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*Title:* The Red Mass

*Date of first publication:* 1925

*Author:* Valentine Williams (1883-1946)

*Date first posted:* October 22 2012

*Date last updated:* October 22 2012

Faded Page eBook #20121035

This eBook was produced by: David T. Jones, Mary Meehan, Al Haines & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <http://www.pgdpCanada.net>

# THE RED MASS

BY VALENTINE WILLIAMS

*Author of "The Man with the Club Foot," "The Orange Divan," "The Three of Clubs," etc.*

BOSTON AND NEW YORK  
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY  
The Riverside Press Cambridge  
1925

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CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS  
PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

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TO  
THE MEMORY OF  
A. R. G. T.

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*On the day of the execution, Voulland ... saw the tumbrils approaching. 'Come,' said he to those who were at his side, 'let us go to the high altar and see them celebrate the Red Mass.'*

(Mémoires de Sénar)

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# THE RED MASS



# CHAPTER I

## THE PORTRAIT OF A SPOILED YOUNG MAN

*These have not known the sting of rain  
Nor sweet storm waters, heavy falling;  
And they have never felt the pain  
Of burning sun;  
And in the stillness never one  
Has heard a wild bird calling.*

*The loud east wind may call and shout  
Among the trees and sing and cry  
Against the window panes, 'Come out!'  
But they are still,  
And, heedless of the east wind's will,  
They live their lives and die.*

From *In a Conservatory*, by Bernice Kenyon

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The drum of the King's Guard was beating a ruffle.

Harshly the roll awoke the echoes of the Palace as the guard turned out to the huge lumbering coach that was bearing His Majesty from Saint James's to his castle of Windsor. The pigeons flew whirring up; and the old courtyard, its windows flashing in the morning sun, reverberated to the din as the drummer, horridly mindful of the drum-major's curling cane, chin up, arms stiff, wrists flexible as tempered steel, briskly plied his sticks.

Stirringly the roll rang out over the placid morning air. It swelled forth into Saint James's Street. The ragged beggars caught the sound as they clamoured miserably for alms from the great gilt coaches that went lurching by. There were some, in tattered uniforms, whose dull eyes it fired with the light of brave old memories of the days when to them the drum was the very voice of war, the herald of victory and defeat, when the tall round case, with its emblazoned coat of arms and white leathers, was their familiar, constant companion, table for food and dicing, seat and pillow—pillow in sleep and death.

The drums of '94! The flames of war reddened the horizon of Europe, and amid clouds of drifting powder smoke, black against the blood-red sky, the eighteenth century was passing away. From one end of the Continent to the other the brazen-throated roll rang loud in men's ears as the drummers of Santerre, of Dumouriez and Pichegru, drummed a sad procession of periwigged, beribboned spectres to the grave. The sky-line was a mass of jostling figures, above which the shot-torn standards tossed while the blood-stirring, maddening, irresistible music of the drum roused the faubourgs, drowned the unheeded voice of majesty on the scaffold, and swept the barefoot republicans to victory....

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The drum of the King's Guard beat a ruffle.

In his lodging in Saint James's Street, Hector Fotheringay, Lieutenant and Captain of His Majesty's Third Foot Guards, heard it as, clad in a frilled cambric shirt and white breeches, he sat before the mirror at his dressing-table. His stiff, tight scarlet coat with its heavy gold braid and epaulettes, his sword and sash and three-cornered hat, were lying on the bed where he had thrown them when, just now, he had come off King's Guard.

May was approaching its close. Though the hour was early, the Colour Court had been unpleasantly warm at guard-mounting. The sun had beat down fiercely upon the enclosed yard and he had seen the sweat glisten even upon the dusky

face of Hassan, the negro cymbalist, as he marched by with the band in all the glory of his tall turban, with its red and white plume springing from the glittering crescent, and his silver chain and neck-plate.

The heat made the men slack, and Ashdown, the Captain of the Old Guard, had been sadly short of temper. He had found fault with everything and kept the drill-sergeant running up and down the ranks striking at the men with his heavy cane. He had even checked Fotheringay, his Lieutenant, because, forsooth, he found that his hair was not sufficiently powdered.

The mirror was a relic of the Court of Anne and the grandsires of his reigning majesty, mysteriously acquired on retirement by Buttrell, Fotheringay's landlord, for many years footman in the Royal service. Among the patches and powder, the eager glances and pouting lips of those artificial days, it must have reflected often the fretful, discontented expression that now disfigured the handsome features of the young Guardsman.

He held a letter open in his hand. With a scowl on his face he referred from the letter to the glass. The letter was from his cousin Betty and marked a stage in one of their periodical tiffs.

*You are not ill-looking really, she wrote. Your face is well enough, your sun-browned tint (which shows, at least, that the whole of your day is not spent at the gaming-table) is Vastly Becoming to your powdered hair, your blue eyes are Attractive, your nose has Distinction. But any pretence you may have to Good Looks is destroyed quite by the Overweening Arrogance of your expression. At the age of twenty-five, my dear Hector, you wear the Disillusioned Air of the Finished Courtier, not realising that you are too Young to appear Spoiled and too Old to appear Sulky.*

To his impatient scrutiny the old mirror disclosed an oval, sunburnt face, the white powdered hair emphasising the tan, bold, haughty, courageous eyes, in colour the deepest blue, an aquiline nose, a firm and well-shaped mouth, the upper lip decorated with a small and elegant black mustache, such as, in this year of grace 1794, officers of the Household Brigade, almost alone of the Army, wore. It was an arrogant, a discontented face, the face of a spoiled young man with a faint air of dissipation, which, but for a magnificent constitution and a natural love of fresh air and hard exercise, would ere this have marred features of unusual attractiveness and beauty.

With a muttered exclamation Fotheringay turned from the mirror to the table in the centre of his bedroom. On the tray with his chocolate a pile of letters stood. He opened one or two, then flung the whole packet to the floor in a rage. They were all the same, bills, reminders, dunning letters. With a pang they recalled to him the unpleasant fact that, at the Thatched House Tavern on the previous evening, he had lost nine hundred guineas to Maxeter, of the Blues.

He was in a vile mood. He had returned to find his servant absent and no one to help him change his clothes. O'Dare was becoming intolerable, the idlest fellow in the whole Brigade of Guards. And yet the rascal was, in a way, indispensable. Never had he had a servant with such a way with duns. His Irish plausibility was never at a loss: his genial persuasiveness mollified in the most extraordinary fashion these thieving tradesmen, and had hitherto miraculously averted the supreme catastrophe, an appeal to the Commanding Officer.

He stood up and threw back one of the casement windows, letting into the room the sounds and smells of the London morning, the crash of heavy wheels over the cobbled street, the crack of whips, the raucous, discordant cries, the faint scent of wood fires, the stale odour of the open kennels....

Another day begun, another day of aimless idleness, the same unchanging round—a call at the Saint James's Coffee-House to read the papers, a stroll in the Mall, dinner at White's ... no, he had promised Montgomerie, a brother officer, to dine with him at the Cocoa Tree ... then Vauxhall or Ranelagh, and, inevitably and ultimately, an adjournment to the Thatched House or White's or to one of the foreign gambling-dens in Soho. The round scarcely varied from day to day.

A Brigade of Guards was with the Duke of York in Flanders, regiments of the line garrisoned the coast towns, there was a great camp at Warley, and, in obedience to the clarion call of Mr. Pitt, volunteers were springing to arms against the threat of invasion. Yet London held Fotheringay. London with its life of parade and pipeclay, of tiresome levées and dull social functions, unchanging, endless, unbearable.

Unbearable but for Betty. It was she, he realised, not the town that fettered him to London. He might have managed a transfer to the first battalion in Flanders; for the Duke of Argyll, the Colonel of the Regiment, had been his dead father's

friend and patron. But when he had consulted Betty on the project, his cousin, in one of her rare kind moods, had cried out she could not spare him. And so he had let the chance go by nor had of Betty any thanks for so doing.

For a whole week, he reflected, he had not seen her, the divine, the incomparable, the quick-tempered, the nimble-witted Lady Betty Marchmont. On his last visit her wilful elusiveness, her aloofness, her capricious refusal to read what was in his mind, had exasperated him. But he felt himself drawn to her again. He would call on her that very afternoon: an hour with Betty would, he decided, pleasantly bridge that gaping void between the intolerable dullness of the Saint James's Coffee-House and 'Monty's' dinner at the Cocoa Tree.

There was a brisk tap at the folding doors between his bedroom and sitting-room, and O'Dare appeared, a pair of boots in his hand.

'Curse you for an idle rascal!' exclaimed Fotheringay, springing up from his chocolate. 'Od rot you, where have you been?'

'I stepped out to Mr. Hoby's in Piccadilly to fetch your boots, sir,' said the man sullenly. 'They kept me waiting by rayson of th' account, sir ...'

'Damn that for an idle excuse! You were at the King's Head swilling ale, I'll warrant. Curse me if I don't send you up for a couple of dozen if I have any more of your idle ways! Come! Dress my hair again and be quick about it! Only this morning I received "goose" from Lord Ashdown about it. And, blast your eyes, don't breathe down my neck!'

A silken wrapper cast about the front of his fine linen shirt, he seated himself again before the mirror while O'Dare, his face set and sulky, busied himself with his duties.

His toilet completed, Fotheringay changed into undress uniform and prepared to sally forth.

'Tell my groom to bring my horse round to the Saint James's Coffee-House,' he said to O'Dare from the top of the stairs. 'And see that he doesn't keep me waiting, you idle ruffian! Well, Buttrell!'

The landlord, a fat man of fifty-odd, sleek as a firkin of butter, in a snuff-coloured suit and white cotton stockings, who was descending from the upper storey, bowed low.

'Your servant, Mr. Fotheringay, sir!'

'The chocolate was not hot this morning, Buttrell!' Fotheringay rapped out. 'See that it's properly warm another time—you charge enough for it, God knows! And, hark'ee, you needn't send in your bill again. When it pleases me, I'll pay it....'

'Begging your pardon, Mr. Fotheringay,' the landlord interposed, cringing and fawning, 'if so be as you could make it convenient to allow me a little something on account ...'

But the young man waved him aside. Insolent, proud, handsome, and beautifully dressed, he strode down the stairs.

Turning, the landlord found himself face to face with O'Dare.

'Treats us like dogs!' muttered the Irishman. 'There's no way of plazin' him at all, at all. He's the proud divil, so he is, bad luck to him!'

'Ush, O'Dare, 'ush, I beg!'—Mr. Buttrell raised in deprecation a fat red hand—'for shame, man, to say sich wicked things about your good kind master what 'as condescended to pick you up out of the gutter, as one might say ...'

'"Out of the gutter" is it, you fat, pork-fed flunky?' exclaimed the Irishman indignantly. 'The gutter be damned! There's no better name than O'Dare in the whole of Ireland. An', lavin' that on one side, is it the Brigade of Guards you're callin' the gutter? 'Tis a gintleman's life, I'd have ye know, Mr. Buttrell, forby 'tis rough awhile, and I wouldn't have left the company but that I felt meself was a power too good for thim hulkin' black Prasbyterians in the Third Guards. I declare to God, an' I don't care who hears me say it, that life in barracks was heaven compared to what I have to put up with from *him*! Tyranny, that's what it is, Mr. Buttrell. He's a tyrant, and he trates the pair of us like what we were his naygur slaves!'

'My goodness!' exclaimed the landlord, his fat face trembling like a jelly. 'I declare I don't know what's come over you.'

And 'im such a fine gen'elman and heir to one of the finest properties in the country. 'E's 'aving 'is fling now and 'oo shall gainsay 'im, fine rich young gen'elman that 'e is, with 'is uncle, Sir John, at 'is back to pay 'is debts ...'

'Is ut his wealth that gives him lave to insult me?' demanded the Irishman fiercely. 'Thim days is passing, landlord. The toime is come for tyrants to trimble before ... before the thramp of pathriots. The suv'rin people is roisin' up to cast off its fetters ...'

'For the love of God, O'Dare,' cried Buttrell, and clapped a hand over the soldier's mouth. 'Tis rank treason you speak. 'Tis all very well for Dr. Priestley and ruffians like 'im to praise up the murderin' Frenchies at their meetings, but I'll have no talk like this in my house. Patriots, indeed! I'd like to get at 'em with my old besom, the infernal massacring scoundrels! Nothing would please me better than to see their Mossoo de Robespierre strapped up at the triangles, by Gad, with a couple of your drummers warming 'is back. There's treason in the air, O'Dare! You watch out you're not infected by it!'

And with stately tread Mr. Buttrell descended to the kitchen to read in the morning paper the latest news out of the Low Countries.

O'Dare looked after him contemptuously. He shrugged his shoulders, and then, taking from his pocket a thin brochure, opened it where a page was turned down, and, immersed in his reading, returned to the bedroom.

On the outer cover of the pamphlet was printed in heavy black type: 'The Rights of Man. By Thomas Paine.'

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## CHAPTER II

### MR. GRAY

In years to come, Hector Fotheringay was wont to look back upon that glittering May morning as the virtual beginning of his life. As he strolled forth into the sunshine, despite the brave weather, he was conscious of a quick feeling of unrest. It was as though the imminent change that, before another day should dawn, was to overtake his fortunes, had cast its lengthening shadow across his mind.

In truth, the times were unsettled enough. Great events were stirring. England was at death grips with an ancient foe in new and terrifying shape, and, only three days from London, the deadly machine of the regicides day by day in Paris was swamping history in seas of blood. And he was out of all these historic doings, Fotheringay reflected, condemned of his own volition to be a mere pawn in a red coat and march behind a band or drink and lounge and gamble through the long summer nights which, in Flanders and in Paris, were witness to such deeds of high adventure.

At the door of his lodging he stopped and surveyed Saint James's Street. From the windows of the clubs and coffee-houses, thronged with rich and well-fed loungers, his gaze descended to the filthy beggars that swarmed over the pavement. How their numbers had increased since the war with France and how many old soldiers and sailors trailed their ragged uniforms in the mire of the kennels! Even as he stood a grotesque figure in stained and faded scarlet, who, with dog and bell, tapped his way along the pavement rolling his sightless eyeballs and screaming, 'Pray remember the blind man!' sought to clutch his fine lace coat with grimy hand, while an old sailor with tarry pigtail and face the colour of mahogany, who wheeled himself along in a little carriage, clasped him about the legs. When Fotheringay shook him roughly off and bade him begone, the fellow cursed him roundly for an 'aristocrat.'

A new spirit was abroad in the land, infection spread like a murrain from France, the young Guardsman angrily reflected. Even his own servant was not free from it. He noted the dense crowd that, as every day, thronged the pavement before Humphrey's shop where Mr. Gillray's disgraceful caricatures were exposed for sale. The fellow spared no one with his pencil and the common people made a god of him. Mr. Pitt who, thank Heaven, and none too soon, was taking action against the agitators, should lay an information against the ruffian. The filthy doctrines of the regicides were poisoning old England. One could scarcely contemplate the old Palace at the foot of the street without wondering whether it, like the monarchy it stood for, was as solid as it looked.

As he descended the street, the tap of a drum from the interior of the Palace again came to his ears. The brassy roll stirred him strangely. The sound of the drum always carried his thoughts to Paris. His mother had been French—he was glad now that she had not lived to see disaster overwhelm her beloved France—and her brother, the Marquis de Sainte-Valentine had perished, but eight months before, on the scaffold, the last of his line. To tap of drum the tumbril had borne him to the Place de la Révolution, and, as he and his companions met their death, the letter from Coblenz had told him, the drums had beaten again lest the victims should have been tempted to address the mob.

Fotheringay crossed the street in front of the Palace, past the Yeomen of the Guard, resting on their halberds, to the Saint James's Coffee-House. A prodigious buzz of conversation greeted his ears as he entered. The ground-floor room was densely crowded and every newspaper was the centre of an eager and animated group.

A big man in the undress uniform of the Horse Guards, who was breakfasting at a table against the wall, beckoned Hector over.

'Good-morning, Maxeter!' said Hector, stopping at the table.

'Join us, Fotheringay,' invited the big man, his mouth full. 'Let me present you to my friend, Mr. Gray.'

He indicated a natty little ant of a man of middle-age, very neatly dressed in sober brown with spotless linen of the finest texture at neck and wrists. He was clean-shaven and wore a brown wig.

'I am honoured, Mr. Fotheringay,' said Mr. Gray, rising and bowing.

Hector saluted him punctiliously. He remembered having seen him at odd times at the coffee-house.

'The luck was against you at the Thatched House last night, Fotheringay,' observed Maxeter.

'Yes, curse it,' Fotheringay agreed. 'Nine hundred guineas, wasn't it? You'll have to wait a day or two for your money, Max. I've got to journey down to Somersetshire to that old skinflint, my uncle, and see if I can raise the wind!'

Maxeter laughed.

'There's no hurry about it,' he said. 'But why don't you marry, man, and get rid of the leading-strings? Mr. Fotheringay here,' he explained to Mr. Gray, 'is, under his late father's will, deprived of the full control of his fortune until such time as he marries. Sir John Fotheringay, his uncle, is his guardian and controller of the purse ...'

'Sir John Fotheringay?' said Mr. Gray. 'He was with the Army in America, I think? Aye, I know him!'

'Then you number among your acquaintance a damned old skinflint, sir,' Fotheringay broke in hotly. 'Four times a year have I to travel down to the wilds of the West Country and weary myself to death in the set of fox-hunting country squires with whom my uncle delights to pass his time. Each time I must stay a fortnight, for so he will have it, and of that a week at least is spent in the stormings and blusterings, the reproaches and reprimands, which the mention of my debts invariably calls forth!'

'Sir John has the reputation of belonging to the old school,' observed Mr. Gray sedately.

'He has stayed in it too long, sir,' replied Fotheringay severely. 'He thinks that an officer of the Guards may do with a hundred pounds a year as he could in the days of Corporal John. Why, dammit, Maxeter here pays his *valet de chambre* as much!'

'And he's worth every penny of it, curse me!' heartily vociferated Maxeter. 'Peyraud has not his equal in London for the tying of cravats. The Prince would have taken him from me, but I protested to His Royal Highness that it was unfair, "for you, Sir," I told him, "are, so to say, *hors concours*!" He was devilish amused!'

An excitable voice that cried out suddenly in French now drew their attention to the next table. Three men, all dressed in the height of fashion, but with certain niceties that stamped them as foreigners, sat there, an open newspaper before them. One of them, a dark young man with a passionate face, who wore the riband of the Order of Saint Louis on his breast, was exclaiming excitedly:

*'Ils se moquent de nous! Ils se moquent de nous!'*

One of his companions, a foppishly attired youth of about twenty-five, who was drinking sherry, nodded his head in approval.

'What can one expect of a government that bows always to the will of the people?' remarked the third man, whose large and fleshy face wore an undoubted air of authority. He had narrow eyes and thin lips that shut with a snap.

'Is there bad news from France again?' asked Fotheringay in a low voice of Maxeter. 'The *émigrés* seem very excited.'

'The Duke of York has had a drubbing at Tourcoing by Lisle,' Maxeter answered. 'And, if Mr. Gray's information be correct, he owed his safety only to the swiftness of his horse.'

'I had the news from Mr. Secretary Dundas himself,' replied Mr. Gray. 'The Marquis d'Aligre seems mightily put out about it!'

'Which is he?' asked Fotheringay.

'The old man with the fat face. He brought a vast fortune out of France with him and steadily declines to give a sol to aid the grievous distress among his fellow *émigrés*. The one with the riband is the Vicomte de Solesmes: the young man I do not know.'

Meanwhile the conversation among the *émigrés* had been resumed.

'They are all shopkeepers,' declared the Vicomte. 'They are not a race of soldiers as we. They have the strength and the determination of which soldiers can be made, but their soul is in their shop!'

Fotheringay flushed up.

"Fore God," he said to his companions, "their impertinence is intolerable. Do you know what they say?"

Maxeter yawned.

"I have said all the French I know," he remarked cheerfully.

Mr. Gray leaned forward.

"I see you know French, Mr. Fotheringay," he said. "My advice to you is to turn a deaf ear to the political arguments of these gentlemen. They are of the type of French nobleman which, to my way of thinking, is one of the few excuses for the conduct of the Jacobins."

But the Vicomte, who waxed more excited with the warmth of his eloquence, was speaking again.

"Look around us!" he exclaimed. "The town is full of idle officers. They look brave enough in their red coats now, but when it comes to fighting they run ... like their famous Duc d'Yorck!"

With a crash Fotheringay's chair fell over. The young Guardsman had sprung to his feet. He strode to the Frenchmen's table.

"You and your friends," he said, addressing the Vicomte in polished and exquisite French without a trace of English accent, "will take yourselves out of this coffee-house and will return only at the risk of receiving the chastisement which your impertinence merits."

He had spoken in a ringing voice and a dead hush fell upon the room. Very white the Vicomte rose to his feet.

"By what right, Monsieur, do you interfere in a private conversation?"

"By the right conferred by respect for the uniform which I have the honour to wear. You will permit me to add, Monsieur, that it would be more fitting for you and your friends to be in the field seeking to liberate your country than to seek shelter here to criticise those who are doing it for you!"

The Vicomte's eyes blazed. He was about to speak when the Marquis rested a pudgy hand on his laced sleeve. He fixed his small eyes, dulled with years of vice, on the Guardsman's hot and angry face. He did not rise.

"Monsieur, you insult us!"

Fotheringay shrugged his shoulders.

"My remarks were addressed to your friend," he said. "But you can accept them for yourself if you wish!"—he paused—"they will cost you nothing!"

The hand of the Marquis d'Aligre flashed to his sword; but now the room fell into an uproar. A party of officers stepped between the adversaries.

"I shall kill you for this!" exclaimed the Vicomte over a barrier of restraining arms. Then to the Marquis: "No, no, Marquis, he is my man!"

"My friend, Lord Maxeter, will be glad to receive any friend of yours!" Fotheringay retorted. "Max," he went on, "I count on you!"

Some one handed him his hat. It was Mr. Gray, looking at him curiously with his keen eyes. Fotheringay bowed to him stiffly and strode out of the coffee-house.

---

# CHAPTER III

## THE MAN ON THE SOFA

The whole day had gone wrong, the young man reflected, as he slowly rode towards Chelsea where the Lady Betty Marchmont lived with her aunt, the Dowager Countess of Orifex. He was more concerned than he would admit over the state of his money affairs, for there were transactions with certain seedy Hebrews of Long Acre which he had sedulously withheld from the knowledge of his guardian. His capital was not large, and he knew, what Maxeter and his other friends did not, that the estates to which he was heir were already heavily encumbered. He was growing increasingly conscious that his means would not indefinitely stand the strain of his life as a man of fashion. He would have to make up his mind to marry and settle down before it was too late.

His encounter with the *émigrés* had upset him. He cared nothing that two duels, perhaps three, would follow the brisk brush of that morning. But the Vicomte's sneer about the town being full of red coats rankled. It rankled because, as far as Fotheringay was concerned, it was a palpable hit.

'I'll kill him for that!' he muttered, and savagely dug his spurs into Paladin's sides.

His nerves were yet jangling when he was ushered into the prim drawing-room of Lady Orifex. Betty was at the clavecin humming over to herself an old song of Lulli's, while her aunt's companion, Baroness von Schlippenbach, the impoverished daughter of one of George II's Hanoverian Court, bent over her embroidery frame at the window.

The melody broke off abruptly, as he entered, on a note that jarred and sung. Betty rose and dropped in mockery a deep curtsy.

'The Baroness and I,' she said, casting down her beautiful eyes, 'are profoundly sensible of the honour Mr. Fotheringay does us in remembering our poor existence!'

And with spreading skirts she sank down before him once more.

'You seemed to be so glad to be rid of me the last time, Betty,' the young man answered, flushing, 'that I had thought my presence would not be missed!'

'Nor has it, sir! Nor has it!' Lady Betty flashed back, tossing her head. 'Strange as it may seem I have managed very well to amuse myself without you. Indeed, I wonder that you should have troubled to-day!'

And opening her large eyes in feigned amazement at him, she dropped into a gilt *bergère* and began to play with her little spaniel.

Fotheringay drew up a chair and sat down beside her.

'Indeed, Betty, I have been much taken up with my military duties ...' he began. He tried to mollify her; but her reception of him had increased his exasperation and, even as he spoke, he was conscious that he had made a false start.

'So I observed at the Rotunda on Wednesday night,' she answered with a teasing smile. 'I had believed I had seen you in gallant company with Mr. Angelo and Mr. Bannister, the actor, and ... and others who, no doubt, were likewise engaged in military duties ...'

'You were at Ranelagli on Wednesday?' said the young man. 'I did not see you. With whom were you?'

'I am so much taken with my social duties, I vow, that I scarce remember,' she rejoined mockingly. 'With Mrs. Sheringham and Major Doyle, I believe I was. A great number of people joined our party. I think the Prince of Wales was there ...'

Fotheringay bit his lip.

'You fly high, Betty, my dear,' he said. 'I did not know you numbered His Royal Highness among your acquaintance.'

'Odd as it may seem, I do,' she retorted with a toss of her head. 'And no later than last night I was at Carlton House to

hear the Prince play in the quartet of chamber music. On the violoncello His Royal Highness is quite admirable!"

Fotheringay shrugged his shoulders. There were few men of his set who would venture to discuss the character of the Prince of Wales with an unmarried girl.

'Betty,' he said in a low voice, 'get rid of the Baroness. I want to talk to you.'

'Schlippenbach,' observed the girl in a resigned tone, 'will you leave us? Cousin Hector is going to talk secrets!'

'*Teueres Kind*,' said the Baroness, looking up from her work, 'scarcely I think it is brober that a yong maiden shouldt alone remain vith a yong man. Your oldt Schlippenbach iss disgreet. It is a family dradition. Queen Garoline of plessed memory hass said of my late Papa, "Der Schlippenbach" she hass said "iss domb like a fish!"'

But the girl stood up.

'Schlippenbach!' she cried peremptorily. 'Leave us when I tell you!'

The old Baroness, a haggard and acidulated spinster, her powdered hair piled high in the fashion of a bygone age, had learnt the lesson of years of humble dependence. Her thin and mittened hands folded in front of her, she rose and with a guttural 'I go!' glided silently from the room.

'Ugh!' ejaculated Betty, resuming her seat. 'Every time I see her I am terrified of poverty and old age!'

'Betty,' said Fotheringay, taking her hand, 'there is something I wish to say to her ladyship your aunt. But before I speak to her I want to consult you, to ... to ...'

Betty whipped her hand away.

'My dear Hector,' she said. 'Is this a proposal?'

'Don't mock me, Betty,' Fotheringay pleaded. 'Since you came to town two months ago to be presented I have discovered again my old playmate of our childhood years. Do you remember the old days at Frome? Your aunt brought you to spend Christmas with my mother. You were in mourning for your father then, such a solemn little girl in black. We were sweethearts then, dear Betty, and since I have seen you again in London it has come upon me that you are the only woman for whom I have ever cared. It has seemed to me sometimes that I was not wholly indifferent to you. Dearest Betty, I want to seek happiness with you again at Cranwell where my father and mother began their married life. On my marriage the property, now administered by my uncle, comes back to me. We will live on our estates; our friends shall visit us; and, from time to time, we will travel up to London to taste the delights of the town. How does the prospect please you, Betty? May I speak to your aunt?'

The girl sat very erect in the high-backed chair, her face inscrutable.

'Your proposal does me great honour, my dear Hector,' she said, 'but I beg you to put it from your mind. It is impossible.'

The young man started back.

'Am I so unsuitable a *parti*, then?' he asked. 'My estates are large and, with the careful management which I shall bestow, will return a more than comfortable income. And, on my uncle's death, as you know, I shall succeed to the baronetcy!'

'I will never live in the country again,' the girl exclaimed passionately. 'I was never meant for a hum-drum life among cows and sheep and poultry. I hate the country, do you understand? I hate it. When my father was killed in the American War, I was left a penniless orphan and all my life that I can remember has been spent in retirement as a dependent on my aunt's generosity. I have only begun to live since I came to London. I have beauty, I have wit, and in London I mean to stay!'

'Town life is hollow,' said Fotheringay gravely. 'Its pleasures are soon exhausted. There is no happiness in the town, my dear!'

The girl stamped her foot.

'*You* have had your fling!' she cried. 'There is no novelty in London life to *you*. But what do *I* know of life? Whom do I

ever see at Stoke Norton except old Dr. Benfield or the Squire or Parson Clutterbuck? Here in London a woman may sway empires, may make and unmake men, there are fortunes at her command. Mrs. Sheringham says that with my looks I may make a great match. The Prince is greatly *épris*, Major Doyle tells me.'

'With all respect for His Royal Highness,' said Fotheringay, 'the Prince of Wales is no fit acquaintance for an unmarried girl!'

Fiercely Lady Betty turned on him.

'And are you any different? With your painted women and your drunken parties and your gambling night and day? And when you tire of it and the money begins to give out ... don't deny it, every one says you are *criblé de dettes*...! you come to me and offer me to become a squire's wife in Somerset!'

'Better a squire's wife than a Prince's mistress!' Fotheringay retorted hotly.

'Oh!' cried the girl indignantly, 'how dare you say such things to me?'

'You put them in my mouth,' cried the young man vehemently. 'You speak as if there were no such thing as love. Has love no place in your thoughts?'

'If I could meet a *man* ...' she said.

'And yet I thought ... you gave me reason to think ... you cared for me?'

'You do yourself too much honour, cousin,' she replied coldly.

'When I would have taken service with our battalion in Flanders, you dissuaded me from so doing, if I remember rightly ...' he began.

But, furiously, she cut him short.

'Yes,' she said. 'And you bowed to a woman's whim! You let a woman command you when your comrades are lying out in the open under the grapeshot of the enemy, when your own uncle, your mother's brother, died for his faith on the scaffold. Oh! I wonder you have the courage to look your men in the face. When crimes are being perpetrated that cry to Heaven aloud for the vengeance of a man's strong right arm, you in your fine uniform prance about London, an autocrat among your soldiers, drinking and dicing whilst women of your own mother's birth and race are being foully massacred in Paris. If I met a man I could respect and love, I'd follow him to the ends of the earth. But as for you, I respect more highly Pichegru's ragged Republicans! At least they are ready to die for what they believe!'

White to the lips, Fotheringay stood up and bowed to her. Blindly he took his hat and sword from the old servant in the panelled hall and blindly rode away. By five o'clock, when Montgomerie called at the Saint James's Coffee-House to fetch him to dine at the Cocoa Tree, he was drunk.



He had very little recollection afterwards of the dinner. He remembered a note arriving from Maxeter saying that he was meeting the seconds of the Vicomte de Solesmes that evening and would let Fotheringay know what was decided. For the rest the meal was a confusion of bunches of lights that bent and swayed at him in their big branch candlesticks, of loud voices talking together, of laughter, the popping of corks, of speeches, of songs. There followed a journey in a coach to some gardens where, the soft air of the May evening reviving him, he partly recovered his senses in a box overlooking trees all dappled with coloured lights and leafy paths crowded with throngs that strolled up and down to the strains of a concealed orchestra.

Here there was more claret and champagne, and horse-play with women who shrieked with laughter. One girl tried to slip a great latchkey down his back, and he pursued her, shrilly screaming, until he was brought up leaning over the ramp of the box. Carfax, an ensign, saved him from taking a header into the grounds.

'You're most uncommon drunk, Hector!' he said, grinning, as he put him back on his feet and, ringing for the waiter, ordered him soda-water. Then somebody proposed visiting the gaming-house that had recently been opened in Pickering

Court, at the foot of Saint James's Street. They all piled into coaches, leaving the supper table strewn with broken glass, the cloth stained with spilt wine, and a faint odour of perfume hanging in the air.

Arrived at Saint James's Street, a narrow passage between the houses brought them to a small flagged court with a cloistral air, at the end of which stood a low-pitched red-brick house with a green door. On one of the pillars of the doorway was a brass plate inscribed: 'Rouge and Roulette, French and English Hazard. Commence at one o'clock.' A couple of link-boys idled about the court, and in the shadows lurked various shabby individuals, hook-nosed and thick-lipped—Jewish bill-discounters, always at hand 'to accommodate the nobility and gentry.' The windows of the house were brilliantly lit, and through the open casements the sound of voices and laughter floated forth upon the warm evening air.

At the door Montgomerie linked his arm in Fotheringay's.

'You're so dam' drunk, Hector,' he said, 'that you'd best go home. I'll walk round with you if you wish!'

Angrily Fotheringay shook him off.

'What ... what d'you mean?' he said thickly. 'I'm all right, curse you! If any man says I'm drunk ...'—he raised his voice and looked round the knot of men streaming up the steps—'damme, I'll call him out!'

'Gentlemen, gentlemen,' said an agonised voice from the hall, 'I pray you make less noise. You'll bring the watch on us else!'

'Let him be, Monty!' called another voice.

'He'sh ... hic ... not drunk!' boomed a third. 'Come ... come up and show 'em how to throw a main, Hector!'

A vague and swaying form, silhouetted against the light within, waved from a window.

Friendly arms encircled him and he was drawn into the house.

The draught of soda-water and the drive through the night air had cleared his brain, at least, though his head throbbed and he seemed to have strangely little control over his legs. But Hector Fotheringay had an iron constitution that reacted well against the effects of strong liquor, even when, as on this evening, he had drunk what would have sufficed to put most men in his set under the table. As they trooped through the hall in a body, there flashed back upon his bemused brain, bright as lightning in a clouded sky, the clear recollection of Betty's words to him that afternoon. It was like a stab in the heart, and he knew that, even drunk, he could not find oblivion.

The long, oval gaming-table covered with green baize was set at the far end of the long low room, which was lit by clusters of candles in sconces fastened to the wainscot. The crowd about the tables was silent and preoccupied, and the only sounds were the rattle of the bones and the cry of the throws. Little groups of men stood chatting while waiters circulated with trays of iced punch. All round the walls were settees upholstered in faded red plush.

Hector's party, men and women in a joyous, convivial troop, instantly melted into the company about the table. But for the moment, Hector had no wish to gamble. His numbed brain was fumbling with the memory of Betty and her stinging taunt. Mechanically he took a glass of punch from a waiter and stood a little on one side, morose and gloomy, despair and mortification cankering his heart.

And then, to his unbounded surprise, he heard Betty's name mentioned. It resounded clearly from a knot of men gathered about one of the couches against the wall.

Fotheringay did not catch the words. But the loud guffaw they evoked left him in little doubt as to their purport.

'The fortress is yet inviolate, I swear,' said another voice, drawling and slightly guttural—not the one that had spoken first—'but I doubt whether it will withstand a long siege, eh, Doyle?'

This time he had a brief view of the speaker, a stoutish man who sat on the couch, the only one of the group thus placed. Fotheringay caught a glimpse of him as one of the men in the circle half-turned to give his glass to a passing waiter. Something seemed to snap in the young man's brain. All the pent-up irritation of the day burst its dam and, leaping forth, overwhelmed him. Scarcely conscious of what he did, his glass still in his hand, he strode furiously up to the group,

blindly pushing aside two men that stood in his way. He was mad with red, unreasoning rage. He saw nothing, heard nothing. He was only vaguely conscious of a sea of swimming faces that stared whitely at him out of the void as he thrust his way up to the couch.

'You speak of my cousin, sir,' he said, addressing the man on the sofa. 'Let this teach you to mend your manners!'

And he flung the contents of his glass in the other's face.

There was a moment's frightful hush. Stunned by the death-like silence, the glass in his hand dripping on to the carpet, Fotheringay stared stupidly round the circle. The mist began to clear.... Rather to his surprise he recognized in the group Mr. Gray, his acquaintance of the Saint James's Coffee-House, his gimlet eyes fixed upon him. On the sofa a plump, elegantly dressed man was wiping his face with a lace handkerchief. A star glittered on the breast of his exquisitely fitting blue kersey coat. When he saw his face, Fotheringay, drunk as he was, knew what he had done. Even as he reeled back aghast, from the back of the room a drunken voice said clearly:

'Gad! He's soused the Prince!'

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# CHAPTER IV

## AFTERMATH

In the ominous pause which followed that exclamation, Fotheringay came to his senses and realised that his career was irretrievably ruined. They were almost all men of his world in the room, and their deadly silence was the silence of those assembled round a scaffold to see a fellow mortal die. If sympathy or pity there was in that awed and speechless throng, it was suppressed out of respect for the social code that had been outraged.

In that age their world looked with amazing indulgence upon the weaknesses and follies of men and women; but it guarded with scrupulous jealousy its prerogatives and the principles from which those prerogatives derived. Ruthless hands had rudely shaken one of the pillars of their order and instinctively the entire company gathered about it to defend it against the aggressor. In that instant Fotheringay perceived that a pit had opened between himself and his comrades.

Unsteadily the Prince had risen to his feet. A tall man, with a great hawklike nose and elegant-waisted figure, was at his side. It was Colonel Douglass who commanded one of the battalions of Foot Guards.

'Sir,' he was saying, 'I entreat Your Royal Highness to withdraw and leave me to deal with this affair!'

The Prince who, in all circumstances, comported himself with dignity, did not even glance at his assailant.

'I know my honour is in safe hands, Douglass,' he said with composure. 'Doyle, will you see to my barouche?'

The crowd fell back precipitately as, accompanied by his gentlemen, the Prince left the room. Then, with a black, icy look, Colonel Douglass turned to Fotheringay and beckoned him aside.

'Your name, sir?' he rapped out.

'Lieutenant Fotheringay, Third Guards!'

'You will return to your quarters and consider yourself under close arrest. Are any other officers of your regiment present?'

Fotheringay turned and mustered the awed group surveying them from a respectful distance.

'Captain Montgomerie, sir, and Ensign Carfax!' he replied.

The Colonel looked round and named the senior of the two officers, who at once stepped forward.

'You will take this officer's sword,' the Colonel said, addressing Montgomerie, 'and conduct him back to his lodging. I make you personally responsible for Mr. Fotheringay. You will wait upon your Commanding Officer in the morning and ascertain his wishes regarding your charge. Is that clear?'

'Sir!' said Montgomerie, stiff as if on parade.

Fotheringay detached his sword from his side and handed it silently to his friend, who received it with cold, impassive face. Already the crowd had begun to drift back to the gaming-table and the rattle of the dice came to the ears of the two officers as they filed out into the moonlit night. At the door a man stood back to let them pass. It was Mr. Gray searching Fotheringay's face with his enigmatical regard.

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The next evening Hector Fotheringay sat at the window of his rooms and looked out upon a world whose whole aspect had changed. The scene which he contemplated was familiar enough, the chairmen gossiping at their stand at the top of the street, the lamplighter with his ladder and his oilcan and his tinder-box swiftly going his rounds, the great gilt coaches lumbering down the cobbled slope bound for the Court or the play. From time to time the evening breeze brought to his ears from Piccadilly the flourish of a horn from the White Horse Cellar or the Gloucester Coffee-House as the coaches came spanking in from the West, and once the brazen roll of drums from the Palace hammered at his lonely

heart. But these were the sights and sounds of a world which was no longer his.

He was ostracised, an outcast. He had insulted one who stood too high for the code of honour to touch. That the provocation was great had not been, would not be, taken into account. He had brought the good name of his regiment into disrepute, and for that he was to suffer.

His career in the Army was at an end; his Colonel, before whom he had passed a terrible quarter of an hour that morning, had said as much and a great deal more besides. It was a question whether Mr. Fotheringay should be tried by court-martial for conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman or be permitted to send in his papers. A humble apology to the Prince, he was advised, might secure clemency. His Royal Highness had been gracious enough to say, in mitigation of the offence, that the officer was undoubtedly drunk.

Bitterly he felt the humiliation of his position. The studied aloofness of Montgomerie, who had been his friend, and the veiled insolence of O'Dare, his servant, told him all too clearly that his fall was complete.

The final blow had been struck an hour before in the shape of a perfumed note delivered by a little black page.

*It has come to me, it ran, that you have made a scandal with the P. about me at a gaming-house. If you have a shred of honour left, you will let this matter rest where it is and leave London without more ado. I never wish to see you again.*

B. M.

Some garbled version of the scene had, of course, reached Betty. Would she judge him thus harshly if she knew the truth? In vain he tried to compose a letter that, while defending himself, should mollify her. In the end he abandoned the attempt. Betty despised him so heartily already, he told himself, that it can have wanted but little to make her join in the hue-and-cry against him.

Ten o'clock was striking from Saint James's Church when Montgomerie put his head in at the door.

'A Mr. Gray is below and asks if you will receive him,' he said frigidly.

'That surely rests with you,' Fotheringay rejoined.

'He has permission!'

'I want no visits of sympathy! Tell him I am engaged!'

Tragic is the loneliness of the proud heart. At that instant what Hector Fotheringay desired above all things else was an understanding word or even a comprehending handclasp. But his world had outlawed him and he would have none of his world.

Montgomerie was back with a note.

*If I venture to crave five minutes of your time, the crabbed handwriting read, it is because I think I have a way out of your present difficulty.*

Hector shrugged his shoulders.

'I will see Mr. Gray,' he said.

Mr. Gray was as composed, as enigmatical as ever, very soberly dressed in black with a cloak across his arm.

'Mr. Fotheringay,' he said, taking the chair to which the Guardsman pointed, 'if I venture to intrude at a moment that doubtless appears to you ill-chosen, it is because I come on a matter of business, of pressing business!'

His keen eyes ferreted in the young man's face.

'Last night I was witness of a scene that did your heart more credit than your head. The consequences of that unpremeditated act are likely to be grave. For that reason I offer you my services in averting them.'

Hector shrugged his shoulders.

'There's no use in crying over spilt milk,' he said. 'The damage is done now. My career in the Army is at an end and I can no longer show my face in London.'

'Your logic is inexorable, Mr. Fotheringay, and I bow to it. But you are young, you have a long future before you. What if I proposed to you the means of rehabilitating yourself?'

Hector laughed bitterly.

'By apology? By boot-licking? My Commanding Officer spoke of this. Let's hear no more of it, Mr. Gray. For defending the honour of a lady I will not apologise. If you proffer me your influence at Carlton House to this end'—he stood up stiffly—'I must reject your assistance ...'

With firm hand his visitor thrust him back in his seat. 'Tock, tock, tock! How quick you take me up!' he said. 'What is past is past! But I can put you in the way of rendering your country a signal service which, successfully accomplished, will go far to efface the memory of last night.'

Hector stared at him, the blood draining from his face.

'What do you want with me?' he said slowly.

'If I may count upon your acceptance,' said Mr. Gray, 'I will take you to a friend of mine who shall acquaint you more nearly with the details of your mission. But, I warn you, Mr. Fotheringay, it is not without danger. Nay, I will go farther and say that possibly your rehabilitation may be achieved only at the price of your life ...'

The young man started, his eyes bright with excitement. The other's words were like a rope flung to a drowning man. Here was the issue he sought out of the black slough of despond in which he floundered. Here was the chance to prove himself a man in Betty's disdainful eyes.

Long afterwards he was wont to think of that scene, the prelude to his great adventure, the little sitting-room dimly lit by the heavy candlestick that stood on the table between them, the flickering light of the tapers falling upon the shrewd and eager face of his visitor, and through the open casement, where the moonbeams fell into the room, the distant voice of the watchman calling the hour.

'Think well on it,' Mr. Gray was saying, 'for once this matter is engaged upon, there can be no drawing back.'

Hector stood up abruptly. From the armchair in the corner he gathered up his hat and cloak.

'Will you take me to your friend, sir?'

For the first time the features of Mr. Gray relaxed. A gentle smile lit his face with warmth. He sighed with the air of a man who has successfully come through an ordeal.

'Mr. Fotheringay,' he remarked, 'I had little doubt, when I met you yesterday at the coffee-house, but that you were my man. I have a coach below!'

But with a dismayed expression Hector smote his brow.

'I protest I had clean forgot it!' he cried. 'Mr. Gray, I am under arrest and may not leave my quarters!'

Another of Mr. Gray's quizzing looks.

'I have that which forces all doors, breaks all consigns,' he declared. 'You shall see! You permit me? Captain Montgomerie,' he called.

Hector's brother officer appeared.

'I desire that Mr. Fotheringay should accompany me. Is that in order?'

The Guardsman bowed.

'The papers you have shown me, sir, entitle you to dispose of my prisoner as you deem fit.'

Profoundly puzzled, Hector Fotheringay followed his companion downstairs and out into Saint James's Street where a hackney coach was waiting. What manner of man was this who had power to override the awe-inspiring authority of the Brigade of Guards? He was obviously not a military man; by his dress he seemed to be rather a lawyer or a doctor. Fotheringay turned the problem over in his mind as, his companion at his side, they bumped and rattled through the dark and narrow back streets of Saint James's. He scarcely noted whither they were proceeding, and it was only when the coach halted and Mr. Gray bade him descend that he found they had stopped on the far side of Saint James's parade ground outside a wooden door in a high brick wall.

Mr. Gray paid off the coach and, producing from his pocket a key, unlocked the door. They traversed a small garden by a path at the end of which a light burned in a fanlight above another door on which Mr. Gray knocked. It was instantly opened by an elderly footman in livery. He seemed to know Hector's companion, for, without a word, he led the way up a few shallow stairs and along a broad passage wainscoted in dark oak. He opened a door and, holding up his hand to enjoin silence, tapped at another door that stood beyond the threshold.

There was a pause. Then a resonant voice said clearly:

'Come in!'

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## CHAPTER V

### AN INTERVIEW, AND WHAT CAME OF IT

A hushed and secluded air rested over the great dim room into which they were ushered. The heavy padded door that closed noiselessly behind them, the thick green curtains, drawn across the windows, banished every sound. In the centre of the room was a pool of yellow light where wax candles in silver candelabra softly mirrored their rays in the polished wainscot and in the glass of the mahogany bookshelves lined with green silk that occupied the whole of one wall. For the rest the noble proportions of the room were swallowed up in gloom.

A silver candlestick stood in the centre of an immense map that entirely covered a large table over which the slim form of a young man was bending. He had a document in one hand and a pencil in the other and constantly referred from the document to the map. On a broad desk beside him, piled high with despatch boxes in crimson and dark-green leather, calf-bound volumes marked for reference and bundles of documents, a space had been cleared for a silver tray with decanters of port and glasses. A half-emptied crystal goblet of wine stood beside the candlestick on the map which the young man was studying.

He took no notice of their entry. Mr. Gray put a finger to his lips and motioned to Fotheringay to take a chair. In a state of utter bewilderment the Guardsman obeyed. He was appalled at the interview to which he had thus, mysteriously and unexpectedly, been bidden. For in the slim figure, silhouetted against the candlelight, with the characteristic profile, the abundant hair carelessly combed back, the challenging, pugnacious nose, the mobile and finely chiselled mouth, he had recognised the most remarkable young man of his day. How often had he seen him at White's, bending over the green cloth, as, even now, tireless, restless, self-possessed, he pored over his map, with the pale dawn peeping in under the blinds!

For fully five minutes Mr. Gray and his companion sat in the shadow and contemplated the rapt figure of the man at the table. From time to time he would raise his glass to his lips, then fall again into a fit of abstraction. At last, as he turned to replenish his glass, he seemed to remember that he was not alone. He straightened himself up and advanced across the carpet with a quick, firm step, his head erect, his chin thrust forward. It was as though he wished to show that the immense burden of his responsibilities was not bearing him down.

But his face, pale and harassed from prolonged strain, with bags beneath the eyes, belied the brave parade of his gait. As he met the quick, enquiring regard of the steady blue eyes, Fotheringay told himself, had he not already known him by sight, he must have recognised Mr. Pitt if only that, of his years, one man alone in Europe could have combined as he did youth with the poise and gravity that great responsibility long sustained brings.

'Ah, Gray,' said the Minister in his grave and polished voice, 'this news from Flanders is vexatious. We make no progress. But the wind must soon bring accounts from the Channel. Has my brother Chatham no tidings from Lord Howe?'

'I have not been to the Admiralty, sir,' Gray replied.

The First Minister put one slim hand to his brow.

'True, true,' he said, 'it was for another matter you came. Let me think ...'

'I have brought the officer of whom I spoke, sir,' Mr. Gray put in, 'if you would suffer me to present him.'

With a warm-hearted, spontaneous gesture the Minister stretched out his hand.

'Of the Third Foot Guards, I think,' he said, glancing at his visitor's uniform. 'The Duke of York reports noble things of your men in this last engagement, Mr. Fotheringay. General Lake should be proud of his brigade. But surely I have seen you before?'

'At White's, sir,' said Hector.

'Ah!' said the Minister. 'We are fellow club-men, then, it would appear. A glass of wine, Mr. Fotheringay? Gray, I know you won't refuse! Be seated, gentlemen, I beg!'

He filled their glasses and waved them to chairs. Then a fit of abstraction took him again and he was lost in thought for a while. Suddenly he turned to Fotheringay.

'You are partly French, I think?' he said.

'My mother was a Marquise de Sainte-Valentine,' Hector replied.

'Is your knowledge of the French tongue sufficient to enable you to pass yourself off with impunity as a Frenchman?'

