

THE THUNDERER

By
E.
BARRINGTON



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The Thunderer

*A Romance of
Napoleon and Josephine*

by
E. BARRINGTON



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THE THUNDERER

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A Romance of Napoleon and Josephine

CHAPTER I

SEED SOWING

“WELL, you have given your opinions,” said Madame Permon, leaning back in her chair; “now hear mine! I may say I have known the young Buonapartes from the cradle. I knew their mother, Letizia Ramolini, in Corsica—the handsomest girl there. And *I* say that the remarkable one in the family is Lucien. Napoleon has will and selfishness, and if he can thrust himself in front of others, he will; but Lucien has ideals. He is the true son of the Revolution. Napoleon swims with the stream, but do you suppose he cares which side he is on so long as it’s successful? Not he!”

She fluttered her fan, and with a final air furlled the pretty *amorini* dancing on rosy clouds. Madame Permon had a son of twenty and more and a daughter of sixteen, but everything about her was charming—except, indeed, her insight. That was a little too keen for such dark southern eyes veiled in such attractive black lashes. She too had been a Corsican beauty, rejoicing in the sonorous Greek name of Panoria Comnena and the beauties, Panoria and Letizia, had been friends. Fate reserved a very different destiny for those two girls who started the race of life with equal hopes and handicaps.

The gossiping Madame Larousse was another member of the party. “Buonaparte,” she said, sipping her coffee, “is a curious name. And is it a Corsican name, citoyenne? Is there ancients behind it? One would like to know, now that this young general is beginning to give himself airs. I have heard Lucien talk of his family with a kind of affected reverence—very silly, if they’re nobody in particular.”

Madame Permon kindled beautifully in response. She detested the republican “citizeness” form of address, and whenever she dared, which was seldom, exacted the aristocratic “madame.” Her bright eyes rayed out scorn on the Larousse.

“It is not, citoyenne, because a family is not wallowing in gold that it can be despised. The Buonapartes were allied in the past with *my* family. The

Comneni were Emperors of Constantinople—the last Emperors of the Roman Empire. The real Greek name of the Buonapartes was—is—Kalomeros, which in Italian signifies “a good place”—*buona parte*. Being allied with *us* they also were allied with the Emperors of Byzantium. Certainly they had royal blood! And people did not close their eyes then to the existence of distinctions which exist!”

“I often think,” put in the handsome young soldier, Andoche Junot, leaning over the back of a chair, “that my General has a Roman look about him. You can fancy that clear profile on a coin, can’t you? And there’s a bust in the Museum: I thought directly I saw it, it had a look of Buonaparte. Of course, I never can make Citoyenne Permon allow that an aide-de-camp is any judge of his general. She thinks she knows more about him than I do. Own it, citoyenne!”

Madame Permon tossed her pretty head with its curls and coils of silky black knotted high upon it. That form of address annoyed her even more from the lips of a man.

“My dear Junot, you are an incurable sentimentalist about Napoleon, and how can you judge? I have seen him as a troublesome, self-willed brat, a plain boy with a furious temper which poverty compelled him to keep in some sort of control at Brienne and the military school of Paris—compelled, for he would have broken out a hundred times if he had dared. It was wormwood to him that he and his sister Elise were educated at the cost of the State. He never will forgive that stroke of fate as long as he lives.”

Her daughter Laure, listening with the bright-eyed quiet of a mouse, ventured a little breathless word.

“But, mother, it was frightfully hard on poor Elise that she never had money to do as the other girls did. Don’t you remember—”

“Am I likely to forget! Yes; the poor child! Madame Letizia had asked me to visit her girl, and when I went one day with Napoleon she was weeping tears as big as grapes because the girls of her class were to give a little *fête* to a classmate who was going on holiday, and she had only six francs in the world, which had to last her until next quarter. I saw Napoleon slip his hand into his pocket, and draw it out again, deadly pale. You know, Junot, how he always pales instead of reddens when things move him!”

“I know! Our regimental surgeon says people like that are always the most dangerous. The blood rushes to the vital centres and they’re capable of anything at the moment. But you helped the poor child, madame.”

“Possibly I did. And even for that Napoleon will not easily forgive me; nor for the fact that in the attic here there was always a bed for him when he had a holiday and nowhere else to go.”

There was a little irony in the finesse of her smile. Madame Permon prided herself on her insight into human nature and was a lady who could never be admittedly in the wrong. Possibly she understood the Buonapartes so well because she too had the Corsican strain, which is as segregating as the Southern Irish and has points of resemblance with it.

“Well, I call it gross ingratitude!” said stout Citoyenne Larousse, willing to conciliate her rapier-witted hostess. “Every one knows the excellence of Citoyenne Permon’s heart, and for a benefit to be forgotten—or resented—is beneath human nature. But I have noticed that kind of unnatural restraint in young Buonaparte, as if he were always on the defensive. He hasn’t the pleasant easy manners of Colonel Junot here. Not by any means!”

Junot bowed, but the compliment did not please him. He looked coldly into the lady’s eyes.

“No person that I know of has any reason to complain of my General’s manners. He took lessons in dancing and deportment at a time when he could ill afford them, and when certainly public opinion did not call for them. I have heard excellent judges pronounce him perfectly polite and I am sure Citoyenne Permon will agree with me.”

People might rally him on his devotion to Buonaparte, but it was fixed and unalterable; possibly the strongest feeling of his heart. In all the violent discussions which took place in Madame Permon’s salon between herself, Buonaparte, and others who frequented it, Junot’s quiet support was always behind his friend, whom he persisted in believing to be the most wonderful man on earth, the staunchest of Republicans. When, towards the end of the Reign of Terror, Buonaparte was arrested as a spy and in some danger of losing his head, Junot was ready instantly with a romantic plan for his escape from prison, and when it was refused declared he was determined to share his friend’s imprisonment even if it were to be for life. But after thirteen days in the shadow of the guillotine his hero was released and the two resumed their hand-to-mouth existence of the struggle with poverty, the tragic longing for success.

Yet was it hopeless? The Revolution and its bloody sequence had set France at odds with all the world. Surely for two young men of dash and courage there was a prospect—say, in Italy, where the war clouds were gathering black in Italian defiance of Austria. Meanwhile, they supported themselves very largely on Junot’s successful gambling. Their pay was

scarcely enough to keep them in bread, not to mention butter, and economize as Napoleon would, he still had to make contributions to the support of his family, now compelled to leave Corsica for France. There were times when he almost sank under the difficulties, growing leaner, more strained and haggard every day.

At Junot's reply, Madame Permon looked at Madame Larousse with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes. She might herself censure Napoleon and, as a matter of fact, often did, for when two extremely hot tempers come into collision there can be only one result; but she was Corsican and so was he, and no mere Frenchwoman must intrude.

"General Junot is perfectly right," she said warmly. "Persons whose own manners entitle them to judge commend General Buonaparte's. Persons whose manners do *not* entitle them may be as censorious as they please. He is always perfectly obliging. Must you leave us, citoyenne?" for the Larousse rose heavily, scenting lightning in the air. "Well, it is our loss. Albert!—"

Young Permon squired the lady to the door, and returned laughing. "You frightened her away, mother. When you knit your little brows and colour up, the enemy generally takes to her heels. Napoleon should be very much obliged to you. Personally, with all due deference to Junot, I have found him a little difficult."

Madame Permon laughed gaily.

"The good God will forgive me my little lies! Napoleon will never have good manners. He will always either bully or sulk. But for all that I think he has the rudiments of a heart, when one can get at it, and certainly he stands by his family. Heavens, what a lot of them: Elise, Caroline, Pauline!" She ticked them off on her pretty fingers, Junot colouring at the last name. "Joseph, Napoleon, Lucien, Louis, Jerome. Providentially several of her thirteen died! The poor Letizia! I always think there's a little vanity in insisting on presenting the world with so many copies of oneself. What can become of them all? The girls have no fortunes and never will have. They are good-looking enough—"

Laure Permon interposed again.

"Oh, mother, Elise is beautiful, Caroline is more beautiful, Paulette is most beautiful of all. She is exquisite—such a complexion, such a lovely mouth, such a perfect figure! What does she want of money? She's like a princess in a fairy tale."

“My dear Laurette, the Revolution has left decent persons so scandalously poor that no man can afford to amuse himself with only pretty lips nowadays. The prettiest lips must be fed, and Paulette Buonaparte is as fond of good things as any one else I know. Sentiment was guillotined in the Revolution with the fortunes of all decent people. It’s only the Convention who are rich—those bats and dormice who profess to govern France.”

Junot looked decidedly uncomfortable. The allusion to Pauline Buonaparte coloured him to the ears. The allusion to the Convention ruling France was worse. The members might be bats and dormice, but they had their spies and though France was gorged with murder and sensation by this time, and they were hardly likely to emulate the blood-lust of Robespierre and his friends who had just come to a well-deserved end, the comparatively toothless lion might still scratch, if not bite. Buonaparte had warned him more than once that Madame Permon was dangerously free with her tongue: that the atmosphere of political discussion in her salon was not the healthiest for young officers who knew that kissing went by favour of the powers that be.

“I am attached to Signora Panoria,” he had said lately. “She showed kindness to me and my family when we needed it. She attended my father’s death-bed when he died away from us all in France; when I was hard up as a fellow could be at Brienne and the Military School, she was hospitality itself to me. If ever I can do her a good turn I will. But her little tongue blisters. She is suspicious and quick-tempered, like all Corsicans, and spits fire on every one she doesn’t agree with. For my part I think it safer to keep out of her salon. She ran her family into danger of their lives more than once during the Reign of Terror, with her aristocratic notions, and we are none of us out of the wood yet. Be careful, Junot.”

These ominous words recurred to Junot as he listened. Like Citoyenne Larousse, he rose to flee from a dangerous neighbourhood. The pretty Laurette looked at him quizzically. With her mother’s insight, she knew perfectly well that “Puss in Boots,” as she had nicknamed Napoleon, with his huge cheap boots and slender legs, had cautioned his aide-de-camp. She knew too what had escaped Madame Permon, that Junot was fatuously in love with the exquisite Paulette. Not that that mattered, for neither Paulette nor Napoleon would ever give a second thought to Junot’s sentiments if they stood in the way of any solid advantage, but a man of twenty-six desperately in love elsewhere is not an amusing companion for a charming dark-eyed girl of fifteen. Let Junot go—she did not care! A colonel at twenty-six? Yes, but everyone was a colonel now—that did not count. She found no particular interest in either Junot or Napoleon. Her mother had friends

among the *noblesse* and returning emigrants who had survived the Revolution, and she infinitely preferred their company and manners to either the one or the other, handsome fellow as Junot might be.

He went off now with Albert Permon and the mother and daughter were left alone. They were exceedingly like each other: both charmingly pretty; dark with dancing eyes; fiery; full of energy and acumen, subdued for the time in the daughter by the manners of the period which required that a girl should be rather seen than heard. Perhaps since Madame Permon had been a widow, discipline had been a little relaxed and there was more *camaraderie* than had been allowed before. At all events, mademoiselle now permitted herself a remonstrance.

“Mother, dear mother, after all the horrors and dangers we escaped in that awful time of the Terror, isn’t it dreadfully dangerous to abuse the Convention? I know Junot would never tell what’s said, but Napoleon hardly ever comes to us now and it makes it very uncomfortable for me with the Buonaparte girls. Paulette let slip that Napoleon said that as a soldier under the orders of the Convention he can’t go where they’re abused.”

Madame Permon laughed like silver bells. She was prettier and younger than ever when she laughed. No sensible person looking at her could have believed in the existence of Laurette, except as the younger sister, not to mention Albert.

“You goose, you darling goose, do you really believe respect for the Convention keeps Napoleon away? Well, now, you shall know the truth—the simple unadulterated truth—which happened a few months ago and was not the best thing for my good little *fillette* to hear at the time.”

Laurette pricked up her pretty ears. Could it be—? No, surely. That would never do! She had scarcely begun to look out on life yet with those wide-open brown eyes! Her mother, still smiling, shaded her face from the fire with the *amorini* dancing on their rosy clouds:

“Napoleon came here one day looking queerer, I think, than *I* ever saw him, and *that’s* saying a good deal. His long lanky hair—Oh, so badly powdered!—hung over his shoulders, and if you had been there you’d have shrieked ‘Puss in Boots,’ at his little slender legs lost in the wide gulfs of boot-leather. But he was bright with an idea—in fact, more ideas than one. He sat down just where you are at this minute and began.”

She acted the scene—another of her accomplishments—perfectly:

“‘Signora Panoria, I am come with a proposal.’

“‘Yes, Napoleon. For an excursion to Fontainebleau? Laurette will be charmed.’

“The poor Napoleon was dashed. ‘Pray, Signora Panoria, let me speak. No, something much more serious. Here is my family settled in France, and here’s yours. Well, we are all Corsican. One can never really be at home with these French. I detest them more every day I live! Look at their idiotic behaviour in this Revolution of theirs. Why, a whiff of grapeshot would have blown the whole thing to blazes at the beginning and saved the monarchy. Saved the country too from being the laughingstock of Europe. But no one had the sense.’

“‘True enough!’ I said. ‘If only they had stuck to the Constitution of 1793 the horrors might have been spared and France respected still as a constitutional monarchy. But the proposal? Do you mean to stand for the Convention with my support? We are coming up in the world indeed!’

“‘Signora Panoria, do be serious! No. I expect I shall soon be rising to some sort of standing in the world. I have my eye on a position now where I can get places for those belonging to me. I want an alliance between our families. Here is Paulette, as pretty as can be, and there’s your Albert. Why shouldn’t they make a match of it? My mother and you are life-long friends. Do say “Yes.” We may all yet make a fat living here in France.’

“I was silent with astonishment. In a way, Laurette, he was touching, too. So young, and yet acting as the father of the family; and so unspeakably queer! The Marquis of Carabas was in my head all the time I looked at him.

“‘Albert must judge for himself,’ I said, as gravely as I could. ‘He’s of age. Yes, Paulette is certainly pretty—perhaps almost too pretty—and not troubled with brains.’

“‘Who cares for brains with a face like hers!’ says he. ‘But that isn’t all. What about Jerome and Laurette? Why not?’

“You may well jump, little daughter! I really couldn’t contain my laughter then. ‘Laurette and Jerome!’ I said, ‘but, good God, Jerome is younger than Laurette, and she has scarcely done with her dolls! You are certainly in a marrying mood, Napoleon. This is a massacre of the Innocents.’

“He laughed himself at that. ‘More still to come, Signora Panoria!’ he said. ‘A marriage-breeze certainly blew upon me this morning—and why not, now I begin to see my way in the world a little! I have plans—’ but he stopped himself there. He waited a minute, then came forward and took my hand and kissed it as awkwardly as he always does. I’m sure he would have

his own hand kissed instead for choice! He's as vain as six peacocks, really. And then out came the wonderful proposal. He wanted to marry me. *ME!*"

Laure Permon burst into a wild fit of laughter. Puss in Boots propose to her beautiful mother! Puss in Boots! She laughed until two bright tears of mirth ran down her cheeks.

"Mother—that was the day we heard you laughing—wasn't it? And Napoleon came out all red and furious. Mon Dieu, what did you say?"

"I stared at him stupefied and then laughed until I was tired. I couldn't help it even if it did hurt his feelings. He drew himself up and glared at me like Don Desperado. 'If *this* is good manners!' said he,—and still I laughed until I could laugh no more."

"I can just see how furious he would be," Laure Permon said more gravely. "And he doesn't forgive things. And then, mother?"

"And then I said: 'My dear Napoleon, let us talk seriously. You think you know my age. Well, you don't! That's one of my little weaknesses. Why, I might not only be *your* mother, but Joseph's! There now! Do spare me this kind of joke. I don't like it from your mother's son.'"

"'But I'm serious, Signora Panoria,' he said. 'As serious as can be. You don't look a day over thirty, and what do I care about age? I assure you, I've thought it over. And now I see my way better, I must marry. Indeed, they want to find me a charming wife who belongs to the aristocratic quarter, good-tempered, agreeable—Oh, I assure you I've not far to seek—but you would suit me better for several reasons. Do think it over!'

"He almost reduced me to hysterics. He was so grave about it, so sure he was right, and such an incurable young idiot! To quiet him I said I would think it over, though I had never aspired so high as to conquer a heart of twenty-six and I hoped this wouldn't interrupt our friendship.

"'At any rate, think it over,' he said, and I said, 'Well, well, I will.' But what do you think, Laurette? Have you heard the Buonaparte girls chattering about any *coup* he means to bring off? There must be something. Anyhow he was offended, for he has scarcely been here since."

"It's a curious thing," said Laurette, in a meditative fashion for so young a girl, "that one's always talking about Napoleon; his queerness, or his poverty, or his looks, or the wild things he says. One *has* to talk about him, he's not like other people. I wonder who the woman of the Faubourg St. Germain is that they want him to marry? And I wonder who 'they' are?"

"Depend upon it, the whole thing was nonsense," her mother said briskly. "I don't even flatter myself he *thought* he was in love with me. He

had just shaped and planned the whole thing in his head as an end to some scheme he has in view. But give me Lucien for calm good sense and stability. You may laugh, Laurette, but it would never surprise me to see a real genuine Republic established in France—not a weak despotism like the Convention—and Lucien the president. He believes in Liberty, and is a man who will rise by the nobility of his ideas. Napoleon believes in himself.”

“Oh, mother, no more politics to-day, I entreat!” cried Laure, stopping her pretty ears. “And no more Napoleon! We have my new evening gown to choose. I prefer India muslin and silver lama to all the ill-mannered young generals alive. You got rid of him and his impertinence very well, and there’s an end of it. Of course, I see now why he stays away. Let him!”

“I wonder where I should have landed if I had accepted the gentleman,” said Madame Permon, laughing again at the mere recollection of that absurd moment. “In an asylum for lunatics, I expect. Well, come along, Laurette. Get your hat.”

CHAPTER II

THE RIPENING OF HARVEST

WALKING quickly, Junot found his way through crowded narrow streets from the Permons' house to the Jardin des Plantes.

Paris was a queer sight in those days. Something of its mediæval dress lingered about it still in the inconvenience, narrowness, darkness and odour of those streets. They were horribly noisy too, with ill-fed horses and ill-set wheels clattering over the cobbles. And every he or she hurrying on his or her business had a furtive air as if conscious that a sudden clutch might be laid on the shoulder and prove to be Death's. So many, so suddenly, had dropped down that dark oubliette in the last few years by the bloody way of the guillotine. You might know as little of politics as the man in the moon and meddle as little, but if you had a private enemy, spiteful woman or jealous man, a nod to the Committee of Public Safety would do the trick, and the black oubliette swallowed you and so an end. Things were better now, but still—still, who could know?

Junot had an appointment which he would not have missed for much fine gold. He paid little attention to the hurrying faces. He had meant in any case to be there earlier than necessary, for there were one or two matters he must consider carefully before the moment of meeting came, so his own affairs shut out all of this, and Paris went by unheeded. Pictures from the past flashed into his mind instead as he walked slowly up and down; waiting, waiting among the leafless October trees.

Toulon. The cursed English had made good their footing there, invited by those who hated the line the Revolution was taking. It had to be recaptured and he himself, a young sergeant, had often noticed the little haggard, eagle-faced Corsican, a captain of artillery whom they called Buonaparte. Junot thought he had fire, readiness, other good gifts for a soldier. Two fellow soldiers, Duroc and Marmont, themselves eager for success, thought so too, but the little Corsican was so damned reserved that no one could get near him; least of all a sergeant like Andoche Junot. He had the burning pride of poverty—one could see that! How had the real meeting come to pass? The Corsican captain wanted an order carried to a point of danger—let us say death, for the risk amounted to that—and Junot was sent to take his orders. He noticed then how quiet and pale the little captain was, with just one dangerous spark in the grey-blue of his eye.

“Off with your uniform and take this order.”

That was all, but there was the authentic ring of command in the voice. How had he found the courage to answer as he did? “Mon capitaine, not I! Not without my uniform. I’m no spy. A soldier of France.”

The answer flashed.

“You refuse?”

“I’ll have my uniform. It’s honour enough for those bloody Englishmen as it is!”

There was a gleam of a smile, no more, and he went and returned. And still he had not got near the Corsican; if one really wanted to get near a hybrid like that! Who cares for a Corsican anyhow? And yet—he did want it. Young men are like that. But it was not long before the little captain of the artillery wanted a letter written for him down at the battery. Again Junot! He sat and wrote and was finishing when a bursting bomb from the English scattered dirt all over the paper. That was droll. He laughed out loud.

“Shan’t need any sand to dry the ink!” he said.

The little captain turned and looked at him. Their eyes met. They had often seen each other before, had even spoken, but never really met until then.

“You’ve got to be about me!” he said slowly. “You’ll do.”

They had been together ever since; with intervals, but together. Friends; on one side at least.

Junot knew all the shifts of the Buonaparte family as the tie drew closer. He knew how they had come over to France all but destitute. He shared Napoleon’s chagrin when Lucien—the idle sapless dreamer, as his brother thought him—married Christine Boyer, his landlord’s daughter, a girl who could neither read nor write.

“My God, why can’t a man believe in his future? To damn himself like that,” was Napoleon’s comment. “One woman’s as good as another in a year’s time except for the advantages she brings, and Lucien—” He broke off there, biting the words into pale lips. Junot knew as well as if he had spit it out that Lucien would never be forgiven. Joseph was the eldest, but Napoleon was the real man of the family. All the Buonapartes knew that. Well, he had earned the position. He had struggled for them all. When he began to be noticed as a soldier and through his means France held the coast along the Mediterranean, his family was his first thought. His friendship with the younger Robespierre got Joseph a commissionership with the army,

and Lucien a superintendency of stores. God knows they never would have got them for themselves! It was always Napoleon.

