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Traitor and True

A Romance

By

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TRAITOR AND TRUE

CHAPTER I

The doors of the Taverne Gabrielle, in the Rue des Franc Bourgeois in the Marais, stood open to all passers-by, and also to the cool wind blowing from the south-east. This evening, perhaps because it was summer-time, and perhaps, also, because it was supper-time for all in Paris from his Splendid Majesty down to the lowest who had any supper to eat, the appropriately named tavern--since directly opposite to it was the hôtel which Henri IV. had built for the fair Gabrielle d'Estrées--was not so full as it would be later on.

Indeed, it was by no means full, and the landlord, with his family, was occupying the time during which he scarcely ever had a demand for a pint of wine, or even a *pigeolet*, to have his own supper.

There were, however, some customers present--since when was there ever a time that the doors of a cabaret which is also an eating-house, and that one of good fame in a populous neighbourhood, did not have some customers beneath its roof at every hour of the day from the moment the doors opened until they closed? And the Taverne Gabrielle was no exception to this almost indisputable fact.

In one corner of the great, square room there sat an ancient bourgeois with his cronies sipping a flask of Arbois; in another a young man in the uniform of the Régiment de Perche was discussing a savoury ragout with a demoiselle who was masked; close by the open door, with the tables drawn out in front of it, though not too near to it to prevent free ingress and egress, were two men who, in an earlier period than that of Le Dieudonné, might have been termed *marauds*, swashbucklers, *bretteurs*, or heaven knows what. Now--even in the days which seemed to those who lived in them to be degenerate ones with all the flame and excitement of life departed, and which seem to those who have lived after them to have been so full of a strong, masterfully pulsating, full-blooded existence, perfumed with all that goes to make life one long romance--these men might have appeared to be anything except sober citizens or honest bourgeois carrying on steady, reputable callings. For, on their faces, in their garb, even in their wicked-looking side-weapons which now hung peacefully on the wall close by where they sat, there was an indescribable something which proclaimed that they were not men bringing up families decently and honestly. Not men content with small gains obtained by honest labour, by taking down their shutters at dawn and putting them up again long after nightfall; not men who walked side by side with their wives to Saint Eustache or Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois on Sabbath mornings while leading their children by the hand. Men, indeed, to judge by their appearance, their words and exclamations--which would not have graced the salons of St. Germain or Versailles!--and also by their looks and gestures, more fitted, more suitable to, and better acquainted with a huge fortress-prison close at hand, termed the Bastille, than any place of worship.

"He should be here by now," the elder of the two said to his companion, whom he addressed frequently as Fleur de Mai. "The sun has set and, ere long, every bell in Paris will be proclaiming that it is nine o'clock. If he comes not soon, there will be little time for us to go to the Hôtel des Muses and have a cast for a pistole or two. Van den Enden closes his *tripot* early."

"He will come, Boisfleury. So will the other. His master and, now, ours. Yet, remember what I have already told you, treat neither of them too much *en maître*. Remember also, that we are all officers and gentlemen--or have been."

"Yet--*malheur à tous!* we are no longer officers and, well! they are."

"La Truaumont is not. The other, the Chief, is, seeing that he is actual first in command of all the guards of the Splendid One."

"If he were not he would not be coming here to-night. That command gives him the power he desires."

"Yes, combined with the other power, the other assistance, he expects."

"Will he succeed, Fleur de Mai?"

"Succeed!" the younger man, addressed as Fleur de Mai, exclaimed. "*Cadédis!* 'tis to be hoped so. Or else, where are we? We, *mon ami*. Where are we?"

"There," Boisfleury said, pointing a finger towards the Rue St. Antoine, at the end of which the Bastille stood; "or there," directing an eye towards the vicinity of the Louvre, close by which was the Place du Carrousel where, when the great *place* in front of the Bastille was similarly occupied, the Wheel was set up.

"Precisely. Therefore, *mon camarade*, he must not fail. There is too much at stake; our precious lives principally. Afterwards his. Then, hers. To say nothing of Van den Enden's life."

"Theirs are of poor account. Yet, *à-propos* of hers; where is she and what is she doing now?"

"Plotting, of course. For him whom she loves and for her province which, though it treated her but scurvily, she still loves. Being a woman, neglect on one side and ill-treatment on the other has made her love grow stronger. It does that with some women and most dogs, since their love is like tropic flowers that often grow best in dry, uncared-for soil."

"But her other love; for him? Does that not prosper?"

"Again the dog's nature is shown in that. She gets no love, but still she loves on and on blindly. If that," imitating the other's recently pointing finger, "or that," imitating his recently directed glance, "claims him it will claim her too. Should he ever get into the jaws of Madame la Bastille she will get there also. For, again, dog-like, where he goes Emérance will follow."

"Such a love is worth having," his comrade said meditatively, as though, perhaps in better days, he had once possessed, or dreamed of possessing, a similar one.

"For which very reason the Chief does not value it. If he were forced to sigh and moan for want of it and still find it refused----"

"He would never do that for any woman!"

"'Tis true. And in this case he is right. So long as he disdains her so long will she serve him heart and soul. She will intrigue for him, spy for him, work for him and, in the end, die with him if he dies 'there' or 'there'," again imitating, saturninely, the other; "or, if may be, die for him. But, if he succeeds, if he arrives at that which he hopes to reach, then--well!--they will die apart. For, succeeding, she will not be able to follow where he goes: the spot where she remains will have been left far behind by him."

"'Tis hard on her," the elder man said, still musing. "A woman's love, a true woman's love, is worth having; it is too good a thing to be wasted."

"It is the fate of woman's love where misplaced. Now," he said, "look behind you down the street. La Truaumont is coming. We shall hear of our first employment. It will not be a pleasant journey, but we shall be away from all plotting and we shall be well paid. That is better than 'there,'" and again Fleur de Mai mockingly imitated his companion.

Turning round on his chair and glancing down the street, Boisfleury saw that a burly, bull-necked man was coming along it with his light cloak thrown over one arm, since the evening had not yet become cool enough for it to be worn, and heard the end of the scabbard of his rapier scraping the cobble stones of the road as he walked, since there were no footpaths in the Rue des Franc Bourgeois.

Yet, bull-necked and burly though this man might be, there was about him something that proclaimed him of better metal than those whom he was undoubtedly coming to meet, and also that, even as they were men accustomed to obey, so he was one well used to command. For there was in him an indescribable yet easily recognised air of command, a look, an air, that told plainly enough that this man had in his life given more orders, with the certainty of those orders being obeyed, than he had ever taken. In age he was perhaps fifty, or a year or two less, he was plainly but well dressed, and, in spite of the ruggedness of his appearance, he was a well-favoured, good-looking man.

He drew near to the Taverne Gabrielle now and entered it as Fleur de Mai and Boisfleury each rose to their feet and saluted him in a manner different from that of the other, yet typical of each. The former, who, though a younger man than his companion, was evidently the principal of the two, welcomed the Captain La Truaumont more *en camarade* than the other; more familiarly indeed, as though feeling that, in absolute truth, he was his equal. The latter rose with some sort of quiet dignity which, while expressing the fact that he considered himself as quite a humble instrument to be bought by money, was not without a certain self-respect. Also, that dignity seemed to suggest that, once, the man's position had been different from, and better than, it was now or would ever be again.

"So," La Truaumont said, "you keep the rendezvous. It is very well. Unhappily, I have made it too late. The citizens have supped, their wives will be putting the children to bed, they will be

coming forth to drink their flask and discuss their neighbours', and their own, doings. This tavern will be full ere long; we had best go elsewhere since there is much to talk over."

"There is Van den Enden's," Fleur de Mai said. "Plenty of rooms there where none can overhear or intrude! What say you, noble captain? You know the place and the man. Likewise, *she* is there and--well! she is in the affair and deeply too."

"'Twill do. It is there I have told the Chief I will be between ten and eleven. He will be back by then from making his last arrangements for the departure of that other." After which he said, while addressing both men, "You set out to-morrow night."

"All nights are the same to us--is it not so, Boisfleury?" Fleur de Mai exclaimed, slapping his somewhat melancholy comrade on the back as though to hearten him up.

"It is," the other said. "All nights and all roads, and all days as well. Fleur de Mai and I require little preparation. Our horses are in their stables, our clothes on our backs; our best friends," with a glance of his eye--that glance with which a Frenchman can infer a whole sentence!--towards the weapons hanging in their sashes on the wall, "are there."

"Good. You will have a light, easy task of it, a pleasant ride through the sunniest provinces of France; the best of inns to sleep in, eat in, drink in----"

"So. So. 'Tis very well," grunted Fleur de Mai approvingly.

"--and," continued La Truaumont, "your pockets filled with pistoles ere you set out, replenished with them when you arrive at your destination, and refilled again when you return to Paris. Can heart of man desire more?"

"Whatever the hearts of Fleur de Mai and Boisfleury may desire more," the former of those two worthies said, "they are not likely to get. Therefore we are content. We will guard the noble lady valiantly. If our two swords are not enough to shield her and her companion, 'tis not very like a dozen others could."

"There will be one other," La Truaumont said quietly, as now Fleur de Mai made a sign to the drawer to bring the reckoning.

"One other!" the latter exclaimed, turning round to look at La Truaumont. "What other? Any of our 'friends' by chance? Of our noble and distinguished confraternity?"

"By no means. The other blade--he is a good one--is a young man who loves the *demoiselle de compagnie* of the illustrious traveller; one who rides half-way upon the long journey to thereby keep his *fiancée* company and to act as protector, escort, squire of dames."

"Who is he? Do we know him?" While, dropping his voice, Fleur de Mai added, "Is he in the Great Venture?"

"No, to each and every question. You have never heard of him or seen him, and he knows no more of the 'Great Venture' than he who is the object of that great venture's existence knows. The man in question is an Englishman."

"An Englishman!" the two companions exclaimed together, while Fleur de Mai added, "What do we want with him?"

"Nothing--no more than he wants with you, he going only, as I have said, to be by the side of his beloved. He goes," La Truaumont continued with some little emphasis, "unpaid, unhired and untrammelled. He can turn back when half of the first portion of the journey is completed, or, arrived at the end of the first portion, he can, if it so pleases him, encompass the second with the ladies. He is well-to-do and his pockets are well lined."

"He is an Englishman all the same," Fleur de Mai grumbled.

"On one side only. His mother is a Frenchwoman."

"That's better," both the men said together. After which Fleur de Mai asked:--

"But the Venture? The Great Attempt? You say he knows nought of that. Yet he will be *there* as well as we when the illustrious lady has gone on her way; when Van den Enden----"

"Hush, idiot. No names."

"When the emissary, then, comes to meet her. That other whom we shall see to-night."

"Again I say he is harmless, since he knows nothing. Now, come. Let us to the 'emissary's'. The Chief will be there as soon as may be. We must not be later than he."

Whereon Fleur de Mai once more crooked a ringer at the drawer lurking by the window and keeping an eye on those who had been consuming his master's wine--he being accustomed to trust no one whom he did not know to be an honest bourgeois of the vicinity; and, at the same

time, each man reached down his hat and sword and buckled the latter around his waist.

Then, the reckoning paid, the three went forth into the narrow street and directed their steps towards the Rue Picpus which was not so very far off. For it was in that street that there dwelt the man who had, but a few moments before, been spoken of as Van den Enden and the "emissary." A man who was as much concerned in that Great Venture, that Great Attempt referred to, as was either Le Capitaine La Truaumont or the other man termed the Chief.

CHAPTER II

He--Affinius Van den Enden--who spoke and knew eight languages and had invented a new system of shorthand, who was a physician and was called a thief by many; who was a Dutch Jew and proclaimed himself an atheist and an unbeliever in the Christian religion, and had made an atheist of Spinoza amongst others; who lived well on other people's weaknesses, and, eventually, was hanged in Paris over the Quillebeuf affair, kept at this time a bagnio in the Rue Picpus which he called a *pension* and styled "L'Hôtel des Muses." And a pension it was in some ways, though a strange one. In it one might take warm baths, or cold either, if anybody could be found in Paris disposed towards the latter; and one could lodge and board there at a more or less fancy price, while ailing persons could go into retreat in the Dutchman's house until they were over their maladies. Here, too, *sub rosa*, one could purchase diamonds and other jewels--always unset!--at a remarkably cheap price on condition that no questions were asked, and, for the matter of that, sell them without inconvenient questioning. It was likewise possible to buy gold dust, ambergris, elephants' teeth, *Fazzoletti di Napoli*, pills, chocolate and Hogoo (snuff) here; while, also, conspirators, gamblers and private drinkers could have rooms in which to meet in this delectable *pension*. Finally, to add to its charms, one might at night play basset and ombre with some of the most accomplished *escrocs* in Paris.

It will, however, have been gathered that it was neither to buy such commodities as the above, nor to gamble or drink, that Captain La Truaumont and his henchmen proceeded to the Hôtel des Muses after leaving the Taverne Gabrielle. They were, indeed, engaged in a more or less degree upon so great an undertaking, one having such vast consequences attending on its success or failure, that, in comparison with that undertaking, bags of pistoles, or chests full of them--if such could have been found in Van den Enden's house!--would have appeared but as dust upon the high road.

Arriving at the Hôtel des Muses and giving two sharp knocks upon the door, it was at once opened to them by a red-haired young woman who was no other than Claire Marie, the daughter of the "physician." To her La Truaumont instantly made known his desire that they should all be shown into a private apartment; one that, for choice, had no occupied room on either side of it. Then, the maiden having escorted the three men to that which they required, while saying that the house was almost empty to-night in consequence of the warmth of the evening and the fineness of the weather, the Captain gave orders that Monsieur Louis should be brought to this room immediately on his arrival.

"Also, my child," he said to the red-haired young Jewess to whom Fleur de Mai had already addressed a series of jokes to which she paid very little heed, "tell your father to join us when Monsieur Louis arrives. While as for Madame la Marquise, she is, I should suppose, already within doors."

"She is. *Hélas!* poor lady, she goes out but little now seeing that she is ashamed of the garb she wears. She has but one robe and that is torn and frayed. Between you all--Monsieur Louis, you and my father--though he is not much by way of giving aught--you might well supply her with better array."

"She will be supplied soon. Perhaps to-night. Money has not been too plentiful with us of late. Now, Spain has sent some. Henceforth, Madame la Marquise will not be without fitting raiment. We may have to send her travelling. She must travel as becomes a--marquise."

"She owes money to my father also," the girl added, her hereditary instincts doubtless causing her to recall the circumstance.

"Bah! When we are all as rich as heart of man can desire he can pay himself out of his share of the spoils. Now, *ma belle*, begone and warn your father to be ready for Monsieur Louis, and tell Madame la Marquise to prepare to join us."

Claire Marie went off upon these errands, the former of which she proceeded to execute by calling over the stair-rails to her father below--though she was careful not to do so in a tone that could by any possibility be heard outside the house. After which, and also after having received from her parent below the answer that he knew Monsieur Louis was coming as well as, if not better than, any one else in the house, she made her way to a flight above that on which she stood, and, going to the end of the passage, rapped on the door of the last room.

Being bidden to enter, the girl did so, and, pushing open the door, found the occupant of that room, a young woman, engaged in arranging her hair in front of a very small glass.

"Madame," Claire Marie said, "all the company are below excepting Monsieur Louis, and he is looked for at once. The Capitaine La Truaumont has bidden me summon you and my father."

"I am making ready to descend," the other answered. "I shall be there ere long." And, she added to herself, after Claire Marie had closed the door and departed, "a fair object I shall appear in his eyes when I do so!" While, as she muttered this, she sighed.

If, however, these reflections were made on her personal appearance, the woman either did not know herself or misjudged herself. For, although she was not beautiful as beauty is reckoned, she had charms that might well be considered the equals of beauty. Her hair, that now she was endeavouring to arrange into the fashion of the day--the fashion that Van Dyck and, later, Kneller depicted--was a lustrous dark auburn; her eyes were dark grey fringed with long black lashes: her mouth, with its short upper lip and full, pouting, lower one, was perfect, especially when she smiled and showed her small white teeth. Her figure, too, was as near perfection as might be.

But, with these charms, there was mingled that which went far to detract very seriously from them, namely, a worn, weary look, a pallor that was hardly ever absent from her face, a lack of colour that spoke either of bodily ailment or mental trouble. Gazing round the melancholy room in which this woman sheltered--"harboured" is a more fitting word--an observer might well have thought that the hardness of her life, a hardness in which, to the sordidness of the apartment was, perhaps, added sometimes the want of food or ordinary necessaries, explained that pallor. Yet, still, in speaking to this woman, in hearing the tone of melancholy in which she answered, in gazing into those dark grey eyes and observing the sadness of their glance, an observer, a listener, would have been disposed to think that the first supposition was wrong and that not bodily, but mental, trouble was the cause of her careworn appearance.

Her hair arranged at last, the woman rose from the chair on which she had been seated, and, after smoothing out some creases in her dress as well as, also, endeavouring to remove some of the stains it bore, went to a drawer and, taking out some various pieces of ribbon and silk, stood before the glass while endeavouring to discover which of the poor frayed scraps of colour might best add any charm to her appearance.

"Yet," she said bitterly, as at last she made her decision, "of what use are these efforts of my wretched vanity? He regards me, will ever regard me, but as a useful auxiliary to his ambitious schemes. I am of the land and the people whose voice and assistance he seeks--once I was of the best of those people. So, too, he knows my fierce determination to stand at last, if Fate so wills it, before those people as their human saviour and not as the outcast they made of me; as the woman who, despised of them, has lived to earn their gratitude. Knowing this, he uses me to aid his own great purpose and will so use me to the end, and, if that end be successful for him, then cast me off. Unhappily," she murmured, her face almost the picture of despair, "I know he will do so, which is for me the worst of all. I serve him understanding well that I am as nought in his eyes. I work to help him, starve and go in rags to make his chance better, and--I am but dust, dross, in his eyes."

After which she turned away from the glass, into which she looked so often while hating to look at all, and went towards the door, muttering, "And still I do it."

When this woman reached the room into which La Truaumont and his companions had been shown earlier, she saw at once that she was the last to arrive at the conference that was about to take place.

Seated round the table there were, besides the three original occupants of the room, two others. One was Affinius Van den Enden, the proprietor of the Hôtel des Muses, the man who had been spoken of as an "emissary," a central figure in the Great Scheme so often referred to. The other, who had not taken the trouble to remove his hat, was a man of not more than thirty years of age and was extremely handsome. Yet, whatever the charm of his appearance might be, however softly his deep blue eyes could glance from beneath the long dark lashes, however well-cut the features were, all was marred by a look of haughty arrogance that sat perpetually on those features. By an expression that had, however, been described by some as not so much one of arrogance as of an evil disposition or a harsh, cruel temper.

Whatever may have been the cause of this man having continued to wear his hat before those who were his companions for the moment, and whether it proceeded from pride, contempt or superciliousness--or absolute forgetfulness--he instantly removed it on the entrance of Emérance, Marquise de Villiers-Bordéville, as the new-comer was termed. Indeed, if she was in this man's eyes that which she had described herself as being, namely "dust" or "dross," he allowed no sign

of any such appreciation, or rather depreciation, of her to be perceptible. Instead, he rose quickly from the chair he occupied, and, while removing his hat from his head with one hand, held out the other to her. After which he murmured in a low, soft voice some words of thanks for her presence in the room that night, and added to them still more thanks for the many services she had performed for him in what he termed "his dangerous cause."

But from Emérance there came no words that could be construed as an acknowledgment of the man's courteous phrases. On entering the room she had glanced once into his eyes while making some slight inclination of her head: when he held out his hand she took it listlessly, and, on seeing that Fleur de Mai was, in a more or less good-humoured manner, motioning her to the seat that he too had risen from on her entrance, sank into it. While, as for words, the only ones she uttered were: "I am glad we have all met here to-night: it is as well that our plans should now be known to all."

"They will not occupy much time in exposing," the man who had been spoken of by La Truaumont and his companions as "Monsieur Louis," answered. "The time for action is approaching." After which he continued, "Van den Enden sets out for Spain almost immediately. He may go to-morrow, or a week hence, or in two weeks at least. He will return as soon as he has got the promise from Spain and that which is as necessary, the remainder of the money. Only he will not return to Paris."

"Meanwhile?" Emérance asked quietly, "what of the others. Those I have seen in Normandy are firm."

"All are firm, madame."

"That is well. But if he," directing her eyes towards Van den Enden, who was engaged in turning over a mass of papers that he had brought into the room, "if he does not return to Paris, to where will he go?

"Basle is the place appointed."

"Basle!" Emérance exclaimed, while as she did so her pallor became even more perceptible than before. "To Basle! Ah, yes, I understand," and she whispered to herself: "Basle that lies almost half-way betwixt Nancy and the road to Italy by which *she* will progress."

"Perhaps," said Monsieur Louis, "madame does *not* understand. Basle lies outside France though close to the frontier--therefore, once there, all French people are safe."

"The Colonel of all King Louis' Guards is surely safe anywhere in France. Monsieur must be thinking of the safety of some other person than himself. In any case I could never believe monsieur's own safety, at such a moment as this above all, would induce him to voyage to Basle."

"Madame has judged aright. I have no intention of quitting France."

"Ah!" the marquise exclaimed, a dash of colour springing to her cheeks at these words. Then she added, "It is very well. Monsieur should be in France now. Especially, now."

The other took no notice of this remark and, at this moment, La Truaumont spoke for the first time.

"Emérance," he said, addressing her without any ordinary prefix, "you understand well enough why Basle is chosen for the rendezvous. All those who will accompany Madame la Duchesse from Paris to Nancy, and from Nancy to Basle, will leave her there, unless the young English *fiancé* of Mlle. D'Angelis chooses to go farther. To go even to Geneva or across the Alps. Being in no wise concerned in our hopes and aspirations there is no reason why he should not do so. He knows nothing of our plans, he will never be permitted to know. Indeed," continued La Truaumont grimly, "if he were to know of them, if he were ever to learn them, the knowledge would have to be dearly paid for."

"It would," Fleur de Mai muttered, as he curled up his great moustache, while the expression on the faces of all the others--from the grin on that of Van den Enden to the calm, far-off look in the eyes of Emérance, showed that La Truaumont had clearly expressed that which was in all their minds.

CHAPTER III

"The Great Attempt," which has been more than once referred to in the previous pages, was nothing less than a plot devised to remove Louis XIV. from the throne of France and to place upon that throne Louis, Prince and Chevalier de Beaurepaire, a man who had been the chosen playmate of the King in his infancy and was now the Colonel of all his Majesty's regiments of Guards.

The infamy of this treachery--infamous as treachery always is!--was doubly so in such a case as this, and it is not, therefore, surprising that all the principals concerned in it were spoken of by other names than their own; that meetings were hardly ever held twice in the same place, and that, as had happened before now, many such meetings had even taken place outside of France itself. Amongst those who thus masqueraded under such aliases--and they were many--were the Prince de Beaurepaire who was always spoken and written of as "Monsieur Louis," Van den Enden as the Seigneur de Châteaugrand, Emérance as the Marquise de Villiers-Bordéville--and countless noblemen in Normandy who did so under other sobriquets.

For "The Plot" originated in Normandy and owed its rise to a tax which had been imposed on the wood, or trees, of which the forests in that province were so full, and which wood was to the landowners a considerable source of revenue. One of the old original taxes of this nature had long been submitted to by the Normans, but the imposition of a new one had caused the discontent that gradually grew into a plot--it was only one of many formed against Louis XIV. during his long reign!--to depose him. Gradually too, as the scheme grew, the wealthy landowners and nobles of Brittany and Guienne also took part in it.

A more powerful conspirator against the King of France and his throne than the inhabitants of three of his most important provinces was, however, in the field, that conspirator being Spain itself. Louis had, earlier than this, deprived Spain of some of her possessions, and it was now suggested to the Spanish Governor of Brussels that, if his country were willing to supply the Norman conspirators with money, arms and men, Quillebeuf, at the mouth of the Seine in the Bay of Le Havre, might easily be seized by a hostile fleet. And, since half the country between that place and Paris would be favourable to the designs of the invaders, six hundred men well mounted and equipped could easily reach Versailles, overpower the detachments of regiments serving there as the King's Guard, and not only possess themselves of his person but also of the persons of all the Royal Family. A Republic such as that of Venice or of Holland was to be founded, De Beaurepaire was to be the President, and ample funds were to be supplied by Spain.

It was at this meeting that all was to be decided with regard to a visit that Van den Enden was now to make to Brussels--in spite of his seventy-four years of age!--there to draw the promised sum over and above the trifle that had already been advanced as earnest on the part of Spain, and to arrange for the attack on Quillebeuf.

"For," said the old adventurer--whose gifts and talents should long ago have lifted him far above the level of ordinary adventurers, and probably would have done so if his sense of rectitude and plain-dealing had been as considerable as were his acquirements--"the signal is made by Spain, she joins in. Behold the *Brussels Gazette*," and he placed before De Beaurepaire and the others a copy of that, then, well-known paper.

Leaning over the Prince's shoulder, La Truaumont read out from one portion of the paper: "His Majesty King Louis XIV. is about to create two new marshals of France," and from another: "The courier from Spain is expected shortly."

Then, seeing on the faces of Fleur de Mai and Boisfleury a look of bewilderment which showed plainly enough that, however much the other persons present might understand these apparently uninteresting portions of general intelligence, they, at least, certainly did not do so, La Truaumont, addressing them, said:--

"It was arranged with the Comte de Montérey, the Spanish Governor of Brussels, that, if Spain decided to act, these pieces of news should be inserted in the *Gazette* by his orders. They have been inserted; therefore we have won Spain to our side. The fleet specially belonging to Holland will embark six thousand men at a given moment; arms and weapons for twenty thousand men will also be put on board, and money to the extent of two million francs will be provided. Van den Enden goes now to Brussels to finally decide everything and----"

"To bring a portion of the money away with him," Van den Enden put in. "We want money badly in spite of having already received something as earnest of the matter being considered."

"But Basle! Why Basle?" Emérance exclaimed, while as she spoke her eyes rested on De Beaurepaire's face. "It is far away," she continued, speaking with emphasis. "Far from Paris and farther still from Normandy. It is going a long distance."

"It is outside France," La Truaumont said, "and, consequently, safe. While Spain is doing the business in company with the Normans in the North-West, those who are directing the puppets will be doing so from the South-East."

"*He* cannot be there," Emérance said, her eyes still fixed on De Beaurepaire.

"No," De Beaurepaire replied, "I must remain in Paris. I may indeed be required in Normandy. But there is a certain lady, a certain *grande dame de par le monde* who will pass through Basle from Nancy on her road to Italy. You know that, Madame de Villiers-Bordéville, as well as you know that I have promised to see her to, and safely outside, the gates of Paris."

"Yes, I know," the woman said, her eyes lowered now as his were raised to them, while her usual pallor had once more given way to the flush that at intervals tinged her cheeks, "I know."

"Also you know, madame, you must in very truth know, that I have agreed to find for this lady some trifling escort as far as Basle, whence she may cross the St. Gothard or go to Geneva if she decides to pass the St. Bernard. Now, that escort will be composed of Fleur de Mai, as he elects to call himself, and Boisfleury----"

"Which is a name his fathers bore," that worthy interrupted.

"Both," went on De Beaurepaire, "are Normans as you, madame, are. Both, like you, are heart and soul in this great scheme now so near to its accomplishment. And, since they, perforce, must find themselves at Basle, though not necessarily at Geneva, it is to Basle that Van den Enden will go. Thence, from that place, they can all return in safety to Paris, since who, entering France from Switzerland, can be suspected of coming from the Spanish Netherlands or of having any dealings with the Normans?"

"And I? Where shall I be? I who am as much heart and soul in this as you, or any of you?" looking round on all present. "I who am Norman as La Truaumont, Boisfleury and Fleur de Mai are? Though heart and soul in it from no desire of reward but only in the hope to obtain justice at last."

"Later, I will tell you where you will be in this great scheme," De Beaurepaire said in a low voice, his almost whispered words being unheard by the others who had begun to read a number of letters that Van den Enden had produced. Letters that, in those days, had they been signed by the actual names of the writers instead of by assumed ones, would have meant death to each and all: letters that now, old and dingy and with the black ink turned red and rusty, still repose in the archives of Paris. Yet letters now--and long ago--known to have been written by those whose names are scrawled plainly across them in a far more recent hand than those of the original writers; names such as De Longueville, Saint Ibal, Franquetot-Barberousse, De Fiesque and many others illustrious for centuries in the North-West.

"I will speak with you later. To-night," De Beaurepaire said, even as Fleur de Mai and his companions still conversed and told each other that, with such men as these at their backs and with, towering over all, the wealth and power of Spain--though they forgot that Spain could scarcely be still powerful when ruled over by its baby King, Charles, who was later to become an idiot in mind and an invalid in body--they could not fail in their great attempt.

And so the talk--the discussions of the future arrangements, of how Van den Enden was to correspond with De Beaurepaire by first sending his news in cypher to Basle, whence it would be re-written and sent to him, while other re-written copies would be sent to Rouen--went on until, at last, the meeting drew near to its end.

"And you, Emérance," La Truaumont said, as now the men were resuming their swords and preparing to depart from the Hôtel des Muses, "do you know what part you have next to play? There are no more hesitating Norman nobles or gentlemen left in Paris for you to watch; they have all returned to their homes, being persuaded that the attempt is as good as made and carried through triumphantly. Likewise, you can do nought in Normandy yourself."

"Somewhere I can do something."

"Doubtless," the man said, looking down on her with a glance that might well have been taken for one of pity. "And it may be--we will hope so--under happier, more cheerful circumstances than this," now looking round the room they were in with a glance that might have been considered as embracing the whole of Van den Enden's delectable abode. "Your life," he went on, "has never been a happy one; your circumstances here, in Paris, are of the worst. They may now improve."

"What is to be done with me?" the unfortunate woman asked listlessly. "Or for me? I have no hopes. Or only one--which will never be realised. My greatest hope," she almost whispered to herself, "is that at last I may lose all hope."

"Be cheered," La Truaumont said, the roughness of the old soldier of fortune--part bravo, part hero, part swashbuckler--the usual ingredients of most soldiers of fortune!--smoothed out of his features so that, for the moment, he presented the appearance of a tender father talking to an unhappy child: "Be cheered. If that which we hope for and, hoping, greatly dare to attempt, should succeed, you will, you shall, rise as we rise. Whatever you can wish for, aspire to, he 'Monsieur Louis'--*le Dédaigneux* as he is sometimes called, will see that you attain."

"It is impossible," the girl whispered. "Impossible. What I wish for he cannot give, not possessing it himself."

"Be not so sure. He is young, passionate, and, though many a silken thread has held him

lightly for a time----"

"I have no silken thread wherewith to bind him," Emérance said, her eyes cast down, her breast heaving painfully. "Nor do I desire any other woman's--women's----"

"You do not understand, Emérance," La Truaumont said very gently. "Much as trouble and sorrow have taught you, you have not yet learnt all the secrets of a man's heart. A silken thread!" he went on, turning his back still more on the others so that, while they could not hear his words, neither should they see the movement of his lips, which movement, on occasions, will sometimes tell as much as words themselves. "A silken thread! What species of cord, of thong is that to hold a strong, reckless man? A thing befitting the place where it is most often found--a lady's boudoir, her bower, the seat in a tower window; a gilded chamber where carpets from Smyrna, skins, rugs, make all soft to the feet; the plaything of a *rêveuse*, a love-lorn dame."

"Well?" Emérance whispered, lifting her eyes to the other. "Well?"

"But there are other cords," La Truaumont went on. "The heart-strings of women to whom dalliance is unknown: women who will starve, intrigue, follow, dare all for him they love: who will bravely bear the cords, the threads that make them regard the block, the gibbet, as a sweeter thing than bowers and tapestry and silken hangings--so long as block or gibbet are risked with him they love."

"Ah!" the woman gasped in an indrawn breath.

"What does he want now with women in their great saloons, their oratories, their boudoirs? Is he not risking his life upon one cast; does he not therefore want women as well as men of action to help him, women who will keep steady before their eyes, even as he keeps, as all of us keep before our eyes, the diadem of France, the throne of France--France itself, on one side? As also he keeps, and we keep before our eyes, the scaffold outside the Bastille, the Wheel at the Cross Roads, the Gibbet--on the other side? And for such a woman will there be no reward, no acknowledgment?"

"Alas!" the unhappy creature murmured. "He is De Beaurepaire. I am--what?"

"A sorely tried, a deeply injured woman, a lady. One evilly, wickedly, entreated by the land she now hopes to aid. One who loves De Beaurepaire," he added softly.

"Heaven knows how much," the other whispered. "That only!"

"To-night the Prince will speak with you," La Truaumont continued. "To-night he will show to you the absolute faith and belief he will put in your loyalty to him and his cause, which is yours and mine and that of all Normans. Emérance, to-night he will confide in you a great task; he will put himself, his life, his honour, the honour of his house in your hands; he will place in your hands the chance of sending him to that wheel, that gibbet I spoke of but now. Does a man trust any woman with his honour and his life unless he knows that they are so safe in her hands, that they are so bound up with her own life and honour, that she needs must guard them safely?"

"Briefly," the woman said, her eyes raised for a moment to those of La Truaumont, "he knows I love him. Alas! the shame that any man should know I have given him my love unasked and unrequited."

"How can he fail to know? Yes, he does know. But you, Emérance, do you not know something on your part of how love and, above all, fidelity, begets love in return?"

* * * * *

The three men, La Truaumont, Fleur de Mai and Boisfleury had gone, they having taken the precaution to separate and make their way by different routes towards the better part of the city. Van den Enden and De Beaurepaire were in another room concluding their last arrangements for communicating with each other when the former should have reached Brussels. And Emérance leant out of the window of the room in which the meeting had been held and inhaled such air as was to be obtained from the stuffy street that was little better than an alley.

Yet it was not only for the sake of inhaling the air of the warm summer night that she leant over the sill while idly toying with a flower that grew, or half-grew and half-withered away, in an imitation Nevers flowerpot, but also for the sake of gaining time to collect and, afterwards, arrange her thoughts.

For she knew that, if La Truaumont's words meant anything at all, to-night would be fateful to her. She knew that, ere the bell of Saint Eustache, which had but a moment or so ago struck ten, should strike another hour, De Beaurepaire would have confided to her some task which, while it raised her from the almost degraded position of a spy--from the hateful task of watching Norman

gentlemen and noblemen in Paris to discover if there was any defection on their part from that which they were deeply sworn to assist in--would not only put his life in her hands, but also jeopardise her own.

Nevertheless--as still she trifled with the flower while meditating deeply--not one of these three things, her own advancement to a position of trust and importance, or the power over De Beaurepaire's life and honour which that position would put in her hands, or--and this was, or would have been with many women, the greatest of all--the deadly peril in which she herself must stand henceforth, weighed with her in comparison with a fourth. In comparison with the fact that, henceforth, no matter whether the Great Attempt succeeded or failed--as it would most probably do--she and De Beaurepaire must for ever be associated together. For, if it failed, there could be but one fate for them to share together: if it, by any chance, succeeded, some little part of the success must fall to her share.

That, that only, was all she desired while knowing well there could be nothing more. She had herself uttered the words to La Truaumont that told all. The man she loved was De Beaurepaire, and he was far, far above her; as high above her as the eagle soaring in the skies is above the field-mouse; while, if the success were achieved, he would be as much more above her as the sun in its mid-day splendour is above the eagle. But, still--still--she would have played her part, she would have helped him to that splendour he had attained, she could never afterwards be forgotten or put entirely aside.

"To some women's hearts," she whispered now, "a recollection, the shadow of a memory, is all that they may dare to crave, all they can hope for. Happy are some women to obtain so much as that. If I can help him to succeed it will be enough. It is not much, yet, for me, it must suffice."

Then, as thus she mused, she heard the door open behind her, she heard a step taken into the room and, next, the voice of De Beaurepaire say, "Madame, I am here to speak with you."

CHAPTER IV

When first Georges, Sieur de la Truaumont, of an ancient Norman family, late a captain of "La Garde de Monsieur" and formerly of the Regiment de Roncherolles, had broached to the Prince Chevalier de Beaurepaire the suggestion that he should place himself at the head of the Norman plot for deposing King Louis, he had also indicated to him a number of persons of whom he might make use.

Passing over the greatest, since they were all known to the Prince and were also resident in Normandy, he had described to his half-friend and half-employer more than one who would be useful in Paris, and, among them, was Emérance, who styled herself the Marquise de Villiers-Bordéville.

"Who and what is she?" De Beaurepaire had asked almost indifferently, while wondering how a woman who lived in a decayed, though once fashionable, quarter of Paris and was reported by La Truaumont to be in an almost penniless condition, could be of the slightest assistance to him.

"She is a woman well born, of ancient family, who has been badly treated by all with whom she has of late had to deal. She was accused and tried for a crime she never committed and--she was acquitted. But, with those of her breed, the trial was enough to place her outside the pale. Fortunately it was the King's own court--not a local Norman one--that tried her, and, out of that, grew her determination to assist in wrenching Normandy--nay, France--from his hands, of reinstating herself in the eyes of our beloved province by acting as one of its saviours."

"How?" De Beaurepaire asked, already almost wearied by this short account of the unhappy woman's life.

"By spying on those who, having given in their adhesion to the plot, might, perhaps, find more profit in betraying it than keeping faith with it. Therefore she came to Paris, and, while watching those who might become backsliders, learnt that you, whom she had seen before, were the accepted head of the movement. And she will serve you well. Never fear for that."

"Why serve me? At present her pay cannot be great. As yet the bulk of money we hope to get is not ours."

"Why! Why! Well! you have known enough of women, young as you still are. You know why she

will serve you."

"Bah!" De Beaurepaire said, "she works for her pay, poor as it is."

"Does she?" replied La Truaumont quietly.

"Georges," De Beaurepaire continued, addressing the other by his Christian name as he often did in these days, "who *is* this woman? You know still more than you will tell."

"I know nothing more of her except that she is, like myself, from Normandy. And I know that, for this self-same reason, she will go hand in hand with us in the scheme we have set afloat when--well!--when Madame la Duchesse is safe in Italy and we are back in France."

"You know nothing more of her?"

"Nothing. Van den Enden brought her to me here and said she might be useful, being Norman. When she heard you were the head and front of our future undertaking, she said she would do all we might ask. She had, as I say, seen you before and--la! la!--admired you. But she was poor, she said, and she must live. As you now know, the Jew brought you and her together, and she was finally vowed heart and soul to us, to the cause--to you. De Beaurepaire, you can grapple her to that cause, to yourself; you can make her do aught you, or we, desire if you will but give her a kindly word, a----"

"I will think upon it," the Prince said, while telling himself that already he had thought enough.

"She will be worth it. Do that. Be generous to her and she will go hand in hand to the scaffold with you if you desire."

"*Bon Dieu!* there is no need for that. And the scaffold is not for a De Beaurepaire."

"The heavens forbid! Yet, when the time comes--it is at hand--we shall throw a great stake."

"And win!"

"So be it. I live in hopes."

After De Beaurepaire had seen Emérance again, after he had more carefully observed her soft features and noted her sad look: above all, after he had seen one or two of the glances she had cast on him, he decided he would grapple her to him and to the cause. A woman such as this was wanted for the scheme he had on foot--the wild, delirious scheme of striving to find himself ruler of France and with, it might be, Louis for his subject instead of his king. He would do it, he would use Emérance de Villiers-Bordéville, as she called herself, to wheedle and hoodwink others, to sow the poison-seed of treachery and anarchy and revolt in their souls, to ride for him to other countries with messages and treaties to be signed and executed; to do all he bade her. And, as slaves had ere now been crowned with roses and rewarded, so he would crown and reward her. He would be soft and gentle to her, he vowed; he would speak her fair and sweet, and she should be well repaid for her services and no longer go in rags or live poorly.

He had decided all this some month or so before the night when now he came back to Emérance to tell her what further services were required of her above those she had already rendered, and, during that period, he had had good opportunities of observing her unfailing fidelity to him and his cause. One thing, however, that he had resolved to do had not yet been carried out. The money with which he meant to reward her, the money that should enable her to be decently housed, well fed and properly clad and equipped, had not yet been forthcoming. Spain had sent nothing until a few days before, and that only a trifle, since it had been arranged that no money was to be paid until the signal was given in the *Gazette de Bruxelles*, and then she had only sent this small sum on the representation being made that the conspirators in France would themselves do nothing until Spain led the way. As for De Beaurepaire he had nothing; his years of extravagant living and the expense which his appointments caused him necessitating his continually asking money from his mother.

"Madame," he said, as now he entered the room, "I am here to speak with you." Then, seeing that although Emérance turned away from the window and faced him, she uttered no word, he continued, "My presence is not irksome, I trust."