'Unquestionably, sir!'

'Are you willing, in the guise of a Frenchman, with papers with which Mr. Gray will provide you, to go to Paris to discharge a certain mission on my behalf?'

'Nothing would suit me better, sir!'

The Minister looked up quickly.

'I find your promptness exceedingly becoming, Mr. Fotheringay,' he remarked. Then, leaning back in his chair, the tips of his fingers pressed together, he went on:

'In France great events stand before. Every indication shows that the Jacobins are nearing the end of their resources. At home, it is true, their reign of terror holds their enemies in thrall, and on the frontiers their armies are everywhere victorious. But France is starving, Mr. Fotheringay, for fine words fill no bellies and the Republicans want bread. And their paper money has no purchasing power.'

He paused and drank from his glass.

'The growing arrogance of Monsieur de Robespierre is alienating his stoutest supporters. To hold things together he must advance ever farther along the road that leads France to perdition; for there is no turning back on the path he treads. He is bound to plunge ever deeper into worse excesses like a gambler who, to settle his debts, borrows afresh to play on.'

He spoke softly, measuring each word, but his beautiful voice rang out distinctly in that quiet room.

'I am of those,' he went on, 'who have ever held that out of the present convulsions of France general harmony and regular order must sooner or later emerge. France is being strangled by politics, Mr. Fotheringay. Now, mark what I say! Robespierre will surely fall as all men of blood like him have fallen. But France will not be saved until she finds a man who will place the interest of the State above the interest of a party!'

A lump came in Fotheringay's throat. He had a mental vision of this wise young man sitting nightly in that silent room peering into the dark future.

'All France seems smitten with madness now. Who could have said that such evil dwelt in the hearts of men? But it will pass: it will surely pass. And then...?'

The silver voice died away and there was a moment's hush.

'But I waste your time, Mr. Fotheringay,' the Minister resumed briskly. His manner now was hard and practical. 'The fate of Europe for many years to come will be decided in Paris within the next few weeks. It has been and is my constant endeavour so to shape events that from her present ordeal France may emerge discerning that her true interest lies in the maintenance of peaceful relations with this country.'

He paused and mustered Fotheringay with his penetrating glance.

'What I am about to tell you now,' he said, 'I reveal to you only under the pledge of absolute secrecy. Through a gentleman in Paris—I will call him Mr. Engstrom, the name by which he is known, for, though an Englishman, he passes himself off as a Dane, a banker—we are in close touch with a certain group of deputies of the Convention. They have divers proposals to formulate of so delicate, nay, so dangerous a character that Engstrom has requested Mr. Gray, who is in general charge of our intelligence service in France, to send an absolutely trustworthy emissary to him in Paris to receive them. You are the chosen emissary, Mr. Fotheringay. You speak French fluently: in appearance you might pass for a Frenchman: and you are, Mr. Gray informs me, a man of integrity and courage. Mr. Gray will provide you with a

French passport and other papers of identity that should go far to deflect suspicion from you. But I will not hide from you that your mission will be one of the utmost danger. The Jacobin Government has its spies everywhere, and, in the present state of affairs in France, the breath of suspicion is as good as sentence of death. Now that you have learnt what your mission is to be, are you still willing to go on with it?

'Yes, sir,' said Hector.

The Minister glanced at Mr. Gray and nodded approvingly.

'You don't ask me what your reward will be?'

Fotheringay shrugged his shoulders.

'Mr. Gray already has my promise,' he answered.

The Minister stood up and his visitors followed suit.

'As from to-day,' he said, 'you will receive a month's furlough from your regiment. On your return from France we will see how best to adjust a certain incident which has made no small stir in the clubs.'

A roguish smile lit up the wan, tired features. It reminded them that he was only thirty-four.

'Gad!' he exclaimed. 'I should like to have seen his face!'

He held out his hand to Hector.

'Au revoir, Mr. Fotheringay!' he said. 'Gray will arrange all details with you. Good luck and a safe return! You will not delay his departure by an hour,' he added anxiously to Mr. Gray.

'Mr. Fotheringay will leave immediately, sir!'

'With your permission, sir,' Hector broke in, 'there is a small matter I must adjust before my departure!'

The Minister looked at him coldly.

'My business brooks no delay, sir!' he rejoined severely.

'An affair of honour ...' Hector stammered.

'A meeting?'

Hector bowed.

'The time to kill a Frenchman, sir, and I am at your service. We meet in Hyde Park at five o'clock to-morrow morning!'

'No, no,' said the Minister. 'Positively I'll not have you risk a thrust through the guts, Mr. Fotheringay. Gray, you will have the goodness to stop this meeting!'

'Sir,' said Hector proudly, 'you have stayed my disgrace; but that does not entitle you to take away my honour. I *must* meet this man ...'

'Better be branded as a coward than fail in your duty to your country,' said the Minister. 'Let's hear no more of this, Mr. Fotheringay. I hold you to your word. Sir, your servant!'

He bowed and turned away. By the time they had reached the door, he seemed to have forgotten their existence. They left him in the big dim room bowed over his great map in the wan candlelight.

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# CHAPTER VI

## THE EVENING BATCH

Rocking and swaying over the rough cobbles the Calais diligence threaded its way through the seething Faubourg Saint-Honoré. Paris stewed breathless in the sultry air of the hot May evening. On every floor of the tall old houses windows were garnished with citizens and citizenesses in various stages of undress. At the house doors, on chairs set beneath the frowning black carriageways or thrust forward on the narrow sidewalk, the concierges, male and female, lolled and gossiped with their neighbours or watched the busy life of the street. The heat was oppressive, and from the reeking heart of the city nameless odours of pollution and decay rose in one vast and nauseating blend to the bronze-tinted sky. All Paris was limp and extenuated, gasping for the cooling breeze that sundown, in this torrid summer of the Year Two of the Republic, so persistently denied.

When the coach neared the Tuileries its progress grew slower as, with every turning, it became more deeply involved in the stream of traffic that, night and day, surged about the approaches to the Convention. The rue Saint-Honoré was packed. Carriages and market-carts, mounted men and foot-passengers, hawkers and idlers, moved slowly forward in an almost impenetrable phalanx. From his lofty perch the coachman of the mail rained down warnings and oaths upon the jostling crowds that so reluctantly divided to make passage for the diligence as it lumbered its way towards the Messageries, its weary, road-stained horses slipping on the broken and neglected roadway, their hoofs striking forth showers of sparks from the uneven stones.

'*Attention, tonnerre de Dieu!*'—'*Gare à vous, les citoyens!*'—'*Hé, là-bas, la citoyenne!*' thundered the driver, and, loud as a pistol-shot, his whip cracked about the heads of his steaming horses. Imprecations, abuse, and chaff were flung back at him from the shabby, evil-smelling mob that swarmed, wheel-high, about the Calais Mail.

Suddenly, out of the press ahead, the roll of drums resounded. A murmur of excitement ran through the crowd. The shouting and laughter ebbed and died. An odd hush fell upon the mob swaying to and fro around the coach, as the driver, with wrists of steel, checked the straining horses and drew up at the kerb.

The muffled note of the drums drew nearer. Above the heads of the billowing multitude two carts were now visible such as farmers use for carting grass or hay, with high wheels and a sort of low palisade above the axle. Each was filled with standing figures that staggered and lurched to every movement of the vehicle. Before went two drummers in dirty blue uniforms, striped cotton trousers that flapped at the knee, and stained and ragged stockings falling in wrinkles about coarse black shoes, big tenor drums slung from a leathern strap that crossed their chests. Behind them the evening sun glinted on a line of drawn sabres that rose and fell on either side of the carts.

The driver of the mail, having brought his horses to a halt, slackened the reins, dropped his tall whip into its slot, and dexterously blew his nose on his fingers.

'The evening batch!' he said to the young man on the box-seat by his side.

From the windows of the diligence now the inside passengers were craning their necks, and on the roof the occupants of the rear seats were standing up. The young man beside the driver looked about him curiously. He was a well-built, handsome young fellow with a proud and rather arrogant air, clean-shaven, his dark hair (which, according to the custom of revolutionary France, he wore without powder) gathered up loosely under the broad brim of his hat and tied with a black riband behind. The dust of the road lay thick on his plain grey travelling-suit and even powdered his cheeks and eyebrows.

The crowd remained very quiet in an attitude of mournful indifference. As it heaved forward and back, its feet rustled in the silence like the dance of leaves in a churchyard. Now the carts turned to pass down a side-turning, and the dull rumble of wheels joined itself to the echoing rattle of the drumsticks. On the shafts of each cart the driver sat, ragged, ill-featured fellows with matted hair and feet thrust into sabots dangling listlessly. An escort of mounted men brought up the rear.

They were a wan and dejected company, the occupants of the carts. Men and women, they numbered about a dozen in all. Their heads were bare. At the throat the upper part of their garments had been shorn away so that neck and throat were exposed, showing a deep expanse of skin which, like their faces, was yellowed with the sickly hue of long confinement.



Dirty ropes, deeply stained with blood, were tightly wound about their wrists, giving them a helpless air that accentuated the look of mute despair graven in their hollow eyes.

There was little means of distinguishing their station in life, for almost all, like the crowd that silently regarded them, appeared to be dirty and shabby. A perpetual murmur went up from the carts, a jumble of incoherent, high-pitched chatter like the babble of a fever ward. A fat, gross woman in bedraggled finery, her face grey beneath its coat of paint, her coarse, dyed hair shorn close away from the nape of her swelling throat, screamed repeatedly, '*Jésu! Jésus!*' while a middle-aged man with congested features, leaning over the side of the cart, seemed to be addressing the mob—the drums drowned his voice—in a flood of never-ceasing oratory. There was a young girl who, looking like a boy with her clipped locks, was quietly sobbing: there were two ragged men, their hairy torsos protruding from their torn and filthy shirts, who laughed and shouted badinage at one another; and there was a grey-beard, quite oblivious of his surroundings, whose lips moved silently.

In all this company of spectres there was only one whose bearing revealed complete indifference to the goal of that sad journey. He was in the second cart, a big man, with a vast chest and a leonine head covered with auburn ringlets. Of all the company he was the only one that was respectably attired. Of all those pale prisoners he alone had the clear skin and the fresh tint of health.

He had a bold, calm eye, the eye of a leader of men, and as he lolled nonchalantly against the back of the cart he let his haughty gaze rove out across the crowd. For a moment it met the compassionate and earnest regard of the young man on the box-seat of the Calais Mail. It stirred him strangely, and, in the one brief instant in which their glances met, to him, the stranger in this forbidden, blood-drenched city, it was like a handclasp of amity.

The next moment the cart had turned the corner and the mournful wailing procession had passed on. The crowd stirred into life again, the mail-driver shook up his horses, and the diligence resumed its rocking progress towards the rue des Victoires.

Arrived at his destination, the young man, after giving the driver a greasy assignat from a bundle he produced from his pocketbook, descended to the ground and waited composedly for the guard to get his valise from the boot.

The yard of the Messageries was densely crowded. There were people who had come to meet relations or friends, a knot of important-looking men with enormous cockades in their hats who respectfully greeted the pompous official that, girt about with a tricolour sash, had joined the mail at Abbéville, shabby clerks that fussed prodigiously about the way-bill, hawkers who ran in and out of the assembly with newspapers and broadsheets shouting, '*Voyez le dernier discours du Citoyen Couthon à la Convention!*' or, '*Demandez "La Conjuration de l'Assassin Pitt!"*' and pedlars with cakes and fruit, lemonade-sellers, porters, touts, and gendarmes. And all this swarming, shouting, gesticulating, pushing multitude was cockaded, the men with the red-white-and-blue of the Commune flaunting on their hats or red caps, the women with enormous rosettes worn in their hair or planted between their breasts.

It was a squalid, ill-mannered, evil-smelling horde, and the young man, as he waited for his valise, let his thoughts slide back regretfully to Piccadilly, as he had left it three days before, with the rich shops, the splendid horses, the well-dressed citizens waving to the spick-and-span coach as it turned out of the yard of the White Horse Cellar and bowled along the even, well-metalled roadway.

Only three days ago! How far away already seemed that momentous interview in the great dim room in Downing Street and the long talk that followed it in Mr. Gray's snug quarters at the Treasury! That night, in the Minister's study, he had been dimly conscious of the presence of a hidden force that imposed its will on his. It seemed to him that some influence, recking nothing of convention, had taken charge of his life. It had brushed aside the Draconic code of his order and placed, for the first time, the responsibility for his acts on himself instead of on others.

He was a defaulter, but he was free. He had flown in the face of society, but his flight had borne him aloft above the cramped confines of his sheltered life. He was master of his actions now in a hand-to-hand struggle with fate.

He exulted in his sense of new-found liberty. He regretted nothing. Now and again, especially when, from the top of the Deal coach, he had seen dawn redden the sky, he had had a disturbing vision of Maxeter anxiously consulting his watch as he paced the dew-soaked grass of Hyde Park and of the growing look of raillery in the faces of the Vicomte and his friends. He had fled an engagement of honour, and by this time, he reflected, his name was anathema in the clubs. But so it had to be. Mr. Gray would suffer no explanation, no compromise, for so the service of Mr. Pitt demanded. It was

Hector Fotheringay's first lesson.

At length his valise was deposited at his feet. He handed it over to a porter and bade him bear it to the Hôtel des États Unis in the rue Favart, a quiet and inconspicuous house, where, since a week or more, a room, he knew, had been reserved for the young French timber-merchant from Copenhagen. The hostess, a buxom and black-eyed woman with a kindly expression, looked at him sharply as she handed him the key.

'Number 23, the second floor,' she said. 'Take the citizen's valise up, my friend,' she added to the porter, and privately motioned to the young man to stay behind.

'You are a stranger in Paris, I think, *citoyen*,' she said to Hector, when the porter had mounted the winding stair. 'You will do well to don a cockade before you go out in the street again, especially as you must proceed at once to the section of the *Quartier* to report your arrival. In the departments one is less exacting, but here in Paris ...'

As she was speaking, she rummaged in a drawer.

'Give me your hat,' she said.

She produced a large tricolour cockade, and with a pin which she took from her ample bosom fastened it across the buckle that adorned the front of the young man's hat.

'*Et voilà!*' she exclaimed. 'You will give the *porte-faix* a few sols more, *mon petit*, and he will guide you at once to the Section Lepeletier—it is but two paces from here. One cannot be too prompt in putting one's papers in order!'

And so, in the wake of the porter, who wore in his buttonhole a little plaque inscribed, beneath crossed fasces, 'La Patrie ou la Mort,' Hector Fotheringay, Lieutenant and Captain of His Majesty's Third Foot Guards, went forth adorned with the emblem of regicide France.

A long queue of people extended along the pavement of the rue des Filles-Saint-Thomas, where, in the disestablished convent of that name, the headquarters of the Lepeletier Section was installed. A red bonnet set on a pike, fastened to the gate above a decapitated statue of the Blessed Virgin, marked the entrance.

Hector followed the porter to the head of the queue. These endless queues seemed to be universal in Paris, he had noticed on his drive through the city. Every butcher's, every baker's shop had its patient file of customers.

'Give the citizen something for himself and he will take you in!' whispered the porter as he beckoned to a man in a red cap who leant on a pike under the archway. To Red Cap he said:

'The citizen lodges *chez* the Citizeness Dupin. He comes for his *certificat de civisme*.'

Hector had his assignat ready and slipped it into Red Cap's greasy palm. Then he paid off the porter, who insisted on shaking hands, and accompanied Red Cap into the house. An angry murmur rose from the crowd; but of this Red Cap took no notice.

He brought Hector into a spacious room with a groined roof, a long table set at the far end, at which, in the midst of a prodigious confusion of papers, a humpback was writing furiously. He wore an immense cocked hat pushed back from his low forehead, and on the table in front of him was a long cavalry sabre and a brace of pistols. Above his head, crowned with a wreath of laurel, was a bust of Marat, '*L'Ami du Peuple*.' The room smelt abominably close, though many of the leaded panes of the windows were broken. The floor was indescribably filthy. Some soldiers squatted on a heap of straw in the corner. One of them, naked to the waist, was anxiously examining his shirt inch by inch.

A young man with a rakish air and brown hair falling about his shoulders detached himself from a knot of men lounging behind the table as Red Cap and his companion approached. He exchanged a few words in whispers with Hector's escort. Then he extended his hand.

'Your papers, citizen,' he said to Hector.

Hector handed over his passport and certificate of employment. The young man glanced at them and dumped them down on the top of a pile of correspondence at the humpback's elbow. Then he returned to Red Cap.

'To go back to what I was telling you this morning, Petitpierre,' he said. 'Yourself and the Citizeness Petitpierre can have the *loge* at the Théâtre Feydeau any evening you wish. The new piece is very good, *formidable*!—it deals with the patriotic career of the *Citoyen* Robespierre! Every night the *parterre* rises and acclaims the actors!'

'*Bien sûr*, we'd like to go, friend Maurice,' replied Petitpierre. 'If so be as to-morrow evening ...'

'*C'est fait, c'est fait!*' exclaimed the other. 'You shall have the seats in the morning, my friend. And if, when next you visit your brother at Mélun, you could manage to bring me back a little butter ...'

Petitpierre clapped him on the back.

'A patriot never fails his friends,' he said jovially. 'A pound of the finest for the Citizen Maurice: I shan't forget ...'

'Charpentier, Jean-François,' said a high-pitched voice from the table.

'*Allez, allez*,' remarked Maurice, and plucked Hector by the sleeve. 'The Citizen Commissary Grand-Duc is waiting!'

The young man advanced to the table. He saw a pale face, unshaven for days, with matted hair that fell about a narrow, sloping forehead.

'You are the Citizen Charpentier?' said Grand-Duc.

Hector bowed.

'Yes,' he replied.

'Say "Citizen Commissary" when you address me!' the humpback commanded.

Hector felt his colour mount in his cheeks.

'Yes, Citizen Commissary!' he said meekly.

'Born at Saint-Lunaire, in the Department of Île-et-Vilaine, according to the old calendar, the 20th September, 1767. Profession, Merchant. Employed by the firm of Hendrik and Christensen, timber-merchants, of Copenhagen?'

'Yes, Citizen Commissary!'

The humpback handed him two square cards.

'Fill up these! You are fortunate, citizen. The President of the Section is in his room beyond and can sign your certificate immediately!'

Hector took the pen the Commissary proffered and began to fill in the particulars. It was his first contact with the Revolution as a living force. He thought he had seldom seen a more sinister-looking individual than this pigeon-chested manikin who eyed him with such singular pertinacity. His hands shook so much that he could scarcely write.

At last it was done. Grand-Duc took the cards and, after glancing at them, struck a bell at his side. Darkness was falling without and a man appeared with a lamp which he put down on the table. To him the Commissary gave the cards and a pile of documents. The man bore them away in silence while the Commissary stretched himself and laid his horny hands upon the table before him. Sideways he looked at Hector.

'You come to offer your services to the Republic, Citizen Charpentier?' he said.

'As every good patriot should, Citizen Commissary!'

'You come late!'

'The English blockade is hard to evade, Citizen Commissary!'

'I do not reflect upon the patriotism of the citizen. I mean you were expected before this!'

Hector's heart turned to ice within him. The humpback's eyes, somnolent, yellow eyes, were fixed upon his. Always he was watching him. There was an indescribable air of suspicious inquisitiveness about this misshapen creature that filled

the young man's mind with the deepest misgiving. What did his words mean? Was it a trap?

His hands were cold as ice as he replied as boldly as he could:

'For a week my ship was delayed by contrary winds in the Downs before the English coast whilst I lay hidden in the hold. I made all speed I could, Citizen Commissary!'

The messenger reappeared with one of the cards, Hector's passport and his other papers. The humpback handed them to the young man.

'Wear the card in your hat, young man, that all patriots may know you are an honest man. Au revoir! Lose no time in paying your respects to our mutual friend!'

With a soft chuckle he gave Hector his hand and plunged once more among his papers.



## CHAPTER VII

### AT ENGSTROM'S

In grave perplexity Hector left the Section. The dark allusions of the humpback had made him vividly conscious of the appalling danger of his mission. He felt that the small square card which, like everybody else he saw, he wore beside the cockade in his hat, was his only shield. Once let the identity of Jean-François Charpentier be stripped from him and he would be utterly, irretrievably lost. But who was this Jean-François Charpentier? A young Frenchman making his way from Copenhagen to Paris, Mr. Gray had told him, whom the excise officers had found concealed in the cargo of a Danish brig in the Downs. They had clapped him in the prisoners-of-war camp at Dartmoor, but his papers they had retained against an emergency such as this. But what had he to do with the Citizen Commissary? And who, above all things, was their mutual friend?

Well, events must take their course. Whoever Charpentier was, he must go through to the end with his identity. Engstrom, who, Mr. Gray had assured him, would make all arrangements for getting him back to England with the proposals he had come to fetch, must, of course, be told of this complication. He would doubtless be able to furnish him with fresh papers for his return. And, having thus satisfactorily settled things in his mind, Hector made for the Palais-Royal—now christened the Palais-Égalité—to dine; for he had tasted nothing since the mail had stopped at Creil for the midday meal.

He knew Paris pretty well. He had often visited France. One of his earliest recollections was of being taken, a chubby urchin, by his grandfather, that awe-inspiring old aristocrat, the Marquis de Sainte-Valentine, to see His Majesty King Louis the Fifteenth at meat in his Château of Versailles. He retained a dim picture of a knot of people behind a golden barrier staring at a little periwigged old gentleman, a laced hat on his head, dining in solitary state off gold plate at a small table.

In later years he had often stayed with his mother at the family *hôtel* in the Place Royale with its great pink courtyard, its swarms of brilliantly liveried servants, its vast kitchens, its enormous stables. Where was all that pomp to-day?

His last visit had been in the spring of the Revolution, in '89, when he and Henry Venables, his companion on the grand tour, had made their bow at the Tuileries to poor, placid King Louis and his dainty Austrian queen. Strange to think that five brief years had swept that Court away and buried its glories in nameless graves!

The *ci-devant* Palais-Royal was as noisy as a fair. A band of music played in the garden, and the keepers of the open-air lottery tables and wheels of chance rent the air with their raucous *boniments*. The colonnades were densely crowded, and outside the cafés every table was taken. With some difficulty he found a seat in the Café des Milles Colonnes, where the excellence of his dinner and the choiceness of his bottle of Beaune taught him that, to any one with money, the hungriness of France was naught but a fable.

The Café des Milles Colonnes was very gay. Its gilt mirrors, torn from the salons of dead Philippe Égalité's palace, reflected a scene from which the sordidness of the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, as Hector had seen it that evening, was utterly banished. He was surrounded on every side by exquisites of both sexes, the men in brilliant silks and satins and the finest linen, abundantly perfumed, and the women lavishly frocked in the classical style that had lately become the fashion and that revealed their charms with an audacity that amazed him.

But, as he lingered over his wine in contemplation of the scene, it seemed to him that the note was forced. The *abandon* was too high, the laughter too loud. There was an air about this chattering, flirting throng as unreal as the ciphers on the paper money that bulged from the pockets of the waiters' aprons. It was as though every one there had vowed to forget for the evening that tall machine which, not a mile away, reared its scarlet posts to the star-spangled sky, in grim expectation of the morrow ...

His dinner cost him, with the tip to the waiter which the Republic, One and Indivisible, he noticed, had not abolished, five thousand livres, which, he reflected, in his grandfather's day, was about the monthly allowance of poor Uncle Sainte-Valentine who had perished on the scaffold. He donned his hat and strolled forth thoughtfully into the night.

Engstrom lodged in a house in the rue Vivienne, not a stone's throw from the headquarters of the Section Lepeletier, and within easy distance of Hector's hotel. This was the young man's next objective, for the fright he had received at the Convent of the Filles-Saint-Thomas had determined him to lose no time in getting in touch with the banker.

The door of Engstrom's house was open. At the door of her loge beneath the *porte cochère* the concierge sat on a chair knitting. A bright lamp lit up the neat little room behind her, and above her head, aroused no doubt by the light, a canary chirruped cheerfully in a cage. It was a pleasant, soothing picture of French domesticity.

'The *Citoyen* Engstrom?' said the old lady after demanding the young man's errand. 'On the third floor. But I don't think he has yet returned.'

It was an old house with a broad flight of downtrodden stone steps, black and greasy, that wound their way aloft. They were dimly lit by a light that fell from above through the well of the staircase.

Hector mounted to the third floor on which, above a brass plate inscribed 'Engstrom,' the handle of a bell protruded. He rang, and, after what seemed to be a long interval, a light shuffling footstep fell on his ear. Presently the door opened about half an inch.

'The Citizen Engstrom?' Hector demanded.

'He's not at home!' a quavering voice replied. The unseen ministrant would have closed the door had not Hector, foreseeing the movement, slipped his foot forward.

'You are a friend of the Citizen Engstrom?' the voice demanded.

'The friend of all oppressed!' Hector answered in a low voice.

Instantly the door swung back. An old woman in a mob-cap, a candle in her hand, stood there.

'Come in quickly, for the love of God!' she whispered.

Hector obeyed and noiselessly she closed the door behind him. Without a word the old woman led the way along a corridor and into a sitting-room, where, on a Buhl table, a lamp was burning. There she turned, and Hector saw that her face was grey with terror.

'Monsieur,' she whispered, 'he has not come back. Always he returns before dark!'

She had clutched her cheek with her hand which she now drew shuddering away.

'A misfortune has happened to him,' she moaned. 'I know it. All the evening I have sat here and waited for his step upon the stair. Yet he does not come!'

On the mantelpiece, above which a portrait hung, a great gilt clock ticked solemnly. Hector felt the old woman's distress gaining upon him. He made an effort to shake it off. He glanced at the clock.

'It's not yet half-past ten,' he said reassuringly.

The old woman wrung her hands.

'In the two years I've served him,' she wailed, 'I've never known him return as late as this. I have a feeling, M'sieu, that some evil has befallen him. I dreamed of bats last night, and that always foretells misfortune! Hark! There's some one at the door!'

She picked up her candle and crept away. Hector heard the front door open and the sound of a whispered conversation in the hall. Then came a wail of fear from the old woman and her light and trailing footstep went padding down the corridor.

The sitting-room door opened. A big man stood on the threshold. He had dark, burning eyes and a great black mustache. His face was contracted with fatigue and his caped cloak white with dust. Dully, suspiciously, he surveyed Hector. Then he closed the door and came into the room. With a jingle of spurs he walked across to Hector.

'Do you take snuff?' he asked.

The young man started.

'Certainly,' he replied, recovering himself swiftly. 'Permit me?'

And from his pocket he drew a scarlet snuff-box, and, flicking the lid up with his thumb, held it out to the other. The man's stern expression relaxed.

'So you've come,' he said.

He glanced round nervously at the door. The old woman was there in a poke-bonnet, a shawl about her shoulders.

'*Bon Dieu de bon Dieu!*' she mumbled. 'To plunge us all in disaster! I go, Messieurs!'

'Go, *la mère!*' replied the big man. 'And, as you value your life, don't come back!'

She padded softly away, and they heard the front door slam.

Then the big man turned to Hector.

'Something's happened to Engstrom,' he said rapidly. 'He was to meet me at the Café Conti by the Pont Neuf at six. He has never missed an appointment before. It was vital that he should see me. I've ridden all the way from Brussels.'

He glanced about him with a hunted look.

'He would never let me come here. But I thought he must be ill. And I daren't carry what I've brought about Paris with me. I've always reported to him before at his place in the rue des Petits Champs. He keeps a bookseller's shop, you know.'

'I thought he was a banker!' said Hector.

'Only in this house. His bank is on the *entresol*. In the rue des Petits Champs his name is Poirier! *Grand Dieu*, who's that?'

The bell at the front door had jangled furiously. Together the two men tiptoed into the corridor. Through the door they heard a voice whisper frantically:

'Open for the love of God!'

'Simon!' muttered the big man, and pulled back the latch.

A man came whirling in, bareheaded, breathless. With shaking hand he motioned to them to shut the door.

'Engstrom ...' he gasped.

'Not here,' said the big man, and drew him into the sitting-room.

'Now,' he said when they were gathered round the lamp.

'They took him this morning ... at the shop ... I was on my way to report to him ... I saw it all. I tried to get a word with him ... but they guarded him too close. He went before the Tribunal at noon ...'

He shrugged his shoulders with a despairing gesture.

'This evening ...' he began, and burst into tears.

The big man's brow darkened.

'Already?' he said half aloud. Then: 'Have they got any one else?'

Fiercely Simon flung up his head. Hector saw the tears glisten wet on his face in the lamplight.

'Van Brink, the cur. They took him at eight o'clock at his lodging. He has given this place away. I had it at the Section and went to the Café Conti to warn you. Jules told me you had come on here. Philippe, save yourself! They will be here any minute now!'

He sprang to his feet and made for the door.

'Are you coming?' he cried.

'In one instant!' said the big man quietly.

'Adieu!' cried the other.

'Simon, stop! There is something you must do!'

'*Sauve qui peut!* I have warned you ...'

He flashed away, and they heard the door slam. From his breast-pocket Philippe had taken a wad of flimsy paper which he held over the lamp until it kindled. He nursed the flame and watched the papers burn until they were a charred mass that he stamped beneath his feet into the carpet. Then he raised up the lamp and faced the portrait that hung above the mantelpiece.

'My poor friend!' he said.

Hector, looking over his shoulder, saw a big leonine head set in an aureole of auburn ringlets. It was the face of the quiet, proud man he had seen that evening on the way to the guillotine. He would have cried out in astonishment had not Philippe, putting down the lamp, laid his hand on his sleeve.

'Now,' he said, 'we must be quick. Come!'

He blew out the lamp and the room was plunged in darkness. From the hall a faint glimmer of light fell through the glass panels of the door. Suddenly, from the distance, a muffled report rang out, there was a shout, a shrill scream, and the thunder of feet on the stairs.

'*Actum est,*' said the big man and stood stock-still. He had a pistol in his hand.

'My friend,' he said composedly, 'we are too late. They are on the staircase already.'

The bell pealed wildly: they could hear the wires strain and jangle. Heavy hands beat on the door.

'*Monsieur,*' said the big man firmly, '*je vous salue!*'

In the faint glow that from the doorway pierced the gloom, Hector saw his companion swiftly raise his weapon. Instinctively he snatched at his hand; but he was too late. There was a deafening report, and the big man, swaying, crashed dead to the floor, overturning table and lamp in his fall.

From the ground came the sound of something that gushed and gushed. A little swathe of black smoke hung in the air and the room reeked of burnt powder. Outside the front door the clamour redoubled.

Suddenly above the din a deep voice resounded.

'*Ouvrez au nom de la loi!*'

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## CHAPTER VIII

### LOISON

It was then that all the instincts of Hector's upbringing asserted themselves. A wild and unreasoning anger seized upon him, a fierce revulsion against the Jacobins and all their works. Better a thousand times to die even as the man at his feet had died than to be carted like an ox to the slaughter. But he didn't mean to die just yet, or, if he must, he would, at least, die fighting. He sprang to his feet and darted out into the passage.

Now they were smashing in the panels of the front door with a flintlock; he could hear the woodwork shiver beneath the heavy blows of the iron-shod butt. A stream of filthy invective resounded from the other side of the straining woodwork as he tiptoed away down the corridor.

Only a confused plan of action was in his mind. Was there a back entrance, he wondered, a service staircase leading from the kitchen? If there were it would probably be guarded. Then perhaps a window? But the apartment was on the third floor, an almost impossible descent unless one had a rope. He opened a couple of doors—a small dining-room with stags' heads on the walls, a big, dark bedroom. Ah! here was the kitchen!

A louder crash than the rest, a roar of triumph from the corridor behind him announced that the front door had at last given way. Quickly he stepped into the kitchen and closed the door behind him.

A fire glowed redly on the big open hearth. By its light he glanced swiftly round. His heart sank. There was no door and the window was small and closely barred—barred!—the mockery of it!—because it gave on a shallow roof beneath. He was caught like a rat in a trap. Heavy feet went tramping through the corridor outside and loud voices rang through the apartment. First they would go into the sitting-room, he expected, and find the body: then they would proceed to ransack the whole place methodically.

They could not know of his presence yet, unless the old concierge had given him away. But she was not likely to speak unless she were asked, and no one else had seen him come to Engstrom's. They might never know he had been there if he could but escape them now. If he could but hide...!

Hide? But where? He cast a despairing glance round the kitchen. No place of concealment could he see. That flat cupboard with the shelves was useless; useless, too, the dresser ...

*The dresser!*

It was slowly moving forward, swinging inwards like a door, noiselessly without even a creak. A ray of light fell into the kitchen. In the opening a young girl stood, shielding a candle in one hand. When she saw him she drew back swiftly with the instinctive, distrustful movement of a frightened bird. But Hector stayed her with a gesture. He did not dare to speak. He put one finger to his lips. So they stood for a fleeting instant, regarding one another in silence. And then, in the passage outside, there fell upon their ears a footfall. The floor-boards creaked protestingly. And Hector Fotheringay remembered that the kitchen door was not locked.

He opened his right hand and disclosed the scarlet enamel snuff-box he had shown to Philippe. It was his last chance, and it did not fail him. The girl nodded in understanding and beckoned. In the corridor a voice cried, '*Voyons la chambre au fond du couloir!*' and Hector followed the girl into the opening. The dresser fell back into place behind them with a slight click.

They were on a narrow flight of stairs. The girl went in front, and her slim, cool fingers enclosed the young man's wrist. They descended a dozen steps or so, then she stopped, fumbled with a catch, and a low door swung back.

She laid a little hand on the cross-beam of the door to warn her companion not to strike his head and, stooping, scrambled through. Hector followed, and found himself in a black and stuffy hole. But now the girl raised a curtain and showed a lighted room.

They emerged from under a long shelf, screened by a deep valance, that ran along one side of what was apparently a dressmaker's workshop. The shelf was strewn with paper patterns pinned to lengths of cloth in process of being cut out. A table in the centre of the room was littered with sewing materials and in a press in the corner a line of finished

garments hung. On the far side of the room was a door, and the roof, which was paned with glass, ran up to a long skylight.

On the centre table a tiny lamp was burning, and by its light Hector surveyed his rescuer. She seemed little more than a child. Her blonde hair was braided in plaits round her head and her wide grey eyes were limpid with a child's look of trusting innocence. She wore a clean but ragged little frock of blue flowered muslin, high-waisted, and her coarse white stockings could not disguise the slimness of her ankles. Her skin was waxen white, her features pinched and wan, and she had an ethereal, a gossamer air about her which Hector had never met in a woman before.

'I was working late,' the girl said. 'And I came to see Monsieur Engstrom. Who are those men in the house?'

'They came to search Monsieur Engstrom's apartment,' Hector replied. 'He was arrested this morning!'

The girl laid her hand on her heart. Her eyes were dilated with fear.

'Arrested?' she repeated awe-struck. '*Alors ...?*'

Hector nodded gravely.

'This evening,' he said.

The girl looked at him blankly for a moment.

'Then *you* are in grave danger,' she said. 'Where do you live? Have you any place to go to?'

'I arrived in Paris only a few hours since,' the young man answered. 'But if I can but get safe away from this house, I can make shift for myself!'

With a critical eye she surveyed him.

'Untie this riband in your hair,' she suggested. 'So!'

She went to the press and took down a long black cloak of silk with a hood.

'Put this on!' she commanded. 'Pull the hood over your head and carry your hat beneath the cloak. There is a box, an urgent order, to go to the house of the Citizeness Vallier to-night. She lives at the end of this street, the rue de la Loi, at Number 31, to the left when you leave the house. I was to take it, but you shall be my messenger. You will excite no suspicion if you are seen leaving the shop!'

'And you?' Hector asked.

'I shall stay here. It's not the first time I've sat up working in the *atelier* all night; *allez!*'

'But if they find that secret door?'

'They'll not find it. The wall is solid and the door cannot be opened from Monsieur Engstrom's side. For more than two years now he has used it when he desires to come back unseen. But now ...'

She bit her lip and turned away.

Hector took her hand.

'Mademoiselle,' he said, 'may I not be favoured with the name of the lady to whom I owe my safety?'

'Monsieur Engstrom called me "Mademoiselle," too,' she said. 'And he made me call him "Monsieur." I like it. It sounds so old-fashioned! Everybody calls me Loison, M'sieu! For my other name'—she shrugged her shoulders—'I don't need to use it, so why should you burden your memory? We shall not meet again!'

Hector bowed and kissed the small slim hand.

'Mademoiselle Loison,' he said, '*votre très obéissant serviteur!*'

A little colour stole into her waxen cheeks.

'How strange that sounds!' she said. 'Once I met a *ci-devant* abbé who talked like that! *C'est drôle tout de même!*'

And she gave a little silvery laugh. Like a child she passed without effort from grave to gay.

From under the shelf she produced a large round cardboard hatbox and hung it on Hector's arm.

'You must pull out your hair *thus!*' she said, and suited the action to the word. 'And when you walk, take short steps! And take no notice of the men who speak to you in the street! These dirty Jacobins think that every woman is in love with them, the ...!'

And she rapped out a foul expression that Hector had never heard in a woman's mouth before even from the frail beauties of the Palais-Royal.

She used it quite naturally, so that it scarce seemed to sully her lips. Now she got up, and, opening the farther door, turned to watch the young man cross the workroom.

'*Doucement, doucement!*' she cried. 'You stride like a *Tambour-Major* of the National Guard! So! That's better! Leave the box with the concierge and say the *Citoyenne* Vallier must have it at once! And send the cloak back to-morrow!'

She led him through the dark front shop and stood for an instant, her hand resting on the latch of the door.

'When I open,' she said, 'slip out quickly.'

Then she bobbed to him.

'Mademoiselle,' she said, mimicking his formal air, '*votre très obéissante serviteuse!*'

But her voice shook a little. He looked at her quickly. Suddenly the tears welled from her eyes and her small breasts were shaken with sobs.

'Go, go,' she pleaded as he was about to speak, and, opening the door, she pushed him out into the darkness.

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# CHAPTER IX

## THE OWL

The night was fine, and the rue de la Loi, which, in happier days, Hector had known as the rue de Richelieu, was dark and deserted. It was much cooler, and a little breeze tugged at the weather-beaten placards of the Convention that covered a blank wall at the corner of the street. Hector did not tarry, but, gathering his cloak about him, his box dangling from his arm, made off briskly to the left as the girl had instructed him.

When he reached Number 31, he found that the big doors were closed for the night. But from a window of the ground floor on the right of the carriageway a light fell from a heart-shaped opening in the shutters, while a violin squeaked out a little lilting air that the young man had never heard before.

A bell-pull stood beside the door. Hector tugged at it, and the music ceased. The shutter opened. A head was thrust out.

'*Eh bien?*' demanded a rude voice.

Hector lifted his box to the window-sill.

'For the Citizeness Vallier,' he said, disguising his voice as best he could. '*C'est pressé!*'

The shutter opened a trifle wider, disclosing a man who wore a red cap with a tassel. Slowly he scrutinised the hooded figure on the pavement below.

'Hand it in, *ma belle!*' he said. 'For the sake of thy pretty eyes I will take it myself at once to the citizeness!'

Bending suddenly down he attempted to seize the young man round the waist. But Hector drew back hastily, and, with a guffaw, the man took in the parcel and closed the shutter. As Hector hastened up the street, he heard the violin again. But now the man sang in a wheezy, discordant voice to his jaunty little air:

*'Dansons la Carmagnole,  
Vive le son, vive le son,  
Dansons la Carmagnole,  
Vive le son ... du canon!'*

So this was the infamous *Carmagnole*, Hector reflected, as he hurried away, the song of the *sans-culottes*, that had echoed through the profaned halls of the Tuileries and resounded in the ears of the helpless victims of the massacres in the prisons. Gently scraped on a fiddle by the light of the moon, it sounded like the tune of an old country dance.

But the porter and his song soon passed from Hector's mind. He was desperately concerned with his own situation. Engstrom dead, the object of his mission had vanished, but what was he to do now that Engstrom had failed him, Engstrom upon whom he had relied to clear up the mystery of Jean-François Charpentier's identity and furnish him, if needs be, with fresh papers to return to England?

The mocking glance of the humpback haunted his memory. 'Lose no time,' he had enjoined him, 'in paying your respects to our mutual friend!' In order to leave Paris, he would, he knew, have to get his passport viséd at the headquarters of the Section and also at the Department of Foreign Affairs. But to what cross-examination would he not have to submit if he faced the humpback again? And should he explain his failure to report to 'our mutual friend'?

Then there was that evening's adventure. Apparently he had succeeded in getting away from the workroom unseen; but what if the concierge should remember his visit and be able to describe the young man who had asked for the Citizen Engstrom and had entered the house, but had not been seen to come out again? Could he in safety return to his hotel? On the other hand, if he did not, and abandoned his valise there, would it not arouse suspicion?

He had doffed the cloak that Loison gave him and resumed his hat, carrying the cloak on his arm. He strode along, heedless of where he was going, racking his brain to find a way out of his appalling dilemma. What should he do? To whom should he turn? Why had not Mr. Gray envisaged the possibility of the arrest of Engstrom and the dislocation of the whole organisation?

A touch on his arm aroused him in terror from his meditation. There was a glare in his eyes. A man with a smoking torch stood under an archway above which, on a pike, the red bonnet of liberty was suspended. And at his elbow, grinning up at his face, was Grand-Duc, the Citizen Commissary, a ragged *houppelande* covering, but not concealing, his monstrous hump.

'You walk late abroad, *citoyen*,' he said. 'These are troublous times for midnight strolling!'

With an effort Hector pulled himself together. His walk had brought him back to the rue des Filles-Saint-Thomas. He was outside the headquarters of the Lepeletier Section.

'My first evening in Paris, Citizen Commissary,' he replied, trying to master the cold fear that swept over him like a nausea. 'I ... I wished to see the life of the city. I have been to dine at the Palais-Royal—I mean the Palais-Égalité!'

The manikin frowned.

'A cesspool of profligacy, young man,' he said severely. 'In a little while the stern and pure virtue of good patriots will cut out this canker from the body of the State. These are spies and traitors, the slaves of Pitt and Yorck, who, with their foreign gold, seek to corrupt the morals of the Republic. But a terrible vengeance will overtake them. Their sins shall be purged away in blood. Our great healer, the guillotine, will minister to the well-being of the Republic One and Indivisible. Forty yesterday! Sixty-one to-morrow! Not enough! Not enough ...'

He spoke with an exalted air, his yellow eyes flashing, his hands in unceasing play.

He drew his ragged coat about him.

'Come,' he said. 'You will take a cup of spirits with me and the saviours of the Republic.'

He turned to the man with the torch.

'If I am wanted,' he remarked, 'I am *chez* Chrétien!'

Then he linked his arm in Hector's, and together they walked along the silent street.

For a brief moment Hector wrestled with a feeling of panic. This stunted creature with his frenzied talk of blood horrified him so that the mere touch of his arm on his sleeve made his senses reel. Resolutely he fought down his paralysing sense of fear. Fate had willed that he should retain the identity of Jean-François Charpentier and see this mad adventure through. He must collect his thoughts, he told himself, for he would have to call on all his *sang-froid*, all his confidence, to meet the ordeal that stood before.

'For one so young,' the Commissary remarked as they went along, their footsteps echoing in the quiet street, 'you are singularly privileged, citizen. The Republic has need of as many eyes as the hundred-headed hydra to detect the foul assassins who plot in the dark the murder of citizens. I am overwhelmed with the work of the Section and cannot get about as much as I should like, but you are young and active and you shall learn from me. *Tiens!* You saw this young man Maurice at the Section this evening, a dashing fellow with brown hair? *Peste!* There's a fine blade for you, but it was I who taught him all he knows. Trust Grand-Duc, *l'ami!* Once they mocked me for my name and urged me to change it, because, they said, a grand duke is an aristocrat. "*Pour ça, les amis, pas de doute!*" I told them. "But *grand duc* is also the great owl, the bird of night that sees in the dark. And, even as the owl spies out its prey in the blackness of the night, so will I pierce the darkness wherewith the hirelings of Pitt seek to cover up their conspiracies against patriots!" *Bigre!* How they acclaimed me! "Grand-Duc," they cried, "be *grand duc* still!" And so I kept my name.'

A narrow lane brought them out upon the small square before the Théâtre Favart. The evening performance was over and the front of the theatre was in darkness. But at one corner of the *place* a dim light fell from a window. Two trees in green tubs flanked the door of a small café. The door opened from the square directly into a long room with a low ceiling, which, like the walls, was discoloured, with a counter at the far end at which *la patronne* sat enthroned against a background of bottles and kegs. The floor was strewn with sawdust, and on the stained and peeling walls various inscriptions, mainly of a political character, were scrawled. Tall barrels set about the floor did duty for tables. The room was poorly lighted by a couple of smoky lamps suspended from the low ceiling.

Only a few persons were present, and they conversed in undertones or played cards or draughts silently. The whispering,

the low roof, the dim lighting, lent the place a furtive air. As Grand-Duc crossed the café, the conversations abruptly ceased. He nodded to the woman at the counter and pushed open a door in the wall behind her.

About a table in a back room five or six men were assembled drinking spirits out of tin pannikins. A large demijohn, encased in wicker, stood on a barrel against the wall, and from time to time one of the group got up and replenished his drinking-vessel from it. The air was suffocating with the mingled fumes of unwashed humanity and strong tobacco.

At the door Grand-Duc saluted the company.

'*Bonsoir, les amis!*' he said. 'I bring you the patriot Jean-François Charpentier who has slipped the yoke of tyrants to offer his services to the Republic!'

'Shut the door, *nom d'une pipe!*' grumbled a hoarse voice. 'We don't want every *sans-culotte* in here drinking at our expense! There are pannikins on the side, comrade! Draw yourself and the young man a dram!'

But one of the company had forestalled this invitation. A man with a bloated face and eyes shot with blood, who seemed to be more than three parts drunk already, thrust a cup of spirits into the hands of Hector and his escort. Some one made room for them on one of the two wooden benches set on either side of the table.

They were a villainous-looking lot assembled at that board. Round that table were faces such as Hector had seen before only in the greasy crowds that flocked to the hangings at Tyburn or in the mobs that had glared savagely at him and his company of Guards during the recent street riots in London, brutal faces, debauched and debased, with a vulpine leer in their cruel eyes, with beetling foreheads and loose, sensuous lips ...

'The patriots who watch over our safety,' said Grand-Duc, indicating the company with a sweeping gesture. And he named to the young man at his side a string of names, Louis du Bas-Rhin, Amar, Jagot, Voulland ...

'*Baste!*' cried the man with the bloated face. 'The Citizen will become acquainted quick enough with the Committee of General Security ...!'

*Le Comité de la Sûreté Générale!* The infamy of this little band of seven had spread far beyond the boundaries of France. Men shuddered at the very name of this gang of butchers, '*les gens de l'expédition,*' as they were called in Paris —'the despatchers,' as one might say—who brought their daily grist to the red machine of the Place de la Révolution. Hector seized his pannikin and drank deeply of the spirit it contained, raw and fiery Hollands that burnt his throat.

'What of these mountebanks of the Committee of Public Safety?' a third man broke in—the others called him Voulland. 'Is the knife to go rusty for lack of meat? What of the Citizen Couthon's famous bill? When does it go before the Convention, *tonnerre de Dieu?*'

The humpback cast a frightened look around the circle.

'Mind how you speak,' he cautioned.

'I'm not afraid of Robespierre or of that wretched *cul-de-jatte*, Couthon, or of that mummer, Saint-Just, either!' the other vociferated. 'Shall patriots be silent when the enemies of the Republic are allowed to shelter their infamous conspiracies beneath the pall of justice? Shall they stand idle and see *la Mère Guillotine* cheated of her prey? *Parbleu*, it's only that saint can save us!'

Grand-Duc held up his hands to still the turmoil that broke out all round the table.

'*Doucement, les amis!*' he said. 'No later than this afternoon I was at the rue Saint-Honoré. Citizen Couthon assured me that the new law is almost ready. It comes before the Convention next week. It simplifies matters admirably, my children. No witnesses, no defence, nothing to impede the course of justice, and death the only penalty. Henceforth the Republic will rely entirely on the patriotism of the judges, the Public Accuser, and the Citizen Jurymen!'

'Good!' said an old man with an evil, debauched air about him, whose speech was thick and who hiccupped as he talked. 'Dumas knows his business, and Fouquier can take a hint as quick as most. What is the tally for to-morrow?'

'Sixty-one!' another put in. 'Citizen Fouquier is at the Conciergerie now drawing up his lists.'

'He'll work overtime before we're done with him, this animal!' exclaimed the man with the bloated face. 'He's a rare ferret for digging the *sacrés* aristocrats out of their holes!' And he emptied his pannikin.

Their language was indescribable. Their speech was the thieves' Latin of the Paris underworld, the *argot* of the hulks and stews, filthy, obscene, every second word an oath or a blasphemy. Hector felt his gorge rising. The stench of the room, the suffocating fumes of their tobacco, the coarse earthen smell of the spirit, nauseated him. He longed to be out in the fresh air under the stars, out of the taint of these ghouls of the guillotine.