One really might say he had won a wife with a dowry for Joseph: Julie Clary, the rich soapmaker's girl. Clary *père* had behaved very handsomely to Signora Letizia too. He had come to believe that what with Napoleon and the beauty of the three girls there might be a future for these Corsican refugees. Junot knew—for Napoleon had told him—that he himself had had more than a passing thought of marrying Désirée, the other Clary daughter who was desperately in love with him.

"A nice girl, and the money would be convenient just now," Napoleon had said to him. "But, no. The Convention is tottering, and when it falls—there will be a better market!"

Junot could not for the life of him imagine why the fall of the Convention should affect Napoleon's value in the marriage market. His own honest Republican heart was filled with anxiety at the thought of it. More blood, more bother, more silly upsets in Paris; and Italy waiting all the time like a fat goose ready for the plucking. Why in the name of sacred thunder couldn't the country settle down to its business in peace? The business of prosperity within and war without.

And when Napoleon gave Désirée Clary the go-by after suggesting her in vain to Junot, she married Bernadotte, a soldier friend, and Junot really felt it to be a chance lost to Napoleon.

The Convention still tottered on and nothing particular happened, except, indeed, that Junot fell madly in love with Paulette Buonaparte. His love for her brother began it; her own loveliness finished it. Heavens, how beautiful she was! Figure, face, smile—perfection: the Roman Venus returned to make havoc of the hearts of men. Somewhere he had seen a cast of the Medicean Venus, lovely, shrinking, in her studied pose of modesty. That was Paulette; Paulette to the life. All but the modesty. Alas, modesty had gone out of fashion when the guillotine came in, and there were *risqué* stories rampant in Marseilles where Signora Letizia had lived with the Three Graces, her daughters, on landing in France with uncommonly few French francs in her pocket to pay her way. Still girls will be girls and a true love, deep, sincere, like his for her would cure her of these childish escapades and

Steps came along the gravel through the trees; light quick steps. He knew them very well, and they scattered his thoughts as a stone flung in water scatters reflections with reality. He never could concentrate on anything else when Napoleon was there.

He came along through the trees, head down, thinking his own secret thoughts—the way of him that Junot knew very well. He was a friend of the little Corsican general's, but had he ever got an inch nearer than the beginning at Toulon? They thou'd and thee'd each other, and there were moments of approach, and then quite suddenly Andoche would find himself at a distance again and leagues of a cold wind of the spirit blowing between them.

No one could describe Buonaparte as a good-looking fellow, but the word “noticeable” might have been made for him. His face was lean enough to show the bones, and none the worse for that since its architecture, built up from a most powerful and thrust-out jaw and chin, was fine. The line of brow, nose, lips, clear-cut and beautiful; a sculptor could have done no better, aiming at classic heroics. Some Roman or dominant Renaissance strain came out in him there. Put him in robes and you had a keen young cardinal of the Borgia circle with his eye on the throne of St. Peter, if that were the best prize in the lottery. Complexion pale as wax with a luminance about it that caught the eye. But here beauty ceased and power dominated.

The eyes, deep set in marble caves, were not the eyes of Apollo; the ponderous hind-head on its short throat and ill-matched figure scorned proportion. Ill-matched, because from the waist upward he was built for a big man. From the waist down the small neat legs and hands were those of a fop. Contradictions, physical as well as spiritual and intellectual. The eyes, a deep grey-blue and in repose not remarkable, but of them more hereafter; the hair thin and fine in quality, a dull chestnut. People already had begun to speak of him as altogether unusual. Junot had never doubted it from the beginning.

Buonaparte took more pains with his dress now that things were looking up with him. His uniform fitted his lanky figure well, and the boots would no longer excite Laurette Permon's derision. They were better cleaned also than in the days when he had to keep them up to the mark himself.

So deep in thought was he that he would have passed Junot unseen if he had not saluted, half in jest, half nervously.

“Mon Général!”

Napoleon stopped, smiling too, and all the meaning of his face changed from a landscape in mist to one in sunshine. Now for a moment his face was entirely beautiful: the eyes mild and winning, the lips upcurved with almost feminine sweetness—the sweeter for the massive background of head and brows.

“You here, Junot!” he said. “Well, I’ve got twenty minutes to spare. No more, no less. Let’s walk up and down—I want exercise—and get through with it, whatever it is. How was the Citoyenne Permon? If she could only rule her tongue, there’s no more charming woman in France. Eh! You might do worse than think of the pretty Laurette, Junot. Too young yet, but she’ll grow.”

“I had a very different proposal to make, General,” said Junot, quivering. The very clank of his sword as he walked unnerved him. And then Napoleon was so obviously thinking of something else and caring not at all for what was in his mind! It grew irrelevant as the ants he saw criss-crossing on the path before them. Napoleon spoke again, unhearing.

“You see, I’ve got a terrible lot on my mind to-day. The parting of the roads—it’s come at last! Here, listen; I know I can trust you through thick and thin and you may have to be in it now for all I can tell. O Junot, if you only had a head and not a barber’s block on your shoulders! I want a word of advice now as I shall never want it again. And everyone’s so damned mediocre! My God, the mess they’ve made of France and the Revolution! If a man had a chance—.” He stopped, with gloom blotting out all the light in his face. Seen thus, the head was too heavy; stooped with its own weight. The man looked like a roughly blocked-out statue in marble—something begun and left unfinished.

Junot took even the barber’s block patiently. He was used to these flowers of speech, and Buonaparte could make amends when he pleased—and then Paulette!

“Well, what is it? You know I’m behind you always,” he said patiently, postponing himself as one always must do with Napoleon. “More rows in the Convention? Poor France! The People should hoof them into the gutter.”

“The People!” The echo in a tone of inexpressible contempt! “They say every country has the government it deserves. The fools! They earned their Convention and they have it! Well, the trouble’s this—turn this way,—fewer fools knocking about!”

They turned down a side-alley and walked slowly, Buonaparte kicking up the withered leaves with his boots. He was nervous and irritable; Junot discreetly silent.

“The Sections of Paris are up against the Convention,” he said. “They won’t stand their fooleries any longer. They’re arming everywhere. Tomorrow Paris will be in insurrection. And how do you suppose the Convention will meet it! Why, by putting Barras at the head of the defence.

Barras! Lath and plaster when they want blood and iron! There'll be real fighting."

"And a good thing too!" Junot said boldly. "The sooner that damned Convention is down and out the better—I'm on the side of the People against this rascally Government."

Silence—his sails fluttered in the calm. He turned a wavering eye on Buonaparte. "*You're* on the side of the People?" he said. Still silence: the little general kicking up the leaves moodily. They turned into another and more deserted path, and then he swung round in front on Junot and faced him.

"Listen to me, Junot, and use my brains if you can't use your own. The People! My God—the bloody apes they've been in this Revolution! Do I care—does any sensible man care a damn for their murdering the King and Queen and swimming in blood if it had done any good? Not I, for one! But it's idiots' folly from beginning to end, and a finish to all law and order. Because a man was low and ignorant and base-born—that was the credential that got him to the top. Is the folly of one fool multiplied by millions any guarantee for good government? And their play-acting for all the world to see! Here's my fool of a brother Lucien must call himself Brutus, to be in the fashion; and they must re-name all the months with high-sounding bosh: Fructidor, Messidor, instead of the good old names all the world uses. I declare to God I haven't got them right in my head yet. And their tenth day instead of Sunday! *Decadi!* I could vomit when I think of their twaddle. Grown-up men to be playing with words."

He paused, breathless. Junot persisted doggedly. It never could seem so absurd to a Frenchman as to an outsider like a Corsican. The man was Italian; no Frenchman. He was never a Frenchman all his life.

"But the Convention—surely a greater set of fools never existed, my friend! They are driving France to ruin."

The other lifted his stooping head quickly: "True enough, but fools have their uses."

"And how?"

"They keep the nest warm for wiser men until the time is ripe. Let them ruin France until she realizes it and looks elsewhere."

Another pause—Junot's hand wavering uncertainly about his handsome moustaches. He could not see an inch ahead in the tangle. Buonaparte halted suddenly.

“I know your politics, Junot, and you don’t know mine, but we’re friends. Can I trust you? Will you follow me?”

Junot looked at him with a smile struggling through sadness.

“Yes, friend, though I often think you wouldn’t let your little finger ache to save my whole carcass. But I’ll follow you. I never have any choice where you’re concerned and you see clear where I don’t. What’s the game?”

It was a virtue, or at least a weapon of Buonaparte’s, that he could take the exact measure of a man’s subjugation to himself. He spoke without hesitation.

“Here it is then. Fréron is a friend of Barras. Fréron is in love with Paulette and willing to do me a good turn.” Junot winced but was silent. “He brought Barras and me together this morning and Barras came straight to the point. ‘To-morrow decides the fate of the Convention,’ he said—and I could see his lips were white and he kept wiping his damp hands with his handkerchief, so I waited. ‘And we can’t trust our generals. They’re afraid of the People. Will you take command of the second army of the Convention?’ I hesitated, for I happen to know the Sections are well-armed and it might be a better choice to back the People. But Barras was waiting. ‘I give you three minutes to decide,’ he said. My God! What a three minutes! A man wants clear sight at such a time.”

He halted in pallid excitement. Junot also, his face quivering.

“But, great God, it was only yesterday you said to me, ‘If only the Sectionaries would put me at their head I would make short work of the Convention.’ Oh, stick to the People! Be an honest Republican and cover yourself with glory.”

Buonaparte smiled a little, explaining patiently as one does to a child.

“My good Junot, the People’s ramp is played out. What France wants is law and order and a tight hand over her, and she’ll get it. I didn’t take the three minutes, for ahead of me I saw . . . more than I’ll tell you now, but I engaged with Barras on the nail.”

Junot was half stunned.

“It was a great honour for a young man like you anyhow!” he said doubtfully.

“Honour! They had no one else they could trust, and they knew a Corsican would be less squeamish about French blood than a Frenchman. There’ll be grapeshot flying to-morrow—fifth of October, or 13th Vendémiaire, as the fools call it. And you’ll stand in with me, Junot? Where I go, my dog shall go? Eh? There are things ahead—but that can wait.”

“Where you go, I go!” Junot said, with a sort of solemnity. “Give me my orders for to-morrow.”

They walked in silence towards the streets again, Napoleon lost in thought. As they neared them Junot said with a certain timidity:

“Can you spare me a moment, General?”

He looked at his watch. “Five minutes,” was all he said.

The lover’s voice choked in his throat. Five minutes, and that cold young face intent on its own mysterious thoughts opposing inscrutability to his fever! But brevity was indicated, and out it came.

“General, I love your sister Paulette, and I wrote to my father asking his advice. Here is his answer.”

Buonaparte listened now. He shot one keen look at Andoche and took the letter in silence. When he had mastered the sense he returned it.

“Not a very brilliant prospect, my friend. Your father speaks of an eventual twenty thousand francs and nothing at all now. Paulette—”

“But I shall be rich then, General! With my pay it means a very decent income, and as you climb, I shall climb behind you. I love—I adore Paulette, but even her value to me is the greater because I should be your brother. You don’t reject me?”

“I neither reject nor assent. The affair hasn’t reached that stage. You have nothing; she has nothing. Twice nothing is worse than nothing. You must wait. God knows one has to wait for anything worth getting. As to whether Paulette is worth getting—”

Junot broke in with a lover’s outburst which even Napoleon’s cool glance could not chill. Divine! Exquisite!

“Well, to you she may be,” he interrupted. “To me she’s an adorably pretty little fool with a perfect taste in dress which she can’t gratify. Nothing more. My dear Junot, you’ve had affairs before. Witness the pretty chambermaid! Witness Yvette! This fever will cure itself like the rest. As for me, I too have had my affairs. They are the natural distractions—but when it comes to marriage I shall never let my head stumble over my heart. Take a leaf out of my book. Now walk with me as far as the Boulevard.”

They parted in front of the Chinese Baths, and Junot had not had the courage to say another word of his hopes. Napoleon was kind but absent. He halted on his foot, however, as he turned to go.

“Be with me early to-morrow. As to Paulette: your father wears well; you may never touch those twenty thousand francs. You must wait for better

days! [And he turned his peculiar steely glance on Junot, the eyes as hard as Polar ice.] To-morrow may be the beginning of them if you help me to bring it off. If I don't bring it off—"

He paused.

"What then?"

"Tails they win, heads I lose!"

He laughed, pulled Junot's ear after a fashion he had, and went striding off into the dark. A nervous trembling ran through the man left behind. The great city was muttering ominously about him in the dark, dreaming new nightmares for the morrow. Or was it the growl of the tiger prowling the jungle as the destined victim draws near? The people awake and moving stealthily on the doomed Convention through darkness charged with fear. And his sympathies were with them—if only Napoleon would let him be. Good God, the puzzle of life: the bewilderment of the heart pulling one way, the brain in another, and circumstance as careless as Napoleon himself! Should he live to bless or curse the day he had met the Corsican?

He walked the streets half the night noting the preparations of the Sectionaries, and even the thought of Paulette was in abeyance under that cold staring moon.

CHAPTER III

HARVEST

IT was the evening of the next day, the fateful fifth of October, and a beautiful woman stood at the window of her house waiting, watching, trembling for news from the Tuileries, where the Convention was holding its sittings—the Tuileries, the palace of dead Royalty, the home of dying dreams. The men using it now as the seat of government blustered to reassure themselves but each went secretly in fear. The spectre of the august past of France haunted the vast echoing chambers, now, as it were, emptied and desolate, and outside forty thousand armed Sectionaries and Barras—Barras was Commander-in-Chief of the Army of the Interior, and a young comparatively unknown general of foreign extraction his only hope. There was reason for fear. It was Barras for whom she was waiting. She must have the news straight from him. If he were not here in ten minutes she would give him and the Convention up for lost. His head might at that very minute be tossing over Paris on a pike.

Her own had had a narrow escape of the same fate in the days of the Terror, and it was to save that graceful head that her lover Tallien had compassed the fall of the bloody Robespierre, and thus opened the prison doors to more destined victims than his lovely mistress.

For this was Thérèse Cabarrus, wife of de Fontenay, mistress and later wife of Tallien, the man of the hour when Robespierre paid for his crime with his blood. Lovely among the lovely, wife of a man infamous from his cruelty and treachery, her all depended upon the life of the Convention. In her whole life of changes and surprises she had seldom lived through a day of more dreadful anxiety than this; for if the Convention crumbled and the People, drunk with blood-lust, ruled again, the Convention and all allied with them could scarcely hope to see the sunrise of the following day. Dreadful images of her former imprisonment, the men and women led out to death as sheep to the slaughter, haunted her as she watched and trembled in mute agony.

A step on the stair: a strange step; not that of Barras, nor yet Tallien. Then it was news—bad news—the news she sickened to hear. The Convention must be worsted, and the guillotine thirsting for its daily drink of blood. Truly, the Revolution devoured its own children!

The servants were off duty; greedy for news. The door opened, and a young man in the uniform of a general of artillery walked in unannounced. He saw no one at first—she was half hidden by the heavy window curtains—and he stood looking about him with calm unruffled interest at the splendidly furnished room.

“The rats in kings’ nests do themselves and their harlots well!” was his thought. “They mimic their masters to some purpose!”

The curtain was lifted and a beautiful woman came forward, a hand on her heart as to press its beating down.

“Monsieur—I mean, citoyen Général, the news quickly if you please. Have mercy. Be brief. Is the Government safe?”

She stood clinging to the back of a chair, her dark eyes entreating, searching his pale impassive face. He answered at once and coldly.

“Citoyenne, the news is good. Citoyens Tallien and Barras are at this moment continuing the deliberations of the Convention. The Sectionaries, which is to say the People, are completely routed. Being obliged to pass this way I was requested to give you the news.”

Bright colour flashed up into her face. At the moment he thought her the most fascinating woman he had ever seen. Her tall elegant figure was displayed in every voluptuous curve by a dress of finest India muslin worked in a pattern of gold leaves and slit halfway up the thigh to display a band of gold and cameos encircling her leg above the knee. The ornament was repeated in a similar band on the upper part of the bare and beautiful arms. Her full bosom, seeming almost to burst the frail bodice of muslin and gold, was displayed almost to the waist, and above this audacity sprang the pillar of her throat and lovely sparkling brunette face crowned with short black silken curls like those of a handsome boy.

She flung her bare arms above her head, drunk with joy, and laughed aloud. The radiant display moved him. He drew a little nearer; he softened his voice for her. The events of the day had given him new courage with women—even with the Queen of the Convention, as they called Thérèse Tallien.

“Citoyen Général, your name, that I may welcome the bearer of the happiest news on earth to the happiest woman? Who commanded the army of the Convention?”

“Citoyenne, it was I. My name is Buonaparte.”

Half hysterical in the release of tension, she struck her hands together until her rings and bracelets jingled.

“Then it was you—yourself! Oh, Barras was wise! He knew his man. He deserves to be a”—she checked the dangerous word that had nearly burst from her lips—“the ruler of a sovereign people!”

“He is a great man,” the young general replied with imperceptible irony.

“But what happened, General? I beg and entreat to be told. I hope these low scoundrels had a sound lesson?”

“Citoyenne, they had. My artillery was placed ready to receive them, an attention they had not expected, and as they advanced upon the Tuileries I opened fire. I gave them the honour of firing first that they might be the aggressors. And then I let them have it. A mere whiff of grapeshot! But enough—why trouble your fair ears? The rabble fled, and Barras reported the complete triumph to the Government. The People are down and out.”

Her bright face shot out beams of delight. She caught his hands in hers and held them in a strong little clasp, scarlet lips apart disclosing the seed pearls within. He knew he might have kissed them at that moment, have caught her in a strong embrace and had no blame, drunk as she was with joy, but he held himself cold and subordinate—for reasons.

“General, you are a true Republican—a true and faithful Republican! In the name of France, I thank you. There will be no reward too great for Captain Vendémiaire when the People comprehends the service you have done them.”

He had really forgotten for a second that the sober old fifth of October figured in the Republican calendar as 13 Vendémiaire, but the flash pleased him—one of those useful nicknames which tag a man with something he would not have forgotten.

“Captain Vendémiaire, at your service, citoyenne!” he said bowing. “And for my reward—”

The door opened slowly, and another woman moved languidly into the room. In a voice soft as silver bells in twilight, she put her question to Thérèse Tallien.

“Is it news, chérie?”

“News and of the best!” cried the other. “Heartening news, Josephine, ma mie! Good Republican news. Allow me to present Captain Vendémiaire, who brings us such news that I must order a bottle of champagne to drink its health in and that of the Convention! The servants have all gone mad, I think. I’ll fetch it myself.”

She darted to the door and turned there.

“I forgot! Pardon me. The Captain Vendémiaire, the Citoyenne Beauharnais.”

The two remained looking at each other with a smile as the lovely Tallien flew down the stair, twinkling with jewels as she ran.

He saw grace itself moving in soft undulations to the sofa upon which grace must dispose herself to the best advantage, and watched her with his cool interest. The name. What did he connect with that? He knew. The Viscount de Beauharnais—that was it. A noble, yes, and he had renounced the privileges of his rank and cast in his lot with the Revolution. They had made him Commander of the Rhine, and there he did his best, but what chance had a noble with the men of the Terror? They trumped up an accusation and guillotined him. Of his widow, Buonaparte knew nothing but supposed she had scraped through the Terror like Thérèse Tallien by granting her favours to the new men. Stop!—had he not heard something about an aristocratic mistress of Barras’s? Some woman who had escaped out of prison with Tallien’s mistress, owing to the fall of Robespierre? Then this might be she.

He looked with a deeper interest at the woman before him, and made his inventory. Certainly not beautiful like the other. None of that radiant flush and colour about her. Not in her first youth. Possibly six and twenty, about his own age, but who could judge in that flattering rose-shaded candle-light? Her figure exquisite, with slender lovely curves of bosom and limbs, not quite so lavishly displayed as the Tallien’s. Features—good enough and no more; complexion, the waxen whiteness of some thick petalled tropic flower which will show no flush of its life blood through that immaculate purity; eyes, large, dark blue as hyacinths and well shaded by dark lashes; abundant chestnut hair on a head perched imperially on a swan’s throat. This gave her dignity. She had a foreign air. He sought the French type in her and could not find it. What word summed her up, and reduced her to a cipher to be inventoried in the list he kept for reference? Seductive. That was it. Slowly, languidly seductive; a woman to send thrills and throbblings along a man’s blood, if no more.

At her request he repeated the story of the day, noting how she smiled with pleasure, saying little—a close-lipped smile which did not disclose her teeth. He hurriedly added the word “Distinguished” to his inventory. Yes; she looked an aristocrat to the long slender feet and almond-tipped fingers.

“Were many killed, General? I hope not. French blood is French blood, no matter whose it is,” she said, fanning herself rhythmically.

That question had not occurred to the beautiful, dangerous Tallien, and he liked women to be gentle and compassionate, in all things the complement of man.

“Not much life lost, madame. Most in the section of Brutus. Madame will remember that a little blood-letting is sometimes necessary for the patient! We are really on the People’s side if they did but realize it. But unluckily they don’t.”

“True!” she said, and flushed delicately.

“Madame” he had called her, and unconsciously. It was long indeed since she had heard that form of address, and she liked it well.