"There could be no presence less so," the woman answered, regaining full command of her speech, of which some strange inward agitation had momentarily deprived her. A moment later, forgetting that the room in which she was belonged no more to her than to him, she motioned to De Beaurepaire to be seated and, ere he could place a chair for her, had seated herself.

"To-night," she went on, her calmness all returned, "you are to tell me what farther part I can play in your--our, since I am Norman--enterprise. Do so, therefore, I entreat of you. And, whatever it may be, have no fear to name it. What there is to be done, I will do."

"Madame is very brave," the Prince said, his voice soft and gentle and his look--that was so often harsh and contemptuous--equally so. "Very brave. Madame's heart is in this."

"It is," Emérance replied. "To the end. I fear nothing in this cause; nothing. Speak freely."

"At present," De Beaurepaire said, "there is no danger to madame in what she is asked to perform. Nay, she is but asked to perform that which should bring safety to herself in place of danger. I ask her on behalf of the Attempt and--well!--of myself, to quit France." Then, seeing that the pallor on the face of Emérance had increased--if that were possible: seeing, too, that her lips framed, though they did not utter, the word "Never," he added, "only for a little while. A few days at most."

"So!" the woman exclaimed, divining his meaning in a moment, "it is not to quit France because I am no longer wanted, or am dangerous, or no longer to be trusted, but because----"

"Madame, you have guessed aright, or perhaps you know the service I would demand."

"It is not hard to guess. The great lady," Emérance said, in a tone more of sorrow than bitterness, "she who is so great and might, had she so chosen, have been greater, quits France for Italy. Her journey is to be well protected. Even Monsieur le Prince will escort her outside the gates. The guards he commands; the other soldiery to whom he can issue commands that must be obeyed; the watch, the police, will be prevented from interfering with her. Ah! it is well to be Madame la Duchesse de----"

"Silence, I beg. Do not mention her name. Should it ever become known that I have lent her assistance in her escape from Paris, I should not be safe from the King's wrath. And, at present, that wrath is a thing that even I must fear since, should it fall on me, it might, nay must, prevent our venture from progressing. The Bastille, Vincennes, some gloomy fortress far from Paris are not places where plots can well be carried on."

"The Bastille, Vincennes--for you!" Emérance exclaimed again, her eyes fixed on the other. "Ah! That must never be." Then, suddenly, she leant forward across the table towards De Beaurepaire. "What is it I am to do? What?"

"Listen, Emérance--madame," the man replied, correcting himself as he observed the flush that overcame her features as he mentioned her name: a flush that, he observed almost with surprise, transformed her from a pale, careworn woman to a beautiful one. "Listen. There sets out with madame a party of four, not one of whom I dare trust entirely. Two of this party are Fleur de Mai and Boisfleury, Normans like yourself----"

"You may trust them both. They are too deeply embarked in our scheme to betray any other."

"It may be so. Yet the former is a babbler, especially in his cups. The other is morose and melancholy; one who may possess that inconvenient thing called a conscience. If this conscience pricks him, or he should become alarmed as to discovery being made of the Attempt, he may tell all."

"Not 'twixt here and Basle. Still, if it is to watch those men until they are safe in Switzerland that I am being sent, it shall be done."

"Not that more than to watch the others."

"The Duchess!" Emérance exclaimed, astonished. "She would not betray you!"

"She knows somewhat of the scheme and disbelieves in its chance of success. Above all, she fears for me and my probable ruin."

"Therefore, she loves you."

"Nay. But we have been friends since almost childhood. If by betraying the scheme to the King, by causing all others who are concerned in it to be betrayed so that, thereby, she might save me, I do think she would do it."

"If she will do it nought can prevent her. In Italy--in Basle--in Geneva--in Nancy--she can do it. Who can control the posts? One letter to Louis will be enough."

"Let her but reach Italy, be once across the Alps, and she may send a thousand letters if she will. For, by the time they can reach Louis' hands, he should be powerless. The Dutch fleet will be off Quillebeuf, the men who are to seize on him will be riding in small troops and companies, by divers routes towards Versailles or Fontainebleau or wherever the Court may chance to be. Before a letter can cross the Alps and reach him there--well! he will be neither at Fontainebleau nor Versailles to receive it."

"They will not murder him!" the woman exclaimed, a look of terror in her face. "That must never be. No Norman would consent to that. He must not go the way of his grandsire."

"Fear not. None dream of such a thing, nor, if it were so, would I be party to any such compact. Instead, he will go at first on the way he has sent many others. To Pignerol perhaps, or out of France. To England." After which De Beaurepaire returned to the subject which was the real object of his interview with Emérance.

"Besides Fleur de Mai and Boisfleury," he went on now, "two others go with her. One is Mademoiselle d'Angelis, the daughter of a French father and English mother, the other is an

Englishman named Humphrey West, the son of an English father and a French mother. They are lovers. Have you ever heard speak of them?"

"Of him, never. Of her, yes. Is she not the *demoiselle de compagnie* of Madame la Duchesse?"

"She is."

"What can they know, or knowing, what harm do?"

"Listen, Emérance," De Beaurepaire said now, while no longer taking pains to correct himself since he knew, felt sure, that the unhappy woman secretly loved him, and, consequently, that this familiar style of address would be far from displeasing to her. "Listen. The Duchess is *une folle*, a chatterer. She may talk of, hint at, what she knows. And a word dropped in the ears of her followers, a hint, would be the spark that would explode the magazine."

"What could they do, what should they do? They will be in Italy, too; if a letter from across the Alps will take so long in reaching Louis; if, when it reaches Fontainebleau, or Versailles, he shall be no longer there, how can either this man or the woman he loves travel back to France faster than it? And why should either do anything?"

"His Majesty was good to Humphrey West's mother when his father, an old cavalier, died, and he put pressure on Charles after his restoration to at last make good to them the money and estate Cromwell had seized on during his protectorate. D'Angelis, the girl's late father, was one of Louis' earliest tutors, and Louis loved him and has also been good to his widow and the girl. If either Humphrey West or Jacquette d'Angelis should learn that an untoward breath of wind was like to blow against him, the former, at least, would take horse and ride back as fast as one steed after another could carry him to divulge all."

"What power shall I have to stop them? What can I do?"

"Follow them, watch them, until they leave Nancy together. If Humphrey West still forms one of the *cortége* we are safe until they reach Basle. At Basle watch them again and again, while, if all leave that place, either for the St. Gothard or for Geneva, thereby to make the passage of the St. Bernard--why, then, let them go. Once out of Basle and on the road to Italy and we are entirely safe. You will have done your work and," he added with that smile which so stirred the heart of the unhappy woman, "your friends in Paris will be awaiting you eagerly."

"'My friends,'" said Emérance sadly. "I have none. Not one." But, seeing a look on De Beaurepaire's face that partly made her feel delirious with delight and partly caused her to feel as though her heart had turned to ice within her, so wide was the gulf between this man and her, she quickly returned to the matter in question: "And if I discover aught that you should know at once? If one or other of the men sets out for, returns to Paris; if a letter should by chance be sent--what then?"

"Then," said De Beaurepaire, "fly back more swiftly than they, if you can accomplish it. Spare neither pains nor money--to-morrow you shall be furnished with ample for your needs from the funds Spain has sent. Outstrip post or horseman, or, failing the possibility of that, follow as swiftly as may be. Thus, Emérance, my friend, my co-plotter, my sweet Norman ally, shall you win the deepest gratitude of Louis de Beaurepaire. Thus, too, if he wins in this great cause, will you make him your debtor for ever. You will make him one who will never forget the services Emérance de Villiers-Bordéville has rendered him."

CHAPTER V

Three nights after the conversation between De Beaurepaire and Emérance, the clock of St. Germain-l'Auxerrois was striking ten and the *couvre-feu* was sounding from the steeples of many other church towers, as a large, substantial travelling carriage drawn by six horses passed slowly out of the Rue Richelieu and took its way through the great open Place du Louvre towards where the Bastille stood, and, beyond that, the Porte St. Antoine.

A few minutes, perhaps a quarter of an hour, before this time, that carriage had been stationed in one of the narrow streets running out of the Rue Richelieu and, to it, there had advanced two young men dressed in the height of the fashion of the period. But their velvet and lace, their silk stockings and high red-heeled shoes, and also their rapiers, were all hidden, since they were covered up by the large furred *houppelandes* with which these young gallants were

enveloped from their throats to their heels. So much enveloped that the patches on their faces were even more invisible than were their remarkably bright eyes and, indeed, the greater part of their features.

Behind these evident scions of the *haut monde* there walked a young serving man, or servitor, dressed in a sober, faded-leaf coloured costume yet having on his head a great hat from which the long cocks-plumes depended and fell over his face, and, at his side, a stout rapier of the Flamberg order.

Drawing near to the carriage at which one or two passers-by were looking curiously, while one of the night-watch who happened to be in the neighbourhood was doing the same, one of the two young men turned round to the servitor behind and said:--

"Jean, have you left word that we shall return at midnight from the masquerade and that we shall require supper?"

"I have, Monsieur le Vicomte."

"So be it. Therefore, Pierre," said the vicomte, addressing his friend, "let us away. Already the first dance will be over and, *me confond!* there are plenty of *beaux yeux* will be looking for our arrival. Fellows," glancing up at the coachman and footman on the box, "set out. And miss not your way. Remember," speaking loudly and harshly, "'tis to the Rue de la Dauphine we go; to the house of Monsieur le Marquis de Vieuxchastel. If you proceed not straight you shall be whipped to-morrow. You hear, dog?"

"I hear, Monsieur le Vicomte," the coachman answered in a surly tone, though, as he did so, he turned his head and looked at a bystander under the oil lamp, and thrust his tongue into his cheek and winked and muttered an offensive word.

"So be it," the vicomte said, as he got into the carriage after his friend and while the servitor clambered up behind. "So be it. Now be off. Do you hear, beasts? *En route* for the Rue de la Dauphine."

Slowly, therefore, because all large vehicles progressed but heavily over the uneven roads of Paris, the great carriage went on its way; though, since, instead of at once crossing the Pont Neuf--which is so old!--it continued to remain on the north side of the river, it would seem that the coachman had, in truth, missed his way in spite of the injunctions of the vicomte.

Soon, too, by following this route, the carriage was underneath the frowning towers of the Bastille and passing by the moat in front of the great door, and so went on through the Marais and past old streets and, at last, past old houses standing alone and having, in some cases, thatched roofs. A few minutes later it neared the Porte St. Antoine with its great wooden, iron-studded gate closed for the night.

But, here, by the side of the road, which was but a mass of dry mud, there stood a house, or rather cottage, with a penthouse roof, having outside of it a staircase leading to the upper floor. A house that had, also, a long wall running at right angles from it which threw a darkness deeper than that of the starlight night itself over all beneath it.

"This," said the coachman to the footman, "is the spot," while the servitor who was behind noticed that the speaker crossed himself. "*Bon Dieu!*" the man went on, "what a place for a love tryst, an elopement."

"'Twill serve," the other fellow said; "and he in there wants neither De Beaurepaire nor us yet."

"And never will, *Dieu le plaise*," the trembling coachman said, since the man who inhabited this house was the executioner.

Then, the carriage, which had gradually drawn into the deepest shadow of the wall came to a stop, and, from out that shadow, there stepped forth a man. A man who, advancing to the door of the vehicle, opened it and said:--

"So! you are here. Both. And, for the third--Humphrey West?"

"He is here, Monsieur le Chevalier," the supposed servitor behind replied, jumping down from the banquette. "Here."

"And you, my noble and illustrious friends," the Prince said, glancing up at the coachman and footman, "my noble friends of the tripot and the gargote; how fares it with you? *Cadédis!* the ride you have before you will wash all the fumes of Van den Enden's poisoned wine out of you. When you return to Paris with your pockets stuffed full of pistoles your mothers will not know you."

"Now," ignoring the answers which the two men on the box growled back; men who were, in truth, Fleur de Mai and Boisfleury. "Now, all is arranged. You, Madame la Duchesse," addressing the handsome young gallant who had hitherto been termed M. le Vicomte, "will ride through the gate by my side. You, Mademoiselle d'Angelis, will ride with the faithful Humphrey. While as for

you," looking up at the men above, "you will follow close behind."

As thus De Beaurepaire spoke, from behind where Paris lay there fell upon the ears of those assembled near the gatehouse the sounds of a horse's hoofs, of a horse in full gallop, while, to them, were added the jangle of bridle and bridoon as well as another sound which told of a sword clanking against stirrup and spur in accompaniment with the action of the horse's body.

"Are we pursued?" asked Fleur de Mai, his big hand ready to draw his weapon from its sheath. "If so, one thrust through the horse and then another through the rider and, lo! there is no further pursuit," and he laughed, indeed gurgled, deep down in his chest.

"If it should be my husband or one of his menials!" the Duchess murmured fearfully.

"Tush!" exclaimed De Beaurepaire, "there is but one, and we are four. While if the rider is soldier, gendarme, or police spy, he takes his orders from me. What have we to fear therefore?"

Suddenly, however, he gave a laugh and said, "Listen. Hark to him how he sings as he rides along. 'Tis La Truaumont who has drunk his last cup in Paris quicker than one might have deemed, and has caught us on the road sooner than I, who know him well, could have expected."

And so, in truth, it was. Upon the night air were borne the strains of a song the adventurer was singing: in a deep, rich voice was being trilled forth the chanson:--

> Pour faire ton âme et ton corps
> Le ciel épuisa ses trésors,
> Landrirette, Landriri.
>
> En grâces, en beauté, en attraits
> Nul n'égalera jamais,
> Landrirette, Landriri.

"*Hola!*" he cried, breaking off suddenly in his tribute of admiration to some real or imaginary beauty while reining in his steed with a sudden jerk. "*Hola!* What have we here? Young gallants in cloak, plume and sword; the great and mighty Prince de----"

"Peace. No names, imbecile," exclaimed the latter.

"And all the basketful," La Truaumont continued, taking no notice of his leader's words. "My own beloved Fleur de Mai, countryman and companion----"

"'Tis true, though you say it," growled Fleur de Mai in a harsh, sonorous voice.

"And Boisfleury. The illustrious Boisfleury. Good! Good!" When, addressing De Beaurepaire, La Truaumont continued, "Noble Prince, do we not pass the barrier to-night, or do we sleep at attention outside that?" and he nodded to the gloomy house close by.

"No. Since you are come so much the better. We will all pass through together," and he repeated the instructions he had given before La Truaumont came up, while adding, "For your descriptions, remember that you," to Boisfleury and Fleur de Mai, "are of my following, and you," to Humphrey, "that which you please to term yourself. You, madame and mademoiselle," addressing the Duchess and Jacquette with a smile, "know also who and what you are. Now for the horses. They are here. Come all and mount, excepting you La Truaumont who are already provided for."

Giving his arm to the Duchess as he spoke he led the way to a still darker portion of the wall, under which were six horses all saddled and bridled and by the heads of which stood two of his own grooms.

"Ah, ha!" exclaimed Humphrey, as a grey mare looked round and whinnied as he approached, "there she is, my pretty 'Soupir,'" and going up to her he stroked her silky muzzle and whispered to her.

"To horse," said De Beaurepaire, "to horse all. Madame," to the Duchess, "mount," while she, obeying him, put her foot in the stirrup and her hand to the mane and raised herself to the saddle as easily as she might have done had she been in truth the cavalier she pretended to be.

A minute or two after, all were mounted. The Prince was on a great fiery chestnut which might have been chosen with the purpose of matching the strong masterful man who now bestrode it; Jacquette was on a mare lithe as Soupir herself, and the two desperadoes on horses strong and muscular.

"Summon the gate," the former said now. "Summon in the name of the King."

"Open," cried La Truaumont, "open. *Par ordre du Roi*. Open, I say."

"Who are you?" cried out a voice from the gatehouse window, at which a man's face had by now appeared. "Who are you that summon thus in the name of the King? Stand and answer."

"The Prince and Chevalier Louis De Beaurepaire, Grand Veneur and Colonel of all His Majesty's Guards," replied La Truaumont, knowing well that his master would not deign to answer at all. "Attended by the Chief of his own bodyguard, the Captain de La Truaumont."

"And the others, most worshipful sir?"

"The Vicomte d'Aignay-le-Duc," called back Humphrey, naming, as had been decided, one of the Duchess's estates, "attended by Monsieur Jean de Beaufôret," naming another, "followed by their attendant, Monsieur Homfroi."

"And the others, who are they, illustrious seigneur?"

"Le Capitaine Fleur de Mai, Le Colonel Boisfleury, both of Prince de Beaurepaire's bodyguard," bawled the former in an authoritative, dictatorial voice.

"Pass all," the man said now, the gate beginning to creak on its hinges as he spoke. "Pass. Good-night, noble seigneurs."

"Bid him let the gate remain open," De Beaurepaire said to La Truaumont. "Tell him I do but ride outside it, there to make my adieux to the 'Vicomte'."

After which, and when this order had been given, all rode through the gate. The travellers were outside Paris; they had left it behind.

All had done so with the exception of De Beaurepaire who--since he had fulfilled his promise of preventing the Duchess from being interfered with in her flight from a mad husband until, at least, she was outside the city walls--was about to say farewell to the party.

"Farewell, Louis de Beaurepaire," that lady said now, as she placed her long-gloved hand in his, while her soft, dark eyes looked out at him from under her curled wig and plumed hat, "farewell. You have placed me in the way that leads to safety and freedom; I beseech of you to do nothing that may make safety and freedom strangers to you. Hear my last words before I go. Even as now you turn back to Paris and all the honours that you have, so turn back from that which may deprive you of all honour; ay! and more. *Addio*."

CHAPTER VI

The road to Nancy from Paris ran through the old province of Champagne until Lorraine was entered--Lorraine, which, since the peace of Westphalia, had fallen under French rule.

Along this road the cavalcade led by La Truaumont progressed day by day on its way towards Nancy, a hundred and fifty miles and more by road from Paris. Between each morning and night the members of that cavalcade rode on and accomplished some thirty miles at a slow pace so as to spare their horses as much as possible, while halting in the evenings at old inns where, though they gave no name, their appearance and their manners proclaimed that they were persons, or at least that one of them was, of high importance.

For the Duchess, Jacquette and Humphrey took their meals together behind a screen in whatever public room they sat down, as was the custom of the nobility when travelling; La Truaumont took his alone behind another screen close by, while the *soi-disant*, or, it may be, the actual Colonel--for Colonels could oft fall low in these times!--Boisfleury took his in company with the sinister and truculent Fleur de Mai.

"And, *sang bleu!*" exclaimed the latter individual on the third night of their halt, which took place at Vitry, "if we were not ordered to sit apart and to restore ourselves like serving men and valets by this insolent La Truaumont, I would be well content with the office. This ride through the air of Champagne is good for our health, the food and drink is wholesome and ample, the absence of expense good for our pockets. Nevertheless, I do think I must stick my rapier through La Truaumont's midriff at the end of the ride. For his insults," and he swallowed a large gulp of golden Avize, a local wine.

"Stick thy fork in thy mouth and thy glass down thy throat!" replied Boisfleury, tearing the flesh off a chicken's wing with his teeth as he spoke, "and utter no banalities. You are well paid, you sleep warm and soft o' nights and eat and drink of the best, and all you have to do is to ride by my side and listen to my sweet converse and hold your babbling tongue. While as to rapiers

through midriffs--what would the attempt profit you? La Truaumont is a *ferrailleur* of the first water. Better put good food inside you than your vitals outside."

"I am as good as he," Fleur de Mai replied in a voice which was getting husky with the Avize, when suddenly Boisfleury interrupted any further observations by exclaiming:--

"Be silent, fool, and stagger to thy feet. See, the Duchess rises from the table behind the screen. Ha! the Englishman bids madame good-night. He kissed her hand and, *me damne!* kisses slyly the ear of the girl, d'Angelis. Ha! Ha! The kiss, the English kiss! They can do nothing without that. And, observe, La Truaumont comes this way. Stand steady on thy feet, *chameau*."

"Boot and saddle at six o'clock to-morrow," said La Truaumont as he came down the great inn-room which was part hall, and, at the end, part kitchen. "Up at five. Boisfleury, see he is up," looking at Fleur de Mai.

"I shall be up," muttered that worthy. "Have no fear. A pint of this wine will not make me sleep heavily. I'll throw the dice with you now for a bottle of the best."

* * * * *

The noble lady, Ortenzia, Duchesse de Castellucchio, who was now riding from Paris to Nancy on her way to cross the Alps and, later, to join her own family, that of the Scoriatis, had some few years before this made almost a similar journey to France, there to marry her countryman the Duc de Castellucchio, a man whose family, originally poor, had followed Concino Concini--the Maréchal d'Ancre--into France, but had managed to escape the awful end that had overtaken both him and his wife.

Having escaped such a fate as the assassination of the former or the execution by burning of the latter, as well as any other forms of death which the creatures of those once powerful adventurers might well have expected to overtake them, the family thrived and prospered. Steering clear of political machinations until the Concinis were almost forgotten and, indeed, until Louis le Juste was himself in his grave, they devoted themselves to commerce and, above all, to money lending and, thereby, grew rich.

But when, at last, Mazarin's star was in the ascendant as it became shortly after the death of Richelieu, they attached themselves to his fortunes, while, as he grew all powerful, so did they who, coming to France almost paupers, were now enormously wealthy.

One grief there was, however, that fell heavily on old Felice Ventura who had, by this time, become Monsieur le Duc de Castellucchio (he having decided to confer honour on his birthplace by taking its name for his title), and that grief was that his only son and successor gave signs of becoming a maniac, if he were not already one.

Always strange as a boy, this son had, as a young man, given still more astonishing signs of mental derangement, and, a short time after he had espoused Ortenzia Scoriati, the daughter of a noble and wealthy Milanese family, he was regarded and spoken of not only as a lunatic but a dangerous one. For, from such outbreaks as rousing the whole house from their beds by saying that a ghost was wandering round it, and by dragging his wife out of her own bed by the hair to look for the apparition; by not allowing any footmen to be in his service who were under seventy, in case his wife should fall in love with them, and by breaking up all the statues he owned (which his father had collected at an enormous cost) since he proclaimed such things to be heathen and profligate, he proceeded to greater extremities. He invariably tore the patches off his wife's face whenever she placed them on it, saying that they were the allurements used by giddy women; he insisted next that his wife should have her teeth drawn so that she should become hideous in the eyes of the world, and it was only by the flight from him which she was now undertaking that the Duchess was able to prevent herself from being thus disfigured for the rest of her life.

But even before this moment had arrived, his conduct had been such as to induce the unhappy Duchess to determine to leave him. He ruined all the costly furniture and pictures, as well as the statues, which his old father had accumulated, on the usual plea that they were not fit for modest people to gaze upon, while, not six months before this flight took place, he invited his wife to go for a drive with him in their coach one afternoon, and, when they had set out, calmly informed her that they were going to Rome. But that which was worse than all for the Duchess was that they actually did continue their journey to that city, though neither of them had either a change of clothes or of linen with them.

It was to De Beaurepaire, whom she had known ever since she came to France, that the Duchess turned for assistance when she determined to finally quit it, while for a companion in her journey she looked to her *demoiselle de compagnie*, "Jacquette," or Jacqueline d'Angelis.

For Jacquette loved her and pitied her sad lot, and, had it not been for her stronger love for

Humphrey, and her hopes for a happy future with him, she would not only have accompanied the Duchess on this journey they were making at this moment but would never have contemplated parting from her.

And now, therefore, not only was Mademoiselle d'Angelis a member of that small band but so, also, was Humphrey West, since, having at present no occupation whatsoever, and no interest in life except to be by the side of the girl he loved so well, he had made interest with De Beaurepaire and the Duchess--both of whom had always treated him well and kindly--to be allowed to form one of the latter's escort as well as to be the knight and sentinel of his betrothed.

That these two should love each other was not strange, nor would it have been strange even if they had met no longer than a year ago. He was young and good looking enough to win any woman's fancy, while, beside his sufficiency of good looks, he was tall and broad and gave signs of health and strength in every action of his body.

She, "his girl," as he called her to her face and to himself, was worthy of him. Amidst a Court that, at least from the day when Louis XIII. died, had been none too moral and, under the influence of the Queen-Mother and the then young King, had long since verged towards absolute recklessness, Jacquette moved free and pure herself, while hating, averting her eyes from, and being unwilling to see, all that went on around her. For, while the girl was as beautiful as though she had just left some canvas painted by Correggio, she was, partly and principally owing to her own nature and partly to her English mother's training, almost as pure as though she had just left that mother's side. Similarly, as neither late nights, nor masques, nor dances, nor any wild dissipations whatever to which the Court and all who were in it, or of it, gave themselves up, could impair that fair soft beauty, so neither could whispered words nor looks nor hints from dissolute courtiers impair her purity of mind. To crown all, she loved one man and one alone, and she would never love any other.

And, now, this strangely assorted band of travellers had reached their third halting-place on the road to Nancy, where shelter was to be found in the house of De Beaurepaire's mother. This strangely assorted band consisting of a woman of high rank in two countries, a young girl whose life had been almost entirely passed in the glamour and ease of the French Court, a valiant young Englishman who loved that girl, and three reckless adventurers.

Yet the first three persons of the number had no thought, no presentiment that, beneath the apparently insignificant nature of the journey they were making, there lurked in the hearts of the other three a deeper, a sterner, a more wicked purpose: a more profound and horrible reason for their being on the road. The purpose of reaching a city outside the King's dominions, a Republican city in which no sympathies for a monarch or a monarchy were likely to exist, even should that purpose become known; the purpose of there meeting the arch-plotter of a hideous crime and being able to discuss in safety how the workings of that crime should be decided on.

These first three knew this no more than they knew that, following them, and sometimes preceding them, when opportunity offered, so that she might await their arrival; spying on all their movements and communicating those movements to De Beaurepaire as she learnt them, went a woman whose mad love for him had spurred her on to sink from what was almost as high as patriotism to that which was the deepest depths of wicked intrigue.

CHAPTER VII

Into the open cobble-stone *place*, which, at that period, was in front of the Krone--at this time the principal hostelry of Basle--rolled the great travelling carriage in which Emérance sat as the night was falling over the city. The coachman cracked his whip loudly as he approached the door, in accordance with the immemorial custom of drivers bringing travellers to any house kept for the accommodation of such persons, and the footman blew upon the bugle which he wore slung round him, partly with the object of warning pedestrians to get out of the way of the carriage, and partly to announce to the villages they passed through that some one of importance was on the road. Now, when the inn was reached, the man sprang from the box to hold the door open and the maid clambered down from the banquette, while the landlord rushed out of the door of the inn followed by two or three *faquins* and stood bowing bareheaded before the handsomely arrayed lady who had descended.

"Madame la Marquise de Villiers-Bordéville," the footman said, while madame herself entered the porch, "requires rooms for herself and following. Also accommodation for the carriage and

horses. Madame la Comtesse will repose for some days in Basle."

The landlord's bows and congees increased in force from the time the rank of the visitor was proclaimed until he had learnt all her requirements--which must necessarily be remunerative!--after which he said in an oily, deferential tone:--

"Madame la Marquise shall have one of the best. A suite of apartments *au premier*; all that Madame la Comtesse can desire. There is accommodation for all that madame requires."

"Show me to this suite," Emérance said, speaking now; "let the luggage be taken off the coach and the animals attended to."

After which she followed the still bowing host up the extremely narrow stairs, common enough in those days, to the suite of which he had spoken.

Perhaps it was not as elegant a set of rooms as his enthusiastic words might have led the woman to expect; perhaps the Darneux curtains and the green printed stuff-hangings were not as fresh as they had once been, or the narrow windows as clean as they might be; or the iron bars outside them--which reminded Emérance, she knew not why, of a gaol-window--as free of rust as they should have been kept. Yet, as she told herself, this was but the *salon* of an inn in which she would pass some week or two ere flying once more to Paris and the man she loved; therefore it would do very well. The great leather chairs, picked out with gilt, and threadbare by the constant use of strangers, would serve her to sit upon as they had served other travellers before; the odious, awful carpet, with the most horrible subjects from scripture woven into it--and almost worn out of it again by countless feet--at least covered the stone floor; while--had she not often sheltered in worse places! The Hôtel des Muses of Van den Enden, to wit, was worse and more shabby; the Schwarzer Adler at Nancy was nothing like so good.

"It will suffice," she said to herself, "to receive Van den Enden in; to harbour in till I can go back to *him* to learn all that is a-doing and to be done. And then--then--to Louis, my *bien-aimé*, to fortune and happiness extreme, or--to death. Yet, what matters death, if it be shared with him. With him! Ah! how I would welcome it if we may not have life together."

And now, an hour later, the woman who called herself the Marquise de Villiers-Bordéville sat over the great fire of pine logs drawn from the forests on the banks of the Rhine, and ate her supper while her maid attended to her. As she made that meal she pondered on what her life was to be in the future, and whether De Beaurepaire would always be as kind and gentle to her as he was now, and would let her have some share in his great fortune or great downfall, whichever might come to him.

Ere she quitted Paris, the man she had allowed herself to love with an unsought love had told her that the Spanish Governor of Brussels, with whom he was in communication through Van den Enden with regard to the scheme which was on foot for invading France and for the appropriation of Normandy at least, had at last sent a large sum of money for use in the scheme.

"A sum so ample," De Beaurepaire said, "that all employed in helping this cause may now be well equipped. Therefore, you, my fairest of conspirators, must take your share of the spoil," while, as he spoke, he drew from his pocket a wallet stuffed full of drafts and *traites* drawn by the Bank of Amsterdam and honoured wherever presented, and tossed it into the woman's lap.

"It is not yours?" she asked, looking into his eyes. "If so, I will take nought."

"Not even from me--the Chief?"

"From you less than any. I must be paid to live by those who will profit most--the Spaniards. For the rest, I am Norman. I shall profit as well as you."

"Emérance, you may take it from me. Yet," seeing a look of dissent on her face at this, "it is not mine. It comes straight from De Montérey and is to be expended in furtherance of the--the--well! conspiracy in Normandy. You are one of the intriguers, ay! and the sweetest and best of all, therefore you must be well paid. Now, listen to what I have done. A coach is prepared for you to travel in; 'tis yours, and, when you have no further use for it, yours to dispose of with the horses."

"Monsieur! I will not----"

"Tush! It is bought with the money of Spain. With you goes a footman, a trusty vagabond speaking many tongues; one who will serve you well both as servant and courier. Also, though he may rob you he will allow none other to do so. As for a maid, you must find her at some halting-place at which you stay, saying your own has fallen sick and been left behind."

"I require no maid. I can do my own hair a dozen ways myself, and--I have been used to poverty."

"You must forget that you have ever been aught but well-to-do. Remember that you serve Spain now, and Spain pays handsomely for service. Her instruments, too, must make a brave appearance. Therefore, provide yourself also with rich apparel at some halting-place----"

"I want it, heaven above knows," the adventuress muttered to herself.

"--while," the Prince continued, "for gems and jewels befitting your assumed station I will bring you some."

"Never," Emérance said. "I will have none of them. I," she said, "am not a De Beaurepaire, yet I, too, am proud. But--but--there is one thing that I would have. Something, no matter how poor a daub, that I can wear close to me by day and night; something, if I can have it so, that shall prick and sting me when I move or turn, and thereby remind me that the Chief of all is near. Give me your picture and let me wear it, and I will cherish it. Thus, though I need no spur to that which I have to do, there will ever be one close to me."

That which she had to do! Well, she told herself now, she had done it, or partly done it, and was yet to do more; was to continue doing it until the Duchess had left Basle far behind her.

She had done what she had been paid to do--and her face would have been awful for any one to see as she reflected thus, while sitting before the logs of the fire and hearing the booming of the quarters from the old Cathedral tower. Paid to do! by money, with clothes and the wherewithal to travel sumptuously; with the means to engage a maid who should attend to her every want--the wants of a woman who, not a month ago, had nightly to mend and brush her rags ere she could sally forth the next day!--the means to be able to sleep warm and soft. Paid--and even this thought was better though still bitter--by a smile, a kind word from a man whom she had allowed herself to love without that love having been solicited, without its being returned.

She had done, must go on doing for a time, that which she was paid to do. Alas! even as, more than once on this journey, she, all unknown to those others, had been in the same inns with them; as she had crept about dark corridors and staircases endeavouring to hear what they might be saying, above all if they were meditating treachery to *him*, her *adoré*; as, too, she had tried to see and sometimes to possess herself of a letter here and there that had been written by any one of them--so she must continue to do. That those others would put up at the Krone in this city, she knew: she had not failed to learn that, either through her maid's gossip or her purse. The purse that was filled with Spanish gold as payment for her treason to her country and her King, or, doubly bitter thought, might, for aught she knew, be filled by the man of whom her mad love had made her the slave!

"The shame of it," she murmured now. "Oh! the shame, the shame of it. I, a woman of gentle blood, well-born, well-nurtured, to sink to this. To this!" and, as she so thought and mused, her eyes would turn furtively towards the window-curtains that shut out the sight of the river though not the sound of its rushing, and she wondered if in the swollen, turbulent stream, there was not a more fitting ending to be found to all her mad folly, her wicked treachery, than in aught else.

"If he knew all," she continued to muse now. "If he knew what La Truaumont knows; if he should hear of what I have been in my time accused, would he trust me--a spy!--to spy upon those others? Would he have treated me kindly, or ever, even in his softer moments, have spoken gently to me. Ah! would he! To me, 'Emérance de Villiers-Bordéville,'" and she smiled bitterly, "whose name is false, whose title and rank are spurious. Yet," she went on, endeavouring perhaps to excuse herself to herself; "my own, my real, name is the equal of those assumed ones, if he did but know. Ay! as good as those and, in spite of the cloud that once lowered over it, not smirched and blackened then with the names of spy, *intrigueuse*, adventuress."

The logs burnt low and fell together with many a soft clash, while making the woman feel drowsy with their balmy warmth as she sat before the hearth; the cathedral bells from above sounded dreamily to her ears and as though afar off. Even the tall, well-knit and superbly moulded figure and the handsome, dark face of the man whose image was never absent from her mind, were vanishing into the light mists of sleep when, suddenly, she sprang to her feet, startled by what she had heard outside.

A bugle had rung below in the open *place* between the inn and the Rhine; there was the tramping of many horses' hoofs on the rough stones beneath the windows; orders were being shouted, and, mixed with these sounds, the shuffling of feet inside and along the corridors of the inn and the clatter of the chains of the main door being unloosed and the bolts drawn back.

"What is it?" the woman cried to herself, her hand to her breast, her face white. "What? Nothing can be known yet, nothing discovered to warrant their taking me, and--pshaw!--this is a Republican city not a French one. They can do nothing here."

Yet, notwithstanding, Emérance went towards the window and endeavoured to see as much as was possible through the long-since uncleaned, diamond panes of the window, and between the rusty iron bars outside.

What she could perceive was a dozen or so of horsemen clad in scarlet and green and armed with swords and musquetoons, who surrounded a coach bigger than that in which she had herself journeyed; a coach which had a table inside it and, on that table, a fixed travelling lamp that shone upon and lit up the faces of two women. One, a woman, dark, soft-eyed and rich in colouring, who was superbly dressed; the other, also well favoured but of a more fair complexion and not so handsomely attired.

The noise and hubbub below continued as she gazed out; the voice of the landlord was heard yelling orders downstairs and the voice of the landlady screaming similar ones above; the escort--for an escort it was, with which the Duke of Lorraine had furnished the Duchess from Nancy to Basle--had dismounted and were leading their horses away. A moment later, Emérance understood that the Duchess and her following were being shown upstairs.

"To the next suite to this," she whispered to herself as she heard voices in the rooms adjoining her own. "Ah! we shall be neighbours. 'Tis well if we encounter each other that she does not know who and what I am."

Listening to the sounds proceeding from the next set of rooms, she endeavoured to discover what person might have taken possession of the chamber on the other side of the partition wall.

What she heard, however, gave her no clue to that. Something she did hear flung down on a table which, by the rattle and clash it made, gave her, who well knew the sound of such things, the impression of a rapier being thrown on the table after having been unlooped from the wearer's body. And she heard also a man's voice giving orders, and a call from one woman to another in rooms still farther off; but little more than this. Nothing more than the ordinary sounds which, in all times, travellers staying in inns and hotels have heard on the arrival of new-comers in the same house.

CHAPTER VIII

Meanwhile, the sounds that Emérance had heard in that next set of rooms shut off by the wall from those which she occupied (while being served outside by the same corridor running at right angles from the main passage) had been made by Humphrey West in the room appropriated to him.

For the Duchesse de Castellucchio besides being a timorous woman in some things, although one bold enough in others, was by no means sure whether--even now that she was in a free Swiss Canton and in a city that claimed to be one of the most free and independent in Europe--some steps might not be taken to seize upon her and drag her back to France and into the clutches of her awe-inspiring husband. She knew that, but a league or so off was the frontier of France, while she did not know what the myrmidons of that powerful country might not be able to do against a woman of her position who had fled from a husband possessing the influence which her husband undoubtedly possessed, maniac though he might be. And, not knowing what she feared, she feared doubly. Italian-like, she was naturally superstitious, while, at the same time, her mind was filled with wild romances dealing with beautiful and unfortunate heroines shut up in gloomy castles, or beset in strange inns and out-of-the-way places at night and hidden in dungeons, or thrown into torrents and rivers not unlike the rapid swirling river now rushing beneath, or almost beneath, her windows.

Therefore, out of this large suite of rooms to which the landlord had led her and her party, or some members of it--and it is certain it was the largest and most expensive one now unoccupied!--she had selected for herself the most interior of these rooms. For Jacquette she had chosen the one next to hers on the right, with, right of that, a room for La Truaumont, and, on the left of her room, the one at the other end for Humphrey. Thus, when the outer main door was securely fastened and her door fastened on the left side and Jacquette's on the right--yet both easily to be opened if the assistance of either of her attendant cavaliers was required--she felt secure. A cry would bring Humphrey from the left or the captain from the right. Little harm could come to her.

On this night of their arrival all sought their beds, or rather their rooms, as soon as they had refreshed themselves after a journey that had been a long one, they having set out earlier from Remiremont than the Marquise de Villiers-Bordéville had done from Luxeuil and, as has been seen, had arrived later. All sought their rooms, that is to say except La Truaumont, who, on bidding the Duchess and Jacquette "good-night," had descended to the great general room with a view to seeing that not only were Fleur de Mai and Boisfleury well disposed of, but also that the soldiers of the Duc de Lorraine had been properly housed.

That this was so he had little cause to doubt on reaching the general room. The former worthy was busily engaged in making a hearty supper well washed down with wine, his comrade was keeping him good company, and the soldiers were eating and drinking with a Teutonic attention to what was set before them which plainly showed that they had no intention of going to bed hungry.

"*O-hé!* noble captain and leader of all the band," cried Fleur de Mai, as he espied La Truaumont coming down the room; "here you find us doing justice to the fare of these worthy Switzers. *Me confound!* if t'were not composed so much of veal--for 'tis veal in the *ragoût*, veal for the *grosse-pièce*, veal in the *potage*, and, I do think, veal it will be in the next dish--there would be nought to complain of. Then, too, the wine never grew on any slope of sunny France. Yet it, also, will pass. 'Tis red, 'tis strong and----"

"It will make you drowsy. That is enough for you. Besides, it costs you nothing. You should be content. Now listen. We rest here for some days----"

"A month if need be!" cried Fleur de Mai, plunging his knife into a fillet of veal. "By which time the calves may have turned into beef and the wine have become more mellow."

"Think not so much of thy gourmandising. Meanwhile, attend. Beware how you comport yourself here. This city is given up to good works. Erasmus reformed it ere he died. If you look at a pretty girl here----"

"They mostly look at me," muttered the swashbuckler, his mouth full.

"--or speak to her, or whisper in a Switzer's wife's ear or sing one of thy ribald ditties, you are as like to be imprisoned, or burnt, as not. Therefore, when you walk abroad to-morrow be careful. For if you get laid by the heels we shall not stop to haul you up again, but shall go on. At least the Duchess will," La Truaumont added, altering his statement somewhat. "And, even though you may eventually die in prison, it had best not be a Swiss one for you."

"One prison," said Boisfleury who had not hitherto spoken, he being engaged on a huge veal pasty, "is as good as another to die in."

"Ay," replied Fleur de Mai. "To die in--yes. But to live in till you die--*nenni!* For some prisons there are I know of--or should say, have heard of--where you may feed fat and drink too----"

"Peace," said La Truaumont. "And so, good-night. Disturb not the house with your ribaldries when you have drunk still deeper, nor with any brawlings with those Lorrainers over there. Keep your swords in your sheaths. There is no use for them here. Good-night," he said again, "we have ridden far to-day and I am tired. Here is for bed."