The door opened, and a young man in a dirty neckcloth appeared.

'*Salut, la compagnie!*' was his greeting.

He was not more than thirty with the profile of a rat. Yellow eyes set close together and lit by a strange, haunted look, peered out of a grey and ravaged face above a long thin nose with wide nostrils and the mouth of a rodent. His features were all atwilt, and his little eyes were constantly in motion. He looked like a man who never slept, like one who lives with ghosts.

'I have submitted my answer to the charges of my enemies to the Citizen Robespierre to-day,' he said as he took his seat at the board. He pulled a bulky manuscript from a pocket of his stained and faded coat. 'I have a copy of my defence here, comrades, and you shall hear it ...'

'Ah, bah!' cried the man with the bloated face. 'One is among friends here, Carrier. We know how you handled things at Nantes ...'

Carrier! Nantes! There came back to Hector's mind the vague recollection of a ghastly tale which had come out of France the year before, of priests shipped at night at Nantes in vessels that were scuttled in the darkness, of the Loire rolling piles of corpses down to the sea, of a ghastly fusillade upon a bridge—tales that many friends of France had stoutly denounced as fabrications.

'A song, Carrier!' proposed the man with the bloated face. 'Fill your pannikin, man, and let your troubles be! Give us your song!'

Uproarious applause, accompanied by the hammering of tin cups on the table, greeted this suggestion. Eager hands presented the new arrival with a brimming cup, and, after a copious draught, the young man with the haunted eyes began to sing in a throaty voice. The air was '*La Carmagnole*,' the song a doggerel blend of blood, blasphemy, and bawdiness. And the entire company roared the refrain, beating the board with their pannikins:

*'Mangeons à la gamelle,  
Vive le son, vive le son,  
Mangeons à la gamelle,  
Vive le son ... du chaudron!'*

The noise was at its height, Carrier, his yellow eyes aflame, the saliva frothing at his lips, swayed to and fro, cup in hand, animating the chorus to further efforts, when the door opened suddenly. A gendarme in a blue coat with a yellow cross-belt, a tufted *bicorne* hat on his head, stood on the threshold.

'*Citoyens! Citoyens!*' he bawled, striving to make his voice heard above the din. Gradually the noise subsided, but the man with the hiccoughs continued to growl discordantly:

*'Ah, ça ira, ça ira, ça ira,  
Les aristocrates à la lanterne!'*

'Is the Citizen Charpentier, Jean-François, among you?' asked the gendarme.

Hector's heart seemed to stand still within him. It was as though every drop of blood in his body had turned to ice. The drunkard had ceased his growling and fallen asleep. The room was quiet. All eyes were turned to Hector.

'Here he is!' said Grand-Duc, and clapped Hector on the back.

'Citizen,' said the gendarme, 'the Public Accuser begs you to go to him at the Conciergerie immediately!'

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# CHAPTER X

## THE FRIEND OF CITIZEN CHARPENTIER

There are moments in the life of every man when the clamour of the world is stilled, and in the brief ensuing silence he seems to hear the pendulum of eternity ticking away the hours of his allotted span. In these rare interludes a man may see himself scaled down to his true proportions in the scheme of things, and realise, though but dimly, that all around him, from the cradle to the grave, immense, unfathomed forces are directing the current of his life.

When Hector Fotheringay stood up to face the summons that had come to him in the back room of Chrétien's tavern, he was suddenly acutely conscious of his utter helplessness in the embrace of the power that, like a raging flood, was sweeping him forward to his appointed destiny. The bestial faces that confronted him faded away, and for a fleeting instant he seemed to see again the quiet dignity of old Saint James's, with the beef-eaters at their post outside the Palace, and the busy traffic of the street streaming up and down the slope past coffee-houses and clubs. Ever since that morning when, in his brave scarlet-and-gold, he had come off King's Guard, he appeared to have been fulfilling a definitely arranged programme. A sort of desperate calm settled upon him as silently he rose to follow the messenger to the Conciergerie.

He was completely ignorant of the bureaucracy of the Revolution, and to him the Public Accuser was merely a name. He knew only, as all Europe knew, that the Conciergerie was the last halt on the journey to the scaffold, and that, in the ill-famed prison, Marie Antoinette had spent the last night of her life before setting out to be reunited to her hapless husband.

The members of the Committee had broken out into conversation again as though a summons to the Conciergerie at midnight were all in the day's work. Hector took courage from their nonchalance. From the approaching interview, he told himself, he might at least hope to derive some information regarding this mysterious Jean-François Charpentier.

Grand-Duc touched his arm.

'I told you our mutual friend was expecting you,' he said. 'You should have waited on him at once instead of letting him send for you. Come to the Section to-morrow and tell me how you got on.'

Hector would have liked to ask his mentor who the Public Accuser was. But he was afraid of rousing his suspicions, so, saying he would see him in the morning, he took his hat and, nodding to the company in as democratic a manner as possible, made for the door.

'*Hé!*' cried the humpback, 'you are forgetting your cloak!'

Hector turned in a panic. Grand-Duc took the black silk cloak from a row of pegs on the wall and was about to hand it to Hector when he stopped and, holding the garment up in front of him, scanned it curiously. With a hurried word of thanks, Hector made to take the cloak from the humpback, but Grand-Duc stepped back and avoided him.

'A woman's cloak!' he said mockingly. '*Ma foi!* You lose no time, citizen! Only a few hours in Paris and a gallant rendezvous already!'

With an effort Hector mastered his growing nervousness and tried to carry it off.

'I must have made a mistake at the Café des Mille Colonnes where I dined to-night,' he said, 'and have taken this woman's cloak in place of my own. If you will give it to me, Citizen Commissary, I will return it in the morning!'

'Do that!' said the humpback. 'Some pretty *citoyenne* is crying her eyes out for it to-night, I shouldn't wonder!'

He was in the act of handing the cloak over when something caught his eye. It was a little shield or tab sewn to the interior of the cloak.

'Ah!' he remarked, and held the cloak up towards the light. 'Here is perhaps the owner's name!'

The badge showed a little embroidered Cupid with bow and arrow above the words: '*Au Cupidon, rue de la Loi.*' Through eyelids half-closed the Commissary shot a quick glance at Hector. It made the young man uncomfortable. It was

as though the mantle-maker's address had told the humpback something. Grand-Duc had grown suddenly reflective. He dropped the cloak over his arm.

'Now I come to think of it,' he said, 'I can save you the trouble of going back to the Café des Mille Colonnes. I live in the rue de Beaujolais close by, and my servant shall run across to the café in the morning, leave the cloak, and fetch yours. You can collect it when you come to see me at the Section! *Allez, jeune homme!* The messenger grows restive!'

Hector dared not protest against this perfectly reasonable suggestion. But he wished he had given some other explanation, and he cursed his folly in forgetting the cloak. And he remembered with a pang that he would not now be able to return the cloak to the shop as he had promised the girl ...

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He had little recollection of that night walk through Paris in the wake of his stolid and uncommunicative escort. His thoughts were very sombre: at every turn fresh complications seemed to arise increasing the need for vigilance, unceasing vigilance ...

A freshening of the air told him that they were approaching the river. Presently they came out upon an open space with a railing along one side, and Hector recognised the Palais de Justice. The guard turned aside down a lane, and presently, at the foot of a gloomy tower, stopped at a wicket on which he hammered. A small trap in the door slid aside while an unseen face scrutinised them. Then the door opened.

Another gendarme presented himself.

'Is the Citizen Fouquier still there?' asked Hector's guide.

'In the registrar's office as usual!' the other replied. 'Twice he has sent down to know if you had returned!'

Hector gasped. Fouquier! Of course, he was the Public Accuser! So this blood-stained ogre was the 'mutual friend' of whom Grand-Duc had spoken. Now came crowding into his mind a dozen tales he had heard from *émigrés* of this scoundrel, the link between the twin Committees of Public Safety and of General Security and the guillotine, of his cold-blooded ferocity, his cynical raillery of his victims, his insatiable blood-lust. And in a moment he would meet him face to face, this man he was supposed to know, the friend of the Citizen Charpentier. He had no plausible tale to tell; and he gave himself up for lost.

In a cold sweat of apprehension he followed his guide along a corridor to a door that stood ajar. Without knocking, the gendarme marched in. In a second he reappeared and beckoned to the young man. Squaring his shoulders, Hector Fotheringay prepared to meet his fate.

The registrar's office—the '*bureau du greffe*,' as it was called—was a fair-sized apartment with dingy cupboards all round the walls save on one side, where there was a door in a partition, the upper half of which was glazed and looked into the adjacent room. The bare boards were begrimed with the dirt of countless feet, the furniture was old and dingy, the walls were stained with damp. The whole place exuded a mournful atmosphere of mouldiness and decay.

At a large table in the centre, behind a rampart of documents, the Public Accuser was seated. Before him was a burly man with a thatch of velvety black stubble descending from his pendulous cheeks to the loose folds of his double chin. He wore a dirty cotton blouse, and a great bunch of keys dangled from a black leather strap that girdled his capacious paunch.

'*Voilà!*' said the Public Accuser, and handed his *vis-à-vis* a paper. 'The list of the sixty-one who will sneeze through Sanson's little window to-morrow! I've taken off the name of this rascally *ci-devant* abbé—what's his name ...?'

'Marchand, is it?' suggested the gaoler.

'*C'est ça!* The Committee want to interrogate him again in the morning, so we'll slip him into the evening batch. I dare say it will be the same to him whether we shorten him at compline or at matins!'

The gaoler grinned. Then he said:

'Did the *Citoyen* Sanson speak to the *Citoyen Accusateur-Public* of the trouble with the carts?'

'Yes, yes,' the man at the table replied. 'It will be gone into!'

But the gaoler was not satisfied. He had a string of complaints. The carts arrived late. The ropes that came back with them were never cleansed and the blood made them so stiff that they could be tied only with difficulty. The Public Accuser plunged with avidity into all these details, dragging up reports, returns, and memoranda from the immense pile of correspondence before him. Gradually it dawned upon Hector, as he listened with horror to the banal discussion of the ghastly incidentals of their work of blood, that this man, with the livid, pock-marked face and dull, fish-like eyes, the rims reddened from want of sleep, was the type of jack-in-office, the petty official, meticulous and hide-bound, prolix, pompous and pedantic, swamped with overwork, suspicious of every one, trusting nobody but himself.

At length the gaoler retired, his list in his hand. Then only did Fouquier-Tinville, lifting his lifeless eyes to the door where Hector had remained standing, beckon the young man to approach the table.

'You have kept me waiting, Citizen Charpentier,' he said in a dry and formal voice. 'You reported at the Lepeletier Section early this evening, I understand. Why have I to send for you?'

Hector had already perceived that the new leaders of France would swallow any amount of flattery.

'I was loath to derange the Public Accuser, who, as everybody knows, labours night and day for the safety of the nation. I had intended to write and ask when it would be convenient for the citizen to receive me.'

Fouquier smiled and showed his yellow teeth. His smile was worse than his frown, Hector decided.

'The guillotine keeps me busy,' he replied. 'And more work is yet to come. Heads must fall like tiles off a roof before the *patrie* is safe.'

With feverish hands he began to rummage in the mass of papers surrounding him.

'The Commissary Regnault wrote to me from Copenhagen in your behalf. He is flattering to you, young man. I do not find his letter here for the moment, but, in virtue of the citizen's recommendation, I propose to give you a trial. Friend Regnault says that those reports on the members of our mission to Denmark were your work! *C'est bien, ça!* A spy who is worth his salt must know how to worm himself into the confidence of his fellows...!'

From a carafe at his elbow he filled himself out a bumper of neat spirits and tossed it off. His voice was loud and vulgar, his language coarse and freely dotted with disgusting oaths. Never had Hector even imagined such a bizarre blend of cut-throat and bureaucrat, arrogant to his subordinates just as he was, the young man guessed, servile to those above him. His breath reeked of spirits and his hands shook. There was a strained look in his face as though he feared sleep and the hours he must spend alone. It was clear that he relied on work and alcohol to distract his mind from the spectres whose names filled the dusty *dossiers* that littered his table.

'You have the *flair* for *espionage*, Regnault says,' he resumed. 'Have you the nose for conspiracy, citizen? Can you smell out the stinking *calotte* of these rascal priests hiding under the red cap of liberty? Can you track down treacherous scoundrels like Danton and Hébert who plot the ruin of the nation? I have work for you, citizen, important work. But first I shall test you; first I must try you out!'

His husky voice sank to a whisper, his head fell forward on his chest, his basilisk eyes were veiled. His lower jaw drooped as, hunched up in his chair, he gazed into space with the vacant, fascinated stare of an imbecile. It was as though he saw something between him and the dingy presses round the walls.

But presently he started, and wearily passed his hand across his forehead.

'What was I saying, *nom de Dieu?* Who are you?'

He stared vaguely at Hector. Then:

'*Ah, oui,*' he said, recollecting himself. 'It was for the Citizen Couthon, I remember. He has asked me to recommend him a young man as confidential secretary. It is a fortnight since he first spoke of it, and every time he sees me he wants to know if I have found him the right man. For fifteen days, Citizen Charpentier, I have kept the post open thinking you might

suit, and this very evening the Citizen Couthon rates me for an idle *coquin* for failing him. And you are in Paris the whole time without reporting to me, *sang de Dieu!*"

'If I had only known, citizen ...' Hector began.

'*Ta, ta, ta!*' he said irritably. 'The post is still open. A word from me and it is yours. But what did I want to say?'

He spoke with a visible effort of concentration that plainly spoke of a brain deadened by overwork and excesses of every kind.

'You will see the Citizen Couthon. A great orator, the Citizen Couthon, a great patriot, who has gathered into his hands much of the power of the party. He has many friends and many, many visitors. It will be a good experience for you. You will learn much in the house of the Citizen Couthon!'

For a moment his listless eyes searched the young man's face. Then he began to grope among his papers again.

'Wait, I give you a word for the citizen,' he said.

For a little while the silence of that sad and dingy room was broken only by the scratching of the quill pen across the paper. Hector sat and watched dully. He was trying to realise that Jean-François Charpentier, Jacobin spy, had definitely stepped into the shoes of Hector Fotheringay, Lieutenant and Captain in His Majesty's Third Regiment of Foot Guards.

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# CHAPTER XI

## COUTHON

In the Paris that Hector Fotheringay had known the rue Saint-Honoré had been, like the Strand in London, in the main a business thoroughfare. It was a street of shops and offices and *bourgeois* apartments. In these tall gaunt houses with the high-pitched *mansarde* roofs the social scale tapered pyramid-wise from the wealthy tradesman, who occupied the first floor, to the artisan or the little modiste, who lived under the tiles.

But the Revolution had changed all that. The Terror had ruined trade and the rich *bourgeois* were fleeing from Paris. The Convention that, for nearly two years now, had sat day and night without a break, had drawn the whole political world to the rue Saint-Honoré and the streets adjacent to the Tuileries. Here the political clubs had their meeting-places, and all about, in apartments and in single rooms, the representatives of the people lodged, trailing behind them, in a squalid cortège that tramped all day up and down the dark and grimy staircases, the tatterdemalion figures that were making the history of France.

It was on the morning following his first momentous evening in Paris that Hector Fotheringay penetrated into this swarming anthep. A good night's rest, a shave, and a change of linen had done much to restore his courage, and he set out for the house of the Citizen Couthon in an adventurous frame of mind.

His ignorance of French politics was his sure shield. He had heard of the Citizen Couthon for the first time on the previous day. He had remarked, it is true, the curious effect which the mention of the name had produced upon his landlady when he had asked her that morning to direct him to Citizen Couthon's lodging. But he had already discovered that people in Paris had acquired a strange distaste for politics. Either through fear or indifference they did not discuss them; their talk was all of food and the growing difficulty of obtaining it.

Of a gendarme that stood under a carriageway guarding an invalid chair, Hector asked if the Citizen Couthon lodged within the house. There was a great coming and going about the *porte cochère*—deputies with their sashes, officers, National Guards—and, even as the young man spoke to the gendarme, two mounted messengers rode up from different directions, and, springing from the saddle, vanished into the house.

'The Citizen Couthon lives on the second floor above the *entresol*,' the gendarme replied. 'But without an appointment, *tu sais*, it's useless. Besides, he is going out at once to the Convention.'

But Hector had his note from Fouquier, and, nodding to the gendarme, he mounted the stairs. The front door of the apartment indicated stood open. The hall was full of people. Some sat on a bench, others stood about, while a group surrounded an apple-cheeked maidservant in a mob-cap. They all talked at once, and the woman raised her hands to gain a hearing.

'The Citizen is working and must not be disturbed,' she announced. 'He goes very soon to the Convention. You can see him there or at the Committee of Public Safety. *Citoyens, citoyens*, you waste your time to stay!'

She broke away from them, but Hector stopped her. He showed her his letter.

'From the Public Accuser,' he said.

An uneasy expression crept into the woman's face.

'From the Citizen Fouquier?' she repeated in a dying voice.

Hector nodded.

'It is most urgent,' he prevaricated.

Slowly the woman wiped her hands upon her apron.

'Wait there a little,' she whispered, and took the letter from him. 'I will tell the Citizen Couthon.'

Some of the bystanders, who had overheard this brief dialogue, nudged one another and scanned the young man with

undisguised curiosity. His appearance seemed to excite their merriment, in some cases even their resentment. Instinctively he felt himself bristling up as he marked the sneering lips, the mocking eyes. But he controlled himself. Hector Fotheringay, he reflected bitterly, could no longer afford to take offence.

In all the company he discerned a certain studied shagginess which contrasted strongly with his own trim and clean appearance. It was as though they rivalled one another as to whose hair should be the most unkempt, whose neckcloth the most ragged, whose clothes the shabbiest. The rather theatrical poverty of the lamented Marat had set the mode. These *sans-culottes*, Hector found, paraded their tatters very much as, in far-off Saint James's, men paraded their cravats, their horses, or their women.

'Ps-sst!'

The maidservant called to Hector from a door at the end of the hall. The company fell back as he crossed the lobby, and, after passing through a small apartment that, from the decked table, seemed to be the dining-room, he was shown into a large square chamber.

The room was newly decorated in white-and-gold, and very tastefully furnished with a suite of white-and-gold furniture upholstered in apple-green. A beautiful Aubusson carpet covered the floor and a splendid Buhl clock ticked on the white marble mantelpiece. The apartment was bright and airy and flooded with the sunshine that poured through the windows.

At first Hector thought he had the room to himself. But suddenly, from the depths of a tall *bergère* that stood facing the light with its back to the door, a grating, querulous voice spoke.

'What is it? What is it? Why don't you come in?'

Hector advanced until he could see the occupant of the chair. It was a man of indeterminate age in a white dressing-gown, a wrap flung about his legs. Arched brows met above an aquiline nose; and his mouth was small and well-shaped, his chin pointed. Altogether his features were good; but they wore the pinched and suffering expression of a confirmed invalid, and their tint was leaden.

As Hector came forward, the man in the chair straightened himself up and looked at his visitor with the imperious mustering glance of one who is accustomed to judge men swiftly.

'You are the Citizen Charpentier of whom the Public Accuser speaks?' he asked. His voice was most disagreeable, rasping like a file, with a touch of the unmistakable accent of the Auvergnat.

'Yes, citizen,' said Hector.

'Show me your papers,' the man commanded, with a suspicious glance at the other. His thin hand drummed nervously on the arm of his chair.

Hector detached from his hat his *certificat de civisme*. The invalid scanned it carefully and handed it back.

'After Marat,' he said, 'the patriot Robespierre has, only a few days since, all but lost his life to the knife of an assassin hired by the infamous Pitt. On the same day the Deputy Collot was murderously assailed as part of the same foreign conspiracy. Those whose lives are precious to the welfare of the State have, therefore, to be unceasingly vigilant.'

The self-assurance with which he spoke was the expression of a vanity so ingrained as to stand on a higher plane than mere vulgar boasting. His French was careful and correct, and his speech devoid of the obscenities and oaths that had so strongly spiced the table-talk at Chrétien's. Almost for the first time since he had clambered down from the Calais Mail at the Messageries, Hector felt himself to be in a normal atmosphere.

'At the tribune of the Convention to-day,' Couthon proceeded, 'I shall deliver one of my great speeches denouncing the conspiracy aimed at the lives of my fellow guardians of the Republic. *Tenez ...*'

From the folds of his dressing-gown he drew a wad of foolscap. Unfolding it, he began to declaim:

*Pitt, Coburg, and you all, cowards and petty tyrants, who regard the world as your inheritance, who, in the last instants of your agony, struggle with so much fury, sharpen, sharpen your daggers. We despise you too much to fear you and you well know that we are too great to imitate you ...*

He looked up quickly to see, Hector thought, if his audience was listening.

*... But the law, he trumpeted, with uplifted, menacing forefinger, the law whose reign terrifies you has its sword poised above your heads; it will strike you all. The human race has need of this example, and Heaven, whom, you outrage, decrees it!*

He broke off again.

'You come from abroad?' he said. 'Tell me, how do they judge me in foreign countries?'

'The reputation of the Citizen Couthon is immense,' Hector improvised rapidly.

'As an orator I have no equal,' the invalid rejoined. 'Again and again the Assembly decrees that my speeches shall be placarded throughout France. You have heard of my great oration against atheism? Robespierre is sound in the matter of his speeches. But he is always a lawyer. *Que voulez-vous?* For eloquence they come to me. More and more do the demands upon my time as France's national orator encroach upon my labours at the Committee of Public Safety and the Club des Jacobins. I am overwhelmed with work. My anteroom is thronged day and night. I require some one who will canalise for me the stream of citizens who daily seek out in his home Couthon the patriot, Couthon the great Republican. On the recommendation of the Citizen Fouquier I will give you a trial. Your nascent patriotism shall be cherished and strengthened in the sternly moral home of the great tribune under the benevolent eye of Madame Couthon, mother of my two innocent children!'

Suddenly he caught his side. A violent spasm of coughing tore at his chest. His livid face went greenish-white and the perspiration stood out on his forehead. With a trembling hand he pointed at a bottle that stood on a table against the wall. Hector fetched it and measured a dose out into a glass. The invalid tossed it off. Little by little the coughing ceased, but was succeeded by a fit of hiccoughs so violent that it threatened to rend the sufferer's frame. Presently, too, this seizure passed away, leaving the invalid pale and breathless.

'I suffer, always I suffer!' he gasped. 'It is as though Heaven were jealous of the great services I render to the Republic and strove to hamper my zeal with this twisted and broken body. Bah! My limbs may be stunted, but my brain is unimpaired. Never forget that, Citizen Charpentier. If my enemies should seek to seduce you, do not let this crippled body mislead you. My spirit is unbroken. If the salvation of the nation should demand it, even as with my hammer I condemned the city of Lyons to destruction, so I should willingly depopulate France, making genius, talents, honour, and industry disappear, that the Republic might live. Sanson and his pupils guillotine with so much rapidity; twelve heads fell the other day in thirteen minutes! The bloody harvest that is ripening will stimulate them to greater efforts, and it is I, Couthon, who wield the sickle!'

He fell back panting, his eyes suffused with blood, froth at the mouth. Hector realised that this neurotic creature, all brain, was more dangerously homicidal even than Fouquier and his masters, 'the despatchers.'

'Now I go to the Convention,' said Couthon after a spell. 'Take from the adjoining room my coat and hat, citizen; you will find them on the couch.'

Hector obeyed, and assisted the cripple to dress himself for the street. Couthon eyed him.

'You are strong, young man,' he said. 'You shall carry me downstairs to my chair. You will be less clumsy than this animal, Javoir, the gendarme who attends on me! Return here at one o'clock, young man, and I will acquaint you with your duties!'

He stretched out his arms and clasped them about Hector's neck. His wrap slipped to the ground, disclosing two shrunken, dangling legs, slight as a child's, powerless as a puppet's. His breath was fetid and his hands were cold and dank, like the body of a frog. With an unconquerable feeling of disgust, Hector picked him up—he was not heavy—and bore him from the room.

Under the *porte cochère* the gendarme still waited with the chair. It was a strongly built piece upholstered in lemon-coloured velvet with two solid wooden wheels in front and a small wheel behind. Above the two arms two handles projected which, by a system of cogs engaging on the front wheels, enabled the occupant to propel himself forward. In this strange vehicle Hector deposited his burden; the gendarme carefully ran the chair off the pavement into the roadway,

and, elbows out, head thrust forward, hands rotating briskly, away the Conventionnel went, rattling over the cobbles. He had no need to call for room; for at the sound of his approach the traffic scattered and men fell silent or whispered awe-struck beneath their breath: '*C'est Couthon!*'

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Thus Hector Fotheringay entered upon his new occupation. Every morning at eight he arrived at the rue Saint-Honoré, and from that hour until late in the evening, sometimes till far into the night, he was at the beck and call of the cripple. He was amazed at the indomitable energy that dwelt within that shrunken frame. Long spells of frightful pain, blinding headaches, and accesses of violent hiccoughing did not affect the *Conventionnel's* astonishing capacity for work. Upon his shoulders fell the burden of most of the great administrative reforms of the Government: he closely followed political developments in the provinces; he was largely concerned with the all-important question of the food-supply of Paris; and he was one of the most frequent as well as the most prolific speakers at the bar of the Convention. He took the keenest possible interest in the work of the Revolutionary Tribunal, and, in innumerable cases, personally drafted the instructions for the Public Accuser and often for the President of the Court as well.

His immense tenacity was the inspiring genius of the new law that stripped the Revolutionary Tribunal of even the semblance of a court of justice. It was his will that he or his fellow dictators in the Provisional Government, Robespierre and Saint-Just, in decreeing the arrest of a suspect, should send him, in the same breath, to his death. And so the great shadow of the Terror lengthened over Paris as the packed carts lumbered to the guillotine, the toll of shuttered shops in the rue Saint-Honoré, marking the ruin or flight of the shopkeepers, became even longer, and the Palais-Égalité, that Hector had lately found so gay, grew dark and deserted.

But the secretary of the Citizen Couthon, busy from dawn to dusk, was glad of the work, because it left him so little time to think of the glittering triangle knife that he seemed to see, day and night, hanging poised above his head....

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## CHAPTER XII

### THE TIGER AWAKES

He was haunted by the appalling danger of his position. It preyed upon his mind. As he elbowed his way through the greasy crowds that hung all day about the Convention and marked how the Revolution had brought to the surface the lees of the Parisian populace, always the most potentially violent mob in the world, he felt forlorn, abandoned, a straw drifting aimlessly upon an angry ocean. It broke his sleep of nights, those hot and breathless nights that a torrid June had brought upon Paris.

Night after night he would awake with a start, bathed in perspiration from some ghastly nightmare peopled in turn by Fouquier and his friends, or Couthon with his fetid breath and leaden face. Or he would find himself again in Engstrom's house with the man Philippe falling dead at his feet, and he would start up, the smell of burnt powder in his nostrils, the sound of heavy footfalls in his ears. But the smell of powder was only the odour of newly roasted coffee and the footfalls those of the serving-maid come to wake him.

Sometimes Betty, fresh and fragrant, flitted through his dreams, elusive, unattainable. He would long for the touch of her small, cool hand to comfort him, he would strain his ears in sleep to catch the vibrant tones of her voice that always so strongly stirred him. But he could not reach her: figures would always interpose themselves, the Vicomte with his burning, passionate regard, or Maxeter, ignoring his erstwhile friend with cold, haughty stare. And he would open his eyes to the blazing sunshine of another day with the tears of longing yet wet upon his cheek.

He was now lodged in the rue Helvétius, within a few minutes' walk of the Citizen Couthon's, in the house of the Citizeness Fourbe. She was cousin by marriage of the gendarme, Javoir, one of Couthon's bodyguard of two, who had recommended the place to Hector as being clean and respectable. For the present, at any rate, the young man's plan was to render himself as inconspicuous as possible. He was therefore glad to move his valise from the Hôtel des États Unis, with its continual comings and goings, to the quietude of the modest back bedroom at Madame Fourbe's.

His position at Couthon's forced him to be more than ever circumspect as to his movements. Remembering what the man Philippe had said about meeting Engstrom at the Café Conti, he had thought of visiting the café on the chance of meeting, through the agency of the red snuff-box, some of Mr. Gray's people in Paris; for he knew there must be others. But very reluctantly he had relinquished his intention. If, as seemed almost certain, the arrest of Engstrom had led to the disruption of his organisation, the place would surely be watched. With every day that passed, he realised more clearly that the downfall of Engstrom signified the absolute annihilation of any prospects of success he might have had. He felt that he was now wholly cut off from home, that no longer could he count on the long arm of Mr. Gray stretching forth from Downing Street to pluck him out of his desperate plight.

Fiercely he chafed at his forced inaction. Again and again he asked himself to what good end he had braved the perils of his errand. He found no reply. He had been drawn into the wheel work of the Revolution and, a tiny cog, must play his part or be relentlessly crushed in the machinery.

He long wavered as to whether he should risk calling on the girl at the mantle-maker's of the rue de la Loi to explain his failure to return the cloak. He had never ventured to keep his appointment with Grand-Duc, hoping that, when no man's cloak was forthcoming at the Café des Mille Colonnes, the matter would pass from the humpback's mind. The girl had certainly known Engstrom and her name might well figure in the *dossier* of the organisation. But Hector could not bear to think he had failed in courtesy to this quaint little sempstress who had served him so well, and he determined to take a chance and see her.

His duties, however, left him little leisure for private errands, and more than a week elapsed after he had taken this decision before he could contrive an opportunity. Here another disappointment awaited him. Loison had left 'Au Cupidon.' 'The young person is no longer employed here,' the acid and elderly forewoman had told him stiffly, and there was that in her manner which had warned Hector not to push his curiosity further. The girl had left no address, the forewoman said, and the young man had quitted the shop with the uneasy feeling that, for all he knew, he had been instrumental in costing the girl her position. He wondered whether she had any family: she seemed very young to be cast forth alone upon the rude mercy of revolutionary Paris. But he dared not make any further enquiry after her and that for a very good reason.

One evening Grand-Duc had called. It was the day of the Feast of the Supreme Being, and Couthon, decked out in his best, had left early in his roll-chair to bowl along in the great procession of Deputies that was to go on foot from the Tuileries to the Champs-de-Mars. All Paris was out of doors, only Hector stayed at home, for Couthon's parting injunction to him had been not to quit the house, as he himself would be absent until late.

Hector sat dreaming over a great pile of correspondence in the apartment of the rue Saint-Honoré. The sun was setting in a magnificent pageant, and through the open windows there mounted from the street the sounds and smells of the hot and dusty throngs flocking homeward from the festival. In the distance resounded in fitful bursts of discordance the fifes and drums of the Volunteers marching back from the review to their great camp in the Plain of Sablons.

Suddenly the door of the sitting-room opened and the humpback appeared. He was very smartly dressed in a brand-new butter-coloured frock suit and top-boots with buff tops. He wore an immense stiff cravat, the front of which was adorned with a large cameo head of Marat set in glass, and there was a cluster of wheat-ears in his buttonhole. His hat and clothes were white with dust.

'Couthon not in, citizen?' he said, blinking his lizard eyes that, after the glare outside, were unaccustomed to the shuttered dimness of the room.

'He has gone to the fête,' Hector replied.

'Aye, I saw him there, enthusiastically joining in the adulation of the Citizen Robespierre. Some of us, I confess, had a different idea of this Supreme Being. We had scarcely pictured him as a manikin powdered like an aristocrat in a bright blue coat. *Pfui!*'

He spat noisily into the fireplace, and, hoisting himself upon the table, looked down upon Hector.

'In your new position you forget old friends, it seems,' he remarked. 'I have it in my mind that you promised to come and see me, is it not so?'

Hector felt horribly nervous. He recollected his fib about the black silk cloak.

'You see how I am placed, Citizen Commissary,' he said. 'All day I am here. I have not a moment for myself or my friends.'

'*Je sais, je sais,*' rejoined Grand-Duc. 'In any case your cloak has not been found. Some worthy *sans-culotte* has doubtless inherited it. It should be a warning to you, citizen, to be careful of the places you frequent. So *ce bon Couthon* keeps you busy, *hein?* What a man! What a prodigious worker! As if I did not have already enough to do at the Section, he has charged me with the *Instruction* in the Engstrom conspiracy ...'

Hector's heart sank. How that name terrified him!

'A vast *affaire!*' the Commissary continued. 'We are only at the beginning. Figure to yourself that this cursed rascal was two men, the banker Engstrom in the rue Vivienne, the bookseller Poirier in the rue des Petits Champs. Always he kept the two identities separate so that it was only Engstrom who appeared at the rue Vivienne and only Poirier who frequented the rue des Petits Champs. Where then did he disguise himself? Not in the street, *évidemment!* What then follows?'

He glanced sharply at Hector. The young man's throat was dry with apprehension.

'I ... I don't know!' he managed to gasp out.

The humpback threw up a finger.

'I will tell you,' he said. 'In one or both of his two houses he must have had a secret entrance in rear by which he entered in the one character to leave, by the front, in the other. This did not occur to the *imbécile* who, until yesterday, had charge of the case. It is my first deduction. I shall act on it at once. To-morrow we carry out the most minute domiciliary search of the two houses...!'

He rubbed his hands gleefully together.

'You will see I am on the right track,' he said.

He slipped from the table to the ground and extended his left hand to Hector.

'I leave you,' he said. 'I shall not see my bed this night. I have the whole case to study. All day I have wasted in this tomfool adoration of the God of the *Sans-Culottes*. If you had seen this man to-day, mincing along in his finery, careful to keep an interval between himself and his fellow deputies, wallowing in the plaudits of the idiotic crowd! Robespierre, Robespierre, pride goeth before a fall!'

He brushed the dust from his hat and clapped it on his head with an air.

'You will tell the Citizen Couthon from me that the Engstrom investigation is *en train*. *Citoyen*, I salute you!'

And he took his departure, leaving Hector feeling that, slowly and surely, from every side the waters were closing in on him.

The heat was terrific. All day and every day the sun blazed pitilessly out of a sky that was like molten metal. Sometimes, when the hot wind, whirling clouds of noisome, stifling dust along the neglected streets, set from the direction of the Place de la Révolution, it wafted along the narrow rue Saint-Honoré a sickening blast of decay from the red shambles at the foot of the guillotine. The stench was so nauseating, especially of an evening when the parched city seemed to lie panting under the painted sunset, that the inhabitants of the *Quartier* began to murmur. So loud, indeed, did ultimately the protests grow that, one day, Hector took down from the Citizen Couthon's dictation the draft of a decree ordering the removal of the guillotine to the distant Faubourg Saint-Antoine.

The decree was enforced. Thereafter the swarming street beneath Couthon's windows heard no more the rumble of wheels as the daily procession of carts that grew daily longer rattled over the kidney-stones through the cowed and muttering crowds.

Couthon's home life was very tranquil. His wife was a placid and taciturn *bourgeoise* who went through life with a dazed expression on her plain face as though she had never surmounted the shock of her husband's elevation to power. Like most of the women of her standing, she had but the vaguest notion of the tremendous events that were taking place around her. She realised only that there were certain solid advantages in being the wife of the all-puissant *Conventionnel*. There was sometimes a carriage to drive out in and often there were tickets for the theatre.

But best of all she was spared the food worries that beset the distracted Parisian housewife in the summer of '94. The immense queues that stood all day outside the shops in the sweltering heat knew her not. The finest white bread, calves' brains, sweetbreads, and other dainties to tempt her ailing husband's difficult appetite were always at her disposal.

She went in obvious awe of her husband, though he treated her genially enough, addressing her as '*ma bonne femme*' or '*ma belle*.' She was good-hearted in an indolent fashion; and more than once she asked Couthon to exercise his influence to obtain some favour for a humble friend. For the rest she kept herself wholly in the background, busy with her kitchen and her children, two beautiful boys with curling golden hair and the faces of cherubs. Couthon was devoted to his children, and would keep them in the room with him for hours while he discussed with an inventor a project for a 'four-head' guillotine or dictated to Hector a savage decree ordering bloody reprisals against some insubordinate provincial town.

Hector took all his meals, save only his *petit déjeuner*, at his employer's table. In the first days fear was his constant companion. He was not afraid of his real nationality being suspected; for not only did he speak and write French like a Frenchman, but his French blood had given his temperament a natural adaptability which the narrowness of his upbringing had never obliterated. But it was desperately hard to attune his mind to the minds of these men of blood, and he had to be constantly on the watch lest his feelings should betray him.

He was more concerned about his ignorance of French politics. He felt it was bound to give him away. But gradually he began to realise that, under the present rule, only those in the swim took any interest in political matters. It was evident that Couthon did not expect his secretary, at the outset, to be different from the bulk of the French. And from what Hector picked up from stray references to the career of the Citizen Charpentier, it was clear that he had left France before the fall of the Bastille. The Citizen Regnault, French envoy at Copenhagen, had found him there and used him to spy on the members of the various missions despatched to Denmark by the Provisional Government to buy supplies for the army.

Charpentier was, therefore, not expected to be posted on current affairs. Hector had a quick intelligence, and he picked up the thread of things fast enough to receive the grudging praise of the *Conventionnel*.

Couthon interested him prodigiously. He could not help admiring the man's pluck. His health was wretched, he suffered agonies of pain, he ate next to nothing; but he never gave in. He was a living brain working incessantly, indefatigably, in a virtually dead body, a fanatic, but cold and deliberate, his whole life vowed to the service of the State. His very patriotism seemed to save him from the base ignominy of his fellows. Like them he was savage and relentless; but it was as though a motive higher than mere blood-lust, personal vengeance, or private gain inspired him.

So he appeared to Hector until disillusion, swift and terrible, overtook him and he saw the tiger awaken in this cold and bloodless man.

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One morning the *Citoyenne* Couthon came into the sitting-room where Hector was reading the *Moniteur* to his employer. Couthon in his dressing-gown was reclining on a couch set against the wall, a wrap about his shrunken limbs. In his lap was a long-eared white rabbit which nibbled at a leaf of lettuce that the cripple extended. Its fellow crouched on the floor close by where Jean, the youngest child, a boy of four, was stroking it with a chubby hand.

The *Citoyenne* wore her habitual morning attire. It consisted of a loose cotton wrapper and a red flannel petticoat girt about with a large print apron. Her feet were thrust into shapeless list slippers and her hair was tied up in an old scarf.

'Couthon,' she said in her flat, lifeless voice, 'there is a young person in the kitchen who would like to have a word with you.'

'Who is it, *ma bonne femme*?' he asked amiably, and jocularly added: 'Not another Corday, I trust?'

'*Pardi, non*,' his wife rejoined. 'It's only a poor sempstress who has worked for me in the past. She has lost her situation and is in great want. She is looking for her brother who came up from our *pays* to Paris and thought that you might help her find him. You will see her, *n'est-ce pas*?'

'*Bien sûr, ma belle*! You can send her in.'

The *Citoyenne* retired and presently they heard her voice at the door.

'Fear nothing, my child. My husband is very kind. *Va*!'

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It was the girl from the rue de la Loi. Hector knew her at once, though she was sadly changed. She looked more ethereal than ever, as though a breath of wind would blow her away. Her eyes were sunken, her small face was drawn and wasted, and her fingers, nervously intertwined, were pitifully thin. Her clothes were an extraordinary collection of odds and ends. Over the flowered muslin dress in which he had seen her before—more tattered than ever and now no longer clean—she wore a man's uniform coat of faded blue with the tails cut off. Her little bare feet were thrust into wooden shoes. On her pale blonde hair a stained and ragged red cap, surmounted by the inevitable cockade, was poised almost coquettishly. Hector felt a lump in his throat as he looked at her, so frail, so timorous, so forsaken did she appear as she stood there, her grey eyes raised appealingly to the terrible *Conventionnel* on the sofa.

'Well, *mon enfant*,' said Couthon benignly, '*la Citoyenne* Couthon tells me you are from our country of the Auvergne.'

He spoke gently and with a paternal air that was well in keeping with that pleasing picture of domestic bliss—the cheerful room with the sunshine glinting on the golden curls of the child fondling the white rabbit on the carpet.

'Yes, *citoyen*,' the girl replied.

'And what is your name?'

'Loison, *citoyen*.'

'And where do you come from in the Auvergne?'

'From Clermont, *citoyen*.'

Couthon nodded affably.

'I knew it well when I was younger. A beautiful country! You seek news of your brother, *mon enfant*? How is he called?'

'Mallet, *citoyen*, Ferdinand Mallet!'

An extraordinary change came over the features of the *Conventionnel*. It was as though his countenance were suddenly illuminated by some internal fire. He struggled erect, heedless of the rabbit he had been caressing, and the pretty animal leapt affrighted to the floor.

'Mallet?' he repeated. 'Mallet? Of Clermont?'

He fixed his pale-blue eyes, now blazing with a spiteful light, upon the girl's wan face.

'Of the Château de la Tour?'

'Yes, citizen!'

'Your ... your mother,' he demanded—his voice had become hard and grating—'where is she?'

'She is dead, citizen.'

'And Mallet, what has become of him?'

'My father is likewise dead.'

A ferocious and horrible joy gleamed in the cripple's livid face.

'They guillotined him, *hein*?'

'On the Place d'Armes at Clermont, citizen, in the Year One of the Republic,' the girl rejoined impassively.

Couthon threw his head back and chuckled raucously.

'And you the brat of the *ci-devant* Chevalier de Mallet and his adulterous spouse, the wanton wretch that bore you, come here to claim *my* help?'

He flicked the wrap from his twisted puppet's legs.

'Look at your parents' work!' he cried in a whirlwind outburst of passion. 'It is the fault of Louise de Mallet that I am a cripple. That painted jade, your mother, lured me to the rendezvous that wrecked my life. Your father lay in wait to surprise us, and it was he that forced me to lie through the winter's night in a stream hiding from him. They crippled me for life, the pair of them! They lamed my legs, but they could not lame my brain. And it is my brain that shall stamp out the whole of your accursed brood. Find your brother, shall I? Aye, I'll find him for you and send him to sneeze into Sanson's basket. But you shall go first, *ma belle*!'

He was screaming and stuttering with fury, an expression of tigerish ferocity on his pale, dank face. He foamed at the mouth, and flung himself about the gilded sofa as though, had he but had the strength to rise to his feet, he would have hurled himself upon the girl. The little child on the floor picked himself up and ran in terror from the room, scattering the rabbits on his passage. But Loison stood still, her hands clasped tight before her, staring in proud repose at the foaming, writhing monster before her.

'Seize her, seize her!' shouted Couthon, and snatched at the bell-rope that hung down the wall at his side. But at that moment the *Citoyenne* Couthon burst in and flung herself upon the frantic figure on the couch. She grasped the hand that clawed for the bell-rope and turned a terrified face to the girl.

'Go, go, for the love of God!' she said.

Hector, who knew that the sound of the bell would summon Couthon's gendarmes, sprang forward and touched Loison on the shoulder. The girl seemed to awaken from a trance. She laid one hand on her breast and looked up trustfully at him.

'Go now,' he whispered, 'and wait for me in the Orangery. I will come as soon as I can!'

She nodded obediently like a little child; and, gathering her ragged coat about her, went quietly from the room.

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## CHAPTER XIII

### GRAND-DUC LAUGHS

The Orangery lay very still in the quivering noonday heat. An air of peace rested over this quiet corner of the Tuileries Gardens. It was as if a vestige of the old-world repose of the Palace and its pleasure-grounds, driven before the raw breath of revolution, had sought refuge and lingered in this tranquil nook. With its statuary, its prim shrubs, its neat paths, it was like an oasis in the savage desert of politics engirdling it.

On the one side, across a stretch of green turf, the Place de la Révolution swam in the dancing heat rays. Through the close-set trees that enclosed it on the other echoed the laughter and cries of the small children gathered about the puppet-show on the Terrasse des Feuillants, where a *sans-culotte* Punchinello was beheading a wicked aristocrat with the sweetest little guillotine imaginable. For the rest, the sparrows that cheeped about the paths and the bees that hummed drowsily above the flower-beds seemed to have the place to themselves.

Noon was past when Hector hurriedly entered the Orangery in search of Loison. He did not see her at first, for she had chosen a seat on a marble bench that a tall shrub concealed from view. Turning a corner, he suddenly came upon her, nursing her knee in an attitude of profound dejection. At the sound of his approach, she looked up, but averted her gaze immediately.

'My dear,' said Hector, sitting down beside her, 'you've made a dangerous enemy this morning.'

She coloured slightly.

'*La canaille!*' she said in a low voice. 'Oh, *la canaille!*'

'He made himself ill with rage,' Hector resumed. 'He's taken to his bed and the doctor is with him now.'

'Did you hear what he called my mother?' the girl said hotly.

Hector took her hand and patted it.

'Don't think of that now,' he replied. 'Can you leave Paris? It were best you were out of his way. Have you any place to go to?'

'And what does it concern you?' she demanded, facing him. 'You showed me Engstrom's countersign that night at the rue de la Loi. But I suppose you are a spy, one of Fouquier's *moutons*! I don't care! You can tell them to come and take me!'

The young man sighed.

'I'm not what you think I am,' he answered. 'I have been forced into this position at Couthon's. I went to your place as soon as I could to explain why I had not sent back the cloak, but you had gone. Grand-Duc, of the Lepeletier Section, found the cloak, and I had to tell him I had taken it by mistake from a café in the Palais-Égalité. He said he would change it, and I didn't dare to try and get it back from him. I felt as though I had been basely ungrateful to you. I don't think I even properly thanked you for what you did for me that night ...'

She turned and looked at him. Her eyes were very sad.

'I did it for Engstrom. He was my only friend,' she said. 'And you, who are you?'

'Only a poor hunted wretch like yourself,' he replied.

Her mood changed. Her eyes grew tender, and she smiled wanly.

'*C'est vrai?*' she asked him. 'Will you help me? Everything is so ... difficult ...'

Her head fell forward, and suddenly she lurched against the young man's coat. Hector caught her in his arms.

'Loison, my dear, what ails you?' he said.

But she had not fainted. She disengaged herself from his arms and put her hand wearily to her head.

'I'm hungry,' she whispered. 'I'm weak! I can't go on!'

Hector sprang up.

'My child, I never guessed,' he said—how could he? He had never seen a human being dying by inches of hunger in his world of Saint James's. 'Do you think you can walk as far as the rue de Saint-Florentin? I know a woman there who will give you food!'

She stood up, so white and woe-begone in her pitiful rags.

'It will be dangerous for you to be seen with me!' she said hesitatingly.

The young man took her arm.

'Couthon will do nothing to-day,' he said. 'Now you shall eat, and afterwards, we shall see!'

There was a dairy in the rue de Saint-Florentin where privileged housewives of the *Quartier* like the Citizeness Couthon obtained milk and eggs and butter. The dairywoman was dependent on the Citizen Couthon for her permits to leave Paris on her periodical foraging expeditions among the outlying farms. This was one of the routine matters with which the secretary dealt. He thought that Madame Bompard would be anxious to oblige him.

His confidence was not misplaced. In a democracy it is the understrappers who possess the real influence. The wise make friends of the subaltern officials who can so easily abridge the most tiresome formalities. As Hector anticipated, the dairywoman, the whole of whose trade was surreptitious and in flagrant contravention of the system of 'maximum' prices introduced by the Government, was all smiles. He told her he wanted a meal for a young girl, a friend from the country.

'*Mais comment, citoyen!*' exclaimed Madame Bompard. 'She is outside, this little one, you say? The friends of the *Citoyen* Charpentier are my friends ...'

She plucked open the back door leading into the courtyard where, by prudence, Hector had bade Loison wait.

'Advance, little one! *Grand Dieu*, the child looks famished! I haven't much to offer, *citoyen*, *tu sais*—a little omelette, a bowl of milk, a few cherries. What does that say to thee, *ma petite*? Oh, *citoyen*, it is not worth the trouble!'

She said this, rather half-heartedly, to Hector, who had laid an assignat on the counter. She protested a little more, eyeing the money hungrily the while, but ultimately, with many expressions of gratitude, slipped the note into the till. Then she began bustling about her kitchen where the bluebottles buzzed angrily on the window-panes while Loison and Hector seated themselves at the dirty table.

But when the meal was brought, Hector rose and stood over against the stove. He did not wish to embarrass the hungry child by watching her at her food. She ate and drank in silence, but when once he ventured to steal a glance at her, he found her regarding him with a curious, enquiring expression in her grey eyes.

'And now,' said Hector, when, with many greetings from the *Citoyenne* Bompard, they had passed out into the street, 'the sooner you go home the better—that is, if you have a home to go to!'

'I have a room,' the girl replied wistfully, 'but it is far from here, citizen, beyond the Pont Neuf. And I am not sure whether I can return to it!'

'Why not?' demanded the young man.

The girl flushed up.

'I owe three weeks' rent!' she said in a low voice.

'Then it shall be paid,' returned the young man gaily. 'You must look upon me as your banker, Loison. I have it in my mind, before I take you home, that you and I should make some purchases together. I am free till four o'clock. Do you think we can buy you some better clothes than these in the time?'