“Citoyenne”—how odious, gross and coarse it sounded! And a great lady to be addressed as the baker’s, scavenger’s, wife is addressed! Hateful! What man could put any homage into such a word as “citoyenne,”—“citizeness.” Good God! The charm of charms was that the young man had not known he said “madame.” It was wrung from him by some elegance of distinction in her that set her apart from other women.

But Buonaparte knew very well. If this were the favourite of Barras, and Barras were to be as useful to him in the future as he intended he should be, the lady must be conciliated. “Madame” was a homage which women of that exotic grace would appreciate. They should have it. Suddenly he appeared to recollect himself.

“Citoyenne, I apologize. It was an involuntary mistake!” he said. She waved him to a chair as Thérèse Tallien came up the stair with her strong swift tread, and entered the room with a huge silver-gilt tray, two bottles upon it and cut crystal goblets. The beautiful Bacchante! The colour and glow of her! It was as if full summer with sunshine and rose-garlands had burst in upon them. She would not let Napoleon touch the bottle or help, and opened it dexterously herself.

“Sit down! You’re tired out and women should wait upon a soldier. Eh, Josephine? See how white he is! Drink, my friend; drink first!”

She poured it into his hand, then lifted her own glass above her head at the full length of her lovely arm.

“Stand up, you little lazy Josephine, and drink too. Up with your glass! No—don’t rise like a snake undulating its coils, but spring like a panther. Health to Barras! And the good government of France!”

They drank, Josephine sipping and smiling at her friend’s frantic enthusiasm.

“To the Convention!”

They drank again.

“To Tallien. To all good and true Republicans.”

Again.

“And now your glasses!”

She refilled them with the light sparkle of the best in Tallien’s cellar.

“To General Buonaparte! And may his star lead him high and far!”

Napoleon set his down halfway to his lips, laughing. Josephine smiled adorably at him as she drank, waving her glass gently in his honour. The Tallien emptied hers to the last drop and flung it on the parquet floor where it shattered into a hundred diamonds.

“Too good to use for anything else,” she said. “And now, citizen General, you are one of us—one and indivisible!”

“One and indivisible!” he repeated, with a bow to either lady.

Certainly no man, and least of all a man who had struggled with adversity like Buonaparte, who had nearly damned himself by casting in his lot with Robespierre just as Robespierre was tottering to his fall, and had only just retrieved that stupidity, could object to union with the constellation of risen stars which these two women represented. They were not only beauty, but power. They had wealth, influence, all the prizes. But more: they were an open door on the way he meant to tread to a goal which even he could not discern at that moment.

He would have lingered with them all night, but presently the Beauharnais said, with the silvery gentleness that had caught his ear at once:

“Thérèse, can’t you see that General Buonaparte is mortally tired? Send him away. He is too courteous to go. Am I not right, citizen General?”

“I am tired, madame—citoyenne—but I forget it here.”

“Then I insist.”

He bowed and in a few moments the curtain was dropped over that glittering scene and its sirens and he was in the cold dark street outside. But he had made his effect: the door was wide open for him now.

“What a very odd-looking young man!” said Josephine languidly to her friend. “I suppose he is going to be useful in future and we shall have to invite him.”

“We shall have to do more than invite him. We shall have to make him one of us and watch him all the time lest he should go too fast and get out of our reach. Odd? I thought his face remarkable.”

“I can never be certain that I like remarkable people. They expect so much. Well—the day is over and I must have my beauty sleep. Good night, chérie.”

She moved about the room with exquisite grace, extinguishing candle after candle. “For you must sleep, too, Thérèse. I am glad I came to keep you company to-day. You would have sat up all night triumphing!”

“I should!” said the Tallien. “Well, you are right. Let us go. I believe the servants are all out in the streets.”

That was the first meeting.

CHAPTER IV

LOVE THE CONQUEROR

FOUR months later Laurette Permon was with her mother at a public and extremely fashionable ball at the Hotel Thelusson. The Convention had triumphed and its five members were now the Directory—the five-fold King of France for it had been considered well to change the name from one so hated throughout France. Though no immediate disorder threatened and a sullen calm had set in, people were still afraid of displaying their wealth in private entertainments; nor was it desirable to advertise to either the sovereign people or the sovereign Directory that here was a fat sheep for the shearing. Consequently, though the world danced as gaily as ever, it danced at the price of a ticket for some public resort. It was objectionable enough to Citoyenne Permon's private sense of aristocracy to find herself and her daughter in the ballroom of the Hotel Thelusson with a paying crowd about her, but as there was no choice, and she could not exist a day without society, she went with her son and daughter, *faute de mieux*.

They looked about them on entering. None of the ladies connected by especially tender ties with the Directory were present, but many of pronounced Republican principles, which at that date superseded and excused the absence of all others. There was a tightness about the corners of the Citoyenne Permon's pretty mouth as she surveyed them and turned scornfully away.

"Napoleon!" she said briefly, indicating to Laurette a little neat figure dressed in an extremely well-cut uniform, whose eyes were steadily fixed on the door, with its rising tide of extremely lightly dressed ladies.

"Then that was he who got out of the fine carriage we saw as we drove up," said Laurette with lively interest. "I thought so but couldn't be sure. Times are changed!"

Her mother laughed a little.

"Times are changed with him indeed, and you'll find he won't be eager to remember the past. General Buonaparte, the right hand of the Directory, is a very different person from the half-starved little officer of artillery with his dirty boots that we knew once upon a time! Well, he has known which way the cat would jump and has jumped with her. What will you wager, Laurette, that he takes no notice of us to-night?"

“I’ll wager a box of bonbons that he does, mother,” Laurette said boldly. “He has far more heart than you’ll allow, and I believe he’s really fond of you in spite of all that silly stuff about marrying. You’ll see! He’ll ask me to dance.”

What they saw for some time was General Buonaparte, fixed, gazing at the door. The magnificent Madame Tallien entered with her lawful Tallien, raying beauty and radiance about her; triumphant, the Queen of the Directory; her position assured for life, as she well believed. Why not? With the little eagle-faced Corsican general for a sword in their right hand, who should say Tallien and Barras nay? She wore a classic band of diamonds in her black curls, glittering like stars in midnight. Black also and glittering with diamond spangles was the robe that professed to veil her Republican charms; if the morsel that would easily lie in a man’s hand could be given so solid a name as robe. But it was the era of lavish display of nature’s handiwork enhanced with art, and when the whisper ran round that Madame Tallien’s exquisitely formed leg was bare to the thigh save for the diamonds that adorned it above the knee, and when the enraptured eye caressed little bare sandalled feet, each toe glitteringly ringed with diamonds, there was scarcely a woman present who did not blush for her own silk stockings. Her greeting to the young general was extremely cordial. Apart from inclination, she had her orders to that effect, for the very efficiency of “Captain Vendémiaire” had alarmed the Directory, now grown extremely sensitive to the dangers of its position. She had been admitted to a conclave between Barras and Tallien where the position was put clearly enough before this daughter of the new-born France so thoroughly baptized in aristocratic blood.

“General Buonaparte,” said Barras deliberately, inhaling a huge pinch of snuff with his retracted nostrils, “must be kept in good humour until we find a man to beat him at his own game of war. For I fear he has realized that a game played once with success may be played twice, and if he should turn and rend us on behalf of the Sovereign People, or should elect to seat the Royal Family again on the throne, it might be—well—inconvenient. There are ambition and, if I mistake not, an unflinching selfishness about that young man which must be reckoned with.”

Tallien, haggard and eager, assented.

“It is the women of our party who should see to this!” he said. “Buonaparte is at an impressionable age, and his pleasures have been restricted by poverty. Luxury, pleasure, those are the best securities against revolt, and we are certainly in a position to give him both.”

“I know,” said Thérèse Tallien. “He’s in a queer position. The people he defeated will never forgive him for the past, and I suppose we shall never forgive him for the possible future.”

She was thinking of that saying and the consequences as he stood fixed by the ballroom door watching—watching! She understood perfectly well what he was watching for, and why.

A little stir, and beauty was for the moment eclipsed as grace herself entered in the person of Citoyenne Beauharnais. She bowed slightly and smiled to Napoleon, glancing over her shoulder to see whether Barras brought up the rear, carrying her *cachemire* a little awkwardly over his arm. The new men had not the manners of the older school—that must be admitted—but Josephine, once Vicomtesse de Beauharnais, owed the uncouth Barras too much to be censorious. She smiled even more charmingly upon him than upon the young general, put her lovely hand through his arm, and undulated beside him to the upper end of the room with an air of mingled submission and possession which marked their relation as clearly as a trumpet proclamation could have done. But the world knew well enough. What was there to hide? There was nothing that was unfashionable in their connection and it was therefore above censure. The easy morals of the New France were only a trifle more down at heel than the old—that was all.

Madame Permon watched with her sparkling ironic glance.

“She will dance with Napoleon. Look how he watches her!” she said to her son Albert. “Now that Laurette is dancing, I’ll hazard a guess. I should not be surprised if Beauharnais is the woman they talk of his marrying to bind him to the Directors’ interests. A woman of the aristocrats, they say—a woman older than himself—”

Albert stared at her, mouth open. He knew his mother’s shrewdness but this stunned belief. It could not be.

“Good God, mother, all the world knows she is the mistress of Barras, and if Napoleon dared—”

“The wiser part of the world know Barras is tired of her. He has done very well by her, too. When she came out of prison with the Tallien she had saved her head by a miracle. She hadn’t a penny left. Barras has supported her and her boy and girl ever since. Oh, it was worth his while, I own. They were proud, that party, of having a woman of her rank and manners among them. The good God knows they have none of their own! But it paid her, and I don’t blame her. What else could she have done? A Creole from

Martinique, and her people poor and far off! Barras was better than starvation anyhow. Look at her diamonds!"

Albert, transfixed, watched the elegant beauty as she swam through the curves of a dance with Napoleon. Older than he? She did not look a day more than twenty-five, though she had a daughter at the fashionable school kept by Madame Campan. But, heavens alive, how could she have come by such amazing distinction! He knew as much of her as the world knew of the notorious friend of Barras and no more. The daughter of a mere sugar planter in the Isle of Martinique and a poor one at that; a demoiselle de la Pagerie, married by a family arrangement between her clever aunt and her lover to that lover's son—the young de Beauharnais with whom she quarrelled soon enough after marriage! How, where, had she learnt that soft distinction combined with exquisite kindness which young Albert could remember having seen once before, and only once, in his life. It was the Queen—that unhappy Marie Antoinette whose name none must now mention—bowing to the people from the balcony at Versailles, with what terrors God only knows hidden under a surface of the perfection of sweet courtesy and dignity. That picture of womanhood at its queenliest and loveliest could never be erased from his mind. But how had this woman, the mistress of Barras, who had sold herself for *cachemires* and diamonds, achieved the same exquisite courtesy of demeanour? He could not tell. Women—the wonder of them!

Marriage indeed! Ridiculous to suppose that Napoleon could pick up a woman like that for the asking or would take her if he could!

"See how he can't take his eyes off her. He is madly in love!" asserted his mother's cool impassive voice beside him. "He embarrasses her, and that's not surprising. But she would not be dancing with him now if Barras had not ordered it. And of course nothing could bind Napoleon to their interests like such a marriage. I wonder if it will be!"

"But what did happen to her, mother, after her husband was guillotined? I never heard," young Albert persisted, staring at the gracious figure gliding and returning in the dance.

"Why, she was imprisoned with Thérèse Tallien in the prison of Les Carmes and condemned to death with other aristocrats. It was a toss-up whether she or her husband would be guillotined first, and I don't suppose either cared much about the fate of the other, for he accused her of infidelity and they had parted after the births of the son and daughter. Beauharnais was guillotined. Luckily for Madame de Beauharnais, Barras and Tallien saw plainly that Robespierre, the devil's spawn as they called him—and he was

—in his fever for blood would have their heads next, and that urgency saved her. They got Robespierre's head before he got theirs. Tallien was in love with Thérèse Cabarrus, and out of prison she came with her friend de Beauharnais safe and sound and all their adventures before them! A good many people better than either of them got out too. Pick up my fan, Albert."

He was silent for a moment, looking at the gliding figures. Barras was talking with Tallien—a jest evidently. They both laughed aloud and Tallien struck Barras—the coarse brute!—lightly on the shoulder to stress his point. Josephine, passing in the dance, swept a reverence to her partner, smiling at Barras's laughter, diamonds sparkling round her long white throat. Thérèse, her beautiful lips blood-red with the rush of strong life within her, leaned forward and whispered in Josephine's ear as they crossed in the dance. The music, drowning talk, gave them all an air of dumb shadowy figures in pantomime, thrown for an instant on a bright background before vanishing. Could it be possible that these smiling elegant women were real; that they had suffered, agonized, in the frightful prisons of the Terror? That the guillotine had all but set its bloody claw where the line of diamonds glittered about that lovely throat? If that were true, how could they have forgotten and laugh and talk now like other women in a ballroom? Yes, he remembered having heard of how she sobbed and wept in terror when she had received the death sentence, and now she was dancing, laughing; light, gay, frivolous! Could people forget like that?

"But watch!" said his mother's voice beside him. "Now the dance is over, see how Napoleon slinks after her; afraid, but he can't keep away. See, she takes his arm. Oh, yes, I told Laurette we should see nothing of him tonight. He is lost, drowned in that woman Beauharnais."

It was true. The ballroom was only a confused glitter of lights before his eyes. The faces swam about him. She took his arm and he believed she must feel the throbbing of his heart through the delicate fingers that rested on it as he led her silently through the crowd to one of the many little nooks set apart for satiated dancers.

Curious eyes watched them as they went. That was Captain Vendémiaire, the crowd whispered: the man who by saving the Convention had saved France from a new Reign of Terror. And with a Convention reformed into a Directory (words counted for so much in France!) what might not be hoped? And that exquisite, pale, aristocratic woman leaning on his arm with dark blue eyes languidly surveying them, that was the Citoyenne Beauharnais, the mistress of Barras the Director. He must have great confidence in Captain Vendémiaire if he permitted her to dance with

him, for the lady was a *grande amoureuse*. All the world knew what the intimate friend of the beautiful Thérèse must be, and Barras as well as any. Indeed, at that moment he was watching the pair with his own expression of coarse cynicism. He laughed to himself and turned again to Tallien. These two were always good comrades in public at this particular time.

So they chattered and Napoleon, silent as death, led the gliding beauty to the little recess where they could be alone and quiet. He had thirsted for that moment, prayed and craved it all night and now it was upon him, and how to deal with it none of the clear-headed decision he kept for other events could tell him. The position was so amazing. How would her sweet delicacy take it? He trembled before her as he had never trembled before mortal man or woman, or the blue starred image of the Queen of a heaven gone so far out of fashion in the Revolution.

She slid into the deep chair among exotic flowers as white as her clear pale cheek and looked up at him,—her own mysterious smile with softly closed lips. That smile had infinitely seductive secret meanings for him. He read all the submissive charm of the sex into that gentle reserve which if he had but known was only the necessity of hiding teeth less beautiful than the exquisitely rouged lips that concealed them. Then, sitting, he leaned forward until his right knee touched the ground, and so spoke, half kneeling.

“Josephine, adored, I must speak and you hear. You can’t evade me any longer. Since that blessed night when you slipped into my arms like a moonbeam and gave yourself to me body and soul, what have I seen of you, and how do you think I am to live?”

She started and looked nervously about her; then, gently as she did everything, laid a jewelled finger on his lip. He kissed it ravenously, clasp and gripping her hand in both of his as if afraid she would slip from him like melting snow.

“But you mustn’t, no, you mustn’t,” she whispered, “and for God’s sake don’t breathe a word of it again. I am ashamed—I ought never to have done it, but these times go to one’s head like wine and I couldn’t bear to see you suffer. Don’t make *me* suffer because I pitied you. We must never meet again like that—never!”

“And why not—why not?” he urged imperiously, with deep-set flashing eyes. “Surely the one good thing the damned Revolution has brought us is freedom. The fence is broken down between men and women, and all the unnatural restraint is destroyed. You did no wrong. How could you? You gave yourself generously, nobly, like the queen you are. But I want more—more!”

“What do you want?” she murmured, throwing her head back on the lovely long throat, and looking up at him under the shadow of long dark lashes. She thought she herself could have supplied the inevitable answer written in the set lips above his gripping jaw and chin. What should he want but what so many men had wanted from her every day and she had so often refused, and sometimes granted—an hour of love and then light parting and oblivion. But when the answer came it half petrified her.

“To marry you. To have you for my wife. To live in your adored arms night and day. To be able to drag you to my breast any minute I need you. To know that no other man can or dares even to dream of you.”

His face burned before her like white flame, the blue-grey eyes dark as night in their deep sockets. He had absolutely lost control. He needed a strong hand over him. He frightened her. And people might come. They might—she stared at him confused and trembling, but still always gentle and conciliating. How could she hold a man like that in check? A boy of twenty-six! She felt old enough to be his mother though there were but six or seven years between them. How mad she had been! What could she do with him now? She never should have yielded as she had. It was to satisfy him and keep him happy and amused, and now came this absurdity! As a beginning she took his hand gently in hers. He pressed both against his thin breast with a catch in his throat that sounded like a dry sob. For the moment he was speechless, and it gave her the advantage she took.

“Napoleon! I do care for you. You are a dear young soldier. Do you think I would do for any other what I have done for you? But marriage is impossible. Things like that don’t happen in our world. I am bound to Barras; you know that, and you have your career to make, if ever you can make it. Could I have the selfishness to stand in your way—I who have a son and daughter to consider! Barras will provide for them, but what could you do? And it is my duty to think of them.”

“Ah, you reason. Reason does not love!” he muttered, still clinging to the fair hand as if it were his only hope of heaven. “You did not reason that divine night; you loved—you thought only of me—of *me*, Josephine!”

His voice was like a stifled cry. There was agony in it, and it touched a heart very easily touched. She pressed his hand tenderly.

“Poor boy! I thought to comfort you and I was mistaken. No—I don’t forbid you my presence. But you must be a younger brother to me—no more. See for yourself! I have Hortense and Eugene to live for. Barras has promised me to provide for them, and I know he will do it. I have luck. I have a star!”

“And what about mine!” he said, steadied in a moment and fixing her with those bright strange eyes. “Half starving at Brienne. Educated on charity, starving as a young officer on thirty pounds a year. Making myself famous at Toulon. Spreading the power of France all along the Southern coast of the Mediterranean. Captain Vendémiaire. I tell you, darling of my soul, that I too have a star, and that I will give Hortense and Eugene as good a provision in life as ever Barras could! And better, because I love any lap-dog that is yours and he loves nothing but himself.”

She drew back, half frightened at his vehemence, releasing her hand.

“But he is master, and you are man,” she said doubtfully, softening the phrase with a smile. “He is a Director. You are the general in the Directory’s pay. What chance have you of winning? He has won. He is the greatest man in France, for what is Tallien? A man of straw!”

“You think that, you darling little fool!” he said, grasping her hand again. “Women should be fools about men’s business. They are too lovely for our dirty work. Then listen. *I* am the greatest man in France, for I made the Directory and can unmake it. Don’t you know in your heart that Barras is afraid of me? Are your eyes as blind and bright as your diamonds? You’ll see! He’ll give me command of the Army of Italy presently—the Cinderella of the army—the ill-paid, neglected Army of Italy; and it will be to get me out of France! Oh, my darling, believe in me; trust me, and with that army I’ll make the world your footstool!”

“Large promises!” she said, with her sweet languid smile, a little tired, like summer faintly touched with autumn. “But again what about *my* star? At best you can make me Madame la Générale, and the old woman in the Isle of Martinique told me better things than that. She said—open your eyes wide!—that I was to be a great queen!”

“And so you are, you beauty! Queen of all women who ever were or will be. Don’t I know it, who have held you in my arms for a night of June and fed on your beauty? My queen—the world’s queen!”

“No: a real queen!” she persisted gently, half laughing at her own folly. “And in the prison of Les Carmes, when they told me my head would fall that day, I used to say, ‘No. You can’t persuade me of that. I am to be a queen and I’ll make you all my ladies and gentlemen in waiting.’ Thérèse was with me in prison and she knows that’s true. When the woman came outside the prison window all barred and terrible—did I ever tell you that?”

“No; never! Tell me! God! To think the devils put you through that agony. I’ll make them all sweat blood for it one of these days! Is it any wonder I curse the Revolution?”

“But not so loud!” she said with her twilight smile. “You might be heard. Well, I’ll tell you. My order for death next day had come, and Thérèse and Madame d’Aguillon and I sat by the window, *numbed*—. After days or hours of waiting (I don’t know which) I saw a woman outside poorly dressed, and she made signs to the window, and we all looked at her, and cared nothing for what message she might have. We had to die next day. But she caught up the end of her robe and shook it and Thérèse said, ‘Robe? What does that mean?’ And she caught up a little stone and threw it, and I said, ‘Pierre? What does that mean.’ And then she drew her finger slowly across her throat, and I said ‘guillotine,’—and then suddenly Madame d’Aguillon screamed out: ‘She means Robespierre—Robespierre!’ and Thérèse cried in a kind of ecstasy, ‘Her throat! They’ve guillotined him.’ ”

She stopped, still quite calm, and smiling a little as at a pleasant memory.

“And you?” he said, watching her passionately, intent on her beauty, not on the story. “What did you say, you loveliest?”

“I said, ‘Didn’t I tell you I should live to be a queen?’ and a few hours after we all walked out of the door free. That was my star! Oh, I’ve always been a mascotte. People said so in Martinique. One of my sisters was chosen for de Beauharnais, and she died, and it was me instead. My mother said: ‘Everything comes to Yeyette!—You’ll see!’ And so it was, in my marriage and in prison, and then when I hadn’t a sou for myself or the children—Barras! And then when Barras was going under you *had* to save him and build up the Directory, and that was because of me. It always is!”