Yet, had there been any to watch his movements--which there were not, since the *faquins* and the *chambrières* had long since sought their own beds, while the landlord and his spouse sat below in their parlour discussing the good fortune that had this day fallen on their house in the shape of two such arrivals as the Duchesse and the Marquise--the watchers might have thought he took a strange way to reach the room allotted to him. For that room was at the farther end of the corridor which ran to the right of the stairs, while he, stopping at the immediate head of the stairs, knocked at the door directly in front of him, after casting a glance above and below and all around. Very gently he knocked, tapping as lightly as was possible with the knuckle of his forefinger, yet the summons was enough to bring a response.

A step and the swish of a long robe were heard upon the carpet within--the carpet which had so revolted the taste of Emérance some hour or two before--then the bolt was shot back gently--drawn back softly, not pushed or dragged--and the woman peered out through the door that she opened a few inches.

"So," she said, "it is you. Is there any one about?"

"No living soul."

"Come in, then," and now she opened the salon door wide enough to give admission to him and closed it again, and, softly as before, pushed the bolt back into its place.

When La Truaumont had kissed the hand she held out to him and she had motioned him to a chair in front of the now almost extinct fire, she said: "What of him? How did you leave him? And is he still in Paris?"

Imitating the woman's own low tones, which it was natural enough she should assume when receiving a man in her salon in an inn at nearly midnight, La Truaumont said, "He is well. I left him so. And he is still in Paris. Lou--Emérance," he continued, with a laugh, though a low one, "are you happy now?"

"Yes. Almost happy."

"You should be. But you may yet pay a dear price for your happiness."

"Bah!"

"You do not fear what failure, treachery, betrayal, may bring to him and you and me and all of us? You do not fear what may be ahead of us?"

"I fear nothing on this earth nor in the world beyond, so that he trusts me. I longed to serve him since first I saw him ride at the head of his guards before the King."

"And now you are happy?" La Truaumont asked again.

"Now I am almost happy."

"I rejoice to know it." After which, changing the subject, he said: "Affinius is on his way here. But this you know. He may arrive at any moment. Then also, at any moment, the time for action will begin."

"I deemed as much. Well! what are the plans?"

"I go to Normandy. You to Paris."

"Ah! 'Tis there I would be. Ah! the happy day. But--you! To Normandy? What then of----" with a scornful, bitter intonation, "Madame la Duchesse!"

"She sets out for Geneva and thence across the St. Bernard, accompanied by Mademoiselle d'Angelis and Humphrey West, there to meet her sister. With her go Fleur de Mai and Boisfleury. Brutes, without doubt! yet savage, ferocious ones. Good swordsmen both and reckless. I am not wanted here and I am wanted there" nodding his head in the direction where he supposed--or perhaps, knew--Normandy might happen to be.

"What is Affinius to tell us?"

"Everything he dared not write in his letter to De Beaurepaire. The remaining money that Spain puts at our disposal, the hour when the Dutch fleet will attack, which is again to be made known by an arranged piece of false news on the subject of the King's creation of two more new marshals. The time when the Norman gentlemen are to rise and also be ready to admit the Dutch and Spanish to Quillebeuf."

"And he? De Beaurepaire?"

"*Sangdieu!* he is then to declare himself. Our old Norman aristocracy will accept a man of high lineage as their leader. Louise----"

"Ha! What? Hsh."

"I should say, Emérance. The man you admire may rise even higher yet than the proud position of a De Beaurepaire. He may become, if all goes well, the head of a Republic greater than that of Holland, which follows Spain in her attempts to help us because she must; a Republic a hundred times greater than this little thing wherein we now are. Or he may become a----"

"What?"--the eyes of Emérance sparkling with excitement.

"He may become a king."

"Never. He, a king! A member of that great family which has for its proud motto, '*Après le Roi--moi!*' Never!"

"They said it, they took that motto," La Truaumont whispered, while smiling cynically, "when there was no chance, no likelihood of their ever reaching so dizzy a height as that of king. Let us see what this member of their house will say if that glittering bauble, a crown, is held out for him to snatch at."

"A king," Emérance said again. "A king!" she whispered, "of France. Oh! it is impossible."

Nevertheless, as she so thought and spoke her heart was beating tumultuously within her, her brain was on fire at the very imagining of such a thing as La Truaumont had conjured up. To see him--him, her love, her master!--a king.

"But, ah!" she murmured to herself, as she still sat in front of the now almost extinct logs on the hearth, while La Truaumont watched her out of the corners of his eyes, "it is a dream. A dream that he should be a king or ever any more than, if all goes well, the ruler of a province, our province. A dream, too, that may have a rude awakening. What was it he said to me ere I left Paris? That, if he failed, the cross roads outside some town, a gallows outside the Bastille, would more likely be his portion. Ah! well, so be it. Throne or gibbet, whichever you reach, Louis de Beaurepaire, I shall not be far away. If the throne, then I shall be near you though ever in the dark background; if the gibbet, by your side. That may be best."

"Come," she cried, springing to her feet as she heard the cathedral clock strike twelve; as, too, she saw the last spark of the last log go out. "See the fire is dead and it is late. Leave me now and go quietly. To-morrow we will talk more on this."

"To-morrow Van den Enden should be here."

"That is well. Now go," while, opening the door and looking out to see that all was quiet in passages and corridors, she sent La Truaumont away and softly pushed the bolt back into its place.

CHAPTER IX

Humphrey West had sought his bed some time before La Truaumont had descended to speak to Fleur de Mai and his companion, and, consequently, ere that adventurer had obtained admission to Emérance's salon he was fast asleep.

Fast asleep and sleeping well and softly, too, when gradually there crept into the cells of his brain, heavy with sleep though they were, the drowsy fancy that he was carrying on a conversation with some other person. This idea, however--as consciousness became stronger and stronger--especially after he had rolled over once in his warm, soft bed, and, once, had thrown out his arms after rubbing his eyes--was succeeded by a second. The idea, the fancy that, instead of being engaged in conversation with another person, that person was himself engaged in talking to some one else.

A few moments more and Humphrey was wide awake and sitting up in his bed, while wondering more particularly whence the sound of those voices proceeded than what the purport of the conversation might be. For, as was customary with all travellers in these days of insecurity of life and property, when no one slept in undoubted safety outside their own particular houses--if they did so much even there!--Humphrey had, before proceeding to rest, made inspection of the room in which he was. That is to say, he had peered behind the tapestry that hung down all round the room over the bare, whitewashed walls; he had looked behind the bed and its great hangings, full of dust and flue--to look underneath it was impossible since the frame of the bedstead was always at this period within an inch or so of the floor, and only high enough to permit of the castors being inserted underneath it. In doing all this he had also made sure that there was no door in the wall by which ingress might be obtained from another room--other than that in which the Duchesse de Castellucchio was now sleeping. Consequently, he was at once able to decide that it was not from her room that the voices proceeded, while, at the same time, his ears told him also that they were not the voices of either the Duchess or Jacquette.

Yet still he heard them. He heard the deep tones of a man subdued almost to a whisper; the softer, gentler tones of a woman, itself also subdued.

Now, Humphrey was no eavesdropper, while, since he had no knowledge of the existence of Emérance de Villiers-Bordéville, he ascribed the voices which reached his ears to the conversation of some husband and wife who were occupying the next room, and, if he felt any curiosity still on the subject, was only curious as to how he should be able to overhear them at all.

Suddenly, however, he heard a word, a name, uttered that caused him to, in common parlance, prick up those ears and listen with renewed alertness to what was being said.

For the name mentioned was that of "De Beaurepaire."

"Yet, foregad," said Humphrey to himself, "'tis not so strange either. In the next room to me is the woman who left her husband's house under his escort to the gates of Paris; the woman who, if all reports are true, seeks principally freedom from that maniac to thereby become the chevalier's wife. But, still, who are these who talk at this hour? The woman's voice, low as it is--and sweet and soft also--is neither the voice of Jacquette nor of her mistress, and we have no other woman in our *cortége*. While for the other--ah!" Humphrey exclaimed beneath his breath, for now a word, uttered in a louder tone than usual by the man who was speaking, smote his ears. "Ah! 'tis the captain of our band, La Truaumont! So! So! Yet what does he do in that room when he sleeps at the farther end of the corridor, and who is the gracious lady with whom he converses?"

For, now, that word, the word which Humphrey had caught was "*Sangdieu*," and *Sangdieu* was the principal exclamation ever on La Truaumont's lips.

Being no eavesdropper, as has been said, Humphrey decided that this was no discourse for him to be passing his night in listening to. It concerned him not that the worthy captain should be sitting up towards the small hours discussing De Beaurepaire and his doings with some strange woman who, for aught he, Humphrey, knew, was an accessory to the flight of the Duchess towards her family in Italy. A woman who, he reflected, might have come from Italy by order of the Duchess to escort her across the Alps and to assist her in scaling the rugged pass of the St. Bernard as easily as might be: perhaps a *gouvernante* who would take all trouble into her own

hands and see her charge safely delivered into those of her relations.

"Yes, doubtless that is so," Humphrey said, as he lay back on his pillow and prepared to continue his night's rest. "Doubtless. And to-morrow I shall know all. Likewise, by daylight, I will discover how it is those voices penetrate so easily into this room."

He turned, therefore, over on his side again and once more prepared to continue his night's rest, when, almost ere he had closed his eyes in that vain hope, he plainly heard the word "Louise" uttered, followed by the sibilant "Hsh" from the woman, this being followed in its turn by the words, "The man you admire may rise even higher yet than the proud position of a De Beaurepaire."

A moment later he heard La Truaumont exclaim clearly and distinctly, "He may become a king."

Listening eagerly now--for this was indeed strange matter to stumble on in the dead of the night, he next heard the low clear voice of the woman in that room exclaim:--

"A king! A king of France! Oh! it is impossible."

After which there was silence for some moments; a silence followed by other words uttered so low that Humphrey could not hear them, they being shortly followed by the sound of a door opened softly and shut equally softly an instant later, and then by the stealthy, cautious step of a man passing along the passage. The step of, as Humphrey understood very well, La Truaumont going to his room at the farther end of that passage.

That Humphrey West should find sleep again after overhearing this conversation was scarcely probable. In listening to it, in being forced to listen to that conversation when once awakened by it, he had indeed become possessed of strange knowledge.

He had become possessed, firstly, of the knowledge that some other woman than the Duchess admired De Beaurepaire, namely, the woman who had been in that next room but a short time before, and not the one who was in the next room on the other side; not the woman whom the Prince had seen safely through the gates of Paris when escaping from her cruel husband's house.

That alone was startling, since, if De Beaurepaire did not love the Duchesse de Castellucchio, why and wherefore had he jeopardised his own great position in helping her in such an attempt! Humphrey West knew well enough the power, often enough exerted, against those who assisted women of position, girls who were wealthy heiresses, or wards of *La Grande Chambre*, by *La Grande Chambre* itself. Were there not men detained in the Bastille, in Vincennes, in Bicêtre at this very moment, ay, even in far off Pignerol, for similar actions, while in their case they had, or pretended to have, the one great, the one supreme excuse that they loved the women whom they had assisted in evading their lawful custodians. Yet, he told himself, this excuse was not available by De Beaurepaire. For here, next to his own room, but a little while ago, was a woman whom La Truaumont had spoken of as an admirer of his; one who was doubtless admired by him. Here in the very same house, under the very same roof, not forty paces from that other woman!

"What does it mean?" Humphrey asked himself a dozen times. "What? While, strange as it all is, it is nought beside this other strange news. This news that he may be a king. A king! Yet how--and king of what? Of what. Of what other land than France could he, a De Beaurepaire, have dreams of becoming king! And by what means? Ah! great heavens, by what means? In what way but by the most bitter, the blackest treason! By introducing, by helping to introduce, some foreign power into the land to--dethrone the present lawful king! Oh! Oh! it is too awful, too terrible to think upon."

Yet the young man did think upon it far into the night and until, at last, through the heavily curtained windows of his room there stole the first grey streaks and rays of the approaching dawn. He thought of it unceasingly; he thought of the terrors that must threaten this man whom he now befriended and helped; this man who, haughty, cruel, hostile as he often was to others, had never been aught but gentle and kind to him--this man whom he had learnt to admire and think well of; whom he was proud to serve in serving the Duchess.

Yet Humphrey was old enough to know, to remember, that of all the treacheries and conspiracies which had surrounded the life and throne of *Le Dieudonné* since, as a child, he had ascended that throne thirty years ago, not one of them had ever approached even near to success. Not one had had any result but a death shameful and ignoble for the men who had been concerned in those treacheries and conspiracies.

"Five years ago," he murmured to himself as he tossed in his bed where, until he heard those whispering voices, he had been sleeping so peacefully, "five years ago Roux de Marsilly perished on the wheel for such a crime as this talked of in that next room this very night. This very year the Comte de Sardan has suffered in the same way; there have been a dozen attempts all ending in disaster. And, oh! the wickedness of it, 'specially in him, the playmate of the King in childhood, his Grand Veneur, the head of his Guards. In him who, of all men, should guard his master from treachery."

The young man thought over all this even as he still sought sleep, while understanding and

acknowledging to himself that he could hope for little farther rest that night; and, since sleep would come no more, he endeavoured to arrange some plan of action whereby, if possible, he, simple gentleman though he was, might be able to prevent De Beaurepaire from rushing on his ruin.

But first he must know something further. He must discover more from those two plotters whom he had chanced to overhear this night. In some way he must make himself acquainted with who and what this woman was who harboured in the very house where was now reposing the woman he had to help escort across the Alps. He would know, if possible, every thread of the plot now in hand, every ramification of it, every person concerned in it.

And then, if he could do that, it would be time for action.

At last, however, he was enabled to obtain some little rest; at last, when daylight had come, the workings of his brain ceased, and, for an hour or so, he slept.

He did so until the hour of nine was striking from all the clocks in the city, when he was aroused by a clatter beneath his window not unlike that which, over night, had aroused Emérance from her meditations in front of the hearth in her salon. Yet this clatter on the cobble-stones of the *place* heralded no such arrival as that which the woman had witnessed, no handsome travelling carriage escorted by soldiers and adventurers as represented by La Truaumont, Boisfleury, Fleur de Mai and even Humphrey himself; no descent at the inn of a beautiful woman whose wealth and position made her one of the foremost aristocrats in France, nor any pretty young girl such as Jacquette.

Instead, the noise alone testified to, as Humphrey saw when he approached the window, the arrival of the French public coach which was, in truth, a vehicle something between the *patache* of the time, the diligence of later days, and the various lumbering travelling-waggons of the period, while being a combination of all. A frouzy, evil-smelling, dirty thing it was, in which men and women were huddled together and even thrown into each other's arms and across each other's knees as the wheels of the cumbersome and almost springless vehicle jolted into ruts and then jolted out again, yet one in which travellers compassed hundreds of miles when too poor to pay for a carriage or to ride post--or when they desired to escape observation and remark!

From this conveyance there stepped forth now, amidst the howls of the driver to his horses who were anxious to be unharnessed and reach their stalls, and the cries of the ostlers and other noises, a venerable-looking old man of about seventy whose head was still enveloped in the cloth in which he had bound it up over night for the journey.

An old man who was received by the bowing landlord--the landlords of those days bowed appreciatively to all and every who arrived at their doors, no matter whether they were likely to spend one pistole or a hundred in their houses--with much courtesy. An old man who at once said:--

"I desire accommodation for some nights if it is obtainable. I desire also that Madame la Marquise de Villiers-Bordéville shall be informed that her father has arrived."

"Her father!" the landlord exclaimed, perhaps in some astonishment at the difference in appearance, as well as in the mode of travelling, between this old man and his daughter, the illustrious Marquise who had arrived in a handsome coach. "The father of Madame la Marquise! But certainly, monsieur, madame shall be apprised. Though I fear she still sleeps. Nevertheless, her maidservant shall be told."

"That will do very well. I myself require rest. Later in the day I will visit my daughter." After which the old man entered the house and, consequently, was seen no more by Humphrey West.

Yet what Humphrey did see was that, before this venerable personage entered the inn preceded by the landlord, he cast his eye suddenly up at a window which the former had no difficulty in feeling sure was that of the room to the left of his own. Humphrey saw, too, that he gave a grin as he did so, while appearing at the same time to thrust his tongue in his cheek as he slapped a large wallet, or bag, which he carried slung round him.

All of which things, added to the fact that the young man had heard rapid footsteps pass from out of another room into the one where the conversation with La Truaumont had taken place over night, and the feet glide swiftly across the floor towards where the window was, caused Humphrey West to feel sure that the woman occupying that room had run to the window of the salon to greet the new arrival.

CHAPTER X

During the whole of that day, Humphrey, in spite of an extreme desire to see something of the woman who inhabited that salon on the left of his bedroom, found no opportunity of setting eyes on her. He was obliged, as part of the duty he had voluntarily undertaken out of his love for Jacquette, to pass half a dozen times in the course of the morning, and equally as often in the course of the afternoon, between his room and the salon of the Duchesse de Castellucchio, and on each occasion he hoped to catch some sight of Emérance in the corridor. But this was denied him.

Something, however, he was enabled to discover.

Outside the room beyond the salon which this, to him, unknown woman occupied, there stood one of those valises, or travelling trunks, so common in the days not only of Le Roi Soleil and his predecessors but also of his successors: a squat, square thing made of black pigskin and contrived so that it would fit into the boot or rumble of a carriage, or, possibly, if the journey was being made on horseback, could easily be strapped on the horse's back in front of the saddle. On this there, also, stood a second box of exactly the same size; the pair of them--outside the casket or small *coffre-fort* that all women of means carried with them in the carriage, and that generally contained their valuables and the few implements of their toilet with which they burdened themselves--providing as much luggage as any one under the rank of a *grand seigneur* or *grande dame*, accompanied by many servants, was ever in the habit of transporting. The boxes in question were quite new and fresh, while the polish on the black pigskin gleamed so brightly that no doubt could be left in the mind of those who observed them that they had but recently come from the trunk-maker's. And, gleaming brightly on their fronts, beneath their padlocks, were some words and letters painted roughly in white; the words and letters, "Mme. la M. de Villiers-Bordéville."

"So," said Humphrey, musing to himself after he had walked softly along the passage to where the boxes stood, "she is Madame la Marquise de Villiers-Bordéville. The fair conspirator who plots and intrigues with De Beaurepaire, or with his followers unknown to him; the woman who will inveigle him into a conspiracy against, *Grand Dieu!* the King and his throne. The woman who knows that old man who leered and winked at her as he descended from the French coach. Madame la Marquise de Villiers-Bordéville! Well! well! It may hap that the Duchess, or Jacquette, knows something of the lady."

As thus the young man mused there came along the passage from the head of the stairs, which latter she had evidently just ascended, a woman attired as a maidservant and having in her hands some freshly cleaned breast lace. A good-looking, though saucy-looking, wench, who, after quickly observing that Humphrey had been reading the name on the boxes, allowed her eyes to roam with undisguised admiration over his handsome face, stalwart figure and well-made travelling costume. Then, with a coquettish glance, she was about to pass on to the farther room when, suddenly, she turned and, following Humphrey who by now was at the head of the stairs, she said:--

"Monsieur, Monsieur," while, as Humphrey stopped to look at her, she continued, "Monsieur is of the following of Madame la Duchesse who is in the great apartment. Is it not so?"

"It is so, pretty one," said Humphrey, who considered that, since this was undoubtedly the maid of the Marquise, a few pleasant words would probably not be wasted. "What then, mademoiselle?"

"There is a brigand of your band," the girl said, smiling with a pleased expression at being called "pretty one" and with a flattered expression at being addressed as "mademoiselle," "oh! a desperado, a vagabond. A man with a great moustache and fierce eyes and a huge sword, who is impertinent. Oh! of the most impertinent."

"'Tis Fleur de Mai," said Humphrey. "Of a surety it is. Well! is he insolent enough to presume to admire mademoiselle?"

"He is. Ah! *Un luron*. And--Fleur de Mai! *Dieu des dieux!* What a name for such as that. Monsieur, I seek not his admiration. Nor any man's."

"Yet," said Humphrey, gazing into the girl's eyes, which gaze she told herself afterwards gave her a *frisson*, "who could help but admire. I blame not Fleur de Mai. *Ma foi*, I, too----"

"Oh! monsieur----"

"--should be tempted to admire if we met often. Yet alas! that cannot be. We set out for Italy in a day or so, while Madame la Marquise goes, I do fear me, another way. Is it not so, *ma mie?*" venturing on the *ma mie* as a further aid towards the information which he was cunningly feeling his way towards obtaining, if possible, by flattery no matter how gross.

"Ah, monsieur!" the frivolous girl exclaimed, her head whirling at the soft words and lightsome manner of this handsome gentleman. "I know not. I am new to the service of madame, having

been engaged by her but a few days ago at Épinal."

"New to her!" exclaimed Humphrey. "And engaged at Épinal. Is that where she dwells?"

"Nay. Nay. She came from Nancy. And----"

"From Nancy," Humphrey said to himself inwardly. "From Nancy. Heavens! Where the Duchess and all of us were but a few days ago. What is all this? What does it mean? What does it all point to? This strange intriguer here in this very house, and known to La Truaumont yet unknown to the Duchess. I must learn more of this."

But, aloud, he repeated, "New to her, eh, pretty one?"

"Ay," the girl replied, her tongue now thoroughly unloosed. "Ay! new as those valises you were just now regarding; as this," flicking with her forefinger the lace she held: "as her robes; new even as her shoes. *Pardie!* one might almost say she had cast an old skin at Épinal and put on a new one in its place. The things she left behind there, that she gave to the maidservant, would scarce have furnished the wallet of a wandering singer; a Jew would not have given a handful of sols for all."

"This is strange matter," thought Humphrey to himself, "and needs seeing into. There is more here than should be." After which he said, "And have you come to care for this new mistress of yours, this woman so new in all things? Is the service soft and easy, and does she treat you well?"

"Oh! as for that," the girl said, "there is no cause for plaint. She is sweet and good and ever soft and gentle, asking but little by way of service. Also, I do think she dreams on nought but some lover she has. Listen, *beau monsieur*. Upon her breast she bears day and night--I have seen it there when I have gone to wake her from her sleeping!--a miniature of one handsome as a god--handsome as a man may be. In the day, too, I have seen her take it from her bodice again and again, and kiss it and whisper foolish words to it, calling it 'Louis, my soul, my adoration. Louis, my lord and king.' Ah! why do you start, monsieur? Why?"

"Louis," Humphrey muttered, forgetting himself. "Louis. Her lord and king. So! so!"

"What does monsieur imagine?"

"There is one such I know of," Humphrey muttered thoughtfully, and, since he forgot himself, aloud, "One to whom that--that--those words--that name might well apply and----"

"And so there is," the girl said, looking into his eyes, while thinking how soft and clear they were. "I, too, know of one who is a Louis--handsome, all the world says--a lord--a king, what if she loves him?"

"Him! Whom?"

"Whom! Ah! What if she loves the one Louis. The one king. *The* king. It might well be so. She is fair enough to possess even a king's love."

"'Tis true," Humphrey said. "'Tis very true. In faith it is. It--it might be so. Perhaps you have guessed aright. Who shall say it is not he?"

Yet, while he threw dust in the eyes of the gossiping girl, he knew very well that it was not the portrait of Louis the king which lay upon that woman's breast by day and night; not the portrait of Louis the superb ruler of France--of, indeed, almost all Europe--but, instead, that other Louis whom, only last night, he had heard spoken of as the one who should, if all went well, undo the other.

"Sweetheart," he said, "my duty calls me now. I must away to the Duchess. Later, we will meet again. And, be not proud," putting his hand into his pocket and drawing forth a gold piece, "take this for spending. We will meet again."

The woman took the coin with a pretence of demur--though, it may be, that the demur was not all a pretence. For, in truth, she would, perhaps, have desired that in place of a piece of gold the donor should have said some more fine words to her, or looked softly once more into her eyes, or, instead of contenting himself with saying, "We will meet again," should have named a time and place for such a meeting.

As for Humphrey, whose heart and soul had only room for the image of one woman, Jacquette, he turned on his heel after a pleasant nod to his gossip and a promise to speak to Fleur de Mai and bid him be of better demeanour, and went along the corridor to where the Duchess was.

He found her in her salon, occupied much as he had always known her to be when he had ever been permitted entrance to her apartments in her husband's house in Paris. Her guitar lay on her knee, the blue silken ribbons thereof dangling down to her little feet encased in gold broidered slippers; by her side was a vellum-bound copy of Massuccio's novellinos: on a table in front of her a flask of Coindrieux.

Near her, directing a buxom maid to pack into a small valise, or havresack, all the clothes

which the Duchess would carry with her across the Alps, was Jacquette.

"Ah, ha!" the Duchess exclaimed. "So 'tis you, monsieur. And did you sleep well and soft, *amico?*"

"Yes, I slept well enough, madame. On one side of my room was one guardian angel--yourself. On the other--perhaps another one. Another fair lady."

"Another!"

"There is a lady, madame," Jacquette said, "who has the apartment of three rooms next to Humphrey's. Her salon is next to his sleeping room, her bedroom next to that, and her maid's beyond that."

"Who is she?"

"She is, madame, a French lady who has travelled from Nancy. The Marquise de Villiers-Bordéville. She----"

"Ah!" with a slight start.

"You know her, madame?" Humphrey asked.

"I know of her," while, turning her head away, she muttered a little Italian oath that, especially from between her lips, sounded more like some soft, whispered love-word; after which she said to herself, "That woman here. That spy in the pay of Spain, as Louis termed her; that spy of his own, as I do believe. The woman who is steeped to the lips in the scheme which will lead to his undoing," and she ground her little white teeth together as thus she pondered. Even, however, as she recognised that Humphrey's eyes were on her and that he was waiting to hear more of what she knew of this woman, there came to her one crumb of satisfaction. The satisfaction that, since this intriguing woman, this *fine Normande*, as De Beaurepaire had called Emérance, was here in Basle she was at least far apart from him.

Hortense had never truly loved De Beaurepaire more than he had loved her, but to her as well as to him there had come the knowledge that each might be of great service to the other. The Prince wanted money; she wanted some one who would help her to evade her husband and to escape out of France. And, later, if the Pope would grant that which she so earnestly desired, namely, freedom from the maniac to whom she was wedded, why then, perhaps, De Beaurepaire would do well enough for a husband if she ever cared to take another; as well if not better than any other man. His birth was illustrious, his name was one of the proudest in France, his position under the King that of the highest, and--which to an Italian woman was much--he was superbly handsome. He was a man to whom any woman might be proud to be allied, but--as for love--no! He had loved and been loved too often; he had been sought after too much and--though the same thing had been her own lot--she would not follow in the footsteps, she was too proud to follow in the footsteps, of those others. But, since she was a woman and that a beautiful one as well as a woman of high rank, and since this man's name and hers were coupled together now and must always be so, she was resolved that, at least, this other woman should not, if possible, take her place.

"Humphrey," she said again, "I know of her. She is an intriguer, one who may do much evil to those who fall into her toils. If you by chance should learn what brings her to Basle come to me and tell me all."

"Can she harm you, madame?"

"Nay. Since I am no longer in France no one can do so. But--there are others whom she may injure."

"I understand, madame. Others in France whom you would not have harmed."

"Yes. Others in France whom I would not have harmed."

"If she works evil, if she should endeavour to work evil to others, then--then----"

"Then warn them or warn me. Even though I am out of France I may do something. This woman," she said, whispering in his ear so that the stolid maid packing the valise should not overhear her, "is here to meet other intriguers, another intriguer, an old man. Together they will plot and plot and draw one of whom we know into their toils for their own ends. They will do so! nay, they have already almost done so, though 'tis perhaps not yet too late to save--him! And it is all madness. Folly! Ruin! They may profit by it--they may win--succeed. But he must lose. You understand, Humphrey?"

"I understand, madame. And," with emphasis, "I sleep next to her salon."

Then he asked in as easy a tone as possible, "Does Madame la Duchesse know of any others than those of whom she has spoken who are in this scheme?"

"Of others. No! Why! Humphrey, are there others in it?"

"None of whom I know, madame," Humphrey replied, while determining that, for the present at least, the Duchess need not know that the chief of her escort, La Truaumont, was one of the principals in this plot.

Later, however, he recognised that not only for him but for De Beaurepaire, La Truaumont, and the adventuress herself, it would have been far better if he had spoken out openly and told the Duchess that La Truaumont and this woman had already met and talked together over all that was on foot.

CHAPTER XI

Before the evening came Humphrey had discovered the manner in which he had been able to overhear so plainly all that had passed between La Truaumont and the Marquise de Villiers-Bordéville the previous night.

On returning to his room after his conversation with the Duchess, he had at once set about looking for the reason why the sounds of their voices had reached his ears so clearly, and, ere five minutes had elapsed, that reason was forthcoming.

The tapestry--if it was worthy of the name, since, in actual fact, it was nothing but coarse, heavy-coloured cloth which hung in front of the walls from the ceiling to the wainscot--was quite loose and might be lifted aside, or drawn forward, by being grasped at the bottom, as easily as a curtain might be, so that, consequently, when this was done the whole of the bare wall behind it could be observed. Now, since Humphrey very well understood that whatever sound had penetrated to his ears must have come from and through the wall which separated his bedroom from the salon of his neighbour, it was to that wall that he at once directed his attention. A moment later he had done this, and saw that high up in the wall was an orifice of about two feet square which was strongly crossed with iron bars, and was probably, if such a thing could have been thought of in even earlier days than these, intended as a means of permitting air to circulate from one room to another. If this had not been the original intention, Humphrey could think of no other reason for the grating being where it was.

"Yet," he said to himself, as he gazed, or rather peered up, at the thing from where he stood, his head being under the lower part of the coarse tapestry, "what matters the cause of its being there since, by its existence, I have been enabled to hear one portion of this villainous scheme discussed, and, by God's will, may be enabled to hear still more. So, too, I observe that the tapestry on the other side prevents that grating from being visible to any in the woman's salon, therefore none will guess that there is a listener here. 'Tis very well. If I know aught of plotters and conspirators there will be no more talk in there until the night has come and the house is at rest, wherefore, since this is the time of day when the Duchess sleeps, as do all her countrywomen and most of her countrymen, I will go and pass an hour or so with sweet Jacquette. Then will I tell her, from whom I have no secrets, of how I purpose passing part of my night."

At the same time, since he was a young man of method, he looked around his room while pondering if he could not utilise some piece of furniture by pushing it up against the wall so that, by standing on it, he should hear better whatever might be said within that room. All the same he decided, after a moment's reflection, not to do this.

"Last night I heard much," he thought to himself, "though that other and La Truaumont spoke but in whispers: to-night, since I shall not be in bed but under the hangings, I should hear still better. And, also, the maid will doubtless come here at night to fill the ewer and prepare the bed; she would observe the change I have made. Let be. 'Tis best so."

Upon which he went out after locking his door behind him, a precaution never to be neglected in such times as these when nothing worth filching, even down to a plume for a hat or a wisp of lace, was safe from some one or other's thievish hands. After which he made his way to Jacquette's room and tapped lightly on the door to call her forth.

"Sweetheart," he said, when she came to it, "put on thy hood and come out into the streets of this old city. The Duchess should be sleeping now and have no need for thee."

"She is asleep, or seeking sleep. You know, Humphrey, we set out for Geneva and the Milanese territory to-morrow."

"I know, dear one, and we will ride together side by side as we have ridden here from Paris, though by devious ways and far off a straight route. Yet, as you may guess, there is much to be done by me ere we set forth."

"I know. I know. But wait for me below. I will but get my cape and hood--'tis cold here in this damp, mountainous land--and then be with you. But for an hour only, Humphrey. Only one hour."

"It must suffice since it can be no more. Yet we shall still be much together until," looking softly at her, "we are together for ever."

After which he descended and went out to the great *place* between the inn and the Rhine and waited for his love to descend.

He waited, idling away the moments until Jacquette came, while seeing Fleur de Mai sally forth with Boisfleury, the former having a new plume in his hat and a fresh scarf round him, while the latter swaggered by his side untidy as ever. He saw, too, La Truaumont across the river, sitting in a tavern balcony which overhung the rushing stream, and drinking with an old man of vulpine appearance--the old man who had early that morning descended from the French coach and looked up at the window of the Marquise's salon and leered and stuck his tongue in his cheek, so that Humphrey had felt sure the woman in that salon was visible.

"Ha," he said to himself, "so he, too, is in it. He is the intriguer of whom the Duchess spoke; the man who was to come here. Well! well! we shall know more to-night."

As he thought this, however, he determined that he would not wait until the full night had come ere he retired to his room and began to keep his watch, since he would thus be ready to hear all that might be said in the next one. A word to the Duchess, a hint of what he was about to do, would absolve him from any attendance on her that evening.

Jacquette came forth from the inn now, her pretty travelling *escoffion* on her head and her little cape around her shoulders, when, stepping across the place to where he stood with his back to her, she joined him. Then--after looking across the river towards the spot where Humphrey told her La Truaumont was seated (La Truaumont who, having seen her come out of the inn, now waved his hand gracefully to her, though half *en camarade* and half with the air of a roystering, boisterous soldier) she put her hand on her lover's arm and, together, they walked side by side along the left bank of the swift, rushing Rhine.

Of love 'tis certain they should talk at first--just a little--as is the case with other lovers when first they meet, and always has been since the world was young and fresh and green, and will be until it is worn out and dead and gone. Therefore, so it was now with Humphrey and Jacquette. And once, nay more than once, perhaps, when they had gotten opposite the great wind-mills on the other side and were shielded from view by the overhanging banks of the river, and hidden by the acacias growing wild on those banks, their young lips met and touched as, sometimes, the petals of one drooping crimson flower will meet and touch those of another. But each knew that they were here for something more serious at this moment than even their love, and gradually they fell to talking on the strange environments with which they, who had but lately been boy and girl together, were now surrounded. They talked of the journey that lay before them over the eternal snows of the St. Bernard or the St. Gothard, of which many travellers had spoken and written and over the former of which Humphrey's father had once himself passed on a voyage to Italy. They wondered, too, how the family of the Duchess would receive her and make a new home for her, and even wondered what the mad Duke would do to regain possession of his errant wife. And then, at last, they spoke of the whisper there was in the air--their air; that air by which they were surrounded; of the whisper that De Beaurepaire meditated some mad stroke by which he would set his life upon a cast and either lose all, including life, in that attempt, or soar still higher than even one of his house had ever soared before. "To-night," said Humphrey, in answer to a question from Jacquette, "I shall know more; perhaps all. If that happens which I think will happen, then I may know enough to prevent the Prince from rushing on his ruin. For, sweet one, I do not believe, nor will I ever believe, that he is aught but a tool, a cat's-paw in the hands of these others. La Truaumont pretends to be his follower, his servitor, yet he is, if I mistake not, the one who leads or pushes him towards the end he himself desires to obtain. While for this woman, who lives so close and snug within her rooms and is seen of none, who is she, what is she?"

"I know naught of her, or only that La Truaumont says she secretly, and unknown to him, loves De Beaurepaire."

"I understand," her lover answered. "Yet I believe that--that--as with La Truaumont so it is with this woman; she, too, pushes De Beaurepaire onward to something he would never otherwise attempt. And if she is beautiful----"

"She *is* beautiful," Jacquette said. "I saw her in Nancy. Poorly clad 'tis true, with poor adornments----"

"She has others now," Humphrey exclaimed, remembering the tray of handsome lace that Emérance's maid carried in her hand when they talked together at the head of the stairs.

"No doubt, no doubt," the colour returning again to Jacquette's cheeks as she spoke. "And you would say that, if she is beautiful she can lead him, wind him round her fingers as a child can

wind a silken thread. He is vain and she may play upon his vanity, although--although, Humphrey--even as she does so she still may love him. If all the world speaks true, many women have loved him ere now."

"If she loves him she should not lure him to his destruction. Yet, if what I overheard last night has any truth in it, her own destruction might accompany his. La Truaumont warned her--and, as he spoke, his voice sounded sinister to me--that she might pay a heavy price for his love."

"A woman would not heed that," Jacquette answered softly. "If she loves a man and would have him love her, the price, even though it be her life, counts nought."

"Has he," Humphrey asked now, after gazing into her eyes as she spoke thus, "confided in the Duchess? Does she know all?"

"She will *not* know. She will *not* hear. She is resolved to know nothing of De Beaurepaire's share in what is being plotted, I think. For if 'tis against the King, against his crown, that danger threatens, then--then--even though it were to bring death to him she would warn the King. His mother, the Princess, would have told the Duchess at Nancy, she endeavoured to tell her, to beseech her to intercede with De Beaurepaire, to beg him to forgo this mad scheme of which he had whispered the greater part to her, though not mentioning that he was the head and front of it; but madame would not listen to her. She will not know it since, knowing, she would feel impelled to divulge all to the King."

"Then, somehow, I will save him. He has been ever good to me: once he offered me a commission in his guards; also 'twas he who pressed King Louis to make King Charles restore to me all that my father lost in his father's cause. I must save him."

"Yet," Jacquette said, toying with the lace of his sleeve, "it does behove you also to save the King, since, if these conspirators are backed by the power and wealth of Spain, there is a chance they may succeed. He, Louis the King, has also been good to you."

"'Tis true. 'Tis very true," Humphrey said reflectively; "he, too, when my father was dead and my mother and I borne down by bitter, grinding poverty, put in our way the wherewithal to live. He placed her in the suite of Madame Henriette, he made me a page at Vincennes. In very truth I owe him much."

"Therefore repay. Endeavour to serve both of those who, in their time, have served you and yours. Save De Beaurepaire from these huckstering conspirators, or, better still, save him from himself: save the King from their assaults upon his great power and position. Yet--yet--ah! heaven," she broke off to exclaim, "if your knowledge of this plot, if the knowledge you already possess, or may further possess, should bring harm to you! Oh! if they should know that you have discovered all, what--what would they hesitate at? Either here, in this gloomy town, outside the power of France to help or save you, or--or--when, later, we are on those icy passes over which we must ride to reach the Milanese."

"Why, sweetheart, what can they do?" Humphrey asked, with a smile. "What! I am as good a man as any one of them, my rapier as stout, my arm and wrist as strong."

"There are many of them who may come against you. The bravo, La Truaumont, the desperado, Fleur de Mai, his boon companion, Boisfleury. And--and--those others! That old, evil-looking man who came to-day; this adventuress who lies fast hid within her rooms. Ah! Humphrey, Humphrey, my love, 'tis not these men's swords I should fear so much for you as the craft and wickedness of that other pair. For God's sake, Humphrey, be on your guard."

"*Ma mie*, fear not. And remember this. If I discover aught that it behoves me to know, it will not be on the passes or here, in this auberge, that they will find their opportunity. For, then, soon, I shall be gone from out their ken----"

"Gone!"

"Ay, gone. Either to De Beaurepaire--if he be their tool; to the King if he be a chief mover in this wickedness. Gone to France, to Paris, ere they can do aught to stop or harm me."

"Gone! And the Duchess and I left without you."

"If it must be it must. And you will be well escorted, even though the escort is none too trustworthy. For, think. Reflect. La Truaumont's orders are never to quit Madame la Duchesse until she is safe in the hands of her sister and her family in Milan. While, as for the others, his jackals, what can they do without his will? They whom he pays week by week."

"And the others? Those two. That old man and that intriguing woman!"

"They will not cross the pass. Nor, if I must travel back, can they travel as fast as I on 'Soupir'."

"But you, my heart, you? My love, my companion, my comrade?" Jacquette asked. "What if you are gone without one word, one last farewell?"

"If I am gone, if 'tis necessary that I start even ere dawn, then you will know the why and the wherefore, my own. You will know 'tis for life and death, for the sake of one Louis or the other. In hinting this to the Duchess you will thus obtain my pardon. As for our last farewell--ah! *ma mie*, we can say it now. We can now take our last embrace until we meet again. While, if I set not out, 'tis one more to the good account."

Whereupon he again drew the girl to him under the shade of the acacias and kissed her long and fondly.

CHAPTER XII

The Duchesse de Castellucchio awoke the next morning an hour after daybreak, which, at this late summer period, took place at about five o'clock, and, since it was her intention to set out early that day for Geneva, thence to commence her journey over the St. Bernard, she called out at once to Jacquette to summon her maid. Then, that being done, Jacquette herself appeared from the adjoining room enveloped in her *robe de chamber* and asked madame how she had slept that night.

"Excellently well," Hortense said, sitting up in her bed, and presenting a charming sight to the girl--who, however, had seen it often enough before--since her long hair streamed down over her lace-adorned night attire until it mingled with the great bear-skin thrown over the bed. "Excellently. A quieter neighbour than Monsieur West next door no traveller need wish to have. The young man moves not, neither does he have the nightmare. A pretty youth is Humphrey, with soft and gentle manners even in his sleep, it would seem. And you, child, have you too slept well?"