'Since you are so good to me, give me a little money for food,' she said. 'I can manage with my clothes a little longer ...'

'We shall buy food as well,' announced Hector, 'if you know where in your Quartier to get it, which, I confess, I don't. And, Loison, don't call me "*citoyen*"! My name is Jean, Jean-François Charpentier—*de Mademoiselle le très obéissant serviteur*!'

The allusion amused her. She laughed a little cooing laugh and flashed her white teeth at him. She had the milky teeth of a child. Then, growing solemn again, she asked:

'Are you a *ci-devant* aristocrat, *cito* ... I mean, Jean?'

'Something like that!' said Hector.

'I thought so that night, the first time I saw you,' she replied reflectively. 'You reminded me of Engstrom. He always bore himself bravely, too. He never looked cowed like these cursed *sans-culottes*, the ...!'

And she rapped out the expletive that had so startled Hector at their last meeting.

'That's a foul word in your mouth, Loison,' he said. 'You ought to remember that you are of gentle birth!'

'No word is too foul for *canaille* like Couthon!' the girl burst out.

Hector laughed.

'I quite agree,' he answered. 'But if we talk like them, Loison, we might get to think like them. There are not many *ci-devant* aristocrats left alive in Paris. You and I have to maintain their reputation for good manners. You know the old saying, "*Noblesse oblige*" ...?'

She stopped and looked intently at him.

'"*Noblesse oblige*,"' she repeated. 'That brings back to me the days when I was a little child. I used to copy that out in my writing-book. But that was years ago in our château outside Clermont-Ferrand. It seems so long ago I had forgotten it. "*Noblesse oblige*!" Tell me again, what does it mean?'

'It means that you must never let yourself forget you are a *ci-devant*!' Hector answered, and the girl grew silent.

Through the blazing heat they regained the Tuileries. In a quiet corner of the gardens Hector gave the girl a wad of assignats. She turned the money over in her hand with an air of stupefaction.

'For clothes and to get some food,' the young man said.

She uttered a little gasp.

'But you are mad!' she exclaimed. 'Never in my life have I seen so much money! Why, I could buy up the whole of the Père Isidore's stall with this!'

And she sought to thrust the packet back into the young man's hand. A few livres would be ample, she protested: when she could afford to buy clothes, she went to the Jewish dealers in the Vieux Marché du Temple. Second-hand clothes were good and cheap just now; for the guillotine ensured a steady supply. Hector shuddered. It was horrible to think of this delicate young girl wearing the cast-off garments of the poor wretches despatched in packets to the slaughter.

'This time you needn't trouble the Père Isidore,' the young man told her. 'You shall go to a *modiste* and order what you like and to a milliner as well!'

And he handed her back the notes. Then only did her womanly instinct get the better of her French sense of thrift. Her eyes grew bright with excitement and the colour mounted in her cheeks.

'It's ... it's like a dream,' she sighed contentedly. 'I've never had any new clothes of my own since I grew up. I was only sixteen when they cut off the head of Papa, and then Mamma died and we had no money. I came up to Paris with my nurse to stay with her daughter. But poor Nounou died, and they ... they were unkind to me, so I ran away. My brother, who is twenty-four, went to Paris when Papa died, and we never heard from him again. I tried to find him, but in a great

city like this, *que voulez-vous?*

'Since then I've very seldom had enough money even for food. If it hadn't been for a girl I met who got me work at Madame Aicard's in the rue de la Loi, I should have starved. Often I used to wonder if I should ever have any of the pretty things we used to make for the *citoyennes*. We had a very distinguished *clientèle* "Au Cupidon." Sometimes in the evenings when I stayed behind to finish an urgent order after the other girls had gone home—like I did the night I met you first—I would dress up and pretend I was a rich *citoyenne* myself. But *I* needn't trouble any *modiste, citoyen ...*'

'Jean,' corrected Hector.

'Jean, *alors*—I shall buy the material and make myself a dress. I know where to go. It will be cheaper, too, to buy from the wholesale dealers!'

Hector nodded.

'And safer, as well,' he said. 'We shall have to see about getting you away from Paris, my dear. In the meantime you must stay at home, and your dressmaking will give you something to occupy the time.'

'I can go out after dark and do my shopping,' the girl replied.

'No, no,' said Hector. 'We will do what is necessary now. You must not go out again until I come for you.'

But the girl would not hear of it.

'Already you have risked too much for me,' she declared. 'If you and I are seen together, your position with Couthon is ruined forever. Remember that this, this'—she broke off, biting her lip, and shot a humorous glance at her companion—'*enfin*, this Couthon means to deliver me to Sanson if he can. Believe me, Jean, it is better we should part!'

They had reached the Seine quays and stood for a moment at the parapet watching the stream of traffic that passed to and fro above the yellow river swirling through the hoary arches of the Pont Neuf.

'No!' cried Hector. 'My debt to you is not yet paid, Loison. Perhaps you are wise to warn me against compromising my situation with Couthon, for while it lasts I should be able to help you. But we cannot part like this.'

She turned and looked at him.

'Leave me, at any rate, now,' she pleaded. 'My friend, the city is swarming with spies, and already Couthon may have heard that you have been with me! Let us go our ways till happier days arrive! Leave me, Jean, I beg!'

'Tell me, then, at least,' he pleaded, 'where you live. I must know where to find you in case I can contrive to get you out of Paris!'

'I am dangerous, dangerous to you!' she said in a low voice.

'Give me your address and I will leave you now!' Hector persisted.

Still she hesitated.

'It is not wise,' she said.

'The address!' urged the young man.

She shrugged her shoulders.

'I live in the Impasse du Paradis—it is in the rue de la Cruche Cassée, behind Notre Dame—the house of the Citizen Braille. But you must not write—it is not safe. If you come, come only after nightfall and ask for the Citizen Darras—he will know if I am in, and you will thus arouse no suspicion. He is an honest man. I shall tell him you may come.'

She held out her hand.

'Adieu!' she said.

'Au revoir!' he answered, and pressed her thin fingers in his. 'Promise me, Loison, you will not linger in the streets. The sooner you are safely back in your room the better!'

'I shall lose no time,' she promised. 'Good-bye, and thank you . . . Jean!'

With that she turned and left him. He watched her until she had gained the bridge and was lost to view in the press of traffic. Then slowly he made his way back to the rue Saint-Honoré.

The first thing he heard on entering Couthon's apartment was the fluty voice of Grand-Duc. He would have drawn back, but it was too late. The sitting-room door stood open, and Madame Couthon, who was within, called out to him.

Hector had not seen Grand-Duc since the Feast of the Supreme Being. But he had not forgotten the humpback's promise to hunt for a back entrance to the apartment of the rue Vivienne. He wondered what his presence portended. He was not left long in doubt.

'Imagine to yourself,' exclaimed the *citoyenne* and drew Hector into the room—'imagine to yourself, Charpentier, that this *coquine* whom I befriended this morning is a dangerous conspirator!'

Directly he entered the room, Hector perceived that the atmosphere was unfriendly to him. He found himself face to face with Grand-Duc, who stood by the window, his hat under his arm, his hands behind his back, his short legs straddled wide. His strange amber eyes glinted unpleasantly.

'My poor Couthon,' lamented the woman. 'Did one ever hear of such a thing? *Bon Dieu de bon Dieu!* A young girl like that! *Citoyens!*'

She inclined herself towards the two men and sailed off to her kitchen. The door slammed ominously. There was a moment's pause. Hector realised that he was expected to say something. The humpback's sturdy silence made him feel horribly nervous.

'Is this true?' he asked. 'The Citizen Couthon was greatly upset. But I imagine it was a private matter!'

The humpback looked searchingly at him.

'I heard of this girl's visit on coming here just now,' he said, 'to report to the Citizen Couthon that we had discovered a secret entrance to the conspirator Engstrom's lodging in the rue Vivienne. This back way leads through a mantle-maker's shop, known as "Au Cupidon," in the rue de la Loi, where this girl, Loison Mallet, was recently employed.'

Hector had his part to play. He knew that the time had come for him to play it. The suspicious glare in Grand-Duc's eyes dismayed him. How much had this man found out?

'That's very curious,' Hector remarked, 'for that was the name on the cloak I took by mistake from the Palais-Égalité. Do you recollect, Citizen Commissary?'

Grand-Duc stared fixedly at the speaker. Hector met his gaze unflinchingly. He was surprised to find how cool he could be now that the critical moment had arrived.

'I remember it very well, Citizen Charpentier,' the Commissary replied. 'What is even more curious is that, two days after the police visited Engstrom's house, this girl absented herself from her work at Madame Aicard's establishment. And then only it was discovered that a black silk cloak was missing!'

'Not the one that I picked up by mistake?'

'The identical one!'

Hector shrugged his shoulders.

'It is, indeed, fortunate,' he said, 'that I am well accredited; otherwise, I suppose one might say that my connection with this cloak was suspicious. I hope you regard me as above suspicion, Citizen Commissary?'

The humpback shot him an enigmatic glance.

'Where the security of the Republic is concerned,' he rejoined, 'no one is above suspicion. But do not fear, *citoyen!* We shall get at the truth. Already we know that Engstrom used this girl to let him into the shop so that he could gain his house by the back way unseen. Already we are on the track of their friends, even of the young man who sought news of the *Citoyenne* Mallet two days after her disappearance from the *atelier!*'

He laughed discordantly.

'The great owl sees in the dark,' he said.



## CHAPTER XIV

### THE IMPASSE DU PARADIS

Three days later the Citizen Couthon left Paris. By the doctor's orders he was going to make a short stay at the waters of Saint-Amand. He was accustomed to assert that he derived great benefit from his periodical visits to the spa, and the doctor encouraged him in his belief.

A large, bluff man, Dr. Largier, with a smooth, round face beaming through horn spectacles and a restless hand that forever flicked away the traces of snuff from the breast of his bottle-green surtout. Careful trimming had made his career. He never committed himself in medicine, and he had applied the same safe and simple plan to politics. Thus skilfully ballasted, the full tide of the Revolution had swept him from a provincial back-water to a snug haven in Paris, where he was content to waive his fees from the important political personages he attended in consideration of certain material advantages which these valuable relationships secured him.

Good Dr. Largier had a finger in every pie—mud pies, most of them. He frequented the company of bankers and *agents de change* and army contractors. Where there was a million-livre deal in rotten hay or paper-soled boots for the army going forward, when an adroitly manipulated political situation raised or depressed the *rentes* at an agreed time, by a whisper in one quarter or a note in another this agreeable and well-informed Dr. Largier usually contrived to net his share. He was a popular figure in the wormeaten world of finance of the First Republic; for in the circles he patronised, honest men were rare, and as he had no character so he had no enemies. For the rest, his patriotism, which was of the most ardent description, was, like his diagnoses, strictly non-committal; he was a tremendous talker, and he was fond of parading a classical education in his speech.

'*Cher grand ami*,' he said to Couthon, as, on the evening of Loison's visit, that worthy lay shaking and hiccupping in bed, 'for a chronic dorso-lumbar pachymeningitis such as you are suffering from, believe me there is nothing like the healing waters of Saint-Amand. How truly did the Greek philosopher proclaim: "*Ariston men hudor*"—"water is best." A little cooling medicine which I shall give you, a few days' rest from your indefatigable labours, "*sub tegmine fagi*," the devoted attention of your noble companion, the charming citizeness, will—I, Largier, confidently assure it—restore that mental vigour—if not your full bodily strength, for I, humble follower of Æsculapius, cannot, alas! work miracles—which the safety of the nation finds indispensable. Go, worthy patriot, seek in your Gallic Tusculum a brief respite from the crushing cares of office. Impose upon yourself this sacrifice and lighten the hearts of those who cherish and admire you!'

He rolled out these turgid periods with considerable unction, and, having vigorously polished his spectacles on a fold of his coat, popped them on his nose and gazed seraphically through them at his patient.

But the physician's idyllic picture did not at all please the invalid. He was extremely loath to give up the direction of affairs even for a day. If he were to follow the doctor's counsel, he made it a condition that his secretary should accompany him. Largier knew his patient's domineering disposition too well to seek to oppose him.

'By all means,' he agreed. 'Provided you are convinced that you will do better to have your amanuensis with you rather than leave him in Paris where he can watch the trend of political events on your behalf.'

The patient wavered, as the doctor knew he would. Couthon's suspicious mind instantly saw all kinds of intrigues set afoot by his enemies as soon as his back was turned. After a great deal of argument and a second devastatingly learned oration from good Dr. Largier, a compromise was reached whereby the Citizen Charpentier should remain in Paris, but should prepare a daily summary of current events for despatch each evening by mounted messenger to Saint-Amand.

Hector's heart rejoiced. Since the scene of the morning he had conceived a violent aversion to the cripple. This loathsome creature, with his foul breath and clammy touch, his insatiable ambition and overweening vanity, his tigerish ferocity lowering behind a screen of *bourgeois* punctiliousness, now seemed to him even more revolting than the black-hearted and bloody-minded Fouquier, who, all said and done, was no better and no worse than he appeared to be. In the days that followed, the mere presence of the cripple filled the young man with horror; but the thought of the coming respite heartened him.

The morning of departure dawned. Below, in the freshness of the June morning, the travelling *calèche* stood at the house-

door. Javoir, the gendarme who was to accompany Couthon to the spa, was busy stowing the famous roll-chair safely away on the roof of the vehicle. Upstairs Hector, under Couthon's eye, was taking note of a hundred different instructions which the cripple, dressed for the road, dictated from his couch.

The *Citoyenne* Couthon in a huge poke-bonnet, a little basket of provisions on her arm, bustled in followed by the apple-cheeked maid with the two children. They were to accompany the *Conventionnel* to Saint-Amand.

'*En route, l'ami!*' cried the Citizeness, and opened the door.

'I am ready,' Couthon replied, and held out his arms to Hector.

A wave of physical nausea swept over Hector as the thin arms of the cripple slid about his neck. Couthon was very light, and Hector felt how easy it would have been to pitch the grotesque creature with the dangling legs through the open window on to the stones of the street far below. But the young man mastered his feelings, and, carrying the cripple downstairs, deposited him on the back seat of the *calèche*.

Now the whole household was safely bestowed. Javoir folded up the steps and slammed the door, then swung himself up on the box, the driver clicked with his tongue and touched up his horses.

'Be diligent at your post, Charpentier,' screamed Couthon at the window as the wheels began to move.

'See that this *imbécile* Muron'—this was the other gendarme who was being left behind—'locks up every night after you go,' admonished the citizeness over her husband's shoulder.

'Remember your orders! If that *coquine* of a Mallet comes back, you are to seize her and send her to Fouquier!'

The cracked voice was swallowed up in the rattle of the wheels. At last they were gone. Hector breathed again. For a week, for seven whole days, he would have the apartment to himself.

The relief was immense. He yearned for a respite from his crushing anxiety. He felt that he was breaking beneath the strain of the incessant suspense. He wanted time to think, to compose a plan of action. That Grand-Duc meant mischief he was now almost sure; the very leisureliness of the Commissary's procedure filled him with gloomy forebodings. With some surprise as well; for every day now men went to the guillotine on the flimsiest of evidence. He could only surmise that the intense rivalry between the different committees of the Terror shielded him for the moment. He was useful to Couthon; and Fouquier, who never worked for his own hand, had, he imagined, placed the Citizen Charpentier in Couthon's household for some specific purpose not yet apparent.

All this Grand-Duc might know and, realising the powerful patronage that the young man enjoyed, was biding his time until he had built up an overwhelming case against him. Hector had already learnt quite enough about the astounding intrigues and counter-intrigues in the inner ring of the Government to realise that quite possibly Grand-Duc was working in the interests of some more highly placed personage, in order to involve in Hector's fall Couthon and perhaps Fouquier as well.

In all this network of plot and counterplot, however, a certain measure of safety lay. If he could manage to keep a bold face, he might yet stave off Grand-Duc, who, for the moment, at any rate, did not seem sure of his ground. Apparently he had not yet learnt of Hector's visit to Engstrom's, and, although he knew that a young man had enquired for Loison at the shop, he had not yet secured a witness who could definitely identify the visitor. The only person who could do this was the acid and elderly forewoman, who, Hector remembered, had been alone in the shop when he had called. It was odd that Grand-Duc had not brought her forward.

And yet, though his own situation was precarious enough, Hector found his mind engaged much more with Loison's plight than with his own. The process was unusual, and it surprised him.

Hitherto in his life he had had to think only of himself, his career, his amusements, his affairs of honour, his debts. Betty, even, had never dwelt so insistently in his thoughts as this insignificant little sempstress. Betty, after all, had her own assured income, such as it was, a devoted aunt, an established home; he had never had to bother his head about her safety, about her material comfort. But now this little girl had become a definite charge upon him, a responsibility none of his seeking, but a responsibility none the less.

He could avoid it, of course. He could take the dismissal she had offered him and put an end to an acquaintance which both of them recognised to be dangerous. But here again he felt, as he had felt on leaving the great dim room in Downing Street, that he was no longer dependent on the approval of others. He was a law unto, he must judge for, himself.

Not that for a moment he thought of evading this responsibility. But, in the long musing fits in which he indulged, walking to and from his lodging or lying awake at night, he discovered with surprise that, here again, Destiny had taken charge of his life and, unsought, interwoven it inextricably with the life of another.

That same evening he went off to the Impasse du Paradis. He had much to talk to the girl about. He was anxious to ascertain, for one thing, whether she had any relations in the country to whom she could go. Her connection with Engstrom was still unexplained; it was important to find out how far she was implicated in the meshes of Mr. Gray's organisation. He and the girl would sink or swim together, he realised that. Already she was cornered; while his existence at Couthon's hung from a single thread. Unless soon they could get into touch with Engstrom's band—if any survivors remained—their ultimate fate was sealed.

In a rookery of old streets beneath the shadow of Notre Dame, so narrow that their entrance was a mere slit between the ancient gabled houses, he found, after long searching, the rue de la Cruche Cassée. It was a quarter of vanished splendours, a region that had fallen on evil days before ever its strait lanes had rung to the stamp of '*La Carmagnole*.'

Here, in the days of Henri IV, great nobles of the Court, fat ecclesiastics of the adjacent Cathedral Chapter, had had their mansions. Slender turrets yet glanced suspiciously down from high walls set flush with the narrow streets; there were vast courtyards, glimpsed through gateless portals, where grass thrust up its green shoots between the stones. The great *hôtels*, with their overladen, crumbling façades, were now abandoned to the lowly. Barrels, stacks of timber, empty waggons, that filled the echoing courts, spoke of the merchants who had installed their businesses in the stately apartments of the lower floors, while above, even to the garrets, whose windows flanked the carven panoplies of arms below the high-pitched roofs, the rooms were now given over to the lodging of all manner of humble folk.

At the end of the street a faded tavern sign that hung motionless in the heavy evening air told Hector that he had reached his journey's end. '*A l'Enseigne du Paradis*' he read upon the board. Before him opened an alley so overshadowed by the crowded buildings that, even at noontide, scarce a ray of the sun could have penetrated it. Now, an hour after sunset, it was almost dark, a place of gloaming, silent and deserted, so narrow that a couple of Hector's Guardsmen could hardly have marched down it abreast, that ran for some fifty paces, to end against a high blank wall.

Hector looked about him for some one who could show him the house of the Citizen Braille. But the law of the 10 Prairial, Couthon's measure, was in full vigour, and Paris was slowly dying in its relentless grasp. The spies of the Convention were everywhere and denunciation meant death. Men sat at home o' nights, or, if they went abroad, hurried by on their business, distrustful of every stranger. And so the rue de la Cruche Cassée was deserted.

Accordingly Hector turned down the alley to hunt for the house. He went to the end before he found it. Set against the high wall, which, by the green foliage waving above the iron railing surmounting it, seemed to enclose a garden, was a tall, crazy old house, grey and weather-beaten, its plaster cracked and stained with damp. A mournful silence enveloped it, and as Hector stood in perplexity the only sound that came to his ears was the rustling of the trees above his head.

And then a painted board caught his eye. 'Braille, Cordonnier,' it said. It was fastened to the gatepost of the house with a rudimentary drawing of a hand pointing to a cellar door that stood flush with the pavement. Various boots and shoes and slabs of leather that stood in diamond-paned windows flanking the door corroborated the evidence of the pointing finger. But the door was solidly padlocked, so Hector, without more ado, entered beneath the frowning carriageway.

He mounted a stone staircase, the steps deeply worn by the feet of the centuries. The house was very still, but as he passed the second landing, a woman popped her head out of a door. The sight of a stranger seemed to terrify her, for she withdrew and would have shut the door had not Hector adroitly stemmed it with his elbow.

'The *Citoyen* Darras, *s'il vous plaît*?' he asked civilly.

'The fourth floor!' gasped the woman, white to the lips, and, with a vigorous push, slammed the door in his face.

'I must look like a *sans-culotte*!' the young man said to himself with a smile as he continued to mount.

He had learnt his lesson from the mocking faces in the lobby of Couthon's house. By letting his hair grow rather longer

than would have met the approval of his adjutant, by not brushing his clothes, and by making the process of shaving a triweekly instead of a daily operation, he had contrived an appearance of comparative dilapidation in keeping with the *mode* of the moment. He had been obliged, it is true, to consent to dingy neckcloths, but he consoled himself by knowing that the rest of his body-linen was clean.

A battered door confronted him as he turned the stair to gain the fourth-floor landing. It was innocent of knocker or bell, so Hector rapped on it briskly with his knuckles.

No sound followed. The silence of the house was unbroken. And yet the place did not give the impression of being empty. The silence was the silence of fear, the silence of a darkened room where there is a man holding his breath to avoid discovery. Hector had a mental picture of frightened citizens, like the woman he had seen, sitting behind each of the innumerable doors he had passed, listening to the footsteps that mounted, mounted, wondering if the summons they portended was for them. He had raised his hand to knock again when, from below, came the creak of a light footstep.

It was not an ordinary footstep, the firm tread of one who is on definite business. It was a light, padding step, frequently broken, the step of one trying to make himself unheard. But Hector's sharp ear, strained to the utmost watchfulness, caught the slight reverberation as that unseen foot slipped on the worn-down stone.

He peered down the well of the staircase. A young man of about his own build was creeping softly up the flight, balancing himself on his toes, stopping repeatedly with head cocked up to listen. And now Hector caught sight of his face. He recognised him immediately.

It was the young man with the rakish air and the brown hair falling about his shoulders whom he had seen at the Section Lepeletier, the young man called Maurice who had asked the guard to get him butter.

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# CHAPTER XV

## ON THE STAIRCASE

This was the young man of whose prowess as a spy the humpback had boasted. 'A fine blade' he had called him, his prize pupil. Maurice must, indeed, be an adept at his trade to have made his way unseen in Hector's wake through the deserted streets of Paris, for Hector, his wits sharpened by his last encounter with Grand-Duc, had kept a close lookout on his walk across the city. Grand-Duc, then, was having him watched.

Noiselessly Hector leaned forward to crane his neck over the banister again. With a shock he discovered that the spy had reached the floor immediately below. He was standing there, motionless, listening. Hector withdrew his head swiftly. One thought was uppermost in his mind, an appalling thought that made his heart beat faster and his pulses race.

The battered door before him remained closed. No sound came from the apartment within. He dared not knock again, for that would betray the man at whose door he stood. And he knew that, trapped in this twilight staircase, he could not escape the spy.

He must kill this man. To elude him would be of no avail, even had escape been possible. Maurice must not leave the house alive to take away the information that would send both Loison and himself to the scaffold.

He must kill this man. From the floor below the soft scrape of that stealthy footfall on the stone stairs began again. The banister moved slightly, creaked. He must kill this man, swiftly, without noise ...

And now the spy's head appeared coming round the bend of the staircase. Hector could see his brown beaver hat with its huge cockade. The man was breathing hard from his climb. From the landing where Hector stood the stair bent sharply upwards. Silently, with the utmost deliberation, Hector began to move backwards until he felt the mounting stair beneath his feet. Now he was on the first stair, now he stood on the second, out of the sight—unless he leaned forward—of any one who issued forth from the staircase upon the landing.

The creaking stopped. A soft footfall rustled; then silence. Hector looked out gingerly. The spy stood staring at the battered door. Hector drew himself up, his hands dropped to his side, his fingers spread, waiting for the man on the landing to turn. Waiting ...

With a whistling sound the spy expelled the breath from his lungs. Nonchalantly he put his hands on his hips, surveying that blank door before him. Then he doffed his hat to wipe his brow, and, as he did so, turned ...

Like a flash Hector sprang. The slight elevation on which he stood gave him, as he had planned, the impetus he required. By the failing light that fell from a window of the staircase at his back he saw surprise, consternation, and then sheer horror, the stark and anguished realisation of death flicker rapidly in succession across the rakish, jaunty face. The brown beaver hat struck him across the eyes; but the blow did not deflect him from his purpose. He had calculated his leap exactly, and his merciless, throttling grip on the throat of the spy checked the other from falling beneath that swift impact and held him upright until his life was choked away.

And now the man was dead. He had not spoken, he had not cried out: only a dull, wheezing rattle accompanied his death agony. Not until he felt the man he clutched unstiffen and relax, and at last remain a loose, sprawling puppet in his grasp did Hector, kicking the legs away, softly lay the body down. Then only was it that, from the well of the staircase, he perceived the uncertain and shifting glimmer of a light.

He glanced down. Far below some one was mounting the stairs with a lamp. The dazzle in his eyes prevented him from seeing anything but the swaying yellow gleam that moved slowly higher. What was he to do? He looked at the stairs and from the stairs to the body. Maurice would take no tales back to Grand-Duc alive. But dead?

Suddenly a voice spoke at his very elbow.

'Pardon, citizen, but it is not permitted to leave corpses on the staircase!'

The battered door had opened. An extraordinary-looking individual stood there. He was a big man with a great bushy beard like one of the Apostles, a bandanna handkerchief bound about his head. He was wearing a dirty white shirt over

what appeared to be a woman's striped cotton petticoat beneath which a stretch of hairy leg was visible. His bare feet were thrust into a pair of tattered and downtrodden Turkish slippers.

'There is, I understand, a large pit at Picpus for the reception of inconvenient dead bodies,' he added gravely, 'and quicklime is at the charge of the Government!'

He had picked up from the floor the dead man's hat with its flaunting cockade and held it in his hand. With it he indicated a printed notice hanging on the wall.

""Tenants are forbidden to deposit rubbish in the staircase,"" he read out. With an ineffable air of disdain he dropped the brown beaver on the corpse at his feet and lightly brushed his hands together.

There was an inexpressible air of raillery about this man which his thin and wasted countenance could not gainsay. He had small, roguish, impudent eyes, and a large, humorous mouth. His whole face radiated the most imperturbable good-humour mingled with a kindly cynicism.

The light in the staircase wavered ever nearer. Hector looked despairingly at the man in the doorway.

'Help me!' he said simply. 'You must be the Citizen Darras, I think? Well, I am the friend of Loison. This fellow followed me here and I killed him. And there is somebody coming upstairs!'

The laughter faded out of the roguish eyes. The man stepped forward and glanced over the banister.

'It's only the Père Braille, our landlord, putting the light in the staircase. It hangs on the second floor. He never comes any higher except to get his rent. And he's stone deaf! Nevertheless, we shall do well to get *this*'—he stooped and grasped the dead man's shoulders—'inside!'

Hector raised the legs, and between them they bore the body across the threshold.

His companion closed the door. They were in a large, bare room with a ceiling that ran sharply down. From the high window that at the far end framed a patch of evening sky it seemed to be a studio, though there was no sign of an easel or any of the other customary paraphernalia of the artist. It was miserably furnished. Carpet or curtain there was not. A small rusty stove with a long pipe that disappeared into the wall, a truckle-bed all tumbled and scattered with clothing in a corner, a table, littered with crockery and the remains of food, and a broken chair constituted the entire furniture. The walls bore traces of former occupants in the shape of various studies, mainly from the nude, done in charcoal on the peeling and mildewed plaster.

'I am Darras,' said the bearded man. 'Loison spoke of you. I should have opened before, but I was in bed. I am one of that large and ever-increasing number of our fellow citizens, who, as long as they preserve their heads in their normal positions between their shoulders, are a source of continual exasperation to our governors. Not content with changing the calendar, the Revolution has, for many of us, reversed the process of nature. I sleep by day and go abroad at night. Hence my delay in answering your summons, for which, my friend, I apologise!'

'The delay was providential,' Hector answered. 'Had you opened at once, I might never have known that this rat was at my heels, and so brought destruction upon you and Loison!'

'Destruction?' said Darras whimsically. 'Can these rascals destroy, think you? The Revolution, citizen, has made us all philosophers. It has brought home to us the great truth that life is but a very little passage through the vast labyrinth of eternity. But their judicial procedure, I confess, annoys me. I can conceive of nothing more provoking than to be dragged before their famous Revolutionary Tribunal. Let us, therefore, hope that this *beau monsieur*'—he touched the corpse with his slippered foot—'came alone. Very often they hunt in couples!'

Night was falling. The studio was almost dark. Only from the tall window the lemon sky cast an eerie radiance athwart the dusky room where, on the bare boards, the dead man lay.

'But let's get rid of him,' said Darras. He grasped the corpse by the foot and dragged it, head bumping, arms sprawling, across the floor to the truckle-bed beneath which he thrust it. Then, taking a cudgel from a corner, he cleared a space on the table, and, mounting, rapped a measured signal on the ceiling. He bent his head and listened. A muffled knocking replied.

'Loison!' he remarked, and jumped to the ground. 'Mount to the next floor, citizen. The door on the left is Loison's!'

'But what about ... him?' Hector asked, pointing at the truckle-bed.

'Him?' repeated the other, who was rummaging in the bed. 'I think you can leave him to me, citizen. I am going out now to see whether this unfortunate *contre-temps* be not capable of adjustment.'

He turned round, a pair of ragged breeches in his hand. He held them up, surveying them ruefully.

'Positively,' he remarked as he loosened the string of his petticoat, 'I shall have to make myself an apron of fig-leaves like our father Adam or a pair of goatskin pantaloons like *ce bon Robinson Crusoë*. This is the only nether garment that remains to me save this dainty confection'—he plucked a fold of his petticoat between his two fingers—'souvenir of a gallant episode in days that are no more! The only consolation I have is that I have never paid my tailor. In this respect, at least, you will agree that my revolutionary principles are impeccable!'

'But,' exclaimed Hector, aghast, 'we can't leave the body here. What arrangement can you possibly make? How can we take a dead body unobserved through the streets?'

With the utmost deliberation Darras pulled on his breeches.

'It is evidently a question which requires consideration,' he observed, tucking in the ends of his ragged shirt. 'But I do not despair of finding a solution. For the present I would only remark, *mon cher ami*, that you keep a lady waiting. Go to Loison now, but return here when I knock: I may have need of you in connection with the affair in hand.'

So saying he extricated from a shabby old coat which he had taken from the bed a flat leather case and laid it on the table. His nonchalance was supreme. There was no bravado about his attitude. He went about the business of dressing as though he had forgotten that dreadful livid thing thrust away beneath the tumbled bed.

Hector held out his hand. 'Permit me, Monsieur Darras,' he said, 'to take the hand of a brave man. Not only do you save my life, but you assume a responsibility that rightly should be mine!'

The blue eyes of the Citizen Darras twinkled.

'*Allez!*' he returned. '*C'est un peu mon métier!*'—as who should say, 'It's all part of my trade!'

But he gave Hector his hand, and the two young men exchanged a hearty clasp. Then Hector left the darkling studio with its dreadful secret. As the door closed behind him, he heard Darras unconcernedly humming the old French song:

*'Il pleut, il pleut, bergère,  
Et plon, et plon, petit patapon.'*

From under Loison's door a light shone dimly. Hector tapped.

'*C'est vous*, Darras?' a fresh young voice replied.

'It is I, Jean,' Hector said softly.

From the other side of the door came a little fluttering gasp. There was a moment's pause. Then the door opened.

At first Hector could scarcely believe that three days could have made so much difference in any one's appearance. It was a new Loison that stood on the threshold, one small hand laid on her bosom, her cheeks rosy with the eager flush of expectation. Her eyes had lost their wistful look: her face was firmer and rounder, and its pallid, waxen tint had vanished. Gone, too, were her rags, those pitiable, formless rags that had hidden her graceful young shape. She now wore a little blue gown, very plainly made, with a fichu, according to the *mode* of the time, of cheap lace, and short sleeves that displayed her slim, white arms. Its simple elegance seemed to set off the inborn refinement of this waif of the Revolution and to bring out a sort of natural dignity that transfigured her. Such was the magic of the little dress that the young man, gazing spellbound across the threshold, realised that this was not a child, but a woman.

With laughing eyes she peered round the doorpost, eyebrows raised, hand poised daintily, like a startled nymph. Moulded closely to her supple figure the pretty gown emphasised the grace of all her movements. No sound mounted to

them from the empty staircase that descended into the dim depths of the old house. The girl and the man were completely alone. She dropped to the ground in an elaborate curtsy.

'Monsieur,' she whispered low, 'deign to enter!'

He started. So, or in such terms, had Betty last greeted him; with equal grace had his cousin sunk in mock obeisance to the ground before him. With no less pride than the Lady Betty Marchmont did this young girl now bear herself; but there was no arrogance, only simple sympathy and friendship, in the sweet and girlish face.

There came to him a breath of fragrance as he crossed the threshold. The air was faintly perfumed with the evasive scent of mignonette, the sweet savour that brings back to every exiled Englishman the memory of some old English garden where the nightingale throbs her heart out to the lucent moon. He saw the flowers in a box outside the open casement, where, shivering in the velvet pall of night, the stars peered down into the little room.

It was a squalid garret with a roof that sloped abruptly down to the white muslin curtain that, at the far end, shut off the bed. But it was clean and tidy. The bare boards were clean-scrubbed; the little dresser was spotless; while the white crockery ranged on its shelves was shining, and the few cooking-pots that hung beneath were scoured bright. There was a small press for clothes, two chairs, and a round table on which, in a pewter candlestick, the long flame of a candle quivered yellow in the still air. In one corner was a small cooking-stove.

She came in and closed the door.

'All this,' she said, her arms outstretched, 'I owe to you, M'sieu Jean!'

'Don't speak of that! You saved my life, Loison!' he said.

But she did not heed him.

'That night I first met you at the rue de la Loi,' she went on as though she had not heard him, 'I had almost made up my mind to end it all. The Seine runs high beneath the Pont Notre Dame; one little jump, and it is peace. I could not earn enough to buy food, and I was always hungry. And I had no friends except Engstrom. He was always kind to me; but to him I was nothing but the little sempstress who would wait on in the shop to open to him when he knocked or to any one who should show the scarlet *tabatière*. He had no time for anything but his work; for he led a hunted life, *le malheureux*!'

'Then you came. You spoke to me differently from any one I had ever met. You reminded me of something, some one, in my life that seems so far away that it is even less than a memory, something that comes and goes, *tiens!* like the odour of my poor mignonette there. I wanted to meet you again because you helped me to recall the old times. That night I came back here to my room—I had no bed then; I used to sleep on some sacks I stole from the slaughter-house of Sainte-Geneviève—determined not to give up. I don't know why ...!'

She broke off. She did not look at Hector. Her face was turned to the window, her eyes roaming out over the deep blue immensity of the night.

'You didn't return. I stayed away from Madame Aicard's—she is the *patronne* of "Au Cupidon"—because I was afraid they would say I had stolen the cloak. I had only a very, very little money. Darras downstairs helped me, but he couldn't do much, for he was as poor as I. Two years ago, when they put Papa in prison, my brother Ferdinand went to Paris. He spoke of enlisting in the army. I thought if I could find him, he would look after me. Ferdo was always fond of me: there were only we two children. But I didn't know where to look for him, and Darras said we should have to enquire of the Government. Then I remembered Couthon. I had heard my mother say more than once that she knew him well before he went off to Paris and became a great man at the Convention. If I had known what he would say about her ...'

Her voice broke, and she put her two hands to her eyes.

'Loison,' said Hector comfortingly, 'don't think of him!'

'*C'est bien, c'est bien!*' she said. 'I don't. But I cannot forget. And I want to thank you, M'sieu Jean, for saving me, for making it possible for me to live. I wish I could show you how truly grateful I am. Would you like to be my lover?'

She had turned and faced him now. They were very close together. The fragrance of the mignonette mingled with the perfume of her hair. He looked into her eyes. More than once he had idly speculated about the morals of this girl

abandoned, almost a child, in the saturnalia of the Revolution. Even as he had sat and talked with Darras, he had caught himself wondering what degree of intimacy existed between her and the trowsled *rapin* downstairs.

But he discovered no depravity, no prurient self-consciousness, in those calm grey eyes. She put the question with utter simplicity.

As the young man gazed at her face there drifted back into his mind various phases of his life, episodes with Nan and Moll and Petra, the pretty Dane, wild nights at Mrs. Harvey's in Great Titchfield Street, and a long (and expensive) entanglement with the Boldini of the Italian Opera ballet. He had been, nay, he was, like the rest, a hunter; but somehow, as he looked into the depths of those clear and steady eyes mutely questioning his, he did not savour the zest of the chase. Instead, the colour mounted in his cheeks, and he felt shy as any school-boy.

The girl relieved his embarrassment.

'Lucie, the girl who had the room opposite,' she said, 'told me that men paid money, much money, for love. That was how she made her living until they guillotined her. Victor, Marie's husband—she was the daughter of my old nurse: I used to live with them, you know—offered me money that night he came to my room. But he was fat and gross and ... and horrible. I couldn't bear him. That was why I ran away from them. But you are different. I like you, M'sieu Jean: you have been kind to me. If, therefore, you will take me, perhaps I can thus pay you back a little ...'

A great and overwhelming pity rose up within him. For a moment he could scarce trust himself to speak. What a picture of ravaged France her ingenuous words portrayed! What a vision of broken-hearted parents driven to the slaughter, their last instants tortured by the thought of defenceless children left behind, of homes dispersed, of young girls hurled from sheltered hearths into the maelstrom to learn the truths of life from the lips of prostitutes, to grow to womanhood in an atmosphere of blood and vice and violence! This tender girl, who had to steal to get a bed, whose very speech told of her habitual associates, seemed to him like a fair flower growing in a weed-choked garden. Her artless offer of her young body in settlement of a trifling debt spoke of a warmly generous heart. The pathos of it choked the words in his throat.

'You would be the first ...' she added; and broke off. A little colour warmed her cheeks.

He put his hands on her shoulders and very gently kissed the smooth, white forehead.

'There is no question of payment, my dear,' he said huskily. Then he held her from him and surveyed her critically.

'So this is the new gown?' he remarked. 'Faith, Loison, you look charmingly. I congratulate you on your *modiste*, mademoiselle!'

She blushed with pleasure.

'I made every bit of it myself,' she announced.

Then, arms outstretched, she slowly pirouetted round that he might view the dress in its every aspect.

'I have organdie too,' she declared proudly, 'enough to make myself a summer robe for best. But that is not yet done. This I wear for every day—the material is good—and for when I go out, after nightfall, to purchase food!'

He begged her to be careful, told her of his interview with Grand-Duc. He would not disclose to her his encounter on the staircase; it would serve no purpose and would surely affright her.

'Have you no one outside of Paris to whom you can go?' he asked.

She shook her head.

'Are you in touch with none of Engstrom's people?'

'None,' she said. 'He never spoke to me of his business, and I knew none of his acquaintances. Apart from Darras, M'sieu Jean, you are my only friend.'

'Reward me, then, by keeping within doors,' he pleaded. 'Believe me, my dear, every time you stir abroad you are in the greatest danger!'

She sighed prettily.

'I'll do as you bid me,' she promised. 'I dare say Darras will buy me food. But it will be dull sitting here. You must come and see me often, M'sieu Jean!'

Then she did the honours of the tiny room, showing him her little purchases, a coffee-pot, a casserole, some blue-and-white bowls, and the like. All the time she prattled on of her experiences in the shops, imitating the Flemish accent of the linendraper or the Polish jargon of the second-hand dealer from whom she had bought her small black shoes. As Hector watched her flit about the little garret, for the first time for many days a great peace descended upon his spirit. It was as though in this city of dementia and slaughter he had found a shelter from the storm, a home.

'And now,' she cried, when he had done admiring everything, 'you and I will sup together. *Ce n'est pas grand'chose, tu sais*'—with Republican freedom she invariably '*tutoyéd*' him—but at least I remembered that one day I might have a gentleman at table!'

She bade him shut his eyes and he obeyed. He heard the clink of glass.

'Now open your eyes!' she cried.

Loison stood before him, her cheeks pink, her eyes dancing with excitement. In either hand she held a glass of wine. The flagon from which she had filled them was on the table. She gave him his glass.

'Before we eat,' she said, 'a toast!'

He stood up solemnly.

'To all good *ci-devants*!' she cried.

'I'll drink that gladly,' he exclaimed, 'coupled with the name of Mademoiselle Louise de Mallet!'

She laughed in a little ripple of delight. Then they clinked glasses. But before he could raise his glass to his lips, a muffled knocking sounded from below.



## CHAPTER XVI

### THE CONVOY OF LA SALPÊTRIÈRE

'Darras!' exclaimed Loison, putting her glass down. 'I had forgot about him, *le pauvre*! He shall sup with us! You don't mind, M'sieu Jean? I will tap for him to come up ...'

'No,' said Hector gravely. 'That was for me, Loison. I must go to Darras now.'

'But he can come up here!' protested the girl.

'No,' the young man replied. 'I must go to him.'

She tossed her head.

'If it's a secret ...' she said.

He took her hands.

'No secret,' he told her. 'Monsieur Darras and I have certain matters to transact, that is all ...'

'Then let me come down with you,' she proposed eagerly. 'I will bring supper and we will make a feast *chez* Darras!'

The young man shook his head.

'No,' he answered firmly. 'I must go alone, Loison!'

Something in his tone arrested her attention. Her light-heartedness fell from her like a cloak. Slowly she clasped her hands together. The colour died out of her cheeks.

'You have grown so serious, you frighten me,' she said in a low voice. 'You are going to plunge into danger, my friend. Be careful, oh, I entreat you, be careful! This Darras is reckless! He cares not what he does or says! He will destroy you and himself as well ...'

He took her hands in his.

'On the contrary, I find your Monsieur Darras to be an admirably wise man ...' he declared.

The knocking began again, slow and fumbling, but none the less insistent, urgent in its summons.

'Good-bye, Loison,' he said as gaily as he might: 'I will come and see you again soon!'

He turned to take his hat; but she caught him by the lapel of his coat and stayed him.

'Take care of yourself for my sake,' she pleaded, her eyes misty with tears. 'I shall not breathe freely until I see you again, *mon bon ami* ...'

She nestled to him and he put his arms around her slim young body.

'Have no fear!' he said. 'I shall not fail!'

Then he kissed her swiftly on the cheek and, snatching up his hat, was gone.

Darras was waiting at the studio door as Hector descended the stairs.

'*Vous voilà enfin!*' the big man cried. 'Almost I feared you had gone. *Faites vite, citoyen*, time presses!'

And he drew him into the room.

In the centre of the floor a long, shapeless object was now lying swathed in a sack, the mouth of which was secured with rope. The leather case that Hector had before remarked on the chair was now opened out and displayed a number of gleaming surgeons' knives. A basin half-filled with a reddish fluid stood on the table near by. On the truckle-bed a

brown beaver hat topped a pile of folded garments.

'It wants but twenty minutes to midnight,' said Darras, 'and at midnight we must be at the Pont Notre Dame with that!'—and he pointed at the sack with his foot.

'But ... whither are we bound?' Hector asked.

'Ask no questions now, but attend to me. We are going to carry that sack downstairs. Speak no word, whatever happens. If we meet anybody in the staircase, *tant pis!*—it is an accident against which we cannot provide. In any case, it is unlikely to occur. Now, listen! When the concierge pulls the string and opens the front door, you will dart out and go to the end of the alley to see that the coast is clear. As soon as you have satisfied yourself that the alley and the street beyond are quiet, you will return at once to the house-door and tell me! *C'est compris? Alors, en avant!*'

From the bed he lifted a heavy satchel which he hung across his body. Then he blew out the candle. A broad glitter of moonlight flooded the room from the tall window. Darras was stooping over the sack.

'Now,' he said in a low voice and raised up his end. Hector seized the other. His hands slipped on a blunt, thick surface within the sack. He groped in vain to get a hold.

'But,' he stammered out in horror, 'he ... it ... there is no head!'

'That also,' Darras replied, 'has its good reason. Come, take my end!'

They exchanged no other word, but, the sack borne between them on their arms, moved softly out of the studio. There was a brief check while Darras, stemming the burden against the wall, made a hand free to close the door. Then quietly they descended the stairs.

With their heavy load they halted again in the darkened gateway while Darras cried out boldly at the porter's window: '*Cordon, s'il vous plaît!*' The latch clicked, and Hector sped down the darkling lane to where the tavern sign swung gently in the night breeze. The rue de la Cruche Cassée lay deserted in the moonlight. Every house was dark: not a cat stirred. Swiftly Hector tiptoed back. The coachway was as black as pitch. Blindly he groped for Darras's hand.

Together they carried out their grisly package. A rope was now attached about the middle. They laid the sack down at the foot of the wall and Hector closed the house-door. Darras was measuring with his eye the height from the ground to the top of the high blank wall that shut off the end of the *cul-de-sac*.

'You are lighter than I,' he whispered; 'mount on my back and gain the top of the wall and draw ... him up after you. Wait! Tie the rope round your arm, thus! Ready?'

He bent down sideways to the wall. Hector scrambled up upon that swaying back. But he could not reach the top of the wall. He jumped down again. Darras raised a hot red face.

'In two jumps I can do it, I think,' the young man whispered, 'only I must take a run. Put down your head once again, I beg!'

He untied the rope from his arm and backed up the alley for a few yards. With the flying start thus gained, he lightly leapt on the broad back and sprang for the top of the wall. The rough cement tore his fingers, but his grasp was sure and did not relax. With a vigorous hoist he shifted his grip to the iron railings studding the wall and so drew himself up.

It was at that moment that the sound of footsteps approaching the head of the alley from the street reached them. Both heard it simultaneously.

'Quick,' whispered Darras from the ground, 'the rope!'

He whirled it up. Hector missed it at the first attempt. The footsteps came nearer. The big man's second throw was more successful. This time Hector caught the rope and, bracing himself against the railings, began to haul up that shapeless mass waisted like an hour-glass in the middle where the cord was tied.

The load was immensely heavy. The perspiration rolled down his face as with straining muscles, the rope cutting deep into his flesh, he hoisted hand over hand the cumbrous package that came bumping and quivering up the wall. Voices



now resounded from the entrance of the *impasse*—drunken voices loud in argument. Apparently a party of revellers had stopped at the street-corner before dispersing homeward.

At last the body had reached the top. With a desperate heave that was agony to his cut and bruised hands, he dragged that dead weight on to the narrow ledge. He glanced down the wall on the other side. At the foot of the rustling trees in the garden at his back the grass grew long and dank. The brilliant moonlight showed it trembling and swaying in the night wind. With a last effort he hoisted the heavy sack clear of the railings and pitched it over. With a soft thud it vanished in the grassy tangle below.

How bright the moon shone! On his lofty perch he must be a conspicuous mark to any one who came down the lane. And now, oh, horror! the invisible group at the mouth of the alley was separating. '*A demain, les amis!*' said a voice. '*Bonne nuit, le vieux!*' a roistering chorus made answer. Then came a confused murmur of men speaking together and again the hollow ring of feet in the echoing street.

And Darras was yet on the ground! Twining one leg round the railings and stemming himself against the bars, Hector leant forward as far as he could reach with outstretched hand. Darras grasped it.

As he did so, Hector looked up. A man was coming down the *cul-de-sac*. Hector could see him clearly in the moonlight, a stoutish figure that lurched a little in its gait. Pray God the fellow was drunk, that, if he saw them, he would not have the wit to raise the alarm!

The strain on Hector's muscles was terrific. He thought his arm would be pulled from its socket. But he was young and vigorous and his grip held. Steadily he drew Darras up until the big man stood safely beside him on the top of the wall.

The drunkard had stopped at a door not a dozen yards away. But he did not look up: he was fumbling for his key. Noiselessly the two men clambered over the rusty railing and, with never a backward glance, dropped to the ground on the other side. Once more they picked up their burden and, breathing hard, staggered forward through a wilderness of grass and thistles.

It was black beneath the trees; but Darras never faltered. It was not the first time, the thought occurred to Hector, that his companion had scaled the wall at night. They were in an old garden, long given over to neglect, with chipped and battered statues, very ghostly beneath the moon, that seemed to peer suspiciously through the foliage at the two men as they plodded forward in silence.

They skirted a high brick wall with the long inky silhouette of some building beyond and came to a wooden paling which they followed until they reached a gate. Here they again bedded their burden in the grass while Darras, signing to Hector to wait, fumbled with a catch. Then the gate swung back, and he slipped through.

This strange man had the secret of silent movement. Like a shadow he flitted away. One moment he was there, peering round the gate, and the next he was swallowed up in the night.