“Then give yourself to me for good and all!” he said with passion, his own superstition catching fire at hers. “We’ll mount together. I may make you a queen yet. Listen! I have a dream of getting out to India after I have done with Italy, and there are kingdoms there for the carving, and the fat-headed English to drive out. You shall have great sapphires as blue as your star-eyes; and pearls like your lovely pale face that only blushes a little—so little!—when I adore you; and great emeralds for your throat and fingers; and diamonds for your golden sandals; and black slaves for you to shine among like a moon at midnight. Only trust me. Only give yourself to me and what can stop me!”

“Common sense!” she said, drawing her perfumed fan softly across his eyes, “and now we must go back. But listen”—seeing his despairing gesture, and the dull pallor that crept over his face—“listen! If you are very good,—*very!* you may come to-night after the ball is over and I may speak to you for ten minutes in my boudoir. Only ten! Can you be good?”

How his pale face lightened and flamed in ecstasy. How his eyes devoured her in mute worship! Afraid to speak, almost to breathe lest he should wreck his promised heaven, he rose instantly, and made way for her to pass, touching her arm almost with a girl's timidity as she glided past him to the ballroom. Barras watched the return with the same cool cynicism as he had watched the departure.

The party of the Directory left an hour later, attended by Captain Vendémiaire. Madame Permon, rising, gathered her shawl about her and directed Albert to recall Laurette from her dance.

“Did I not tell you that Napoleon would neglect us to-night?” she observed drily. “I may do myself the justice to say that he never so much as glanced in our direction. And that imbecile Andoche Junot actually believes that he has a heart! Go, call Laurette. I can't stay with this rabble a minute longer. This woman near me is deluged with cheap perfume and it suffocates me.”

CHAPTER V

PASSION AND POLITICS

A WEEK later Josephine sat reading and re-reading a letter from her adorer, a little knitted frown of perplexity between her eyebrows.

“Seven o’clock in the morning. My waking thoughts are all of you. Your portrait and the remembrance of last night’s delirium have robbed my senses of rest. Sweet and incomparable Josephine! what an amazing influence you have over my heart. Are you angry? Sad? Then my soul is broken with grief and there is no rest for your lover. But is there more for me when, delivering ourselves up to the deep feelings which master me, I breathe out upon your lips, upon your heart, the flame which burns me up?—Ah, it was this past night that I realized your portrait was not you. I shall see you in three hours. Meanwhile, *mio dolce amor*, accept a thousand kisses. But give me none, for they fire my blood. (A Madame Beauharnais.)”

That letter gave her much food for reflection, and thought was a diet which agreed neither with her looks nor temperament. In her nature emotion superseded intellect and exhaled itself in easy floods of tears on every occasion. In fiction tears are an exquisite thing, the dew on a flower petal, the poetry of an April shower seen through bright sunshine. In actual life they redden the eyelids and put the face out of drawing. The death of a linnet, the mismatched colours of a hat, produced a stream of crystalline woe beyond her power to restrain, or repair for at least an hour. Then, with restoratives, with essences and exquisite cosmetics and a skill only just below nature’s own, beauty bloomed again in the delicate exotic fashion which made art itself a necessary part of her charm. Whatever else she lacked her taste was genius, as unapproachable in its own way as that of the poet or artist. There she *knew*, while others must debate and consider, but even her art was sometimes frustrated by these ill-timed tears.

That afternoon the petals of the rose were a little crushed and faded. Buonaparte had been with her the night before until four o’clock in the morning, vowing, protesting his inconvenient raptures, fatiguing the saint he adored with his passionate litanies and violent frenzied tenderness. Marriage and marriage only would content him. She yielded otherwise, submitted to anything, hoping to buy freedom at the easy Revolutionary price which professed to set the sexes on the level of equality in these matters which only a revolution in the order of nature can ever attain. Surely he would be

satisfied and sink into an easy friendship! But the more she yielded the more desperately and madly in love he fell until she rued the day when she had permitted good-nature, vanity, and Barras's orders for attention to Captain Vendémiaire to carry her so far beyond the bounds of civility.

Before he left her, the early dawn diluting the darkness with a chilly grey distressing to wearied beauty, he had announced his intention of demanding the interest of Barras to secure the only joy which could save him from suicide (this also a Revolutionary fashion!)—the hand of his beloved in marriage. And on this—a few hours later, the letter in her hand!

Josephine was really alarmed. What a young man! There were moments when she feared that some folly of this nobody's might ruin her with Barras. If he had seen this letter! She set her wits to work, soothed Napoleon, put him off, exacted a promise that he would say nothing to Barras and then with the soft abandonment which subjugated him more swiftly than anything else, permitted him to cover her hands and feet with kisses, and sent for Barras the moment his back was turned. She must know exactly where she stood, at what point the tether which had given her a seeming liberty would be sharply twitched to recall her to captivity.

Barras came in the evening, when the traces of weariness and tears had all been smoothed away and every detail of the picture considered and perfected.

The walls of that charming little boudoir in the Rue Chantier were hung with shell-pink satin shedding the faintest reflection on an Aubusson carpet of deep ivory velvet soft as woodland mosses in June. The curtains, shell-pink silken gauze shot with the iridescence of silver, and the two deep divans, the couch, and all the chairs, repeated the satin of the walls. The room with its silence and seclusion resembled the heart of a Provence rose, the petals curled about the privileged visitor with velvet warmth and perfume from the silver fountain of rose-water on the ivory inlaid table beside the sofa. The very air was saturated with a soft after-glow, like sunset on snow, that flattered beauty into divinity.

She lay on the sofa in the attitude made fashionable by the exquisite Madame Récamier, and not even the model's grace could equal that of the long-limbed supple Creole, propped on one elbow to meet her master as he came in glancing approvingly about him with a pleasant remembrance of the public money lavished so generously to secure these surroundings.

He stood looking down upon her with intense appreciation. The little aristocrat. The captive of his bow and spear; his to give or retain at will!

These delicate lovely women were the best spoil of the victor when all was said and done.

“Eh, la petite Créole!” he said, with a smile that showed his defective teeth and coarsened the lines of his mouth. “And how goes the world with you? And what do you mean by interrupting public affairs? I was to have seen young Buonaparte this evening on military business.”

A chair cushioned into luxury had been already drawn up by her sofa at the point most desirable for admiration and caresses. She signed towards it with a smile that hid the heart-throb flushing her face at the name. He had meant to play her false? Thank heaven, she had been first. Now for courage, subtle disguising, but courage!

She stretched a hand like a perfumed rose-petal and clasped the Directorial paw softly in her little trembling clutch.

“Chéri, it was about him that I sent for you. I fear, I do fear that he has fallen in love with me, and I am so perplexed that I turn to you as always for advice. You are so wise!”

Barras laughed inwardly. Not a sign of a smile on his dark heavy face. These women! And did they suppose a man didn’t see through them and their pretty treacherous little antics? But outwardly he was as grave as a judge.

“That would not be surprising! You’re not a beauty, *ma belle*, but better—I don’t know what it is. Let us say the girdle of Venus if not her face.”

Even then she pouted. A beauty like that of Thérèse or the exquisite Récamier was what she would have given her diamonds, her honour, all but her life for, and it was hateful to be reminded by this low barbarian whom she had so honoured that anything was lacking. He held up a large hand, ticking names off on the broad fingers.

“There’s Rewbell—another of the Directors. Well done, little Josephine! He can’t take his eyes off you. And—well, I could give a list as long as the daily execution lists at Les Carmes. . . .”

“Don’t!” she interrupted with a shudder. “It turns me sick to think of it. And Rewbell only likes to sit and look at me. As long as the King of the Directors loves me what need I care for Rewbell! But you *told* me to win Buonaparte! You know you did.”

“Certainly. When the Philistines wanted to get the upper hand with Samson, didn’t they turn on Delilah? I am only glad he has responded so well to treatment. I want that young man. But on my own terms.”

“Well—I deserve some reward for succeeding!” she said, with trembling lip, an insufficient barrier to hold back the flood of horrid inconvenient tears hovering so near. “I’m frightened of him. I don’t understand him a bit! His love is a frenzy. He says the wildest things, and looks like a madman with those strange eyes of his. Of course I don’t mean *you*, but I have seen how uncomfortable he makes the other Directors—yes, even Carnot—when he fixes them with that keen contemptuous look. I think he has the evil eye.”

“Isn’t this all evasion?” Barras asked coolly. “You didn’t send for me to tell me that, *ma belle*. You have got yourself into a tangle and you want me to get you out of it. Now be frank—at what stage is the little love affair?”

She was no good dissembler when power confronted her, and the man had power of a sort, though it melted in the white fire of Napoleon’s when the test came. Her lip quivered still more pitifully. She tried for a smile and a tear nearly came instead.

“He wants me to marry him. Isn’t it absurd? What shall I say? Tell me, chéri, I entreat you.”

He still held the little hand crushed in his. He looked down at her with a cynical pleasure in her childish trouble.

“O you Josephine, you Josephine! Have you never heard the maxim that there should be no concealments with your doctor and lawyer? Worst mistake in the world! Tell me the whole truth if you want my help. This Buonaparte has been as poor as a church rat. I don’t suppose he ever met a woman of birth until he met you. His family are all soldiers of fortune—men and women alike. I know, for I’ve had them watched. He himself is a bird of prey. . . . Well, what I want to know is this: How does he dare to speak of marriage to a woman of your birth and manners?—a vulgarian like that! No—I’m not angry. Don’t cry. It wastes time. I simply want the truth that I may help you.”

“He is, he is a bird of prey—an eagle. He swoops and carries you off. And you don’t know what you’re doing. O Barras, help me!”

He looked at her with amorous contempt. The story woke both emotions in him, and in him as in many men they went hand in hand—desire and scorn.

“You mean you exceeded instructions!” was all he said. There was a piquancy in extracting her confession drop by drop, and she could never know that that was what he had intended always. Samson was surely in the bonds of Delilah now, and she should cut his hair for him before long and

deliver him hand and foot to the Directory with Barras for its King. And that should be an end of Buonaparte.

The hand trembled in his, but not a word did she say. The minutes ticked on the silver clock where a nymph counted the seconds by dropping perfume, and Barras was silent also. This was an event involving much, though even then he could not resist the charm of her shame and fear. She must not be frightened too much however. She had suddenly received an accession of value that made conciliation a necessity. He bent down to her then and laid his head on the rosy cushion by her hidden face.

“Do you suppose I didn’t know, you little Creole? Don’t you know that we watch everything and every one here in Paris? I knew the minute he entered your rooms and the minute he left them. I could count the kisses he gave you and you endured—”

“You told me to!” she murmured weakly.

“Not quite so many, not quite so strenuous, were in the order of the day! But no matter. It may well be for the best and if a woman keeps her heart for us nowadays we may leave her body at her own disposal. It’s her only merchandise after all.”

She curled round and against him.

“O how true! You wonderful wise man! You always understand everything.”

“I understand that. Well, you say he wants to marry you. And why not?”

In the sudden shock she flung his hand off and sat upright on the sofa facing him, pale with horror and amazement, the words choking in her throat.

“Why not? You say that—you!”

“Certainty I say that. You have begun a good—even a patriotic—work, if that counted. You must carry it on, with all my support and interest. To let it drop now would be fatal.”

She stared at him with blank incredulous eyes, her little world crumbling about her. God was dethroned in the Revolution, and that had meant a certain amount of ease and freedom,—but still the Fates remained, high above reach, spinning what might be a hateful destiny on never-ceasing looms. The Fates had got her now.

What she wanted was Paris, money in torrents, lovely toilettes, fascinating society where she could always be, if not a queen, at least a princess, ruling by divine right of her aristocracy and exquisite manners. She

must have also successful careers for Hortense and Eugene with rich marriages for both. These were the only things she cared for or understood. And what figures were the cold Fates weaving in their sullen web now? Barras saw the terror in her enlarged eyes and soothed her. It was worth it.

“You don’t understand, my child. But you have sometimes a little grain of cunning behind your charm, and you are worth instructing. Now—come, sit on my knee and listen!”

He pulled at her hands as she raised herself sadly, slowly, and he took her on his knee, his arm about her, her graceful head resting on his breast. Could Barras have been poetized the attitude was romance itself. The conversation halted a little behind it.

“Now understand. You know the danger the Convention was in—the ship on the rocks, the wreckers waiting to plunder her. If that had happened France would have been in all the throes of bloody anarchy once more. Civilization all but disappeared in the Terror. It would have gone under for ever then. I chose Buonaparte because he seems to have luck and military talent. There’s something in him that picks him out—”

“There is!” said the faint voice against his heart.

“Well—I felt it! You know the result, and there was nothing for it but to reward him with the Command of the Army of the Interior. Well and good! I meant great things for him. But I own—and Carnot feels it too—there’s something disturbing about the man, young as he is. He may aim too high—he may some day plot the return of the Royal Family—the Bourbons! See how frankly I speak to my wise little confidante!—and if so—that family never forgives or forgets, and we and our friends—You see?”

“I see. And that was why you told Thérèse and me to keep him amused!”

“Exactly. But that’s not enough. Now I am going to trust you with a State secret. Can I?”

“Oh, chéri, I should be afraid to tell it!”

Barras smiled at the *naïveté*. He knew that, at all events, was true.

“Well, child—we have determined to do well and better than well by Buonaparte. But out of Paris. Out of France. There—”

She pushed herself back from his breast, with one hand rigid against it.

“And you think that I—I could live out of Paris? No—no. Never. Guillotine me at once if you will, but don’t, I entreat and implore you,—don’t send me away from Paris!”

He drew her back and smoothed her hair with his hand.

“You goose, you child! Don’t I want you here? Wait until you hear. Now listen. You know we declared war against that rotten old Austrian Empire which is tyrannizing Italy. We said all the nations must be as free as ourselves. The sacred mission of the Revolution. Well—if you marry him, Buonaparte is to have command of the Army of Italy. There’s promotion for you! And things will trickle on there as they have done for years past. No one takes our operations seriously there. As for you—do women go on active service? You can be happy in Paris while he is loafing about in Italy. We have got to get him out of France.”

“Then why must I marry him if you mean to keep me here?”

“Because the man is besotted on you. Because he will write to his wife, because you will be a kind of hostage for his good behaviour, you sweet coquette. Do you understand now?”

She was still silent. It was all most alarming and uncomfortable. She was afraid of Buonaparte in her inmost soul. When with him those two eyes sparkling with keenness and will-power dominated her—she could only obey and temper the despotism with all the little feminine evasions she could muster. When away from him she could only remember how dangerous, how unaccountable, the young soldier of fortune was in his fierce ardours and intentions as mysterious to her as the very forces of nature.

“Marriage is so horrible,” she faltered, “it’s a dungeon with no door. And he has no money. None.”

“The Revolution has provided so many doors and windows for marriage that the married are always sitting in a draught! And I shall be there to help you out of the window. As to money—the pay of the Commander-in-Chief of the Italian Army is good and the opportunities for speculation better. Fortunes are made in a year. Besides I must be frank. Is it not time you married? Are you seventeen, *ma belle*? Is time kinder to you than to another?”

He touched her on the raw there. He felt the convulsive shudder in her body. Time—time, the arch-enemy of loveliness! It was a cruel reminder!

“And I will look after you!” he ended magnificently. “This dear little hand shall dip in my pocket when it will. Now, what do you say?”

Still hiding her face, she murmured that she must think, consider. There were the children—a house—all sorts of subsidiary matters. She did not know the Buonaparte women, and he seemed to be on bad terms with his

brother Lucien. She did not like a man who had no family feeling. And so on.

“Lucien is thick in politics and his brother’s tool. Another reason for parting them. As to the women—I hear they are pretty jilts. Pauline, the second, has lost what character she had already and young Junot, Buonaparte’s brother in arms, is in love with her. You’ll have no difficulty there.” And so on, on his side.

They talked late and long. It was two o’clock in the morning when Barras strode down the stair and into the carriage waiting patiently at the door with its sleeping coachman. But the time had not been wasted. He had cooked Buonaparte’s goose for him, and so dexterously that the young fellow himself would thank him for evermore. Marriage with the woman he adored, and command of the Army of Italy—what man could ask more of obedient Fates than so glittering a destiny? If that did not bind him to his benefactor for ever and ever how base would be the ingratitude! When he told the wise, the sphinx-like, Carnot next day, that distinguished Director replied with joy:

“You have done well, my friend, well and wisely. Felicitations!” There could be no doubt—none.

But Josephine, left alone, exhausted by her tumults of feeling, had many. All was uncertainty. She looked round at the charming house Barras had bought from Talma, the famous actor. How long would it be hers? Her mind fled back across blue seas to the Island of Martinique and youth with its hopes and fears, the excitements she had loved; by no means always good and wholesome, nor the best preparation for a life of difficulties. She saw the withered, incredibly wrinkled old face of the negress who had told her fortune one sunny day under the palms by the old sugar-barn where they lived hand to mouth after the hurricane had taken their house.

“Ma’amselle Yeyette, you have a star that nothing can keep under. You’ll blaze in the sky—a Queen!”

Absurd! And yet, how great had been her good fortune! For what had it saved her? Might it not be because he was destined to love her that Buonaparte had been able to lift himself out of the ruck? Might not his dreams come true if she shared his fortunes? Besides, only if she were obedient would she have the steady support of Barras. Nobody knew better than she how readily he would cast her off if she dared to disobey.

Perplexed and irritated, the tears gathered in her eyes with a sense of relief that it did not matter. She might cry now and nobody would be wiser. Then, with the drops rolling down her cheeks, drying them now and then

with a morsel of lace handkerchief, she tried to concentrate her mind on the question of marriage.

Could she propose to Barras that only the liaison between herself and Buonaparte should continue? No—for a wife has a hold at a distance. A mistress ceases to exist, and she knew enough of the beauty and conduct of the women of Italy to be sure there would be distraction for his many idle hours. The Commander-in-Chief of that forgotten army would have his temptations. But if it must be marriage or parting, what was there to trust to in marriage? Barras had owned that the appointment was only to get him out of the way. Suppose it were intended to get her out of the way also? Was it likely that Barras would have proposed the marriage if he had not been tired of her? Was it not really a ruse for shuffling off a double annoyance? Barras was quite capable of that. What in the world could she do to secure herself between the indifference of Barras and the insane passion of Buonaparte? Oh, the misery of being a woman, dependent upon looks and youth and with the first signs of autumn apparent!

Was there any hope in Buonaparte? She sat recalling the fire of the man, the quick flashing glitter of his eyes which imposed his will even on the Directors. They were sending him to Italy because they feared him. Only yesterday, speaking of Barras and the rest, he had said:

“Do they think I need their protection? The fools! In a few years they will be overjoyed if I consent to give them mine. My sword is by my side and it will carry me far.”

If that were true! And of course he would always love her, always be mindful of the condescension of the great lady in marrying a nobody. Not only would she bring him the Army of Italy but she was quick to see that the little *parvenu* took her high birth and supreme elegance at their right worth as dowry. He would always be grateful that he had married a de la Pagerie by birth, a Vicomtesse de Beauharnais by marriage. She would be above him forever.

Her star. She fell into a dream, remembering, wondering.

Presently she roused herself and drew towards her an Oriental toy presented by a great traveller not above conciliating the lady who ruled the ruler of France. It was a crystal ball four inches in diameter, of a purity like mountain water petrified, standing on an ebony socket upborne by four grotesque dwarfs, placid, grinning, angry, raging,—a magnificent piece of work, if she had but known it. Often and often she and Thérèse and other modish ladies had gazed into it and had seen nothing but lights and shadows, though they knew it had been used for magic in Japan.

Now she could try it alone.

She gazed and gazed steadily until the very nerves of her eyes seemed to crack. Only floating shadows which might be faces, mountains, trees—nothing, after all, but the pressure of blood on tired sight.

Suddenly a light, a clear ray like that from the diamond on the hand supporting her cheek. It gathered, condensed, a little rolling globe of light—a star. Yes, she could see the rays, a crown of rays surrounding it, as it floated upward to the dome of the ball and there remained swimming in lucent crystal. In the luminous depths another spark of light, feathery, a seed of radiance, curled itself into brilliancy. That too orbbed as it rolled into a star sending out jewelled rays to the first and climbing to the same height. They floated now as if in clear water, but apart.

Nearer, nearer, they verged, slowly, certainly, with some irresistible attraction between them, each drawing each. Then, swaying gently together, they circled about each other, fused, mingled and were one. A single luminous red star shining at the height of the crystal ball was all that remained.

She looked up startled. Was it the reflection of the dim rose-shaded lamps? Surely, no. For a moment she stared in silence, then:

“His star and mine. If that were true—”

The lamps burned slowly down, drinking their oil dry. The dawn came creeping over Paris and still she sat, gazing at the crystal, swayed by deep primeval instincts to the beliefs of the jungle and its dangerous poisonous influences.

Trembling under its obscure urging she went next day, veiled and secretly, to a famous seeress in a quiet street of Paris. The same—the same! “You will marry a great soldier. You will rise with him to grandeur. Trust to your star, for it dazzles. It burns! It is you who will bring him the luck. Without him you cannot have it. Without you he cannot!”

That was the verdict—what her own intuition had told her.

When Buonaparte came to her again, quivering, eager, she put her white hand in his strong one with infinite grace and sweetness.

“It is little to give, but you think it much. It is yours.”