"Nay, madame, none too well. I was not drowsy and, when I slept at last, I dreamed. Horrible dreams, madame, of swords and rapiers, and, oh!--of blood being shed. Yet I know not wherefore I should have dreamed thus. The house was peaceful, no travellers arrived in the night, there was no sound to startle sleep; nothing to tease a would-be sleeper but the noise of that river rushing on and on and swirling past the crazy wooden bridge in front of us."

"It may be your rest was disturbed by some haunting recollection in your brain of the journey that lies before us. Well! it has to be taken; we cannot abide in this gloomy old place for ever. Therefore, Jacquette, let us prepare for the day. Bid Suzanne go get my chocolate ready, forgetting not to put a glass of ratafia in it; and knock on the wall, child, and arouse that slumbering lover of yours. 'Tis time he awoke and, awaking, should bid La Truaumont also leave his bed, since he too, in his turn, must awaken those two brigands who ride with us and of whom, *Dio mio!* I like the look none too well."

Obedient to Hortense's order Jacquette crossed to the other side of the room and, feeling under the tapestry for the spot where she knew the closed and heavily bolted door to be, rapped on it with her knuckles, while saying, "Humphrey, arise! The clocks have struck seven. Awake, sluggard!"

But there came no answer to her summons. All was as still as though she had knocked at, and spoken to, an empty room.

"Knock again," the Duchess said. "*Basta!* how the young man sleeps."

But Jacquette's second knock was productive of no more response than the first had been, whereon the girl--though turning somewhat white with a feeling of apprehension in her mind, while recalling at the same time her dreams of swords and rapiers and blood--whispered to herself, "He has discovered all and he is gone. Gone to save one Louis or the other, as he said. Madame," she cried, turning round to the Duchess who still sat up in her bed listening intently now for some sound from Humphrey's room, "he is not there. Or being there sleeps so soundly that I cannot waken him."

"Doubtless," the Duchess said, "he has awakened before us, and, knowing of what lies before us, has descended to make preparations for the journey. That being so, he has done all we would have him do without being bidden to do it. His is a brave, trustworthy heart. Yet I do wonder if he has also bethought him of awakening La Truaumont. The man is, may be, a heavy sleeper: each night he empties his wine flask to the dregs ere seeking his bed. If Humphrey has not thought to rouse him, I will dare to say he is still snoring as heavily as a tired dog."

"It may be so," Jacquette said aloud, with reference to the Duchess's opinion that Humphrey had already risen; yet to her heart she whispered, "but not risen as you think. Instead, more like he has not sought his bed at all but, overhearing much of the plots of those conspirators, has set out hours ago. By now he has doubtless been long in France, the frontier being so near. By now, also, 'tis certain he is riding post-haste either to save De Beaurepaire or to warn the King. Oh! Humphrey, Humphrey, my lover, may Heaven have and keep you."

"Call Suzanne," the Duchess said at this moment, since, always self-indulgent in her tastes, she saw no reason why her cup of chocolate should be longer delayed, no matter whether Humphrey West still slumbered late or had risen betimes: "Call Suzanne and bid her bring the morning drink. Likewise tell her to go and beat on La Truaumont's door. 'Tis time he was out of bed. And, Jacquette," as she always called the girl, "go out into the passage and beat yourself on Humphrey's door as loud as may be, while, if he answers not, open it if 'tis not locked and wake him."

Suzanne was now at hand and, receiving her instructions, set about obeying them by first going to La Truaumont's room to summon him. At the same time, and when she had departed on her two missions, Jacquette going out into the corridor ran to the next room and began another *tintamarre* on the other door, calling loudly as she did so, "Humphrey! Humphrey! Humphrey! Awake! Awake!"

But there was no more answer from within to this second summons than there had been to the first.

"He has gone," she whispered to herself. "He has gone. He has overheard more strange matter and has deemed it well to set out on the instant. What an ending to our projects of a happy ride into that southern land of sunshine, to all that we had dreamt of being to each other for some weeks or months! To all our hopes of being so much together."

Thinking, however, that, ere her lover had set out, as now she felt sure he must have done, he might by chance have left some carefully worded line for her, something that she should understand very well, though, should it chance to fall into the hands of others, it would to them be unintelligible, she lifted the latch of his door meaning to go in and see if, on some table or chair, and prominently in view, a billet might be lying. If that were not so, she would by one glance be able to discover through the disorder of the room--the absence of his riding cloak and feathered hat and rapier and pistols--whether he was definitely gone or only away for some little while.

As she lifted the latch, however, while pressing on the catch under her thumb thereby to push open the door, she discovered that either the latter was locked or the bolt on the inside shot.

"Locked or bolted!" the girl whispered, her face pale now and her breath coming fast and short. "Locked or bolted, and from the inside! And he there. There and silent--speechless. My God! what has happened to him? What?"

Faint with fear of some horror she could not express, with some hideous apprehension of impending evil--nay, of evil that had already fallen; dreading *what* might be in that room now, wondering if Humphrey had been discovered listening to those plotters in that other room and, in some way, reached, attacked and done to death, the girl leant helplessly against the door-post endeavouring to think what she should do next.

Should she alarm the house, already awakened for the work of the day; cry to some *faquin* or waiting woman passing up and down the stairs, or descend those stairs herself and summon the landlord to come and burst open the door? What--what should she do?

Suddenly, however, another thought whirling in her brain, dispersing and driving forth those which had possessed that brain a moment earlier, brought ease to her.

"He has not gone," she whispered to herself, the glow returning to her bosom that, an instant before, had felt like ice; "he cannot have gone. He has not discovered or overheard anything to cause him to set out for France. It must be so. He has descended, as madame supposed, to take steps for our journey, and, some of his effects being worth stealing, has locked his door and taken the key with him. Ah! yes. It must be so. Had he set forth, had he quitted this room for ever, he would not have locked the door after leaving nothing of his behind."

Eased therefore by these reflections, Jacquette made her way back to the Duchess and was about to enter the sleeping-room when she paused at hearing the voice of Hortense raised shrilly, as though in excitement.

"What!" she heard her say. "La Truaumont makes no reply! You cannot awaken him and his door is locked inside. *Dio mio*, what does it mean! Have all failed in their trust! All deserted me!"

"Ah! madame," Jacquette exclaimed, as now she entered the room, "it must be with the captain as with Humphrey. Both have descended to make preparations for our departure after leaving their doors locked behind them for security."

"It may be so," the Duchess exclaimed. "Yet if it is, 'tis strange. Humphrey sleeps on my left,

yet I heard no sound of movement in his room late or early, nor did you hear any in the room on your right where the captain slept. 'Tis passing strange."

"Yet easily solved, madame," Jacquette replied, "if all is as you suspect, and I," to herself, "hope. I will but don my clothes and then descend myself."

"Instead, send Suzanne. She is dressed and can go down at once."

Whereupon Suzanne, who had by now returned with the chocolate and chip bread for their early meal, was bidden to go at once below and see what had become of the absent men.

"And," said the Duchess to her ere she went, "seek out that other, if they are not about. That *matamore* who styles himself Fleur de Mai. If you cannot find them bring him here to my presence."

The girl sped away to do as she was bidden, and, while she was gone, Hortense, sitting up in her bed, drank her chocolate and seemed more puzzled at the circumstance that neither she, on one side, had heard a sound from Humphrey, nor Jacquette, on the other, from La Truaumont, than at aught else. Then, when five minutes had elapsed, Suzanne, forgetting in her excitement to knock, and forgetting also all deference due to her mistress, rushed into the room, exclaiming:--

"Oh! madame, neither the illustrious captain nor monsieur the Englishman have been seen below this morning. Yet--yet--the horses are all in their stalls, not one is missing."

"Oh! great heavens," moaned Jacquette at this significant piece of intelligence.

"And the other," cried the Duchess, "the great truculent one? The fellow called Fleur de Mai. What of him? Why is he not here as I commanded?"

"Madame," the maid cried, her voice rising almost to a shriek, "he, too, is missing. He slept before the fire in the great room wrapped in his cloak, but at daybreak, when the house was opened, he was no longer there--and--madame, neither can he be found."

"Not found. Yet there was still another, the meaner one; the one called Boisfleury," the Duchess cried, springing out of her bed in beauteous disarray. "What of him? Is he too, missing? And the landlord, where is he?"

"The landlord, madame, is bewildered. He comes with the pass-keys to open all the doors of their rooms. As for the man, Boisfleury, he is outside. He waits on Madame la Duchesse."

"Take him into the salon. And, Jacquette, give me my robe. Quick. 'Twill cover this *négligé*." While, as she spoke, she seized the masses of long hair that hung down her back and twisted them up into a huge knot upon her head. After which she thrust her little feet into a pair of warm, soft slippers and entered the salon followed by Jacquette.

Before her there stood the man, Boisfleury, white and shaky looking, so that, as Hortense shrewdly suspected, he had been hastily summoned from his bed, wherein, she did not doubt, he had been sleeping off the potency of the draughts in which he and his companion nightly indulged.

"What know you of these absent men?" she asked now, while her usually soft, velvety eyes looked anything but softly into those of the man before her so that, either from their piercing glance, or from the vision of beauty *en déshabille* which confronted him--or, perhaps, from that other cause which the Duchess had suspected--he shivered and shook before her.

"What know you, I say? Answer, man, and stand not trembling thus. Speak, fellow."

"Most gracious lady, I know nothing. Last night I sought my bed early, the better to be ready for our departure this morning and----"

"Got you that wound on your face in your bed? 'Tis a strange place to encounter such a thing."

"Madame la Duchesse, I fell upon the stairs and hurt myself."

"It resembles not a bruise. More like unto a sharp cut. Yet this is nought to me. Tell me, I say, what you know of the absence of those three. Of the young English seigneur, of your leader, the captain, and your boon companion?"

"Gracious lady," Boisfleury said again, "I know nothing. The young English seigneur I saw not at all. Madame la Duchesse will remember that he abode not with us but with madame and mademoiselle," directing his eyes towards Jacquette. "The noble captain supped alone very early and then retired at once. As for Fleur de Mai and me, we supped together; he drank more than was good for him--as--as I warned him--and then rolled himself in his cloak and slept before the fire. Whereon I sought my bed."

"I will have the house ransacked to find one at least of them," the Duchess exclaimed, her eyes ablaze; "nay, I will have the whole of this heretical, canticle-singing town ransacked, if I can do

so, to find him. For the others I care not, no, not even if they have gone to their master the devil! While as for you----"

"As for me, most noble dame?" Boisfleury repeated, cringingly, though with a strange gleam in his eye. "As for me, Madame la Duchesse?"

"I do not believe you. If we were in Paris you should be sent to the Bastille or La Tournelle----"

"Madame la Duchesse has shaken the dust of Paris off her feet," the man answered, with an insolent leer. "We shall not meet in Paris when I return to it."

"Out, dog!" the Duchess cried, advancing towards the fellow, her hot Italian blood aflame at his insolence and also at the certainty that he was lying to her. "Out, animal! Or the landlord----"

At this moment, however, the landlord himself appeared at the door, and, with many bows and genuflexions, announced that he had opened the doors of the rooms of all the missing men with his pass-keys--and--and--it was very strange, but all their effects were there untouched.

Then, ere the Duchess could reply to this ominous statement a cry from Jacquette startled her, and, a moment later, she had rushed toward the girl and caught her in her arms ere she swooned.

"Can I lend assistance?" a soft voice asked as this occurred, and Emérance de Villiers-Bordéville appeared at the open door of the room, clad, like the Duchess, in a long *robe de chamber*.

"No," the latter said, looking at her with a glance that would have withered many another woman, a look full of disdain. "No. And, madame, this is my private room, therefore I desire to possess it in privacy."

CHAPTER XIII

"She knows," Emérance muttered to herself as she sought her own rooms from which, in fact, she had only been brought forth by the noise and chattering in the passages and the sounds that issued from the Duchess's salon, owing to the door being open. "She knows--in part--what I am. That look from those dark, haughty eyes told all. Yes, she knows something--but only something; not all. She cannot know of the Great Attempt."

She took up now a little hand-bell from the table and, ringing it, brought forth her maid from the bedroom where she was engaged in arranging that apartment; after which Emérance said:--

"What means this turmoil in the inn, this hurly-burly on the stairs and in the passages? Know you aught?"

"Madame," the woman replied, only too willing to talk, "there are strange happenings in this house. The retinue of the Duchesse de Castellucchio have mostly deserted her. They are missing."

"Missing!" Emérance exclaimed, while her face blanched. "Missing! Her retinue missing. Explain to me."

"Ah! Madame la Marquise. They are gone, vanished. All except one--the lowest of them. The handsome young man so gay and debonnair, with shoulders so broad and stalwart and such soft, dark eyes, is gone----"

"Proceed. No matter for his looks."

"Also the captain. He who was like a bull. Also the great swashbuckler, *le fanfaron*, with the red-brown hair."

"The captain gone," Emérance muttered to herself, "and Fleur de Mai gone too. 'Tis strange. Wondrous strange."

"And, above all," the girl persisted, determined that the one who had been so gentle and courteous to her, so much of an admirer, should not be overlooked, "the young seigneur, madame! The handsome, courtly one."

"Bah!" Emérance exclaimed, "his looks count not." Nor, in truth, would the looks of any man in all the world have counted with this woman who had no thoughts or eyes for the beauty of any, or only one, man. Then, continuing, she said: "And that other? The lowest of them, as you term him. Where is he?"

"He saddles his horse below. He rides to the Syndic to beseech his help in finding them; the Syndic whose lodge is outside the walls upon the route de France, a league or so from here. He does so, having spoken first with the venerable father of Madame la Marquise. The illustrious Seigneur de Châteaugrand."

"Ah! yes. My father. The Seigneur de Châteaugrand!" and now there came a look upon her face vastly different from the look of a few minutes before--one which seemed to speak of some internal spasm of pain, or regret or self-reproach, so different from this which was one of irony, of contempt. "Where is he?"

"He prepares to descend to madame from his room above. He wishes to know something of these strange doings. He will be here ere many moments more are past."

"So be it. He will find me. Now make me ready for the day. Put out my clothes and toilette necessaries. My father," with a scornful smile, "hates ever to see a woman in disarray."

That "father" made his appearance, as the maid had said would be the case, ere many moments were passed, yet when he did so the interview that was to take place--if it was an interview--was not of long duration. Emérance, who was in the bedroom in the hands of the maid when she heard the door of the salon open, called out to know if it was he, and, on discovering such to be the case, had her dress put on hastily and then went to him. After which, without salutation or greeting, she went close to Van den Enden and, speaking to him in almost a whisper--for, which there was scarcely any need since she had carefully shut the door between them and the maid--she said:--

"What is this report? And--what does it mean? Where are they all? All?"

But the Jew made no reply. Which abstention from speech was, in truth, the most pregnant of replies.

"I understand, or almost understand," Emérance whispered, while as she did so she stepped back some paces from Van den Enden and, perhaps unconsciously, drew the skirts of her gown closer round her. "We have been overheard, were overheard, and--and, after you left me last night you and La Truaumont discovered such to be the case. And--and--and----"

But still Van den Enden uttered no word but stood looking strangely at the woman.

"Ah," she gasped. "And De Beaurepaire? Louis? Is he safe? Will he be safe?"

A moment later, though still the old man had uttered no word but only let his eyes meet hers, she murmured, "Ah! *malheur!* Yet--yet--there is none to harm *him* now."

* * * * *

Ere Humphrey sought his room the previous afternoon, there to carry out his determination of keeping a watchful ear open, from then till the morning, over all that might transpire in the next one to him, he whispered a last word to Jacquette.

"Sweetest and dearest," he said, "say no word to the Duchess on what I am about to do, give her no inkling. Tell her what you will, excepting only that."

"What shall I say? I would not willingly deceive her. 'Specially since she trusts me so."

"Nor would I have you deceive her. She is too good and kind to have deception practised on her. Yet, remember, you have said that, if she were forced to know of what I think is being plotted, she would find means to bring the news to the King's ears. And that would not take long in the doing. A trusty messenger, a swift horse or so, and, ere a week was past, that which hath been plotted here in this out-of-the-world Swiss place would be known in Paris. And--and--if she has never loved the King she is well nigh the only one of all women near him since his youth who has not done so. She would not spare De Beaurepaire whom, in very fact, she does not love, but has only used for her purpose of escape from her mad husband."

"What then shall I say?" asked Jacquette, grasping the force and truth of her lover's words.

"What you will. That I have ridden forth to see the beauties of this great river out there; or to mount to the cathedral, or that I am indisposed, which in truth I am since I am indisposed to be prevented from overhearing these tricksters."

"Short of absolute falsehood, I will tell her," Jacquette said with a smile; after which, since now they were near the Krone, the girl added, "Farewell until to-morrow, Humphrey, and may heaven bless you, my sweet. Oh! I do pray that what you are about to do--it is in a good cause, He above knows!--may bring no harm to you. Farewell until to-morrow. To-night I will pray for you, and all night, too."

So, with a blessing on him from the woman he loved so fondly and truly, Humphrey West set about his task.

When he was in his room, after pausing until Jacquette had had time to rejoin the Duchess, he sat down in the one chair the place possessed and wondered how long he would have to wait ere anything should happen in the next one that, by being overheard, might be of service to him. The day was still young, it being no later than four o'clock, and he knew that it was more than probable that neither La Truaumont nor that horrible-looking old man with the vulpine features and the repellent leer--whom he felt sure was one of those most concerned in what was hatching--would visit the woman in the next room until late at night and when most of those in the house had retired.

One thing, however, he did at once, after observing that his chamber was made ready for the night--the bed turned down, the ewer filled and so forth. He quietly lifted his chair up to the wall which divided his room from the next one and placed it against the wainscot. Thus he would be nearer to any sound that issued from the lips of those in that next room and, also, if necessary, he could stand with his head underneath the frowsy tapestry, and between it and the panelling, and so hear still better. Next, he locked his door while determining that, no matter who should come to it, he would give no answer. Those outside might think that he was absent, or asleep, or what they would, but he would not reply.

At first, he thought of sitting down and writing to his mother in England a long account of his doings of late--there was a standish on the rickety table, under one leg of which some previous traveller had thrust a piece of folded paper to steady it, and, in the standish, was some half-dried ink as well as one or two pens much mended and worn, and a little jar of sand; but he desisted from following this idea. He would have to bring the chair back again to do so; if, while writing, he should move it unthinkingly, it would grate and rasp upon the parquet floor and warn any who might be in the next room that he was here, while, also, to obtain his writing-paper (with which educated travellers always provided themselves ere setting out) he would have to unroll his valise, the doing which might also betray him if he made any noise.

"Therefore," he thought to himself, "I will lie down a little while. It may hap I shall be awake most of the night, so best that I refresh myself ere night comes. While if I sleep I will do so like a dog, with one eye and both ears open. A whisper will awaken me if 'tis loud enough to penetrate through the tapestry on t'other side and on this."

That he had slept he discovered later when, suddenly opening his eyes, he heard the deep-toned clock of the cathedral striking the four quarters, and, after counting the strokes of the hour, learnt that it was nine o'clock. He noticed, too, at once--though even now but half-awake--that the room was in darkness, that night had come. Upon which he lay quite still a little while, his ears on the alert to discover if there were any persons in the room to his left.

There was, however, nothing to tell him that such was the case, though, from the other side of his room he could hear, in the apartments of the Duchess, her lute being softly played and the light tones of her voice as she hummed the words of an Italian *canzone* to its accompaniment. Once, too, he heard her call to Jacquette and say something about her cavalier costume in which he knew that, on the next day, she purposed setting forth on her long dreary ride across the Alps--no carriages being possible for that journey. He also heard her tell Jacquette to bid Suzanne bring a flask of Muscat.

Then, suddenly, he knew that a door on his left had opened and shut gently; he heard a voice speaking which he had never, so far as he knew, heard before.

"If," that voice said, it being a low rasping one, "they set forth to-morrow, the captain should be here almost at once. They sup at eight and should be abed soon after. There is much to talk over since we all separate to-morrow. La Truaumont's band sets out to escort madame to Milan, he to go hot foot to Paris afterwards, and then to Normandy--I to Paris direct and----"

"I to Paris and Paradise since De Beaurepaire is there."

That enraptured voice told him at once who this speaker was, it being the same he had overheard the night before. It was, he knew, the voice of the woman who occupied those rooms, the woman to whom La Truaumont had said half-sinisterly, half-warningly, "You may yet pay a dear price for your happiness."

Almost ere the man could make any reply to that remark, another, a deeper, more profound voice seemed to obliterate all other sounds except those of a second gentle opening and shutting of the door; a voice, the full though mellow tones of which the owner was undoubtedly endeavouring to soften. The voice of La Truaumont.

"So," Humphrey heard the captain say, "we meet to decide all. Now, Van den Enden, unfold.

Speak, and to the purpose. What is done? What will Spain and Holland do?"

"To commence with," Humphrey heard the unknown voice of the Jew say, "I have the money--all of it--in safe keeping."

"In safe keeping," murmured La Truaumont. "In safe keeping. Where?"

"Some in the hands of the party. Some in mine."

"I'll be sworn, and deeply too."

"Some for those bold hearts who help us with their hands and heads."

"Good! Good!" the voice, which sounded like the soft rumbling of a cathedral organ afar off, murmured.

"Some," Van den Enden went on, as though pleased with his own words, "put aside for fair ones who, also, have helped and can help well. For beauty's coaxings and *câlineries*; for love professed; for love false as beauty's oath or vow----"

"And as true, too!" Humphrey heard the woman exclaim.

"All can play their part and play it well, and earn their guerdon," Van den Enden continued.

"And the rest? Where is it? *Hein?*" La Truaumont asked in tones that, though low, did not disguise the cynicism beneath them.

"The rest! Why in the hands of *Le Dédaigneux*."

"So!" exclaimed La Truaumont. "So! Good. That binds him. He is committed to us."

"He needs no binding, no earnest. He is heart and soul with us. And you know it," the listener heard the woman say sharply.

"And the sum total?" La Truaumont asked, ignoring her.

"A million of livres."

"Half of what we asked! Half of what is necessary."

"Added to six thousand Spaniards on board the Dutch Fleet; arms for twenty thousand men; weapons and instruments of siege against the fortresses of Quillebeuf and Honfleur."

"Enough to begin with at least if not enough to complete the glorious task. Now unfold all that is decided on."

CHAPTER XIV

"*Le Dédaigneux!*" Humphrey said to himself. "*Le Dédaigneux*. Some man, some great one masquerading under a sobriquet, a *nom de guerre!* Who can it be but one! Who but the one whose proud family motto almost speaks of their disdain for even kings; whose own life bespeaks his scorn for all who are not of his blood; who looks down on other men as other men look down on the insects crawling in their path! Who can it be but he? Yet--does he lead these conspirators or is he led by them? Is he their chief or cat's-paw? I must know that."

"Listen," he heard Van den Enden saying now. "Briefly, all that is devised is as follows."

"Those men, that money, and the Dutch Fleet are in our hands, at our service," Van den Enden continued next; "the moment that your Normandy is prepared to rise against this tyrant whose tyranny is greater than was the tyranny of Richelieu, of Mazarin, or of both combined. If your chiefs, your great noblesse, your merchants of Rouen, Havre and other cities--all groaning under this tyrant's unjust taxation of them, specially for his wars; all hating his wantons, his mad extravagance and love of splendour--are ready to rise and form themselves into a Republic which shall at last be a Republic formed of the whole of France, then the Spaniards and Hollanders are ready to play their part."

"Republics have heads, dictators, rulers, as well as monarchies. Men who are yet monarchs

though without crowns, or thrones, or rights hereditary. Whom does Spain produce?" La Truaumont asked.

"De Montérey at first stipulated for the head of the house of--*Le Dédaigneux*. The Duke----"

"Ah!" whispered Humphrey to himself.

"But finding that this might not be, that the Duke refuses since he would have to throw too heavy a stake to win even so great a prize as this, they will accept him."

"They must," the listener heard the woman say. "He must be head or nothing."

"They have agreed," Van den Enden continued. "They desire Quillebeuf, De Montérey avers, more than all the places of which Le Roi Soleil has despoiled them. They wish to form a Republic rivalling that of Venice, one that, in being with them, shall crush all who are against them."

"And Louis! The King. What of him?"

"Listen. His guards have been dispatched to join the army. *Le Dédaigneux* as their colonel has taken care of that."

"My God!" Humphrey whispered to himself. "He is in it. The chief conspirator and no tool!"

"The King will," Van den Enden went on, "be either at St. Germain or Fontainebleau for the next few weeks or months. And then--then----"

"Then?" said La Truaumont.

"Then five hundred Norman gentlemen will subdue the courtiers and seize on him. We shall have him. Hold him."

"Go on!" La Truaumont muttered, his voice husky and deep. "What next? What will you do with him?"

"He will sign a renunciation of his throne or----"

"Or?"

"He will go to the Bastille, or Pignerol--Pignerol is safer; it is afar off, out of, lost to, the world. He will experience that which he has caused countless others to experience. And, later, he will--die."

"Die! How?"

"As others have died," the Jew hissed. "As all die who suffer under his tyranny. By his own hands, or--will--appear--to have done so."

"My horse is in its stall," Humphrey thought to himself now; "my rapier to my hand. It is time, and full time, too, for me to be on my way. On my way to France--thank heaven the frontier is so near at hand! To Paris, to the King. There is no time to lose. The King to be seized and, later, the country invaded; the fortresses taken! And I know all the scheme. All, as well as the names of all concerned."

"Yet," he went on, "I must contain myself longer. To leave this room now, however softly; to attempt to unbar the door of this closed house, if it is yet shut; to saddle 'Soupir' and ride off now is to tell those wretches in there that they are blown upon. I must wait--wait till full night has come, till midnight at earliest, or even until later and, then, off and away. Away through the mountains, over the plains--on--on--till I stand face to face with the King and tell him all. Heaven above be praised, he knows me and my name: he has befriended me and been good to my mother. It will not be hard to do. Oh! that I could creep out now, at once, so as to waste no precious moment."

For an instant, as thus he communed with himself, there had come to him a thought that he would endeavour to communicate with the Duchess by tapping gently on the door that was between their rooms; by attracting the attention of her or Jacquette, both of whom were probably at supper now in their salon; and by stealing away in that manner. But no sooner had this idea come to him than it was discarded. The tapping, or scratching, he must make to call their attention to him would equally summon the attention of those in that other room, and might, indeed, reach their ears sooner than it would reach the ears of the others whose notice he desired to attract. No! he must stay quiet until, at least, those in the next room had separated, which, judging by the words he had heard the once unknown voice utter to the effect that La Truaumont and his party should be abed before ten--would undoubtedly not be long now.

Meanwhile, as these reflections passed through his mind his ears were still on the alert; even as he thought, so he could listen, too, and not only hear but grasp what was the subject of conversation between the conspirators in that room.

From the absolute conspiracy itself the talk had now wandered to other matters, and at this

moment Humphrey heard La Truaumont say:--

"I ride with this heroine of romance--this *folle* who is covered with jewels but, *sangdieu!* will not have more than a change of linen with her--as far as Martigny. There I shall be taken with sudden illness, the vapours, the falling sickness--the megrims--one will do as well as t'other, and so I shall be left behind. And then, when they are gone, hey! for France, for Normandy."

A moment later, the opening and shutting gently of the door was heard by Humphrey; a stealthy though heavy tread in the corridor was also apparent to the young man's ears: he knew, he felt sure he knew, that the man had left the room. The plot was laid bare by Van den Enden, the meeting over.

The other two in that room continued, however, to remain in it, and more than once Humphrey heard the rasping tones of the voice which he felt sure belonged to the old man who had descended from the French coach, and the softer, sweeter ones of the woman who inhabited those apartments and, as far as he knew, never stirred out of them. But, though he heard the tones, the words that were uttered were now unintelligible, and it flashed instantly into Humphrey's mind that the pair were whispering to each other.

"Whispering," he said to himself. "Whispering! Yet why now, when the worst is told and has been told openly and, beyond uncertainty, without fear of that worst being overheard? Why have the two to speak in whispers now since, when they were three, they said nothing that--as they thought--needed suppression?"

He heard, however, something further. He heard shuffling feet which, Humphrey did not doubt, were the feet of the old man moving about the room; a piece of furniture--a chair as it seemed to him--moved from one part of the apartment to another; a smooth, rubbing sound on the other side of the wainscot against which he leant with his head beneath the folds of the frouzy, dusty tapestry, and once--or twice--a word or the fragments of a question.

"Are you sure? Certain? It is death if so," the rasping, or feeble, voice asked, not in one sentence but in three exclamations, while the clearer, more fresh voice replied, also interjectedly. "Service, I tell you. Safe. Covered. Impossible."

To what these words might refer Humphrey could not conceive, no more than he could conceive to what those various movements in the room applied. Neither could he form any opinion as to the meaning of what he next heard clearly and distinctly, since, forgetting himself for the moment, the man said:--

"No chance if that is done. The swiftest portion of the Rhine is quickly reached by that brawling, rushing river outside. I know, I have been a refugee in this city ere now--and then, once there, the secret is hidden for ever. The swirl at that spot is worse than the grave, since the latter can be made to give up its dead or what is left of them, but *it* never."

Of this speech Humphrey could understand nothing; it conveyed naught to his mind. Or, if it did convey anything, only the thought that some proof of their secret, something which he could not guess at or surmise, was to be consigned to an eternal and unyielding oblivion.

It seemed as if, now, those two were about to separate for the night. In still broken, still interjected sentences and scraps of sentences and stray words, Humphrey could understand that they were telling each other their future plans. He gathered that the woman had promised to set out the next day in her coach for Paris, that she would wait at Mülhausen till the French coach from Basle arrived when she would take her confederate into her own carriage and convey him with her. He also found out for certainty what the old man's name was.

"I will not have you masquerading as my father," he heard the woman whisper. "You need be no longer the Seigneur de Châteaugrand. Your own name of Van den Enden will do very well, since nothing connects you with us or Normandy."

"It will do very well for me, too," Humphrey said to himself, "since I know both of them now. And yours also, my lady, thanks to your chattering maid and your travelling necessaries."

A moment later he once more heard the door opened and shut, gently as ever, and knew that the woman was left alone. Still another moment, and he heard her cross the floor of her salon and knew by the sound of a closing door--the different sound made by a different door--that she had entered another room, the one in which she doubtless slept.

It was now ten o'clock, as Humphrey heard plainly from all the various clocks in the city, and he knew that he must, as yet, have no thought of setting out for France. By the absence of all movement whatever in the Duchess's room to the right he recognised that she had not yet sought her bed; he heard, too, all the sounds rising up the stairs from the ground portion of the inn which told him that there was as yet no likelihood of the place being closed for the night. There were, he knew well, no other travellers, or at least none of importance, staying in the house, yet--even in this rigid and now harsh and severe Protestant city that, nearly a hundred years after Calvin's death, had not yet shaken off the gloomy asceticism with which he had dyed and imbued it, as well as Geneva and others--there were wassailers and carousers who came here to drink nightly. He had seen them and heard them, too, the evening before, as, also, he had seen Fleur

de Mai and Boisfleury drinking with them. He knew, also, that until midnight, or at least as long as the landlord would allow them to remain, which was so long as they would drink and sup, the house would not be closed and these topers sent forth.

"Therefore," thought Humphrey, "I must possess my soul in patience. There is naught else for it." Though, even as he so thought, there came another reflection to his mind.

"Foregad!" he said to himself, "if I stay in here until the house is closed, I am as like not to be unable to leave it. Therefore let me consider what is best. Either to quit the house before it is shut up for the night, to get to the stables and remain in them till all is quiet and then steal away on 'Soupir'--she is fleet of foot and, once off, none will catch us!--or wait here till all are gone to their beds and take my chance of finding an exit? Which shall I do?"

Suddenly, however, he made his final decision. To stay here and risk being unable to obtain that exit was folly. Better walk about the streets for hours and then return and make his way to the stables and obtain his horse--if the stables were not themselves made fast for the night--than stay here to be shut in till the morning. Consequently, he decided he would go in an hour's time if not sooner. And, also, it might be best that then, if he could get into the stables, he should saddle "Soupir," at once, lead her out gently, and, mounting her without delay, ride forth out of the town. That he would have to pass the gate he knew, but, with the passport he carried in his pocket signed by D'Argenson for the King--the King whom, if possible, he went forth to warn and save--this would be easy.

So that he should make no noise which might inform the woman he was there, if at any minute she should return to the room next to him, he took off his long boots and walked softly about seeking the few necessaries which he must take with him: to wit, his rapier, his pistols and cloak and hat. The other things he had with him, which were contained in the little valise for strapping in front of the saddle, he would leave behind. Jacquette, he knew, would understand in the morning, when he was found to be missing, that he had purposely left them and would see that they were placed in safe custody, while, even if she did not do so, their loss would be no serious thing.

Humphrey went to the door now, turning the key back as softly as might be so as to make no noise, and, next, took it from the inside and inserted it in the lock on the outside and pushed the door-to without shutting it, after which he drew his boots on once more and crept softly out. Then he locked the door and, dropping the key into his pocket, descended the stairs.

He met no one on them and, so far as he knew, no one saw him. The landlord was not in his room, as he could see through the glass window giving on to the passage: the door of the great general room was shut, though from it there issued a hum of voices, above all of which he could distinguish the loud boasting tones of Fleur de Mai as, doubtless, he indulged in some of his usual rhodomontades. Likewise, and he thanked heaven for it, the street door still stood wide open as though inviting custom. To add to his satisfaction the oil-lamp in the passage was extinct, it having probably been blown out by the warm southerly breeze that had arisen with the coming of the night.

"All is very well," Humphrey said to himself. "Yet a few moments more and 'Soupir' and I shall be on our road for Paris. Then, catch who can."

And he stepped out on to the *place* between the inn and the river.

CHAPTER XV

To reach the stables which were at the back of the Krone without passing through the kitchen (and it would have been madness for Humphrey to attempt to do so unnoticed, since the scullions and cook-maids were, he imagined, finishing their tasks for the night, while the drawers and servers were idling about and, probably, in some cases, emptying down their throats the heel-taps of various flasks and bottles), it was necessary to proceed to the end of the street, some houses off. Then, a turn to the left had to be made beneath the ramparts between the river and the city proper, and, next, still another to the left to bring Humphrey to the rear of the inn and the stables themselves.

This he knew well enough, as, in the morning, he had visited those stables to see the soldiers of the Duc de Lorraine who had escorted the Duchess from Nancy set out upon their journey back. And, good cavalier as he was, he had more than once in the past twenty-four hours gone to

them to see that all was well with "Soupir" and that she was properly fed and groomed and attended to.

He strolled on, therefore, in an easy manner towards where the mare was, assuming the air of one who, after his supper, might be sauntering about by the side of the river ere seeking his bed, while inhaling the soft, warm southern breeze of the night. To appear well in keeping with such a person--one who might be a traveller taking his ease, or one on the road to or from France or, across the river, to the German States--he also went on to the bridge and gazed idly into the turbulent waters rushing beneath, and so walked across to Klein Basel, all with the desire to kill time.

"For," said Humphrey to himself, "I must be neither too soon nor too late. If I go in too early I may come against La Truaumont or his myrmidons seeking to know if all is well with the animals, which I desire not to do. While, if I tarry too long I may find the door fast for the night, whereby 'Soupir' and I cannot come at each other."

Consequently, he made no movement for still some little time, nor until all the clocks were once more competing hotly with each other as to which should be the first or the last to strike the hour. And the hour which they were striking was eleven.

"Almost I might venture," Humphrey said to himself now. "The band of which it is supposed I shall form one," and he smiled at his thoughts, "sets out early to-morrow for Geneva and Martigny. La Truaumont will have given his commands by now since he sees to all. Fleur de Mai and Boisfleury are deep in their cups or gone by this time to their beds. The rest, the horsekeepers, the stablemen, do not count at all. I stand as high with the Duchess as does the captain; I may do what I please." Upon which he rose from his seat on a bench across the river and made his way back and towards where his mare was.

Returning to the bottom of that old street which leads down to the Rhine from the city above, it seemed to Humphrey that he heard, either ahead of, or behind, him, the ring of spurs upon the stones as well as the tramp of heavily booted feet: and he heard, or thought he heard, the well-known click-clack of the point of a rapier sheath against those stones.

"Humph!" he said to himself. "One of the watch perhaps, or some traveller."

He, however, thought little more of this beyond observing that the sound of those heavy boots and spurs, and that tap of a rapier, were becoming fainter, when, suddenly, upon his ears there fell the words: "Excellency, I will tell him. Be sure of me, Prince."

"The voice of Fleur de Mai!" Humphrey exclaimed. "And 'Excellency!' 'Prince!' Foregad! whom should he know here--or anywhere for the matter of that!--to whom such terms apply? And in this Republic where there are no Excellencies or Princes."

As he so thought, though heedlessly enough, since to him who, both in London and Paris, had mixed always with the highest and noblest, such things counted for little, it seemed that either those footsteps were returning towards where he was now, or else that they were the footsteps of some man similarly attired and accoutred who had passed the other.

"Perhaps," he mused, "Fleur de Mai is coming this way after greeting his acquaintance the 'Prince'. It may be so. And to-morrow the vagabond will boast of his friend, his close and intimate friend the Prince of this or that, whose acquaintance he has, in truth, only made to-night in some other hostelry than ours."

Suddenly, however, as thus he laughed at the bravo's probable braggadocio, the fellow himself loomed up large before him.

"'Tis Fleur de Mai, as I thought!" he exclaimed aloud. "I knew there was but one such rich and unctuous voice in all the wide world." After which he laughed, while adding, "And the friend of Princes."

"'Tis very true," the other answered. "Ay, the friend of many princes. Yet 'twould be best for you, my cock o' the walk, if you too were thinking of the princes whom you know. Here is De Beaurepaire come post-haste to Basle."

"De Beaurepaire here!" Humphrey exclaimed.

"Ay, and seeking for you everywhere. In my lady's chamber, beating on your door and cursing you loudly for being a seek-your-bed; making *poursuivants* of us to ferret you out, while you, *cadédis!* are strolling about the streets making odes to the moon, I do suppose, or dreaming of the fair Jacquette."

"Silence, brigand."

"Silence is best. You will hear enough when De Beaurepaire lets loose his tongue on you."

"Bah! I am not his servant nor in his pay as you are. I ride as his friend and help, not as his varlet. Yet, since he is here, I would see him. There is no man in all the world on whom I would

more willingly set eyes" ("for his own good," Humphrey added to himself). Then he said aloud, "Now tell me where he is. Lead me to him."

"'Tis that which I am here to do," Fleur de Mai said, "though, in doing it, I bid you observe I obey him, not you. Come, therefore."

"Where is he, I say?" Humphrey exclaimed again, stamping his foot.

"At the stables, looking to his horse, as a good soldier should. *Ciel!* did you not hear him bid me find you?"

"I heard you say 'I will tell him,' meaning me I suppose. Well! let us away to the stables, they are close at hand."

"Come then, my pretty page," grunted Fleur de Mai contemptuously, and venting the spite which, from the first, he had conceived against the good-looking young man who was always so handsomely dressed and made so much of by the Duchess, as well as always a guest at her table while he and Boisfleury were relegated to the common living rooms at whatever hostelry the band put up.

Following after the fellow, Humphrey drew near the stables while puzzling his head as to what could have brought De Beaurepaire to Basle since he knew that, holding the offices he did, the Prince had no right whatever to be out of France.

"Has the plot failed already," Humphrey wondered as he went; "is it blown upon and has De Beaurepaire put himself outside France for safety? Or has he been unable to stay longer away from his fair friend, the Marquise? If 'tis the first, he may now ride on with the Duchess to the Milanese territory: if the second he has fair surroundings for his amorous dalliance. While as for me--well!--in either case I am free of my hurried ride to Paris. If the bubble has burst the King knows as much of it as I: if love has drawn De Beaurepaire hither, the two principals of that plot, she and he, can work no harm at present. I shall have time before me to meditate on what I must do."

By now, he and Fleur de Mai were outside the stables, one half of the doors of which stood ajar, while, through the opening thus made, there streamed out the glimmer of a lantern. When, however, Humphrey had followed the other in--and when "Soupir," who was in her stall at the top, turned round and whinnied as she heard her master's voice exclaim, "Where is the Prince? I see no one"--he noticed, by hearing the latch fall even as he spoke, that the door had closed--by itself as it seemed--behind him. Turning round instantly at this, he saw that a man enveloped in a long cloak had shut it.