'Ps-st!'

His bearded face appeared at the opening. Once more they picked up their heavy load.

The gate debouched on a broad flat declivity that ran down to the river. Beyond great cubes of merchandise—barrels, bales of fodder, and the like—that dotted the slope in high stacks loomed black the long shapes of the barges moored to the wharf.

Darras did not halt. He hurried his companion along the wharf, keeping in the shadow as much as possible, until before them they discerned the outline of a bridge. The wharf narrowed sharply to pass beneath it.

Not until they were in the Stygian darkness that reigned beneath the arch did Darras halt and motion to Hector to lay their package down. On either side of them, in the open, the lights of the bridge diffused a yellow glimmer of light. The silence was intense. The faint lapping of the swiftly flowing river against the quay was the only sound.

Hector doffed his hat and wiped his dripping face. But Darras gave himself no leisure. Squatting on his haunches he untied the rope that fastened the opening of the sack and, freeing the mouth, swiftly disengaged the sack from its contents. Something that gleamed whitely in the dimness appeared, the naked torso of a man, headless, with red-rimmed neck ...

Hector felt his senses reel. On either side of him the half-circle of moonlit quay seemed to grow and grow, and the dank odour of the sweating stones of the arch came to his nostrils like the smell of a freshly dug grave. But Darras caught his arm roughly. The distant rumble of wheels, mingled with the protesting shriek of ungreased axles, had broken the silence of the sleeping city.

'The convoy of La Salpêtrière!'

Darras had spoken, but his voice sounded as from afar in Hector's ears. With deathly sickness surging over him, the young man leaned back against the slimy sets of the bridge, staring with eyes of horror at the white and shapeless thing that sprawled at his feet. He felt a rude grasp on his shoulder. His companion was shaking him.

'Courage, my friend,' he said. 'In a little you will have need of all your fortitude. Listen to me well! That cart that even now approaches will presently pass over this bridge above us. On the bridge it will halt to allow the driver to get down and take a stone from the horse's shoe. It will not be for more than an instant, and we shall have to act swiftly. The moment the cart stops, we will carry *him* there up these steps, which, as you see, lead from the quay to the bridge, throw him over the back of the cart and return here without the loss of a second. It is our only chance. Unless we are prompt, we are lost. You understand? And, whatever you may see, keep a cool head and say nothing!'

He broke off, hand upraised, to listen. But Paris slept on. Only the mournful drone of the approaching wheels disturbed the warm and brooding stillness. Side by side the two men waited.

And now, by the sound, the cart was close at hand. The axles sent their despairing cry far into the jewelled night as though a lost soul, imprisoned within the hubs, were clamouring for release. The bridge shook and the arch reverberated to the thunder of heavy wheels. 'Yeoh!' suddenly cried a gruff voice just above the heads of the watchers beneath the bridge. The strident axles fell dumb: the noise of the wheels was stilled. The cart had stopped.

'Now!' said Darras quietly.

The naked body lay upon its sack. Sack and all they raised it, Hector most grateful for the rough fabric that saved his bare hands from the chill contact, and bore it out into the moonlight and on up the steps. Upon the bridge, not half a dozen yards away, a farm-cart stood, its high wheels splashed with ancient mud, its tail towards them. Forward a dim figure was seen stooping over the forefeet of the horse.

The cart's high back hid its contents from the view of the two men as they approached with their burden. But over the side an arm hung limply dangling and above the battered tail-board, fingers widespread, a hand pointed straight at the sky. It seemed to be flung out in a supreme gesture of protest, in mute apostrophe of Heaven.

Whatever the cart contained, its freight appeared to fill it almost to the level of the sides, for a basket, balanced on the top, projected above the tail-piece. From the basket a face looked forth, frozen to an unchanging regard of mournful perplexity, with glazed, reproachful eyes ...

Then Hector's nerve forsook him. He heard the slithering thud as their freight was added to that unseen pile; then he turned and ran for the steps, nor halted until the gloom of the sheltering arch had received him once more.

'That cart ...' he gasped to Darras, who had followed sedately after.

'... is bound for the dissecting-room of La Salpêtrière!'

'Dissecting-room? Then you are a doctor?'

'Late surgeon at that same hospital. Every night the convoy of La Salpêtrière goes to the Place du Trône to collect the specimens of the day for dissection. Pierre, the driver, is an old friend of mine. Man is mortal, citizen; but science never dies. Only the young and vigorous are taken: my colleagues will be glad of *him*! And no questions will be asked! One above, one under the number ... what is one among so many? And if he should be recognised, *eh bien!* it is a mistake. It won't be the first time the wrong man has been presented to "The Widow," *allez!*'

Hector gave Darras his hand.

'I shall not forget,' he said.

'I was glad of the practice,' replied Darras. 'My hand loses its skill, citizen. It is two years since I touched lancet or probe!'

Instinctively Hector's eyes sought the satchel at his companion's waist. It was empty.

Above their heads with crying axles the convoy of La Salpêtrière rumbled away into the night.



## CHAPTER XVII

### A MISHAP, AND WHAT FOLLOWED

It was shortly after his adventure at the Impasse du Paradis that the crowning misfortune overtook Hector. For two days a press of work kept him late at his desk at Couthon's. June was nearing its close: the Terror was at its zenith: and Robespierre was all-supreme.

But the populace was losing its taste for blood. The knife as it crashed down no longer heard the frantic applause of the dense mobs that, not so long before, had made the office of 'Sainte Guillotine' a public festival. Now the ragged *sans-culottes* and the *tricoteuses* were paid to sit at the foot of the scaffold banished to the Place du Trône and keep up appearances, and the tumbrils packed with victims passed through silent streets.

Yet opposition to the dreaded dictatorship of the Jacobins was already crystallizing. Despite their as yet unchallenged supremacy, Couthon's colleagues were obviously apprehensive of their position in the Convention. In the Committee of Public Safety the antagonism to Robespierre had become so marked that he no longer attended the meetings. There was a constant flow of correspondence to the house in the rue Saint-Honoré, and Hector had the feeling that the seething cauldron was showing signs of boiling over. Every day his budget of news for the absent Couthon grew bulkier.

He saw no more of Grand-Duc. With bated breath he waited for some visible indication that the spy, Maurice, had been missed. But nothing happened. It was Hector's habit now, when he went abroad, to pause and scan the street before sallying forth. But he never could detect any sign that he was being followed. He began to wonder whether Maurice had not been acting on his own initiative.

And then, on the second night, as, towards midnight, he stepped out into the still warmth of the rue Saint-Honoré to walk to his lodging, he noticed a shadow detach itself from the gloom of a doorway and follow in his wake. He felt very unconcerned. He told himself he was the confidential secretary of the Citizen Couthon on lawful purposes bent, and he determined to wait his opportunity to round on the dim figure that dodged behind him.

Accordingly he struck off into the cluster of narrow streets that lay between the rue Saint-Honoré and the Boulevards, quickening his pace somewhat so as to reach a certain *cul-de-sac* he had in mind in time to take cover and pounce out on the shadow when it should draw level. But even as he reached the lane in question, a man stepped out of a doorway and blocked the way. Hector moved on one side to let the other pass, but the man did not budge.

'Citizen Charpentier?' he said.

Hector was not impressed by the speaker's looks. He was a sullen-featured fellow with a drink-inflamed face.

'Why do you ask?' Hector demanded cautiously.

'Because I have a letter for him,' retorted the man in his hoarse and beery voice.

Hector started. The letter could be only from Loison or Darras, he decided. He knew no one else in Paris who would write to him.

'My name is Charpentier,' he said. 'Will you give me the letter?'

Odd, the way the fellow stared at him!

'I had it just now,' he muttered, searching his pockets. '*Nom de Dieu!* Wherever did I put it?'

He kept glancing at Hector as he spoke. The young man felt vaguely distrustful. Why did the fellow scrutinise him thus? And then, even as a light step from behind fell on his ear, he realised the truth. The man was looking not at him, but beyond him.

Quick as lightning he swung round; but he was too late. A terrific blow crashed down upon his head, a great blaze of light flashed redly before his eyes ...

When, twenty-four hours later, he regained consciousness at his lodging at the Citizeness Fourbe's, he found that he had

been robbed of all his money.

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It was a staggering blow. He had brought with him from England the sum of two hundred pounds in French paper money, an amount which, Mr. Gray had anticipated, would amply cover the expenses of his mission to France and back. As an additional safeguard, however, in case anything should go amiss, Hector had received a draft for a further two hundred pounds drawn by a Danish house in London on Engstrom's bank in Paris. On Engstrom's arrest and execution, however, the business was confiscated. Hector quickly discovered that any attempt to cash a draft on a bank under sequestration would involve him in endless and probably perilous formalities.

And so, feeling like one who burns his boats behind him, he had destroyed the draft. It was the only compromising paper in his possession, and he could not afford to keep it, he decided. At the depreciated value of the French currency two hundred pounds represented a small fortune. His living did not cost him much; his lodging was cheap, and though he received no wage from Couthon, he took all his meals save the first breakfast at the table of the *Conventionnel*. He was confident that, with careful management, he would be able to make his money last until such time as he could contrive to find a way out of France. He had had no qualms in giving away the equivalent of five pounds sterling to Loison.

But now stark disaster stared him in the face. Without money he was irretrievably lost. What a fool he had been to carry all his wealth about with him! But could he have done otherwise? Pilfering was rampant in the Republic One and Indivisible. In the hotels boots vanished from the rooms and the very linen was filched off the beds. He had not been a week at the Citizeness Fourbe's before a plausible rogue gained admittance to the kitchen and made a clean sweep of the washing there hung up to dry. His bag had included two of Hector's small stock of shirts. Before this the young man had kept his money locked up in his valise, but on this warning he had fashioned with scissors a rudimentary pocket in the lining of his waistcoat and stowed his bulging pocketbook there, putting it at night under his pillow. And now his store of money was gone, and with it his watch, his seals, his keys, and his scarlet snuff-box as well.

A little bundle of assignats, representing a few hundred livres, was in a small silk purse he had kept in a drawer of the wardrobe. He had forgotten to transfer them to his pocketbook. This money was all that stood between him and blank penury. He staggered across the room and feverishly ransacked the drawer. Thank God, the purse was still there and the money in it! Then a wild idea seized him that perhaps his landlady, when they had brought him home, had locked up his money for safety. She was an honest woman, the Citizeness Fourbe ...

Wildly he looked about him for the bell-pull. Heavens, how his head did ache! A gigantic pulse was throbbing in his brain, every beat like a hammer-stroke upon the cells. His throat was dry, and, though his hands burned, his whole frame shook with ague.

Suddenly the room seemed crowded with people: there was Darras with his roguish eyes in the doorway—no, by God! It was Maxeter with a great beard. And here with his narrow face and thin lips was Couthon crouched in the armchair, his puny legs dangling, a pocketbook in his hand, counting bundles of notes. By Heaven, Couthon had robbed him! He sprang forward, but stopped short in horror. What was that strange, white-gleaming thing propped up against the curtains of the bed with livid hands and clutching fingers? It was headless: it was dead: yet see! it came loping towards him. In a frenzy of fear he flung up his arms to ward that horror off and shrieked and shrieked again ...

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Out of the mist two shining lamps emerged. A bright light flashed in his eyes.

'It is the sixth day he has lain like this,' said a woman's voice. 'And always he cries for his money, *le malheureux*! To think that honest patriots should be stripped by footpads in the centre of Paris!'

The gleaming lamps came nearer. Strange that those brilliant discs should grow smaller as they approached. Now Hector found himself looking up at the spectacles that dominated the round and hearty face of Dr. Largier. The room was in darkness save for a rushlight that glimmered in a basin of water in the fender. But the doctor had in his hand a candle that he was moving to and fro before his patient's eyes.

'A *conditio febrilis*, but without lesion of the cerebellum,' the sage pronounced. 'We shall not need to bleed the young man again, citizeness. See! He has opened his eyes. Well, well, *mon brave*, how goes it?'

'All right!' said Hector, and spoke without knowing it in English.

'What does he say?' demanded the doctor, turning to the landlady.

'God knows!' retorted Madame Fourbe. 'It is, I think, the Danish language, for the Citizen Charpentier is new come from Copenhagen. In his fever often he has cried out in this foreign tongue, *le pauvre* ...'

Hector heard her with a chill feeling of fear. He felt pitifully weak, but his head beneath its bandages was cool and his senses were quite clear. What had he not babbled out in his delirium?

'How long have I lain like this?' he asked faintly.

'This is the sixth evening since they brought you home robbed and unconscious,' Madame Fourbe replied.

'Six days!' he repeated feebly. 'But what of my work? What of the Citizen Couthon?'

He tried to struggle up, but Dr. Largier's plump hand stayed him.

'On learning of the dastardly attack on his secretary,' he said, 'the Citizen Couthon immediately broke off his cure and returned to Paris ...'

'Twice he has been here in his chair to enquire for you,' put in the landlady, '*le brave homme*, in all this heat!'

'But I denied him the door,' said the doctor pompously. '"Let no outward intrusion check the healing work of Nature!" was my decree. "No visitors" I ordered, and, when Æsculapius commands, the patriot that is Couthon bows his head!'

'No visitors!' That was the phrase at which Hector's slowly waking brain snatched. Then only Madame Fourbe and the doctor had heard his fevered babblings! That they knew no word of English was apparent. In grateful relief he closed his eyes and sank into the deep sleep of exhaustion.

He awoke to find it was morning. The shutters were closed; but long pencils of golden light streamed on to the shabby carpet of the bedroom. He felt immensely refreshed, and it was only when he got out of bed that he found out how weak he was. He managed to reach the window, however, and, swinging back the shutters, looked out upon the glittering summer morning.

His room gave on a large inner court where the house martins swooped and darted in the sunshine. Though the hour was yet early, all the houses around teemed with life. The housewives were visible at their windows, shaking out rugs and mats, watering the flowers or shouting discordantly to the slatternly group that with buckets and pitchers surrounded the mournfully clanking pump in the yard below.

It was a scene of peace, and Hector was in the mood for peace. In emerging from his long delirium he seemed to have sloughed off the horrors that had beset him. Subconsciously he was aware that his position was critical, but he felt in a languorous frame of mind, revelling in his repose, like one who, having swum out from land, grapples, gasping, the side of a boat before turning to face the waves of the homeward journey.

He went back to bed. He slept a great deal that day, and the next morning did not rise until midday, when he sat up in an armchair at the table and drank a little bouillon which Madame Fourbe served him.

The landlady was in an odd mood. She seemed to be labouring under suppressed excitement. She was the widow of a small tradesman, a thin, anxious-looking woman with a pointed nose, always very neatly dressed in black, whose mind the events of the past five years had reduced to a state of permanent bewilderment. Like every one else she had tacitly accepted the new régime. But she invariably addressed Hector as 'Monsieur,' though the title had been abolished to tap of drum; though the Republic had proscribed religion, she said her rosary; and she laboured under the fixed delusion that the shortage of butter—a problem that touched most Parisians in that hot summer of '94 far more nearly than the hideous, indiscriminate slaughter of the Place du Trône—was due to the machinations of a certain unrighteous foreigner called 'Monsieur Veto' who had very properly received his deserts.

To Hector she appeared as a reserved and tight-lipped creature as a rule, but to-day she chatted gaily as she propped the young man up in his chair. She was not satisfied with the trim of his hair, but must needs fetch a comb from the dressing-table and arrange it afresh.

'You must not neglect your appearance, M'sieu Charpentier,' she said, 'a fine young man like you. You've broken many a woman's heart in your time, I can see that with half an eye. Supposing one of your lady-loves were to call and visit you with your hair all tousled like that! *Ah, non*, if the good God gives one beauty, one must make the best of it, *pas vrai*?'

So saying she arranged his pillows, tied a napkin under his chin, and whipped the cover off the steaming earthen pipkin of soup.

'You're very gay to-day, *citoyenne*,' Hector commented. 'Have you won the lottery or has a patriot given you a pound of butter?'

Madame Fourbe threw up her hands and turned up her eyes.

'*Pour ça, non!*' she said decidedly. 'They with their famous *maximum* have made a conspiracy to compel honest folk to eat their bread dry. If it weren't for my husband's sister ... Hard times, hard times, M'sieu Charpentier! But come, your bouillon grows cold! We must feed you up now. You must eat and grow strong. The beautiful ladies think nothing of a cavalier who looks as if he had one foot in the grave, *voyons!*'

'And what do the beautiful ladies concern me?' demanded Hector.

'*Fi donc!*' cried the citizeness. 'To speak so when who knows but that this very afternoon a charming person might be coming to see you!'

'I am allowed to receive visits, then?'

'To-day for the first time.'

'And you say a lady is coming?'

'*Nenni!* How you run on! I said no such thing!'

'*Voyons*, Madame Fourbe, you torture me with suspense! A lady *is* coming to see me to-day. Who is it?'

'You will see what you will see!' said Madame Fourbe darkly. 'And if Monsieur does not know, *parbleu*, the greater the pleasure of the meeting. But I think he will be content!'

And with sundry nods and becks and wreathed smiles she bustled away, leaving Hector dreaming in his chair.

A delicious lassitude had overcome him. Loison, he decided, must have ventured forth to have news of him. Perhaps she was in the house already? Yes, that was it. Madame Fourbe, good creature that she was, had taken her in. He would be glad to see little Loison again. She was so gentle, so soothing ...

He must have dozed, for he became aware of his surroundings again with that sort of violent panic that befalls one who wakes from an afternoon nap. Voices, the sound of a door slamming, were in his ears. Heavy with sleep, he stared about him. The first thing his eyes encountered was Grand-Duc gazing at him from the doorway.

The sight of the crookback acted like a cold *douche* upon Hector's bemused senses. In an instant he had stiffened into watchfulness. With a rush all his old doubts and fears crowded into his mind. What did the Commissary's presence in the house portend?

'I rejoice to see you convalescent, Citizen Charpentier,' said Grand-Duc in his squeaky voice. 'And I bring you an old friend!'

The door behind him stood ajar and he pushed it open with his elbow. Without taking his eyes off Hector's face, he called out softly over his shoulder: '*Citoyenne* Regnault!'

*Regnault!* Hector felt the last dregs of his optimism drain away. This was the *coup de grâce* with a vengeance. For Regnault was the name of the Commissary in Copenhagen who had recommended Jean-François Charpentier to the

revolutionary leaders in Paris, and this woman, the object of Madame Fourbe's smirking allusions, was obviously his wife. The game was up.

Hector struggled to his feet and prepared to face exposure.

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## CHAPTER XVIII

### JUNO OUT OF THE MACHINE

Not for many a long day did that confirmed sentimentalist Madame Fourbe forget the meeting between these two. Afterwards she gave a detailed description of the scene to her cronies, Madame Pichet, a bearded and bottle-nosed harpy who washed for patriots next door, and the rather bibulous-looking dame known in the *Quartier* as la Mère Goulott who kept the wine-shop across the street.

'... A blonde and beautiful person, the *Citoyenne* Regnault, not in her first youth, you hear me?—not in the blossom, you understand?—but'—an expressive gesture—'well-developed, a rose in all its summer radiance. Such lustrous hair! Skin white as milk and shining like satin! Little hands! Slender feet! And such elegance of dress and deportment! *Non des fois*'—withered finger-tip to lips to waft an imaginary kiss of ecstasy into space—'*la belle créature!* And I, knowing of the *Citoyenne* Regnault's *béguin* for this young man—the romance dates, so she told me herself, from the days when he worked for her husband, the Commissary, in Copenhagen—you can imagine with what feelings of excitement I watched the *Citoyen* Grand-Duc introduce her into the apartment of Monsieur Charpentier. You know this Grand-Duc, *les amies*—this little humpback of the Lepeletier Section? *Eh, bien*, he came to the house yesterday and "*Citoyenne* Fourbe," he says, "when can your young man receive visitors?" he says. "To-morrow, Citizen Commissary," I tell him; "to-morrow and not before, for such are the doctor's orders." "Good," says he. "Then to-morrow I shall bring a visitor for the Citizen Charpentier." "See that you don't fill my house with your rowdy *sans-culottes*, citizen," says I, "for the young man is only just over a grave illness." "Is that a way to speak of your noble fellow citizens?" says Crookback, very put-out like. "Mind how you wag your tongue, *citoyenne*, or one of these fine evenings you'll have no head to wag it in!" "Really," says I. "Then permit me to say ..."

'Stow it!' the Citizeness Pichet put in—her voice was so gruff that you would have said she had left it in the cellar where she habitually worked. 'We know what you told him! We all talk like that when they aren't there! Tell us what he said about the woman, la Fourbe!'

And with great genteelness she handed a greasy tin snuff-box round the group.

'*Alors*,' resumed Madame Fourbe, after a deep snuffle and an ear-shattering sneeze, 'when I had given Master Crookback a piece of my mind, "It's a lady, *citoyenne*," he says, "and a very charming one at that, a light o' love, as you might say, of the young man's. Don't mention the matter to him," he says, and tells me how the lady is most anxious it should be a surprise for the citizen. And surprise it was, I give you my word!'

La Mère Goulot heaved a vinous sigh.

'Ah! The surprises of love!' she remarked. 'There is nothing to surpass them!'

Probably by reason of the fact that one of her late husband's innumerable amorous adventures had led to his untimely demise at the hands of an infuriated National Guard, her interruption was listened to in respectful silence.

'And he has an air about him, this Charpentier!' she added in a tone that implied regret for the vanished days of her youth.

'It is sure!' exclaimed Madame Fourbe, 'and with his dark hair combed back and the clean white morning gown I washed for him myself, you might walk from here to the shrine of Saint-Denis and not find a more proper-looking young man. I stood with the Citizeness Regnault outside the door—we let Grand-Duc go in first—and when Grand-Duc called the Regnault in and pushed back the door, the first thing I saw was Charpentier swaying on his feet as pale as any ghost. Ah, love, love! It's a droll thing how it takes some people! I remember when Fourbe was courting me ...'

'Was there ever such a woman!' grumbled Madame Pichet's *basso profundo*. 'If you're washing, wash: if you're rinsing, rinse: if you're starching, starch! But don't try and do everything at once or you'll never have the laundry finished...!'

'What did the *Citoyenne* Regnault do?' demanded la Mère Goulot, more practically.

'She stopped in front of Charpentier with her hands clasped in front of her,' Madame Fourbe continued her story. 'She opened her big blue eyes and stared at him. She seemed struck of a heap, as you might say. And Charpentier didn't do anything except just stare, either ...'

'I should 'a thought he'd 'a dropped on his knees at the least, a beautiful person like that!' remarked la Mère Goulot.

'Or kissed her hands!' boomed the washerwoman.

'If I hadn't 'a been there, I'd 'a said the same,' declared the landlady. 'But being there, I saw in a twinkling of an eye how things stood. The love birds had quarrelled. There had been an estrangement which, doubtless, was the motive that led Charpentier to abandon a magnificent career in the Danish timber-trade and come to Paris to offer his services to the Republic. The woman ... *mon Dieu, les amies*, we are always so weak towards these monsters...! unknown to Charpentier sought this meeting in order to effect a reconciliation. But even when she comes to him, he waits for her to speak first. Bah! How like a man!'

'The animals!' growled the Citizeness Pichet, and snuffed abundantly.

'All rascals!' la Mère Goulot agreed, and dipped absent-mindedly into her companion's box.

The Citizeness Fourbe disregarded these comments. She was warming to her tale.

'For a little instant they stand and regard one another like two cats of porcelain. Then the woman turns to Grand-Duc, feigning an air of perplexity. "But this individual" ... she begins very coldly. The time had come for the Citizeness Fourbe to play her part. Was I to stand by and see two such charming lovers sacrificed to a false instinct of pride? *Mais non!* "Be not hasty, Citizeness," I said. "The young man has been grievously sick. See! Even now he scarce can stand on his feet! Regard a little how pitifully he looks at you! Stay, I beg you, and he will soon find his voice!" ...'

'And the woman stayed, I warrant?' said la Mère Goulot lugubriously.

'My friends, I will not deceive you—she stayed. Grand-Duc had no hand in it, though. "Who asked you to speak?" he snaps at me; then, turning to the woman, "Is this your friend?" he asks. And she, her eyes fixed on that poor young man's pale face, replies, "But of course!" And on Crookback pressing her and saying, "Is there no mistake? Are you sure this is the man?" she up and speaks to Charpentier herself. "You remember Victorine, your little Zouzou, don't you, Jeannot?" she says, and Charpentier takes her two hands and holds them, and says, looking in her eyes, "*Ma chérie*, of course I have never forgotten!'"

'A-ah! *C'est joli, ça!*' crooned la Mère Goulot.

'And what happened then?' the bass chimed in.

'She bade us leave her alone with him. You should have seen Grand-Duc's face. One would say that this man has a heart as twisted as his back. It was fortunate for those two poor things that I was there, for had Grand-Duc had his way, there would have been no reconciliation. We left them hand-in-hand. A miracle, I say, that they were brought together ...!'

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A miracle! It was the word that Hector himself would have used. For when Grand-Duc had stood aside to let this fair and florid creature claim her erstwhile friend, the young man had made up his mind to the worst. And, indeed, he had read blank astonishment in the doll-like eyes of china-blue that searched his face, and, with the imminence of exposure, it was as though his heart had turned to stone when the woman, her disclaimer on her lips, had turned to the humpback closely watching them out of his slanting eyes.

Then, exuberantly, Madame Fourbe had intervened, and, when the woman had looked at Hector again, the perplexity had vanished from her face. In the blue eyes he now saw a sort of amorous interest mingled with compassion, and a trace, perhaps, of mischief that suggested somewhere in this soft bundle of bloneness a latent sense of humour.

Her voice was full and charming, every syllable a caress. 'You remember Victorine, don't you, Jeannot?' she had said, and he had blessed the womanly cleverness that had given him her Christian name to forestall Grand-Duc's probing suspicion. For that Grand-Duc had planned this meeting to expose him was plainly written in the Commissary's face. As clearly depicted was his bitter disappointment on hearing the *Citoyenne* Regnault maintain her identification.

Why had she professed to recognise him? What, in the very act of repudiating him, had led her to acknowledge him? This

was the question that, like a huge query-mark, seemed to hang above their heads as Grand-Duc and Madame Fourbe withdrew leaving the two together. Would she now declare herself? And what would be the price of her silence?

Not yet was his curiosity to be satisfied. When they were alone, she gently thrust him back into his chair, and, looking down at him, said:

'*Mon petit*, I have come to carry you away to the country out of the heat of Paris. It is arranged with the Citizen Couthon and *le Docteur* Largier. For a week you come with me to Neuilly. My carriage is below and we can start at once.'

Again, then, Fate had intervened in a crisis of his life. At the eleventh hour reprieve had arrived. With the loss of his money his situation in Paris had become utterly precarious; but before he was thrown again upon his own resources, this instrument of fate, this veritable goddess out of the machine, had descended from the clouds to procure him a further respite. True, it was for a week only; but the hand-to-mouth existence he had led since the evening—how far away it seemed now!—he had descended from the Calais diligence had taught him that in a week of the French Revolution many things might happen.

Here, at least, was an ally that was not proscribed. Good-nature radiated from every dimpled roundness of the woman who gazed down upon him with a faintly quizzing look in her luminous eyes. Her hair, which she wore in ringlets about her head, was in colour the most brilliant gold, shading down towards the roots to the hue of ripe corn. Her fairness, her soft and peach-like complexion, her saucy little *retroussé* nose, her small and perfectly shaped mouth, her rounded chin with its comely cleaving dimple—everything about her was pretty and appealing. Her throat was full and rounded, and, though her figure was well-developed, it was, as yet, in no sense matronly. As Madame Fourbe had said, she was like a rose in all its summer beauty, though, in looking at her, one might discern that the day of the fading petal and dropping leaf was nigh.

She put up a soft plump hand and stroked the hair out of his eyes.

'You are so pale and wasted,' she said. 'You want good food and country air, *mon ami*.'

Then she burst into a gurgle of laughter, and laughed till she was breathless and the tears stood in her blue eyes.

'Ah!' she gasped, 'what fun! The face of this humpback! Did you remark it, *mon petit*? Scarcely could I remain serious! He could have wept for chagrin, I do believe. Ah, *la, la* ...!'

And she was off again. She had the jolly infectious laugh of the plump and comfortable of body, and she enjoyed the joke so whole-heartedly that Hector found himself laughing, too. Helplessly she made a pass in the air.

'Never shall I forget his face!'

Then, half-serious, she snuggled herself up to the young man and said softly:

'You are satisfied, at least ... Jeannot?'

'Yes ... Victorine,' he replied, rather at a loss.

'My friends, those I like, call me "Zouzou,"' she put in archly. 'You can, too, if you wish!'

He put his hand up and patted hers as it rested on his dark head.

'A charming name that suits you admirably, Zouzou,' he improvised at a venture.

She flashed a brilliant smile at him—her teeth were like two rows of evenly matched pearls—and twined her shapely fingers in his. She gazed at him with eyes melting and half-veiled. She made as though she would have spoken, but changed her mind. Reluctantly, as it seemed to him, she relinquished his hand.

'I will send the Citizeness Fourbe to pack your valise,' she said, 'if you can manage to dress yourself. We will start as soon as you are ready.'

She lingered for an instant at the door. Then she blew him a little kiss.

'*À tantôt, joli garçon!*' she cooed softly in her musical voice.

'*À toute à l'heure*, Zouzou!' replied the young man brightly.

But he felt that the situation was getting a little beyond him.

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# CHAPTER XIX

## CYTHEREA

To Hector, parched by the reeking heat of Paris, the verdant freshness of the Villa Mille Fleurs was as a glimpse of paradise. It lay beyond the village of Neuilly, out of reach of the white dust that rested thick upon the posting-road, a cream-coloured pavilion crouching low among trees. A grove of ancient elms debouched upon the little open space before the house, where, amid a spouting fountain, a marble Pan, moistly gleaming, played upon his pipes. In rear an open loggia gave on an old-world garden where clipped hedges of yew and *lignum vitæ* screened a gorgeous profusion of roses that perfumed the air with their fragrance.

The villa, built in the form of a shallow 'E' with the middle bar missing, boasted but a single story. The rooms, arranged *en suite*, were decorated and furnished in the ornate and graceful style of the Fifteenth Louis. Its absolute seclusion, its bright frescoes with their exuberant nymphs and cupids, its lavishly gilt furniture and rich silk hangings, made clear the original purpose of this nest of love, built to embower the amours of some great noble in the past. To Hector, coming upon it from the dust and glare of the highway, it seemed like one of those enchanted palaces of which as a child his mother had read to him from the surprising tales of the Chevalier de Perrault.

The domestic staff of the *Citoyenne* Regnault, assembled beneath the little porch to greet her, consisted of a bouncing, buxom, black-eyed woman whom she addressed as Marthe, an oafish, slow fellow with a dull eye and enormous mouth, who wore a blue apron over his corduroy small-clothes, and a trembling old man, who seemed, by his broad-brimmed hat of coarse straw, to be the gardener. Their welcome made up in heartiness what it lacked in conventionality. Marthe flung her arms about the plump person of Victorine and kissed her heartily, while the oaf, as he helped her from the carriage, slapped her affectionately about the lower portion of her back, and genially murmured: '*Cette sacrée Zouzou!*' As for the old gardener he doffed his hat and waved it about his head, croaking, with dripping, toothless gums (rather irrelevantly, Hector thought): '*Vive la nation!*'

Zouzou stood beneath the cool porch and gazed happily about her.

'My friends,' she said, 'I present the Citizen Charpentier!'

Marthe bobbed, while the oaf extended a hand as big as a spade.

'*Zut!*' he cried heartily. 'One goes to amuse oneself, it seems!'

He spat noisily into his palm.

'Your hand, patriot!' he cried.

Meanwhile Marthe was indulging in audible whispers with Zouzou.

'What a splendid young man!' she said in awe. 'What a distinguished air! Oh, Zouzou!'—she flung her arms about the Citizeness Regnault's neck again—'oh, *la, la, la, la!*'

Hector looked so irretrievably bewildered by these demonstrations that his hostess came to his aid.

'Jeannot,' she said in her pretty way, 'this is Marthe, my *femme de chambre*, and this Polydore, my major-domo, who makes the best *ragoût* you ever tasted. *N'est-ce pas, mon Polydore!*'

The oaf grinned sheepishly.

'One does what one can,' he remarked.

'And this,' Zouzou continued, pulling forward the old man, 'is Alceste, my gardener. He's stone-deaf and not all there. For him it is as though the Revolution had not been; when he remembers it, he cries, "*Vive la nation!*"—*pas vrai, grosse bête?*'

With trembling hand the dotard bared his grizzled head and louted low.

'Madame! Monsieur!' he bowed. 'Does it please Madame that I show Monsieur the gardens?'

Zouzou tapped her forehead resignedly and turned away, leaving the old man fumbling at his hat, humble friendliness peering out of his rheumy eyes.

'Come, Jeannot,' said the citizeness, 'you shall look at my house!'

But Hector, revolted by what he had seen, paused. In the household of this woman who tolerated gross familiarities from her servants, he felt that he and the old gardener were the only representatives of the normal order of things. From his sadly shrunk bundle of assignats he slipped a note and crushed it in the gardener's hand.

'*Voilà pour toi, mon ami!*' he said loudly. 'And I hope you will show me the gardens afterwards!'

The old man heard and understood. As he stared down at the greasy bill lying in his blackened palm, the tears welled up in his sad old eyes. Then his hands dropped to his sides as he bowed and bowed again, mumbling something about '*the humble servant of Monsieur*,' or some such courtly phrase of the France that lay buried in the pit of Picpus.

'*Tu es fou, mon cher!*' exclaimed Zouzou good-humouredly, and, putting her arm through Hector's, she drew him into the house.

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Then began for Hector an extraordinary existence. In that topsy-turvy household he often wondered whether he were standing on his head or his heels. There was neither discipline nor order nor privacy in the Villa Mille Fleurs. Meals were served in any room at any time, and as often as not Marthe, the serving-woman, sat at table with them. Doubtless Polydore, who was her husband, would have joined them as well, only his duties as *chef* detained him in the kitchen. From time to time, however, in his white cap and apron, he would gladden them with the sight of his face reddened by the fire and receive, with perfect *sang-froid*, criticisms on his cooking.

The extravagance was sheerly wanton. Where the money—or what was more vital, in these lean times, the supplies themselves—came from it was difficult to say; but there was no lack of either. There was wine in abundance, and a goblet of choice Burgundy was invariably at the elbow of Polydore as he sat in the white-and-gold boudoir of a morning breakfasting off bread and garlic. He and Marthe were always astir betimes, but Zouzou lay abed till noon, or if she rose before would wander through the handsome rooms or about the cool loggia in the flimsiest of night-robes which barely concealed her abundant charms.

But she was quite on her dignity when callers came. She had hordes of friends. Not an afternoon passed but a pillar of dust, turning off the distant *chaussée*, announced the arrival of a carriage-load of gay ladies, painted and powdered, with their attendant swains. They all had a vaguely 'flash' air. For the most part they were 'companions' of wealthy adventurers in those curious *ménages* that, under the Republic, so often took the place of marriage, or perhaps they were more catholic and less discriminate in the distribution of their favours. Their companions, like the rest of Zouzou's men friends, belonged almost exclusively to the world of finance, that shady realm haunted by every variety of *chevalier d'industrie* attracted by the Revolution to Paris.

There were queer figures in the group that would sit through the hot afternoons gossiping over their wine beneath the verandah, grotesques like the Citizen Epaminondas Boudin, a burly mulatto who had made a fortune in West Indian sugar, or Kafkarian, the Armenian broker, or Eleutherios Gonsenheimer, the mysterious 'Russian' who called himself 'Envoy of the Free Republic of Libau.' And, needless to say, good Dr. Largier was a frequent visitor. Like the rest of the men, he paid assiduous court to Zouzou.

'A remarkable woman,' he told Hector; 'a financier to her finger-tips. When she was with Roussard, of the Crédit Foncier, she accumulated a small fortune by judicious speculation. When this poor Roussard got into bad company and finished at the guillotine, she went with Regnault, and in eight months—*eight* ... months, only, remark!—she made enough money in Copenhagen out of investments in wheat and other commodities in which Regnault, as head of the French buying commission, was interested, to be able to leave this stupid animal and return to Paris to set her cap at whom she pleases ...'

He nudged the young man with his elbow.

'See, now she speaks with Lévy, of the Agricultural Bank. She never misses a chance, *la drôlesse!* *Bon sang de Dieu*, citizen, if I were twenty years younger, I wouldn't mind trying to cut you out myself. But that would be none too easy, *hé, hé?* You're cock of the walk here, *pas vrai?*'

With odious familiarity he ogled him and prodded him in the ribs again.

The allusion revolted Hector. He had not been twenty-four hours in the villa before he was fully aware of the ambiguousness of his position. Zouzou had said nothing to reveal her motives in claiming him, a perfect stranger, as an old friend. But in the way she looked at him, in the way she followed him with her eyes about the room, he was uneasily conscious—though he was loath to admit it even to himself—that the doctor's horrible innuendo was not entirely unjustified.

Every day, from early afternoon till far into the night, the villa was full of visitors. Hector realised that the gay life of the capital, banished from Paris by the Terror, was not extinct, but had merely transferred its seat to the outlying suburbs. They played tric-trac and loto for high stakes, and, did they weary of gambling, games of forfeits, Blind-Man's Buff, or the like. But when the purple shadows descended over the fragrant garden, many of the couples stole away, and thereafter the bosky thickets rustled mysteriously to soft whispers, a smothered laugh, a faint exclamation ...

And yet in this pleasant, easy life Hector Fotheringay found no repose. Though, for the moment, Paris and its perils had receded into the background, he was persistently haunted by the thought of Loison. He had not been able to spare the child much money: she had spent forthwith a part if not all of what he had given her, and that was a week before he had come to the Villa Mille Fleurs; surely her means must be exhausted by now. Yet money was all that stood between her and the guillotine, for, as sure as she ventured forth upon the street, she was ultimately bound to fall into the hands of the scouts of Couthon or Grand-Duc.

At last, in desperation, he determined to sound Zouzou as to his chances of escape. She was essentially good-natured, and he thought that, if she could help him, she would. It was late one night when he opened the subject. The last carriage full of noisy guests had melted into the mellow dusk of the elm drive, and Zouzou, protesting it was too hot for bed, had led Hector to the end of the rose garden, where, on the skirt of a little wood, a rustic bench encircled a gigantic beech.

Zouzou leant back her golden head and, stretching her firm white neck, gazed up into the dense greenery of the ancient tree.

'Oh!' she sighed, '*je suis lasse.*'

Hector, moody and perturbed, was silent.

'Jeannot,' she cooed, 'always you are silent. Why don't you say something?'

'Because I am worried, Zouzou!'

'Do all these tiresome people weary you, *mon coco?* To-morrow we will bar the gate of the avenue and Polydore shall tell them we are from home, *veux-tu?*'

She turned her head and smiled eagerly up in his face. But he shook his head.

'It's not your friends,' he said.

He leant forward and looked at her intently.

'Zouzou,' he said, 'who do you suppose I am?'

She laughed her pretty little gurgling laugh.

'That's a droll question to put to oneself about any one in these droll times. Perhaps you are the *ci-devant* Grand Kham of Tartary!'

And she laughed her merry laugh again.

'No, but seriously ...'

She shrugged her shoulders.

'I know you are not ... Charpentier,' she said, with a sudden trace of wistfulness in her voice.

'Then why did you claim me as he?'

She pursed up her mouth and feigned to be studying the toe of her little gilt slipper.

'It amused me to annoy the humpback,' she answered slowly. 'Besides, your eyes implored my aid. I am good-natured: I like to help people.'

She laid her little hand on his sleeve.

'*Dis!* You played a trick on this dull fellow Charpentier, *pas vrai?* You stole his papers, *hein?* Yes, yes, he was my lover, I know, but he wearied me. He was handsome, he was a fine figure of a man, but, *mon cher*'—her voice gave each word measured cadence—he ... was ... a ... fool!'

With a rush of wings and melancholy hoot an owl whirled over.

'Zouzou,' said Hector bluntly, 'I want to get out of France!'

She looked up quickly.

'Jeannot!' she exclaimed reproachfully. 'And leave me? Where do you want to go to, pray? Back to Copenhagen?'

'Yes,' said Hector.

'You only have to get a passport: the Citizen Couthon will help you.'

'I can't use these papers any more to leave France,' Hector said in a low voice.

She caught his hand.

'And what do you want me to do, *moi?*'

'If you could help me to any others ...' he began, but stopped on seeing her expression.

She had drawn back from him against the tree, one hand pressed to her pink plump face.

'Oh! You must be mad!' she cried in a low, frightened voice. 'Do you know what the penalty for *that* is? It's death! *Bon Dieu de bon Dieu!* Even to think such things to-day means destruction! Listen to me, Jeannot. *Je suis bonne fille*: I do what I can to help others: but I will not mix myself up with the *sans-culottes* for any one. There are no half-measures about Fouquier and his band. One-two! You are in prison! One-two! You are condemned! One-two! You cough into the basket! Ah! *Ça? Non!*'

She was bristling with indignation and fear. She looked away and nervously passed her handkerchief across her face. Then, her mood changing, she snuggled up to the young man at her side and laid her hot face against his hand.

'*Voyons*, Jeannot,' she crooned, 'be nice to me! Why do you try and frighten one with your tales of false papers and I know not what? *Mon ami*, I have a horror of death. If they came to arrest me, I should die of fright before ever I looked Sanson in the face. You're happy with me here, *pas vrai?* *Alors ...*'

He sat in cold despair while she whispered her endearments. He had failed with her, then. He could count himself lucky not to have told her more, for she was capable, in her terror of the scaffold, of denouncing him. For the present, though, of course, she knew he was impersonating Charpentier, it did not seem to have occurred to her that he was using false papers. She appeared to think that his impersonation of her old lover was a business trick or a practical joke. He realised that, like so many other clever women of a sort, she had only the vaguest notions of the affairs of State.

He calmed her down as best he could in the half-tender, half-joking manner which, like a buckler, he always kept between them. In his heart of hearts he knew that matters could not rest where they were. But he hoped to stave off the



inevitable crisis until he had quitted her house. He was not a prig, but the Cytherean atmosphere of the villa cloyed upon him, and to succumb to it would, he felt, be degradation. He could not buy immunity at that price ...

That night they parted, as usual, at her bedroom door. As Hector went to his room, the thought occurred to him that twice since he had come to France women had offered themselves to him, and in each case the strange force that had taken charge of his life had compelled him to stand aside. The old life of Saint James's, where his love-affairs had given him a certain prestige with the ensigns, was but a few weeks away. How Montgomerie and his brother officers would have chaffed could they have seen him in his new rôle of the virtuous Joseph...!

As he crossed the *salon* the next morning, he found Polydore scrubbing a set of harness on the magnificent porphyry table.

'One makes a little jaunt to Paris,' the handy man told him. 'Zouzou has ordered the carriage for eleven and we take a cold snack to eat in the shade of the trees of the Bois de Boulogne. One will drive slowly, citizen, I promise you. We shall have the heat of the devil to-day!'

And, hissing through his teeth, he bent to his scrubbing again.

His announcement was confirmed a few hours later by the appearance of Zouzou herself, dressed for the road, in a pretty cerise bonnet and a cerise cloak over a dainty white muslin frock.

'We sit too much at home,' she declared. 'You must not mope, *mon petit*. We will drive out to the Bois and eat beneath the trees while waiting for the heat of the day to pass. Then we will go in to Paris and call on my *modiste* to see what progress my new robe makes!'

The versatile Polydore was their coachman, but Marthe was left behind. Zouzou was in the highest spirits, and her sprightly conversation diverted even her dull-witted major-domo as they lounged through the noonday heat under a spreading oak. 'If only she would remain in this comradely frame of mind,' Hector mused to himself, 'she could be of real use to Loison and me.'

The edge of the sun's rays was blunted when, about five, they entered Paris by the Barrière de Neuilly. But the air was oppressively warm as though a storm were brewing, and after the rural charm of the villa the city seemed hotter, shabbier, and sadder than ever. They spent an hour at a dressmaker's in the rue Neuve des Petits Champs, and, as the clocks were striking the half-hour after six, plunged once more into the crowded rue Saint-Honoré on the return journey.

The new robe was a great success, and Zouzou was radiant. The carriage was open, and it obviously pleased her to be seen driving through the heart of Paris side by side with such a presentable young man. As though to establish her claim to him, she rested her little white hand on his large brown one and kept her blonde ringlets in close proximity to his curly black head.

The carriage was passing the church of Saint-Roch, where the Section Committee of the Quarter was now established, when Hector started and made an instinctive movement as though to rise in his seat.

'What is it, Jeannot?' said Zouzou, craning her golden head round. *Mon Dieu, mon petit*, how pale you are! *Tiens*, who is this young girl who regards you so strangely? *Hé, Polydore, halte là!*

The major-domo reined in the dust-stained horses. The woman turned and looked out over the back of the carriage at the knot of loungers sitting or standing in the shade on the steps of the church.

'She's disappeared!' said Zouzou. 'Was it some one you knew, Jeannot?'

Hector, who had been intently scanning the crowds gathered on the steps, sank back in his seat.

'No, no,' he answered. 'I suddenly felt a little faint, that's all. I expect it's the heat! Shall ... shall we drive on, Zouzou?'

She looked at him out of the corner of her eyes.

'*En avant*, Polydore!' she ordered.

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## CHAPTER XX

### A FACE IN THE CROWD

For a fleeting instant only he had seen her, two reproachful eyes that sought his out of the sea of pallid, sweaty faces ebbing and flowing about the railings of Saint-Roch. He had been thinking of her, for the sights and smells of the familiar street had brought back to him, with a pang sharp as homesickness, the memory of their short-lived intimacy begun that morning when in her tatters she had come to Couthon's house. Suddenly her face in all its dainty wistfulness had thrust itself into the foreground of his thoughts, and he had found himself looking into her eyes. In the moment when, on Zouzou plucking his sleeve, he had averted his gaze, the girl had disappeared.

As they drove back in silence through the still and muggy evening, he tried to tell himself that he had been the victim of delusion. But he knew he had made no mistake, knew, too, that Loison had recognised him as he sat with Zouzou's gleaming head all but resting on his shoulder and her bejewelled fingers intertwined in his. No need to ask himself what Loison thought of him! He had read it all in his brief glimpse of those reproachful grey eyes ...

For a moment he had had a wild impulse to spring from the carriage and seek her out among the crowd. But all that jostling throng was in motion, and it had closed in upon and swallowed her up in the second in which he had looked away. He could scarcely hope to find her now, and by dashing after her in pursuit he would only arouse Zouzou's suspicions. He could not afford to risk it. He must seek Loison out and explain. But it must be soon. He felt he would hardly sleep again until he had justified himself to her for his long absence, for his seeming neglect.

Zouzou did not speak again until they reached the villa. She sat back in her corner of the carriage fanning herself with her gloves and emitting from time to time a little gasp of protest against the closeness of the atmosphere. The sky was lurid with an angry glow, and as they turned into the elm grove not a leaf stirred. Through a blue haze of heat at the end of the avenue the villa trembled whitely.

As they swung into the open space in front of the house, the back wheel of the carriage violently struck the marble rim of the fountain so that the vehicle lurched strongly and was almost upset. Zouzou screamed shrilly and sprang to her feet.

'*C'est bien, c'est bien,*' grunted Polydore, half-turning a shining red face from the box-seat. The horses stopped irresolute and panting, the steam from their glistening coats mounting in the still air. Hector helped his hostess to alight.

'Descend!' she cried to Polydore the moment she had set foot to ground. When he had obeyed her, the man's condition was immediately apparent. He was reeling drunk.

'You dirty animal!' cried the citizeness. 'You drunken sot! Do I keep you here in luxury that you should break my neck, *imbécile*? How dare you get drunk when you drive me out, you idle ruffian!'

The versatile major-domo made a vague pass with his whip in the air.

'I feel ... very well,' he hiccupped gravely, 'not ... drunk, *ma belle*, not drunk!'

Like a fury she turned on him then and discharged a volley of the vilest and basest invective at his head, her voice shrill, her gestures abundant, a veritable virago. She never repeated herself, she scarcely paused for breath, abusing, insulting, sneering at the swaying lout before her. In the midst of the tirade, Marthe appeared at the door, and, after vainly trying to make herself heard, thrust herself, arms akimbo in a challenging posture, between the citizeness and her victim.

'*Eh bien quoi!*' she demanded roughly. 'Hasn't a man a right to drink a glass if he's thirsty, *ma petite*? This is a free country, I believe, *hein*? And who are you to cast insults, *la drôlesse*, I should like to know?'

With a fresh outburst of rage, Zouzou turned on her maid and overwhelmed her in turn with abuse. The woman gave as good as she got, and they shrieked insults at one another, like a brace of fishwives at Les Halles, until Hector, who had made various efforts to intervene, saw that in a moment they would come to blows and stepped resolutely between them. Thereupon Zouzou burst into a torrent of hysterical weeping and fled into the house, while Marthe, looking for a fresh victim, attacked her husband, and seizing him by his shirt-collar ran him off to the kitchen. Musingly, Hector led the carriage round to the stables.

