was all comical enough; but, by-and-by, when, having finished our meal, we found ourselves in the street again, Carinne thrust a folded slip of paper into my hand.

"What is this, *mignonne*?"

"Look, then," said she. "It was conveyed by the *élégant* under thy plate."

I opened and examined it. It was a note for five pounds.

"*Au diable!*" I murmured, flushing scarlet.

Carinne placed her hand on my arm. She looked up in my face very earnest and pitiful.

“Jourdain,” she said, “makes his living by turning his knowledge of weaving to account; De Courcy begs his by ‘*parfilage*.’ Which is the better method, *mon ami*? Is it not well to face the inevitable courageously by taking thy accomplishments to market?”

“I will become a salad-dresser,” said I.

. . . . .  
On the following day arrived a very courteous note from my *petit-maitre* of the dining-room, entreating me, as a special favour, to come that evening to a certain noble house and make the salad for a large dinner-party that was to be given therein. I went, was happy in confirming the great opinion formed of my powers, and was delicately made the recipient of a handsome present in acknowledgment of my services. From that moment my good little fortunes rolled up like a snow-ball. Within a period of eighteen months I had accumulated, by the mere “art of selection,” a sum of near a hundred thousand francs — truly a notable little egg’s-nest.

. . . . .  
One morning, not so very long ago, Madame de Crancé came to me with her eyes shining.

“Little Thibaut,” said she, “thou hast a great heart. Yet — though doubtless thou wert right to insist that the husband should be the bread-winner — it has grieved me to stand by and watch my own particular gift rusting from disuse. Well, sir, for thy rebuke I have at last a surprise for thee. Behold!” and with that she fetched a canvas

from behind her back, where she had been secret-  
ing it, and presented it to my view.

“Is it not like?” she said, her throat swelling  
with joy and pride.

I made my eyes two O’s; I “hedged,” as the  
sportsmen say.

“It is, indeed, *ma mie*. It is like nothing in  
the world except, of course——”

I stopped, sweating with apprehension. She  
relieved me at once.

“Ah!” she cried, “is it not baby himself—the  
dear, sweet rogue! I threw all my soul into it for  
thy sake.”

“Carinne!” I exclaimed, passionately grateful;  
“I knew I could not be mistaken.”

THE END.











Cornell University Library  
PR 4415.C72A6 1898

Adventures of the Comte de la Muette dur



3 1924 013 453 398

o/n