CHAPTER VI

THE IRREVOCABLE

It was a bride with many doubts and fears who approached the moment of her marriage on the 9th of March 1796. She was not oppressed by the solemnity of the surroundings; if there had been any solemnity about the appearance before the mayor of the second ward of the city the witnesses would have dissipated it quickly enough, for they were Tallien and his Thérèse, to whom Josephine clung as a sister, Barras, Lemarrois, the aide-de-camp of the bridegroom, and a lawyer, Calmelet, the solicitor of the Beauharnais family, a representative revolutionary group (with the exception of Calmelet) who would have jested in the face of God himself, given the chance. So it was not that which daunted the bride.

She found the party assembled, with the important omission of the bridegroom, when she entered the room which was to be the gateway to the Imperial crown. Anxiety had its usual subtle effect on her appearance and it had taken much time and care to obliterate those light prints of the flying feet of time. It mattered the more because the Act of Marriage had been most carefully drawn up on the point that most concerned her, and she had pleased herself in the matter.

Martinique is a far-away island and who could contradict if she returned her age at twenty-eight years or complain if the bridegroom gallantly added two to his twenty-six and returned himself at twenty-eight also? No one knew better, whatever they might guess, and it certainly sounded pleasanter than a disparity of six years on the wrong side. Besides, Josephine scarcely looked twenty-five, if so much, in her nymph-like robe of white with its classic embroidery in gold, her hair enclosed in a gold net, the meshes of which met on her beautiful brow in the fashion set by the famous Aspasia long ago in the City of the Violet Crown.

Thérèse Tallien was brilliant as ever in Greek drapery of glimmering satin held together from disaster on either shoulder by a cameo. A gold scarf just below her glorious bosom defined its matchless curve, and from her shoulders hung a priceless flame-coloured *cachemire*, the envy of every woman who beheld it. And above this fire of splendour rose the white column of her throat and the lovely audacious head with its black silken boy's curls. She looked at the bride with an indecipherable expression of

pity, feeling her to be rather the victim of the needs of the Directory than anything else.

Indeed it was an odd marriage and an odd party when one came to think of it. Here was the bride only just relinquishing the protection of Barras, King of the Directory, and rumour whispered that his handkerchief was already thrown to the radiant Tallien. Not that Tallien himself could have any right to resent such a *volte-face*. Why should he? The Revolution had scattered all old-fashioned scruples of fidelity and chastity, and why on earth should any self-respecting mortal trouble his head about trifles? The code of morals was as new as the Constitution drawn up by the Convention, and much less stringent.

“But—but—where is Napoleon?” asked Josephine with paling lips. She should be used to Republican manners by this time, but a woman of her rank must feel that no earthly circumstance could excuse that negligence in receiving the coming queen. She had not loved Alexandre de Beauharnais—far from it—in fact she had known him for rather a poor creature and had acted accordingly—but he would not have failed there, not he! And this little Corsican adventurer, to whom she, the great lady, had condescended, the command of the Army of Italy for splendid dowry in her hand, what right had he to expose her to one instant of comment?

“Cheer up, citoyenne!” said Barras jovially. “Better begin as things must go on. No doubt our little General’s busy with military matters. Certainly the appointment has given him plenty to think of.”

He pushed a chair towards her and she sat down in dead silence, bowing coldly to the mayor’s profuse greetings. Thérèse took her hand caressingly:

“Don’t be angry with him, chérie. Tallien and Barras say there has been the most furious anger among the generals in Italy at having what they call a young whipper-snapper put over them. He has so much to think of, what with that and the rest.”

Still Josephine was coldly silent. Even her lovely amiability resented that ugly want of deference. And what did it matter to her or to Napoleon, who should have been absorbed in her only, that Kellerman and the other stupid generals out there were raging at seeing themselves superseded, and declaring that Napoleon’s plan of campaign was sheer lunacy and the Directors were mad as he to have sanctioned such folly? Why did he not come? Her slender foot tapped impatiently on the floor.

Lemarrois, a mere lad not yet of age, with admiring eyes fixed on the neglected bride, tried in vain to make himself agreeable. The mayor, past the age when beauty’s wiles prevail, composed himself in an armchair whence

presently loud snores punctuated the conversation of the others. Half an hour went by.

“It is really too bad!” said Thérèse at length, looking at her little Breguet watch rimmed with pearls. “Can he be ill? He can never have mistaken the day.”

“He has very much mistaken what is due to *me*,” said the injured bride. “And I think, Barras, you will admit that your advice looks as if it were rather dangerously at fault. It is better to know a mistake late than never.”

“Public affairs first, citoyenne—always first! We will give him till ten o’clock, and if he is a minute later we’ll fine him a dozen quarts of champagne. Eh?”

“In that case you will drink it yourselves,” said Josephine with tremulous dignity, “for I shall have gone home! And you may tell the citizen general that I shall not be at home when he follows, if he condescends so far.”

It really was uncomfortable. None of them had ever seen her even annoyed before, but now she held herself aloof as if they too were in fault. They were, as witnesses of her discomfiture!

And still the minutes drifted by, and still the mayor snored, and the notary took snuff, and Tallien talked with Barras in a corner, and Thérèse coquetted maternally with the infantine Lemarrois. And at ten o’clock the door burst open and Napoleon rushed in an hour late.

He was ash-pale, his blue-grey eyes burning like coals in their sockets, —his right hand twitching with a peculiar convulsive motion which meant nerves strung like harp-strings. Straight to the offended goddess he rushed and fell on his knee as if they had been alone.

“Josephine, Josephine, forgive me! I could not get it done. I was up all last night and worked all to-day over the damned convoys, but I couldn’t, and now I have run through the streets like a madman because a *fiacre* would have been slower. Do you forgive me, my angel?”

“The citoyenne thinks that on the wedding day business should take a back seat, citizen General. But a Director can hardly reproach you. Wake up, citizen mayor!” Barras roared in the sleeping ear. “Here, Buonaparte, give him a kick!”

They roused the indispensable, while Josephine sat cold and impassive, almost questioning in her mind whether a dignified withdrawal would not be the most suitable punishment. But he had eyes for no one but her. The hungry pleading gaze was fixed on her only,—the thin hand caught hers with such true passion that even vanity was satisfied, and Her Amiability, as

Thérèse had christened her, thawed a little into one of those smiles of soft relenting which made Josephine the darling of all the nervous frightened creatures of her little world.

“But you must never do it again—never!” she whispered in his ear.

“Again? Do you suppose that I should ever in this world cast a look at another woman? You little know my heart.”

She knew it well enough, perhaps, but understanding it was a different matter. That was beyond her. Beyond himself for that matter.

The mayor assumed his tri-coloured scarf. The witnesses ranged themselves, and after a few bald questions and answers Josephine’s retreat was closed for ever. De Beauharnais had vanished; for good or evil she was the Citoyenne Buonaparte, the property of this strange young man of whom all she really knew was that he was said to have extraordinary military ability and that he adored her to frenzy.

Is that enough on which to base a marriage? Heavens, what had she done! The blood fell away from her cheek in that irrevocable moment. They crowded about her with congratulations, and Napoleon, wildly snatching at composure, looked at her with a heaven in his eyes which provoked the most cynical of his smiles from Barras drawing Tallien aside to let the bridal pair precede them.

“How long do you give this particular bit of foolery?” he asked in a noisy whisper. “I give it until the first defeat in Italy! And you?”

“Since the bride remains in Paris I give it until the bridegroom’s return,” answered Tallien. “And you Directors can fix that time as you please. You have him in your pocket now. He might easily have had you in his pocket instead.”

“Not me!” said Barras with his grin. “I knew better. And his gratitude for life is assured to me. I have given him his career and his wife.”

“His wife!” echoed Tallien with meaning. “Certainly his gratitude should be eternal! But personally I never knew gratitude worth a spit and I should say Buonaparte would let no emotion but love stand in his way for a day!”

To Josephine’s confused consciousness when they were left together the chief element of consolation, for consolation she needed, was that she was to remain in Paris and that the honeymoon would be brief. That at least would give her time to adjust herself, Hortense and Eugene, to the new and amazing order of things. But the children appeared to like him so far, which was fortunate. If only, if *only*, she could be certain she liked him herself. She hated the sort of people he had about him—those rough ardent young

officers who swore by him and could be interested in nothing but their loud bombastic talk of military glory. It confused and annoyed her to the last degree. As if any sensible person could worry about that! She detested their extraordinary ideals, which did not include the elegant behaviour to be expected of gentlemen in a salon.

There was Junot, his chief of battalion, who followed him like a dog, and really seemed to grudge her existence! There were Berthier, Marmont, Lannes,—a whole rabble of young officers, hulking savages they seemed to her, used as she was to the lawyer type of man in ascendancy in Paris and consequence at the moment. They reminded her of the gentlemen adventurers one read of; if one ever read!—only one might easily omit the word “gentleman,” for not one of them was really a gentleman. Look at their manners! Their coarse provincial accents! Why Murat was the son of a little innkeeper, and the rest as bad. They talked of their swords, of careers, of plunder. Yes—Napoleon had held up a glittering prospect of the plunder of the fat Italian cities, rich with all the splendour of the centuries. She had heard him; she had seen their eyes sparkle greedily; she had seen the expression in the face of that gigantic, handsome, stupid lout of a Murat, who was said to be paying attention to Caroline Buonaparte—who was simply a little girl in short petticoats. It could only be to please her brother.

They adored him. And why? Why could not she? Those were the confused thoughts tossing in her mind as at last they sat alone in her boudoir and she faced the inevitable.

“Mine!” he said, and put his arms about her. “My adored wife. Mine, only mine!”

And that to her? And this was marriage. No escape—only rights.

What she would have answered she could not tell, but a knock came to the door, and he started to his feet, his face changing into fury as a card was presented. He tore it violently across and flung the atoms into the fireplace.

“Junot! The dog, the—”

“Why not see him?” said Josephine amiably. “There must be some good reason. I can wait.”

She could, only too well, and perhaps that was what lent the sting to her words. He turned the white glare of his face on hers, then tore down the stair like tempest let loose. Junot was standing at the bottom.

“A word, General,—only a word. I asked Paulette to marry me before we leave for Italy—I couldn’t wait. You’re married, you see, and I . . .”

Something choked in his throat,—he turned it into a cough and went on:

“And she laughed in my face! I shall take your advice, General. Laurette Permon—” Even Junot’s dog-like affection quailed before the look Napoleon turned blazing on him.

“And you came here to tell me that? Fool—idiot! To hell with you and your women. Go!”

From the room above Josephine heard the lion’s roar and smiled to herself.

“Isn’t he funny, this Buonaparte!” she said aloud, slipping swiftly to the long glass to deepen the rouge of her lips. “Poor Junot! But serve him right after all!”

The light swift feet came running up the stairs, and in a moment more he was kneeling at her feet and she felt her hand wet with tears of nervous agony. Passion shook him. It tattered his thin body unbearably.

“But *I* can tame him!” she thought with pleasure.

A brief honeymoon. The wedding took place on the ninth of March, the parting on the eleventh, and of that time many hours were spent by Napoleon over letters and maps, lost as profoundly in those problems as he had been in her.

Who on earth could understand that, she thought, half in anger, half disdain. Least of all can a Frenchwoman bear such *lèse-majesté*, and she was very French of very French—Parisian to the marrow of her bones. Perhaps on the whole, however, it made things easier. She was at least able to slip away and spend the afternoon and evening with Thérèse and Barras—in the society which delighted her.

When the second day came and brought parting with it, doubt seized her again. All military preoccupations had vanished now and he was the lover only—the passionate heartbroken lover, leaving his one delight.

He turned speechless to Josephine, clasping her as a man clasps life in the face of death. She felt the labouring of his heart as his arms went round her, felt the deathly cold of his hand and cheek on hers. It was as though the blood had fled to re-inforce the inmost citadel of the heart and left none for outward sign.

She was silent from sheer inability to meet the situation.

Small wifely suggestions as to care of himself, warmth, food,—all the things which will occur to a sensible woman, fluttered on her lips and died. How could one talk to a man in such despair about a fur-lined coat and recommend him to fill his pocket-flask before he started? For the life of her she could think of nothing else to say.

Her easy tears, so appropriate then, entirely declined to flow and the clearest thought in her bewildered mind was the wish that it were over and that she had acquitted herself decently. She had learnt in the School of the Revolution to coquette and lie in pretty trifles but how to recognize and return deep human feeling was beyond her and must be learnt in a stranger school than that of the Revolution itself, if indeed she could learn it at all.

The carriage was at the door when he lifted his head from her bosom, his eyes plunging into hers with an expression that startled her.

“If you were false to me I should kill you!” he said, with his face like a tragic mask of despair.

She hid hers on his shoulder and leaned against him trembling, with not a word to say. He wrenched himself from her at last, and, falling into a chair, she thought she could have endured no more and that—thank heaven!—it was over. But outside the door he turned.

“Josephine, if I send for you, will you come?”

She made a faint sign with her hand which he might read as he would. In a moment the front door shut violently. He was gone.

Next evening at a dinner where all the gayest society of the Directory was present and the Citoyenne Buonaparte the centre of all interest, Barras drew her aside.

“Did you know that your man intends to be ‘Bonaparte’ in future instead of the Italian ‘Buonaparte’? He thinks it will give him more hold over the Army in Italy if he drops any Italian connection of ideas. What do you say? We’ll put obstacles in the way if it doesn’t please you. I can see our friend means to have a career in France and to be more French than the French themselves, though in reality he’s a mediæval Italian if ever I saw one. What do you say?”

She looked up with a little pucker between clear brows.

“That’s why I never can understand him. He’s a foreigner all the time. As to the name I don’t care a straw. I wish he could get rid of his Corsican family as well as the ‘u.’ Oh, Barras, Barras, why did you make me do it?”

“Nonsense! Be happy, little Creole. There will be any amount of money and amusement and Paris at your feet. As for Bonaparte, he will have plenty to break his teeth on in Italy and toothless dogs don’t bite. We may forget him now and be comfortable.” She smiled into his eyes with her own lovely grace.

“Paris is my heaven. How good you are to me!” On these terms she could certainly be a happy wife. Not otherwise.

CHAPTER VII

THE LOVER

AND then from the Italian blue came flying back to the dovecote of Josephine's bosom, as he proudly imagined, some of the greatest love letters of the world. There too he was to leave his mark—the lover, the burning flame of love which, had she but had a heart for him, must have fused them together for ever and set them in the heaven where glow the stars of the greatest passions of history.

But Napoleon's love shines, a lonely star, and clouds were to obscure it, and like the moon it was to burn itself out in cold ash and eclipse. Neither he nor Josephine could foresee the bitter irony of fate hidden in the inscrutable future when he wrote his first letter after their parting.

“Every moment separates me further from my beloved and every moment I have less energy to exist so far from you. You are the constant goal of my thoughts: I exhaust my imagination in thinking what you are doing. If I see you unhappy my heart is torn. If you are gay among your friends I reproach you with having so soon forgotten our sorrowful separation. So you see I am not easy to please. But, darling, I have quite different sensations when I fear that your health may be affected. My unique Josephine! away from you there is no more joy. The world is a wilderness in which I stand alone. You have robbed me of more than my soul: you are the one and only thought of my life. When I am weary of the worries of my profession, when I mistrust the issue, when I am ready to curse my life, I put my hand on my heart where your portrait beats in unison. I look at it, and love is for me perfect happiness, and everything laughs for joy.

“By what art have you learnt to captivate all my faculties to concentrate in yourself my spiritual existence?—It is witchery, dear love, which will end only with me. I am dying to be by your side. Ah, my sweet wife, I cannot tell what fate is before me, but if it keeps me from you it will be unbearable.

“There was a time when I prided myself on my strength, and sometimes on the fate which might be in store for me. But to-day the thought that my Josephine may be ill, and above all, the cruel, fatal thought that *she* may love me less, make me wretched and dejected. To die without your love, to die in uncertainty of that, is the torment of hell: it is a life-like and terrifying

figure of absolute annihilation. I feel passion strangling me. I stop, dear love. My soul is sad, my body tired, my spirit dazed. Men weary me.

“To-morrow I shall be at Albenga. The two armies are in motion. We are trying to deceive each other. Victory to the most successful. I shall beat Beaulieu, I hope, out of his boots.

“Dear love, forgive me.

“Kind regards to Barras, to Madame Tallien. To Eugene and Hortense best love. I lie down without you. I pray you let me sleep. Many times I shall clasp you in my arms, but—it is not you.”

He wrote, like a man moving in a dream, among vast phantasmagoria of men and battles and the crashing of doom; and the only real thing the white figure of his love receding, receding into a melancholy distance. In these letters he was a poet. He was a poet indeed in more than his love for a woman who could never understand the huge cloudy visions which possessed his soul and made her for a moment and a moment only a figure of immortal loveliness.

“Letters where the reader, reading,
Halts him with a sudden stop;
For he feels a man’s heart bleeding,
Draining out its pains exceeding,
Half a life with every drop.”

Wild Ossianic loves and hatreds permeate these letters and the thunder of battle, the pale young husband, the lover whose face was the oriflamme of battle, the flame of victory, dropping the sword and seizing the pen to write his torturing passion to the woman who could never understand! Letters of agonized pleading to one who could not even comprehend their language.—Indeed at that time war was the phantom and she the only real figure in his world of dreams.

There are none like them in history. Even the passionate letters of the great Marlborough to the wife who ruled him flicker and faint before the fire of Napoleon’s.

The agonies he suffered at that time must have ended him or made him callous. There was no other way. His officers knew it, seeing without comprehension that it acted as a spur to his magnificent genius. Indeed it awoke it, and it is conceivable that, but for Bonaparte’s passion for Josephine, Napoleon might never have been Napoleon. It was as though he cried out for pain, demanded it, must have it as the electric battery harnessed to brain and heart, spurning the easy amiability she offered.

The truth was that his passion drove him to another plane of existence where the thoughts are not those of ordinary life, but gigantic, scaling impossible heights and sounding the abysses. If she would not love him as he demanded at least she should know what she scorned. Italy should be laid at her feet, the power of France crouch before her. And this to Josephine!—Josephine who wanted only to sleep, eat, and dress in comfort that she might shine to advantage in the best society! Yet none the less an inspiration which, burning him pale and haggard, meant victory. He himself did not know what he wanted from her—could never have had it, for it was the urge to find some inmost self in her which should complete him and reveal the meaning of life in some unguessed unity impossible in this world of shadows.

His officers saw, wondering, with a kind of misunderstanding pity—they who took women as the amusement or necessity of life!

Says Marmont, later a Marshal of France, “He was continually thinking of his wife.” How otherwise, since she was life itself to him?

When the glass of her portrait broke against his breast he turned ghastly pale.

“Marmont, my wife is either ill or unfaithful.”

He sent a courier speeding to Paris for news, telling her:

“My life is a perpetual nightmare. A black presentiment oppresses my breathing. I am alive no longer. I have lost more than life, than happiness, than peace. The courier will stay only four hours in Paris. Write me ten pages; that is the only thing which can in the least comfort me.”

That was one side of the passion, but its necessary result was the other. Because he was her lover he was in Italy to conquer, incidentally also to trample the Directory under his feet, to heap the woman he adored with all the luxuries he knew she could value and doubted his ability to give her. Her taste for splendour must be gratified; she must owe all to him.

Many were the fears and speculations in the army before he joined it. It had loitered and slouched in Italy for three years without firing a gun; ill-fed, ill-paid, ragged and listless, forgotten in the preoccupations of the Directory at home. What luck would this young Commander-in-Chief bring them—he who was superseding men so much his seniors in years and experience that they might well have hoped for the post he filled? It caused much jealousy.

“For my part,” said big Augereau in a conclave discussing the matter before Napoleon’s arrival, “I think the appointment absurd. All one can say

is that the Directory *is* absurd! What influence, I ask you, what power of command can a boy of twenty-six exercise out here with veterans who were at war when he was sucking pap out of a bottle? Who is this Bonaparte? An upstart favourite of Barras's, and all the world knows the reason. *Voilà tout!* Why, he's spelling his name 'Bonaparte' like a Frenchman now to cheat us into forgetting an Italian is in command!"

They were standing in a group awaiting his arrival, outside the house where the reception was to be held, sworded and uniformed with a kind of frayed slovenliness, the outcome of the long lassitude in Italy.

A few of Napoleon's own men, young and eager, had arrived, burnished to the last point of efficiency. They looked with contempt on the others. Was it not rumoured that there were men in Italy no longer even staunch Republicans; that royalist songs had been heard in the camp, and that one regiment had desecrated itself with the name of "The Prince's"?

"I think," said Marmont, who was standing by the tent leaning on his sword, "that the citizen officers will scarcely complain of the General's youth when they see him. It may not be the same with others as with me, but from the first moment I saw him the feeling he inspired was—well, fear! A man born for power. I don't know why I felt that. I am willing to be corrected by events, but that was the impression. Eh, Junot!"

Junot looked up quickly. It was his declaration of faith now as always.

"I think what I have always thought: that he is the kind of man given to a nation when big things are to be. Here are we falling away from all the ideals of the Republic. He will revive them."

The other officers looked doubtfully upon each other. Republican ideals had grown a little stale and out of date in Paris, except among the austerer patriots. They were more than a little stale in Italy. Frenchmen had been promised a new heaven and a new earth, but though the old one had become impossible the new one was not perfection. They were disillusioned, wearied. And these new men of Napoleon's—so young, so eager! What were they but men of the people after all,—coarse accents, ill-bred manners. For those who could remember the stern but graceful courtesy of men of the old school, what were these newcomers!

General Decrès interfered:

"I know the man, citizen officers, and am on very good terms with him—quite easy, in fact. It will give me the utmost pleasure to present you. I think our young friends here exaggerate the General's impressiveness. At least it left me unannihilated!"