Within and without, the atmosphere of the villa was electric.

They did not sup until late. Neither Marthe nor Polydore appeared; but a table was spread on the loggia with cold chicken and a salad and a dish of peaches. The night was warm and uncannily still. The moon had not yet risen, and in the perfumed dark that faced them the quiet garden with its wealth of roses seemed to be waiting in hushed anticipation for the storm to break.

Zouzou would eat nothing. But she drank a great deal of wine. She sat with her chin propped upon her hands staring into the velvety, unfathomable night.

'These animals exasperate me!' she said to Hector. 'That drunken clown might have killed us!'

She stretched herself luxuriantly.

'I think the air's a little fresher,' she said. '*Tiens, mon ami*, fill up my glass!'

She held out the crystal goblet, and, when Hector had replenished it, emptied it at a draught. She made him fill it up again.

'I'm like that,' she observed, and began to peel a peach. 'I am an easy-going person, but sometimes my nerves get the better of me, *et pan!* there's an explosion! This stupid Marthe ought to know me by now. It's not the first time we've had a row, *allez!* To-morrow I shall give her a little present and you will see how she is repentant. It's pleasant here, *dis?*'

'It's Heaven after Paris!' said Hector.

'How nicely you say that! Come closer, Jeannot, and you shall have half my peach. *C'est ça!* Do you like being here alone with me like this my Jeannot?'

'What a question to ask! Of course I do!'

'Of all the men I know you are the only one who never makes love to me,' she said simply. 'And yet I'm not ugly, *tu sais*. My skin is soft as satin and white as milk. And my hair is natural. Never do I use rouge or dyes. All my charms are my own. It's something to be able to say that nowadays, *allez!*'

She leant forward. Beneath the thin muslin of her low-necked dress her bosom glinted whitely.

'*Embrasse-moi*, my Jeannot!'

He dared not falter. He dared not temporise. Her soft red lips were raised to his. He bent down and kissed her lightly on the mouth. But her arm was about his neck, and, when he would have drawn away, she held him fast. Her mouth was pressed to his and she kissed him greedily.

'*Que tu es beau!*' she murmured voluptuously.

Of a sudden a great wind sprang up and set the darkness stretched out before them all arustling. On the horizon the summer lightning played fitfully.

With a little sigh she drew away.

'The storm is coming,' she said, and filled up their glasses. In the distance the thunder now rumbled dully. There was a musical tinkle as she touched her glass to his. They drank together. Then she drew his arm about her trim waist and leaned back, her head against his coat.

'One sees well that you are not accustomed to love,' said she presently. 'But I like that, *moi!* These *nigauds* who storm every fortress and who think that if they present themselves it is bound to capitulate—*ça m'ennuie, tu sais!* But if a general invests a *place forte*, he makes plans, *pas vrai?* He reckons with the possibility of a long siege; for if a city is worth storming, it's worth taking pains over, *n'est-ce pas, mon gros loup?*'

There came a sharp patter of raindrops on the leaves outside.

'It's only love that makes the world worth while to-day,' she went on. '*Tiens*, we two here, what does Paris and its

horrors trouble us? We have one another, just ourselves and our love.'

Her voice trailed off softly. The rain splashed more heavily down. A long, jagged flash of lightning showed a glimpse of leaden sky. With long, ominous growling the thunder rang a clanging peal. Hector felt the yielding form beside him vibrate to the electricity in the air. Zouzou's arms were about his neck. She clung to him, limp with eager surrender.

'Love me,' she whispered, 'love me, oh, *mon amour*!'

The noise of the rain rang in his ears. From all about the house came a gurgling and splashing. One could fancy one heard the parched earth sigh with relief as it soaked up the cooling torrent. The air was pleasant with a fresh and fragrant smell of wet grass and moss and leaves, a healthy, purifying smell, the odour of the forest after the rain. This is the home smell of the English, the smell of rain, their foster-mother, and it claimed Hector Fotheringay. Cost what it might he would pander no more to Cytherea ....

But she, feeling him unresponsive under her caress, unloosed her hold and leaned back to regard him. The surprise in her eyes gave place to mortification when she saw the stern look on his face.

'Ah!' She flung herself back in her chair. 'You don't love me, I see well! Am I right?'

'My dear,' he answered, in confusion grappling with the hardest situation man can be called on to face, 'I must explain ...'

'Explain?' She cut him off with a hard, dry laugh that sounded almost like a sob. 'There is some one else, *hein, mon petit*? This girl, perhaps, whose heart looked out of her eyes at you to-day before the Church of Saint-Roch?'

'Yes,' he said firmly—he was master of himself again now—'though I am not in love with her. But I am dreadfully anxious about her, Zouzou. She risked her life to save me ...'

Shuddering the woman drew away.

'*Comment?*' she said in a low and dreadful voice. 'You are in danger? You are ... suspect?'

He nodded curtly.

'And now I'm going to leave you, Zouzou, with deep gratitude towards you for what you have done for me. You saved my life—through caprice, through your kindness of heart, who shall say?—but you saved me and I shall never forget it.'

Behind the swaying trees that faced them the lightning flared whitely and the rain rustled down. But the thunder sounded already more distant. It was clear that the storm was passing over before it had fully broken. The woman raised her head and looked at him.

'You need not have told me,' she said. 'You could have been my lover and stayed here forgotten! You need never have returned to Couthon. My friends could have arranged that.'

He smiled and shook his head.

'The temptation was great, Zouzou, but I have a duty to that poor child we saw to-day.'

For the space of a minute or so without speaking the woman searched the young man's face. Her womanly intuition proved an abler sleuth than all the 'fine blades' of the Committees. Love it was, not always blind, but sometimes all-seeing like the Divinity that begat it, that penetrated the mask of Hector Fotheringay.

'Oh!' she exclaimed with a little fluttering gasp. 'Now I know what has so puzzled me about you. *Tu n'es pas Français, dis?* You might be a Dane, or, *attends!* one of those English naval officers I used to see walking on the Lange Linie at Copenhagen ...'

He raised his shoulders, dropped his hands to his sides.

'For all the world but you, my dear, I am the Citizen Charpentier!'

'You must be mad!' she murmured. 'The risk is awful!'

'Too great for you to share any longer,' he rejoined. 'To-morrow I shall leave you and return to Paris.'

'To do what?'

'To resume my duties with the Citizen Couthon, *parbleu!*'

A little shudder ran through her. She laid a trembling hand on her bosom and swallowed down her emotion.

'If ... if anything should happen to you, I am implicated,' she said. 'Promise me that you, at least, will never admit you are not what you seem to be. You won't betray me, *dis*? I speak like a coward, but'—her shoulders heaved and her voice broke—'I am so afraid to die. And yet I hold you guiltless, Jeannot. I alone am to blame!'

'Why did you pretend to know me, Zouzou?'

'Because,' she flashed back with pride and passion in her voice, 'because I loved you ... from the moment I looked into your eyes that afternoon at the Citizeness Fourbe's. I know well that I am nothing to you, but now that we are to part, never to meet again, I will tell you that, had I my life to live again and I were free to choose, you are the man I would have taken as my mate. And believe me I should not be the woman you see me to-day.' She paused and drew a deep, helpless sigh. 'I don't know why I tell you this,' she added, 'but, I think I am a little mad to-night and lonely, so lonely ...'

A violent knocking that resounded from the interior of the house interrupted her. Lifting a white and tear-stained face, she looked at the young man fixedly. In the moment's silence that followed, the long, bubbling cough of a horse resounded from outside above the melancholy drip of the rain.

'What can it be?' she whispered.

'I will go and see,' he replied.

She caught his arm. 'No! Let Polydore open!'

He shook his head.

'He sleeps like the dead. I must go ...'

The knocking came again.

'If you hear me shout out, fly! Fortunately, the night is dark, and if you gain the main road from the garden you can get to your friends at Neuilly who will give you shelter ...'

With drooping head she sat at the disordered table.

'Adieu, Zouzou!' he said softly, and turned to enter the house.

'Jeannot!'

She called him back. Risen to her feet, she stood with her face towards him, silhouetted against the dark sky. He bent down and their lips met. This time it was he that kissed.

The sound of her anguished sobbing was in his ears as he crossed the hall.

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# CHAPTER XXI

## THE SUMMONS

A smother of warm rain blew into the little marble lobby as he unbarred the front door. Outside beneath the porch stood a dark figure swathed up to the eyes in a long cloak that spilled a steady stream of water on the stone flags. Behind, with heads bowed to the heavy drizzle, the vague shapes of a pair of horses were discernible.

'Is it you, Citizen Charpentier?' asked a gruff voice.

The lobby was unlighted, and out of doors it was so dark that Hector could not immediately distinguish the speaker's face. But the moon peering out at this moment from behind a screen of flying wrack and the man in the porch plucking aside a fold of his cloak, Hector recognised the rugged countenance of Javoir, Couthon's gendarme.

'What a night, *tonnerre de Dieu!*' the man grumbled. 'Br-rr! As black as the ace of spades. Three hours almost I am on the road!'

He doffed his *bicorne* hat and shook a trickle of water upon the ground.

'The *patron* wants you to come to him at once, citizen,' he added. 'I brought a spare horse with me for you to ride.'

Hector felt momentarily relieved. This, at least, was normal. Some emergency of the service claimed him, he imagined. But Couthon, he had heard from Largier, had taken an interim secretary during Hector's absence, a young man named Leroy. Hector had yet two days of his leave unexpired. Why, then, was he sent for thus hastily in the middle of the night?

'It seems to be urgent,' he remarked to the gendarme.

'*Parbleu*, you have said it, citizen,' retorted Javoir, flinging back his dripping mantle and scratching his head. 'Never have I seen the *patron* of a humour so massacring as to-night; and yet, as you know, he has his fits of impatience at times, *pas vrai?* "Ride post-haste to the Citizeness Regnault's at Neuilly," says he, "and fetch me this good Charpentier who lodges with her. Take your comrade's horse and bring the young man back without delay, it is understood?" he says. *Bigre!* I didn't wait to be told twice. I tightened up the girths on Sully here and on Muron's mare—we keep our horses ready saddled in the yard—*et me voilà!* If you'll take my advice, *l'ami*, you'll lose no time; for, in the mood in which the *patron* found himself when I started out, he is capable of doing a mischief to any one who crosses him!'

An odd friendship existed between Hector and Javoir. A gaunt scarecrow of a man, the gendarme, awkward as a rake, with a stringy black mustache and a long, haggard face sprinkled with warts. He had spent twenty years or more in the service of the police, and, being a soldier first and last, had made as little fuss about changing the Royal cipher on his collar for the tricolour cockade as in the past his predecessors had made about swapping the pike for the flintlock. In matters of discipline he was a wooden automaton, shrewd in his way and scrupulously honest, a type that the young man knew well in the Brigade of Guards, though he had never had the incentive to study it before. They had developed a marked liking for one another, yet Hector fully realised that Javoir would, if ordered, make no bones about marching him off to the scaffold, and, if need were, of himself guillotining him into the bargain. For the rest the gendarme was a kindly enough fellow, a Norman from the neighbourhood of Rouen with a full store of the Norman peasant's caution and intelligence and a remarkably shrewd judgment on politics when his native reticence allowed him to express himself.

'A little moment to fetch my hat and cloak and pistols,' said Hector, 'and I am with you. And you, *mon brave*, you could probably manage a dram after your ride, *hein?*'

'I wouldn't say "no,"' returned the gendarme.

Only the gurgling gutters fended the stillness of the house as Hector passed through the empty *salon* to gain the loggia, where in the fitful moonlight the guttering candle-flames were paling on the deserted supper-table. Of Zouzou nothing was to be seen. She had stolen away without a sound. Hector picked up the brandy bottle and a glass and returned to the lobby. Then he went to his room and made a rapid change for the road. A few minutes later the two horsemen dived into the inky, dripping blackness of the elm grove.

The rain had ceased, but the night oozed moisture and the air was steamy. All around the raindrops pattered stealthily

down from the trees, and the moon, in her fitful appearances through the scudding, fleecy clouds, was mirrored in great pools of water that lay upon the broken surface of the *chaussée*. They met never a soul as they rode forward in silence, their horses' hoofs plashing in the mire, nor, as they clattered over the cobbled street of Neuilly, did any house show a light to greet them.

'One will be content to see you back at work, citizen,' remarked the gendarme suddenly, when, after a canter of a mile or so, they had checked their horses to breathe them. 'These *coquins* who robbed you played the *patron* a scurvy trick, *allez!* Do you know what Couthon says?'

'No,' said Hector.

'That it was a plot to get you out of the way so that his enemies could plant a spy in his house ...'

Hector grew thoughtful. He had been followed the night he was attacked: had Grand-Duc tried in this fashion to get rid of him? Perhaps; but not with the motive that Couthon suggested, for Fouquier-Tinville had no reason to suspect that the Citizen Charpentier, Jacobin spy, would not be at any time amenable to his wishes.

'When did the *patron* say this?' Hector asked.

'To-night, *pardi*, when we arrested Leroy!'

'Leroy arrested?' cried Hector.

'So well and truly arrested that he passes before the Revolutionary Tribunal in the morning,' retorted Javoir. 'And you know what that means, citizen!' he added significantly.

'But what has he done?' Hector persisted.

The gendarme shrugged his shoulders.

'Things have moved swiftly since your accident,' he said. 'The Citizen Robespierre has quarrelled with the Committee of General Security, it appears. He will have no more dealings with the *gens de l'expédition*: he now has his own agents in the Committee of Public Safety. One no longer sees the Citizen Robespierre: he has withdrawn to a country-house at Maisons-Alfort, I have been told. It is the *patron* who looks after everything, and so, as he holds to Robespierre, their enemies, the despatchers, fearing that their hour approaches, sent this jackanapes, Leroy, as a spy to our house, profiting by your absence.'

Hector nodded reflectively. The meaning of his talk with Fouquier-Tinville was not clear to him. He was to have been the tool of the *gens de l'expédition* in the house of Couthon to encompass the ruin of the *Conventionnel* as soon as he became inconvenient to their plans. The psychological moment had arrived during Hector's absence. Obviously Leroy had filled the rôle that Jean François Charpentier had been destined to play. And where did Grand-Duc figure in this meshwork of intrigue? Clearly on the side against Couthon, since he had first taken Hector to Chrétien's. This would explain his caution in building up his case against the secretary.

Javoir shook up his reins, and they fell into a trot which, save for a brief halt at the barrier where the gendarme's passes obtained them instant admittance, they kept up till, hot and muddy, they drew rein outside the *Conventionnel's* house in the rue Saint-Honoré. Torches flickered in the yard. A party of gendarmes surrounded a young man who, with his hands tied behind him, was just being led away. His eyes were haggard, and his face was grey with terror.

Resolutely Hector mounted the staircase. Couthon's front door stood wide. From within he heard the rasping voice of the *Conventionnel*, hoarse with anger, rating some one who answered in a squeaky, high-pitched voice that Hector knew all too well. On the threshold of the apartment the young man paused, suddenly apprehensive of the events that stood before. But the remembrance of that cowardly blow dealt from behind which, he now felt sure, he owed to the humpback, steeled him to the encounter. He pushed open the door of the sitting-room and walked in.

The humpback stood before the empty hearth. With his topaz eyes burning hotly in his sallow face, he was methodically biting his nails, one finger after the other, with a nervous fury that bespoke the fires consuming him within. Opposite him on the familiar couch the cripple sprawled, a white cotton night-cap on his head, a grimy night-shirt, open at the throat, displaying his scraggy neck beneath a shabby coat cast across his shoulders. Out of his livid face shining wet with

perspiration his eyes flashed spite. He shook a bony, menacing finger at the man before him.

'I read you like a book, you rascal!' he screeched. 'You would corrupt my household, would you, you reptile, you and your friends? Did you see your protégé below? Why didn't you bring your Collot, your Barère, your Bourdon, your Amar, your Jagot'—his voice mounted shrilly as he declaimed the string of names—'to see what you and they will look like when vengeance that draws near overtakes you all? Fouquier will rid me of this wretched tool, this Leroy, but, look to it, Grand-Duc, look to it I say, that he does not warm the plank for you! *Bon Dieu!* Is there no measure to the effrontery of traitors? Not only do they send a spy into my house, but when I replace him by an honest man, *sapristi*, they make plots to accuse him!'

As he broke off breathless, he perceived Hector at the door.

'Ah! Here is Charpentier,' he cried. 'Now bring your charges, Citizen Commissary!'

Grand-Duc plucked his fingers from his mouth and began to crack his knuckles nervously. Desperately uneasy he appeared. With his small eyes narrowed down to mere slits beneath his jutting brows and his thin upper lip drawn up over his teeth, he wore the sneering, snarling air of a hunted rodent, like a stoat at bay.

'No charges, citizen,' he stammered. 'No charges. I only want information from the citizen about his connection with a certain dangerous conspirator'—he paused and looked peeringly towards the couch—'one Louise de Mallet, *ci-devant* aristocrat, of Clermont-Ferrand, in the Auvergne.'

'Stop!' trumpeted Couthon—he had jerked himself to a sitting posture on his sofa. 'Do you allege that Charpentier is implicated with this girl?'

The humpback writhed and gnawed his nails.

'I allege nothing. There are certain indications, however ...'

'Tell your story!' the cripple ordered. 'And don't beat about the bush!'

Grand-Duc shot a long, spiteful glance at Hector who had been an impassive witness of the scene.

'On the night on which the Citizen Charpentier arrived in Paris,' he said, 'the police raided the apartment of the conspirator Engstrom, who that evening had paid the penalty of his crimes. A young man named Simon was shot dead in trying to escape from the apartment, and a second man, whose identity is unknown, was found to have committed suicide inside. A certain van Brink, another of the conspirators, who was arrested earlier in the evening and on whose indications the police visited Engstrom's lodging, stated that the banker was expecting the visit of a young man from abroad: he did not know his name. The unidentified suicide, however, was not young.'

'Now, mark what I say! Engstrom's apartment had a second entrance at the back, a secret stair that led to a mantle-maker's known as "Au Cupidon" in the rue de la Loi. On the night of the raid this young girl, Louise de Mallet, commonly known as Loison, remained behind in the shop after the other sempstresses had gone home. Two days later she absented herself from her work, and then a black silk cloak was found to be missing. Late on the evening of the raid I found that cloak in the possession of the Citizen Charpentier. One minute'—he raised his hand to enjoin silence on Couthon, who was about to speak—'one minute, citizen, and I have done.'

'Some days after the disappearance of the girl, a young man called at the mantle-maker's and asked for news of her.'

'Unfortunately, the shop has since closed down, and we have not yet been able to lay hands on the person who received this caller. But it is my theory that the young man whom Engstrom awaited—a young man from abroad, Citizen Charpentier—the young man who obtained the cloak—for the purpose of disguise, evidently—and the young man who afterwards sought out Loison at the mantle-maker's are one and the same person. *Who was he?* I should like to hear what the Citizen Charpentier has to say to *that!*'

Now from Grand-Duc's narrative Hector had elicited two cheering facts. The one was that the humpback had as yet no direct evidence that Hector had ever been at Engstrom's; the other that Grand-Duc had failed to find the elderly forewoman who was the only person who could identify the young man that had asked for Loison. His plan of campaign was ready: a brief defence, then swift to the attack.



'My answer is "Nothing!"' he said. 'As to the cloak, I took it by mistake for my own from the Café des Mille Colonnes in the Palais-Égalité where I dined on the evening of my arrival in Paris. From what the Citizen Commissary says it is clear that this young man he speaks of deliberately stole *my* cloak in order to get rid of the other. For the rest, the Citizen Commissary's innuendoes bewilder me. He knows I took the cloak from the Palais-Égalité, for I asked him to return it for me the very same night.'

'Is this so?' Couthon demanded.

'I took charge of the cloak because I did not believe his story,' the humpback retorted sullenly. 'But I found no confirmation of it at the Café des Mille Colonnes.'

'Because, of course, my cloak was no longer there,' cried Hector. 'Rather than waste the Citizen Couthon's time by these idle accusations, Citizen Commissary, why not produce the girl Loison and let *her* say what she did with the cloak and whether she gave it to me?'

On his couch the cripple was stroking his chin with short, swift pats, a habit he had when thinking, and darting quick glances from one man to the other.

'Yes,' he said, and nodded approvingly, 'produce the girl, Grand-Duc!'

The humpback hunched his rounded shoulders.

'We have not yet managed to lay hands on her!'

'Ha!' cried Hector, greatly daring. 'Because you know well that she will demolish this tissue of falsehoods you have built up against an honest man whose only fault is his devotion to the great patriot, Couthon!'

The attack was succeeding. The humpback wilted visibly, and Couthon looked with approval upon his secretary. Hector was beginning to enjoy himself.

'Release me from your service, citizen,' he exclaimed, 'if to serve you is to be accused of conspiracy against the State!'

'Do not excite yourself, my good Charpentier,' said the *Conventionnel*, and then addressed Grand-Duc.

'Citizen Commissary,' he remarked in a freezing tone, 'the leisurely procedure of the Engstrom *instruction* will be forthwith examined by the Committee of Public Safety. You will be called upon to justify your failure to clear up this great conspiracy. Go now, and when you have accusations to bring, support them by proofs!'

Biting his lip, the humpback settled his hat very deliberately on his head and walked across the room to the couch.

'Proofs, *hein?*' he snarled. 'You shall have them, citizen! But in the meantime—*keep an eye on the Citizen Charpentier!*'

On that he strutted out, but, as he passed Hector, he threw him such a look of triumph tinged with malice that the young man involuntarily recoiled.

His onslaught had carried the enemy positions. But what of the counter-attack?

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## CHAPTER XXII

### THE GATHERING OF THE STORM

And so Hector came back to Couthon's. He had been absent for only a fortnight, but in that time the whole atmosphere of Paris had altered. Outwardly the aspect of the city remained unchanged. The same haggard, hopeless queues stood all day before the shuttered shops, with drums rolling the same ragged battalions of the sections marched through the streets to and from their drills, the same line of muddy farm-carts, longer than of yore, waited, morning and evening, in the flagged courtyard of the Palais de Justice, where, with bewildering rapidity and deadly monotony, the Revolutionary Tribunal despatched to their death batches of sixty at a time.

But below the surface the city seethed and bubbled like a volcano stirring to life. Javoir's diagnosis was just. The long smouldering jealousy between the two Committees had burst at last into flame, subterranean still, but ready, at any moment, to spout forth in a fiery eruption that would inevitably overwhelm either Robespierre or his enemies.

There were mysterious movements of troops, from Paris to the frontiers, which, above all things else, preoccupied Couthon, for, even in the Utopia of him and his friends, force remained the ultimate sanction of the law. But Billaud-Varonnes, Collot d'Herbois, and Barère, who now no longer slept at home, conscious that their names were noted on Robespierre's 'little list,' played a waiting game. Methodically, secretly, they were denuding Paris of troops against the day when the cabal they were forming in the Convention should rise up and topple over the Dictator.

More than ever the city swarmed with spies. There were spies in the street, spies in the political clubs, spies in the Convention, spies in the prisons, and spies to spy on spies. The quietude of Couthon's household was banished quite. A piquet of citizens from the local Section Committee was now on guard, day and night, in the courtyard of the house in the rue Saint-Honoré, and when the *Conventionnel* went abroad an armed escort surrounded the hunched figure in the whirring, rattling chair.

More prodigious than ever was the cripple's capacity for work. He scarcely slept. He grudged the time for meals even, though, while he ate, he studied reports or scribbled down, in his crabbed, untidy hand, notes for the orations which, almost daily, he thundered from the tribune. With his bloodless face and sunken eyes he looked like a living corpse; but his energy, like his vindictiveness, was unflagging.

In this labyrinth of violence and intrigue, Hector walked miserably like a soul in torment. His first care had been to seek out Loison. She had refused to see him. It had not been easy, for Grand-Duc's spies were watching him again, and Couthon, by declaring that henceforth the secretary must sleep at the rue Saint-Honoré on a truckle-bed prepared for his use in the dining-room, had considerably restricted his chances of visiting the Impasse du Paradis.

However, on the morning of his return from Neuilly, he had been despatched by Couthon to the Conciergerie with a letter for the Citizen Fouquier. Javoir was given him as an escort, and Hector was in doubt as to whether this was to be interpreted as a measure for his safety or an indication that the *Conventionnel* had taken the humpback's advice. A furtive-looking individual detached himself from the crowded pavements as Hector, with the gendarme at his heels, emerged from under the carriageway, and thus, in a little procession of three, they traversed Paris.

Hector's instructions were to wait for an answer. But Fouquier was not in his gloomy office. The Public Accuser was fulfilling his functions in the Revolutionary Tribunal adjoining, and could not be disturbed. Hector paced the corridor for a time. Then it occurred to him that here was a heaven-sent opportunity for visiting Loison. The Impasse du Paradis was not far. Javoir was gossiping with the guards at the main entrance of the prison and the spy was doubtless hanging about in the vicinity; but both could be eluded if Hector could leave the Conciergerie by a different door.

Nothing, in the upshot, was simpler. He asked a guard if he could pass through to the Revolutionary Tribunal, the man indicated the way, and eventually, debouching from a dark passage, Hector found himself in the vestibule of the Palace overlooking the courtyard where the tumbrils stood ready in the sunshine. Boldly he crossed the yard, and, plunging into the greasy mob that lined the railings in expectation of seeing the morning batch depart, headed off in the direction of the slender spires of Notre Dame.

In ten minutes he had reached the Impasse du Paradis. He dawdled a while before entering the lane to make sure that, this time, he was not shadowed. But no one appeared, and he gained the house of the Citizen Braille without challenge, or, as

far as he could detect, remark.

He was aware of a sense of pleasurable excitement as he climbed the well-worn stair. For him that house held a terrible memory; but, on this day of days, it did not come into his mind. He was thinking of a quiet room fragrant with mignonette and of a dainty figure with dancing eyes, one finger lightly poised on scarlet lips, that had peered mischievously at him from the threshold. He felt that he had been familiar with this old house many, many years, and his excitement grew as he went up like one who, returning home after long exile, rejoices to identify each tree and hedge of his boyhood days.

He mounted swiftly to the top. He did not even pause to try Darras's door on the floor below. Outside Loison's room he paused and listened. He heard a light footfall within. He tapped, and at once the movement ceased. Once again he tapped, and thrilled to hear a young clear voice reply:

'What is it?'

'Loison,' he said softly in a voice that he could scarcely control, 'Loison, it's I, Charpentier!'

She must have been very close to the door, for he heard the little gasp she gave. Feverishly he waited for the door to swing back. But nothing happened.

'Loison,' he said again, 'open to me. It's Jean!'

Still the door remained pitilessly fast and no sound came from the room.

He tapped again.

'Loison,' he cried, 'let me in. Don't be angry, my dear! I can explain everything ...'

But no answer came. From the lane floated the melancholy cry of the groundsel-man, peddling his wares in the street: *'Vo-o-oyez mon mouroon, le beau mouroon, du mouroon pour les p'tits oiseaux!'*

Despair now overcame the young man at the door. Frantically, more fiercely than he knew, for his nerves were frayed to ribbons, he beat upon the blankly inhospitable panels.

'Let me in,' he pleaded hotly. 'I must speak to you! Loison, let me in! Answer me! Are you ill?'

The sudden creaking of a door two floors below shamed him into silence. When the sound had passed, a forlorn little whimper on the other side of the keyhole where he stood and listened caught his ear.

'My dear,' he entreated, 'don't cry. Hear me! I've been ill: I couldn't come before ...'

Now he could hear her quietly sobbing. But then, with a great jarring vibration that seemed to crowd the whole staircase with noise, the big bell of Notre Dame tolled noon. Hector sprang erect. He had been half an hour away. Already he had delayed too long. Hastily he scrawled a line upon a scrap of paper and thrust it under the door. Then he descended the stairs.

He stopped for an instant on Darras's landing, where he had killed the spy, but his hasty rapping brought no answer. The doctor was asleep or from home. With a bursting heart he went back through the sun-baked streets to the Conciergerie.

Thereafter for three long days he knew no repose. Sleeping and waking Loison's pale face, as it had stared at him out of the crowd about the steps of Saint-Roch, was his constant companion. It gazed up at him from the documents he handled, blurring the Phrygian cap of the Republic engraved at the head; it floated in the air when he looked from the window; it was with him day and night.

The work was crushing. There were swarms of callers. Almost daily now he was summoned to gather up his papers and retire to the dining-room to leave Couthon free to confer in private with his political friends. Once Robespierre came, a vivacious, vital man, reserved and imperious with a snapping black eye, and on another occasion the handsome and dapper Saint-Just, hastening from a mission to the armies on the frontier, whose open, engaging features were in such violent contrast with his perpetual talk of blood. A continual procession defiled through the white-and-gold apartment where the cripple, huddled on his couch, raved and gesticulated from dawn till dark, a gallery of types, some of *bourgeois* mien, others tatterdemalion grotesques, alike only in the strain of hysteria that ran through words and gestures

of every one.

He went to the Convention, where, day and night, the great hemicycle roared like a den of wild beasts; he escorted his employer to the dismal monkish chapel of the Jacobin Club and, lifting him from the roll-chair, bore him through the seething crowd to his seat below the three pulpits, one above the other, draped in scarlet cloth, where torches flickered eerily. He waited with a note for Fouquier in the benches reserved for Government officials at the Revolutionary Tribunal beneath the podium, where amid the clamour of the thronged galleries Dumas, the President, from his high chair glared ferociously between the drooping feathers of his plumed hat at the packed dock. And in all this shifting background of faces, brutish, frenzied, epileptic, cowed, terror-struck, despairing, one he always saw, the pale face of a young girl with serene and candid eyes.

He yearned for her with a longing that was pain. Perhaps it was pity, the pity that rose suffocatingly in his heart when he tossed at night upon his truckle-bed and endured again in memory the anguish of her sobbing. Perhaps ... but then his heart was given to Lady Betty who had spurned it. He had lost all sense of danger to himself; but his terror for Loison drove him almost frantic.

And then, one glorious July day, the whole fabric of life crumbled about him and left him dazed and almost defeated, beaten to the ground and broken-hearted.

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## CHAPTER XXIII

### IN THE REGISTRAR'S OFFICE

As oftentimes before, he had gone to the Conciergerie with a note for Fouquier on some confidential business of Couthon's. On this occasion it was later than usual and an hour past noon when, with the faithful Javoir at his side, he presented himself at the little wicket.

'The Public Accuser?' said the gendarme at the gate. '*Au greffe, citoyen!*'

This meant to say that Fouquier was at the registrar's office, where he sometimes used one of the two rooms of which *le greffe* consisted. It was that same dingy apartment, separated by a glazed partition from its fellow, where Hector, on a memorable night, had identified the friend of the Citizen Charpentier.

There was an unwonted stir about the corridors when Hector, on the rasping '*Entrez!*' that greeted his knock, passed into the Public Accuser's presence. Through the begrimed panes that formed the upper part of one wall he saw that the adjoining room was full of people. Fouquier stood between the door and the partition, restlessly picking his teeth and staring with his besotted air through the glass into the room beyond. With him was a man with a bloated face whom Hector remembered to have seen in the company at Chrétien's on the Place du Théâtre Favart.

With his toothpick the Public Accuser pointed through the glass.

'*Morbleu,*' he sneered, 'that's a resolute rascal! Mark how he jokes with the barber! I must see if he weakens before the end. I'll watch his head fall if I have to go without my dinner!'

His companion laughed loudly. Then Hector presented the letter which, not without some show of irritation at being interrupted, Fouquier sat down at the desk to read. Thus abandoned to his own devices, the young man, his interest quickened by the other's gibe, glanced through the long and shallow window that commanded a view of the adjoining room.

It was a narrow slip of a place, bare and dingy as the outer office at an attorney's. Hector had already noticed that it was full of people; a single glance at their faces told him on what dread errand they had been brought there.

They sat on benches placed a foot or so from the discoloured wall, about a score in all of men and women of different ages and stations in life. Behind them, fumbling and tugging, four solidly built young men in red caps moved briskly along, pinioning their mute and unprotesting victims with short lengths of dirty rope which they chose from a collection hung about their shoulders. Their work was supervised by a silent, self-effacing man who watched them closely from his place near the door, sometimes stepping forward to test a bond himself. He never spoke. He gave his orders by signs which his assistants appeared to understand without difficulty. They worked swiftly with quiet efficiency.

At the end of the room another red cap, with a large pair of shears, was clipping the hair away from the nape of the neck of a man who, with his hands fastened behind his back, sat on a three-legged stool placed so that his face was turned from the room. On the floor stood handy a tall wicker basket already more than half-filled with tresses of human hair, golden and brown and black and grey and white. The man with the shears, who worked with lightning dexterity, was laughing at some witticism of which the individual on the stool had seemingly just delivered himself. Hector saw his white teeth glitter in his brown face as, the hair-cutting operation at an end, he drove the point of the scissors into the other's shirt and snipped out a deep round opening so as to expose the neck.

There was a kind of ghastly unnatural primness about that pallid company as, with their hands behind them, they sat bolt upright on their benches, like a class of young ladies with backboards, and watched with dreadful fascination the toilet of the scaffold. The partition muted all sounds that rose from their midst; but some of them were weeping, and now and then a faint moan or a little fluttering sigh came to Hector's ears.

Presently there was a shuffling on the benches. The man with the shears had tapped his client jovially on the shoulder and cried barber fashion, '*À un autre!*' and a fresh candidate was thrust forward. The man on the stool stood up and turned round.

And Hector saw it was Darras.

They had shorn away part of his bushy beard and cropped the shaggy mane that had dangled about his broad shoulders so that he looked younger and less uncouth. Otherwise he was quite unchanged in his shabby old coat and his ragged, patched breeches, his mocking eyes unflinching as though they scoffed at death as they had always scoffed at life, his broad, humorous mouth wearing its habitual expression of good-tempered raillery.

As their glances met through the window, Hector felt the colour drain from his face, his throat contract, and his eyes fill with tears. It was Darras's cool and smiling courage that unmanned him more, even, than the thought that this man, who had risked so much to save him, was about to die.

Fouquier had risen from his desk and, pushing past Hector, opened a door in the partition.

'Bring that rascal in here!' he commanded, and Darras was thrust in. Fouquier's companion, who had been lounging in a corner, lurched nearer, an anticipatory smirk on his loose and mottled face.

Arms akimbo, a straw between his teeth, the Public Accuser leaned back against the desk and surveyed his victim.

'Well, my learned doctor,' he said, 'in a little while you will make the acquaintance of a colleague who can cure all ills!'

Darras smiled good-humouredly.

'Then I ask myself why *you* should not have sought out his ministrations, citizen!' he rejoined.

'I!' exclaimed Fouquier. 'I have no traitorous pestilence that needs the knife of Dr. Guillotin!'

'And yet,' said Darras drily, 'France will never be cured while she is cankered by such ulcers as you and your kind represent!'

'*Peste!*' cried Fouquier, and sprang erect. 'Is that the way to speak to patriots?'

And with his open hand he struck the doctor a stinging slap in the face.

A scarlet mark stood out on the other's wan cheek. But the smile never left his face and his eyes were mocking as before.

'The *ci-devant* Jesus was also buffeted when His hands were tied and He could not defend Himself,' Darras remarked impassively. 'But His captors, at least, were representatives of law and order, not the hirelings of anarchy, citizen!'

For a moment Fouquier looked as though he would strike him again. But he mastered himself with an effort.

'The Republic has abolished the superstitious beliefs with which you seek to drug your mind before death,' he snarled.

'Beliefs?' said Darras, and shrugged his shoulders. 'You wrong me, citizen. I go out into the *néant* in an enquiring frame of mind, just as, when a student in the dissecting-room, I made my first incision in a corpse to see whether, as the books assured me, I should find heart, lungs, and liver in their appointed place. And yet I find some wisdom in the sayings of the Nazarene. *Tiens*, if I remember rightly He spoke a phrase which would apply to you. "*Those that live by the sword,*" He said, citizen, "*shall perish by the sword!*" The day will come, Fouquier, when you will pass the same way as I!'

Into the mind of Hector Fotheringay, as he stood and listened to this odd duel of wits, came the remembrance of a great dim room and of an eager, strange young man with weary eyes and a pallid face, who cried, 'Mark what I say, Robespierre will surely fall as all men of blood like him have fallen!' Did he, did this quiet, smiling man, speak with the tongue of a seer?

Fouquier laughed discordantly.

'You, at any rate, won't be there to see it, my cockerel!' he sneered.

The man with the bloated face guffawed and spoke a foul blasphemy.

'But *he* will be late for his dinner,' he snarled, pointing at Fouquier, 'rather than miss seeing *you* die!'

Darras smiled brightly.

'It is really scarcely worth the trouble!' he remarked apologetically.

The Public Accuser thrust his face into the speaker's.

'Your turn comes last,' he muttered fiercely, 'so it is arranged, *mon beau monsieur*! With those already in the *charrettes* and these rascals in there, the tally, counting you, is forty-one this morning. Forty times you will hear the knife scream down, forty times you will hear them grunt, before you pick your way among forty headless corpses to take your place upon the plank. You have no fear of death, *dis*?'

Darras paused to reply, and when he spoke his eyes were fixed on Hector's.

'My only regret in dying,' he said slowly, 'is that I leave behind a young girl, alone and unprotected, whose faith in one she trusted has been sadly shaken. I, who have a knowledge of men, have assured her that this friend is worthy of her trust, and that, though appearances are against him to-day, he is not, he cannot be, so base as he seems. And I die happy in the certain expectation that, knowing I have been called away, he will hasten at all costs to her side!'

Proudly the gallant eyes met Hector's, and so in silence they exchanged their last farewell. But Fouquier's jackal was shouting, in the manner of a hawker of broadsheets:

'See the last will and testament of Dr. Darras, the famous physician of the Hospital of La Salpêtrière! His instruments he leaves to the celebrated surgeon, Sanson, guardian of the nation's health, his breeches to a worthy *sans-culotte*, orphan of the guillotine, his mistress to ...'

For the first time Darras displayed signs of emotion. He shook his big head restlessly and his eyes flashed anger.

'*Pour ça non!*' he declared. 'Daughter, perhaps, but mistress—no!'

A comic face under a red cap was popped in at the door.

'The carriage of Monsieur waits!' a jolly stentorian voice roared.

Fouquier and his jackal were much amused by this witticism. A glint of humour came back into Darras's eyes. He bowed ceremoniously to the Public Accuser.

'I will take the liberty of going first!' he said, and so, head erect, with merry eyes and proudly smiling lips, Dr. Darras, late of La Salpêtrière, passed through the partition door to meet his Maker.

The narrow room was in a turmoil of despairing farewells. There were shrill cries and shuddering sobs and heart-broken groans as the burly young men in the red caps drove their flock into the corridor. But Hector heard nothing. He stood like a graven image looking out through the little door by which Darras, of La Salpêtrière, had disappeared.

Suddenly he became aware that Fouquier was speaking to him. The adjoining room was empty, and through the open window overlooking the sunlit courtyard of the Palais mounted the sonorous murmur of a great crowd like the drone of the sea in a shell. And above the murmur rose the hollow rumble of wheels.

'Say to the Citizen Couthon on my behalf ...': Fouquier gave him a long verbal message. Hector had to make an effort to memorise it. His brain seemed to be oscillating, swinging to and fro between that brave and upright figure even now being borne through the streets, and Loison, abandoned and defenceless, without money and without friends, crouched on the bare boards of her little room ...

Javoir was waiting at the wicket. He had been round to the front of the Palais to see the tumbrils start, and told Hector a long story about some comic fellow in torn breeches who had made jokes as he clambered into the cart. Hector paid no heed. He was thinking that he must go to Loison at once; but first he must return to Couthon and deliver Fouquier's message which he knew to be important. Why hadn't Fouquier given him a note that Javoir might have delivered? Hector could surely have contrived a pretext to get the gendarme to take a letter in his stead. But he would never get a verbal message into the Norman's thick head. He must deliver it himself. But, that done, how could he manage to get away for an hour or two?

Two o'clock was long past, and the sun was high in the heavens as they walked slowly back through the grilling afternoon heat. The streets were like an oven, and the heaps of rubbish that bestrewed the neglected roadway reeked foully. As far as they could they kept in the shade, and so, towards the hour of three, by the Place du Carrousel and the rue de l'Échelle, gained the rue Saint-Honoré.

They had gone some hundred yards along it and were not far from Couthon's, when, suddenly, on the other side of the way, Hector espied Grand-Duc. The humpback was but a few paces ahead of them and walking in the same direction. He was accompanied by a female figure, a thin and angular apparition in sober black. To his blank dismay Hector recognized the acid and elderly forewoman of the mantle-maker's in the rue de la Loi.

It was the counter-attack.

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## CHAPTER XXIV

### IN WHICH TWO YOUNG PEOPLE MAKE AN OLD DISCOVERY

Then Hector Fotheringay knew that he had reached the end of his tether. Here before his eyes was the concrete meaning of the humpback's boast that he would bring proofs. The forewoman had been found at last. Probably she would remember him, for a young man must have been a rare visitor at the mantle-maker's; but, whether she remembered him or not, she would have no choice but to identify him to save her own skin.

Her evidence would be enough for Couthon. Too well Hector knew the suspicious mind of the *Conventionnel*; nor had he forgotten the frenzied hatred Couthon had displayed towards Loison. The game was up. He could not return to Couthon's. Henceforth, like Loison, like poor, gallant Darras, he was an outcast.

Strangely enough, he felt something like relief at the prospect. The strain of his position had become well-nigh unbearable. He could shoulder the ever-present anxiety of his assumed rôle, he could face with courage the knowledge that, in the background, industriously and methodically Grand-Duc was spinning his web to enmesh him. What wore him down and filled him with nausea, physical and mental, was the daily intimate association with these homicidal maniacs, these ghouls of blood. Surely the freedom of outlawry was preferable to intimacy with these vampires! The sense of liberty filled his being, sweet in his nostrils like a draught of mountain air.

But not yet had he won his freedom. His watch-dog had to be got rid of; moreover, any minute Grand-Duc might turn and see him. Somewhere in their wake, too, was one of those hangdog figures that always shadowed him now when he went abroad. Insensibly Hector slackened his pace until, espying the friendly awning of a small wine-shop, he slipped behind it, out of the humpback's sight when he should leave the opposite pavement to cross to Couthon's.

Hector doffed his hat, wiped his damp brow.

'My friend,' he said to Javoir, who had halted, 'I die of fatigue. I cannot take another step, I vow. I must sit down and repose myself in the cool for a little moment. Remember I have been ill and have not yet fully regained my strength. But I will not keep you from your duty. Go on to Couthon's, I beg, and should the citizen ask for me, say I am following on immediately.'

The gendarme hesitated, looking down his long nose. Then he gazed at Hector, and from him at the street swimming in the heat and from the street to the imposing array of bottles that gleamed invitingly through the gloom of the darkened shop behind.

'If the citizen be ill,' he said slowly, 'it were better I stayed with him. Maybe a drop of wine ...'

Ruminating, he gnawed his drooping mustache and longingly licked his thick lips. The tavern-keeper, who had stirred himself from his siesta among the swarming flies at the back of the shop, bustled out and wiped over a table with a grimy swab.

'*À vot' service, citoyens*,' he muttered, and paused enquiringly. Resignedly, Hector bade the man bring a pitcher of Vouvray. Swiftly, he accepted defeat—for the moment, at any rate. Javoir had checked him at his first attempt. Nor was he sanguine enough to imagine that he might yet succeed with the aid of the thin wine dispensed at the drinking-kens of the rue Saint-Honoré. Javoir, he was well aware, had the strong head of the cider-drinking Normans.

The *patron* pattered away and reappeared with an earthen jar of wine and two glasses which he set down on the table and retired. The two men drank their wine in silence, Javoir fanning himself at intervals with his tufted *bicorne*. Hector's mind was busy, and, when the pitcher was empty, he slapped his pockets hurriedly and exclaimed:

'My good Javoir, I must, after all, trouble you to precede me to Couthon's. I find I have come out without my money. Fetch me my purse, I pray you. You will find it in the pocket of my blue coat that lies across the bed in the *salle à manger*. I will stay here as a pledge to the *patron* until you come back.'

Now, the Normans are a near and grasping race, as Hector knew. The alternative which his words presented to the gendarme's mind would, he was confident, so appall his companion that, in a contest between his sense of thrift and his sense of duty, the former must inevitably win. But he had overlooked the fact that in all human beings there is an

unknown quantity, ever ready to obtrude itself and upset the most nicely balanced equations.

The gendarme cast Hector a slow look, the doubtful, mustering glance of the horse-dealer who receives a first bid. Irresolutely, he stood up and sat down again. Then, after a protracted period of thought, with the utmost deliberation he thrust a red hand into his breeches pocket. Hector's heart sank.

'As for that, citizen,' Javoir remarked, staring hard at his companion, 'I believe you to be an honest man. I will settle the shot and you shall repay me when, presently, we go home.'

He produced a battered leather purse.

'A measure of Vouvray? 'Tis fourteen livres,' he said. And he pounded the earthen pitcher on the table to call the host.

Check again! Hector felt the cold perspiration break out on his brow. They called the Normans tenacious; but this man was a very leech. The young man pushed back his chair and gazed warily round the awning. There was no sign now of Grand-Duc in the street. The rue Saint-Honoré was deserted, and the shadow who erstwhile had dogged their steps was no longer to be seen. Javoir kept hammering on the table, but the tavern-keeper did not appear. A last wild hope flickered up in Hector's breast.

'You are a good fellow, Javoir,' said the Citizen Charpentier, 'and I shall not fail to settle our debt. But where is this *animal* of a *patron*? He sleeps, no doubt. Time presses and we must return home. Go in, my good Javoir, and pay this man what we owe!'

So saying he stepped out into the brilliant sunshine of the street and stood an instant as though waiting for his escort. Still the tavern-keeper did not come. Unsuspectingly the gendarme got up and entered the shop, turning his back on the street. In that moment Hector darted off to the left.

He took the first turning that presented itself, running as he had never run before. Fortunately, the streets were almost empty; for in that great heat as many Parisians as were able remained within doors during the midday hours. But Hector was reckless now. He cared little what the rare passers-by thought of this odd young man who went careering along with the sweat pouring down his face and his stockings falling about his dusty shoes. His sole idea was to outdistance pursuit—and to find Loison.

She would still be at the Impasse du Paradis, he thought. Darras had told him as clearly as might be that the girl was yet at liberty. It seemed, therefore, as if Darras had been arrested away from home; otherwise, to have mentioned her name might have gravely compromised her, since her friendship with the doctor was probably known in the house.

Not until he found himself beneath the leafy chestnut trees of the Boulevards did Hector drop into a walk. Apparently, he had got clean away. The gendarme must have assumed that his companion had gone on to Couthon's without waiting for him and had followed him thither without raising the alarm. The young man followed the line of the Boulevards until he saw the high pylon of the Porte Saint-Martin rising above the green trees. Then he plunged down the narrow and squalid rue de la Lune and, through the network of streets that lay between the Fishmarket and the Tanners' Hall, gained the Marché des Innocents and so the quays. As the bell of Notre Dame was striking four, he entered the old house of the Impasse du Paradis.

A hand-cart piled with mean furniture stood at the door, and before him a red-and-white mattress mounted the dirty stairs mysteriously above two solid stockinged legs. The door of Darras's old apartment stood wide giving a glimpse of a huddle of furniture on the floor of the studio. Though the doctor had but died that afternoon, already his apartment had a new tenant. Truly the span between life and death was short in those days of revolution!

Loison stood on the landing before the open door of her room, her small hands resting on the hand-rail of the stairs, immobile, inert. She was dazed and listless like one who has waited long. Her eyes were fixed on the well of the staircase, and Hector had to touch her arm before she perceived him. Then she looked at him blankly.

'Where's Darras?' she whispered like a frightened child. 'Why hasn't Darras come back?'

Very gently Hector led her into her little room. She followed unresisting. He closed the door. It was stifling up there under the tiles. The stagnant air that came in through the open window was hot like the breath from a furnace. He pulled forward one of her two chairs and she sat down. The expression of absolute despair on her face seared the young man's

heart. The pity, the great overwhelming pity, he felt for her spoke so clearly from his eyes that, when she turned her head and looked at him, she read the tidings he had not the heart to speak. Slowly her head drooped forward on her breast and she was shaken by a torrent of passionate weeping.

He stood aside and left her to her grief. Tears, he told himself, were better than her stony despair. After a spell, she lifted her face, her eyes lifeless through a mist of tears, the tragic mask of the Mater Dolorosa.

'He went out to buy food,' she said. 'Since the night before last I have waited and he has not come back. When they arrived to take possession of his room, I feared ... I feared the worst.'

She looked at him with painful intensity.

'When ... when was it?'

'This afternoon. He went to his death smiling like a brave man would. And his last thoughts were of you.'