"Who are you?" he exclaimed, addressing this man whose back was towards him, and whose face was, consequently, invisible, "and why do you close the door thus?"

"I am the Captain la Truaumont," the man said now, wheeling round and facing Humphrey, "and I have to speak with you."

"Where is De Beaurepaire? He is not here!" while Humphrey, suspecting some trick, took a step backwards as he spoke, and, dropping his left hand on his rapier hilt, loosened it in its sheath.

"Where he should be, I suppose, in Paris attending to his present duties. Later, as you know, he will have others to attend to. Meanwhile, loosen not your weapon. It will not save you here. I know a trick or two more of fence than you."

"It would seem you know many tricks, Captain La Truaumont. In spite, however, of your ordinance touching my weapon, I will make bold to draw it," and, in a moment, Humphrey's right hand had whipped the rapier from its sheath.

"So will I mine," he heard Fleur de Mai say.

"And I mine," exclaimed another voice which Humphrey recognised as that of Boisfleury.

"You see," said La Truaumont, "you are caught. Your English blade will stand you in little stead against three stout French ones. Though I account mine of so little need that, as yet, it is not drawn."

"Later," said Humphrey who, while he recognised that he was tricked and caught in a *guet-apens* from which there seemed little likelihood of escape, felt no tremor of fear: "Later, we will see for that. Meanwhile, ere we commence our play, explain to me what is the meaning of this--lie--that has been told me."

"The meaning is," said La Truaumont, "that you were locked in your room for some hours while I and two friends were in the salon of Madame La Marquise de Villiers-Bordéville. Owing to a grating between the two rooms, which her respected father discovered later, you were undoubtedly enabled to overhear all, or the greater part, of what took place in that salon. Do you deny or acknowledge this?"

"I deny and acknowledge nothing. What you imagine is of no import to me. No more than how you have become possessed of this knowledge through Madame's 'respected father,' or he, himself, of it."

"Yet you shall learn. The waiting-maid of Madame la Marquise, whom you bribed with a gold louis and fair words and sweet looks to give you information of her mistress, was over-bribed with five times the sum by me--who saw you engaged in talk with her--to give us information of you."

"Which, being gained, did not prevent you from speaking out your plot to one another. Bah! tell a better tale or none at all."

"Softly, *beau garçon*. The maid was bribed to watch and see that you entered not into your room, it being thought you were still with your pretty Jacquette, or her mistress, or outside the house. Later, when you crept forth from your room, after locking it behind you, I comprehended that you had been in it all the time and that, also, you had doubtless heard all, the maid telling me you had not entered it since she took up her watch. Now, you *have* heard all, you hold us in your hand, our lives are at your mercy, unless----"

"Unless what!" speaking contemptuously.

"Unless we take yours."

"Take it then!" though, as Humphrey spoke, he turned his body a little so that, now, neither Fleur de Mai nor Boisfleury were any longer at his back but, instead, in a line with La Truaumont. Consequently, he had them all before him while the outer wall of the stable served as a base.

"You mean----"

"I mean, if you can."

"*Sangdieu!*" La Truaumont said, "though you are such a pretty youth you are also a bold one. It must be your mother's French blood makes you so! Yet, listen, Humphrey. We have all been comrades. Also remember, you are no tried *ferrailleur*. Fleur de Mai knows more of fence than you, and I than both."

"I will make proof of that ere many moments are past."

"Tush! be not a fool. A word can save you, one easy to speak since 'tis so small. You are of gentle birth in each land from which you draw your being; give me your word, *foi de gentilhomme*, that no breath of this ever passes your lips to any mortal soul; say 'Yes' to my proposal, and we clasp hands here and crack another bottle, as comrades should do, ere we sleep to-night."

"There is," said Humphrey quietly, and quietly contemptuous too, "another word as small as 'Yes' in your tongue. Smaller too, in mine. As easy, or easier therefore, to say."

"Fool! you mean----"

"I mean, 'No'. I mean that to-night I ride her," glancing towards Soupir, "across the frontier on my road to Paris, Fontainebleau or Versailles; wherever I may find Louis the King. I mean that every word I have overheard this night he shall hear from me a week hence or earlier. With, too, the names of those who have to-night complotted against his crown, his throne, his life--ah, brute! ruffian!" he broke off to exclaim as, at this moment, he saw Boisfleury creeping towards his mare; the sword the fellow held being shortened in his hand. "So, 'tis her you would first disable thereby to disable me." After which, and grasping his own weapon two feet below the *pas-d'âne* he swung it round as he advanced towards the creeping, crouching vagabond and, striking him full on the temple with the hilt, felled him to the straw of the stable.

"Now," Humphrey said, with a look on his face which possibly none had ever seen there before; a look black as the night outside, savage as the face of an aroused tiger, and with all of the devil that was in him aflame. "Now, be quick with your dirty work. There are but two against one left, and that one draws his thews and sinews from English loins. Be quick or soon there will be but one; the fight will be man to man. As for you, bully, come on." While, as Humphrey spoke, he thrust with his rapier full at the breast of Fleur de Mai and, had the burly scoundrel not stepped aside swiftly as he parried the blade, would have run him through from breast to back.

A moment later all was silent in that stable except for the muttered ejaculations, mostly of surprised admiration, which he could not resist, from La Truaumont; the heavy breathing of Fleur de Mai as Humphrey pressed him hardly, and the adder-like hissing of the two men's rapiers as they entwined with one another in a struggle *à outrance*.

CHAPTER XVI

"*Dieu des Dieux!*" whispered La Truaumont between pale lips, "it must be done. It will fall to me to do it. Yet the pity of it! He is a young lion and brave as a lion, too; one who, if it is not for me, will have put that *luron* out of the world for ever ere another moment is past. And I am a gentleman, yet must now stoop to be a murderer. I cannot. I cannot. I, Georges du Hamel, Sieur de la Truaumont! I, to become a murderer!"

In truth, the scene was a weird one on which the pale, trembling man gazed; that man who, in all his adventurous career, had never known what it was to tremble at the most terrible of impending catastrophes: that man who had looked on tremblings and qualms as fit only for women and puling children.

A weird scene, added to and made doubly so by the sickly rays emitted from the lantern behind whose dirty, horn encasement a guttering rush-light burned. Added to, also, in weirdness by the whimpering of the frightened animals who were startled by the clash of steel, and by the grunts of Fleur de Mai as he fought desperately while knowing, feeling sure, that his hour--his moment--was come, and by the occasional contemptuous ejaculations of Humphrey as he bade his opponent take courage since it was but the first bite of the blade which was agony, and to utter a prayer if he knew one.

By now Humphrey had driven the bully into a vacant stall and, having him there, had ceased to lunge at him, but, instead, with his blade crossed over the other's was slowly but surely beating down that other's weapon until the moment came when, swift as the lightning flash, he would run him through. And Fleur de Mai knew that this was so, that it would happen: there needed no jeers from his opponent to tell him what the bite of the steel would feel like. Yet, breathing heavily, his face, nay, his whole body, reeking with the sweat that burst from all his pores, he still endeavoured to save himself, to avert the moment of his doom. As that moment drew near, however, his heart failed him and he shrieked to La Truaumont for assistance, knowing full well that from Boisfleury there was none to be hoped, since he lay stunned outside the next stall and was himself in danger of his life each moment from the hoofs of the excited animal within it.

But from La Truaumont the assistance came not. Rough soldier as the man was, conspirator as he had become, part-assassin of the King as he had proposed and still proposed to be, he could not bring himself to steal up behind the man fighting so gallantly against the great bravo and run him through the back or maim him. He could not force himself to become a common murderer.

"Not yet," La Truaumont whispered to himself. "Not yet. If he kills Fleur de Mai, as he will, then I must engage him, though not until he has had breathing time. But not this way. And--my God!--we have been friends, comrades. Oh! that he had not learnt this secret."

Suddenly, however, he saw that the fight had taken a different turn.

Fleur de Mai, desperate, knowing himself lost, had resorted to one last trick: the last in truth that is left to the swordsman who knows his chance is gone. A trick that may succeed yet is doubly like to fail. One that may save an almost beaten man if it succeeds, but that, in failing, places him in no worse, no more perilous, position than he was before.

Therefore he tried it, doubting yet hoping.

Swiftly, with one last attempt--it was successful!--of escaping his enemy's blade, Fleur de Mai essayed the once well-known *botte de lâche*. He fell to the earth on his left hand, catching himself adroitly on that hand and, ere Humphrey could draw back his weapon to run him through and through, the other had thrust upwards at his conqueror's breast. He had thrust up with all his force and, even as he did so, knew that he had won. With a gasp the young man reeled backwards, staggered against the stable wall and, a moment later, fell to the floor insensible.

"So, so," muttered La Truaumont, "there was no need for me. I am quit of that." After which he stooped over Humphrey's now inert body, tore open his jacket at the breast and, thrusting his hand in over the heart, let it rest there a moment or so. "It beats still," he said. "It is not pierced. Yet, see," and he drew forth the hand and held it up before the other, who, by the miserable light of the horn lantern, saw that it gleamed crimson. "You have given him his death. There is a wound somewhere here big enough to let his life out, to set his soul free. What to do now?"

"Do now!" Fleur de Mai grunted, as he leant, blowing and puffing, against the side of the stall while supporting himself on the handle of his sword, from the point of which the red drops ran down and tinged the straw at his feet. "Do now! Why! Clear ourselves from this, my most noble captain who would not come to a comrade's help in a dire hour."

"I was not wanted. Two men were not needed to kill one. Your own skill has proved that"--"foul blow though it was," he added inwardly. Then he continued, "Best we desert the *folle furieuse* at once and ride to Paris. De Beaurepaire will absolve us when he knows what we have done to save him, even though we break faith with her. Add to which, we are wanted there and in Normandy. She can do without us, or, at least, she must."

"No, not ride," Fleur de Mai said, while as he spoke he assumed a greater tone of equality with La Truaumont than he had done before, if not a tone of command. For he it was who had vanquished the man who would have undone them, and he was not disposed to regard the accomplishment lightly. "No riding on these horses," glancing his eyes down the line of stalls. "Yet, still, away. To make for, not ride to Paris."

"I understand you not."

"Listen. I will propound to you. Let heaven give you the brains to comprehend."

"Beware. No insolence. I bear a sword more cunning than his," looking down at Humphrey.

"A *fico* for your sword! Again I say, listen. Let us back to the inn and be seen about it. Possibly 'tis not yet closed--you shall pay for a bottle. Then I will depart. Later you, too, can do so. On foot, together or alone, we can escape across the frontier; thus we are safe. In France none can touch us for what we have done amongst these Switzers, or, if they attempt it, let them beware. As for money, you have some I know full well. While he, too, perhaps, has some about him," touching Humphrey's body with the tip of his murderous sword as he spoke.

"What! You would rob your victim!"

"The spoils of war! Feel for his purse."

"Feel for it yourself. I need not money."

"I do." Whereon the ruffian calmly knelt down by Humphrey's side, ransacked his clothes and, at last, drew out a fairly well-filled purse which he clinked joyously in front of the lantern. "With this," he said, "we can--I mean, I can--buy me a horse across the frontier or get a seat in some coach, or *patache* or waggon for France. You need not money, you say. Therefore you, too, can do the same."

"Why not take our own horses?"

"Because thereby we tell the tale. This butterfly is found here dead; we are gone and our horses, too. What does that point to, *hein?* Whereas, there is mystery in it if we are also gone without our horses, and he, if dead here, and----"

The fellow paused, hearing a slight rustle in the straw and whispered, "Ha! he stirs. 'Tis best to finish the affair," and he lifted his sword.

"Nay, fool," said La Truaumont. "'Tis Boisfleury who moves. And--hark--he moans in his insensibility."

"Boisfleury! Boisfleury," the other repeated, musing. "Boisfleury. A crafty knave and violent. Listen again," he continued, whispering, "perhaps Boisfleury, too, will die. Then 'twill be thought they have killed each other--Boisfleury's blade is out; he would have maimed the mare. While," and now Fleur de Mai placed a brawny finger on La Truaumont's breast and peered into his eyes, "if he does not die, still," and he tapped the other with the finger, "he will be found here alive. He cannot stir yet. So, too, will that be found," pointing at the reddened straw. "So, too, that," pointing at the bruise on Boisfleury's temple. "You take me? The murder--will--be out. And Boisfleury will--pay--for it. They execute freely here, they say, for any little violence. He will not go scot free. But we shall. Come, man. Come. Away. A flask first and then off--off--to the frontier. And I have this," shaking the purse. "*Pardie!* the valet pays better than *madame la patronne*. Come."

* * * * *

The eternal clocks told the hours again and again; it was growing late--or early; outside in the street there was now no sound. Perhaps the watch slept, or, if it did not, at least it came not near that stable wherein two men lay. Or where, rather, one man lay against the wall and the other sat up outside a stall peering across the stones at him.

"So," that second man said to himself, "'tis Boisfleury who will be found here with him, is it? 'The murder will out, and Boisfleury will pay for it.' Ha! Well, we will see for that."

He rose now from his sitting position, or, instead, he crept upon his hands and knees towards

where Humphrey lay, while as he did so he muttered to himself. "No. No. No. The body will not be found. It may be that the murder will not out: that Boisfleury will not pay--for--it! But," and a hideous grin distorted his face which, added to the bruise on his temple, would have made him horrible to the eyes of any who should have beheld him, "others will--others shall. *Bel homme*," he muttered again, as now he touched Humphrey, "you will never reach Louis the King, but--another--may. And--and--peace to your manes!--what you would have told him shall be told by that other and well told, too. Nought shall be forgotten. Nought. Nought. Messire Fleur de Mai, M. le Capitaine de la Truaumont, Madame la Marquise--bah! Madame *la coquine*--de Villiers-Bordéville--Monsieur le Prince et Chevalier de Beaurepaire"--hissing out sardonically all these titles and appellations through his white lips as though it gratified him to repeat them to himself, "and you, Jew, call on your friend and master, the Devil, to help you when I tell my tale to the Splendid One."

And again he muttered, "The murder will out, and Boisfleury will pay for it," while, as he did so, he once more snarled like a hunted wolf.

"I cannot feel it beat," he said now, as he placed his hand beneath Humphrey's satin undervest, much as La Truaumont had done some hour or two before, "therefore he is dead. Still, the murder must not out. Boisfleury," he muttered again, as he harped on Fleur de Mai's words, "must not be made to pay for it. No. No. Instead, this murder must be hidden away from all men's knowledge. It must never be known. Never. It is well I was but stunned for a few moments after that blow; that I lay dark and snug and let them fight it through. Well, very well. Thus my skin is safe and the secret is mine."

He rose from the floor and left Humphrey's prostrate body now, and went to the stable door which the other two had closed behind them, and, opening it, peered out into the night. He saw then that all was still dark and black and silent; he also perceived that heavy rain was falling. There was no living thing about; not so much as a houseless dog shivering in any porch or stoop; neither was there any light in any window, nor any sound except the swish of the rain and the noisy swirl of the Rhine as, rushing by, it sped away upon its course towards and past France.

"The murder, for murder it was," he whispered to himself, "will never out. Never. Boisfleury has no reckoning to make, no scot to pay. But others have."

He went back now to where Humphrey lay, and, lifting him up, gradually got him hoisted on his shoulders, for, though neither big and burly as Fleur de Mai nor sinewy and bull-shaped as La Truaumont, he was wiry and strong. Then, going to the stable door again, he pushed it open with his foot, his hands being engaged in holding his burden on his back, and went out into the pitiless rain and so across the *place* to the high, built-up bank of the river.

"'Twill carry him on swiftly," he whispered to himself, "through ravines and past sunny meads until, at last, it throws him ashore leagues and leagues from here: 'tis better thus than lying in some town fosse or common graveyard. *Allez, pauvre homme*."

As he spoke he turned his back to the river, leaning downwards against the wooden rails erected to prevent the townspeople or children from falling into it, after which he let go of Humphrey's arms, which he had drawn over his shoulders, gave a strong, swift throw backwards of his body against the rails, and knew that his burden was gone. Gone with one heavy splash into the rushing, tumbling waters beneath; carried away as a cork thrown into those waters would itself have been carried away.

Nor, when he turned round swiftly an instant afterwards, was there any sign of Humphrey. He could not see a human mass rolling over and over in those turbulent, leaping waters, nor a white face gleaming from them, nor any glassy, lifeless eyes glaring up into the leaden skies above. The body was gone and had left no sign behind.

Boisfleury went back now to the stable, and, taking the lantern from the hook on which it hung, placed it on the floor and carefully picked up all the straw tinged or soaked with blood that he could find. Next, he picked up Humphrey's rapier--the cloak, he knew well enough, was on the victim's back excepting that part of it which he had wound tightly round his arm ere he attacked Fleur de Mai. Finally--after having carefully arranged some clean straw in the vacant stall with his hands--while all the time watched by the gleaming, startled eyes of the horses gazing at him over the divisions of the other stalls--he blew out the lamp and, shutting the door behind him, went over to the river again.

"There is no score to pay now," he murmured, as he flung the tinged straw and the rapier into the Rhine. "None, here, in Basle. None by Boisfleury. But elsewhere? And by others! Ah!"

CHAPTER XVII

"The Splendid One"--"*Le Dieudonné*"--otherwise Louis XIV., King of France and Navarre, sat in the *Galerie des Cerfs* at Fontainebleau before a blazing log fire, his feet and legs encased in long, heavy riding boots, half a dozen dogs round him, and, on his lap, a little spaniel of the breed afterwards known in England as that of King Charles, with whose long silky ears he toyed.

Near the King, yet still at some distance from him, were many members of his family and Court, including the Queen, who sat before a second fire farther down the room in the riding-dress in which she had that day accompanied her husband to a wild stag hunt in the forest. A little distance off, chattering, laughing--in discreetly subdued tones--were women who bore, or were yet to bear, names that the world will never forget. One there was, who, although already a recipient of the favours of Le Roi Soleil if not as yet of his love, sat plainly dressed and with her eyes demurely cast down, near to Madame de Montespan--*mâitresse en titre*--and only raised those eyes at some sallies from the children of the latter who played around her knees. After which she would let them steal swiftly towards the face of the ruler of France's destiny as well as of the destiny of half Europe. Yet, sometimes, too, she would smile softly at some thought not aroused by the children's gambols, when her lips would part and disclose her teeth which were already giving signs of the decay that, later, was to take entire possession of them. When this occurred, those near her would wonder what the woman who, as Françoise d'Aubigne, had been born in a prison, was thinking of. Perhaps, they speculated to themselves, on the jokes and gibes of her dead husband, the diseased and crippled poet, romancer and dramatist, Paul Scarron. Or, perhaps, on the lovers she had so often run to meet (when she was supposed to be at mass or confession) in the little, green-hung *parloir* lent her by Ninon de l'Enclos for her rendezvous: perhaps of the manner in which, slowly but surely, she was spinning her web around the King and enfolding him in it even as the spider spins its web and enfolds and strangles the fly.

Near her were, however, other women who, had they had their way, would themselves have strangled the life out of this woman, now, by creation and gift of estate and brevet, Madame de Maintenon, as willingly as she was secretly strangling the will and power out of Louis; women whom once the King had loved more fiercely than--though not so subserviently as--he was now beginning to love her. Close by *la femme funeste* was the once lovely Duchesse de Châtillon--now grown fat and troubled with a nervous twitching of the face--who had once disputed with Madame de Beauvais, who had never been lovely and who squinted, the right of having been Louis' first love. Here, too, was the beautiful Mdlle. d'Argenson now married to a husband who was reported to beat her; and many others. While, had the phantoms of all those whom the King had adored and then neglected, and then cast off, been able to appear, the room would have been full of sombre shadows.

Before the King there was placed a small table on which, at this moment, was piled up in great disarray a vast heap of letters that had that afternoon arrived by special courier, and which he was at this time engaged in reading after his return from the stag hunt. Or rather, he was engaged in reading all those which a courtier who sat next to him in a smaller, less comfortable chair, handed to him after he himself had perused them. This courtier was no less a person than the Marquis de Louvois, whose precise position was that of Minister of War but who, during the ascendancy that he had for some years been gradually obtaining over the King--in which ascendancy he ran a race of deadly rivalry with Madame de Maintenon--had become his right hand.

"Two letters, both of the same import," Louis said now, placing one which he held in his hand face downwards on top of another he had previously laid on the table; "two letters from two women, and each telling the same story. Letters coming, you observe, from widely different cities. One from London. The other from Geneva. Almost, it seems, there must be some truth in what they tell."

The King might also have added, had he not doubtless entirely forgotten the fact, that the two women from whom those letters came had each been strongly affected towards him and his interests if they had not, like so many others, allowed themselves to love him.

"Can it be true?" he went on now. "Can it? Yet, it must be, Louise is in a position to know all, everything that transpires, everything that is known in London: the Duchesse de Castellucchio must know every secret that her admirer possesses."

"If, sire, he is her admirer."

"What else should he be?"

"*Prétendu*, perhaps, sire. Perhaps *soupirant*, awaiting events and fortune. Needy men have often married rich women, heiresses, women who can set them on their feet again; and they have done so without loving them."

"It is true," the King said, speaking in tones so low that none but his companion could hear him, but still tones clear, keen, incisive.

Then, lowering his voice as he changed the subject, the King said, "Is *he* gone?"

"He is, sire, in this room."

"Summon him."

Obedient to this order De Louvois rose from the far from comfortable seat in which he sat, and, proceeding down the gallery while smiling with a smile that had little mirth in it and scarcely any cordiality, reached at last a courtier who, clad in a green hunting costume adorned with gold lace and having on his shoulder the device in gold of a bugle above a sun, was talking to a lady. This courtier was no less a person than De Beaurepaire in his dress of Grand Veneur, while the lady, who possessed a simpering weak face that, in her case, was no index to her mind, and whose little curls all over her head gave her an appearance of youth to which she no longer had any claim, was Madame de Sevigne.

"His Majesty," De Louvois said to the former, after bowing to the latter, "desires to speak with you."

"I am at his service as always," De Beaurepaire replied. "I trust he is satisfied with the day's sport. It was worthy of a royal hunt, thirteen stags being killed."

"No doubt, no doubt," De Louvois muttered, as now De Beaurepaire followed him to where the King sat, while he observed as they drew near their master that the two letters were no longer lying on the table as they had originally been placed.

"Ah! Louis!" the King said to his namesake, addressing his old playfellow as he had always done since boyhood, "so you have not yet left for your house at Saint Mandé, where you now keep yourself so much when you are not called forth from it by your duties to me. Your duties of huntsman and Colonel of my Guards."

"Not yet, sire. The evening runs on; later I will ask your Majesty to permit me to depart. May I crave to know if your Majesty is contented with the day's hunt?"

"Beyond doubt. What you do for me, either as purveyor of sport or as the chief of my guards," bearing again on the fact of the Prince occupying the latter position, "is always well done."

"And always will be, sire. As it has ever been since, if I may recall the past, it was done when I was permitted to be your Majesty's principal playmate and comrade."

"Yes," the King replied, his bright blue eyes resting softly on the other, "my playmate and comrade. My playmate and comrade," he said again. "They were happy days. Once, Louis, you saved my life from an infuriated stag here in this very Forest of Fontainebleau--you remember?--and once in the Forest of Vincennes from an intending assassin."

"I have not forgotten, sire. If your life is ever in danger again, which heaven forfend, I pray it may be I who shall again save it."

"I hope so," the King said gently, "I hope so. Having saved that life before it should be dear to you now. Now, when I am environed with enemies worse than starving footpads and assassins; when the Dutchman, Orange, would, they say, go down on his knees and thank God for my taking off; when the ministers of my imbecile brother-in-law, Charles of Spain, would have me assassinated on my own hearth if it could be accomplished. When," he continued, "there is not a country in all Europe, except that over which Charles Stuart now reigns, that does not thirst for my life. In truth, I need good friends like you, Louis, and you, Louvois. The one to whom I have confided the charge of my own guards, the other the care of my whole army."

"Your Majesty may rely on me and my guards," De Beaurepaire said. "Your Majesty may rely on----"

"I know. I know," Louis said. "Should I have confided that charge to you otherwise?"

"And on me for the whole of your Majesty's army," De Louvois exclaimed.

"That too, I know. Now," the King said, rising from his chair, at which action all the others who were seated in the room rose as one person. "Now, let us prepare for supper. Louis," he said, addressing De Beaurepaire, "I spoke of an imbecile but now. There is another in Paris like unto him, who has a reckoning to make with you. The Duc de Castellucchio. What have you done with his wife?"

"She should be in Milan now, sire, and in her sister's arms. I sent her on to Nancy from Paris well escorted. I did my best for her. If the Duc de Castellucchio has aught to say to me he will know where I am to be found."

"He will not endeavour to find you himself. He may, however, persuade my *Grande Chambre* to do so."

"I do not fear even that august assembly, sire, so long as I have your protection."

"Do you fear aught on earth, Louis?"

"Nothing, sire, except your displeasure," the Prince answered with the courtier's true--yet false--air.

When, however, some hours later, De Beaurepaire had withdrawn, not only from the Royal Presence but also from all the crowd of courtiers who hovered round *Le Roi Soleil*, and he was seated on the back of a fresh, mettlesome horse which was to bear him to Paris as swiftly as might be, he rode as one rides whose mind is ill at ease. For his head was bent forward over the animal's mane, his handsome features were clouded and the reins in his hand were carelessly held.

"How he harped on the word assassin," he mused, "how oft he repeated it. How, too, he dwelt on my command of his guards. Yet I am no assassin nor would-be assassin. Whatever evil I may meditate against him, I have never thought of that. Nor has there been any talk of murder, of assassination--of him--so far as I have heard. La Truaumont spoke nothing of this after he rode back from Switzerland, but only that I should put myself at the head of the discontented nobility of Normandy who so protest against heavy taxation and the ignoring of their rights. Assassination! God! it is an evil word. And--assassination of him, my friend, my early playmate! The King who has showered benefits on me full-handed."

Musing still, meditating always, he rode on down the great avenue that led towards the little town of Fontainebleau, and, past it, to Paris five-and-thirty miles off; while, as he continued upon his way, he still mused, though now his thoughts took a different turn.

"A pity 'tis," he pondered, "that Humphrey West pryed into their--our--secrets. I would have had him spared, or, at least, slain in open honest fight, not done to death by so foul a thing as that Boisfleury--as La Truaumont says he was after he confessed that he knew all. Boisfleury! A piece of vermin fit only to crawl in the gutters of Paris, to herd with the lowest, but not fit to take the life of young, handsome Humphrey West. Humphrey, poor Humphrey! And poor Mademoiselle d'Angelis. She loved him passing well."

He paused ere concluding what he was saying, and, reining in his horse, stared fixedly into a dense copse that bordered the side of the drive. He stared at something he saw moving suspiciously through the undergrowth and as though with the desire of avoiding attention. Recollecting, however, that, on such a night as this, and after a great hunt in the vast forest which, at that time, covered very nearly a hundred square miles of ground, and where, too, hundreds of villagers, *vauriens* and ne'er-do-wells generally would be about, he muttered, "Psha! what need to be surprised at the sight of any creeping, crawling vagabond here," and withdrew his hand with almost a feeling of self-contempt from the holster towards which he had thrust it.

As, however, he again set his horse in motion, he saw that which, in all likelihood, had caused the creeping figure to take shelter in the undergrowth, if it was not due to his own appearance. Coming up the long avenue from the direction where, afar off, Paris lay, was one of those vehicles known as a *chaise roulante*--a small carriage which would hold but one person; a thing not much larger than a sedan-chair, but which was transported on two wheels and had a seat in front for the driver. To-night, since it was entirely dark, a lamp placed by the driver's side was alight and the rays from it were sufficient to illuminate the whole of the interior of the small carriage.

Attracted by the appearance of this vehicle, wondering who could be coming in so plain and common a conveyance to Fontainebleau at this hour--Fontainebleau, with the King in residence!--De Beaurepaire could not resist the impulse of curiosity which impelled him to glance in at the occupant.

Then, suddenly, his hands so tightened on the reins they held that his high-mettled horse rose on its hind legs and, in its rearing, nearly threw him.

He had tightened the reins thus as he saw a white, death-like looking face gazing out as he glanced in at the window; a face from out of which two hollow eyes stared into the darkness of the night.

"*Dieu!*" De Beaurepaire whispered, even as he knew, as he divined, that he had himself turned as white as that sepulchral-looking face inside the *chaise roulante*, and while he felt his whole body suffused with the perspiration that burst from every pore. "He is alive. And he knows all. To-night the King will know all, too. He must be here to tell him all!"

CHAPTER XVIII

The *chaise roulante* went on slowly up the avenue towards where, a quarter of a mile ahead of it, innumerable lights shone from all the windows of the royal château; the driver, as it passed De Beaurepaire, saluting obsequiously the man whom, by his rich apparel and quantity of gold lacing and passementerie, he knew to be some great functionary of the Court.

And that great functionary, that man who, but a few moments before had boasted to himself, who had told himself proudly, that he was no assassin, sat on his horse revolving hurriedly within his mind whether he should not now become one. Now, ere another two or three moments had elapsed; now, ere the conveyance could advance another dozen yards upon its road. Revolving in his mind whether he should turn rein and rush at that carriage, thrusting his sword through the driver's heart and, ere he could help himself or cry for assistance--which would not be forthcoming!--through the heart of that white, sickly-looking man within. For, it could be done, he knew. Nothing could prevent him doing it, nothing could save either passenger or driver if he chose to do it. Nothing.

With the exception of that creeping creature who had glided from his sight into the darkness of the underwood, and who was probably far away by now, there was no living creature near. No living soul. And it was dark at last! One thrust at the man who had just saluted him, another at the other in the vehicle: the light extinguished and the *chaise roulante* thrown over on to its side as he, in his great strength could easily cause it to be--and--and--that was all! All that was needed. All! The Court was at supper: the menials busy attending on the Court. It could be done in a moment and he far away half an hour after. And none would ever know. That was all that was needed! Yet, was it--all? Would none ever know? Ah, God! would He not know? Would his own heart not know? Yes, always! Always! Always! He would have become a twofold murderer. And he was--a De Beaurepaire!

With a sound that, as it issued from his lips, might have been a curse--or a sob--he loosed his rein and dug his spurs into his horse and rode away from that carriage. Away to Paris to meet his confederates in the great plot; to tell them that they were betrayed; that the one man outside their own band who knew this secret was alive and had, must have, divulged it to the King. That this man was alive while he, their chief, had had the chance of slaying him, of silencing him for ever--and that he had let the chance pass.

"Yet," he muttered to himself, "also have I missed being a murderer. I have missed that. Thank God! And--and--I am a true De Beaurepaire still. One who has brought no blot upon the name, who has nought to blench at."

Meanwhile, the *chaise roulante* went on until it drew up at a side door of the château, and two lackeys sauntered down the stone steps to see what the business of its occupant was.

"Monsieur desires?" the first inquired, letting his eyes roll insolently, or, at least, indifferently--which in a menial is the same thing!--over the terribly ill appearance of the man inside and also over the shabby hired vehicle in which he arrived. "Monsieur desires?"

"To see His Majesty the King. At once. On a matter of life and death."

"To see His Majesty the King," the fellow repeated, while a faint smile spread over his face. Yet, even as it did so, the footman felt some wonderment creeping into his mind. For the tone of the new-comer's voice proclaimed that this was no common person; his white hand as it lay on the lower part of the window-frame was not white from ill-health alone: it testified that its owner was of gentle blood. Also, the look and bearing of the traveller spoke more plainly than silks and satins and laces would have done of who and what he might be.

"To see His Majesty the King," the man repeated again, while his fellow-servant stood by his side--"On a matter----"

"Valet!" the new-comer exclaimed now in a tone of command, "open the door and help me out. Stand not muttering there but do as I bid you, and then take my name to some chamberlain who will pass it on to His Majesty. It is known to him. He will see me."

The words, if not the tone in which they were uttered, had their effect. In a moment that contemptuous, scornful address, that voice of command from a superior to an inferior told the footman with what manner of man he had to deal. The nobility, the gentry, spoke thus--to such as he was--with sometimes a snarl, with sometimes a curse--often with a blow--but they alone did so. The rest--who had not yet gathered themselves together into that black cloud which, more than a hundred years afterwards, was to burst over France and destroy King, Court, Nobility and all who were better than themselves--were nothing. They were nothing but dogs, beasts of burden, toilers for their betters; providers of playthings, in the shape of their daughters and wives and sisters, of toys for their rulers and masters, to be afterwards broken and flung away.

Obediently to the dictatorial voice of the young man in the conveyance--whose ill-health they now supposed was due to some form of long-continued aristocratic debauchery--they did as they were bidden. They opened the door of the *chaise roulante* and helped its occupant out; they assisted him to mount the stone steps and led him to a deep fauteuil in the richly carpeted vestibule, and then the first lackey said in a deferential tone:--

"His Majesty the King is at supper. But, if the seigneur will give his name it shall----"

"My name is Humphrey West. The King is acquainted with it. Here, give me some writing things. I will set it down. Your master knows it well, I say. Then lose no time. I tell you, man, I come on serious import." After which, Humphrey took the pen and paper that the footman brought and wrote his name as largely and legibly as his weakness would permit. Bearing the paper in his hand the man went away, while his fellow walked to the farther end of the vestibule and entered into conversation with another member of his fraternity who was loitering about. A few moments later, however, the first one returned followed by a handsome young page dressed all in crimson and lace, over which latter his long fair hair streamed--a pretty youth who, bowing to Humphrey, said:--

"If monsieur will give himself the trouble to follow me, I will conduct him to the apartment of Monsieur le Marquis de Louvois. Yet, I protest, monsieur," he said, in a well-bred, soft voice as he witnessed Humphrey's painful attempts to rise, "you will not get so far alone." An instant later, in a totally different tone, while stamping his red heel on the richly carpeted floor, he said to the lackeys: "You dogs, do you not see that monsieur can scarcely rise? Give him your arms at once. At once, I say, or I will have you both whipped."

"At once, Monsieur le Duc. At once," the fellows exclaimed, rushing to obey the summary orders of this handsome youth. "We but awaited Monsieur le Duc's commands." After which they assisted Humphrey along the corridor, while the masterful young sprig of nobility walked behind them muttering further objurgations as he tossed his fair locks over his shoulder.

After traversing two corridors--during which time the aristocratic page was profuse in his regrets at the distance Humphrey had to accomplish in his enfeebled state--the group arrived at last in a large room furnished in dark, highly polished oak on which the lights from the candles in a huge silver candelabra were reflected as in a mirror. Then, when the footmen had retired, the page, after saying in a soft voice, "Monsieur le Marquis is here," bowed to Humphrey and backed out of the door after the others.

Looking round the room, which was so vast that one portion of it was quite in shadow, Humphrey saw that down at the farther end, and standing before a vast fireplace in which the logs were almost extinct, was a man. A man richly, handsomely dressed whose eyes were fixed on him. One who, when the page and the footmen had departed, advanced towards Humphrey.

"Nay," this man said, seeing the latter's efforts to rise from a chair to which the young Duke had motioned him, "do not distress yourself. I have heard that you are in sore plight. Now, Monsieur West--whose name I know well and my master, the King, knows better--tell me all you have to say. I am the Marquis de Louvois," and, as he spoke, he drew another chair up close to Humphrey and sat down in it.

That this man was De Louvois--De Louvois called by some "the terrible," by others "the unscrupulous," and by still others the "curse of France"--Humphrey knew very well, since he had seen him often. He knew, also, that not only was De Louvois the Minister of War but Louis' most confidential minister: the only confidant the latter had ever possessed since De Louvois had gradually ousted Colbert from the same position. He had often seen that tall, rugged frame and coarse-featured face which told of the many vulgar passions beneath, and of the evil temper and overbearing disposition which caused the man to be hated by all who surrounded him and were in a position to be tyrannised over by him, and, consequently, he knew well enough that he was speaking to the domineering autocrat who, if not the king, was the King's right hand.

"Monsieur le Marquis," Humphrey said consequently, "I have come post-haste from Basle after escaping from death by a miracle, to reveal to His Majesty the existence of a plot which threatens not only his throne but his life."

"His life. *Hein!*" De Louvois muttered, rubbing his square jaw reflectively; "his life as well as his throne. How is that to be? Come, tell me that. But, stay, first tell me how you chance to be in possession of this knowledge. Thereby I shall be better able to judge of what value that knowledge is."

Then, as he said this, Humphrey was astonished to see the powerful minister spring to his feet and assume a most deferential attitude while, as he did so, Humphrey heard at the same time a low clear voice say behind him, "And as I, too, shall also be able to judge."

Looking round as well as the stiffness and soreness from which he was suffering would permit him to do, the young man saw that the King, who must have entered the room softly, was standing behind him. The King who was now dressed in a black velvet Court suit devoid of all adornment, save a glittering diamond-set semblance of the sun that sparkled from out the rich lace of his breast. The King who, even as Humphrey endeavoured to struggle to his feet by aid of pressing his hands on the arms of the fauteuil, said, "Nay, Monsieur West, be seated; do not rise," and added, "I grieve to see you in such a condition," while as he spoke he held out his hand, sparkling with jewels, to the young man to kiss.

"Sire," Humphrey muttered, having done so, "I--I--must rise----"

"Nay. Instead, I will be seated," and Louis subsided into the chair just vacated by Louvois.

Then he said, "Now proceed with your tale. Tell all you know. Everything."

It took perhaps not more than a quarter of an hour for Humphrey to describe all he had overheard in that bedroom of his at Basle; all of what was said in the adjacent salon. Nevertheless, he told the story clearly and succinctly, omitting only one thing, namely, all mention of De Beaurepaire. *His* name he could not bring himself to pronounce, remembering that he had ever been treated kindly by the chevalier and also that, even now, he was not resolved as to whether the former was the head and front of the whole conspiracy or whether his name and position were not being used by the conspirators without his consent.

"So," said the King, "you overheard all this. And--the names of those who plotted thus? Do you know them? Outside that of La Truaumont with whom you rode in the train of the Duchesse de Castellucchio, are you aware of the names of the others? The name of the woman and also of the man passing as her father?"

"Sire, the woman is known as the Marquise de Villiers-Bordéville."

"The Marquise de Villiers-Bordéville. De Villiers-Bordéville!" the King repeated. Then, after a moment's reflection, he said, "There is no such title in France."

As, however, the words fell from his lips the attitude of De Louvois, while he leant nearer to him, showed that he desired to speak.

Whereupon the King said, "You know her, De Louvois?"

"Sire," the minister answered, "La Reynie, your *Surintendant de Police*, knows her. He has signalised her to me as dangerous."

"Who is she?"

"She is Louise Belleau de Cortonne. Her husband was Jacques de Mallorties, Seigneur de Villers and Boudéville. Villers and Boudéville are almost akin to Villiers-Bordéville. That husband died mysteriously by poison, she was tried at Rouen for his murder but acquitted. Now----"

"Yes, now?"

"She is a spy in the pay of either Holland or Spain or both, and she loves secretly--the--man--whom--we suspect."

"*Dieu!*" the King exclaimed, exhibiting, however, as little agitation as, in all the great crises of his long reign--the plots and conspiracies against his life, the combinations of half Europe against him, the treachery of those whom he had enriched and advanced, as well as the treachery, in one extreme case at least, of the women he had loved--he was ever known to show. Turning, however, to Humphrey now, Louis said in a voice that was absolutely calm:--

"Was any great name mentioned in this talk you overheard? Any name so great in all that pertains to it that, almost, it casts a shadow over, or pretends to cast a shadow over, the name of Louis de Bourbon?"

"Your Majesty," Humphrey whispered, "such a name was mentioned, hinted at. But--but----"

"But what?"

"More as the name of one who occupied the position spoken of by Monsieur le Ministre a moment past. As one who is admired, perhaps loved by----"

"That woman, the *soi-disant* Marquise?"

"Your Majesty has said it. More as that than as the name of a plotter, an intriguer."

"So be it. Let us pass from this. Now, Monsieur West, the name of the other man? The old man who travelled from Paris to take part in this grievous conference after having travelled beforehand from Holland to Paris. The man who passed as the woman's father?"

"Sire, as her father he passed under the name of Châteaugrand. But he was addressed and spoken of as Van den Enden."

"A man," exclaimed De Louvois, "well known to La Reynie and to me. A Dutch Jew, who has been everything: doctor, schoolmaster--he speaks all languages--a preacher of atheism, keeper of a bagnio, proprietor of a *tripot* and spy and plotter. But principally the latter."

"'Tis well. Very well. Communicate with La Reynie to-night. He will know his work. Now, Monsieur West, let me hear the rest of your story. When that is told you will remain here as the guest of the King whom you have striven so bravely to serve."