He looked about him with a superior smile. Marmont smiled also to Junot, but with a difference.

A pause, a stir, and the young Commander-in-Chief rode up on a white charger, and all eyes concentrated with breathless eagerness upon the man who held their fate in the hollow of his hand.

Pale, stern, reserved, there was something in his bearing which shut him into a world of his own of which he only held the key. He saluted coldly and entered the house, followed by his personal staff, taking up his position at the end of the salon.

General Decrès had made a quick step forward, full of eagerness, pleasure and military *camaraderie*, intending to advertise his familiarity with the man of the hour. The hard eyes quelled him as a hedge of bayonets would not have done. The chilly voice, the cold nonchalance of the attitude set him back, and very quietly and with scarcely concealed nervousness he introduced the officers of the Italian Army one by one. Neither by him nor any other was any attempt made then or thereafter to cross the straight line drawn between Napoleon and the rest of the world.

They discussed it afterwards when the introductions were over, for all had turned out very differently from their expectations. Big Augereau led the discussion—a rough frank man with his opinions at every man's service.

"I tell you what, you fellows, that man's no common sort. I meant to stick up to him but it wasn't to be done. I backed out. One doesn't know what there is behind that set face of his, but it's there. He frightens me."

Lavalette took up the tale.

"I know. My first notion was that he looked a sickly kind of fellow. But his eyes have a fixed look that goes through one like a gimlet. Can't explain it. There it is!"

There it was. That was universally agreed, from the highest in command to the most careless private. So far he had conquered.

And then Napoleon unloosed upon friends and enemies alike his terrific energy. He reached them on the 22nd of March, thirteen days after his marriage, and on the nineteenth day after his arrival operations began, face to face with the Austrians and their allies, the Sardinians. A month after his marriage he had won the glorious victory of Montenotte, and the tattered Army of Italy had defeated two armies stronger by ten thousand men than itself.

The Sardinians were at his feet. The Austrians still sullenly resisted, and Europe in amazement turned its eyes on the young General—the new

portent cast up by the violence of the Revolution which it had fondly believed to be extinct. His next move might be a march on Turin. The men of the Directory heard and quaked.

To the Directory he wrote:

“Another victory and we shall be masters of Italy.”

To Josephine:

“Your letters make up my daily pleasure, and my happy days are not often. Junot bears to Paris twenty-two flags. Do you understand that you ought to return with him? Be ready if it is not disagreeable to you. Should you not come, woe without remedy! Should he come back to me alone, grief without consolation. My beloved, he will see you, he will breathe on your temples; perhaps you will accord him the unique and priceless favour of kissing your cheek, and I—I shall be alone and very far away. But you are about to come, are you not? You will soon be beside me, on my breast, in my arms, over my mouth. Take wings. Come quickly, but travel gently. If you should be overturned or taken ill—if fatigue—Go gently, my beloved.

“I have received a letter from Hortense. She is entirely loveable. I am going to write to her.”

Victory after victory—Lodi, the entry to Milan, the institution of the Lombard Republic, great earth-shaking events, and Josephine cowering in Paris, hiding in a little ambush of lies and excuses lest she should be dragged from her pleasures to join the conqueror in Italy. How should she understand? Paris had never been more delightful. She shared with Thérèse Tallien all the prestige of the Directory, such as it was, and more, for as the flags and great resounding reports of the victories poured in from vanquished and trembling Italy, people began to consider her more and more as the wife of the great little General who was harrying the enemies of the Republic.

“Our Lady of Victories!” they called her, and in Paris, the city of nicknames, that spread far and wide, and it became necessary to bow enchantingly from her carriage to the plaudits of the people when she passed. Necessary also to plan the most ravishing toilettes now that she was the centre of all eyes, and these foolish people would range themselves before the house in the Rue Chantereine to catch a glimpse of the great conqueror’s wife undulating out with her supple grace, all waving plumes and beauty, to take her seat in the carriage.

“And then”—she said to the Tallien, with tears of despair—“he wants me to leave all this and to follow the army like a sergeant’s wife on a

baggage waggon! Is it unreasonable, I ask you! I never can or will!"

They were sitting in the beautiful salon of the lovely Tallien, where she had first met Captain Vendémiaire—a name now to be forgotten in the avalanche of victories. Thérèse contemplated her with mingled kindness and curiosity. She was extremely kind, as indeed was Josephine herself. Women careless of moral prohibitions are usually lenient in their judgments of others when they are at the trouble of making them at all, and a sense of humour should certainly blight austerity in ladies who live in such glittering glass houses. Josephine's kindness is celebrated. Like that of Providence it rained on the just and the unjust, though unlike that of Providence it had no ulterior designs for their improvement.

It was the same with the enchanting Tallien. She was held in that universal affection which, however, implies no respect.

"Indeed, chérie, I shall think it very hard lines if you have to join him. But might it not be wise? A man with the fame he is gathering so rapidly—you know what the Italian women are! They'll all be after him like flies round honey. He had nothing to give when he left you. He has everything to give now. I *think* I should go and look after him if I were you!"

"As to that," said Josephine with tremulous dignity, "it's very certain I needn't trouble my head. He thinks and dreams of nothing but me. If I were to show you his letters—"

"I know. I have had the like myself," said the Tallien and was wrong. No one woman in millions ever had or will have such letters. "But still—men change!"

Josephine shook her head with placid certitude.

"Not he! Indeed I don't understand how he finds time for victories when he is writing all this stuff to me. How queer he is! But I shall not go. I shall—well, it wants consideration!"

"What wants consideration?" asked Barras, entering the room at the moment with Tallien behind him. "I bring news of another victory, citoyenne! They rattle about our ears like hailstones. And I am told that Colonel Junot is to arrive to-morrow, and take you back with him to the arms of your Achilles."

"Good God!" cried Josephine, genuinely shocked. "But I have just said to Thérèse that I never can—I never will. Nothing will induce me. I shall say I am ill. Barras, you promised me—you faithfully promised me that I should remain in Paris."

Barras looked at her steadily. He wondered now that he had ever thought her charming, for beside the radiant Thérèse she looked a faded moon at dawn. And even to his callous way of thinking it seemed strange enough that a woman should take so much and give so little. They did it, one knew,—but still—! He laughed aloud.

“He’ll never let you off for a mere headache or indigestion. You must send an artistic excuse,—something that will appeal to him as a man—a husband—a—a father! Now if that were the case . . .”

He turned away laughing to Tallien, himself not at all at ease. He knew only too well now that he had made no wise choice in the Commander-in-Chief of the Italian Army. For Napoleon was writing haughty angry despatches to Paris, demanding stores, ammunition, a hundred things very painful to have publicly demanded, with the knowledge that the thing could not be done. That Army so comfortably forgotten was becoming a daily anxiety and dread. Was this the way to dispose of a man possibly dangerous—to set him flaming in the face of Europe like a bonfire on a hill? His feelings of jealousy and hatred against Napoleon strengthened daily, and were not unshared by the other members of the Directory. And there was worse—his own position of authority in the Directory was seriously menaced by Gohier, and Gohier had become the intimate friend of Josephine, whose languid aristocratic charm had its way with him as it had had originally with Barras. He was very clear that Paris would be well rid of her now.

“That woman is playing the fool!” he said to Thérèse, when they were alone, and Tallien was escorting Josephine to her carriage. “You have sense; she has not. And you have influence with her. Send her out to him. It’s her proper place. She is in the way here, advertising him everywhere. And moreover he goes too fast. We don’t want to over-run Italy and raise Europe against us. If she can keep him amused—”

Thérèse knew as well what was implied as if he had spoken for an hour, and set herself to the task.

“Chérie, you should go to him!” she said gently, when next they met in the boudoir of the house in the Rue Chantreine. “He adores you to distraction. You torture him. And consider. You will live in an Italian palace. You will be a queen. All the men will adore you. You will set the fashion to all the Italian women. Take out lovely dresses from Bertini’s and go—as soon as you can!”

“Thérèse, you are cruel!” said Josephine with gentle dignity, wounded by a friend’s desertion. “Of course I should go if I could. Would I ever

neglect a duty? But I am not well. I could never face the journey, and—what's that?"

A step on the stair,—an announcement at the door, the citizen Colonel Junot to see the Citoyenne Bonaparte,—and Junot upon them in his way-worn uniform, his sombre beauty of face and bearing, before either could utter a word.

"I salute you, citoyennes both. I have a message from my Commander-in-Chief to the Citoyenne Bonaparte. Is it your pleasure I should deliver it now?"

"Certainly,—this is my best friend," said Josephine, reaching faintly for a silver bottle of essence beside her.

"Then, first, this letter." He handed her one securely sealed. "Next, the announcement of the entry into Mantua. Thirdly, the direction from the Commander-in-Chief that I should have the honour to bring his wife with me when I return to Italy to-morrow. The Palace of Montebello is prepared for you and the army is at your disposal."

He stood stiff and straight before them like a man on duty. The woman was impossible. She must learn her place. That was the thought in his heart. His very love for Napoleon gave him insight—he knew that behind that pale face, white as flame, lay a devastating passion for a woman worth, in the opinion of Junot, not one single one of the myriad desires that Napoleon sent with every heartbeat to France.

"At your orders, citoyenne!" he said, stiff as a ramrod, while Thérèse looked on in cleverly concealed amusement.

There was no fight in Josephine. There never could be, but she had what served as well; the pliancy of the reed which bends to the storm. She relaxed gracefully into the rose-coloured cushions of her sofa, and pressed a perfumed handkerchief to her lips.

"If I could do as I wished I would set out this very day, Colonel. There is no inclination to keep me in Paris. But unfortunately my nerves and the wretched state of my digestion forbid me to think of travelling. . . ."

"There are doctors in Italy."

So Junot interposed, still standing and speaking like an automaton, his very soul flaming within him.

"But not my own. And my poor little dog, my Fortuné, is so ill that I could not *think* of leaving him, and my daughter just at the age when she needs my care. And—"

“Then you refuse?”

“Sir, your manners appear very singular to me! I have written fully to the citizen Commander-in-Chief, who will well understand, and—”

“Citoyennes, I have the honour to wish you both a very good day.”

He clicked his heels, saluted and was gone.

Josephine turned tragic eyes on her friend.

“And now what am I to do? O that man, that man! Think of the story this brute of a Junot will carry back to him!”

“Go, of course. But have you written? And what?”

“I’ve told him I think I am going to have a child. I know he won’t disturb me then. It was the only thing I could say.”

“And are you?” demanded the Tallien, fixing her with eyes a little clearer and harder than ordinary.

“I—I don’t know. I think so. Anyhow I shall not go with that man Junot.”

Thérèse retired with the news and her entire disbelief of it to Barras, and the next posts and papers to Italy were full of the gaieties and entertainments of the Citoyenne Bonaparte. It was very desirable that her husband should be acquainted with them and Barras assisted by his *chère amie* took care that he was well informed. But he wrote still with despairing faith in his wife.

“I am sure and proud of your love. A child as lovely as its mother will soon see the daylight and pass many years in your arms. Unhappy me! I would be happy with one day! Do you remember my dream in which I was your shoes, your dress, and in which I forced you to come bodily into my heart?”

And again in a very rage of love, on the return of Junot.

“You ought to have started on May 24th. I waited until June 1st—as if a pretty woman would give up her habits, her friends, both Madame Tallien and Barras, and the acting of a new play, and the dog Fortuné, whom you love much more than your husband! I lash myself to fury that I may love you no more. Set me at defiance, stay in Paris, have lovers, let every one know it, never write me a monosyllable and I shall love you the more, and it is not folly, and I shall not get the better of it.”

That blind love encouraged her to resist a little longer. Never had Paris been so fascinating, and the acclamations went to her head like strange wine. Her glass told her, and did not lie, that she had recaptured youth, for her cheeks flushed with the pale and exquisite rose which best became her. Her

bright eyes glittered as they had done when first she landed in France to meet her strange destiny. No wonder Gohier and others were at her feet. No wonder Barras showed signs, as she thought, of regret that he had been so ready to give her away to another.

“Other women are beautiful,” he said to her one day, “but you are seduction itself. The poor Bonaparte!”

But suddenly and perforce her resistance collapsed. There were several reasons. In spite of his compliments and Thérèse’s affection she and Barras were gently undermining Josephine’s determination. She herself had seen that the story of the expected child was scarcely compatible with the news which must reach Napoleon of the wild gaities in Paris. It was safer to write a touching letter owning she had been mistaken. The reply startled her. Unless she came he would throw up his command and join her. Did he mean it? Who could tell of what such a man’s passion was capable? At all events there was the risk, and even to her not very swift intelligence that was alarming.

And Gohier, the fascinated, the most powerful of all the Directors, now that Barras’s power was waning, was also of opinion that she should go for however short a time. Like or dislike it, she had become a political factor of importance. They imagined that she might delay the swiftly unrolling scroll of destiny which was driving Austria to madness and facing the Directory with problems they were quite unequal to solving, and things being so she must go.

It was made clear to her by the only people she really valued outside her children—Thérèse, Tallien, Barras and Gohier—that she had no choice. And dazed with the thundering renown of victories of which she could not in the least understand the purpose, and which appeared the most annoying things imaginable because they disturbed her newest flirtation with the fascinating young Hippolyte Charles, she consented at last, weeping, reluctant, delaying to the latest instant, and hoping for some stroke of Providence to save her. None intervened. On the contrary, Colonel Junot returned to Paris with magnificent news not only of victories but of millions of money laid by the King of Sardinia at the feet of the Conqueror. That Italian war was even to have the merit of being self-supporting, amongst all the rest!

Paris was *en fête*, the Directory more and more fearful of this blazing star ascending the firmament, and individual Directors afraid to support the General’s wife in rebellion. Barras and Gohier both knew the ins and outs of the situation perfectly well.

Would she go under the escort of Junot if some light and easy occupation could be found for the rose-cheeked Hippolyte Charles in Milan? He could easily be of the party if that would be an inducement. He had enough soldiership to keep himself afloat in some easy billet.

Thérèse Tallien suggested it carelessly to Josephine, and laughed secretly to see a sunbeam, faint, but a sunbeam, struggling through the dark cloud of despair on leaving Paris.

“It would certainly make it pleasanter,” she said reflectively. “You see, Bonaparte will be perpetually with the army, and as I must entertain a great deal I shall want some sort of man in attendance to look after invitations and so on.”

“Undoubtedly, and Charles has had some sort of military experience at Besançon. He would make an excellent Assistant to Adjutant-General Leclerc at Milan. Barras says so. You know too that Milan is quite as gay as Paris.”

“But different!” Josephine said ruefully. “Still, if one *must* go . . .”

The battle was won. She went, attended by her women, by Fortuné, the little lap-dog, by Junot and the delightful Hippolyte Charles. There was only Paris wanting.

Went to be a queen in Italy, *fêted* by the army, served by the Italians, the recipient of costly jewels and magnificent gifts from conquered towns that had hoarded their treasures for centuries to pour them at the feet of the woman the new Attila delighted to honour.

Luxury surrounded her, worship dogged her footsteps, the conqueror was her slave. And still she thirsted for Paris; still she wearied of a passion beyond her understanding.

Was this the queendom foretold by the ancient negress of Martinique? Could it be possible that there were any glories beyond the glories of Italy? She wanted no more thrust upon her, desiring no heaven beyond a magnificent income, perfect freedom and Paris. And as to gratitude—why should she feel gratitude to Bonaparte? It was she who had given him the Army of Italy. The success was hers. It was entirely her own doing.

CHAPTER VIII

FRUITION

So strangely had the scene changed. The little Corsican whom she had thought incapable of providing her with the luxurious future of her dreams received her in Milan with transports of passion which did not touch her very greatly, but also in the noble palazzo of the Duca di Serbelloni, which moved her for the first time to realization of the immense change which had taken place in their relative positions.

That indeed was magnificent. That was what she would have chosen had it only been in Paris; and to a woman whose life had been passed in shifts and plannings to secure money and extract the last drop of its spending power and more the change was like the transition from a stormy ocean voyage into anchorage in a golden sun-lit bay with never a ripple on still waters.

But it bewildered her. Could it last? She who had lived through the swift and terrible transitions of the Revolution knew very well how a woman may be a princess one day and a headless corpse the next. Few had had closer experience of how the world can serve its favourites. And since she could never understand Bonaparte, to her there was no reason for trusting in his stability. A quarrel with great men like Barras and Gohier, and all would be over with him. What was he more than the men and women she had seen blown on a wind of destiny like bright bubbles, glittering and gone?

“Do you like it? Is it good enough, my heart’s treasure?” he asked breathlessly as he led her about the noble echoing marble chambers where the masterpieces of a dead art surveyed her with calm incurious eyes from stately walls. When she had done with the palace they would be torn down and packed and sent in lumbering waggons to Paris to bear their witness to the victor’s triumph. Yes—Italy, ravished, mutilated, lay at his feet now, and how were the cities left desolate and stripped of their ancient ornaments of beauty and pride!

“If there is anything here that pleases you it is yours!” he persisted, and did not know that the rosy cushions, the satin-hung walls of the Rue Chantier were more to the Parisian beauty than the magnificent faded tapestries and coldly splendid furnishings of the Italian palace. In its way her taste was perfect, but it was not after that manner.

“Don’t you think it looks a little cold and uncomfortable?” she said amiably. “Of course it is very fine, but—”

Even Napoleon’s passion began at last to perceive there was always a “but.”

He did his best to understand, to say the right thing. He put his arm about her and drew her passionately to him. “I know you miss Hortense and Eugene—such a loving mother as you are! But, O my Josephine, there is me too. I have only a week in my wife’s arms, and then Wurmser and his army to finish, and battles and blood and—I don’t mind that, not I,—if I know I have your love at the back of it all. I love you so. I love you so!”

She stroked his hair kindly, even affectionately, as his head lay on her bosom, but the cry did not reach her heart. He was so dreadfully young and unsophisticated; what meeting ground could there be? He had told her of his little love affairs; very few, for love had been a luxury quite beyond his purse, and their incredible youth and innocence left her with a taste of sour milk in her mouth—she whose experiences had not been few, who very much preferred the highly sophisticated and by no means innocent society of the men of Paris—of the Revolution. He was still in her eyes the raw foreigner, the Corsican, new to the only world she valued.

What on earth was she to do with him? That was the thought as her hand went softly to and fro in his hair. Really Hortense would have been a better wife for him than she!

“Isn’t this weakness? Can’t you take things more easily, Bonaparte?” she said at last. “We are married; what more do you want?”

He raised his head presently, still with his arm about her, and looked her in the face with those brilliant haggard eyes.

“Weakness?” he said. “No. It is not weakness. It is life which is killing me. I have things to give that no one can take. Josephine, I can’t stir you. What can I do to break the apathy that comes between us? I thought love like mine could work miracles. It has out here in Italy. Do you suppose I could have driven the Austrians before me but for you? *You* did it! But though I can move all the rest I can never get at the real you. Never. Never! Are you happy with me? Tell me.”

“Naturally I am happy,” she said. “Why should you think I’m not? I shall like it better when we settle down in Paris and have Hortense and Eugene with us, and you go into politics. With the interest I have with the Directors and all you’ve done out here it seems quite possible you might be a Director yourself one of these days. That’s what I have in view!” she ended with her

wisest look and most diplomatic tone—she who had given him the Army of Italy and therefore all his successes.

“I might be a Director!” he repeated slowly. “Well—so I might, I suppose. They are certainly very great men.”

There was a silence of which the irony escaped her. No one knew better than he what the men were worth who governed France. He had had to deal with them face to face for the needs of the campaign and he could gauge the lath painted to look like iron to a nicety. He knew them now. Rotten through and through. Driving France to ruin with their formulas and follies, and fattening on her like leeches on a sick man. And in Italy his dreams had grown vaster, more grandiose, and through them all he beheld his own figure moving alone, utterly alone, if it were not for his other soul, flesh of his flesh, who would move about him in the rhythm of a perfect companionship as the moon sways to the sun’s vibrations and reflects his light in softened radiance. With her—the world was his.

“You *are* like moonlight,” he said to her suddenly, “so soft, so pale and harmonious. Your voice is music, your hands are white moonbeams and as cool. I knew when you came you would bring rest and tranquillity. If you failed me—”

“But I really can’t understand how all these extraordinary ideas come into your head!” she remonstrated gently. “I have just come all the way from Paris and my children—and you *know* how I love Paris—to be with you. I have sacrificed everything for you, and you call me apathetic! What am I to do?”

“Nothing, nothing!” he said, with one of his swift transitions. “I’m the most unreasonable dog living. You have given me yourself, and heaven and earth can’t balance that gift. And here’s Duroc and Junot.”

He sprang up and the moment of confidence was ended. The two colonels bowed in the unfinished way which always shocked her taste, and immediately absorbed him. Not a look, not a gesture, that was a tribute to her charm. How was it possible she should not miss Paris with young colts about her like that?

They had need to be brave, for they had nothing else to recommend them! And the eternal talk of guns and convoys and the commissariat! She yawned and yawned with the utmost grace behind a little hand bearing a sixteenth-century gem from the Medici collection set in diamonds brighter than her eyes. It was her welcoming gift. That at all events she could admire. Thérèse had nothing to match it.

But happily the *tête-à-tête* would be interrupted to-night. She was to hold a magnificent reception at the Palazzo, and Hippolyte Charles would be there, that very attractive and fascinating young Parisian. Ah, if only Napoleon could have borrowed a few of his graces! If she could but coquet with him as with Hippolyte! If he would not take himself and her so seriously! Certainly love was the greatest stupidity in the world!