Again the tears fell fast; but she was calmer now. And presently she drew out a little square of linen and dried her eyes. She stood up and with perfect dignity held out her little hand.

'I thank you, M'sieu Jean, for coming to tell me,' she said. 'There was grave danger in what you have done and, believe me, I am grateful. Good-bye, my friend, and *bonne chance*!'

He took her hand, but retained it in his.

'Would you send me away, Loison?' he asked.

With face averted, she nodded.

'I am a danger to all my friends,' she said in a low voice. 'In your position you cannot afford to know me. The spies of the Jacobins are everywhere, and you, too, would finish at the scaffold.'

With a sudden impulse she plucked her hand away.

'I implored you before to let us part,' she cried tensely. 'You have your life to live and I would not drag you down.'

He did not seek to recapture her hand.

'Do you think I would abandon you like this after you saved my life?' he exclaimed passionately. 'Darras's last words to me were to commend you to my care. Can you believe I would betray a trust like that?'

'I don't want your pity,' she rejoined with a little catch in her voice.

'Loison,'—he caught her arm and brought her round to face him—'you do me wrong in thinking I abandoned you. Did you not have my note? I was attacked by footpads and for six days I lay unconscious. I should have kept my word else to visit you again!'

She turned her head away and nodded. Her fingers plucked a fold in her dress.

'I wronged you in my thoughts,' she said in a low voice, 'and I ask your pardon, my friend. You saved me from Couthon, you gave me food when I was starving, and you clothed me when I went in rags ...'

'I had no thought of that!' the young man expostulated.

'I know, I know!' she returned gently, and smiled. 'But it makes us quits, my friend, and so we can part!'

She held out her hand. But he brushed it aside and caught her by the shoulders.

'Listen to me!' he cried. 'It was no sense of obligation brought me here, either to you or to Darras. I came because ... because ... Oh, don't you understand?'

She was looking at him now, her lips parted, her bosom heaving quickly under the lace *fichu*. But she did not reply. And desperately, passionately, he went on:

'Ever since that first evening at Engstrom's I have thought of you. Night and day you have dwelt in my mind. I'm ... I'm not what I seem, Loison. One false step in all these weeks since first we met would have sent me straight to the guillotine. But what has haunted me, waking and sleeping, has been *your* danger, the realisation that you were alone in Paris unprotected and that I was powerless to seek you out and care for you. And now that I am free I have come straight to you. Ah, Loison, tell me that you knew I would come!'

Her face was very close to his now and he saw a shimmer of colour stain the wan cheeks.

'That ... that other woman with whom you were driving that day,' she murmured. 'Did you say these things to her, too?'

He stared at her in astonishment. He had entirely forgotten about the fond and blonde Zouzou.

'My dear,' he cried, 'that woman was brought to brand me as an impostor. She was the friend of the man whom I am impersonating. But instead of repudiating me, faith, through a womanly caprice, she claimed me as her lover and carried me off to the country for a week! I was in her power, and could not free myself at once, for she could have denounced me. She's a good wench, but she's nothing to me. You don't think I'm in love with *her*, do you?'

One little hand stole out and toyed with his neckcloth. The tears welled up in her eyes.

'*J'ai été bien malheureuse, allez!*' she whispered.

He drew her to him. Slowly her arms went about his neck.

'Loison!' he murmured.

She raised her eyes to his with love shining through the tears.

'What is your real name, *dis*?' she asked.

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## CHAPTER XXV

### THE DRAUGHT-PLAYERS

Night was falling over the Seine. The last fires of sunset had been quenched and the brilliant colours that trailed behind had paled to a wan and lurid light. The day yet lingered in the sky reluctantly, as though jealous of the proud radiance of the yellow half-moon that, propped on its side, a shining star below it like a spur, rode in the wide arc of heaven.

Across the Pont Neuf the vast pile of the Old Louvre was black and sombre, but all around it and on the bridge lights were beginning to twinkle. In the foreground the red lanthorns of a string of hay barges cast a blood-red reflection on the water, and at the corner of the quay, where it made an angle with the rue Dauphin, a yellow lamp threw a dim ray of light over the terrace of the Café Conti.

It was pleasant sitting outside the café on this warm July night. A breath of freshness came from the river, bearing with it the intoxicating perfume of the old limes, bordering the bank. From the little tables set beneath the striped awning came the gentle murmur of voices, and, now and then, the jar of a glass on marble, the click of dominoes or the rattle of the dice on the backgammon board.

At the end of the terrace, at a table placed on the edge of the sidewalk below the flap of the awning, two men sat and played Polish draughts. They were an ill-assorted pair. The one, with a grizzled head and hard-bitten, battered face, wore a shabby military uniform, the facings discoloured, the felt worn and stained. A touch of swagger, the clay pipe he smoked, and his general out-at-elbows appearance imbued him with the air of a soldier of fortune. His companion was a little fellow, nervous and alert, with a pursed-up mouth and bright gimlet eyes and a forehead deeply lined. He was certainly not a soldier; but he might have been a follower of any settled and unexciting calling from a tax-gatherer to a country apothecary or a horse-leech. His whole attention was concentrated on the game. His companion, on the contrary, as he puffed his clay, kept looking round the terrace as though he were expecting some one.

'I huff you, Arthur,' said the little man, his hand on a piece. '*Sapristi*, you must have seen it!'

'Nine o'clock past,' remarked his companion moodily in a French that had a little singing lilt to it. 'He'll not come to-night either, I'm thinking, Richard!'

The little man advanced his foot and gently pressed his companion's beneath the table.

'Look round presently,' he said in a conversational tone of voice as he moved his piece. 'I think it might be our man.'

The soldier withdrew his pipe from his lips and, turning, tapped out the dottle against the table at his back. As he swung round to the draught-board once more, he casually lifted his eyes. Two tables away an unkempt, black-bearded man was sitting. At his elbow was a cup of wine, and before him, spread out on the table, was the *Moniteur*, which, chin propped on hand, he was reading. His face was very thin and its pallor was accentuated by his black scrub of beard. His hair, jet-black and curly, fell thick about his shoulders. But, under his well-worn grey coat, his form was lissom and well-knit, and there was an elasticity about his movements that suggested he was younger than his shaggy appearance indicated.

A shadow fell athwart the draught-board. A waiter was gathering up the empty flask that stood between the two men.

'The same again, Jules,' said the soldier.

'*C'est bien*,' replied the waiter softly, and added in the same tone: 'that is the young man, reading the newspaper behind you!'

He whisked up the empty flagon and pattered off.

'Put up your filthy pipe, Arthur,' the little man suddenly remarked in clear tones, 'and take a pinch of snuff!'

He whisked out a snuff-box, flicking up the lid with his thumb, and extended it to his companion. But his eyes were riveted on the black-bearded stranger behind them. The latter, immersed in his reading, paid no heed. Then, with a jerk of the wrist, the little man sent the snuff-box flying. It fell to the ground between the draught-players and the table behind.

The little man leaned over the back of his chair.

'Citizen,' he called; and, seeing that the other did not look up from his newspaper, called again, 'hé, citizen!'

And now the stranger raised his eyes. They were hollow with dark rings about them and his gaze was mournful and suspicious.

'I have dropped my snuff-box,' remarked the little man affably. 'Might I trouble you? That's it at your foot!'

The stranger lowered his eyes. A scarlet snuff-box lay half-open at his feet, its contents gushing out on the sawdust of the terrace. He flashed a mustering glance at the two men watching him, then bent and gathered up the box.

'Won't you do me the favour...?' invited the little man with a gesture towards the *tabatière*.

The stranger bowed.

'Gladly, citizen,' he answered, 'for *my* red snuff-box is lost.'

And with elegance he took a pinch of the brown *rappée* and conveyed it to his nose. Then he rose and, with a bow, handed the snuff-box to its owner.

'Jules will instruct you what to do,' said the latter. 'Wait for Jules!'

He spoke between his teeth so that his lips scarce seemed to move as, with a friendly nod, he took the box and slipped it in his pocket.

'Come, Arthur,' he said to his companion, 'we will pass the time of day with *la patronne* before we go to our beds. Jules shall serve us our wine within.'

The stranger returned to his newspaper, and arm-in-arm the two men passed inside. Gradually the café began to empty. Parisians went early to their homes in those days; for after 11 P.M. the flying patrols of the sections examined all citizens' cards, a practice that had been much abused and had led to complaints at the Convention. One after another figures drifted out into the night and melted into the purple shadows of the lime trees fringing the quay. At last, looking up, the stranger discovered that the terrace was deserted save for himself. But then at the door of the café, the waiter Jules appeared and beckoned.

'Take the door that faces you through the café,' he whispered, when the stranger stood beside him; 'descend by the stairs to the cellar and follow the passage until you come to a door. Knock on it five times, three knocks, and then two! *C'est entendu? Allez!*'

Within the tavern all the lights were extinguished now save one, an oil-lamp that flared on the counter. The chairs were piled on the tables, and a woman, with her skirts pinned up, was swabbing the floor. The stranger passed through the café, and, after descending the narrow stair, groped his way along a pitch-dark passage until he felt his way impeded by a door. He knocked as directed and the door immediately swung back. The little man stood there.

'Follow me!' he said briefly, and led the way across a coal-cellar, dimly lit by a grating from the street, and through a door along a passage which ended in another door. This he opened in turn and they found themselves out under the stars on the lower part of the quay a few yards from the water's edge. A barge lay along-side, a long plank stretched from her deck to the shore. The little man glanced about him, then tiptoed swiftly across the plank. His companion followed, and between them they drew in the plank and deposited it on the deck. The little man whipped aside a screen of canvas and showed half a dozen steps that went down to a little black hole of a cabin. Here at a table beside a smoky lamp the grey-headed officer was sitting. The little man motioned to the stranger to go down and waited to pull the curtain across behind them before joining the others in the cuddy.

'For more than a week,' began the little man, addressing their bearded visitor, 'you have frequented the café, Jules tells us. Who are you, my friend, and whom do you seek?' His gimlet eyes bored into the other's face. But the newcomer did not flinch.

'I am the friend of all oppressed,' he answered stoutly.

The officer and his friend exchanged a glance. They drew to one side and conversed in whispers. Presently the man in uniform broke away. 'D'ye think now ...' he began in English. His companion sought to restrain him. But he motioned him

away with his hand.

'Ah, Richard,' he said—his accent was broadly Irish—"tis as good a way as anny to test him. An' it's two to one, we are, below here, and ne'er a sowl to hear us. Let our friend rimimber that and moind his answers! D'ye think ye could talk English for a spell?" he asked, turning to the stranger.

'Most gladly if at last we may speak straightly and not in riddles!' that individual replied in English with a heartiness that contrasted strongly with his former attitude of restraint. 'Either of you gentlemen know Mr. Gray?'

'That depends,' observed the little man cautiously.

'Arrah, don't moind him and his pernickety ways!' the Irishman broke in. From his waist-belt he pulled out a pistol, cocked it, and laid it on the table within grasp of his great hairy hand. 'I'll tell you I do know that same Mr. Gray,' he went on. 'And now—who the divil are *you*?'

The stranger smiled and showed his clean white teeth. The smile lit up his face and made him suddenly seem much younger.

'Mr. Gray sent me to meet Engstrom,' said he simply. 'But I arrived too late!'

The Irishman clapped his hands together.

'For the love o' Mary, 'tis the missin' young man from London! By the hokey, an' wasn't we sart'in, Richard here an' meself, that your bones was long since bleachin' in the pit o' Picpus!'

With formal dignity he bared his grizzled head.

'Permit me, sir,' he said, 'to present me friend, Mr. Richard Savory, of London, commonly known, for raysons ye will apprayciate, as the Citizen Savarin, forwarding agent of this city.'

The little man rose and bowed ceremoniously.

'For meself,' the officer added, 'I am Arthur O'Farrell, of Gertnamona, in the barony of Clontarf, sometime Major in the Royal Regiment, but now of the artillery of the Armies of the Republic, attached to the Department of War. 'Tis in mighty quayre company ye find me, sir; but there! a man must live, and to a soldier it matters not greatly who gives the order. Fortune, I've heard tell, makes strange bedfellows, but I niver thought that the grandson of Count O'Farrell, who died for King Louis at Fontenoy, would share a pallet with this ould harridan, the Republic! An' now, sir, to whom have I th' advantage of addressin' meself?'

The stranger inclined himself gracefully.

'Mr. Savory, Major O'Farrell, your servant, sirs. My name is Hector Fotheringay, Lieutenant and Captain, of His Majesty's Third Foot Guards!'

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Yes, it was Hector Fotheringay, this tattered vagabond, whom, in his old life, the very dogs would have chased away from the barrack-gate. Sometimes, as he slunk at night through the quiet streets, he would stop beneath a lamp before a shop-window, and, surveying the shaggy wretch who looked at him out of the diamond-pane, ask himself if this was truly the same trim gallant, who, but a few weeks since, in his brave scarlet-and-gold, had slow-marched the colour out of the courtyard of Saint-James's to the strains of the old Brandenburg march? Was this harassed phantom, bearded like a Barbary corsair, the elegant and disdainful coxcomb who had yawned his idle way through the well-ordered life of rich and luxurious Saint James's? Could it be that, under that bristling beard, that filthy neckcloth, that dusty, threadbare coat, was the same young Guardsman whose arrogant expression—yes, *arrogance* was the word Cousin Betty had used—the old mirror at Buttrell's used to reflect?

He was learning his lesson now—every day a fresh one. Each morning, a basket on his arm, he would start out, he who, before, had ordered his very gloves from humble tradesmen bidden to his bedside—early, so as to get a good place in the queue at the baker's or, twice weekly when the meat ration was issued, at the butcher's. The shops were open only in

the daylight hours, of course, and every moment he spent abroad in the daytime was, he knew, fraught with the utmost peril. Only now did he realise what an inestimable boon Couthon's powerful influence had been to him. In the quarter of the rue Saint-Honoré he had been known and deferred to as the secretary of the all-puissant *Conventionnel*; but here, in this strange neighbourhood, he was a cipher, forced to share his lot with the common herd—and a bitter lot it was.

He dared not apply for ration-cards in his own name or Loison's. For his purchases he used a stock of tickets that Darras had from some odd acquaintance procured for the girl and himself in the name of Poteau, Hippolyte, Locksmith, and Spouse. There were means of supplementing the rations. Mysterious pedlars flitted down the lane at night with a small stock of soap, precious rarity, or butter, even harder to come by, and the like, and there were certain shops where, at back entrances, after nightfall, the initiated might, at a price, buy a scrag-end of mutton, a skinny fowl or a small piece of cheese. These addresses were whispered from mouth to mouth in the queues during the long hours when they stood huddled together, men, women, and children, waiting for the distribution to begin.

In those hungry, ill-tempered mobs Hector Fotheringay learnt something of the life of the very poor, their helplessness towards extortion and robbery, their little prides, their kindness to small children, their infinite charity to one another, their awe-inspiring, unrestrained gusts of collective passion, or brutality or cowardice, their suspicion of authority, their hatred of the police. Day after day, the whole cosmorama of life among the submerged was unrolled in those long and restless queues, and there was often wonder as well as compassion in Hector's eyes when he returned to Loison.

Her garret was now their home. He, more far-seeing than the girl in her ignorance, had wished to seek out a lodging close at hand for himself. But she had cried out at the idea, and, clinging to him, had begged him not to leave her again. To find a room he must procure a *billet de logement* at the local Section headquarters, where by this time the name of Jean-François Charpentier must certainly figure on the long list of those proscribed by the dread Committee of Public Safety. He could not gainsay the truth of her warning. And so he stayed.

In revolutionary Paris there were hundreds, perhaps thousands, of unhappy people like themselves, men and women, mere children often, driven by an inexorable fate to share a hovel in an irregular union, sometimes sentimental—for of misery shared in common love is often born—sometimes economic, sometimes platonic. That first night, when on them, as they sat hand in hand in the window, darkness fell, he had packed her off to bed behind the curtain, taking for himself only a blanket wherewith he had made his bed upon the floor across the door. The arrangement held good, and so their relations shaped themselves into a loving companionship and nothing more. But sometimes at night, as he lay sleepless in that airless room, he smiled to himself to think how his friends of the old days, the companions of his frolics about the town, would have shrugged their shoulders incredulously at the symbol of that drawn curtain.

In their wretched life Loison was his only solace. When his spirits flagged, he found moral support in her uncomplaining acceptance of their misery. She had the Frenchwoman's divine genius of companionship, and, if she shared his incessant anxiety about their black future, deepened by the progressive dwindling of their slender stock of money, she never showed it.

He did the heavy work. Every day he descended to the pump in the yard and fetched water. The shortage of soap was his greatest trial, for he had the Guardsman's hatred of dirt; and the meagre supply he was able to procure rarely sufficed for more than to enable them to wash their faces and hands. So he swabbed down the floor each morning without soap and cleaned and lit the little stove on which Loison prepared their food.

For clothes, he, the beau, who had presses full of suits and uniforms at Buttrell's, had only the garments in which he stood. His thin suit soon began to show traces of his work, and he did not possess even a brush to remove the dust of the street. He would have bought at least a shirt to give him a change of body linen, but the price was prohibitive. So one morning the young Guardsman buttoned his coat up to his chin and sallied forth shirtless while Loison washed his only shirt.

Loison was always cheerful. Only when he went out to the queues did she grow pensive. But his return found her radiant, though the heat of their room was stifling and she had spent the morning cooking over the stove.

Each day he found new delights in her. Only she could banish the unutterable squalor of their daily life. When the warm dusk was dropping over the panting streets, and a little air from the river stirred the mignonette blossoms at the window, was their favourite hour. Then they would sit and gaze out over the swarming traffic of the Pont Neuf to the majestic pile of the Louvre and talk.



He had unbosomed himself to her. She had been enthralled to find that he was an Englishman, fascinated with a touch of fright like a child that sees an elephant for the first time. She made him tell her about London and the fogs and that resplendent personage, of whom her old Nana used to read to her from a book, 'le lor' Maire.' And she, in her turn, would tell him little anecdotes of her childhood, of a wild-boar hunt at her father's château, of how she had seen the Comte d'Artois, the King's brother, driving through Clermont in a gold carriage with lackeys with wands running beside. Or she would croon to him little songs of her childhood, like '*Rosette à l'âge de quinze ans*' and '*Où vas-tu, bergère?*'

At their attic window, as the darkness deepened and the stars came out above the unhappy city, Hector would feel again that sense of liberty that first had come to him as, from the Deal coach, he had seen the dawn redden the sky. It seemed as though another man were looking back down the vista of the past at a shadowy figure in scarlet-and-gold marching behind a band. In these moments he realised that the old Hector Fotheringay was dead and that, however brief the span of life accorded to the new might be, he at least had lived his little hour.

But when he thought of Loison, he felt his courage melt.

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## CHAPTER XXVI

### IN WHICH HECTOR SENDS A MESSAGE AND RECEIVES ONE

And then, while Paris slept and the slapping of the water against the broad sides of the barge was the only sound, Hector told the draught-players of the Café Conti the adventures of the Citizen Charpentier. As a precaution they lowered the lamp to a pin-point, and in the dim light they squatted on stools about the little table of the cuddy, O'Farrell, sprawling back, puffing at his eternal pipe, Savory with his head cocked forward like an intelligent terrier, his beady eyes fixed on the speaker's face. In silence he heard the young man's tale; but when Hector began to describe his life at Couthon's, the sheaves of despatches, the throngs of visitors, and the *Conventionnel's* doubts and fears about the political situation, the little man abandoned all his usual restraint.

"Fore God," he cried, 'you dealt with Couthon's private correspondence, you say? You saw and spoke with Robespierre; you read Saint-Just's reports from the armies; you have definite information about this project of Barère's to strip the Provisional Government of troops? Man, it's prodigious! This is news from the fountain-head, indeed! Tst, tst, tst, that we had met before! But alas, we knew not your name; for Engstrom had kept it to himself. And for weeks after his arrest—a fine fellow, that, a noble fellow, Mr. Fotheringay, Maxwell he was rightly called, an English wine-exporter of Bordeaux, ruined by the war—the Café Conti was under observation and we could no longer frequent it. 'Tis but a week since Jules passed us word that the coast was clear.'

He dipped a groping hand into the tails of his maroon-coloured coat and laboriously drew forth a folded copy of the *Moniteur*. He opened it wide and, laying the paper down upon the table, proceeded methodically to smooth out the creases. Then from an inner pocket he produced an ink-horn, tightly corked, and a quill pen.

'And now to work!' he cried. 'There's no time to be lost. At five o'clock this morning an express leaves the Messageries for London and the mail shall carry important tidings for a good friend of ours at home. Come, Mr. Fotheringay, have the goodness to give me a lead and between us we shall make shift to set down your news.'

He uncorked his ink-horn as he spoke and paused, biting the end of his quill. After a short reflection he settled down over the newspaper and, dipping his pen into the phial, commenced to write between the close-set lines of print. Hector, who was watching him, saw that the phial contained an almost colourless fluid and that Savory's tiny and exquisitely neat characters faded from view almost as soon as they were penned.

'Paris,' the little man droned and wrote, 'this 25th of July, 1794, by the Revolutionary Calendar, 7 Thermidor, Year Two. General review of the situation ...'

For two hours or more, until the grey light of the coming day pierced the coarse chinks of the canvas curtain at the head of the cabin stair, the spluttering quill scratched over the rough paper. Savory was a merciless questioner with a gift of intuition swift and direct as a dagger-thrust. His mind was a veritable encyclopædia of information about the Revolution, its leaders and its tendencies. Hector marvelled to see how, in plain, lucid English, he drew a faithful picture of the French catastrophe and whither it was heading. This agile brain leapt to conclusions which the young man from his experience recognised to be exact, but at which, in his ignorance, he had never before arrived; these adroit questions inexorably discarded the trivial, but hunted down and pounced upon the salient facts.

At length the report was done. The newspaper was folded flat in a sheet of foolscap, sealed up with wafers which Mr. Savory produced from a little comfit-box and addressed in the small, neat hand to:

'Mr. Jno. Smithers,  
Corn-Merchant,  
At Dover.  
Opposite the Post-Office.'

This done, the little man put up his writing-materials, yawned discreetly and stretched himself.

'Mr. Savory,' said Hector then, 'if you have not a courier for this report, I fain would take it myself!'

The little man cocked an eye at O'Farrell across the table and laughed drily.

'The Citizen Charpentier would scarcely get as far as the office for the Calais Diligence,' he remarked.

'I would not travel under that name,' Hector urged earnestly. 'Have you no other papers I could use?'

This time it was O'Farrell who laughed. He removed his pipe from his mouth and chuckled softly.

'There's upwards of thirty uv us workin' on this lay,' he announced, 'an' ne'er a wan has a chance uv lavin' the city at all! They've got Paris bottled up that tight, so help me God, ye wouldn't get a bodkin past the barrier widout a direct order from the Committee uv Public Safety!'

He grunted and returned to his pipe.

'I do not ask for myself,' the young man pleaded, 'but there is a girl, a friend of Engstrom's, that is dependent on me. She is as compromised as I and wholly on my account. There is a moral duty upon me, gentlemen, to save her from the guillotine. For three weeks now I have lain in hiding in her garret. Our money is almost gone. In a little while we must choose between starvation—or the scaffold!'

His voice shook. In the harsh light of dawn his face looked drawn and haggard.

Savory passed his hand over his thin locks.

'Mr. Fotheringay,' he said in his dry, formal way, 'it is with us all but a question of time. If this government of monsters endure, scarce one of us can survive. This is at least the tenth secret meeting-place that the Major and I have contrived within two months, but who knows whether to-morrow, to-night even, a spy may not denounce us to the Committee—*et puis, bonsoir!* To seek to leave the city, as the Major says, is madness. It is only thanks to the Committee that we can send our reports to England at all. For this we are indebted to a friend of the Major, the secret courier who travels weekly to London with bundles of this pernicious revolutionary literature for distribution at home among the poor dupes of Tom Mann and Doctor Priestley. As for money, our funds—I won't conceal it from you—are low and are but irregularly replenished. 'Twill cost me ten thousand livres presently to grease the palm of this scoundrel of a courier and that will all but empty my purse. But if you will pass this way again to-night I will gladly be your banker, Mr. Fotheringay, at least to the extent that shall serve to keep the wolf from the door.'

He glanced up the cuddy steps.

'Morning is on us and I must away to the yard of the Messageries. Your pardon, Mr. Fotheringay, for having kept you from your bed. It is our wont to leave singly at an interval of five minutes. With your permission I will go first, you shall follow, and the Major, who is well-favoured in the eyes of *la patronne* of the Café Conti, may retire at his convenience by the way we came, through the cellars of the house. It will be better for you and me to leave by the quays. Mr. Fotheringay, your servant, sir. We shall see you this evening!'

Precise and formal, as imperturbable as a merchant walking on 'Change, Mr. Savory passed out into the coloured light of dawn.

'A hard file,' commented the Major, and, standing up, blew out the lamp, 'but honest as God's own daylight. An' stout-hearted! 'Tis not a man at all, begor, 'tis a lion he is! But he's a howly terror for dooty! "The sarvice of Mr. Gray before all else" is his motto.'

He looked round at Hector.

'I'm tellin' you this the way you won't think him unsympathetic, ye understand? 'Twixt you an' me an' the little ass-cart, Mr. Fotheringay, the situation's well-nigh des'prit—des'prit's the worrud. They're rakin' the city through, an' I wouldn't give a *Reichsthaler* for the chances uv e'er a wan uv us!'

With which cheering opinion, delivered with the utmost good-humour, the Irishman held out his hand.

'Good luck to ye, Mr. Fotheringay,' said he. 'Tis a notable sarvice ye've rendered and Mr. Gray is not the wan to forget it. I wish ye good-day! Ye'll find us on the terrace this evening'—paused and added humorously, 'always barrin' accidents!'

Then, noticing the young man's dejected air, he added quickly:

'Savory will do what he can. Ye may trust Savory!'

They shook hands, and Hector went up into the morning freshness. He was in the depths of despair. The hopes which the sight of the red snuff-box had kindled into flame were now finally quenched. His visit to the Café Conti had been his last throw, a gambler's chance, and when Jules, the waiter, in reply to his cautious soundings, had hinted that the scarlet *tabatière* was not unknown amongst the frequenters of the café his spirits had shot madly up. For a week he had haunted the terrace on the chance of this meeting. Now that it had come, he was only to discover that Engstrom's successors were powerless, or practically powerless, to help him. Again he found himself thrown back upon his own resources; but he realised that these were now at an end.

Savory's money might stave off the inevitable crisis for a spell; but their ultimate fate was certain. Already the neighbours in the house were beginning to gossip; Braille, the landlord, though his rent was faithfully paid, was forbiddingly dour when they met; and Hector did not relish the way in which the tenant below, a fanatical revolutionary from the provinces who had taken Darras's apartment, mustered him as they passed on the stairs. Unless they could leave the Impasse du Paradis, denunciation was certain—he could feel the atmosphere of the house thick with suspicion—but where could they find another refuge?

He hastened on his homeward way, for he knew that Loison would be frightened to death at his protracted absence. Their compact was that never, on any pretext, should she leave the house; but he was beset by the constant fear lest her anxiety for his safety should tempt her, as had happened on the day when he had seen her outside Saint-Roch, to sally forth in quest of him. He had quitted her as soon as darkness fell on the previous evening, promising to be back before midnight. He prayed God that she had fallen asleep before she had marked his absence and that she would not discover it until she awoke to the morning light; for ere the sun had fully risen he counted to be within doors.

Early though it was, the rue de la Cruche Cassée was astir as he hurried down it. Housewives, girt up with sackcloth aprons, were shaking mats at doors and windows, and outside the dairy the head of the queue was already beginning to form. The air was full of cheerful sounds, the clack of voices, the barking of dogs, the rattle of pails, the clatter of wheels, and to the nostrils rose the odour of wood-fires.

As Hector swung round the corner of the street to enter the Impasse du Paradis, he felt a tug at his coat-tails. A diminutive urchin with a crutch stood there, clasping to his frail and wasted body a tin pannikin full of broken scraps of food.

Hector smiled down upon the pinched and hungry face.

'*Tiens*, Armand,' he said, patting the child's close-cropped head, 'hast thou been out thus early buying the dinner for thy *maman*?'

It was the small son of a widow who lived in their house, the Citizeness Blaise, that selfsame woman of whom, on the memorable occasion of his first visit to Loison, Hector had enquired for Darras's apartment and had had the door slammed in his face. She was pitifully poor, always hovering on the brink of starvation, earning a few sols a day for herself and her ailing, rickety boy by a little washing and a little mending for the neighbours. Armand was a docile and affectionate child, and Loison and he were firm friends. More out of compassion for him than anything else, for the mother was an embittered, harassed woman, Loison gave them from time to time such scraps of food as she could spare.

The child did not answer Hector's question, but, loosening his little hand from the crutch, held out a scrap of paper, his large, solemn eyes fixed on Hector's face. With a sudden sense of foreboding Hector took the fragment—it was a piece of coarse wrapping-paper—and unfolded it.

Scrawled in ink, in a French so ungrammatical, so fantastically phonetic in spelling as would have baffled any one who had not had the advantage of handling the private correspondence of the Citizen Couthon, Hector read this message:

'Don't go home. They have taken Loison.'

It was signed 'Femme Blaise.'

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## CHAPTER XXVII

### THE FORTY-EIGHTH

The street went black about him. His anguish must have shown itself distorting his face, for the child gave a cry of fear and, whipping round, made off headlong down the lane, his crutch tapping briskly on the cobbles. The wisp of rough paper crushed in his hand, the young man closed his eyes in agony while all around him, heedless of his pain, the busy life of the city revolved. The hurrying throngs, the slow, rumbling carts, the hoarse, sad cries of the street-sellers, as, hand to mouth, they backed sideways along the street with upward glances to right and left at the tall old houses, mocked at his grief. The very sun that threw its golden shafts across the opalescent sky behind the red-tiled roofs to him was as a blasphemy. Loison was taken, and he—O God!—he was at liberty.

The temptation to push on and climb the well-known stair, to dull the edge of his grief by looking once more on the scene of their misery and their happiness, was overwhelming. But it would serve nothing. They were watching the room to seize him when he should return—the woman Blaise's note had said as much; even where he stood, at the head of the alley, he was in danger.

He slipped away into the crowds of the rue de la Cruche Cassée, his mind in a whirl. His awful sense of helplessness numbed him. To save Loison he would venture anything. But what could he *do*? If only he could have hurled himself, unarmed as he was, into the fray and plucked her with his bare hands from the grasp of her captors! But no men of flesh and blood confronted him. He was face to face with a system, a vast, impersonal machine, ponderous, relentless, irresistible, that swallowed up its victims like those dragons of old that claimed their maiden tribute. He thought of the silent efficiency of the red-capped aides in the registrar's office, of that quiet man testing the thongs, and he shuddered.

If he could but avoid arrest, he might yet save her. It was a chance in a thousand, nay, in a million. There was but one quarter to which he could turn for help—to Savory. He would confront that machine-like man, break down his iron reserve, inject by force some loving-kindness into those chilled arteries and compel him—aye, by threat of denunciation, if needs be—to snatch this girl from death. But he could not see Savory until nightfall: why had he not demanded his address against an emergency such as this? Twelve, nay, more, fifteen hours, to pass in maddening, heartbreaking anxiety!

The Revolutionary Tribunal met at ten each day. If she were for immediate trial, she would be conveyed to the Conciergerie, to the dreaded common prison, the foul and pestilential *Souricière*, the mouse-trap, and taken into the Tribunal in the adjoining Palais de Justice for the morning session. He wandered aimlessly about the streets until that hour, and then joined the pushing rabble that swarmed about the entrance to the public seats of the Tribunal. All through the sweltering heat of the morning he sat among the dregs of revolutionary Paris, cheek by jowl with cut-purses and prostitutes who shrieked filthy abuse at the dock.

The court-room and its precincts were peppered with spies; but Hector knew no sense of danger. Perhaps his ragged beard was an effectual disguise even against the piercing glances of Fouquier, who addressed his brief oratory mainly to the public; perhaps the Goddess Chance, who so often favours the reckless, smiled on the haggard stranger; at any rate, when the Court rose, he passed out unchallenged into the blistering noonday heat. He had scanned the serried ranks of prisoners in vain: Loison was not in that day's 'batch.'

All through the afternoon he roved about Paris. To urge on the leaden hours that separated him from nightfall, he imposed upon himself the task of visiting as many as possible of the city's twenty prisons and houses of arrest. From the Luxembourg to the Cannes he wandered, and from the Carmes to L'Abbaye and La Force, hanging forlornly about the walls and scrutinising with his despairing glance the blank, unrevealing windows. At one of the women's prisons, Les Anglaises-Lourcin, he attempted to get into conversation with a turnkey who sat and sunned himself on a bench against the wooden gate. But the man would not answer him, and Hector turned away, realising that to the prison-guards of Paris wretched strangers that prowled about gaol precincts were nothing new.

Sunset—and he was on the north side of the Pont Neuf, one of a string of idlers that lined the quays and watched the women pounding out the clothes on the laundry-pontoon moored above the bridge. For four-and-twenty hours he had neither eaten nor drunk; yet he felt neither hunger nor thirst. He was conscious only of a raging fever of restlessness that seemed to burn him up and for hours at a time to efface all sense of his surroundings. Then he would regain

consciousness like a man awaking from a broken sleep, to find himself muttering as though in delirium.

Another hour to wait, he told himself, as he watched the sun sink in crimson majesty in the west beyond the empurpled river. Another hour to think of Loison starting up in terror after a night of fruitless waiting to hear heavy footsteps without and the summons at the garret door: '*Au nom de la nation! Ouvrez!*' Another hour to upbraid himself for leaving her alone ...

One by one the cold clear stars began to glimmer in the blue-black heavens. A lamplighter went trotting on to the bridge, his ladder on his shoulder. Points of fire appeared at the parapet, and, as though in reflection, others winked back from the far side of the river. The hour had come to seek out Savory.

All day long Hector had avoided the Café Conti. His rendezvous was for nightfall and he would not jeopardise Savory or O'Farrell and their friends at the café by appearing before his time. But now he crossed the bridge rapidly, his thoughts busy with the impending interview. Savory was an honest man, a lion-hearted friend, the Major had said; surely he would let himself be touched by the tale of a young girl's agony? The Major, too, in his impulsive Irish way, would, he felt certain, lend his aid in winning Savory over if Hector's appeal did not accomplish it alone. He did not expect them to be able to rescue the girl out of prison; but, if they could contrive to have Couthon approached and Hector offered in place of the girl, might they not be successful in saving her from the scaffold?

He had left the bridge to cross the quay to the café when, glancing across the road, he came to a full stop. What was that? The terrace was unlighted. The windows below the awning were dark. The tavern was silent, deserted. Then, silhouetted against the darkling sky, he saw on the terrace, facing the river, among the abandoned chairs and tables, the figure of a guard resting on his flintlock, the tip of his bayonet glinting in the moonlight. And on the other side, facing the rue Dauphin, another guard was pacing to and fro in the street.

His last hope had gone. The café had been raided.

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He had a recollection, afterwards, of having come to himself in a clammy, vaulted place, under the ground, where the walls and roof were made of crumbling, uncovered brick and huddled forms sat at tables drinking by the guttering light of tallow dips. A pannikin of liquid was at his elbow, and, suddenly aware of a burning thirst, he put it to his lips and drank. It was neat spirit, coarse and fiery stuff, that seemed to flame in his throat; but he drained the pannikin to the last drop.

The dram revived him and cleared his brain. He could remember now. Loison was arrested and he had gone to the Café Conti to get that little man—what was his name?—to help him save her. But the café had been shut and guarded and he had strode away blindly into the night. But how had he found his way into this sombre drinking-ken?

He looked about him. There was a furtive, lurking air about the cellar. Only a few of the tables were occupied, and at these men spoke in undertones or sat silently over their hollands. One or two were asleep, their heads pillowed on their arms flung out across the table. The whole company wore the dull and brutish look of drink-sodden peasants; indeed, by their blouses and *sabots*, thickly smeared with clay, they appeared to be farm labourers.

One or two women were present, tattered drabs, prowlers of the barrier. Most of them had a cavalier whom they were busy plying with drink. But at Hector's table a girl sat alone. She smiled at him as she caught his eye.

'So you've woken up at last,' she said. 'You're a cool hand, aren't you? Don't you know better than to sleep in a place like this?'

He shrugged his shoulders.

'What does it matter where one sleeps?'

'And have you no fear of being robbed? Your purse, have you got it still?'

His hand went to the pocket where he had kept his last roll of assignats. It was empty.

'It's all the same to me now!' he rejoined.

The girl looked at him keenly. She was a poor, faded thing, rouged and painted, a wench off the streets like the rest of the women in that place. She patted his hand.

'They are after you, *hein?*' she questioned. '*Pauvre petit*, you are frightened ...'

'Not for myself. For some one who is dear to me,' he said.

He could not have told why he thus unbosomed himself to a chance acquaintance, this wretched woman of the streets, her cheeks hollow beneath their coat of rouge. But he had suffered so long, so greatly, in silence, that it eased his breaking heart to speak.

The girl made a little vague gesture of the hand.

'There is only that remedy'—she pointed at the empty pannikin—'only that to make one forget. They come in like you, with the face of death, the eyes of a madman—I have seen so many, *allez*—and they take their dram and, little by little, *pouf!* the heartache passes. *Tu es joli garçon, tu sais!* We will drink together and I will pay!'

She called to the *patron*, a stolid man who sat and smoked his pipe behind a little counter. He brought a jug over and filled up their pannikins. A number of men, muddled like the rest, came clattering down the stair. Each carried a pick or a mattock that he added to a pile of implements which, Hector now observed, were stacked in a corner.

'*C'est fini?*' the tavern-keeper demanded of the last arrivals.

'Aye,' retorted one of them curtly.

'And what was the tally to-night?'

'Sixty-four!'

'*Morbleu!*' remarked the *patron* with his thumbs in the string of his apron. 'One works, it seems!'

'*Pas mal!*' the other rejoined. 'Quickly, a dram here, *le patron!*'

The host hustled back to his counter and Hector turned to the girl.

'Where are we? What is this place?' he demanded.

'*Dame!* "At the Widow's" they call it. I never heard another name ...'

'But where is it?'

She looked at him oddly.

'*Mais voyons*—in the crypt of the *ci-devant* Convent of Picpus ...'

Picpus! At the sound of that ill-omened name he gazed at her in horror.

'Who—what, then, are these men?'

'The grave-diggers, naturally!'

He sprang to his feet, overturning his chair, and, leaving his drink untasted, fled from the place. He came out in a tangled garden where a leaden day was breaking sullenly. A grass-grown path led to a deeply rutted road that brought him out upon a broad *chaussée*. Through a wilderness of wasteland and tumbledown shacks with rare houses intervening, the highway ran into the city. He hastened blindly through endless streets whose echoing silence was disturbed only by the sound of his footfalls, the passing of a rare market-cart or the crowing of a cock. He was trembling at the thought of those muddled men refreshing themselves in that sombre cavern from their ghastly labours of the night. He walked until, literally dropping from fatigue, he crept into a field at the foot of Montmartre Hill and dozed brokenly for an hour or two under a hedge.

But ten o'clock found him once more in the public seats at the Revolutionary Tribunal. The hall was packed again, the atmosphere unbreathable, though, all along one side, the windows stood open. Outside the day was dull and overcast without a breath of wind; and an angry sky rested low over the city.

Paris was oddly restless. The whole city seemed to be stirring on this airless morning, heaving to some unseen force like a ship at anchor that suddenly rocks and shivers to a passing vessel's wash. The beating of drums, the clang of bugles, now near, now far, kept drifting in through the open windows, and once, with jingling harness and thunderous wheels, a battery of guns jogged past. The rabble behind the barriers was more turbulent than ever, a seething, hectic mob, that scuffled and swayed and gesticulated and bayed in deep-throated unison. The atmosphere was electric; the storm was about to break.

Then, of a sudden, a great hush fell on the tossing court-room. The turmoil died away into a long-drawn-out hum of expectation as the little door beside the void of the immense dock swung back and a gendarme appeared. He led the first of the morning's batch, a heavy, thick-set fellow. To a bearded man with ghastly face and hollow eyes who craned forward from his seat amongst the public, that awkward, loutish figure seemed familiar.

The prisoner cast a glance round the court. As he turned his face towards the tribunes, Hector recognised Polydore, Zouzou's famous major-domo. What was he doing in the dock? And here, after some other prisoners, came Marthe, deadly pale, scarce able to drag her feet along, and behind her a little, in his best suit, very bewildered, the grey-headed old gardener, Alceste.

And then, after a host of others—Zouzou! The crowd gurgled its appreciation of her soft prettiness as she came forward, simply dressed in muslin, radiant in her bloneness, and calm—incredibly calm. With a gentle nod of thanks to the gendarme escorting her, she took the place indicated to her among the prisoners.

A yell of anger from the mob, and a pasty-faced fat man stumbled blindly into the pen. The word flew about the benches that he was a speculator in wheat. '*A mort*' the rabble howled. Again the shout died away in their throats, 'A-ah' they droned on a deep *bourdon* note, and on tiptoe the swaying press of people behind Hector straggled and strove to get a view of the last prisoner to be ushered through the little door.

'Forty-eight!' yelled a woman in Hector's ear.

But he did not hear her. Loison was entering the dock.

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# CHAPTER XXVIII

## THE LAST TUMBRIL

Brave he had known she would be; but he had not thought to find her so serene. Her eyes were calm, her smooth young forehead was unruffled, and, indeed, upon her face there rested such a look of peace that one would have deemed her happy. True, on the threshold of the little door she quailed, thrust from the sombre twilight of her prison into that bedlam of heat and noise, and stood an instant shrinking back from the sea of faces that rose up at her from the tiers of seats with a booming bell-like note. But the reaction was instinctive and immediate. There was wonder, but no trace of fear, in her face as, with a firm step, her golden head held high, she followed the gendarme into the crowded dock and took her place in the third row of prisoners.

The court shook with noise. The public shouted and sang, and excited voices resounded from the dock where the accused were loudly talking among themselves or crying to friends behind the barriers. Stentorian shouts for silence rang out unavailing above the din and there was a great shuffling of feet as people rose to greet the entry of the judges.

As in a dream Hector heard the hush descend reluctantly upon the crowded hall, saw a red mottled face beneath a black-plumed hat stoop forward from the judge's throne to where at a large table behind a frieze of *dossiers*, the Public Accuser sat among his clerks. Then came the drone of a voice gabbling through an interminable document, and on all hands the uproar broke out afresh.

But Hector heard it not. The squalid court-room with its mildewed walls, the four bored judges sprawling indifferent on their chairs, the standing figure of the *greffier* peering through his spectacles at his manuscript, as he raced through the indictment in a snarling sing-song, the row of backs in the dock, the blue coat and buff pouch of a gendarme with each prisoner—the whole stage faded away. The shifting scene melted into a blurred mass of movement, leaving one face only that stood out sharp and dear.

Loison was scanning the public seats. She was in the back row of the prisoners, and, with one slim arm propped along the edge of the dock behind her, turned half round, was gravely surveying the agitated crowd behind the barriers. Hector leaned forward transfixed. He knew she was looking for him. Out of all that multitude of staring faces could it be possible that she could distinguish his?

He wanted to spring up and cry, 'Loison, I'm here, your Hector, watching over you, planning for you, praying for you, hungering for you!' But he felt powerless to speak or move. Perhaps some vague hope of rescue yet flickered in his heart; perhaps he was stricken by the numbing fear of the tragedy that stood before. Once he thought her eyes met his; but at that moment the gendarme at her side touched her on the shoulder to motion her to face the judges.

He felt like one who, in a nightmare, flies in sleep, from peril to peril always with the hope, half-conscious, scarce indulged, that perhaps after all it is but a dream. He was conscious of an air of utter unreality about the scene he witnessed. Could it be that this dry and formal procedure, with these nonchalant officials and stolid gendarmes, this gabbling drone that took his mind back to the Court of Petty Sessions where Uncle John lorded it at home in Somersetshire, could all this be the prologue to the sharp and awful drama about to be played out there in the barren wilderness of the Place du Trône? Had he to realise that in an hour, two hours, this girl he loved would lie under the whirring, screaming knife, that in a little those calm, grey eyes would close forever...?

Now the President was questioning the prisoners, putting one short question, slightly varied according to the indictment, to each.

'Cornay, Jean-Baptiste'—he was addressing the pasty-faced corn speculator—'do you plead guilty to conspiring against the safety of the nation?'

'*À mort!*' boomed the crowd with fists brandished in denunciation.

'Citizen President,' the accused began, a sheaf of papers trembling in his hand, 'I wish to submit to this Court that ...'

'Answer the question!' the cold, hard voice from the high chair insisted.

'I am in a position to call witnesses to prove ...'

'The prisoner's reply is "No,"' announced the relentless voice. 'Next! Woman Regnault, Victorine, do you plead guilty to conspiring against the safety of the nation at the instigation of the spy Charpentier, hireling of the assassin Pitt and accomplice of the infamous Engstrom?'

The corn-dealer was still protesting, and his outcry was so loud that it all but drowned Zouzou's quiet 'No.'

The Public Accuser had risen at the table.

'I am prepared to admit,' he said, 'that the woman Regnault was misled by the false papers of the villainous Charpentier who represented himself as the friend of her worthy companion, the patriot Regnault, Envoy of the Republic at Copenhagen! The Citizen Jurymen will no doubt bear this in mind!'

A torrent of hand-clapping burst from the public benches.

'*Élargissez!*' stormed the rabble. 'Release *la belle citoyenne!*'

'Silence! Next: Parvus, Laurence Charles, do you plead guilty ...'

The voice, inexorable as doom, droned on. Zouzou was to be acquitted, Hector realised. She knew it, and could afford to be calm. His mind snatched at the thought. Her influence had secured her immunity. Could she—would she—do as much for Loison? With a fast-beating heart he turned his attention to the dock again.

Loison sat with her hands in her lap. He could see her thin fingers protruding from her mittens. There was a little red mark on the forefinger of her right hand where she had burnt it on the stove a few days before. When he had come in with the day's supplies, she had tried to hide the blister so as not to grieve him. But he had discovered it and washed out his only handkerchief forthwith to bind up the burn.

The old gardener's turn to be examined had arrived. Twice the President had to repeat his question. Slowly the old man let his dim eyes rove round the court. Then, '*Vive le roi!*' he piped, and the crowd stood up on the benches and shrieked for his blood. 'Next,' said that ominous voice.

Alceste had forgotten his cue.

'Femme Mallet, Louise!'

The President had come to Loison now, the last of the 'batch.' The crowd was growing indifferent. A man on the other side of Hector was eating an onion, and, with cheeks bulging, was trying to pull a bottle out of the grasp of his companion, a gross woman, fat as a slug, with small and cruel eyes, who was drinking noisily.

'Do you plead guilty to conspiring with the spy Charpentier, and his accomplice Engstrom, against the safety of the nation?'

The President, his fingers toying with the medallion that hung by a tricolour ribbon on his chest, looked up at Loison.

'No!'

She spoke her answer clearly in a voice that did not tremble.

The presiding judge raised his plumed hat, displaying a flame-red thatch of hair, and wiped his brow with the back of his hand. Somewhere outside, beneath the window of the court, a horse stamped with a rattle of harness. The faint thudding of drums was again audible in the still air.

'No witnesses for the prosecution,' remarked the President casually. 'The Public Accuser has the word.'

And he flung himself back in his chair.

A splash of wet fell on Hector's hand. The sweat was pouring off his face. He was bathed in perspiration so that his shirt hung dank on his skin; but his hands were like ice, and he shivered. Fouquier was on his feet, his face towards the long benches where the jury sat, his narrow eyes with their curiously upward-slanted brows restlessly flitting from the jury to the dock. He spoke without fire or conviction, a couple of sentences that Hector scarce heard. He stopped suddenly and sat down; the President's metallic voice added a few words and read out something from a slip of paper. One of the

gendarmes in the dock sneezed loudly. '*À vot' santé!*' cried a waggish voice, and the crowd was convulsed.

The jury benches began to empty. The judges stood up. The dock was in a turmoil. Nearly all the prisoners were addressing the bench, waving their hands about in a frenzy of protest. The corn-factor, in particular, was gesticulating like a man possessed, brandishing his sheaf of documents above his head and roaring out words that were lost in the general hubbub. But the little door stood open again, and the gendarmes were stolidly edging the accused towards it. As Loison passed out of the dock, the first to leave as she had been the last to enter, she turned her head towards where Hector sat and smiled. Her eyes were brave; but they carried no message of hope.

Amid that shambling file of prisoners she disappeared from view and with a groan the young man buried his face in his hands. It was the end then. The heads that were to fall, he knew, were counted in advance, and only Zouzou, and perhaps her servants, would benefit by the Public Accuser's appeal for clemency. The rest were irretrievably lost, and from the court, for such was the invariable custom, would be taken to the scaffold to die. And he could not share with her the pangs of death; even a last farewell was denied him, other than such a brief message of the eyes as he had exchanged with the gallant Darras. All he could do now to assuage her last moments would be to follow her to the scaffold and let her see him when her moment came. To that final, anguishing ordeal he must steel himself.