CHAPTER XIX

Half an hour later Humphrey had told all that had happened to him since he fell senseless from the foul thrust of Fleur de Mai; or rather he had told all he knew and could remember.

For memory, consciousness, had failed him from the moment when the truculent but craven bully had essayed that *botte de lâche* and he had sunk insensible upon the straw of the stable until, some two hours later, he had opened his eyes again upon a scene which brought neither recollection nor understanding to him.

He opened his eyes to see a glare shining in them that his disordered mind could not comprehend until, at last, consciousness began to regain its hold upon him, when he was enabled to understand that it proceeded from some miserable light--probably that of a rush-light--which had been placed behind a common bottle filled with water, perhaps with the intention of increasing the flare. He saw, too, that there was a fire burning in the corner of whatever the place might be in which he was lying: a fire made of sticks, not logs, which, since they emitted a horribly pungent odour as well as clouds of smoke, were probably green and damp. Next, as sensibility returned to him, he knew that he was very cold and wet, that he was shivering as a man in a fit of ague shivers, and that he ached all over as though he had been beaten.

A moment later, and when he was about to call out to know if there were any person within hail and, if so, to ask where he was, he heard a woman's voice speaking, yet speaking in so strange a patois, or dialect, that he had to devote all the attention his still giddy brain could furnish to grasp what the possessor of that voice said. Still, he was by a great effort enabled to understand the tenor of the words.

"Nothing on him, father, nothing!" the voice said. "*Himmel!* a trout of a kilo would have been a better haul. I would have cast him back into the river and have let the rapids have him. Yet," the speaker added, "his clothes are good, of the best. They are worth something and he is a handsome man."

"*Nein, nein*," a man's voice, gruff and harsh, replied. "I could not do that. Never! My heart is too soft for such deeds as that. And, Therese, I was once nearly caught and dragged into those accursed rapids myself, and I remember my awful fears, my sweat and agony as I was swept along towards them. I could not see another going that way and let him continue his course, especially since the net had got him. And, 'Rese, this is a gentleman; look at his hands. Even though he has no money in his pockets he must have friends and belongings. They will pay me well for the fish I have caught."

"He," the woman's voice said, "is handsome as a picture. When he is well and not so deathly white he must be beautiful as the paintings of the boy angels in our church. I wish I had not seen so handsome a face. I shall think of it for long."

"Bah! you women think of nothing but men and their looks. Now, come, help me to take off his garments and to put him in the warm straw before the fire. Maybe he will recover."

"*Ach, mein Gott!*" the woman screamed, as she drew near to Humphrey in obedience to the man's command, "look, look, father, his eyes are open, and, ah! what eyes they are. Oh!" she muttered to herself, "I have never seen such eyes, such lashes. 'Tis well you saved him. So handsome a man should never die."

"Good people," Humphrey said, finding his own voice now and wondering if it was his voice, it came so weak and thin from out his lips. "Good people, I pray God to bless you for your mercy to me. And--and--I have heard all you said. If there is no money on me now, as there should be, still I can reward you well. I am not poor."

"Who are you?" the woman, or rather girl, asked in her strange jargon.

"I am a gentleman. I have substance. You shall be well rewarded."

"How came you in the river?"

"Heaven alone knows. I was stabbed in a fight in Basle. Rather tell me how I came here."

"I had a net stretched across from this side to the other," the man said. "The river narrows here and it is easy to get over. When the storms come, the great salmon trout and the pike come down from Rheinfelden. I thought I had two at the least, if not three, when I saw the net nearly torn off its ropes as it caught you."

"They threw me in the river then," Humphrey mused. "It must be so. Ah! if I live, *gare à vous*, La Truaumont, and you, Fleur de Mai. Heaven help you if we ever come face to face again or I live to reach the King." Then aloud, he said, "How far is this from Basle?"

"A kilometre. Opposite, across the river, is the Fort de Stein."

"A kilometre! I have been borne that far and I am alive! God, I thank Thee." Then turning to the man he said, "Is my wound serious? Have you looked to it?"

"Nein. I knew not even that you were wounded. Where is it?"

"Below my right shoulder. Through the lung, I fear."

"Rese," the man said to his daughter. "Assist me to remove the gentleman's garments."

"Nay, nay. Let the maiden retire. You can do that."

With a grunt and a laugh the fellow did as Humphrey bade him, and did it gently too, so that in a few moments the latter's body was bare while the orifice of a gaping wound was plainly visible two inches below the shoulder. Yet, probably owing to the action of the water through which Humphrey had not only been borne but tossed upon, that wound was neither livid nor covered with blood and was, doubtless, thereby prevented from mortifying. The man found, too, by running his hand under Humphrey's back, that the weapon had not passed through the body, while, by pressing the side and finding that the young man neither winced nor groaned, he opined that the sword had not entered very deeply.

"I am no surgeon," he said; "I can do naught. Yet there are good ones in Basle. When daylight comes, if you will have it so, I will get out my mule and cart in which I take the fish I catch to Basle, and will drive you there."

"Ay," Humphrey said, "in heaven's name do so, I beseech you. And then you shall be rewarded. The Duchess with whom I travel----"

"You are a friend of duchesses?" Therese and her father exclaimed, while the first added, "Was it for this woman you were stabbed and thrown into the river?"

"I rode in her service," Humphrey replied; when, again addressing the man, he said, "You shall be well paid for your services."

"Sus! sus!" the latter grunted, "I seek not reward for saving life. Yet you are rich you say, and we--God help us!--are splitting with hunger and poverty. Now, let me strip you," he went on, "and wrap you in the straw--we have no other covering even for ourselves--and I will dry your habiliments. Meanwhile, a rag to your wound must suffice till we reach Basle. It will not be long; the dayspring will come soon. Sleep, seigneur, sleep; sleep is both food and balm to those who have naught else."

This story Humphrey told--even more briefly than it has been set down--to the King sitting before him and to the harsh, severe-looking minister standing by his master's chair.

He told, too, of how he reached Basle where his wound was dressed by a learned doctor, and of how his bruises and contusions--caused by his being tossed by the rushing river against boulder stones and logs borne down like himself on its cruel bosom--were soothed by cunning unguents and salves as well as might be. He narrated, also, how he found the Duchess and Jacquette almost distraught at his disappearance as well as at that of La Truaumont and Fleur de Mai, while their consternation was enhanced by the disappearance next morning of Boisfleury who had also decamped on the pretence of seeking the Syndic. All were gone, yet, with the exception of Boisfleury's horse, upon which the vagabond rode away, their animals remained in the stalls.

One thing alone Humphrey did not tell the King and De Louvois. He made no mention of how he and Jacquette had met and been together again; how the girl had wept and sighed at his sufferings and laughed and smiled at having him safe in her arms once more, and how she had nursed him and cared for him till he was ready to set out for Paris. Nor did he tell the King how Jacquette swore that the moment her mistress was safe in Milan she would return to Humphrey, or he should set out again to her, and how, the next time they met, they would be wedded and never part more.

"And this Fleur de Mai, the ruffian who bears this *nom de fantaisie*," the King asked, "this truculent *luron*, who and what is he? A hired bravo or a conspirator? What? When we have him fast in our hands, as we may do yet, which is he most worthy of, the wheel, the gallows, or the axe?"

"Your Majesty, I know not. His bearing and manner are those of a swashbuckler."

"Sire," De Louvois said now, producing two papers from his pocket, which papers were the letters the King had been reading before supper, the letters of two women. "Sire, the Duchess of Portsmouth writes that in this vile plot which has come to her ears at the English Court, a name

is mentioned. That of the Chevalier la Preaux. This may be he, for he, too, is Norman like all the rest--except one. Except the greater one."

"Monsieur West," the King said, as he rose to his feet, and Humphrey, determined to be no longer seated while His Majesty stood, struggled to his feet in spite of Louis' protest, "I would you were a subject of mine, a man born wholly French. Then I could repay you for your care of me and my crown and of, perhaps, my life. Yet, though you are none such, I shall not forget."

"Sire, I--I--could not learn this and not speak. Had I ne'er been permitted to enter your presence I could not have done so. But, sire, my mother! Your Majesty obtained the restoration of our lands and----"

"Ah," the King said, "your mother. She is well and happy?"

"She is well and happy, sire. She owes all to your Majesty."

"She should be proud of you. Proud of such a son." Then, as again he gave Humphrey his hand to kiss, he bade Louvois see to it that the former was well lodged in the château and treated as one of his most honoured guests.

Whether that treatment would have been good for Humphrey had he been heart whole up to now may perhaps be doubted. For, although in England it had been his lot to be surrounded by the butterflies, male and female, of the giddy Court, there had never been anything which singled him out as one to whom particular attention should be paid by the fair sex--except his good looks.

But here, where--though nothing was absolutely known of what he might have done to make him signally favoured by the monarch who ruled the destinies of all in France--the thistle-down of gossip and chatter blew freely about, and whispers were circulated that Humphrey West was one marked out by *Le Roi Soleil* for high distinction, while, as at Whitehall, his appearance alone would have caused him to be much courted and petted by the favourites and demoiselles of the superb Court.

Therefore, maids of honour, themselves of high birth, vied with those splendid dames who glittered in the dazzling beams of the great ruler's smiles: one and all endeavoured to intoxicate the young man with their charms and their *câlineries*. They played at nursing him, at waiting on him, even at being driven mad for love of him; and it may be that, in more than one case, the love was more real than simulated. They also, when it was possible, abstained from forming part of the King's retinues that daily set out for the hunts in the huge forest; of joining those dazzling *cortéges* of which beautiful women, soldiers of distinction, courtiers, statesmen, Church dignitaries, young girls and scheming *intrigantes* all formed part. They abstained so that they might be with Humphrey whose heart was far away, whose mind held only one image, that of Jacquette, and who, in consequence, could not be tempted by pretty faces and sparkling eyes, love knots and love-locks, subtle perfumes and flowing robes fashioned more to suggest than to disguise the shapely forms beneath.

One woman, too, who, in all that brilliant if garish Court, played the strongest, most dominating part of any, while pretending to play the most retiring and self-effacing, had a smile always for Humphrey, a quiet, modest word and, now and again, a glance which, though it told the young man nothing, must, at least, have assured him that if her friendship was worth anything he possessed it.

The woman who was to be in years to come the evil genius of the splendid monarch now in the full pride of his manhood; who was to cause him to commit one of the wickedest acts ever perpetrated by any monarch--the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. To egg him on to deeds of aggression and spoliation which, at last, caused the whole of Europe to enter into a coalition against him that, if it did not eventually hurl him from his throne, did send him to his grave unlamented by his people.

The woman who, a subtle and crafty wanton in her youth, became an intolerant bigot in her riper years; the woman "so famous, so evil and so terrible"--as the most celebrated of all diarists, the Duc de St. Simon, termed her--who had once been the wife of the diseased and malignant poet, Paul Scarron, and will be known to all time as Madame de Maintenon.

CHAPTER XX

It was a bright, sunny morning when De Beaurepaire drew rein in the long, dirty street of Charenton, and, turning his horse's head, directed it towards the hamlet of Saint Mandé where his Lodge was. The Lodge that, enshrouded in trees, stood on the edge of the Forest of Vincennes and was one of the many which, wherever there was a royal forest, were the residences of the Grand Veneur of the time being.

Leading his animal to the stables, while observing that already the heavy curtains were drawn apart and the inmates stirring, he tethered it in a stall and fetched a feed for it from the bin near at hand. After which he locked the stable door with the key he had drawn from his pocket, retraced his steps to the garden, and, mounting to the verandah, went towards the window.

If, however, he did this with the intention of tapping on it and thus attracting the notice of whosoever might be, within that room, this intention was anticipated.

As his heavy riding-boots sounded on the crushed shell path and his gilt spurs rang at his heels, he heard the *frou-frou* of a woman's long robe on the parquet of the room and saw the thick folds of the stamped leather hangings drawn aside by a slim white hand, and, next, one side of the window opened.

A moment later he was in the room, and the woman who called herself Emérance de Villiers-Bordéville stood before him.

"So," she exclaimed in a whisper, the very murmur of which told of her joy at having him with her once more; "so you are back once more. And almost to the moment, as you promised. Ah! I have so longed to see you since you quitted Paris for Fontainebleau." Then she said, "Come, see, a meal is prepared. Come, refresh yourself, eat and drink and let us be merry. We meet once more."

Yet, as she spoke and while gazing up into the handsome face of the man before her, she saw something in that face, something in the dark eyes that were looking down into hers, that startled her.

"What is it?" she asked in a low voice, a voice that was almost hoarse in its depth. "What?"

"I will tell you," De Beaurepaire answered, "but first a drink of wine. I am parched and dry with my ride, and also with a fever that consumes me within. Give me the drink."

Obeying him, the woman went over to the table which stood at one side of the room; a table set out with cold meats, a pasty and some salads and, also, with a large flask of wine, when, pouring out some into a goblet, she brought it to the man she loved. As he drank, eagerly, thirstily, she let her eyes rest on him till he had finished the draught. After which she said again, "What is it?"

"This. Humphrey West is alive. La Truaumont has either lied to me or been deceived."

"Alive!" Emérance repeated, her face blanching as she spoke, while the softness of it seemed to vanish, to leave it in a moment, and her \ eyes became dim. "Humphrey West--the man who heard--as they all thought--what was said in that room at Basle."

"Yes. Alive and--at Fontainebleau."

"*Malheur!*" while, as Emérance spoke, the goblet she had taken from his hand after he had finished drinking fell to the floor and shivered into a dozen pieces on the parquet. "At Fontainebleau! Where the King is. So," and she shuddered as though the room had suddenly grown cold. "You are undone. Lost. Oh!"

"You are undone. Lost," she had said. She had not said, "We are undone." And, as she said it, the man knew, if he had never known before, how strong her love was for him. There had been no thought of, no fear for, herself springing quickly to her mind in learning the danger that overhung them both, though there could have been no possibility of her failing to understand that what threatened him threatened her also; she had thought only of him. She had not said, "We are undone." Her wail, her terror had been for him alone.

"Emérance," De Beaurepaire said, taking her to his arms now and kissing her, while--whatever the man's faults were, and they were many and grievous!--indifference to the self-abnegation of this thing that, he now knew, loved him so, could not be counted among them. "Emérance, I think not of myself but you. I have staked and lost. I must stand the hazard. *Les battus payent l'amende*."

"No, no," Emérance wailed. "What! You think of me! Of me the schemer, the adventuress--the woman who is herself of Normandy, who hoped to see this proud, masterful ruler beaten down by the Normans he despises and treats evilly. The woman who hoped to see the man she loves, the man she worships, help in the work and, perhaps, assume that ruler's place. Who am I that you should think of me? Yet, nevertheless, this sunders our lives. Or! no--no!" she went on, a wan smile stealing on to her face. "For though we go out of each other's lives it may be that we shall set out from each other together, at the same time--though we go different dark roads at parting."

Excited, overmastered, by what her imagination conjured up, at what must be their fate if their conspiracy was known by now to the King, she went toward the table again and, filling another glass, drank it to the dregs. After which, as though inspirited by what she had drunk, she came back to where the other stood, while saying:--

"Tell me all. Have you seen him at Fontainebleau?"

"Five hours past. Ill, white, like a man who has been close to, who has knocked at, death's door, yet has been refused admittance. In the great avenue, on his road to the château."

"You could not have been mistaken?"

"I was not mistaken. Our eyes did not meet as he looked out of the crazy conveyance in which he sat. But in seeing him, I learnt all."

"Was La Truaumont deceived in what he repeated to you--or--or is that wretch, Van den Enden, a double traitor? Yet--yet--you told me ere you went to Fontainebleau that the former said La Preaux forced Humphrey West to fight with him and slew him, leaving the blame to fall on Boisfleury. That he saw the young man slain."

"La Truaumont was not deceived nor did he lie. He saw the fight: he saw the other fall. Yet, now, I have seen him alive. This very day. Alive and making his way to the King."

"And ere the Englishman was killed he had killed Boisfleury?" Emérance asked meditatively.

"Nay. La Truaumont thought not so but that he only wounded him sorely."

"They should have killed him ere they left Basle. They should have killed them both. They should have made sure of their silence for ever. Thus, too, when they were found they would have been thought to have slain each other; their lips would have been sealed--you would have been safe."

"Emérance, think not of me alone. I am but one."

"But one! You are the only one of whom I can think. What are a thousand lives, a thousand murders, to me so long as you are safe!"

Before this overmastering passion of the woman for him, this love that, like the love of the tigress for its mate or its young, would have swept the lives of all in the world away to preserve the one thing precious to it, De Beaurepaire stood speechless. In truth it startled him--startled even him who had known so much of women's love yet had never known such love as this.

"Nevertheless," Emérance went on, fearing that the violence of her passion, of her fears for her lover, might make him deem her what she was not, "I would have had no blood shed, and treacherously shed, too, had you been safe. Had I known before what I know now since La Truaumont and I have met again in Paris, had I guessed that this Englishman had overheard all, the attempt to do him cruelly to death should not have been made. At least, that ruffian, La Preaux, who masquerades under his buffoon's name of Fleur de Mai, should not have tried his treacherous *botte* on him. I would have seen the eavesdropper, have sworn him to secrecy, and have saved him."

"La Truaumont would have saved him if he could. He endeavoured to swear him to silence, to make him give a promise to breathe no word. Had the other consented all would be well. But----"

"But?"--with an inward catching of her breath.

"But he refused scornfully. He boasted how, that very night, he would be on his road to Louis to divulge all. Therefore it had to be. His blood was on his own head. If he had slain Fleur de Mai, as it appears he went near to doing, La Truaumont would have slain him." And De Beaurepaire muttered, "it had to be," while adding, "and still it was not done."

Shrugging her shoulders the woman exclaimed, "Yes, and--alas!--still it was not done. He is alive and the King by now knows all. Only--will he believe upon this man's testimony alone? Will he act at once, without further proof or corroboration, ere he is sure?"

When Emérance de Villiers-Bordéville, as she called herself, asked this question, she did not know, could not know that there had already come a letter from England from Louise de Kéroualle, Duchess of Portsmouth--herself a spy of France--to Louis, telling him as much as, if not more than, Humphrey West could tell him of the Norman plot against him. Nor could she also know that, from Basle, had come another letter from the Duchesse de Castellucchio telling him in more guarded language (since she, at least, could not betray De Beaurepaire) of what she had gathered, and bidding him beware of Spain and Holland.

"I know not what he will do, nor what he will believe, nor if any name is yet divulged," the Prince replied, "though, when he spoke with me last evening ere I left him, he dwelt strangely, ay! and strongly too, on our boyhood's companionship and my command of all his guards. But, Emérance, tell me what was said of me that night in your room. Was my name spoken so that this man listening in the next one might easily catch it; was my share in all laid bare? Think, recall;

and speak boldly to me. For if it was----"

"Yes; if it was, what then?"

"Then there is but one thing left. Flight----"

"Ah! From me?"

"Nay, never. But flight together. I will never part from you in life. As man and wife we fly together."

"Ah!"

"Never otherwise! Now, Emérance, speak. Tell all."

"If," Emérance said, after meditating deeply for some moments, while there was on her face the look which all have seen when those with whom they converse are thinking carefully, or endeavouring to recall some once spoken words; "if--if--this man overheard me and La Truaumont the first night, then--*he*--heard your name. Because La Truaumont said that you might rise to even higher flights than the proud position of a De Beaurepaire."

"*Dieu des Dieux!* If he did hear! Well! On the next night?"

"On the next night," Emérance continued, "ah! let me recall. Yes. On the next night your name was again uttered. By me--accursed be my tongue!--when I spoke of rejoining you here in Paris, and by La Truaumont by the sobriquet I love to hear applied to you, that of '*Le Dédaigneux*.' For disdainful you are to all--except to me," her voice sinking to a murmur as she added those last two words.

"Ha!" De Beaurepaire said with a grim smile, "if Humphrey West heard no mention of my name by you, he would scarce know that I am '*Le Dédaigneux*'."

"Alas," the woman almost wailed, "'twas touched upon that the King's guards had been despatched to join the main body of the army: that *Le Dédaigneux* had taken heed for that. *Le Dédaigneux*--their colonel."

"Enough. With this he knows all. And by now Louis and De Louvois, too, who never leaves his master's side, know it also. It is enough, more than enough. When the Court returns from Fontainebleau four days hence La Reynie will know it as well."

"Four days! You have four days in which to escape, to hide yourself, to put some frontier between you and the King's wrath! Ah! heaven! you are saved."

"And lost also. Once I cross any frontier I shall never recross it, never return to France. Never. Never. And I am a De Beaurepaire; my blood, my life is drawn from France and I shall never see it more."

"Nay. With time the King will forgive. You have often said his heart is kindly, that he is never cruel. That he has forgiven much to both women and men who have deceived him."

"Ay, to both women and men. But the women were false to his heart alone, and there are thousands of other women in France as fair as they: a king woos and wins where he will. And the men he has forgiven have but forgotten for a moment the difference between him and them; but when it is his throne, his crown, that is in danger, he never forgives."

"Seize then upon these four days; fly to Holland or Switzerland, or Italy, and escape. Sell your charges to those whom you have oft told me would buy them, and fly."

"And you? You--my love?"

"As you bid me I will do. If you will have me by your side, or go before you or stay behind, you must but say the word and I obey. Do with me as you would with your favourite dog; leave me or take me.

"I will never leave you," her lover murmured. "Never. We escape together----"

"Or we fall together. Is it not so?"

"It is so. And, remember, our danger and our safety go hand in hand. If either of us is found in Paris when once La Reynie's blood-hounds are let loose, there will be but one end for both."

"No matter so that we share that end. Yet," she said suddenly, recalling what both had forgotten. "There is La Truaumont. Also Van den Enden and the bully, La Preaux. The former, at least, should be warned."

"La Truaumont shall be. As for the Jew and La Preaux, let them look to themselves."

"Nay! nay! That is madness. If they are taken ere we are safe they will divulge all. To save ourselves we must save them."

CHAPTER XXI

The following day De Beaurepaire rode into the great courtyard of Versailles, while, as he did so, the sentries of the Garde de Corps du Roi saluted him, the guard turned out, and the drummers sitting outside in the morning sun sprang to their drums and hastily beat them in honour of him who commanded all the various regiments of the King's Guards. He wore now the superb *justaucorps* of gold cloth and lace to which, by virtue of his charge and office, he was entitled; across it, under his scarlet coat, ran his white satin sash stamped with golden suns: his three-cornered hat was laced with galloon, his sword was ivory-hilted, with, surmounting its handle, a gold sun.

For a moment the man who, as he had said to Emérance had set his life upon a cast, who had murmured half-bitterly, half-sadly, after knowing that the die of Fate had gone against him, "*les battus payent l'amende*," looked round on those receiving him with homage and deference, and, as before, his thoughts were terribly poignant while tinged also with self-contempt.

"And I had all this," he murmured as, mechanically he acknowledged the salutes; "and have thrown it away for a shadow; a chimera. Never more will drums roll to salute me nor shall I hold high command. Instead, there is nought for me but a strange land where all who dwell therein will know why I am an exile, a fugitive; and I shall know that I am a traitor. A man false to his King, false to the master who was his friend in childhood, false to the oath of fidelity he has sworn. Fool, doubly-accursed fool and knave that I am!"

Dismounting from his horse and throwing the reins to a soldier who advanced to take them, he bade another man summon De Brissac, who commanded the Garde du Corps, to his presence, when, entering the Lodge, he sat down to await the coming of that person.

A moment later De Brissac had entered the room, and, after greetings had been exchanged, that of De Beaurepaire being cordially condescending while De Brissac's was coldly respectful, the former said:--

"De Brissac, I have ridden here specially to see you and speak with you----"

"Your Highness," De Brissac repeated, giving the other the most superior title by which he had the right to be addressed, "has ridden here specially to see and speak with me!" while, as he said this, there came a little nest of wrinkles outside each of his eyes that gave to his face a look of bewilderment. "To see me! Particularly me?"

"Particularly you? Yes. Why!" exclaimed De Beaurepaire, with an attempt at mirth, "is it so strange that I, who am Chief of all the Guards as you are Chief of the Garde du Corps, should have some matter on which I desire to speak with you?"

"No, no. Without doubt not strange. Yet--I am only De Brissac--le Sieur de Brissac--and you are Prince and Chevalier de Beaurepaire."

"Nay! We--are--both--soldiers."

"Yes, we are both soldiers," the other said, yet his tone was so strange that his Chief should have observed--perhaps did observe--it. If, however, the latter was the case he made no sign of doing so. Instead, he continued:--

"You spoke to me not long ago of one who was eager to buy some great charge under the King."

"Yes. I so spoke. Is, then, such a charge vacant now?" De Brissac's tone being still cold and distant as he spoke.

"There is, and if he who would purchase such a charge is sufficiently high in rank, if the King will permit him to buy it, he may buy mine. My charge of the guards. That of Grand Veneur cannot be sold."

"Yours!" De Brissac said, and now he took a step back from where he stood as a man steps back when utterly astonished at what he hears. "Yours!"

"Yes, mine. I--I am not well in health. And--I have other calls on me."

For a moment De Brissac said nothing but stood looking at his superior strangely. Then he said:--

"The person of whom I spoke holds so high a position that the King would not oppose him in his desires. Only----"

"Only!"

"He will not buy your charge."

"What!" De Beaurepaire exclaimed, while, with a sneer, he added, "is he so high that even it is too low for him. *Cadédis!* he must be high indeed." Then, rapping the table irritably, he said, "Come, Monsieur de Brissac, explain yourself. Who is this man, and why should my charge be the one he will not buy?"

Still with a strange look in his eyes and with that little nest of wrinkles on either side of his face very apparent, De Brissac glanced out through the window and saw that his men were all engaged at their various occupations; some fetching water from the spring for their horses, some attending to their animals and rubbing them down, and some cleaning and polishing their accoutrements. After having done which he came nearer to De Beaurepaire than he had been before, and said:--

"I will explain myself. The man of whom I spoke will not purchase your charge because--it is no longer saleable."

"What!" exclaimed the other, rising to his feet, while his hand instinctively sought his sword-hilt. "What? Is this insolence? Explain, I say."

"I will. Yet take your hand from off your sword or I may be forced to draw mine. Likewise, look through that window. Those men are under my command for the time being, not yours----"

"Explain," the Prince repeated, stamping his foot angrily. "If they are not under my immediate command, you are."

"No, I am not. A general warrant for your arrest is out this morning. You are no longer in command of the King's Guards nor any portion of his army. In coming here to-day you have walked into the lion's den. Prince Louis de Beaurepaire, give me your sword. I arrest you on the charge of high treason against your King."

For a moment the Prince stood gazing at the man before him with so strange a look that the other--brave soldier as he was, and one who had given his proofs in many a campaign--scarce knew what might happen next. The handsome face usually so bronzed by the open-air life De Beaurepaire had always led was bloodless now, so, too, were the lips, while the veins upon his forehead looked as though they were about to burst. Yet this transformation was not due to any of those sudden gusts of passion to which he was known to be so often subject when thwarted, or contradicted, or addressed familiarly and on terms of equality by those whom he considered beneath him--as, in truth, he considered most men to be.

Instead, his pallor proceeded from far different emotions that had now taken possession of him. It proceeded from the thought, the recollection which sprang swift as lightning to his mind that, with his arrest, all hope, all chance was gone of warning Emérance, of putting her on her guard and giving her time to escape. This first--above all things--was what almost stilled the beating of his heart; this and his fears for the safety of the bold, daring, reckless woman who loved him so, and who, herself, had thought only of *his* safety. This--to which was added in a slighter degree the thought that La Truaumont, who had served him well and faithfully while serving his own ends and those of his Norman friends, could no more be warned than she.

"You arrest me!" he said now to De Brissac who stood quietly before him, his eyes upon his face; "you arrest me, you tell me I am removed from any command. Also, you ask me for my sword and hope to obtain it--a thing never asked or hoped for by an enemy. So be it. But, first, I must see your warrant for your demand. If not, you will have----"

"My warrant! Prince Louis, do you think that I should act thus to one who was last night my superior, my commander, if I did not possess a warrant. It is here," and he went to a table covered with papers and took up one of them. After which he added, "The same thing will be in the hands of every officer commanding a garrison or fortress in France as soon as the couriers can reach them."

"I left Louis at six on the night before last," De Beaurepaire said aloud, "and--and--we parted as we have ever parted, as friends." But to himself he added, "An hour later that man might have seen Louis and told him all. An hour after that the couriers might have set out. Had I not tarried at my Lodge, had I but mounted Emérance on another horse at once, we should have been safe, or almost safe, by now."

Then he put out his hand and took the warrant from De Brissac and read it. It was brief and ran thus, after being addressed to various commanding officers, as the latter had said:--

"It is our will and pleasure that Prince Louis de Beaurepaire be removed from his charge of Colonel of our Guards, and that, wherever he may be seen, appear, or be signalised, he be arrested and detained until our further pleasure is known. The which we charge you not to fail in and to use all proper caution and expedition, subject to our displeasure if you do so. On which we pray God to have you in His holy keeping. Written at Fontainebleau this tenth day of September in the year of our Lord 1674.

"Signé. LOUIS R. F. et N.

"Sousigné. LOUVOIS

(*Ministre de Guerre*)."

"Your highness observes?" De Brissac said; "it is the King's orders."

"I observe," De Beaurepaire answered in a low tone.

"Yet take heart," the other said. "This may be no serious thing. Louvois makes many charges now and pushes the King to many things he would not do without him at his side."

"It may be so. Ah! well. My sword! My sword! You would have that?"

"I must," De Brissac said, not without a tremor in his voice. For he remembered De Beaurepaire (then a young man of twenty and the handsomest of all the flower of the *haute noblesse*) at Arras and the Siege of Laudrécies, and recalled his bravery and reckless daring. And now it had come to this!

"Take it," his prisoner said, drawing the blade from its sheath, kissing it, and then handing it to him, "take it. I pray God that ere long I may receive it back again."

"Amen," De Brissac said solemnly.

"Now, what next?" De Beaurepaire asked.

"The next is--the Bastille."

"And after?"

"I know not."

"Ere I set out, tell me one thing. And before you answer listen, De Brissac; listen as a soldier to a soldier, a friend to a friend. There is a woman whom I have learnt to love----"

"Ah!" exclaimed the other, recalling how often this handsome patrician's name had been mixed up with the names of women and knowing, as all in Paris knew, how the hearts of those women had gone out to him.

"A woman whom I love," De Beaurepaire went on, his voice sounding broken to the other's ear. "A woman who loves me and has long loved me fondly, tenderly, as I now love her. Not a woman who is one of those giddy, heartless butterflies who circle round Louis' Court, who change their lovers as they change their robes; who love one man to-day and another to-morrow; no! not one of these. But, instead, one who is poor, unknown to our world, and of, I think, for in truth I do not know, humble origin--yet whose love and devotion pass aught I have ever met. One who would rather die with me, for me, than live with others."

"*Die!*" De Brissac said, turning away his head as he spoke, since, rude soldier as he might be, and acquainted only with camps and battlefields and sieges, there was a heart in his bosom. "Nay, surely there is no thought of dying for you or--for--her!"

"Alas! if, as I suspect, this sudden resolve of the King to dismiss me, to arrest me, points to one thing, the end will not be far remote from death. For myself I care not, but--ah! not death for her!" he cried. "She is, as I have said, nought in the world's eyes--nought--nought! but she is a tender, loving woman, too good to be hacked to death or mangled on the wheel."

"What would you have me do?"

"Cause a letter, permit a letter, to be conveyed to her. Either where I left her this morning in my Lodge in the Bois de Vincennes, at Saint Mandé, or where'er she may be in Paris."

"It is impossible. Not even if your letter was untied, unsealed, so that all the world might read, could that be done. D'Hautefeuille is in supreme command at Versailles now; it would have to pass through his hands but it would pass no farther. It is impossible."

"Impossible," De Beaurepaire muttered. "Oh! Emérance! Emérance!"

De Brissac had spoken with his eyes turned to the floor, since he would not be witness of what, he knew, must be the other's misery when he learnt that no letter would be permitted to pass between him and this woman of whom he had spoken so fondly. But now, as the unhappy man uttered that woman's name, he looked up suddenly and stared fixedly at him.

"Who is this woman? What is she?" he asked.

"As I have told you, the woman I love."

"And her name is Emérance?" De Brissac said, endeavouring to speak as lightly as possible and as easily as the present circumstances might permit. "It is a pretty name. Of the North of France, I think. I have heard it before."

If he had not heard it before he had at least read it before. He had read it only that very morning when the *courrier du Roi*, after calling on La Reynie, had continued his journey to Versailles and, besides bringing one of the warrants for the arrest of De Beaurepaire if he should appear there, also brought with him the copies of the warrants issued by La Reynie for the arrest of four other persons. Four other persons, one of whom was described as Louise de Belleau de Cortonne, styling herself Emérance, Marquise de Villiers-Bordéville, another who was known as Affinius Van den Enden, which was believed to be his proper name, and another who passed under the sobriquet of Fleur de Mai, but whose right name was La Preaux, and who termed himself Le Chevalier de la Preaux, though unregistered in any order of knighthood. The fourth was the Sieur Georges du Hamel of La Truaumont, styled the Captain la Truaumont.

De Brissac's astonishment, perhaps, also, his emotion, was not therefore singular, as not only had he seen the warrant with the woman's name in it, but the task had been deputed to him of proceeding to Rouen there to arrest the Captain la Truaumont, the Lieutenant of Police, La Reynie, having received undoubted evidence that the conspirator was now in the city preparing to levy war against both the King's throne and his person.

CHAPTER XXII

"The hopeless Conspiracy," as it came to be called later, was, from the moment that De Beaurepaire, the Marquise de Villiers-Bordéville and Van den Enden were arrested, one that caused more sensation in France than any other event of the period. Not even that of the Marquise de Brinvilliers for poisoning her own father and brothers at the instigation of her lover, nor that of "La" Voisin for the sale of poisons--for the purchase of which the Duchesse de Vivonne and Madame de Montespan were themselves denounced, while Olympe Mancini fled the country--were more talked of than this affair.

In this conspiracy stood, as its head and front, the handsomest representative of a house that, since the suppression of the family of De Guise, was the first in the kingdom; while others whose names were the most notable of the time were strongly suspected of being implicated in the plot. Among those names was that of the Duc de Bourbon-Condé, grandson of the Prince de Condé--a man of whom it was said that he was "an unnatural son, a cruel father, a terrible husband, a detestable master, an evil neighbour, a man without friendship or a friend, and equally fit to be his own executioner and that of others." Another, on whom suspicion rested deeply, was the brother of the Duc de Guiche; another the Cardinal de Retz. Of these latter none were ever brought to trial, while the name of Condé's grandson was, by order of the King himself, omitted from the interrogatories and trial. For the Condés were of the House of Bourbon, and the great head of that house could not see one of his own blood, however evil, receive the ordinary treatment meted out to suspected men.

In the Bastille, therefore, Louis de Beaurepaire, Emérance and Van den Enden, all in separate rooms or *cachots*, awaited the day when they should be put on their trial, the former inhabiting one of the principal rooms in the Tour de la Bertaudière, the woman another off the Chapel, and the Jew a dungeon in the basement. Day after day they were submitted to interrogatories, sometimes by La Reynie himself, sometimes by Bezous, *Conseiller au Parliament*, and sometimes by De Pomereu, *Conseiller d'État*, yet, though not one of them had ever the least opportunity of communicating with the other, or of knowing what either of the others had admitted or denied, from none was any admission obtained. De Beaurepaire asserted that he knew naught of the conspiracy, while advancing what was an undoubtedly strong, as well as a true, point in his favour, namely, that his family was not Norman and that, absolutely, he had never been in Normandy. Emérance stated that she was of Norman origin but that her social standing was of

too humble a nature for her to be admitted into any such conspiracy as the one in question, even had she desired to be so admitted; while Van den Enden said that his various visits to Holland and other places were connected with the many commercial affairs in which he was concerned.

While these interrogatories were taking place, however, De Beaurepaire learned that one person who, perhaps above all, had had it in his power to testify against him and to include him in his own ruin should he desire to do, was harmless now.

As, escorted by the Lieutenant du Roi, second in command of the Bastille, and by four soldiers, he passed to the *Salle de Justice*--where the Judges would occasionally, when they had nothing else to occupy their time, attend with the view of inspecting the accounts of the prison, the list of the prisoners who were still alive or who had died since their last visit, and, also occasionally, to discover if any person had happened to be detained there under a false charge, or through a mistake, for some years--he observed De Brissac seated in the Armoury, out of which the *Salle de Justice* opened. He observed also something else, namely, that the Commander of the Garde du Corps was engaged in conversation with a man, well but plainly dressed, who was standing before him; one whose heavily plumed hat drawn down over his face partially disguised, but only partially, the features of Boisfleury.

"So," De Beaurepaire thought to himself as he passed on, "De Brissac has laid his hands on that rat. Well! what can he tell? He, who was subaltern even to La Preaux! Nothing, except that La Preaux attempted to slay, and thought he slew, Humphrey West."

His progress was, however, stopped by De Brissac, who, rising suddenly from his chair, advanced towards the Lieutenant du Roi and, while requesting him to halt the escort for a moment, stated that he wished to address a few words to his prisoners.

"Monsieur le Commandeur," the Lieutenant du Roi replied, "it is against all orders that any one should hold converse with the Prince de Beaurepaire, even though it be Monsieur de Brissac, who can scarcely be suspected of----"

"Bah! Bah!" De Brissac replied in a low voice, so that the man in question could not hear his words, "what should I have to say to him that can do harm, since on me has fallen the task of arresting all these conspirators. Is De Brissac to be regarded now as one of the joyous troop! Yet, let us remember that he and you and I have all been soldiers together, and--*Bon-Dieu!*--good ones too; let us be as kind to him as we may. Remember, too, that he is not tried yet, therefore he is not yet pronounced guilty."

"If--if," replied the Lieutenant, "it is no communication from any of the other prisoners; no message from----"

"*Peste!* I have a message from, or rather an account of--since he of whom I speak can send no messages now--one who is dead. The birds you have got fast in this cage are all alive--for the present."

"Is it about----?"

"It is." After which De Brissac advanced towards De Beaurepaire while the Lieutenant du Roi gave an order to the soldiers to stand apart from their charge during the time he conferred with the Colonel of the Garde du Corps, and commenced to pace up and down the floor of the Armoury himself.

"What is it, De Brissac?" De Beaurepaire said now, on observing that the others had all withdrawn out of earshot. "What? Have you come to tell me that you have at last found more *suspects* for this charge? I hear--for, even in this hideous place, whispers filter through the very walls and reach us--that you and your master, De Louvois, seek to ensnare half the noblesse of France within the net you throw broadcast."

"Nay," De Brissac said, understanding yet not resenting the bitterness of the other, since he recognised how justifiable such bitterness was, if--as many people thought and openly said--De Beaurepaire's name had been freely used by the Norman conspirators without his knowledge; "nay. Instead, on seeing you here I have come to inform you of that which may bring some calm to your spirit. That fellow over there--Boisfleury--can tell the whole story of how the young Englishman was first of all nearly done to death by the vagabond, La Preaux, while, to make the certainty of death more great, he was afterwards cast into the Rhine by him."

"What! Why! La Truaumont----" but he paused. If he repeated to De Brissac what La Truaumont had told him, then, at once, he divulged that he and the latter had been in communication with each other. Added to which he knew also, perhaps by those very whispers which, a moment before, he had said even filtered through the walls of the Bastille, that La Truaumont had been in some strange way denounced to De Louvois and La Reynie as one of the principal leaders of the conspiracy, and he understood that it was madness to appear to be in possession of any information furnished by him. Nevertheless, he had mentioned La Truaumont's name ere he could collect himself and De Brissac had heard him do so.

"La Truaumont!" the other exclaimed, while the strange look that was so apparent at times came into his face. "La Truaumont!" Then, as though desirous of helping De Beaurepaire out of a

snare into which he had inadvertently fallen, he said, "Ah! yes. It is so. He was in your service. Did he not ride to Nancy for you?"

"To Basle in the escort of the Duchesse de Castellucchio. Afterwards he was to go forward with her to Geneva on the road to Milan. Has he--have they?" he asked, continuing his attempt to throw dust in De Brissac's eyes, or, perhaps, with the wish to prevent it appearing that he and La Truaumont had met in Paris recently, "have they arrived in Italy?"

"Madame La Duchesse may have done so," De Brissac replied, while the inscrutable look in his face became even more pronounced than before. "As for La Truaumont, he arrived at Rouen the night after you were arrested by me."

"Is he arrested, too?"

"I attempted to arrest him since it was to me that the order to do so was sent."

"You attempted to do so! And failed!"