Yet she was forced to admit when evening came and the great rooms were lighted with wax flambeaux, shedding long reflections across the glimmering marble, that the man who stood by her side could hold his own in such an assembly, though in a stiff unpleasant way.

They stood side by side, she in satin sheening pearl-white and the bandeau of diamonds in her hair which Barras had given her, pale, exquisite, with the touch of rouge which emphasized the milky pallor of her skin. Her eyelids were delicately darkened and lengthened, the curves of her lips defined with faint rose.

His eyes adored her when she glided into the great salon with the rhythm of perfect music, but he was silent. There were moments when his feeling for her choked and stifled all expression, like a wave curling back upon itself. At others it became unendurable, and then he must speak, whoever was about him.

Now he was stiff, pale, silent, and coldly dignified, the outline of his face thin as a hatchet,—his lean young body braced into a tight uniform which made him look a lad of eighteen but for the pale almost tortured face. He took up his place beside her, and they stood before two gilded chairs to receive their guests, for all the world like a king and queen, with his aides-de-camp behind him.

A nervous feeling oppressed her for the first time in her life. Not for herself. There could be no social position for which the Vicomtesse de Beauharnais had not prepared the Citoyenne Bonaparte, but she did not wish to be ashamed of her husband, and this was the first ceremony in which she had seen him take the leading part. Marmont, Duroc, Murat, Junot, were all in attendance, all tall and imposing men, and among them he stood like an embodied reserve, apart,—as an alien stands among men at home in their own country. It would be very distasteful to her if he should be *gauche* and clumsy, especially in his treatment of women, who make or mar a man's social renown. Therefore she watched.

A prince of one of the oldest Italian houses, one devoted for many centuries to the Papal service, was introduced, his exquisite wife on his arm, pale as an orchid in tropic forests, with dark silken hair banded back from

the pure oval of her face and midnight eyes clouded with heavy lashes. Josephine, to whom the name recalled all the old aristocratic perfume, prepared her most attractive smile and reverence as she saw them advancing up the long room,—a little whisper of admiration running before the Princess like the murmur at the bows of a full-sailed ship. Heaven send Bonaparte might behave gracefully to these distinguished strangers, dragged there by hard triumph!

Gracefully? She saw the chilly courtesy of the Prince's stiff smile, the unwilling bow change—half, as it were—in process of production, and turned to her husband for the cause. He stood, unsmiling, set jaw, eyes fixed stern and unwavering on the supple handsome man before him, not a flicker in the blue flame that swept him and the woman alike. The man lost composure, his colour rose, and stepping forward uncertainly he bowed to his knees, stumbled against the carpet and passed on dragging at his trailing sword. The woman's face wooed and flattered like a slave's; flushing rose-red she loosed the artillery of veiled glances and little supplicating smiles. Josephine understood perfectly. She glanced again at her husband. The steady stare swept the Princess, passed over and dismissed her. She curtsied humbly, and followed her husband with bent head.

"They have been sending information to the Pope!" he said almost aloud over his shoulder to Colonel Duroc. "You knew it. How dared you allow them to appear here! Turn them out!"

Duroc, saluting, detached himself and followed the retreating pair. A subdued murmur of hissing wonder ran round the room, as every head swayed to see. Bonaparte surveyed the oncomers with stiff unmoved dignity.

"Bonaparte—that lovely woman!—how could you?" whispered Josephine behind her lace fan. "She was almost fainting. And a Princess! *That* isn't the way to make friends!"

He looked not at her but the ground.

"It is the way to rule. Make friends for me. That's your department. But not with spies in diamonds. Who is this devil of a fop coming up all smirking and bowing?"

It was Hippolyte Charles, ambrosially curled and perfumed, diffusing rays of Parisian splendour on the alien air.

"A very great friend of mine!" she said coquettishly. "He travelled with Junot and me from Paris and really saved Fortuné's life on the awful journey. Do be nice to him, Bonaparte. Do!"

“How is one nice to people like that!” he asked morosely as Hippolyte ambled up all smiles and nods and salutations to the general and his wife. “What does one do with it? Have we a glass case handy, Junot?”

Fortunately, engrossed in the approach of this perfection, Josephine lost those terrible words, and turned, all grace and smiles, to her husband to make the introduction. That it passed off with the coolest indifference on the part of his general was an immense relief to Junot, who had had more reason than one to reproach himself with permitting that addition to the travelling party even though it had left him free to lavish his own fascinations on Josephine’s extremely attractive maid.

The greater part of the visitors disappeared at the close of the reception, but a few specially invited guests, chiefly women, stayed on to make acquaintance with the vice-reine of Italy, for so they were naming her among themselves. Then, indeed, she was in her element, the perfect hostess, graceful, tactful, amiable, with Hippolyte as her aide-de-camp, setting off her elegance with his airs and graces of the Parisian salons. Well might the French and Italian ladies feel and assure each other that Paris had pursued them to Milan.

They cooed like a coterie of doves, preening their feathers, warming themselves in the sunshine of this society of heroes led by the mighty military genius who was dictating to the Pope, domineering over Princes, driving the flying Austrians before him like dust in a roaring March wind.

She formed tables for vingt-et-un with Hippolyte at her shoulder. Napoleon, unbending after the formality, consented to play himself, and the fun raged fast and furious. It was all very new and odd; not at all what she had expected in this strange marriage of hers. Shy no longer, he was shouting and laughing loudly now. She could not tell that in his half insane excitement of thwarted passion these flattering women appealed to him as a release for the dumb suffering that strained his nerves until they were taut as harp-strings and on the edge of snapping in some wild outbreak. She watched him, puzzled and more than a little displeased.

“How do you get on with the barbarian?” Hippolyte whispered, as standing in the embrasure of a stately window, draped with purple velvet, they were flooded with the soft Italian moonlight glorifying the narrow street outside. She looked over her shoulder apprehensively. “Don’t be foolish! Take care! As if I should tell you! Hush—hush. Well—if you *will* know”—for his hand insisted—“extremely well—that is, in a way. He worships the ground I walk on. No, don’t pretend! I am not to be taken in with fine words. *You* worship the ground I walk on? I know better.”

Protestations muffled in the folds of the curtains, and Bonaparte's keen eyes watching over the edge of his cards. Yet at a safe distance.

"But that matters little to me. It is *your* heart I want to know. Do you repay the adoration, my loveliest?"

She looked at him beneath languid lashes.

"I scatter a few crumbs from my table. One must—to one's husband. Husbands after all have certain rights which must be—"

A card table overturned. Apologies,—the voice clear above them all.

"Enough of cards. Let us tell stories. Josephine, come here! Lower the light, Duroc. Leave only one burning. Who will begin?"

She shrugged her shoulders with gentlest grace and undulated back to the little crowd. Who could understand a man who wanted to tell stupid stories when one might sit in the shadows and moonlight and talk perfumed nonsense to a sympathetic listener? Her glance at Hippolyte was the answer to his disdainful silence.

"Ghost stories!" Bonaparte insisted. "I have a gorgeous one, but I won't begin. Much better than staring out at that cold moonlight, and I turn on the moonlight in my story. Signora—you begin!"

A young woman, submitting unwillingly, twittered a little story of the apparition of a nun in her father's windy castle in the Apennines, and the firelight from the great logs burning in the enormous open fireplace was so flattering to her shrinking prettiness that it went off to the admiration of the applauding men. As a reward to herself she presented her pretty plea that the General would be gracious enough to favour them next with the promised moonlight story, and Josephine bit her lips with annoyance. One may not love one's husband but it may still be unpleasant to see him make an idiot of himself in polite society! Why could they not have asked Hippolyte, who could be trusted to acquit himself so perfectly with some graceful little anecdote of society?

The group gathered closer. Only one wax light remained, lost far away in the vast chamber. Twenty people clustered together there looked little and forlorn in its huge dimness. They had the air of huddling together for protection from slowly deepening shadows lit only by dying flames. These fell changefully on the corner where Bonaparte sat, making the eyes gleam like jewels in his white impassive face. He began slowly:

"This is a true story—would it be worth telling if it were not? And believe me, when I say before I begin, that these things not only happen but

have some strange law of their own to which they have to be obedient, and which we shall learn when we trust our senses less and our intuitions more.

“Well, there was a man known to my father, and I myself have often seen him as a boy, who came to Corsica more than once because he loved the sea and the rough life of the island and the strange scent of the moors which is like nothing else I know. He was a gentleman, a Monsieur de Médat (how queer the old titles sound now!) and as loyal as man could be to the reigning family. He came over one year—it was before the troubles in France began, and I was a boy,—and sitting one night in our house in Ajaccio, he told this story to my father and mother—I heard it myself, but I could not now say what led up to it. Stay! I’ll give it in his own words. He said it had happened two months before he had sailed this time from Marseilles to Corsica.”

The group drew a little closer together. The firelight brightened and darkened over him, sometimes the face visible, white and fixed, sometimes only the glittering eyes, again nothing but the deep resonant voice from the man hidden in the shadow.

“‘I was walking at two o’clock in the night—or rather morning,’ said Monsieur de Médat, ‘in the gardens at Versailles, and if you ask why I was doing such a thing at such an hour, I must own that I was transacting a *liaison* at that time with one of the waiting women attached to the Queen’s service. I had left her and meant to get back to my rooms in Versailles as quickly as possible but the beauty of the night delayed me. Never had I seen such a moon—not even in this favoured island of Corsica. She shone, pure, lonely, and steadfast in a dark blue sky, drowning the stars in radiance, and the air was breathlessly still, every leaf hanging motionless. I strolled along under the trees, and a fancy seized me to have a look at the great basin where the glorious fountains play that I might see the moon reflected in it, though naturally the fountains themselves would not be playing.’”

Under the cover of the shadow Hippolyte had possessed himself of Josephine’s charming hand where glittered the Medicean gem. She could not bear ghost stories. The superstitious negroes of Martinique had infected her with their terrors, and the least a lover could do was to give her courage. But Napoleon’s strange gloomy presence, crouching in the dark, a voice uttering menacing dangerous words, so possessed her that at the moment she was not conscious of anything else. Her hand lay coldly in the man’s; her eyes were on the shadows.

“‘I walked up the long avenue beneath the trees and as I came in sight of the water heard light quick footsteps following me, and looked over my

shoulder. It was a woman in the distance, alone and surely trying to overtake me. My first thought was the natural one that my angel had some stringent reason for wishing to speak to me again and I turned instantly to meet her.

“‘No, it was not she. But young, light, graceful, and she came on swiftly, the moonlight full on her face but too far for me to be certain of the features.’ My God,—how shall I describe what followed! I shudder in telling it.”

He sprang to his feet and began walking up and down the great room, first slowly, then rapidly, his voice near and far as he came and went. The story had become his own experience, pouring forth from an intense and terrible memory, and fear hovered about him, infecting those who heard.

“‘It was a figure that all Versailles would have known, and none to match it for beauty. The queen’s—Marie Antoinette. I felt my heart flounder and stop. God in heaven, what should the queen be doing in the gardens at that hour! It could never be she! But nearer and nearer she came and the moon glared full on her face, and it was—it was the queen! I tore my hat off and stood stiff, drawing aside to let her pass, for she came straight at me. And yet I knew—no, I cannot tell the fearful confusion of thought that held me. Was she ill, mad,—walking in her sleep? It was not natural—horrible! She passed in an instant, never looking at me, and so to the basin. Then a new terror—would she throw herself in? Had she gone suddenly mad?’ ”

The women’s faces were strained on him. None could turn away. There were men and women present who had seen the queen in her brilliance and her agony. Her very name sent a creeping shudder through them—the name of a woman who had gone through hell to her bloody grave.

The firelight was sinking. At the end of the room he was invisible.

“‘I followed—what else was possible? “Madame?” I hazarded, but nothing answered. I called it aloud. I ran towards the water, ghastly terror weighing my feet like lead. I approached the white figure until I was near as I am to you, and she turned and faced me and flung out her hands to forbid me. And, O God—God! It was the face of a woman long and horribly dead, and the head dropped from the shoulders and rolled to my feet reeking of corruption.’ ”

There was a hissing intake of breath.

“Oh, don’t finish it! Don’t tell any more!” one woman screamed out at his elbow. “Gentlemen, fetch the lights!”

“General, it’s too near the things some of us remember!” Duroc said in his ear. “And you tell it too horribly well. The women are frightened. Shall I

get lights?”

“Lights, lights!” Bonaparte shouted discordantly. “Didn’t I know I could frighten you? Isn’t that better than cards? I was watching all the time—all of you, every one. True? Yes, of course it’s true. I heard it myself. Sometimes I think I saw it myself. The only question is: Was the queen dreaming the future at that moment in the royal bed at Versailles with the gold crown holding up the curtains? She had reason enough to dream though she didn’t know it then. But why Monsieur de Médat saw into her dream, who knows? Not I!”

He was in wild excitement but tossed it aside and calmed down as the lights came and the fluttered women recovered. Then he sat apart and stared coldly at them all in gloomy silence. The fire had gone out of him.

A very singular scene, as Duroc reflected then and later. It gave him a sense, to be very much deepened, of the unexpected and startling in the man. Power grasping for power over men and women in small and great things alike. There were depths beyond sounding. Perhaps time would make him more intelligible, but at present, Duroc thought, one could only shrug one’s shoulders and postpone discussion with one’s inward misgivings. Misgivings there certainly were.

Four days later he was off again to harry the Austrians, winning victory after victory until the loud world echoed back his fame. He himself could not understand the whip that drove him. Tortured by a most unavailing passion for his wife, possessing her but realizing that he could hope to wring no answer from her coldness, his very agony acted as a force releasing energies and powers miraculous to those who beheld them unleashed.

The army was the embodiment of his will, and that will struck like a thunderbolt when and where he would.

But at Milan there was nothing but relief at his absence. It was not Paris, but it laughed and bubbled with gaiety and little frivolous pleasures, the more titillating for the battlestorms thundering about them.

And Hippolyte was there.

CHAPTER IX

THE ENCHANTRESS

MILAN pursued its way—a shining little planet of gaiety and light loves and outside its charmed orbit were a great consternation and terror. The Austrians, harassed and broken, could not understand the simplicity of the strategy which met and defeated them at every point.

An Austrian veteran voiced the bewilderment with which they saw the stately science of war as Europe had known it fall into ruins before their eyes.

“Things go very badly. No one seems to know what he is about. The French general is a young blockhead who knows nothing of the regular rules of war. Sometimes he is on our right, at others on our left; now in front, and presently on our rear. This mode of warfare is contrary to all system and utterly insufferable!”

Insufferable! Europe, watching breathlessly, agreed. But it succeeded. Could the manner be learned? Keen brains were seeking the answer to that question, how could the seed be captured? Not yet. That red blossom of war was unique at present. The soil where it grew one man’s brain—there only. He knew. In his own words:

“My hand of iron was not at the extremity of my arm; it was immediately connected with my head.”

So in the dazzle and uproar he held his steadfast way, and every day his dreams grew vaster. Life, the world, the huddling peoples, shaped themselves into the rhythm of a great epic in his brain. Under the urge of a creative energy it took form and shape as each day unrolled its circumstances and flung them into harmony with the clear picture before him. Power crowded in upon him, swept him along on its flood, but it was he who rode the flood—the directing genius always, for without him it could not have been, and he and Power were one.

To the Directory, seeing very clearly the unreality of these vain and inefficient men and the part they played in his drama, the poem of action unrolling before him, he wrote:

“I have conducted the campaign without consulting any one. I should have done no good if I had been under the necessity of conforming to the

notions of another person.”

True as truth. Did Shakespeare consult another person in “Hamlet,” or Phidias in his Athene Fighting in the Front, and was their creation more truly theirs than his was his own?

Day by day he learnt the augustness of solitude in the realm of ideas, of lonely self-dependence. Thus and no otherwise Power embraced that strange translucent insight for which he himself had no name or understanding, and of their embrace was born the deed complete and perfect. So much for his work.

There he was keen, alert, magnificent in swift irrevocable decision. “Fortune is a woman,” said he, “and the more she does for me the more I will require of her.”

But Josephine also was a woman and from her he could gain nothing but humiliation. She haunted him for there he was weak and at her mercy. Where he gave blindly of his best she repaid him only with languid indifference. Even letters from her would have struck the gloom to sunlight, but she would not write.

He wrote instead:

“I am very anxious to know how you are and what you are doing. I have been in Virgil’s village on the border of the lake in silvery moonlight, and not an instant without dreaming of my Josephine. Ah, let me see some of your faults; be less beautiful, less gracious, less tender and especially less kind; and above all, never be jealous, never weep, for your tears madden me, fire my blood. Be sure that it is no longer possible for me to have a thought except for you. A thousand kisses as burning as you are cold. Your letters are as cold as if you were fifty; we might have been married fifteen years.”

It grew unendurable. She would not write, or, writing, chilled him with the passionless gentleness of falling snowflakes. And miserable rumours reached him by his couriers and others. Junot in particular had a way of looking unutterable things so evidently demanding a question that Napoleon was compelled in spite of himself to hover nearer and nearer to the affairs of Milan. What was going on there? Were the fine ladies who had come from Paris managing to amuse themselves without the officers who were on duty with him? Junot, whom military business took occasionally to Milan, would sigh ostentatiously and Napoleon, longing to kick the heavy stupidity out of him into words, would wait for his reply as if it were the very voice of fate.

“Amusing themselves, General? I should think so. What do they care about the men who are fighting and dying for them! The idlers have it all

their own way. Men like that Hippolyte Charles—a painted ass I call him.”

“But the ladies apparently don’t!” says Bonaparte in an agony. “Is he much at the Palazzo Serbelloni?”

“Every day and all day,” Junot answered with that covert pleasure in the annoyance of a friend which is common to humanity. “There are private theatricals, dinners, *déjeuners*—Lord knows what! And he leads the whole crowd of women. They’re one and all at his feet.”

Napoleon, still very young in these matters, puts on the air careless and disdainful.

“Not all, I’ll swear.”

“All.” Junot replies with what his General calls the certitude of a beast, and the young General-in-Chief turns away silent but with the worm that dieth not gnawing at his heart.

He wrote to her again, driven at last to desperation:

“Do not concern yourself with the happiness of a man who lives only in your life, rejoices only in your pleasure and happiness. When I exacted from you a love like my own I was wrong; why expect lace to weigh as heavy as gold? I was wrong, since nature has not given me attractions with which to captivate you.”

So he wrote in the intervals of battle, his heart uttering its torment like lightning in the peals of thunder, and heavy silence for the only answer.

For Josephine was too busy with important frivolities, with the all too fascinating Hippolyte, to find a moment to spare for the suffering of a mere husband, who after all should content himself with his rights and take them as easily as she did.

Unable at last to endure the alternations between public triumph and private despair he sent for her to his headquarters in Brescia. And with reluctant bored delay she came, as angry as her languor could be at being compelled to leave the delights of Milan.

Wonder and awe waited upon his every movement from the outside world, but to the pale graceful Creole woman he was still only the unformed boy so absurdly and tediously in love, one who must be gently shown his place and made to understand it if there were to be peace.

“You were glad to come?” he questioned eagerly, the moment they were alone in quarters so much less enticing than those of the Palazzo Serbelloni that she looked about her with dismay. She had the martyred air with which many women are adepts.

“You know I’m always glad to see you, but really, Bonaparte, is it safe for a woman with all this fighting going on? I was told as I came to-day that the Austrian General, Wurmser—”

He drew a little back, his face hardening.

“And you think I would expose you to any danger to secure happiness for myself? You know me very little, Josephine. I am as good a judge of danger or safety as any gossip you were likely to meet on the road.”

She saw the hurt look and took his hand in her cool palms.

“Dear, you don’t think the less of a woman because she’s frightened of the great big guns that are nothing to you? See! I’ve brought the loveliest dress for the *fête* here that you told me of. I shall look like a queen. You like that, *chéri*, don’t you?”

So little won him! In a moment his arm was about her, his head on her bosom. For him she made the place a Paradise with her white-rose beauty and gracious ways. Did it matter after all if she amused herself at Milan? Such loveliness must have incense and it meant no more than that.

She stayed with him for a few hectic days of which he could not have said whether they most hurt or gladdened him. Joy, he had learnt to know, is very often pain masquerading as its brother. But he tried to interest her in the military situation, and the staff clustered about “Our Lady of Victories” and sunned themselves in the warmth of her smiles. A delicious interlude if all had gone as he hoped, but it never did, never would, and she remained nervous and uneasy.

“Bonaparte, I have presentiments and if ever I go against them I rue it. I shan’t stay here to-morrow night, and I want you to come away too.” He looked at her with the line between his brows which was becoming so marked.

“Can’t throw over the Mayor of Brescia’s *fête*. We must keep friends with the friendly Italians. And your beautiful dress?”

“I know—I know—but I’m frightened. Something horrible is going to happen.”

“Nothing can,” he replied with calm confidence. “Are you afraid with *me*, Josephine?”

“I’m afraid of feelings like this—like when thunder is coming on. The old black woman told me to trust my presentiments. Bonaparte, let us go to-morrow. Promise me.”

The facile tears were in her eyes now, brimming over.

“And it’s so hot here!” she said, with a little sob in her voice. “And I do hate it so. Come with me to Milan.”

About to speak, he shut his lips close. What was there to say? An hour later, to his consternation, Josephine and her presentiment had won the day and her aerial telepathy had surpassed his semaphores. The Austrians were on them. The French communications were cut and the army and its leader in danger together from Brescia. Only just in time and trembling in heart with terror at her peril, Napoleon was compelled to send her to Milan by way of Lake Garda, where she was under fire and the horses of her carriage killed. He stayed to face the enemy.