Unless Zouzou would help him! At all costs he must speak to her before she left the court. It was a forlorn hope at best; for Couthon had willed this girl to die, and what influence should prevail against his? And there was so little time, a bare hour at the outside! What if Zouzou declined to help him? He had not forgotten her agonised terror of the guillotine. And supposing she were not acquitted!

The jurymen were filing back into their seats. The President and his two associates, who had been gossiping at Fouquier's table, resumed their places. A slip of paper from the jury was handed up to the high chair. The President glanced at it, rapped out an order. The little door swung open; the prisoners reappeared.

They were a silent company now, white-lipped and dejected. As Loison stepped into the dock, her eyes sought Hector's. She tried to smile again; but he could see that she had been weeping.

'The jury having answered in the affirmative the *questionnaire* submitted to them on all points of the indictment with regard to all the accused except three, the under-mentioned to wit ...'

The President had donned his plumed hat and, standing up, was reading the sentence. His rasping voice hurried through a string of names.

'... Nadin, Marcel, and the woman Mallet, Louise,' he concluded, 'having been found guilty of conspiracy against the safety of the nation, are condemned to the penalty of death.'

A despairing chorus of cries and groans and maledictions burst from the dock answered by stormy applause from behind the barriers.

'The accused woman, Regnault, Victorine, and her servants, Matthieu, Polydore, and the woman Vignon, Marthe, are acquitted, the jury finding that the good faith of the said woman Regnault was abused by the spy Charpentier, and that her servants acted under her direction. This clemency is not extended to the aforementioned accused, Prades, Alceste, whom the jury regard as a dangerous agitator and a supporter of the old *régime*.'

The hard voice shut off with a snap, and the President, turning about, disappeared through the door behind his chair. A great buzz of conversation ascended to the roof of the court. The spectators were flocking to the exits to post themselves outside to see the tumbrils start. Once more the stolid gendarmes pushed their reluctant flock towards the little door that for forty-five of that pale company marked the threshold of life and death.

Through the jostling rabble Hector fought his way down to the front of the barrier. Not a dozen yards away, Loison was stepping from the dock. With the grace that he had always admired in her, she turned her blonde head towards him. Her face was deathly pale and her lips, that seemed to form his name, were trembling. She smiled a little wan smile, but then the tears burst from her eyes and, bowing her head, she passed swiftly through the door.

A gendarme had motioned to the *Citoyenne* Regnault to stand aside until the dock was cleared. With her two servants she remained in a corner of the great pen, her plump white hands clasping the edge of the box. The last gendarme clumped out behind the last prisoner and the little group moved to the door of the dock. They stepped out and were

crossing the floor of the court when Hector, leaning forward, cried softly:

'Zouzou!'

She swung round quickly and, for an instant, gazed in stark bewilderment at that gaunt and bearded figure with the wild eyes and the pallid, hungry face. Dully, hopelessly, he waited for the shrill cry that should denounce him or the coldly ignoring shrug that should give him his dismissal. At that moment an elderly man hurried up to her.

'*Belle Zouzou!*' he exclaimed fervently, 'my heartiest felicitations ...'

'*Cher ami,*' she broke in hurriedly, 'there is a poor fellow here, a humble friend of mine, who wants to speak with me privately. Is there a room where I could see him?'

'*Mais comment!*' the newcomer replied. 'The little room for witnesses is empty. Come, I will show you!'

In the dingy *Salle des Témoins*, which the famous law of 22 Prairial had rendered tenantless, they were left together. The tears stood in her blue eyes as she turned and stretched out her hands to him.

'Oh!' she murmured softly. 'To see you thus! How you must have suffered!'

'Zouzou,' he cried, 'my friend, help me. Within the hour the woman I love must die!'

She started back. With frightened eyes she pressed one white hand to her cheek.

'*Bon Dieu!*' she whispered. 'It is the little one who went before the Tribunal with me. I thought I knew her face. So it was the girl we saw that day before Saint-Roch'—she smiled sadly and shrugged her shoulders—'the girl you did not love!'

He caught her hand.

'I did not know it then, I swear it to you. Only afterwards I realised it. Now this child is more than life to me. I do not care to live if she must die. I do not fear death, can I but save her life.'

She turned away, her little foot tapping the ground.

'Why should I imperil myself to save your mistress?' she said, frowning.

Helplessly he shrugged his shoulders.

'Not even that,' he answered, 'nor can I say, indeed, if she loves me. But for three weeks we have been in hiding together; for three weeks we have shared in common the misery you see depicted in my face. And'—his voice broke—'without an effort I cannot see my friend die. Zouzou ...'

He dropped on his knees and clasped her waist.

'I implore you, help us. You know Fouquier: go to him and say that I will gladly give myself up if he will reprieve this child. He will be glad to lay hands on me. Zouzou, go to Fouquier, I entreat you!'

She had grown strangely pensive. Slowly she put her hand to her forehead and brushed her fingers across her burnished hair. Then she stooped down and gathered him up in her arms.

'It is almost hopeless,' she said. 'But I will try. One never knows! *Mon pauvre cheri, mon pauvre, pauvre cheri!*'

Her head dropped forward and she fell sobbing on his shoulder. Presently, with streaming eyes, she drew back and regarded him.

'I will do what I can,' she promised. 'Listen! At eight o'clock to-night be outside the church of Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois and I will send a messenger to you! And now—*du courage!*'

Bravely she gave him her hand. Taking it, he drew her to him. He would have spoken his thanks; but the words would not come. Impulsively she yielded him her lips, then, with bowed head, she stole from the room.

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Outside the Conciergerie, under a lowering sky, discoloured like a livid bruise, a great crowd heaved and jostled. Only the iron railings of the Cour du Mai separated them from the waiting tumbrils. The rabble was seething with excitement. Strange rumours, incredible rumours, flew from mouth to mouth. The Deputy Tallien had been assassinated at the Convention; the Citizen Robespierre had been shouted down; the Citizen Robespierre had been impeached; the Commune was sitting permanently at the Town Hall. Long files of troops, drums beating and colours flying, tramped along the quays on their way to the Place du Grève, and from time to time a group of officers with feathered hats and tricolour sashes clip-clopped past over the cobbles.

A vast murmur seemed to rise from the whole city spread out breathless under that pitiless leaden sky. The faubourgs were up, so the rumour ran, and the roll of drums beating to quarters came down the wind from the eastward. From minute to minute, as the afternoon wore on, the sweating throng grew denser, pressing about the railings, their eyes fixed upon a certain corner of the courtyard, upon the grim gates which presently should open to fill the waiting carts.

Those immobile portals fascinated Hector. He had elbowed his way to the very forefront of the crowd and now stood with his eyes level with the top of the high wheel of the first tumbril beyond the railings. He ached in mind and body. To think was anguish, not to think an impossibility, and he seemed to look back over a lifetime of mental torture. Again and again, as that airless afternoon dragged on, he told himself: 'Presently those gates will open. And I shall count. There will be forty-four who will enter the carts, forty-four, not forty-five.' Maddeningly the figures hammered his brain: 'Forty-four not forty-five.'

And then from behind the doors there came a sudden sound, a vague, undefined noise, that stiffened the vast multitude into instant attention. A dull crash resounded from the prison and the gates shook. They were taking down the bars. Some one plucked his sleeve. Impatiently, he shook the intruder off. Again his arm was shaken. He turned round angrily, and found himself staring into a face that he knew, the passionate face of a dark young man.

'*Citoyen*,' the stranger said in a pleasant, cultured voice, 'it is in my mind that, at our last meeting, you made an appointment with me that you failed to keep!'

For an instant his mind snatched at a passing recollection of the Saint James's Coffee-House, the low, long room with its sanded floor and coloured prints and racks of pipes, and out of an impressive hush this same voice crying: 'I'll kill you for this!' But he thrust the memory from him. What did he care for the Vicomte de Solesmes and his honour now? The doors were opening and he must watch, he must count ...

'*Pardon, citoyen*,' the suave voice at his ear insisted, 'but there is one with me who also craves the renewal of your acquaintance.'

Hector shook himself impatiently. What was this man to him? They had flung the doors back now. The head of a file of gendarmes appeared. All about him the crowd was rocking with excitement. Suddenly an iron grasp tightened on his arm; he swung about in a fury; but the grip did not relax and now his other arm was seized. On all sides uniformed men surrounded him.

He plunged violently, seeking to free himself; and the swarming crowd, with screams of terror or cries of rage, fell back in a panic-stricken haste, billowing all round. He could not shake off that vice-like clutch, and almost before he realised that he was a prisoner, his two arms were forced behind his back and he felt the sharp rasp of cord upon his wrists. In a supreme last effort to shake off his captors, he leapt into the air and as he flung back his head he saw Grand-Duc planted before him, a malicious gleam of triumph in the yellow lizard eyes. At the humpback's side, an easy smile upon his bold, dark face, was the Vicomte de Solesmes.

'We will not try to take him through this crowd, *mes amis*' said Grand-Duc. 'Hold him fast, *mes braves*, and when the tumbrils are away and the crowd dispersed, we will clap him in "The Mouse-trap."'

He looked steadfastly at Hector.

'At least, Maurice will not go unavenged!' he said.

Proudly their captive's gaze swept past them and sought that black void in the prison wall. Slowly, painfully, the condemned were issuing forth. Already two of the seven waiting tumbrils were charged and had moved up to make place for their successors. Swiftly his glance ran over them, but Loison was not among the occupants; nor did he see her in that

sad, shambling *cortège* that between two lines of guards poured steadily forth from the gates.

A great sense of peace descended upon him. Suddenly he was conscious of an utter overwhelming weakness so that he felt his body hang limp for an instant in the grasp of the men who held his arms. With an effort he recovered himself. Not yet must he collapse; for the line was still advancing.

They were charging the sixth tumbril now. Above his head the executioner's assistants were hoisting the flabby, trembling form of the corn-factor into the cart. Then the crowd surged forward to the railings and for an instant engulfed him and his captors. But his guards fought the rabble off and forced Hector against the bars, their bodies making a phalanx about him. When he looked into the courtyard again, the sixth cart, now full, was creaking forward; and the last tumbril, the seventh, drawn by an old white horse, moved up.

Something was happening on the outskirts of the multitude. There were wild bursts of cheering and shouts that rent the air. But Hector's whole mind was centred on that gap in the wall. The gendarmes had mastered the crowd at last and were forcing the people back.

Then Hector heard a little despairing cry. The sixth tumbril as it advanced, revealed Loison. Her hands were tied behind her and with her golden hair cropped close to her head and her white neck rising bare from the rounded opening that the cruel shears had snipped from her little blue gown, she looked like some pale young boy.

She must have issued from the prison-gate while the mob had swept him from his observation post at the railings. He saw her now only when she had reached the tail of the seventh cart, standing so close that, had his hands been free, he might have touched her through the bars.

At the sight of him held pinioned between his guards, she faltered. She would have fallen had not one of the red caps gathered her off her feet, light burden that she was, and landed her in the last tumbril. She staggered to the side and peered piteously down upon a ragged figure that lay prone in the dust.

For Hector, realising that Zouzou had failed him, had dropped senseless to the ground.

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# CHAPTER XXIX

## THE MOUSE-TRAP

With brazen voice a great bell went clanging through the death-like coma in which he lay. In stuttering, affrighted clamour it rang out, flinging its stentorian summons forth in an unending crescendo that again and again broke in upon his half-slumbering consciousness.

He opened his eyes and listened. Far and wide the whole city was in rumour. The wheels that thundered through the echoing streets, the rolling drums that never ceased their din, the swelling diapason of voices, a door that, with a loud clang of metal, slammed and slammed again, proclaimed it.

A fetid odour, like the reek of the lions in the Tower, was in his nostrils. The air was dank and unwholesome in this cavernous twilight place in which he lay. It was almost dark; but high above his head, through low, barred windows, deep-set, a reddish glare came tossing upon the stained stone walls and with it the tramp of marching feet and the rhythmic roar of men singing in unison. He could hear the hoarse voices rising from the street. It was the song of the men of Marseilles:

*'Aux ar-r-mes, citoyens!  
For-r-mez vos bataillons!'*

How they shouted! Their voices were loud in his ear as, with thudding feet, they trailed by. Above the clamour of their passage the low growl of distant thunder resounded menacingly. And still the great bell pealed on.

He looked about him. It was a long bare room like a barn, the floor covered with straw, the walls of discoloured stone, and, at the end, an iron door studded with nails, above it a dingy fanlight through which an oil-lamp shed a funnel of feeble radiance. The room was full of people who stood about in groups, their faces raised to the windows in a listening attitude.

Again the door clanged. A burly fellow came in with a steaming bucket in either hand. The knots of listeners dispersed in all directions and formed up in a line, tin pannikins in their hands. With a wooden ladle the man with the buckets dipped into his pails and filled their cups as they shuffled by. When the last of the file had passed him, he shouted down the room:

*'Hé, mon beau monsieur,* has your lordship no appetite this evening?'

A dark shape stepped between Hector and the feeble light from the door. The young man looked up. A ragged figure with a pale face framed in matted grey hair stood before him.

'It is the evening meal,' he said in a soft and pleasant voice. 'You are a newcomer, my friend, and have no cup. Permit me to lend you mine!'

And with infinite courtesy of manner he extended his battered pannikin. With a word of thanks Hector took it and scrambled to his feet. The soup was thin and greasy; but its odour reminded him that for more than twenty-four hours he had not eaten. He swallowed its contents greedily, then, shaking out the last drops upon the filthy straw, handed the cup back to its owner.

The latter received it with a bow.

'Permit me to name myself,' he said. 'It is the custom in our little society of the Mouse-trap. I am the Comte de Mailly. Your servant, sir.'

'The Mouse-trap!' By that name Hector knew where he was: for so men called the common cells at the Conciergerie for poor prisoners who had not the means to purchase for themselves the use of a room and a straw pallet.

The laced coat the speaker wore was in tatters, and it was obvious that he had no shirt, for his flowered waistcoat, grimy beyond description, was tight-buttoned across the yellowish skin of his chest. A close, greyish stubble adorned his cheeks and chin.

'Might I have the favour of your name?' he requested.

Hector introduced himself.

'Of English or Scottish extraction?'

'I am an Englishman, Count. But my mother was French, of the house of Sainte-Valentine.'

De Mailly nodded.

'I am acquainted with that great family by hearsay, sir. If you would now allow me to present you to our friends.'

He raised his voice.

'Gentlemen, a new member!'

The straw rustled as the prisoners flocked together at the summons. All, Hector remarked, were in the last stages of destitution. All classes of society were represented among that ragged company—a bishop, a marquis, a dealer in pigs, an actor, 'servant of his *ci-devant* Majesty,' were some of the titles he heard—but one resembled the other like two scarecrows in a field of oats.

'You fall well, sir,' remarked the bishop. 'We are hoping that the last tumbril has been despatched.'

He called it '*charrette*,' and the word sent a wave of agony across the young man's heart. Seeing his blank look, de Mailly put in:

'Surely you know that Robespierre has fallen? The tyranny beneath which all France groaned is at an end. The dictator and his supporters were outlawed in the Convention this very afternoon and their arrest decreed. At this moment they lie in those same prisons where so many hundreds of their innocent victims waited for death. In a little while, *allez*, we shall all be free!'

Hector, remembering the afternoon's stir, the shouting, and the cheers, started forward.

'They were arrested this afternoon, you say?' he demanded eagerly, catching the other's hand.

'Towards the hour of five!'

'That is, before the tumbrils started for the place of execution?' ... his hand trembled on de Mailly's tattered sleeve. 'Tell me, was the sentence of death suspended?'

De Mailly sighed and turned away. The bishop, a quiet man with a bald head, rested his hand on Hector's shoulder. Slowly he shook his head.

'The convoy was met by crowds announcing the arrest of the tyrant,' he said, 'and clamouring for the release of the prisoners. Who knows what might have happened, but at that instant Hanriot, who commands the Sections, galloped up and ordered the executions to proceed. The tumbrils went on their way ...'

'You are sure of this?' said Hector in a broken voice.

The prelate gravely nodded.

'I had the tale from the head-gaoler himself. It is, alas! I fear, too true!'

The young man bowed his head and closed his eyes in agony. She had died alone, uncomforted, and Fate, that might have saved her, had stayed its hand. For one brief moment de Mailly's disclosure had banished the awful dull despair that gnawed at his heart, but now that he knew his hope to have been vain, the revulsion of feeling stunned him like a blow. He groaned and sank down again on the foul straw.

But he could find no comfort in himself. The prisoners had broken up into knots again and stood below the windows, listening to the clamour of the city.

'Hear the tocsin!' said one.



'The Sections are gathering before the Hôtel de Ville,' another remarked. 'Those were the men of the Grange-Batelière Section who passed just now singing the song of the Marseillais. The turnkey was at the gate and saw them!'

The dealer in pigs, a brawny fellow with broad, creased face, was laughing.

'Did you mark the *délateurs* to-night when they came to list the names for to-morrow's Tribunal?' he asked. 'This scoundrel, Antoine, had the face to whisper to me that, three times already, he had passed me over. Ah, *les scélérats*! they mark which way the wind is blowing!'

'To-morrow, undoubtedly, we shall be free,' observed the actor, a round, flabby little man with quick eyes and a grey face. There was an air of nervous enquiry about his remark as though he sought corroboration. 'Ten o'clock is past,' he added, 'and we have not yet had to-morrow's list. That appears to me to be an excellent sign. Why, usually the ushers bring it round before we quit the men's courtyard at eight!'

'You talk like a fool, Groseille!' exclaimed a pale and restless man, who, like some caged animal, had been pacing up and down the straw. 'You know that we were not released for exercise to-day. Your theory, then, proves nothing!'

'It shows, at least, that they were apprehensive of how events might shape at the Convention,' another put in. 'They feared a rising in the prison if we learnt that Robespierre had been overthrown. Hark, how the drums beat to quarters!'

'I like not the turmoil without,' said the pig-dealer. 'If verily Robespierre and his accomplices be lodged in gaol, who should the Sections rally? *Sacré bleu!*'—he sprang back as a vivid flash of lightning illuminated the stained and dripping walls—'the storm is beginning!'

With an angry mutter the thunder rolled. The prison was in darkness now. There was a slight stir at the door. It slammed noisily. Again the glare of lightning lit up the place. In the brilliant flash Hector saw de Mailly advancing hastily across the straw. Darkness fell again like a pall.

'What is it, what is it?' cried several frightened voices.

'I have just spoken with Richard'—de Mailly's cultured voice came out of the gloom. 'The situation in Paris is confused, gentlemen. But one thing is certain. The Commune has declared against the Convention!'

'In favour of Robespierre?'

The question, uttered by several lips, sounded like a groan.

'In favour of Robespierre!'

With a deafening crash the thunder clanged, and between the noises of the restless city they heard the swish of heavy rain. Some one was praying. Out of the clammy blackness Hector heard the fervent voice: '*Je vous salue, Marie, tu es pleine de grâce ...*' Once more the lightning flickered and showed for a second the haggard, pitiful figures grouped beneath the windows, some standing, some kneeling, striving to fathom the secret of the night. The droning prayer was silenced by a noisy peal of thunder that seemed to shake the very firmament.

A key grated in the door without and a light shone into that dismal cavern. A hurricane lamp in his hand, a great bunch of keys at his belt, a massive man bulked large in the doorway. It was Richard, the head gaoler. Hector remembered having seen him that first night in the room of Fouquier-Tinville. The gaoler grasped a sheet of paper. Behind him were two turnkeys in red caps.

With a grunt he deposited his lanthorn on the ground.

'*Voici le journal du soir, les amis,*' he announced in a throaty voice, jovial with a sort of gallows-tree humour, and he read out glibly from the paper:

'Summoned to appear before the Revolutionary Tribunal on the Tenth Thermidor, Year Two of the Republic, the under-mentioned, to wit, Beauvais, Auguste; Chantemesse, Alexandre; Épinglier, Robert; Fot—Fot!—'—he broke off and scratched his head. '*Peste!* If I can read these foreign names! *Enfin*, the Englishman brought in here this afternoon!' He returned to his list. 'Hennequin, Armand ...'

'You waste your breath, my good Richard,' de Mailly's quiet voice interposed. '*Voyons, mon ami*, put up your list and tell us what happens in Paris!'

'Yes, yes!' the eager circle vociferated. 'The news, Richard, the news!'

The gaoler held up a hand, big as a spade, for silence.

'You will learn the news quick enough when the carts arrive in the morning,' he retorted.

De Mailly laughed.

'*Farceur!*' he exclaimed; 'you will have your joke. By to-morrow morning the prisons will be opened and we shall be free.'

The gaoler looked down his list.

'That will be as the Citizen Robespierre decrees,' he replied casually.

'The Citizen Robespierre!' cried the actor, fierce as any fighting-cock. 'The Citizen Robespierre is safe behind the bars. I don't care *that* for the Citizen Robespierre!'

And he added a gross expression of contempt.

'Perhaps not,' returned the gaoler imperturbably. 'You may not know that, by order of the Commune, he was released from the Luxembourg an hour since!'

A hush of blank consternation greeted his announcement. It was the bishop who broke it.

'Then God help us!' said he resignedly in his gentle way.

'And what of Robespierre's brother?' cried de Mailly. 'And Couthon?' added a second. 'And Saint-Just?' a third put in.

'All are at liberty,' was the reply, 'and assembled now at the Hôtel de Ville to concert measures for the defence of Paris against rascals and conspirators.'

And the reading of the list was resumed. In mournful silence they heard it through to the end while the lightning played and the thunder growled and the rain gurgled in the gutters. All but two in that foul cage were for trial—that is, for death. Then the lights withdrew, the iron door banged, and they were left alone to the darkness—and their thoughts.

Hector heard his fate unmoved. Loison in that realm where men's eyes shall be opened would know that he had done his best to save her. She would be waiting for him in the little blue gown with a welcome smiling from her clear grey eyes. He would take her in his arms and be at rest. He felt very placid, now that he knew what stood before, very peaceful and very tired. He turned over on his arm and, bedded on that sodden straw, where so many before him had passed their last night on earth, he fell asleep.

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The pressure of a hand on his face awoke him. The morning sun fell in long shafts of light through the grated windows high up in the wall. All about, the straw was dotted with prostrate figures that stirred and groaned in their sleep. One of the turnkeys was bending over him.

'Get up and follow me!' the turnkey said. 'They have come for you.'

He staggered to his feet. He was drunken with sleep, and his limbs felt heavy as lead. None of his fellow prisoners was awake. The stale sour odour of that pest-house was revolting. The air was full of stirrings and groans and inarticulate cries. At the end of the room the iron door stood open with a gendarme on the threshold, his cockaded hat barred by a narrow band of golden light that fell from a window at his back.

'Quick!' said his escort. 'Am I to wait all day, *nom de Dieu?*'

Wondering that he should be summoned thus, to face his judges alone, Hector followed the turnkey across the spongy straw. Though beyond the threshold they were yet within the prison, once out of the dungeon's tainted air he felt his vigour return. They mounted a winding stair and threaded a corridor to a door at the end. The turnkey opened it and ushered him into the registrar's office, the *bureau du greffe*, whence Hector had watched them make Darras ready for the scaffold. The head gaoler was standing at the table talking to a burly man in military uniform, with a great cocked hat and a broad tricolour sash girded about his ample waist. At the sound of the door opening, they turned about and Hector saw that the officer was O'Farrell.

The Irishman made no sign of recognition.

'I identify the prisoner,' he said to Richard. 'And here'—he produced a slip of paper—'is the order of release. You will find it *en règle*!'

The gaoler took the form and scrutinised it. Then he stuck it on a spike. He pushed a book over towards O'Farrell.

'Will you sign the register, Commandant?' he requested.

The Irishman obeyed.

'And at what hour shall I expect our important guests?' asked Richard, dusting the sprawling signature with sand.

'About the hour of ten,' the Major replied—'in time for the meeting of the Tribunal. There will be no trial, they say, since the Convention has proclaimed them *hors la loi*. They will merely be identified—and then, *houplà, la charrette*! Robespierre, they tell me, is to suffer last. I shall be there to see him under the knife, *parole d'honneur*!'

'*Je te crois, citoyen!*' remarked the gaoler pleasantly. 'I would I could be there myself!'

Sternly the Major touched Hector on the shoulder.

'*En route!*' he commanded.

The turnkey held the door open, and they stepped into a little yard which they crossed to a dark carriageway on the farther side, where a gendarme swung back one batten of some wooden gates and they emerged into the Cour du Mai.

Hector trembled. He recognised that sombre archway. These were the gates through which Loison had passed out to die.

'Hould up your head, man,' whispered the Major as they moved away towards the Pont Neuf. 'Don't you realise you're free?'

'I wish to God you had let me die in peace,' said Hector savagely.

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## CHAPTER XXX

### IN WHICH, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HIS CAREER, MR. GRAY, OF THE TREASURY, IS STARTLED

In a private room of the Rose Inn at Dover the mysterious stranger, whose coming had set Mrs. Barclay and her little staff of servants in such a stir, sat alone at dinner. Outside in the small yard—for the Rose, though a reputable hostelry, was a house of no great account, not like one of the roaring coaching-inns one met with on the London road—a post-chaise had been waiting for upwards of half an hour. Its postilion, now sitting in the tap, was the smartest and most reliable boy on the Dover-to-London route, and good for a drink on the house at any of the great inns between the Lord Warden and the Elephant and Castle.

His horses, now enjoying an unexpected feed of oats, were the fleetest pair to be discovered in Dover that evening—and, the Lord knows, Mr. John Smithers, the corn-merchant, who had engaged them, a Dover man born and bred, was able, no man better, to lay his hand on a piece of good horseflesh when he required it in a hurry.

It was he who had brought the distinguished-looking young man to the Rose.

'A private room, Mrs. Barclay,' he had said to the hostess, 'and dinner for one right sharp. My friend here must leave for London within the hour. An omelette, a broiled chicken, a morsel of cheese, and a pint of burnt sherry—that will serve my friend, I believe!'

The strange young man, who scarcely spoke, had acquiesced in everything. Mr. Smithers had lingered as though he would fain have joined his companion at table. But the young man, who had a singular grace of manner for all that he looked so sad, had protested he must not keep Mr. Smithers longer from his family, declaring he would dine alone and take the road for town directly after.

On that Mr. Smithers had bowed himself out with a parting injunction to the landlady to let his friend lack for nothing. This Mrs. Barclay with solemn impressiveness had readily promised. For one thing, she was eager to oblige the corn-merchant, who, on former occasions, had brought her unexpected custom like this; for another, she had not failed to remark that, on leaving, Mr. Smithers had handed a bag of guineas to his companion.

She went herself to spread the table in the private room. It was a snug little place, wainscoted in oak, so darkened with age as to be almost black, with the oaken dresser she had brought from her home at Reculver, highly polished so that it threw back the gleam of the tall brass candlesticks that lit the room.

She found the young man already seated at the table, his chin resting on his hand, sunk in a profound reverie. Now that she could study him closer, she was astonished to see that, under the black travelling-cloak that, encrusted with sea salt, hung about his shoulders, he was in rags. His neckcloth was clean and neatly tied; but his coat was tattered, with a great rent on the shoulder.

'Mercy on us!' she cried and clasped her hands, 'your coat, sir! Did a body ever see the like? Doff it, sir, I beg, and one of the maids shall mend it whilst you are at meat!'

He looked up at her, a little wan smile on his handsome, clean-shaven face. There was no mirth in his eyes, however; they were unutterably tragic, as though, even in that pleasant, homely room, with the Kentish roses nodding at the casement window, they contemplated some nameless horror.

'It matters nothing,' he said. 'I ... I have had an accident and could not stop to change. 'Twill wait now until I am in London.'

'You are from France, sir, the porter said?' she remarked, sorting out the table silver from the basket on the dresser.

'Yes.'

The affirmative was like a sigh.

'Dreadful doings in Paris, they do say!' she observed, rubbing up a fork.

This time he made no answer. He was staring before him. The panelled walls were dissolving, and he saw again the pointed towers of the Conciergerie, and in the foreground, on the open space before the Pont Neuf, the jeering rabble that, two days before, had blocked the way of the carriage in which he was setting out on his journey to London. The mob was gathered about a little group halted at the base of the dismantled statue of Henri IV, and, as the wall before him receded, the young man saw again the dreadful objects at which they gibed—Robespierre, a bloody rag about his jaw, shoeless and his stockings tumbling down, reclining with eyes closed in a chair; Couthon on a stretcher, his frail form torn incessantly by long shuddering convulsions, a bandage about his head, his livid face distorted with fear, his pale watery eyes, glazing with terror, casting beseeching glances to right and left; and with them, inside the fringe of guards, other pallid men, the mottle-faced, red-haired judge whose rasping voice had sent Loison to her doom, and Saint-Just, elegant as ever in a buff-coloured coat, with nervous fingers twitching at his voluminous cravat.

But see! The red-capped porters who have borne Robespierre and his friend from the Tuileries are rested now. They pick their burdens up again, and slowly the grotesque procession crosses the open to the Conciergerie, that halfway house of death. The sombre gates swing back, those gates whose image will never fade from one haunted mind, and close with a jar behind the little band ...

The picture faded. From far away a voice was speaking.

'Now, if you would let me spread the table ... Lord have mercy, sir'—the voice grew shrill—'you are weeping!'

He rose and wearily passed his hand across his eyes. 'Let me be!' he said. 'Tis nothing! I have traveled hard and I am ... very tired!'

He dropped into the oaken settle before the empty hearth, and wonderingly the landlady stole away.

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England, this kindly, gentle land! She took him in her arms and soothed his breaking heart as he journeyed on his way. It was a night of majesty, moonless, but with such a glittering profusion of stars that, in the Kentish lanes, lovers walked in silence, awed by the splendour of the heavens. Between the villages the air was richly sweet with the scent of newmown hay, and in the old gardens the roses and the tall hollyhocks sent up their fragrance into the balmy air.

Little by little, the peace of the night entered his soul, the peace of these restful hamlets slumbering beneath the stars, these swelling uplands and dipping valleys where streams glittered darkly among the birches. Gratefully he yielded himself up to the embrace of his native land, lying back in the cushions of the chaise, his face to the stars, his head bared to the wind of their passage, his eyes half closed, in his ears, hour after hour, the rhythmic ring of hoofs upon the good English road.

After the squalor and poverty and dementia of the ruined land he had left, his eyes dwelt with quiet pleasure on little things that, before he went to France, he had accepted as his birthright. It was good to see the splendid highway winding ahead smooth as a billiard-table, the civil, bustling hostlers at the clean and well-kept inns where they changed horses, the dash and elegance of the outward mail from London that, with glaring lamps and pounding hoofs, flashed past them on the other side of Maidstone. He had been wont to picture himself bringing Loison back to this land of peace, Loison, who, since her childhood years, had scarce heard a friendly word, whose youth has been spent in that bedlam atmosphere of hysteria and violence and blood, Loison, who, at eighteen, had had to die. He imagined her now enthroned among the stars, peerless and shining even as they, smiling down at him as he journeyed home alone.

Through Kennington village, where, from the sleepy houses, the dogs ran out barking; through clattering Lambeth where the housewives in their pattens were swilling down the pavement before the red-roofed houses, over the slope of Westminster Bridge they bowled into London all glittering in the morning light. As they entered Whitehall, the squeak of fifes and the rattle of drums resounded, and a column of troops debouched in the direction of the Green Park. What a flood of old memories their stirring quick-step unloosed! He signalled to the postilion to rein in his horses, and, leaning over the side of the chaise, watched the column draw near.

Yes, they were the Guards! Behind the tall drum-major and the drums in their scarlet jackets laced with blue fleur-de-lys, he could see the bobbing line of bear-skin caps with brass plates flashing in the sun, the grenadier company. By God! They were the Third, the old regiment! That tall figure, with the haughty, impassive face and the blond mustache

riding at the head of the light company, was Montgomerie. And there was MacDonald! And young Carfax! And old Sergeant Biggin and Corporal Findlater—a host of familiar faces! What a swing they marched with, their white-gaitered legs stepping out as one, pig-tails tossing, the sun glinting on their brightly polished buttons, their pipeclayed cross-belts white as snow! Even thus, but a few short weeks since, had he been, one of a host, identical in dress and mind! But now, what a gulf of blood and tears lay stretched between him and the pipeclay and the button-stick! 'Drive on!' he bade the postboy and fell abrooding again.

Though it was not yet seven o'clock, he found Mr. Gray drinking his morning chocolate in his modest lodging in Bolton Row. Hector scarcely recognized the little man without his wig. The sleek, grizzled head emerging from his flowered chintz dressing-gown gave him a less precise, a more human aspect.

Hector came upon him by surprise, for the loutish maidservant, who opened to his knock, contented herself with pointing silently to a door at the head of the stairs and then vanished swiftly into the basement. For the first time Hector saw the little man startled out of his habitual imperturbability of mien. As the door opened and he descried Hector, the dust of the road thick upon his stained travelling-cloak, he scrambled to his feet with an exclamation.

'Mr. Fotheringay as I live!' he cried. 'For the love of God, man, you are as one that returns from the grave!'

As he spoke, he kept boring his bright little brown eyes into the young man's face, shaking his hand up and down, with a movement that was purely involuntary, as though he were working a pump.

'The Terror is at an end!' said Hector gravely. 'Robespierre, Couthon, Saint-Just, and their accomplices were to go to the scaffold three days ago when I left Paris. I saw them in the hands of their guards as I came away!'

Mr. Gray's mobile face changed swiftly. He dropped the young man's hand and sprang to the bell.

'Morrison!' he shouted. 'Morrison! Curse you for an idle ...'

A manservant showed an astonished face at the door.

'Ah, there you are! Quickly, my wig and my coat! And send the maid to order the carriage forthwith! I start for the country at once.'

He whipped off his dressing-gown.

'Mr. Pitt is at Holwood. He has had another access of the gout. He must be acquainted with your tidings at once. The tyrant fallen! Dear, dear, this is news indeed!'

Morrison handed him his neat brown wig, which he carefully adjusted before the glass. Then he drew on his plain snuff-coloured coat. With a wave of the hand he dismissed his man.

'Acquaint me the instant the carriage is here!' he bade him. Then he clapped his thin hands together and gazed at Hector.

'I find you something leaner,' he remarked, 'and your expression is altered, too. I fear you have been through anxious times. Tell me, did you get in touch with my people in Paris after poor Engstrom died?'

'It was Major O'Farrell ...' Hector began.

'O'Farrell?' queried the little man. 'Aye, I mind him. Number 33, we call him here!'

'It was he, armed with an order from the Deputy Barras who has assumed control in Paris, that secured my release,' Hector said.

'Your release?'

'I was in the Conciergerie Prison awaiting trial. But for the fall of Robespierre I should have gone to the guillotine on the morning I was set free! For the rest, these despatches ...'

He produced a bulky packet from his pocket and handed it to the little man. Eagerly Mr. Gray pounced upon it and broke the seal. He dropped into the chair before his cup of chocolate cooling on its tray, and for five minutes was absorbed in his reading.

At last he looked up.

'Mr. Fotheringay,' he said solemnly, 'you have rendered a signal service. I apprehend from Mr. Savory's despatch that you furnished the inestimably important information that the last courier brought from France. By your hand he sends me further to-day the draft of the proposals of the Citizen Barras and his friends to Mr. Pitt. He explains, what I had already divined, that the arrest and execution of Engstrom broke off the negotiations which our poor friend had already opened with this group. The overthrow of the tyrant has enabled these pourparlers to be resumed, and to this end the French Government agreed to release you to serve as the bearer of these despatches. As Major O'Farrell explains in a covering note'—he looked up with a quizzing smile—he is not absolutely certain that, in the confusion of the moment, his political friends, from whom he extracted your order of release, were aware of your identity with that dangerous spy, the Citizen Charpentier!'

'Fouquier would have known,' said Hector, 'but the Major chose his moment when the Public Accuser was away from the Conciergerie arranging for the transfer of the guillotine from the Barrière du Trône to the Place de la Révolution for the execution of Robespierre and the others. In any case, Fouquier's hours are numbered.'

A manservant appeared on the threshold.

'The carriage is before the door, sir.'

'Come,' said Mr. Gray, gathering up his hat, 'we will drive out to Mr. Pitt. The Minister must hear from your own lips, Mr. Fotheringay'—he broke off and smote his forehead—"faith, I had clean forgot to tell you! Your uncle is dead, sir ...'

'My uncle dead?'

'Of an apoplexy three weeks since. The lawyers have pestered the regiment for your address. They were referred to me. And here have I been calling you "Mr. Fotheringay" when, of course, it should be "Sir Hector." Come!' But Hector shrank back.

'I am in rags, sir,' he protested. 'I am not fit to appear before the Minister.'

'Tock, tock, 'twill but add force to your tale. Mr. Pitt, I insist, shall hear from you yourself how nobly you have redeemed your name. He will gladly adjust this matter that we wot of Mr. ... Sir Hector, and also this affair of the duel, which, I am bound to confess, created no small rumour in the clubs.'

'For that,' said Hector, 'tis settled!'

'Settled?' exclaimed Mr. Gray. 'You mean you met this Frenchman?'

'Aye and ran him through at the third *reprise* an hour before I quitted Paris.'

Mr. Gray blinked his eyes rapidly.

'Dear me,' he remarked, 'such a fine young man as he was, too, this Vicomte de Solesmes!'

'A scoundrel, sir,' retorted Hector hotly, 'a paid spy of Robespierre that I saved from the guillotine. O'Farrell had him in custody at the Department of War and we met in the gardens at the back!'

'Faith,' observed the little man, 'you're very thorough. Will you go down to the carriage, Sir Hector?'

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# CHAPTER XXXI

## INTO THE LIGHT

In the fifteen-acre field below the Dutch terrace they were gathering in the harvest. A lofty screen of elms hid the sun-tanned harvesters from view; but over the drowsy afternoon air the pleasant burr of Somerset voices rose to the new squire of Cranwell as he sat in the shade of the house, a book on his knee.

They were carting the wheat to the threshing-floor. He could hear the drivers urging on their horses and the waggons creaking as they rocked over the stubble. Beyond the smiling August landscape, the blue line of the Mendip hills grew blurred before his eyes, and out of the haze he seemed to see emerging the long slow line of tumbrils, each with its swaying load, rumbling with groaning axles over the cobbled street. He snatched up his book and read again these words of Marcus Aurelius, soother of aching hearts through all time:

*Whatever the Gods ordain is full of wise providence. What we ascribe to fortune happens not without a presiding nature, nor without a connection and intertexture with the things ordained by Providence.*

A footstep on the crazy flags made him look up. Old Thomas, the butler, was crossing the terrace.

'Lady Betty Marchmont, Sir Hector,' he announced. Then apologetically: 'Her ladyship would take no denial, sir!'

As he rose to his feet, his cousin came round the corner of the house. She was a vision of summer, all in filmy white, her big straw bonnet dangling from her hand by its flaunting strings, very elegant and modish.

'So,' she cried gaily, 'I've run you to earth at last! La, sir, to think you are a se'nnight in England, with the Steyne and the Pantiles buzzing of nought but your exploits in Paris, and your own cousin has to seek you out to offer her congratulations. Fie, sir, I am ashamed of you!'

Old Thomas, on his parchment face that look of happy pride that the sight of youth and beauty so often inspires in the old, had pattered away. They were alone on the terrace among the bees droning about the flowers. A sundial stood between them, and, of a sudden, as though to support herself, she grasped the lichen-grey pillar.

'Hector,' she said, in a changed voice, 'what makes you look like that?'

'The sight of great suffering makes no man gay,' he answered. He took her hand. 'I crave your pardon, my dear, for not having been to see you ere this; but I have fled society since my return from France. I needed rest. I made sure that August would find you at Brighton or at Bath. Had I known you were at Stoke Norton, as I think you must be, I should have paid my respects before.'

He led her to the wooden bench where he had been sitting.

'My aunt Orifex has been but poorly through the summer,' she remarked, sitting down. 'The doctor recommended her country air and quiet; so we changed our plans and travelled down betimes to Somersetshire.'

She spoke casually; but all the time she stole little glances at his impassive, weary face. A silence fell between them, and they sat and listened to the creak of the waggons in the field beyond the elms. Suddenly she put out her hand.

'Hector,' she said impulsively, 'I have to ask your pardon. I wrote you a cruel note. I did not know then that what you did was done in defence of my good name. Can you forgive me ... Hector?'

He took the hand she proffered him and, stooping, kissed it.

'My dear,' he said, 'what is past'—he broke off and his eyes grew dreamy, clouded with sorrow—'is past. There is nothing to forgive.'

There was another pause.

'Do you remember,' she said presently, 'the last time we met? I rated you a coward then, a worthless *fainéant*. There, too, as you have proved, I did you less than justice.'



He stopped her with a gesture.

'What you said was true,' he broke in earnestly, 'every word of it, Betty. You angered me at the time; but in my heart of hearts I always knew you to be right. God knows how any man with red blood in his veins could have lived the life I did! But I have learnt my lesson. Yes, but at what a cost, my dear, at what a cost!'

He turned his head away and his eyes sought the purple hills. He felt the touch of her hand on his sleeve.

'There was something else you said that day ...' she began.

He nodded to show that he understood. But he would not meet her look. She waited for him to speak; but he uttered no word. She sighed; and so, with all unsaid, as is the English way, they buried their romance.

'Lord Maxeter has asked me to be his wife,' she announced presently.

Hector looked up quickly.

'A fine fellow, Betty,' he said, 'and a loyal friend!'

'He thinks the world of you,' she answered.

'A most faithful friend,' he repeated. 'He never doubted me when things looked black against me. He would make you happy, my dear. Will you take him?'

'Yes,' she answered simply. Her eyes were fixed on his. 'And you, Hector?'

He looked away.

'My heart is buried deep in France,' he blurted out brokenly, and strode blindly to the stone rail that commanded the view of Cranwell's broad acres.

When he turned round, the bench by the sundial was empty and Betty had gone. Old Thomas stood at his elbow.

'Begging your pardon, Sir Hector, a lady is asking to see you, sir.'

'Lady Betty Marchmont?'

'No, sir! Her ladyship has already driven away by the back drive—it is the nearer way for the carriage folk from Stoke Norton. This lady came by the front avenue, a furrin' lady, sir.'

'Where is she?' he asked, staring strangely at the old man.

'In the blue drawing-room, sir!'

Hector darted away, leaving the butler gaping. It was Zouzou. He found her seated in the cool twilight of the smaller drawing-room where canvas covers primly veiled the gilding of the Louis Fifteenth chairs. He caught her hands and looked at her, unable to speak. As for her, her feelings overcame her quite. The cool, plump hands in his clenched convulsively as the tears sprang from her eyes.

'*Mon ami, mon ami,*' she kept on saying brokenly.

'Zouzou,' he said at last, and repeated: 'Zouzou!'

She drew her hands away.

'I am foolish to cry,' she protested prettily, 'but your eyes, my friend, your terrible eyes! As though you lived with ghosts. Sit down now and calm yourself and we will talk.'

She placed him beside her on the sofa.

'That afternoon when I left you,' she said, 'I went to Fouquier-Tinville. I know this *animal, allez*—for months he covets me. I demanded the reprieve of the little Mallet. "Impossible!" he cries. "Couthon has said she must die." "But, Couthon," I tell him, "is since an hour under arrest at the Convention." He says this and I say that, and all the time he looks at me

like a hungry wolf. *Enfin*, we strike a bargain!"

'A bargain?' repeated the young man dully. 'What bargain?'

She ground her sharp white teeth together savagely.

'What bargain other than one does an ignoble *canaille* like Fouquier strike with any pretty woman?' she demanded.

He gasped.

'You...?' he began.

She nodded with a little shiver.

'*N'en parlons plus!*' she begged. 'I left the Conciergerie with my reprieve.'

He groaned aloud.

'And you arrived too late? Hanriot had forced the tumbrils to continue on their way.'

She stared at him.

'*Mais non!*' she exclaimed in astonishment. 'Did you not receive my letter? *Voyons, mon ami*, be calm. You hurt me!'

For Hector had grasped her by the arms and forced her round to face him.

'What are you saying?' he shouted brokenly. 'What are you saying? Don't you see you're torturing me? Is Loison *alive*?'

His violence frightened her. Huddled up in the corner of the sofa, she nodded.

*She nodded!*

'Calm yourself, *mon petit*,' she begged him. 'Sit down and let me finish ...'

'Where is she? Is she safe? Is she out of danger?'

'Yes, yes! Presently, I will answer all your questions. You must be cool, my friend, calm—and courageous. The carts had already started when I left the Conciergerie; but I drove after them in my carriage and we caught them up on the Place du Trône itself. I submitted my reprieve and the little one was released immediately.'

'But tell me,' he implored, rolling wild eyes at her, 'where is Loison? When can I see her?'

'In a little minute! Let me tell my story to the end. They laid her fainting in my carriage, and I drove her out to Neuilly. That very evening an opportunity to get away offered itself. You remember this little Lévy, of the Agricultural Bank ...'

'Yes, yes, but Loison...?'

'Lévy wished to get away to Amsterdam with early news of the fall of Robespierre to speculate on the *hausse*. He consented to take us with him. I wrote you all this to Paris to your lodging in the rue Helvétius. From Holland we came on to London, and there *ce bon* Lévy, who knows and reads everything, found out your address from the newspaper ...'

She would have run on; but he stormed at her.

'If Loison is in London, why haven't you brought her with you? What is all this mystery, Zouzou? Why do you torment me thus? With one word you give me back my life! Tell me there is no mistake, for the love of God...!'

'I was trying to spare you,' she faltered—'my friend, you look so distraught—I wanted to break it to you gradually, I did not know if you could bear the shock'—she put her hand to her bosom. 'But I am exhausted: *je ne puis plus*. Go'—she held out a trembling hand—'in the carriage at the door ...'

For an instant he stared at her like one transfigured. And as she, all tremulous, gazed back at him, suddenly she saw the tragedy lift from that haunted face, from those suffering eyes.

'Go to her!' she said. 'Be gentle with her, Jeannot, she is very frail.'

In a swift impulse he bent and raised the soft warm hand to his lips.

'*C'est bien, c'est bien*'—her voice died away to a whisper—'go, your love is waiting.'

He did not hear her sobbing as he darted from the room.

The light poured greenly into the long quiet hall through the creepers clustering at the Gothic windows. At the porch a carriage was drawn up, and there, on the heavy door, very white against the battered black paint, a little hand rested.

Gently his fingers closed about it. Then, out of the inner darkness, a pale, sweet face appeared, set in an aureole of golden hair. He did not pause to open the door, but caught her in his arms as she rose up to him and drew the soft and slender form to his breast. So the postboy saw them when, presently, full of the Cranwell cider, he emerged from the stables with Maggs, the grizzled groom.

'Never,' said Maggs, when he told the story that evening in the harness-room—'never did oi zee old Squoire dew a thing loike that. 'E wor a woild 'un, wor Measter John, a proper carker 'e wor, afore the gout laid 'un boi, 'specially w'en 'im 'ad a skinful; but, dang me, if ever oi zee 'un bussin' a wench roight in front of the 'ouse! It ain't roightly proper, it ain't ...'

'A tarrible wilful lot, the Futheringays,' observed Lowmass, the old coachman, thoughtfully rotating the cider in his mug. 'Squoire dew for sure be moightily taken with the little lass. I zar 'un watchin' 'er out of 'is eyes w'en oi wor adrivin' 'im and the tew furrin' ladies down to the Lunnon coach this arternoon. I'll tell 'e summat, young Maggs! Her'll be back 'ere as Squoire's lady, her'll be back!'

Young Maggs shook his grizzled poll darkly.

'Oi bean't as zprouightly as oi wor,' he remarked, 'but ef it 'ud bin me, Lowmass, I tell 'e, oi'd a' picked the buxom 'un ...'

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The 'buxom 'un' did not wait for the wedding. The cares of high finance beckoned 'her little Lévy,' as she called him, back to the Continent, and, with her trunks full of presents from Sir Hector Fotheringay and his bride to be, she departed for Hamburg, as blonde, as soft, as cajoling as ever.

'I shall soon follow after, Zouzou,' Hector told her before she went away.

'Not to Paris again?' she queried, aghast.

Hector smiled and shook his head.

'To my regiment in Flanders,' he replied.

'*Bon Dieu!*' she cried, and threw up her hands, 'have you not had enough of scenes of blood?'

'So much,' said he, 'that I should not rest happy at home, knowing I had no hand in saving Europe from their recurrence.'

'And Loison?' demanded Zouzou. 'What does she say?'

She turned to the girl who had come up and slipped her arm through Hector's.

'*Noblesse oblige,*' said Loison, and glanced up at her husband.

'*Voilà la vraie aristocrate!*' he cried; and, catching her up in his arms, he kissed her.

**THE END**

[The end of *The Red Mass* by Valentine Williams]