"Listen. When I, as chief of the King's special Garde du Corps, was ordered to arrest one who had desired to do for Louis that which no Garde du Corps could prevent if the opportunity should arise, I, with four of my men, rode post-haste to Rouen. At six o'clock in the morning--it was the day after you fell into my hands--walked into them!--at Versailles, I was in La Truaumont's lodgings and found him in bed. Awaking him, I told him that I had an order to arrest him, upon which he exclaimed, 'So be it. I am here. Arrest me,' while, as he spoke, he produced two pistols from a cabinet at the head of his bed. 'If you can do so,' he added, pointing the weapon at me. 'Then you are guilty,' I cried, drawing my sword. 'Guilty!' he exclaimed. 'Be sure I am. *Oui, mort Dieu*, guilty. I alone.'"

"Ah!" De Beaurepaire exclaimed.

"Yes. He said it," De Brissac answered. "He *said* it. I can testify to that."

After which the colonel continued, "He called out so loudly as he spoke and as he leapt from his bed, pistols in hand, that three of my men--the fourth kept the door below--rushed into the room and a struggle to the death ensued. La Truaumont discharged both his pistols at me, killing, instead, however, one of my guards in doing so, and was himself shot an instant afterwards by the man's comrades."

"Dead!" De Beaurepaire murmured. "Dead! La Truaumont dead. Ah! we had been friends, comrades, for years. La Truaumont dead."

"He died eighteen hours later. Before he did so he called for paper and ink and wrote that what he had said when I entered the room was mere braggadocio. That he was not guilty but would have been if he could have obtained assistance. He said also that, had the King let him serve him, His Majesty would have had no more faithful subject. They were the last words he spoke ere receiving the sacrament."

"And the only ones?" De Beaurepaire asked.

"The only ones."

The prisoner drew a long breath as De Brissac answered thus, after which he said: "I told you but now that strange things reach our ears in this place. That, from the outer world, comes news----"

"I know, I know," the other interrupted. "Like most who have lived in France, in Paris, I have been here myself. Mazarin sent me here when I was a boy, a *Porte Drapeau*, because I caned one of his bodyguard who was insolent to me!" After saying which De Brissac continued, "What other news has reached your ears?"

"That you have arrested all of us who are now in this fortress on this charge. All who are here on the same charge as I?"

"Yes, it is true. As Colonel of the Garde du Corps, it falls to my lot to seize upon all who aim at the King's body, at his life."

"Am I charged with that?"

"It may be. I do not know. Yet--since I arrested you----"

"I understand. De Louvois and La Reynie cut deep. Like skilful surgeons they stop not at the surface. And--and--therefore--you arrested--her?"

"It is so."

"What did she say?"

"Knowing that I had previously arrested you, she thanked me for also making her a prisoner."

"Thanked you! Heavens!" De Beaurepaire whispered to himself, "it was a heart to win. How many of those others would have thanked De Brissac for that! Rather would they have told all, have witnessed against me and invented all they did not know, so that, thereby, they might set themselves free." And again he exclaimed aloud, "she thanked you!"

"Ay, it is so. While adding, as she spoke and smiled on me, that, since she could not be at large and free to share your liberty, her next greatest joy was to be beneath the same prison roof with you."

De Beaurepaire turned away as the other told him this; turned away because, perhaps, he knew that the tears had come into his eyes and he would not have De Brissac see them there. Yet the latter--from whom the prisoner would have hidden those tears and, it may be, all other signs of emotion which he knew well enough were on his face--comprehended that they were there as easily as he comprehended all that now racked and tore at the heart of the once strong and masterful man before him. Wherefore, to ease that racked heart, De Brissac added:--

"I likewise arrested the bully who calls himself Fleur de Mai, and the Jew atheist, Van den Enden. And they too are firm, very firm. Listen, De Beaurepaire, and, as you do so, deem me no traitor since I am none such, but only one who has fought by your side and, later, taken the word of command from you. Listen, I say. De Louvois, La Reynie, will have to seek further than the walls of this prison to obtain the conviction of any of you. If you and those who are here can be as solidly, ay! and as stolidly, silent as you all are now, if you can hold your peace and acknowledge nothing and deny nothing, they will have trouble in bringing proof against you. H'st! the Lieutenant comes. My friendship, my old comradeship with you has forced me to say this. Think no evil of me for saying so much."

"God bless you," whispered De Beaurepaire huskily, while wondering as he did so how long it was since such words had fallen from his lips, and wondering, too, of how much or little good the prayer could be productive. Nevertheless, he knew that they had been wrung from his heart by De Brissac's friendly care for his safety, and recognised that, evil as his life had been, he had at that moment no power of repressing those words.

"It is the hour when the Commission will sit," the Lieutenant du Roi said to De Brissac, "the Prince de Beaurepaire must tarry no longer. *En avant!*" he cried now to the soldiers who had once more surrounded the prisoner as their leader came forward, "*en avant!*"

"Farewell!" De Beaurepaire said to De Brissac as he set out again. "Farewell!"

"Nay," De Brissac replied, "not farewell, instead *au revoir!*"

CHAPTER XXIII

A month had passed, the interrogatories had been made to all the prisoners concerned in the Norman Plot, and the witnesses had been examined and their depositions signed and sworn to. The day had come for the Extra-Ordinary Commission to sit at the Arsenal; a Commission consisting of nineteen carefully selected members who were to deliver judgment on what was now spoken of in France as "L'affaire du Chevalier de Beaurepaire." Amongst these members were La Reynie, who filled on this occasion the office of Procureur-Général du Roi, the Chancellor d'Aligre who presided over the tribunal, twelve other State Councillors and five ordinary Judges.

The prisoners were seated together, the only difference made between them being that De Beaurepaire, by right of his position as Grand Veneur, from which he had not yet been removed, as well as, perhaps, by his birth and rank, sat alone on a bench a few feet apart from, and nearer to the Judges, than the others. Those others, Emérance, Van den Enden and La Preaux, or Fleur de Mai, sat together in the order indicated, whereby the woman who loved De Beaurepaire so madly was next to him though separated from him by that gap of a few feet.

But for the fact that around the *Chambre Judiciaire* stood various guards and soldiers, such as those of the King's Guards, several of the Gendarmerie, and a number of men of the garrison of the Bastille--under whose charge the prisoners were transported from that fortress--and also various servants and footmen of the Judges, as well as many members of the police of Paris, known as Archers, there were no members of the general public present. That such, however, would not have been the case had the wishes of many members of that public--and exalted ones, too!--been consulted, was not to be doubted. Innumerable women of high rank who had once given their hearts, or what they were pleased to imagine to be their hearts, to the superbly

handsome De Beaurepaire, had applied for permission to be present and had been decisively refused; so, too, had many men of brilliant position. The Great Condé who, though cousin to the King and the most distinguished soldier of his time, if Turenne be excepted, could well enact the part of bully and braggart when he saw fit, had stormed and sworn at La Reynie for being refused, as, it was whispered, he had also stormed and sworn at De Louvois, from whom, however, he was unable to obtain his desire.

Therefore, it was with closed doors that the Commission commenced its labours on this autumn morning, after D'Aligre had addressed a few remarks to all who were present--except his brother Judges--in which he stated that, if any account of what took place within the walls of that room was repeated outside and the culprit could be discovered, that culprit would undoubtedly be punished with either the galleys or death.

Of evidence, beyond whatever might be extorted from the prisoners by the Judges or the Procureur-Général, there was none to be tendered by witnesses, with the exception of that which two persons would be called upon to give, one of those persons being Le Colonel Boisfleury, the other a gentleman, now an official of the King's *Garde Robe*, named Humphrey West. Defenders of any of the prisoners there were none. Until the commencement of the sixteenth century prisoners had been allowed the right of such counsel; some years later an ordinance had deprived them of that right, an ordinance which called forth from the well-known President Lamoignon the still remembered phrase, "Il vaudrait mieux absoudre mille coupables que de faire mourir un innocent." A phrase often quoted in English and French law courts to the present day.

In the witness chair, Boisfleury took his seat after innumerable letters had been read, which, coming from various sources, all pointed to one thing, namely, an attempt of the Spanish and Dutch Governments to promote an invasion of France on the coast of Normandy with the ultimate object of deposing the King and of creating a Republic similar to that of Venice or Holland itself, which should be under the protection of Spain and Holland while presided over by a Frenchman of high rank and position. One of these letters was from the Duc de Saint-Aignan, Governor of Havre, stating that it was impossible to doubt that a plot of considerable depth was hatching in Normandy and Picardy. Another was from Louise de Kéroualle, now Duchess of Portsmouth and favourite mistress of King Charles II., in which she stated that, from Normandy, in which she possessed some small property, similar news came to her with regard to this plot, and also that it was much talked of in Court circles in London. The Duchess also mentioned the name which was suggested as that of the man who was to assume the position of President of this new republic, and that name was De Beaurepaire. From the Duchesse de Castellucchio came another, imploring the King to be on his guard against a plot which was brewing against him, while stating that, though she had learnt of the existence of this plot, she had no knowledge of any who were concerned in it.

"Yet," said D'Aligre to a brother Judge, "'tis strange that this heroine of romance had not heard of the plot ere she left Paris, but had heard of it when she left Nancy for Basle and Geneva. And there was but one friend of hers who could have told her anything whatever, since she would not have stooped to listen to La Truaumont who, in his turn, would not have babbled. *Hein?*"

To which observation the other Judge nodded his head without speaking.

But now the reading of these letters and a dozen others was finished and La Reynie, leaning over on the crimson cushion before him, addressed Boisfleury while referring every instant to the deposition of the man before him.

"You say here that you knew nothing of this plot when you left Paris in the suite of the Duchesse de Castellucchio. When, therefore, did you first know that it was projected?"

"At Basle. When I was told that I should have to take part in the slaying of the young Englishman. I refused to play such a part, since it is not my business to take life except as a soldier, unless I was told why the Englishman was to be slain."

"And you were told?"

"I was told, yet inwardly I resolved to have no share in the matter."

"All lies!" roared out Fleur de Mai at this. "He asked what his pay was to be."

"I will prove they are not lies," the other said, glancing at his brother vagabond. "When Monsieur le Procureur-Général comes to the time at which you stabbed the young man."

"Attend to me and not to the prisoner," La Reynie said to Boisfleury. "You say you resolved to have no share in the matter unless you were told why the Englishman was to be slain. Since, therefore, you were present in the stable--as you affirm in your interrogatory--you had been told. What *were* you told?"

"That the Prince de Beaurepaire, the Capitaine la Truaumont and that scoundrel there," nodding his head at Fleur de Mai, "were all concerned in a plot of which the Englishman had discovered the details. That, also, if La Truaumont were denounced, I, who was truly in his pay and not in that of either the Prince de Beaurepaire or the Duchesse de Castellucchio, would also be denounced."

"Every word a lie!" exclaimed Fleur de Mai who, swaggerer to the last, behaved more as if he were one of the Commission himself than a prisoner against whom appearances looked as bad as might well be.

"Silence," La Reynie said, addressing him. "If you again interrupt you shall be removed and inquiries made into your actions while you are absent." Then, turning to Boisfleury, he said: "Therefore, knowing that this murder was decided on so as to ensure the safety of you all, you at first resolved to take part in it."

"No, Monsieur le Procureur-Général," Boisfleury said quietly, "I decided on no such thing. What I did truly decide on, since I was informed that the young man would but be drawn into a duel with Fleur de Mai, in which his chance might be as good as that of the other--was that I would stand by and see that duel. Thereby I should not appear to be against those two ruffians, La Truaumont and La Preaux, and should obtain time in which to come to a conclusion as to how I might best warn his Majesty against the wicked plot."

"Such being your praiseworthy resolve why did you not put it in practice later?"

"He did," the President whispered to La Reynie. "He went to Fontainebleau to inform the Marquis de Louvois of that plot."

"True," La Reynie whispered in turn as he hastily turned over the depositions. "Yet he did not warn the Marquis. It was to De Brissac that he unbosomed himself some week or so later. But we will hear his story. Now," again addressing Boisfleury, "you say in these," tapping the papers before him, "that you went to Fontainebleau to warn the King's Ministers of this plot against his Majesty. Yet you failed to do so. Why did you refrain? Why also wait some week or so ere you addressed yourself to the Sieur de Brissac?"

"Monsieur le Procureur-Général, I was too much undone, too startled by what I saw on my way up the Grand Avenue to the Château. I thought I had seen a spirit from another world."

"What!" While, as La Reynie spoke scornfully to the man, all eyes, including those of the prisoners, were turned on him. What rhodomontade was this they were listening to, they all wondered; with what gibberish was this man, half knave and half adventurer and wholly vagabond, insulting their understandings as he mumbled this buffoonery about spirits from another world?

They did not know--not even the most astute Judges and men of law in France knew or understood, that the fellow before them was but preparing his final effects, his tableau and *dénoûment* (which should crush the man who had meant to crush him and brand him as a secret midnight assassin) as their own dramatists prepared their tableaux by exciting curiosity from the commencement.

"Monsieur le Procureur-Général," Boisfleury replied, speaking with such well-affected calmness and intensity that his tones became almost dignified and were entirely impressive. "There is no person in this court who would not have thought as I thought, have believed as I believed, that he was looking on a spectre or one who had come back to this world for some dread purpose, had that person seen what I saw on that awful night in Basle and then seen what I saw in the Grand Avenue. A dead man as I thought at first, at the moment,--one who had come back from the grave. Monsieur le Procureur, Messieurs les Judges, may I tell all?"

"'Tis for that you sit in that seat,--that you are here," D'Aligre said. "Speak, but speak only the truth. Otherwise----"

"Otherwise, monseigneur!" Boisfleury exclaimed, "otherwise! *Dieu!* there is no lie, no fiction that mortal man could invent which can equal that which I saw at Basle. Horrors have I known; I have been a soldier"--there were those who said he never had been one but only a common footpad and cut-throat; but this matters not--"yet never have I seen so wicked, so bloodthirsty and cruel a night as that."

"Speak," exclaimed D'Aligre again. "Tell your tale and have done with it."

Whereupon the man told it. As he did so all present knew that the axe was made ready for one neck in that court; for the neck of Fleur de Mai, if for no other.

"Messeigneurs," he said, speaking solemnly, effectively, one hand upon his breast, the other pointing his words, and sometimes, also, pointing straight at the face of Fleur de Mai: "Messeigneurs, upon that night the young Englishman, he who sits there before you white and wan, was set upon in the stable at Basle. He," and he looked at Humphrey for a moment, "wronged me with an unjust suspicion. He deemed that I meant evil to him or his horse, when--God alone He knows--that I did but intend to set that horse free for him, but to cut the halter rope, so as to enable him to ride off at once if he should vanquish Fleur de Mai. At once, since La Truaumont had sworn that, if this happened, he would slay the Englishman the next moment, not in fair fight but ere he could put himself on guard.

"Therefore, he struck at me, knocking me senseless to the straw and there I lay for some moments. But, gradually, as the dizziness left me, as sense returned, I saw what was happening.

By degrees that bully was being worsted; it seemed as though his last hour was at hand. And then--then--he tried the coward's ruse--he fell to the earth on his left hand--with his foot he struck the young man's feet from under him so that he staggered--a moment later his sword was through the young man's breast. I deemed him dead.

"La Truaumont and he thought that I was still insensible, therefore they heeded me not," Boisfleury went on, his eye, glittering like that of a snake, fixed full on Fleur de Mai, upon whose face there had suddenly sprung a drench of sweat--he divining perhaps what was to come next. "They heeded me not. 'He is finished,' La Truaumont said; 'there is no need for me.' 'Not yet,' this other replied, 'not yet. There is more to do.' Whereupon he lifted up his craven blade as though to plunge it through the senseless man's breast, while as he did so he muttered: 'For De Beaurepaire's safety, for yours, for mine, for the sake of all'."

As Boisfleury arrived at this portion of his story--he should have been one of the French dramatists of the time!--the court was as silent as though it had been tenanted by the dead alone: as though it were a tomb and not a room full of living human beings. All eyes were fastened on the face of the narrator; the eyes of Judges, prisoners, guards, the one woman present; and all held their breath. For, if the tale were not true, it sounded like truth. It might be truth. While, for the corroboration of the early part at least, there was present in that court the man on whom the foul attack had been made, on whom was done whatever else they were to hear told.

"Ere the assassin could plunge his sword into the Englishman's breast," Boisfleury continued, while marking the effect of his words on all his listeners, "the hand of La Truaumont fell upon his arm, La Truaumont whispered: 'Fool. Why leave a trace behind! Look there; there--there. The river runs swiftly by; what goes into it comes out no more. There! there! There is the fitting grave for him whom you have almost slain.' Then he went swiftly away, muttering that he would enter the inn and keep all engaged in talk until this one had finished his work.

"I--I--saw him lift the young man," Boisfleury went on, pointing at Fleur de Mai as he spoke, "I saw him go out into the awful storm that had broken over the city; struggling to my feet as he left the stable with his burden, I would have prevented him from concluding his crime. But I was weak and faint from my loss of blood, a vertigo seized on me, I reeled and fell in the straw again. Yet, through the now wide open door out of which he had borne the body, I saw all. I saw this man carry the other on his back beneath the pitiless rain, yet rain that was not as pitiless as he; I saw him turn his back to the river, I saw him let loose the other's hands--I saw that other's body fall into the river, and then, once more, I fainted. I have seen horrid sights, I have been a soldier," Boisfleury repeated, "yet never have I seen aught like that. Messeigneurs," he concluded, "was it strange that, when I saw that man at Fontainebleau, white, ghastly as one who had but just returned from the grave, I deemed that I had seen a spirit from the other world?"

As he concluded, and ere the silence could be broken, there came from the lips of Fleur de Mai an awful sound. One that was neither groan nor gasp nor wail, but a combination of all three. It seemed to those present that the ruffian was choking to death or that some terrible stroke had fallen on him. His great hands tore at the dirty, soiled lace around his neck and at the tags of his jacket, as though he would free his throat and obtain breath; his face was purple, his eyes started from his head, his great, coarse lips were swollen. And through those lips issued sounds that none could comprehend: a jargon of oaths and strange words jumbled pell-mell together without sense or coherence.

Standing by the chair from which he had risen, looking calmly at him, Boisfleury muttered inwardly, "The murder will out and Boisfleury pays for it!" and then turned away his face so that none should see the look upon it that he knew it bore.

CHAPTER XXIV

Before the night came and ere that Commission had finished its labours much more had to be done. Based upon such matter as had been extracted from them in the numerous interrogatories to which they had all been subjected since their arrest, each and every one had been examined by the Court, while, with one exception--that of Van den Enden, who had not been believed and who was reserved for something still worse than examination, namely torture--what they had told or refused to tell was considered sufficient for the purposes of the Judges. One of the witnesses, however, had been spared the pain of testifying, since Boisfleury's evidence was considered enough--that one being Humphrey West.

"It is true," D'Aligre said to the others seated with him, "that he overheard the plot discussed at Basle. But all that he heard is nothing in comparison with what we now know to have taken place in Brussels, in Normandy, and elsewhere. He has endured enough. We may absolve him from further suffering."

"To which has to be added," remarked Laisné de la Marguerie, another of the Judges, a bitter, sarcastic man, "the fact that the young man stands high in the graces of his Majesty and is like to stand still higher ere long."

"While," said Quintin de Richebourg, *maître de requêtes*, a kindly hearted lawyer, "he was once a friend of, and befriended by, De Beaurepaire. No need to force him to speak against one who, at least, never harmed him."

Therefore, Humphrey was released from what would have been a hateful task and left the Arsenal directly he was informed that such was the case, while the Commission at once proceeded to examine the prisoners, beginning with De Beaurepaire.

The answers to the questions put to him were, however, a total denial of any knowledge of the plot. He had never, he said, dreamed of any such conspiracy; he loved the King and always had loved him since they were boys and playmates together. La Truaumont was his factotum and he regretted his death, but while acknowledging that he had employed the man in that capacity, he had never heard him breathe a word of any such a scheme. Had such been the case he would have slain him at his feet. With Van den Enden he had had little correspondence and that only on the subject of raising private loans. No one had the slightest right or justification to use his name in connection with any plot against the King, and Van den Enden and La Truaumont had done so for their own purposes, if they had done so at all.

"That they did so," La Reynie said, "is undoubted, since La Truaumont met his death in endeavouring to slay those who went to arrest him on account of his connection with this sinful plot for which you were yourself arrested on the morning of the previous day." After which he continued gravely: "It is strange that, if your Highness was unaware of this plot, you should have been surrounded by so many persons of Norman birth and extraction who were all interested in it. La Truaumont was one of these persons."

"He was equally well known to me ten years ago and more when I first gave him employment. Was the plot hatched so long ago as that?"

"The so-called Chevalier la Preaux is another; the man who is sometimes known as Fleur de Mai."

"He was as much in the pay of La Truaumont as La Truaumont was in mine. And he is of the *canaille*. I could have no intercourse with him. Had I required a tool I should not have taken a dirty one."

"Dirty tools, or weapons, can be used as well as clean ones. And--in conspiracies--the tools are never clean. But there is still another Norman. The woman by your side, near you. She calls herself the Marquise de Villiers-Bordéville. She is known to be deeply involved in this vile plot. She was arrested in the lodge you had lent her and which was in your possession as Grand Veneur. She went to Basle at your bidding to meet Van den Enden on the subject of that plot. She is your accomplice. Yet you learnt nothing of it from her. Surely that is strange!"

"She is," De Beaurepaire said, while as he did so he turned towards where Emérance sat separated from him by only a little space, and looked her full in the face, "a woman whom I love. One whom, when we escape from this accursed net you are endeavouring to fling around us, I will love and cherish till my last hour."

"*Mon amour!*" Emérance breathed rather than murmured between her parted lips.

And the man heard that breath, as perhaps did some of the judges sitting near the prisoner.

"Yet," La Reynie said, "loving her thus, you tell us you know not of what she was vowed to, namely the destruction of the King, of his throne, of France. You did not know the secret of this woman whom you love, the woman who, you think, loves you!"

"Think!" again whispered Emérance, her eyes on La Reynie now. "Think!"

While De Beaurepaire, speaking at the same time, used the same word.

"Think!" he said. "Think that she loves me! La Reynie, do you think there is any man who does not know when a woman truly loves him? If so, then it is you who have never loved or been loved."

As he spoke, D'Aligre shot a glance at Laisné de la Marguerie. "The *riposte* is deadly," the latter scrawled on a paper in front of him, a paper which the President could see. For La Reynie's wife was a shrew who was reported to have married him for anything rather than love.

"You know who and what she is?" La Reynie continued savagely. "You know her past?"

"No, only her present. Her past is nothing to me. I had no share in it."

"You should have informed yourself of it ere you allowed yourself to love her. You could have learnt that she was, with La Truaumont, the heart and soul of this conspiracy. A woman ruined by extravagant living and willing to make money by any means."

"'Tis false," Emérance exclaimed, looking up at the Judges for the first time and also speaking aloud for the first time. "My husband left me with some small means. But--because after treating me cruelly for months, he was found dead in his bed, for which I was tried at Rouen for having poisoned him and was at once acquitted and absolved--not one sol or denier have I ever been able to obtain from his kinsmen. Extravagant living! I have never yet known what it was to have a handful of gold pistoles to spend, or fling into the river, if it pleased me so to do."

"Madame," La Reynie said quietly, "this is not your final interrogatory. Later I will deal with you."

After which he again addressed De Beaurepaire, saying: "Monsieur le Prince, the man, Van den Enden, states that you have often said in his presence, and that of others, when speaking of his Majesty the King: 'We shall have him yet. We shall hold him.'"

"He lies," De Beaurepaire said, shrugging his shoulders with superbly assumed disdain. "As for the others, who are they and where are they? Produce them."

"Also," La Reynie continued, ignoring this challenge, "he states that you threatened to kill him if he did not act entirely as you bade him."

"Pah!" exclaimed De Beaurepaire, with another contemptuous shrug which, with the exclamation itself, spoke volumes. "If you choose to believe such babble as this, uttered by such a creature as that, you may do so," was what the shrug and the word conveyed.

"Do you deny, monsieur," La Reynie continued, "that you ever uttered the expression, 'I would die content if I could once draw my sword against the King in a strong revolution'?"

"When," exclaimed De Beaurepaire, "you can put me face to face with a credible witness who can testify to having ever heard me utter any such expression, I will answer you before him. But not till then."

"Madame," La Reynie said now to Emérance, while intimating by a look towards the Prince that he had done with him, for the present at least, "Madame, give me your attention. What is your relationship with the last witness?"

"I love him," Emérance answered, lifting her eyes slowly towards her questioner. "No more nor less than that."

"You misapprehend me. I mean as regards his, and your, participation in this plot?"

"There was no plot," Emérance replied again, this time with a cynical look upon her face; "or, at least, none against France or the King of France. Yet, it is true, there was a plot."

"You admit that?" D'Aligre exclaimed, bending forward over his cushions. "You admit it?"

As he asked the question he was not the only one in that Court who turned their eyes on the unhappy woman. In solemn truth, there were no eyes in that Court which did not rest on her now. The eyes of the Judges and the Procureur-Général, as well as those of her fellow prisoners.

"What is she about to say?" the man who loved her asked himself, while knowing full well that whatever she might say would not be aught that could harm him, though fearing at the same time that she might say something which would sacrifice her while shielding him. "What story, what scheme has she devised?"

"The she-cat, the tigress!" Van den Enden groaned inwardly. "She will save him and herself--curse her!--by sacrificing me. Yet, how? How?"

But still there was another prisoner who heard those words--Fleur de Mai. But he said nothing to himself and indulged in no speculation as to what the woman might be about to state. He was doomed, he knew: nothing could save him. There was for him but one hope left in this world; the hope that since, vagabond as he was, he was the off-shoot of an honourable family, he might perish by the axe and not the wheel, or that still deeper degradation, the rope.

"You acknowledge that there was a plot?" La Reynie exclaimed, echoing the President's question.

"I have said," Emérance replied. "Yet no plot against France or the King."

"Explain."

"He," her eyes turned softly towards her lover and then re-turned swiftly toward the Judges, "wanted money. His charges and expenses were great, as you all know. No need to say more of

that. As for myself, I was poor, horribly, bitterly poor, almost at starvation's door, for the reason I have but now told you. That one," her eyes looking from underneath their lids at Van den Enden, "would do aught for money; would betray, steal, murder for the money he always wanted. La Truaumont--well! he is dead. Of him I will but say that he was ambitious. He had been a good soldier yet, like many another soldier as good as he, he had been forgotten, passed over, set aside. We all wanted money. The others--that assassin, or would be assassin, there," looking at Fleur de Mai, "was but a hireling, a varlet, to any who could pay him."

"It was my mind, mine alone," she continued, "which conceived the plot. Mine," and Emérance smote her breast as she spoke, as though to force conviction into the minds of those who heard her. "Mine! Spain hates the King, France, you, I, all of us in whose veins French blood runs--you well know why. So, too, does Holland, for baser, meaner reasons; she hates us because she goes down before us as autumn leaves go down before the storm. Because her Stadtholder, William, can do naught against France. Therefore, since France could not be conquered, defeated, humiliated in the field, other ways were thought of. Shot and steel were useless. It remained to try gold."

That Emérance had aroused the interest of her audience, of the Judges, she knew by now. She had touched that chord, which, as she was well aware, never fails to respond in the hearts of her countrymen to the praise of their country. She knew this, she saw it in their proud, self-satisfied glances as she dwelt on the inferiority of Spain and Holland before France. Only--she asked herself--would they believe? Would this attempt, this last chance, enable the man she loved--of herself she did not think!--to obtain earthly salvation.

"The scheme was tried," she continued. "Learning as I did through La Truaumont that there was a large sum of Spanish money ready for those who would betray France to them, I conceived the idea, not of betraying, but of pretending to betray, France. I was, as I have been termed, *une fine Normande*; the Normans were embittered against the King for his treatment of the province. The instruments were ready to my hand; the faggots were laid; the spark to ignite them alone was needed. You know the rest, or almost know it. But some part you do not know. His, De Beaurepaire's name was used without his knowledge, the money was obtained from De Montérey, yet not one sol ever reached the Prince's hands. We hoped that, when the enemies of France learnt that we had tricked them, robbed them if you will, the plot would be abandoned without De Beaurepaire ever knowing of the use we had made of him."

"The love for him does not appear in this," sneered Laisné de la Marguerie. "The Prince's name was used unrighteously, judging by your own story, while even the money you say you received was not shared by him."

"Where therefore did it go?" D'Aligre asked, grasping the point which his more astute brother judge had made. "It was a large sum?"

"It went to Normandy if it ever came into France," Van den Enden exclaimed, tottering to his feet in his desire to be listened to by the Judges. "But it never came. Never. This woman, this adventuress, has lied to save her lover and herself. There was no plot to either overthrow France or hoodwink Spain and Holland. There was no money whatever forthcoming.

"Nevertheless she was superb. *Splendide mendax!*" murmured Laisné de la Marguerie. "Yet unavailing."

While, as he did so, La Reynie was heard addressing Van den Enden in quiet, impressive tones.

"You forget," he said, "your interview with this woman in her rooms at Basle. You forget that the young man whom you sought to have murdered overheard your conversation with her and La Truaumont. The conversation in which you stated that you had received a million livres from the Comte de Montérey. Also you forget, or, perhaps, you do not know, that that young man's interrogatory is here before us." While, as the Procureur-Général spoke, he laid his hand on a packet of papers lying amongst some others.

CHAPTER XXV

The confrontations of the prisoners with one another and the administration of questions, based upon the answers they had made to their earlier interrogations, were over at last. There remained now but one thing farther to be done, one further suffering to be endured by the

unhappy conspirators ere their doom, which was certain, was pronounced; namely, to endeavour to extract their confessions from them by torture. This system, still in general use in France and still to remain so for another century, was regarded as the one and only final opportunity of extracting from criminals--real or suspected--some confession which should justify their judges in sentencing them to death. For, if from those criminals who were innocent there could be wrung the slightest word that even sounded like an acknowledgment of guilt, the judges could condemn them with a sound conscience; while, even if the really criminal had already confessed their guilt, the application of torture was still generally applied in the hopes that, thereby, some actual or imaginary accomplices might be implicated.

La Reynie, determined to extort confessions from the four prisoners who had appeared before their judges at the Arsenal, had already decided by midnight that all should be submitted to the "question." This resolve, however, was negatived by the majority of those judges.

De Beaurepaire was, they said, too high in position to be treated with such indignity; he had been too closely allied with the King, both as friend and exalted subject as well as bearer of great offices, to be submitted to such degradation; and they had made up their minds that he was guilty and must die. Therefore he was exempted from torture.

To their honour, the same exemption was granted to Emérance on the plea that she was a woman and was also to die.

"It is a noble resolution," exclaimed the Père Bourdaloue, who had been deputed to discover by exhortation the truth and extent of their guilt, if possible. "A noble one. She is a woman. If, like another, she has sinned, so, also, she has loved and suffered."

From the two others, however, Fleur de Mai and Van den Enden, nothing could be obtained in any shape or form at the trial except denials of every statement made. Therefore both, instead of Van den Enden alone, were now to be submitted to the torture.

Yet, once again, as Van den Enden was led into the room where he was to submit to the trial of the Wedge or *Coin* as it was termed, Bourdaloue made a final attempt not only to extract some admission from him but also, from Christian charity, to spare so old a man unnecessary pain.

"My son," he said, "reflect. Why force your judges to obtain by torture that which may be told freely, since you are surely doomed. Remember, there is another world to which you are hastening; a God whom you have outraged----"

"There is no other world," Van den Enden snarled. "There is no God. I am a materialist. I believe in nothing but that which is tangible, that which I can see and recognise. And I have nothing to confess more than I have told. As for your tortures, it is the fear of them that alone terrifies."

Bravely as the old atheist spoke, he was, however, now to learn that it is sometimes far better to rely less upon oneself and more upon a Superior Power.

The torture of the *Coin* did not vary much in method from that which, at the same period, was known in the British Islands as the "Boot." *Brodequins*, or long half-riding boots, were placed upon the feet and legs of those who were to be put to the question. Into these, which were sometimes made of wood and sometimes, but not often, of hardened pigskin almost as tough and firm as wood, the wedges or *coins* were thrust, or hammered, one by one according to the stubborn refusals of the prisoners to reply to the questions put to them.

To the room where he was to be subjected to this inquisition, Van den Enden was led. There were present to administer the questions two of the Councillors of State, De Pomereu and Lefèvre de Caumartin, each of whom had taken part as judges in the last confrontation of the prisoners, as well as the Père Bourdaloue who still hoped to either obtain some amelioration of his sufferings for the wretched man, or to be able to administer religious consolation to him should he perish under the torture. To apply the torture there were the executioner's assistants.

"You have not told all the truth," De Pomereu said, when the *brodequins* had been placed on the legs and feet of Van den Enden and one of the torturers stood by, a wedge in one hand and a hammer in the other. "What more have you to tell?"

"Nothing. You may kill me if you will. I am innocent."

At a sign from De Pomereu the assistant struck in the first wedge, at which Van den Enden winced but said again: "I am innocent."

A second wedge was now inserted and the wretched man emitted a slight groan, but only exclaimed: "I know nothing. Nothing. Mercy!"

A third, a fourth, a fifth, a sixth were rapidly inserted next, and Van den Enden cried out: "I am dying. Kill me at once."

"Answer truly," exclaimed De Pomereu. "Did the Prince say, 'If we could only have the King's person we should win'?"

"No. I did not hear it. Yes!" Van den Enden screamed suddenly, as now other wedges were rapidly hammered in between the boots and his legs until the ninth--which was much larger than the previous ones--was inserted. "Yes. He said so. I heard him."

"Did he say, 'When Quillebeuf is taken we will proceed to Versailles and seize upon the King's person'?"

"No. Never. Ah! mercy! mercy! mercy!" for now the last wedge of all--which was composed of several ordinary wedges bound together--was being hammered into his crushed and bleeding leg. "Mercy. Oh! my God! have mercy on me."

"Stop," exclaimed the Père Bourdaloue advancing, his Crucifix in his hands. "Stop! He has confessed something far better than that which you seek to extort from him. Van den Enden," he said, approaching the old man whose eyes were now so turned up in his head that nothing but the whites were visible, while his face was a mass of perspiration, "you are no atheist, praised be God above. You term yourself one, yet in your hour of tribulation you call upon the God you pretend to deny. Van den Enden, look upon this symbol, 'tis the symbol of One who suffered more than you can ever suffer, yet Who was pure and holy; Who was God incarnate. Kiss it, Van den Enden. Acknowledge at last the error of your ways."

"No! no!" groaned the victim, half delirious from pain. "No! no! I believe nothing. I--I--ah! Ask Spinosa. And--and--I was born a Jew."

"So," said Bourdaloue, "was He."

"Mercy! Mercy!"

"He must reply," De Pomereu said in answer to a look of appeal from the priest; "or the wedges must be struck deeper. Speak, Van den Enden," he continued. "Did De Beaurepaire say he would possess himself of the King's sacred person?"

"No. Ah!" and again he called on the Deity as the torturer struck at the great wedge. "Ah! Ah! Yes. Yes. Mercy. I--I--am dying. Save me."

"Remove him," De Pomereu ordered, "and bring in the other. La Preaux."

When, however, this adventurer was subjected to similar treatment to that which Van den Enden had endured nothing was to be obtained from him.

Whether, knowing that death was certain in any case, or determined that, as he had lived without fear--with one exception, namely his cowardice when thinking he was about to be slain by Humphrey West--so he would die, it is at least certain that he was bold enough to bear the torture without uttering one word or one cry. By some superhuman, perhaps by some devilish, courage, he forced himself to refrain from emitting any sound when the torture was applied, and, though his great coarse lips were horribly thrust out and pursed up by the agony he was suffering, no moan issued from them. To all questions put to him by De Pomereu and De Caumartin he returned but one answer, "I am innocent of any knowledge of the plot," and nothing more could be extorted from him.

An hour later, De Beaurepaire accompanied by Bourdaloue and another priest, Le Père Talon, was led into the prison chapel in which were already Van den Enden and La Preaux, or Fleur de Mai. The former had been supported to this spot between two guards; the latter, indomitable as ever, had managed to limp from his cell to the chapel. Emérance was not there.

"To your knees," whispered the priests to the unhappy conspirators. "To your knees and hear the sentences passed on you."

"This," said the Greffier of the Judges when all were kneeling, Van den Enden being assisted and held up between the two guards, "is the decree of the High Court of his Majesty the King. You, Louis, Chevalier and Prince de Beaurepaire, late Colonel of all his Majesty's Guards and Grand Veneur of France, are adjudged guilty of high treason and *lèse-majeste*. You, Francois Affinius van den Enden, are adjudged guilty of the same. You, La Preaux, falsely styling yourself Chevalier and known to many under an assumed name, are adjudged guilty of the same. The woman Louise de Belleau de Cortonne, widow of Jacques de Mallorties, Seigneur de Villers and Boudéville, styling herself falsely Emérance, Marquise de Villiers-Bordéville, is found guilty of the same."

"The Lord's will be done," said the two priests solemnly.

"For you, Louis de Beaurepaire, Prince et Chevalier," continued the Greffier, "the sentence is that you be decapitated to-morrow at three of the afternoon in front of this, his Majesty's fortress of the Bastille. If your body is claimed by your family it will be given up for burial. At that burial no insignia of your offices of Colonel of his Majesty's Guards and Grand Veneur may be placed upon your bier, or coffin, nor may your Chevalier's sword and *fourreau en croix* be so placed. All your goods are confiscated to the King."

"God save the King!" exclaimed De Beaurepaire.

"For you, La Preaux," continued the Greffier, "the sentence is that you be decapitated at the same time and place as the Prince Louis de Beaurepaire, and in company with him and the woman Louise de Belleau de Cortonne."

"Ah," murmured De Beaurepaire. "Ah! Emérance and I shall be happy at last. We dreamt of a union. At last we shall be united."

"I thank my judges and the King--though they have misjudged me--for recognising my claims to gentle blood," exclaimed Fleur de Mai.

"For you, Van den Enden," again went on the Greffier, "the sentence is that you be hanged by the neck on a gibbet near unto the scaffold on which your companions in guilt must die. And your goods, like the goods of those companions, are confiscated to the King. Amen."

"I shall not leave you till the end," Bourdaloue whispered in De Beaurepaire's ears as the prisoners were now escorted back to their cells. "My son, may God have mercy on you."

"I pray so, holy father. He knows I have need of mercy."

"As have all of us. Come, my son, come."

At the same hour, almost at the same moment, a different scene, though one which owed its existence to the trial now concluded, was being enacted at St. Germain, where the Court now was.

Seated in his chair, advanced three feet from the brilliant circle that surrounded him, Le Roi Soleil witnessed the representation of *Cinna*, that superb tragedy which Corneille--stung by the criticisms on *Le Cid* of those who were deemed his rivals, and doubly stung by the criticisms of those who could by no possibility whatever possess the right of deeming themselves his rivals--had determined should outvie the former masterpiece. By connivance with those who fondly hoped that this play--written immediately after a preceding Norman Rebellion had been crushed--might soften the King's heart towards his whilom companion, it had been selected by the chamberlains for that evening's representation. Never, perhaps, had a greater tribute been paid to genius than this now paid to the dramatist!

Throughout the play, Louis had sat unmoved in his chair, though all present remarked that no word or action of the players was lost by him.

But when, at the end, Augustus Cæsar, having, discovered the treachery of Cinna, resolved to pardon the latter and thus win back his fidelity, the King was observed to move restlessly.

As Monvel, the actor who played the part of Cæsar, speaking with deep impressiveness uttered the superb speech commencing:--

> Soyons amis, Cinna.
> Tu trahis mes bienfaits, je les veux redoubler.
> Je t'en avois comblé, je t'en veux accabler,

Louis' hand was raised to his head and it seemed as though he swiftly brushed away some tears that had sprung to his eyes.

While, a moment later, those seated next to him heard him, or thought they heard him, mutter the words:--

"For the treachery to myself I might have pardoned him. For that against France, for making a pact with her enemies, I can never pardon him."

CHAPTER XXVI

The royal supper, *au grand couvert*, was that night a melancholy one. Surrounded, as was

always the case, by the sons and daughters of his royal house as well as the grandsons and granddaughters, and also by those ladies of highest rank to whom the right was accorded of supping at the royal table, the King sat silent and meditative. It was observed, too, that his Majesty's fine appetite had failed him to-night and that he scarcely ate anything, in spite of this being the meal for which he cared most. The thirty violins that usually played nightly in the gallery of the antechamber were, on this occasion, silent, since the King had ordered that there should be no music; the talk and chatter that, in discreet limitation, usually went on at the second table was now almost entirely suppressed; a gloom had fallen over the Court which, from the august ruler downwards, none seemed able to shake off. Rousing himself, however, from the melancholy that had obtained possession of him to-night--a melancholy produced more by the knowledge that there was no possibility of pardon for his early playmate than by even the reflection that, on the morrow, this playmate was to atone for his treachery on the scaffold--Louis rose from his seat and left the table, while all present rose at the same moment.

"De Brissac," the King said to that officer, who now filled and, until the new Colonel of Guards should be appointed, would fill the place of the unhappy man who was to die to-morrow at three o'clock; "there will be no audience to-night in my bedchamber. Inform the Court," after which the King bowed to all who were present and retired. Yet, so strong was habit that, as he passed a little antechamber on his way to his bedroom he stopped and, going into it alone, saw that his pet spaniels had been fed and were comfortable for the night.

"De la Ruffardière," he said to a young nobleman present in the bedroom, to whom at this time had fallen the privilege of removing the King's coat, waistcoat and shirt before handing his Majesty over to the care of the *premier valet*, "I will dispense with your attendance to-night, and yours," addressing the valet. "I am--fatigued--and would be alone. Bid De Brissac have the guard set at once in the corridor and changed as quietly as possible. Good-night. Heaven have you in its holy keeping."

"Sire," the Marquis de la Ruffardière ventured to say. "I--I--there is a----"

"What is it?" the King asked, looking fixedly at the young man. "What is it----?"

"Sire, a--a lady has arrived to-night. She begs audience of your Majesty. She----"

"Who is the lady?"

"Sire, it is the Princesse de Beaurepaire."

"The Princesse de Beaurepaire! Here! At St. Germain."

"Here, sire. In the blue antechamber. On her arrival your Majesty's Intendant had a suite of rooms prepared for her. But, sire, she implores leave to speak with your Majesty."

"This is the bitterest stroke of all," the King murmured to himself. "*His* mother and almost mine. Heaven!" Then, addressing the Marquis aloud, he said: "I will, I must, go to her. No," he said, seeing that the other made as if he would accompany him. "No. Remain here. This is--I--I--must go alone." Passing through the door which the Marquis rushed forward to open, Louis went down a small passage and, softly turning the handle of the door, entered the blue antechamber. "Madame," he said very gently, as he perceived the Princess rise suddenly from the fauteuil on which she had been seated, or, rather, huddled, "Madame. Ah! that we should meet thus. Oh! madame!" and taking her hand he bent over it and kissed it.

"Mercy, sire," the Princess cried, flinging herself at once at the King's feet. "Mercy! Mercy for my unhappy son. Nay," she said, as Louis endeavoured with extreme gentleness to raise her to her feet, "nay, nay, let me stay here. Here until you have granted my prayer. Louis!" throwing aside all ceremony in her agony, "spare him. Spare him. Ah! you cannot, you will not, slay him, evil as he has been, evilly as he has acted towards you Louis," she cried again as, releasing his hand now, she placed both hers upon her bosom. "Louis, even as he when a child lay on this breast, so, too, did you. As your mother would take you from her bosom to place on mine, so have I taken him from mine to place on hers. We were almost foster mothers as you were almost foster brothers! Ah! sire, as there is One above and He the only One from whom you can sue for mercy, so let me sue for and win mercy on earth from the only one who can accord it." "I am not the only one. He is condemned by his judges. Doomed. If I spare him, then must I spare all who henceforth conspire against me; then have I been merciless to all whom I have hitherto refused to spare for their treachery. For their infidelity."

"Their treachery! Their infidelity! And his! His treachery and infidelity! Do you deem that I do not see it, know it, hate and despise it? Do you think that I, Anne de Beaurepaire--that I, who was the proudest woman in your father's Court, that I whom your father--who hated all other women--alone loved, do not hate and despise my son's acts? Ah! Ah!" she sobbed, "I hate and loathe his infidelity but, God help and pity me! I love the infidel, and he is--my--child. Ah! Louis, Louis," she continued, and now not only had she possessed herself of the King's hand but, with her other disengaged hand, had grasped him above the elbow so that he could not free himself from her; "think of it. Think. Think. Short of making me his Queen, which he could not do, while on my part I would be naught else than that to him, your father loved me so well that there was nothing I could ask that he would not have granted. He who detested all other women; he, the woman

hater! It cannot be that his child will not spare my child. My only child, since his brother, Léon, is imbecile. Ah! I have but one; do not deprive me of that only one."

"Madame," the King replied, while still endeavouring to lift the unhappy Princess to her feet and while the tears streamed from his own eyes as he witnessed her tears falling. "I--I--it rests not with me. There are others to whom are confided----"

"Others," she wailed, yet still with some of her haughty contempt left in her tones. "Others. What others? De Louvois, who reeks of the *roture*. De Louvois the plebeian; La Reynie whose name should be Le Renard; that woman who weaves her toils----"

"Madame, silence! I command--nay, nay, I beg of you to be silent. Not a word of----"

"Ah! I am distraught. I know not what I say. Yet if you will not hear me nor have mercy on me, at least have mercy on my grief and sorrow. See--see--Louis de Bourbon--I kneel at your feet in supplication even as once your father knelt at mine, and--God help me!--you are as inexorable to me as I was to him; yet I kneel in a better, a nobler hope. Sire!" she continued in her misery. "Sire, look on me! If you will not pity me, pity my tears, my supplications; see how abject I am. I--I--Anne de Beaurepaire, who never thought to sue to mortal man. Ah! be not so pitiless, Louis! You! of whom it has been said that you are never wantonly cruel."

"Nor am I now," the King exclaimed, his face convulsed with grief and emotion. "It is not I, but France. Had Lou--the Prince de Beaurepaire--and I been simple gentlemen; had he but aimed his treacherous shaft against me and my life, then he might have gone in peace for the sake of our childhood together, for the sake of the noble Anne, his mother, whom," his voice sinking to a murmur, "my austere father could not refrain from loving. But it was against France. France and her ancient laws and rights; her throne; all that makes France what she is, all that makes your proud race--a race as proud as my own, or as the race of Guise, or Bretagne, or Montmorenci, or Courtenai--what it is. France, for which I stand here the symbol and representative; France which has but one other name--Bourbon."

"Mercy! Mercy! Mercy!" the Princess wailed. "As you are great, as you are Louis the Bourbon, be great in your pardon. Show mercy to a broken-hearted woman."

"If I might I would. But if I spare him, having spared none other who conspired against France, will France spare me? Will she pardon her unjust steward? And there are others. The Council, the great Ministers----"

"Yet," the Princess cried, "it is you who have said, '*L'Etat c'est moi*'. You, whose '*Je le veux*' none have ever dared to question and still live."

"Nevertheless," the King said, still very gently while sick at heart at being forced to so reply, "*he* dared----"

"And," she sobbed, loosing her grasp on his hand and arm as she fell an inert mass to the floor; "therefore must die."

After which she lay motionless, her superb grey hair, which, in her emotion had become dishevelled, making a white patch upon the rich, blood-red Segoda carpet.

Kneeling now by the side of the unhappy mother upon whose breast, as she had said, he had so often been soothed in infancy, the King endeavoured in every way to restore her to sensibility and raise her from the position to which she had fallen. He kissed and rubbed her hands again and again; he whispered words of comfort and affection into her now deaf ears, and said all that one might say to comfort a broken-hearted woman, except that which alone might have called her back to sense and happiness--a promise of pardon for her son.

After which, finding that it was impossible to restore her by his own efforts, the King left the room quietly, went back to his bedroom and, summoning the Marquis de la Ruffardière to assist him, returned to the blue antechamber.

"Poor lady," he said, looking down at the Princess, "she has swooned at learning that there is no hope of pardon for him. Can we convey her to the rooms the Intendant has set apart for her?"

"Doubtless, sire, if your Majesty will permit yourself----"

"Permit myself! In my childhood she has often rocked me to sleep in her arms!"

"Perhaps one of her women, sire, might also assist----"

"When we have conveyed her to her apartments. But, first, go out to the corridor and bid the guard retire for a quarter of an hour. There must be no prying eyes to witness the weakness of the noble Anne de Beaurepaire."

So, when the Marquis had obeyed this order and bidden the sentries leave the principal corridor till he summoned them back, he and the King lifted the Princess gently from the floor and conveyed her to the rooms set apart for her, after which they handed her over to the care of the women she had brought with her on the long, swift journey from Nancy.

Followed by the Marquis, the King returned to his bedchamber and prepared to retire, the assistance of the former being now accepted. Yet, while Louis was gradually undressed by De la Ruffardière who removed his shoes and stockings as well as his clothes, since the *premier valet* had long since departed on receiving his dismissal for the night, the King sighed heavily more than once; and more than once, too, the Marquis observed that the tears stood in his eyes. And, once also, he murmured to himself: "It is his last night on earth. His last night. Stay with me," he commanded as, after rising from his prayers, he prepared to get into his bed. "Stay with me, De la Ruffardière. You can sleep here on the lounge or in the antechamber, can you not?"

"Sire, I will not sleep. Rather may I crave to be allowed to keep guard in the antechamber."

"Nay! nay! Sleep. Rest is needful to all. Extinguish all light, except the night-lamp. Good-night, De la Ruffardière."

"Good-night, your Majesty. God bless your Majesty and grant you a peaceful night's rest."

"Amen," the King said, sighing deeply.

When, however, the guard was being changed in front of the château, and the exchange of sign and countersign could be plainly heard by the Marquis who was lying wide awake on the lounge at the foot of the great *ruelle* of the King's bed, Louis spoke and called him by name.

"Here, sire," the other said, springing off the couch. "How fares it with your Majesty?"

"Sad at heart. Sad. Sad. De la Ruffardière, tell me frankly; here to-night and alone as we are--tell me as man to man--what is the character I bear with my people? Do they deem me a cruel ruler?"

"Ah, sire! The noblest King who has ever adorned a throne. Bountiful, magnanimous----"

"What," the king continued, scarcely pausing to hear the answer he knew must come from a courtier, "what is thought of De Beaurepaire's punishment? Am I deemed implacable?"

"Sire," the other said, hardly daring to answer him, yet forcing himself to do so, "if he should go free what shall be the reward of those who have never wavered in their loyalty to, and love of, your Majesty?"

"Ah," Louis said. "Ah, 'tis true."

After this, the King seemed to sleep, yet, ere the time came for him to awake and give the usual audience in bed to all the courtiers, he spoke to the Marquis a second time.

"You are a friend of De Courtenai?" he asked.

"I am, sire."

"Does he, do all of his family, regret the Byzantine throne they once sat on? Do they who were once Kings, they who are akin to the throne of France, regret their present poverty and lowliness?"

"They have never said so, sire, to my knowledge. They are content to be simple gentlemen. The men are plain soldiers, giving their swords to France, the women to rearing their children as children having the blood of De Courtenai in them. Sire, *bon sang ne peut mentir*."

"They should be happy, very happy," Louis murmured. "The throne they lost could not outvie the gentle, simple life, nor the absence of trouble, care and heartache. De la Ruffardière, pray God that none whom you love may ever attain to a throne."

CHAPTER XXVII

It was, as the King had whispered to himself, De Beaurepaire's last night on earth, as it was also of those others. Of the woman he loved; of the vagabond who, bully though he might be, had been staunch and inflexible; of the old man who, the chief conspirator of all, was now to suffer the most ignominious of deaths.

In the chamber in the Bastille allotted to De Beaurepaire the prisoner sat now before the fire

musing on what all would say when they knew of his end; of what his friends who had loved him well would feel, and of how his enemies, of whom he had so many, would gloat over his downfall. Naturally he thought also of the women who had loved him once and the women who loved him now, in this his darkest hour.

"The women who love me now!" he said to himself. "Who are they? Who? My mother and--and--Emérance. Emérance who is not fifty paces away from me, Emérance who dies by my side to-morrow, yet whom I may not see until, to-morrow, we stand on the same scaffold together. And then but for a moment ere the axe falls."

"Whom I may not see until to-morrow," he repeated. "Not until to-morrow."

And again he said to himself, "Not until to-morrow," while adding: "And there are so many long hours until three o'clock to-morrow!"

As though to corroborate this thought there boomed out the tones of the prison clock striking midnight, the sound being followed an instant later by the deeper boom of the great bell of Notre Dame and then by that of the other clocks in the city.

"Midnight," De Beaurepaire said. "Midnight. Fifteen hours yet of life, fifteen hours spent apart from her! And she here, close by. Ah! it is hard."

He rose from the chair he sat in and went across to the other side of the great fireplace where, in another chair, was seated the Père Bourdaloue reading his breviary. Some time before this the priest had prayed with him and would do so again at intervals during the night, while later--before the end came to-morrow--he would confess and absolve the condemned man as his brother priest would confess and absolve the others, with the exception of Van den Enden, who was resolute not to see either priest or minister of any faith. Now, however, as has been said, the good man read his breviary.

"Father," the condemned man said, standing before him and waiting to speak until he looked up from his book, "Father, help me to see her. I must see her ere we meet there. Below. Help me to bid her a last, a long farewell."

"To see her, my son! The woman who has brought you to this?"

"Nay! nay! Never. None has brought me to this but my own self; my own wickedness, my treachery and ambition. Above all, not she. Instead, her undoing lies heavy at my charge. Had she not loved me with a love passing the love of women, she might have gone free, have escaped. But--but--she grappled herself to me out of that great love and, as I fell, she fell with me. Let me see her once more. Here. To-night."

"What has this love of yours and hers been, Louis de Beaurepaire? The love that honours a woman in its choice, or the mad frenzy, the wild passion, the evil desires that sweep all boundaries and obstacles and laws aside even as the torrent sweeps aside all that stands in its way?"

"An honest love, heaven be praised. On my part the love of the captor for the poor maimed thing he has caught in his hand, and, even in bruising, soothes and comforts too. The love of one who cannot put aside that which, in capturing, he has thus come to love. Yet, further----"

"Yes. What?"

"Our love was not evil. For even as it quickened in our hearts we saw before us a pure, a nobler life that might, that should, be ours. If we had escaped from this our doom; had we never been taken, or, being taken, had we by chance been let go free--we should have wed. Our vows were sworn and deeply, too; they would have been kept."

"You would have kept them knowing what she was?"

"As she would have kept hers knowing what I was. What better am I than she? An intriguer, a traitor, even as she is an *intrigante*, a traitress; yet without her reasons, without her love of her own province as excuse, as extenuation. Had we wedded, our marriage would have but made us more akin and equal."

"If this is in your heart, the chance is still yours. Your vows may still be fulfilled. Louis de Beaurepaire, remembering who and what you are, remembering also who and what she is--as all learnt who were in the Arsenal at your confrontations--are you willing to make this woman your wife to-night?"

"Willing! To-night! Ay! willing a thousandfold. God help her! she has had no return for her attachment to such as I am; if this be an expiation, an atonement from me to her--even at this our last hour--it shall be hers. And--and--" he murmured so low that scarcely could the priest hear him, "for me it will be happiness extreme. To die by her side though only as her lover might have brought its little share of comfort; to die by her side--I her husband, she my wife--will make death happiness. Yet," he exclaimed, looking down suddenly at the priest from his great height, "can you do this? Can this be lawful? Without flaw or blemish?"

"In our holy Church's eyes? Yes."

"And in the law's eyes?"

"The law cannot over-rule us."

"Hasten then, father, to make us one."

"I will go seek the Lieutenant du Roi, yet it needs not even that. Alas! too often have I passed the last night in this place with other prisoners to make any permission necessary for what I do. Yet this I must do," he said, withdrawing the key of the door from his pocket, putting it in the lock and then opening the door itself.

And De Beaurepaire, observing, smiled grimly.

"I could not escape if I would, yet I have no thought of that," he said. "He who awaits at the altar steps the woman he loves seeks flight no more than I who now await her."

After he had heard the key turned in the lock outside, he sat down in his chair again and gave himself up to further meditation. Perhaps--it might well be!--he thought in those moments of all that he had thrown away, with, last of all, his life: perhaps he thought how he, who had once been the chosen comrade of the King, was now to meet his death for his treachery to that King. Above all he must have thought of the proud, handsome woman who was his mother; the woman who, haughty, disdainful of all others, had worshipped and idolised him. And she was not yet old, he remembered; in spite of the early blanching of her hair she was not yet fifty, and he had entailed upon her so bitter a shame that, henceforth, her once great life must be passed in grey, dull obscurity. Her life that had hitherto been so splendid and bright!

"Almost," he whispered, "I could bring myself to pray that God may see fit to take her soon. How shall she continue to live when I am dead, and dead in such a way; for such a sin?"

He thought also of others now, on whom, perhaps, in different circumstances, he would scarcely have bestowed a thought or memory.

He thought of Humphrey West whose death had been so treacherously attempted--thanking heaven devoutly, fervently, as he did so, that in this, at least, he had had no hand or knowledge; and he recalled, too, the gentle loving girl who was, as the Père Bourdaloue had told him only an hour or so earlier, to become Humphrey's bride within a month. That it was not in this man's nature to pray for the happiness of any human being, is not, perhaps, strange, remembering what his own existence had been; yet now, with more gentle, more humane thoughts possessing that nature it was also not strange that he should be able to hope their lives together would be long and pleasant.

"And," he said to himself, Pagan-like to the last, "had I served another as he served me, faithfully and honestly, as a friend, so would I, like him, have denounced that other as he denounced me when set upon and almost done to death by that other's myrmidons. He held the ace--he would have been more than man if he refused to throw it."

Of one other, however, he thought little and cared less. He had never loved the Duchesse de Castellucchio, beautiful as she was; he had regarded her only as a woman who might by a fortunate chance, if the Pope should prove yielding, be able to rehabilitate him in the eyes of the world--and able also to free him from the load of debt that bore him down. Able to assist him to regain the pinnacle to which by his birth and rank he was entitled, but from which by his own failings and errors he had been hurled headlong.

"Nor," he said, and once more he smiled bitterly, "did she love me. Has one of her family ever loved aught but himself or herself? But I served her turn, I enabled her to escape out of France and from her demoniac. While, had a *pis-aller* been required, a De Beaurepaire might well have replaced a Ventura. Now she is safe in Italy and I am here. She should be content."

The key grated in the lock as the doomed man mused thus upon the woman whom he had helped to save from a hateful life; and the bitterness of his fate must stand as atonement for his thoughts of one who was far from being the hard, selfish creature he pronounced her.

A moment later the other woman, the woman he loved so fondly, was by his side. Behind her followed the Père Bourdaloue, who, after bidding two of the gendarmerie to remain outside until he called them, went to the farther end of the room and left the lovers as much alone as was possible.

"Louis!" Emérance exclaimed, as she drew near him. "Louis! Once more we are together. Louis! Louis! Oh! my love."

"*Mon amour. Ma mie*," he cried, clasping her in his arms, while, as he did so, he saw that, though her face was white--white as the long gown (tied round her waist with a cord) which she now wore, and in which to-morrow, nay, to-day! she would go to the scaffold--there was still upon that face, in those soft eyes, a look of happiness extreme. "Thank God it is so. And he," with a look at the priest at the farther end of the room, "has told you? We shall die, we shall go to our

death together as man and wife."

"Nay," Emérance whispered, though as she did so her arms had sought his neck and enlaced it, "Nay, not as that. But----"

"Not as that! You--you who love me so--will not be my wife?"

"I am your wife. In heart, in soul, in every thought, in every fibre of my being. There is nought of me that is not you, that is not De Beaurepaire now. What would an idle ceremony, performed over us by him," with a glance towards the priest, "and witnessed by those soldiers outside, do for us? Could I love you more in the few hours that I should be your wife than I have loved you, not being your wife? Shall we sleep less calmly and peacefully in our graves to-morrow and for ever--yes, for ever!--because that ceremony has not been performed? Louis, there is no wedded wife in all this world to-night who loves her lawful husband more madly than I love you to whom no tie binds me. And--I was a wife once, and my husband beat and ill-used me, and I hated him. You are no husband of mine and I adore, I worship, you."

"But--but--once--we--spoke of marriage, of being wed. Of a life to be passed together."

"There is no life left to us to pass together. Only this hour, these moments--now. When we spoke of that wedded life which should, which might, be ours; when you thought of stooping from your high estate to marry such as I am, there was a hope for us. We might have escaped when we had failed in our attempt--succeed we never could!--and then have been together always. Always. Always. Now," and the soft, clear eyes were very close to the dark eyes of the man so near to her, "we may not be wedded but--I thank God for it--neither shall we ever more be parted. Together we have lived and loved for--how long? A month--six weeks--two months--ah! I cannot well recall. To-morrow brings us together for all eternity."

"You will not be my wife!" De Beaurepaire said again, his voice hoarse, lost in his throat. "You can be so--great--as to reject the one poor repayment I can make for your sweet, your precious, love?"

"Repayment! Does love need repayment? Can there be debtor and creditor in that? And--if so--why, then Louis, Louis, *mon adore*, have you not repaid? You--such as you--to me!"

"My children," the Père Bourdaloue said, turning round and advancing to them, "the night is passing. If you will be wed, now is the time. The Lieutenant du Roi granted you an hour together for that purpose, that hour is running through."

"Father," the woman said, advancing towards him, standing before him so white and pale, yet with, on her face, so calm, so happy a look that he could recall no other dying woman--even as she passed peacefully away surrounded by all who loved her and whom she loved--who had seemed as calm and happy as she. "Father, there is no need. We are wedded."

"Wedded!" he exclaimed. "Wedded! You are wedded?"

"Ay. As much as two need ever be who love each other as we love, who go hand in hand to their doom, to their grave; to that eternal parting which will be an eternal union. Take me," she said now, "back to my cell. To-morrow I shall come forth a bride."

"And you?" Bourdaloue asked, looking at De Beaurepaire. "Are you agreed?"

"As she will have it so let it be," De Beaurepaire answered.

"Come then," the priest said. "Come."

Following him, Emérance took two or three steps towards the door then, suddenly, she stopped and laid her hand on Bourdaloue's arm, although as she spoke her eyes were fixed upon her lover.

"Father," she said, "my life has not been all evil, yet--yet--God help and pity me!--it has not been that of an upright woman, but of one who has been a spy, a conspirator. Not that which my mother prayed it might be as she lay dying. But--if--if--there is aught of atonement for that life, it is that I freely, gladly, yield it up so that as I leave the world I leave it with him whom, of all men alone, I have loved."

A moment later she was back by her lover's side, once more her arms were around his neck, once more she was clasped to his heart.

"To-morrow. To-morrow. To-morrow, we shall be together," she whispered. "Ah! *mon amour adoré*, to-morrow I shall be yours only. To-morrow and for ever."

"You will be brave?" he murmured back. "You will not fear?"

"Be brave!" she repeated. "Brave! Why! what should I fear when you are by my side? When I have all I ask."

CHAPTER XXVIII

The crowd outside the Bastille had begun to form even before the dawn of the gloomy November day which was to witness the execution of the four principal conspirators in the Norman plot; the four conspirators whom alone, of many others of high and low degree, it had been thought advisable to bring to trial. This was because, amongst those others, were names of such importance that, coupled with the name of De Beaurepaire, they would have revealed the existence of so deep-rooted a conspiracy against France and the King as to absolutely threaten the existence of France as a monarchy, as well as the existence of Le Roi Soleil. Therefore, since justice was now to be done upon those four, it had been deemed the highest policy to ignore all others concerned, and thus veil in obscurity the wide-spreading roots of the wicked scheme.

By mid-day the crowd was so augmented that one-eighth of the population of Paris was calculated to be present; the mass of people was so closely wedged that any movement had become impossible. If women fainted from the pressure they were subjected to, they had to remain standing insensible or be supported by others until they recovered, since there was not room for them to fall to the ground. If infants in arms--of which, as always at any public "spectacle," many had been brought--fell or were dropped, it was in most cases impossible to recover them: several old as well as very young persons were trampled to death, and more than one birth took place amongst that crowd.

And still the mob continued to swell and increase until three o'clock, while some hundreds of persons helped to add farther to it long after the "spectacle" was over.

In front of the great door of the prison, above which was carved a bas-relief representing two slaves manacled together, a long scaffold had been erected on which were placed three blocks. Some short distance off was a small movable rostrum, or smaller scaffold, above which was reared a gallows with the rope hanging loosely from it. On this rostrum Van den Enden would later take his stand until, the rope being fastened tightly round his neck, the rostrum would be pushed from under his feet and he would be left hanging. Still a farther distance off was a brazier, the fire in which was not yet ignited. At three o'clock it would be lit and, into it, a huge bundle of papers would be cast. These papers were those which had been found in La Truaumont's possession after death, and contained not only innumerable letters and other documents dealing with the plot, but also his birth certificate and his parchment commissions and *brevets*. As far as was possible his memory, as well as the records of his association with the conspiracy, were to be effaced for ever.

Early in the morning three sides of a square had been formed round the scaffolds and the brazier--the prison wall and the great door of the prison making the fourth side--by a large body of troops. These troops consisted of three lines, the innermost one, which was composed of several companies of the Regiment de Rouen, being so placed owing partly to the fact that the regiment happened at the moment to be quartered in Paris, and partly because it was thought well that its men should witness what had befallen those who had endeavoured to stir up rebellion in the particular province to which it belonged.

Behind these soldiers were those of the Garde du Corps du Roi under the command of De Brissac who, from dawn, had sat his horse statue-like. Behind this were the Mousquetaires, both black and grey.

"How slowly that clock moves," a sandy-haired, good-looking girl of the people said as, at last, the clock of the Bastille struck two and the final hour of waiting was at hand. "Have you ever seen this handsome Prince who is to die?" she asked, turning to a big, brawny man who stood by her side.

"Ay, often," the man, who was totally unknown to the girl, replied, looking down at her. "Often. I was a soldier myself until six months ago. And in the Garde du Corps. Are you an admirer of handsome men?"

"I have heard so much of his beauty. And of his loves. They say all the aristocratic women loved him."

"*Vertu dieu!*" the man said with a laugh; "I wonder then that he did not disfigure himself. One can be fed too full on love as well as other things, *ma belle*," he added with a hoarse laugh, while recalling perhaps some of his own *galanteries de caserne*.

"There is one who dies with him to-day," a dark, pale woman struck in now, "whom they say he

loved passing well, as she him. *Dieu!* what is sweeter than to die with those we love!"

"To live for them, *bonne femme*," the soldier replied, still jeeringly. Then, seeing that this woman's face had clouded with a look of pain, he said in a gentler voice, "Ah! pardon. I have not wounded you?"

"Nay. Not much. But I have loved and been left behind. I would I might have gone too."

"They say he and the woman and the old Jew who is to hang," a cripple exclaimed, "sought to kill the King. *Oh-é! Oh-é!*" the creature grunted, "I would I were tall enough to see the Jew swinging. *Mon brave*," looking up at the ex-soldier, "will you not lift me to your shoulder when they come out?"

"Ay! will I, and fling you at the Jew's head afterwards. If you miss him mayhap you will fall into the brazier. And, so, an end to you."

"Is there a brazier! And for the Jew! Oh! Oh! Oh! To burn him all up. Oh! Oh!" and the cripple, in his efforts to caper about, trod so on his neighbours' feet that they kicked and cuffed him till he was almost senseless.

"The Dutch fleet was off Havre a week ago," one old man remarked to another in solemn, almost awestruck, whispers. "Ah! if the Normans had been ready. If the enemy had landed. If France had been invaded. Oh, *mon Dieu!*"

"*Pschut!*" exclaimed the other old man, one of different mettle from his companion. "The Normans ready! *Fichtre pour les Normans!* There were none who had the power to cause a single village to rise. France might have slept in peace."

"*Attention!*" rang out the voice of the officer in command of the Mousquetaires a little while later, and, as it did so, the crowd roared like so many beasts of prey; then, gradually, yet quickly, too, the roar subsided into a deep, hoarse murmur, and an indescribable tremor, or movement, passed through the thousands present.

For, now, the great bell of the Bastille that had, in days past, so often sounded the tocsin over St. Antoine--and was so often to sound it again in days to come--was tolling slowly: the huge doors were open, they were coming forth.

Ahead of all walked some bareheaded and barefooted Carmelites chanting the *Salve Regina*: following them, the Governor of the Bastille and the Lieutenant du Roi marched side by side. Next, came the headsman and his assistants, masked, the former carrying his axe over his shoulder.

Behind them the condemned ones came forth. First, with the Père Bourdaloue by his side, appeared De Beaurepaire, superb and stately, his head bare. He was dressed all in black velvet but, underneath his outer coat might be caught the gleam of his handsome *justaucorps*. Yet, noble as his presence was, there was missing from his face to-day the look of arrogance and haughty contempt that had hitherto been the one disfigurement of his manly beauty. Now, he walked calmly and solemnly and resigned, as one might walk who followed another to his grave instead of as one who, with every step he took, drew nearer to his own.

Behind him came the woman he loved, the woman who loved him so, the woman whose eyes were fixed upon him as he preceded her and who, it seemed to those who were in a position to observe her, would have drawn closer to him had it been possible.

But still there were the others. Fleur de Mai, big, stalwart, burly, marching with a firm, well-assured step; with an eye that seemed to roam in pride and satisfaction over the vast crowd that was assembled there to see them die; with lips pursed out as though in contempt of what he was about to suffer.

Last of all came Van den Enden, supported, almost dragged along, between two jailers, and muttering as he went: "An old man. So old. So old and feeble!"

That the crowd should make its comments even at such a moment of supreme solemnity was not to be doubted, and that those comments should come principally from the female portion of it was equally certain. The men, excepting only those of the more base and contemptible kind, were mostly silent while, perhaps, feeling within their hearts some satisfaction that the two principal sufferers of their own sex were representing that sex so fearlessly.

From the women there issued, however, almost universal sobbing and weeping, coupled with many exclamations on the splendid bearing of De Beaurepaire as well as the resignation and calm, placid beauty of his companion. "How pale yet brave she is," some said. "How happy she should be to die with him--by his side," said others.

All were now at the foot of the scaffold, Van den Enden going on to the gallows waiting for him, where, when the heads of the others were struck off, he would be hanged. Already the executioner's chief assistant had commenced to cut off the hair from the back of the head and neck of Emérance; another was tucking the long locks of Fleur de Mai up above his neck and

tying it with a piece of cord, while the headsman, observing that De Beaurepaire's wavy hair was cut quite short behind, muttered that "it would not interfere."

"Has monseigneur a piece of this to spare?" he asked, pointing to the dark ribbon with which De Beaurepaire's jacket was tied in front.

"Nay," the doomed man said quietly, while uttering the words which were long afterwards remembered and, when repeated to his mother, brought some solace to her bruised heart. "Nay. Bind me with cord. He Who never sinned was thus bound; shall I go to my death better than He?" Then, putting his purse into the man's hand, he said: "Strike quick and hard. Also be merciful to her," turning his eyes towards Emérance as he spoke.

"Never fear," the man said under his breath.

By this time the others were ready. *La toilette des morts* was made for all. The hair was now all cut away from the neck of Emérance; the executioner had gently turned down the collar of her white robe so that her neck was bare to her shoulders, her wrists were tied together behind. As regards Fleur de Mai, he also was prepared and stood calmly regarding the enormous concourse of people, as though endeavouring to discover among it some friends or acquaintances who might be able to testify how he had died. Later, when the executioner was interrogated by La Reynie as to the events of that day, the man stated that Fleur de Mai hummed a tune as he was being made ready.

It had been ordained that De Beaurepaire's head was to fall first, Fleur de Mai's the second, and that of Emérance the third, and, though the latter had pleaded against this refinement of cruelty to a woman, she was told that her prayer to be executed first could not be granted.

And now the time had come.

With a touch of his hand, a glance of his eyes through the hideous mask he wore, the executioner motioned each to their respective blocks. Fleur de Mai was placed before the outer block on the right of the scaffold, Emérance before the extreme one on the left, De Beaurepaire between them.

"*Altesse*," the headsman whispered. "It is the moment."

Amidst a silence such as perhaps no crowd--perhaps no French crowd!--had ever before maintained, De Beaurepaire turned towards the woman he had learnt to love so fondly.

"Adieu," he whispered, bending down to her so that, for the last time in life, their lips met--embrace they could not, since their hands were tied behind their backs. "Adieu for ever, *ma adorée*."

But from her lips as they met his, the word "Adieu" did not proceed, but, instead, the word "Wedded." As she spoke he saw that she smiled at him.

Advancing now towards the block, he was about to kneel by it; with a sign from his eyes he signalled to the executioner's assistant to give him his hand to assist him in doing so, when, to his astonishment, as well as to that of all in the vast concourse, De Brissac's powerful voice rang out on the dense silence. From his lips were heard to issue the order: "Stop. Defer your task. Proceed no farther in it as yet."

As he thus commanded, his eyes, glancing over the head of the crowd from where he sat above them on his horse, were directed towards a man clad in the *soutane* of a priest, one who was frantically waving a paper in the air. A priest who was seated by the side of the coachman on the box of one of the royal carriages.

"What does this mean?" De Beaurepaire asked in a hoarse tone, while, as he did so, his eyes were directed towards Emérance who had reeled back as she heard De Brissac's stern command and was now supported by one of the monks who had followed the condemned on to the scaffold. In that look he saw that she was white as marble, that her eyes had in them a strange unnatural glance, a glance perceptible even through their half-closed lids.

"Has the King relented at the last moment?" De Brissac muttered to himself. After which he cried to his men: "Make way through your ranks for the Reverend Father. Let him approach at once. It is," he whispered to the officer nearest to him, "the King's Confessor."

This order was easily to be obeyed in so far as the troops were concerned, but more difficult of accomplishment as regarded the crowd behind them. Nor--since it must be told!--was the majority of that crowd very willing to see any interruption of *le spectacle* take place. They had stood here since the November dawn had broken, wet, cold and foggy to observe three men and a woman die, and now, it would appear, they were to be baulked of their sport.

Moreover, there was happening to them that which has always been, and still is, obnoxious to a large multitude of Parisians gathered together, either for their amusement or for the gratification of a sickly, a neurotic curiosity. The troops were dominating them; they were being dispersed, pushed away at the very moment when the great tableau was to have been presented

to their gaze. Slowly backing their horses, the troopers of the Garde du Roi and of the two corps of Mousquetaires were driving back, and, above all, parting the mass of spectators; in a few moments the closely serried gathering was split apart--the priest escorted by some of the men of the Regiment de Rouen was nearing the steps of the scaffold.

"It is an infamy," many in the great gathering muttered. "Has the Splendid one become a Nero?" exclaimed others. "It is torture to them and an insult to us," said still more. "In what days are we living?" While one or two exclaimed, "It has never been done before."

"You are wrong, my son," the priest said, overhearing this last remark and turning round to look at one of the speakers. "I myself have stood on the scaffold and seen a man reprieved, set free; a man to whom I had already given the last absolution. And your mother could not have paid for you to learn the history of your own country. Did you never hear of Saint Vallier, father of Diane de Poitiers, who was spared as he stood on the scaffold through her prayers to the King, even as this man is saved from death--but death alone--through the prayers of his mother to our King?"

"His mother!" many of the dispersed assembly muttered now, a different chord struck by that word so sacred to all French. "His mother. Ah! *Grand Dieu, c'est autre chose*. His mother has saved him! The King has a heart within his bosom. *Vive le Roi!*"

By now the priest was upon the scaffold, the paper he had waved in the air was in the hands of the Lieutenant du Roi, who was scanning it hurriedly, A moment later he turned round to some of his warders and said: "Remove the Prince de Beaurepaire. His life is spared. To-morrow he goes to----"

"Spared!" De Beaurepaire exclaimed. "Spared, to go where? To imprisonment for life, doubtless. I will not have it so, not unless her life is spared too," and, as he spoke, he turned to where he knew Emérance was.

As he did so a hoarse cry broke from his lips, and, all bound as he was, he struggled towards her. What he saw had struck a more icy chill to his heart than the approach of his now avoided death. Upon his knees was the monk, on one arm he supported the form of Emérance; with the hand that was free he held the Cross above her.

"Emérance, Emérance. My love, my love," De Beaurepaire cried. "Emérance. Ah! speak to me."

But the woman's lips did not move. They would never move again.

"She is dead," the monk said, looking up. "She died but a moment ago. As the holy father mounted the steps."

"Dead," De Beaurepaire wailed. "Dead! Gone--and I am here. Emérance is dead! Without me! Gone without one word to me. I will not believe it. It cannot be."

"Not without one word," the monk replied. "As she died I heard her whisper 'Louis' once. A moment later she murmured 'Saved'. Be content, my son, she is at rest."

THE END

Humphrey and Jacquette heard the next day of all that had taken place outside the Bastille and learnt that De Beaurepaire was to be at once sent to the Ile Ste. Marguerite or the Château d'If, where he would remain a prisoner for the rest of his life. The prayers of his mother, aided by the words of the King's Confessor who, though only a humble priest, was much esteemed by Louis, had saved him from death at least.

Of those who mourned De Beaurepaire's fate, and they were many, none did so more than these two who were now about to become man and wife. For, whatever the character of that unhappy man had been, however his vaulting ambition may have o'erleaped itself, it became the custom ere long to speak of him as one who had been more led into error than as the instigator of "the great crime." Indeed, it was not long ere the punishment, even still severe, of Louis de Beaurepaire was generally referred to as one of those *crimes de la cour* which, in earlier days, had made victims of Enguerrand de Marigny and Beaune de Semblançay, of Jacques Cœur and the unfortunate victim of Richelieu's hate, Cinq-Mars. And, as gradually matters became more and more unfolded, as Louis XIV. learnt how De Beaurepaire had been tempted by his enemy, Spain, he himself was known to express regret for him, and, sometimes, to even hint at eventually forgiving him.

For Emérance de Villiers-Bordéville if, until it became known who she was, no sympathy had been expressed in Normandy, some regret for her unhappy earlier life was at last forthcoming. By her real name she was afterwards spoken of and written of in the province as a woman who had been cruelly treated by both her husband and the law, and neglected by those whom, at least at first, she had striven hard to benefit, though in a wicked way; and as one whose mad love for De Beaurepaire had finally led her to her doom. In Paris, those who had witnessed her death, and, above all, those who had heard, or heard of, her last words, regarded her as a martyr to that love. Van den Enden has also, even with all the social prejudice there was against him, at last been written of as "*un pauvre Utopiste Hollandais*." Fleur de Mai, as the Chevalier la Preaux chose to call himself, was soon forgotten or, if ever mentioned, was spoken of as a brigand who had turned conspirator.

It was a month after the imprisonment of De Beaurepaire and when the execution of his two companions had taken place, that Humphrey and Jacquette were married at St. Nicholas-des-Champs preparatory to setting out for England, which country was henceforth to be their home.

"We have done with France for ever, sweetheart," he said to the girl who was to be his bride on the morrow; "England must henceforth be our home. My mother has long made it hers and will never leave it; and it is your mother's land. Jacquette, will it suffice you?"

"It is your land too," the girl replied. "Where you are there is my home. There my heart."

Then, softly, she repeated the words of Ruth which, though not addressed to one who was a lover, have, through the centuries, been so often used by women to those whom they love.

"My own, my very own," Humphrey whispered. "Ah! if it were not that it was I who took the first step to send that unhappy man and woman to their fate, I should carry no regrets away with me. De Beaurepaire was ever kind and gracious to me; I made him but a poor return."

"Nay, say not so. He would have overthrown the King who had done all for him; his myrmidons would have slain you. Your duty lay along the road you took, you could have travelled no other. Had you held your peace, had you let the King fall a victim to him and those who egged him on to such wickedness--the King who persuaded your own King to do justice to you--then would you not have been the hero in my eyes that you are."

"A hero. I? Ah, no! What did I do to earn that name? What, except bring the Prince to his fate?"

"Humphrey. Humphrey, my love, my husband that is to be, do not palter with yourself. Did you not risk your life against those men at Basle rather than consent to keep silence upon their hateful plot? Would you not have slain that bravo had he not played the coward; would you not sooner have slain yourself than become one of them? That--that--was hero's work; as a hero will you ever stand in my eyes."

Wherefore those words of the old dramatist, Quinault, *Les drames sans héros ni héroïne sont les vrais drames*, true as their philosophy may be in general, were not so in this particular. For he who, by his actions in an actual human drama, can earn the opinion of the creature he loves best in this world--the woman who is his wife--as well as the opinion of a despotic monarch, that he is a hero, has scarcely failed to disprove that old writer's remark.

It is not, consequently, to be denied that, in the drama of De Beaurepaire's last year of life, if he was no hero at least Humphrey West was one, while was not Emérance a heroine in a different manner? Not a good heroine, it is true, but a heroine in the same manner as Rodogune, as Phædra, were. A heroine who, though the words were not written ere she died, justified the poet's line: "All for love and the world well lost."

The End.

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