When they brought him the news he paled a little—the only visible sign.

She was too terrified to triumph even when he wrote to her swearing that Wurmser should pay in blood for the tears he had made her shed, a promise he fulfilled amply by the victories of Bassano and Roveredo.

But the incident made a deep impression upon the mystic side of his mind—that dark sphere in such striking contrast to the cold and brilliant luminance of the rest. The night after Roveredo he went over the incident with Marmont—the clearest-headed of his generals.

“What is your opinion of things like that?” he asked. “My wife was certain trouble was coming—could not get it out of her head. She knew.”

“I should say a woman was likely to be frightened at coming so near the enemy in any case. They are always full of fears and flutterations. But the story has leaked out as such things do, and the men are more than ever confirmed in their notion that ‘Our Lady of Victories’ is a mascotte.”

He laughed a little, but Bonaparte listened seriously.

“I knew they called her that in Paris—but the men here—do they?”

“Certainly. You know what soldiers are—the most superstitious dogs alive. They will have it that your luck changed, General, the moment you met your wife—that she has the luck and hands it out to you.”

Later he would have resented that phrase. It pleased him well enough then.

“There are things out of the common about her in more ways than one. She herself believes that—and no wonder,” he said, and turned to his maps and work and the ruin of the Austrians again. She was safe in Milan and happy though she would not write to him. That had to be enough.

But it was not enough for her. The narrow escape had given her fresh cause for petulance and queen as she was in Italy, she sickened for Paris.

Hortense was at the famous school of Madame de Campan, once lady-in-waiting to the unhappy Marie Antoinette and guaranteed to teach all the graces and accomplishments necessary to young ladies of the greatest world. She longed to see her—to see Eugene who gave every promise of charming youth. But above all—Paris! And Italy was the less pleasant because two of the sisters of Napoleon, scenting success in the wind, had borne down on Milan and were watching all her little amusements with cold suspicious eyes.

She wrote in a low-spirited mood of languor to her aunt:

“Monsieur de Serbelloni will tell you how I have been received in Italy, *fêted* wherever I have gone, all the princes of Italy entertaining me. Ah, well! I would rather be a private individual in France. I do not like the honours of this country. I am bored to death, though I have the kindest husband that one could possibly find. I have not time to want anything; my will is his; he is on his knees before me all day long as if I were a divinity.”

But the most devout worshipper cannot remain forever on his knees before a silent deity. They ache. There is a tendency to rise and stretch oneself. And facts were marshalling themselves against her in stern array.

For one thing, Bonaparte was sending waggon loads of the treasures of submissive Italy to the French capital. They lay for the taking and it was his mood to make Paris resplendent with the spoils. But it was a very different matter in his eyes that his wife should accept underhand gifts from the loot, and do what he would, say what he would, he could not stop the steady trickle of beautiful possessions into her hands. People of all ranks, knowing the Commander-in-Chief's devotion to his bride (for that was common talk everywhere), believed that the surest way to conciliation of the greatest power they knew was to heap the charming mediator with their best. Recklessly they gave and she took as recklessly, returning promises, grace, kindly little actions that helped her husband immensely and built up a strong party for him in Italy to be useful then and later. Undoubtedly she knew her world and could use it.

He caught her over a girdle of cameos set in gold one day—an exquisite thing from the collection of one of the princes of Tuscany—and for the first time she saw a frown upon his face—that strange look when the strong muscles clotted in a knot in the middle of the forehead. It was not pleasant for either man or woman to see—especially if they had roused it.

“Josephine, you cannot, you shall not take these things. Don't you see the position it puts me in? A bribe to you is the same as a bribe to me. How

can you compromise me so? I have spoken to you before. Send those things back instantly. No—give them to me!”

In his heart he knew he could not count on obedience. Gimcracks like that were more to her than any pleasure she could give him. She saw the case was serious for the moment, and curled herself into his arms, soft and caressing to every sense. But before doing so she drew a lace handkerchief dextrously over two rings of sapphire and emerald given by the wife of a man who hoped to make some money by contracts with the commissariat of the army.

Absurd! As if she should ever speak to Napoleon about such things! People deserved to be deceived who had such ridiculous ideas.

“Dear, they give them to me because I’m your wife and partly because my little ways please them. But they never ask for anything in return. They don’t indeed. There’s no harm in it, I do assure you. And I do so love lovely things.”

His hard frown relaxed.

“Yes, but *I* must give them to you, and I will. Can’t you trust me? Are you not a queen already here in Italy, and you never believed that possible. And all in six months. But you must be good, my little Josephine. You must promise me on your honour not to take these things. It is bad and sets a frightful example. And if my enemies get hold of it—”

“Of course I promise if you wish,” she said with patient grace. “Even if I do think it unreasonable. Surely you could trust my tact. And am I not helping you very much by all the friends I make here?”

He admitted that, though there were some he could have dispensed with. She had no discrimination—never would have—and no dignity except that of demeanour on occasions when it went well with a state toilette. She took it off with her bandeau of diamonds and was equally friendly and kind-hearted with the rabble and the undesirable when they came across her.

He hesitated a moment, then said slowly:

“If I say Eugene shall come here to Milan and I will make him my aide-de-camp, will you promise then to have nothing to do with gifts? He is seventeen now, and I could.”

Instantly she was round his neck—all promises and kisses. Yes, yes, indeed she would promise! How charming, how dear, was her Bonaparte. Jewels? What did she care for the worthless things? She tossed the girdle on to her table with a curling lip.

But he left her sighing as he went, and when he was gone she slipped the rings into her jewel case and sent the girdle back with the most delightfully tactful and regretful little letter ever penned by the hand of woman. She knew how to value such an exquisite gift and the true heart that prompted it, she said, but think how evil minds might misinterpret it! And much more to the same effect.

Napoleon, going on into the great salon of the Palazzo, found his two sisters there: Elise, on the point of marriage with Bacciochi (and a poor enough marriage too, for Napoleon could not at that time infuse his own burning sense of the great future into his family), and the lovely Paulette, embodiment of spring with her blooming cheeks and lips and the slender voluptuous grace of her figure. They too were looking through a little box of trinkets, pretty sparkling gems of no great value but immensely attractive in the eyes of girls who had had little enough hitherto. He stopped with the thunder cloud on his brow which they knew well enough, but Josephine scarcely yet.

“How did you get these things—and from whom?”

Elise was his match and met him with an eye as keen as his own.

“From your wife. She gave us the box and said we could each choose as many as we pleased.”

The more easily dominated Paulette fluttered in the background fearing to offend her brother lest she should be packed back to Paris away from the fascinating Italian noblemen and still more fascinating soldiers who were at her feet.

Elise was twenty—almost an old maid as one might say, and Paulette’s beauty was of a type that would brush its bloom off as easily and early as a peach in ripening sunshine. The prudent Signora Letizia had therefore sent them to fish in the troubled waters of Italy with instructions, in addition, to watch and record their frank opinions of the new member of the family.

“She has more jewellery than she can count,” added Elise, “and it keeps pouring in every day, and as we have nothing—”

With a violent gesture Napoleon caught the pretty inlaid box and flung it from him with all the strength of his arm.

It flew into flinders on the marble floor and there was an avalanche of rings and chains and brooches sparkling in brilliant sunshine.

Paulette began to cry gently in the background—Napoleon was so impossible! Elise still kept her clear gaze upon him.

"I dare you to touch one of these things again," he added in a voice half choked with passion. "They are bribes, and for my wife or sisters to take them is to put me myself in the position of accepting them. O my God, can't I make any of you see the madness of ruining the future I am building—that I am as sure of as I stand here if only it is not wrecked under my eyes!"

"You can make *me* see it, Napoleon," said Elise, with the calm reasonable manner remarkable in so young a woman, which impressed Napoleon, as it did every one else. Her beauty accorded with it—it had a kind of clear-featured stateliness already, such as one might expect in a daughter of one of the great Roman families, imposing and untroubled. She pushed aside a necklace with her foot.

"Why didn't you tell me sooner?" she added. "I've seen those things coming in, and your wife takes them in handfuls. But I see what you mean, and I won't touch another. Here, Paulette—don't be silly. Stop crying! I'll give you my amber beads."

Napoleon felt a shoot of gratitude in a wearied heart. There was something in blood after all. It called to its kindred. It understood. He brushed her cheek with a rare kiss and went out, leaving the gems lying, and Elise bundled them into another box and carried them back to Josephine, intimating rather curtly that there had been a bit of a row and she preferred to keep out of it in future. She had not known that Paulette had slipped a little rococo pendant of diamonds and turquoises into her pocket nor could she have understood the petty theft if she had. Elise's mind did not work on those little monkey-lines. Josephine dreaded the youthful competition and spitefulness of Paulette. She had much more to dread in the other.

He went back to his post and his solitude of spirit, and always the white figure of his wife grew more and more unreal to him, a thing that might have been—no more. She failed him invariably.

Returning to Milan for a day or two of sorely needed joy, he found her flown on a pleasure trip to Genoa with her gay court in full attendance. Always the same! And for the first time he wrote bitterly to her.

"I flung myself into your room and you were not there. Used to perils, I knew the remedy for weariness and the ills of life. The ill-luck I suffer now is past all calculation. Don't alter your plans. Have your fling of pleasure. Happiness was invented for you. The world is only too happy if it can please you, and only your husband is very unhappy."

She did not care, and next time they met at Montebello, where the Austrian negotiations were proceeding, he summoned her with a command

not to be disobeyed. It was necessary that his wife should at least seem to respect him in the eyes of the world. He would see to that.

But the situation was wearing threadbare—it could not last at that pressure, and when he returned next time fate itself took a hand against the woman who had braved it too often. He left her to her pleasures even when they were together, and withdrew daily to the solitude of his own thoughts, and the inevitable happened.

They were bidden one night to a concert at one of the great palazzi of Milan. It was perhaps the first time she had realized to the full the dizzy height of the position he held; how—thermometers as they are for registering the warmth of public interest—the women swayed towards him like flowers in a light breeze that bows them like one blossom. Where he walked every bright eye was fixed upon him, no other man deflected interest for a moment. He had lost all timidity, and no wonder!—he moved about the great echoing chamber conscious that every glance of man or woman was on him, triumphant that she should see it; master of all there.

He was in a strange mood that night. Loneliness of spirit isolated combined with a great and cruel disappointment. There was no point where Josephine had satisfied him excepting only in the grace and amiability he shared with all the world. If that were all! he thought moodily, taking his seat beside her as the performers trooped in and the concert began.

Music. He loved it. It soothed him like the quiet that night brings after the gaudy day. A man sang, with the golden voice of Italy—mellow moonlight on a sleeping sea—a love song, deep and throbbing with passion, and he sat, his eyes fixed on the marble floor, thinking—wondering. He knew what that meant—but she had never known. It was the voice of his own heart singing outside him.

Applause and the chatter of voices, and then silence, and from the silence springing like a lark the most exquisite woman's-voice he had ever heard. It touched some nerve of youth and joy in him that he had thought dead and exalted it on silver wings into the blue and sunshine of skies out of reach.

What a voice! He would not look lest the crystal spell should break. These singers! One should not look; better to listen and imagine what would never be in real life. They should sing behind curtains.

A man near him whispered to another, "Heavens, what a lovely creature!"—and it forced him to look—but slowly.

In the front of the platform stood a slender woman, or rather a girl, in white that fell about her like rippling water. Her hands, lightly clasped, were extended; his eyes climbed from them to the beauty of her bared bosom and the flower-like grace of a long throat. But her face! Pale and pure and delicately sensitive, a snow-drop beauty, poised like a dream hovering at dawn and as soon to vanish, she seemed. And her dark eyes were fixed on him. It was to him she was singing, adorably entreating his pleasure.

“A fountain scattering diamonds in sunshine!” the man whispered again, and then Bonaparte stooped and picked up the programme he had never cared to glance at.

This was the most famous singer of the day—the lovely Grassini, of whom men said that they could not hear her singing for looking at her or dwell on her face for the delight in her perfect voice. The creature was all music, he thought—face and voice the flower and its perfume.

He fixed his sombre eyes on her and never moved them again, as she carolled for him and him only, evoking many a picture that none could have suspected in that strange young heart of his.

He wondered if she, the enchantress, could understand her own magic. Could she be anything to him if she did—and nothing if she did not? He was alone in the world. Why should he not please himself? At that very moment Hippolyte was hovering round Josephine, evoking answering glances of pleasure he himself could never draw from her. Why should he not please himself? If it would please him!

A resolution was slowly forming in his mind. He would see the Grassini again and test her and himself. And still she sang on and men and women applauding said they had never heard her in such voice, had never seen her so beautiful.

One may say with truth that Napoleon’s one tragedy was in Italy. It tore the wings from his life and left him spiritually crippled and halting forever. He had kissed away his soul on Josephine and was never to find it again in all his wanderings.

“But for loving, why, you would not, Sweet.
Though we prayed you,
Paid you, brayed you
In a mortar, for you could not, Sweet!”

CHAPTER X

LOVE WITH CLOSED WINGS

THE PARISIAN papers, when a little sated with victories, had other items of interest to record in the next few months. For instance, the marriage of Mademoiselle Elise Bonaparte to a Corsican soldier, named Bacciochi. That aroused speculation and there was a little murmur that the General, who himself was a Corsican, a mere foreigner, was strengthening his roots in that turbulent island. But on the whole the match was soothing to the Directors, who had begun to fear ambitious marriages in the Bonaparte family—alliances of a nature to build up overweening pretensions. They sent polite congratulations to their General-in-Chief, and a collective gift of some value to the bride.

This was followed by the marriage of the seventeen-year-old Paulette to General Leclerc, a brother in arms of the General-in-Chief. Very proper! Not the most suspicious Directorate could object to such a family arrangement. And it was certainly wise in Bonaparte to get such a furious little coquette settled as soon as possible.

A little later came an item which set all Paris on fire with talk, conjecture and laughter. The Directors, however, were beginning to find Bonaparte's doings anything but amusing. The smallest move he made called them together.

This was the arrest of Hippolyte Charles with the rumour flying hot-foot on its trail that he was to be tried by a court-martial and shot.

Shot! In the old days an injured husband would do the shooting himself, said Paris—but the new way was safer and far less trouble, if you came to that, and quite as much as a wife was worth.

As for the Directors—their vote would have been for the old way—the duel with its parade of injured honour and so forth, and its element of danger for the avenger, for they could very well have dispensed with Napoleon's services now that the work in Italy was done and there appeared to be no other field than Paris for that devouring insatiable energy. Barras, discussing it with Tallien and Gohier at a dinner at Tallien's house, said frankly:

"We are in the position of that mediæval monk who learnt the spell for setting a devil to work but was ignorant of the spell for calling him off. Result—his house was pulled about his ears!"

“Exactly!” said Gohier sullenly. He was a large red-faced man with far more astuteness than could be guessed from his heavy face and body, and as ready to plot against Barras or any other Director as against Napoleon directly he saw his market in it.

“For my part,” he added, “I think a charge would lie against Bonaparte for using a court-martial as a means of private revenge. That might be worth considering. What has come out about it?”

“We have had our usual information from Italy,” Barras said carelessly. “It came this morning. It appears that Paulette Bonaparte, who held her tongue and took all she could get from Bonaparte’s wife until she was married and independent, gave tongue to him about Hippolyte Charles directly she became Madame Leclerc. We hear the women hate each other—daggers drawn!”

“How did Bonaparte take it?” enquired Gohier with lively curiosity. He had his own opinion about the wife of the General-in-Chief and it was by no means disagreeable to him to think of him in the position of a deceived and ridiculous husband.

“My eavesdropper says he turned on Paulette white as death, until she collapsed into tears and smelling bottles, and then strode out. He said little or nothing, but the sequel was the arrest of the too fascinating Hippolyte.”

“Was Bonaparte born yesterday?” interposed Tallien, with the finest irony he could muster. “Charles was arrested on the charge of receiving secret commissions from the contractors. I expect he did it—it’s a perfect hot-bed of corruption out there, and we can’t very well interfere with the General-in-Chief making examples. The talk of shooting is absurd. Charles will be sent back to Paris—that’s all.”

“And Bonaparte is following!” said Tallien gloomily. “What’s going to be done about that? And what’s the sense of talking about Charles and such fools, when here in Paris your house may be pulled about your ears next month? The people are none too pleased with us—especially after the recent admission of State Bankruptcy. What’s to be done with Bonaparte? That’s the only important question at the moment.”

“To give him something else to break his teeth upon is the best,” Gohier said, picking his own teeth and yawning till he showed the back of his throat. “There’s always England. The effrontery of those accursed islanders grows more insupportable every day.”

They were sitting after dinner in the luxurious dining room of Tallien with its fine Louis XV furniture and rose velvet hangings. And Thérèse,

silent and beautiful, watched and listened in reserve which she by no means intended to lay aside uselessly. It appeared to her woman's wisdom that several means might be devised of harnessing Bonaparte to the Directory and utilizing him there, and that to quarrel with and insult him was the most puerile of all follies. But she only listened as yet.

"How are we to receive him when he shuts down in Italy?" Gohier asked crossly. "Since we haven't had the good luck to lose him out there something's got to be done."

"Undoubtedly," Barras answered, balancing his glass of wine and studying the ruby light through it. "The Sovereign People will expect a fuss over him and a fuss they shall have. The Luxembourg must be all *en fête*—flags, garlands, pretty young women with flowers and so forth. And there must be an Altar of the Motherland, and the five of us must embrace Bonaparte in front of it. The least we can do!"

"Lord!" said Gohier. "I won't, for one! I'd much sooner embrace his wife."

"The one need scarcely hinder the other," Barras answered, laughing. "The object will be to produce pleasant feeling all round. However, if the rest of you decline the bliss I'll embrace him for you in the name of the Directory. *I am not fastidious.*"

At long last Thérèse interposed—a figure of flashing beauty in her yellow and gold array.

"I must say I think Barras has the right conception of the situation," she said slowly, toying with the almonds on her plate. "And I myself shall do my utmost to preserve my friendship with Josephine, whom I sincerely like and who has no reserves with me nor indeed with any one else. But I should like to say one thing more—if you have the patience to listen to a mere woman!"

"A mere woman!" Barras said, with his subtle glance at her. "If the woman whose beauty, kindness, and benevolence to the poor have been the strongest asset of the Directory has not the right to advise, who has?"

Tallien propped his chin on his hands and looked at his wife. She very seldom spoke her mind in private, possibly from a sense that it would be more impressive with the Directorial support she could certainly count on from Barras. That Tallien could gauge the reasons for that support did not make it less valuable. A Director is a Director even if a lover.

"I see the state of affairs in this way," said the Beauty. "Bonaparte is utterly rebellious against the Directory. He knows his strength now and the world knows it. He will be here in a month after two years' absence in Italy,

raging against idleness, ready for any plot—the real soldier of fortune. Is that true?”

“Excellently stated!” said Barras with his bow and leer.

“What we want is a controlling force. Some one to whisper the right things in his ear. Some one acuter than he is acute.”

“Does such a one live?” asked Gohier. “I formed a very high opinion of Bonaparte’s acuteness from his private despatches to the Directors.”

“Have none of you thought of”—she made a slight effective pause, and finished with one word—“Talleyrand?”

There was a silence as the name fell into each man’s meditations. The little party sat reviewing it. She toyed again with the almonds, less white than her pretty teeth, and watched each of the men in turn through long secret lashes.

“Talleyrand?” questioned Gohier. “You make a queer choice in the head of our own Foreign office! That lame devil? And, by God, he’s in touch with the Royalist traitors and the families who have fled abroad for refuge! We all know that, though we use him. Try and think of one less a traitor.”

“A good many others are also,” said the fair Thérèse, and there was an uncomfortable pause. They knew well enough that the dethroned Bourbons had a strong party in France and that in spite of royal blood spilt their day might dawn! It was certain that many an outwardly staunch Republican had two strings to his bow however he might abuse royalty in the streets.

Thérèse saw her effect and went on coolly. “Bonaparte may be subtle. I think he is. But Talleyrand is subtlety itself. I think his is the sharpest-edged intellect I ever saw in my life and he the most accomplished liar. If that man were attached to Bonaparte as adviser—”

“A disinherited noble! Who could trust him?” said Gohier. Barras looked up quickly from his plate.

“A disinherited noble with his way to make in the world, and no heart or bowels to hinder him in anything! An unfrocked priest with all the subtlety of the priesthood and the want of conscience of the atheist he is! He can lie like his master the devil and as smoothly, and because thought is always stronger than action he may well get his net about Bonaparte. Machiavelli come to life to meet and beat a Renaissance Bonaparte! Citoyenne Tallien is right. If it is to be done, Talleyrand is the only man to do it.”

“And there is Fouché also,” said the Tallien, keenly interested. “With Fouché as Chief of Police we can always know the very thoughts of Bonaparte. We have the honour of the Republic to defend and must take our

means. Why not tell Talleyrand to write a letter to Bonaparte describing the warmth with which we shall welcome him in Paris. It ought to be made a great occasion.”

Little more was said and so it was settled. Did they dream that Napoleon believed in their friendship and could be taken unawares? Did they think the deep unsleeping scheming Italian spirit in him could be lulled asleep by their pipings? They knew him very little.

Before they separated Thérèse said lightly:

“By the way, we are to have Grassini to sing in Paris. Our beauties here will have to watch their laurels.”

Barras looked sharply at her.

“Yes, I saw that in the paper. Is there anything behind it?”

“Why, they say Bonaparte is very fond of music—that’s all. And not so passionately in love with dear Josephine as he was.”

A loud laugh went round. That passion for Josephine had been a great asset as well as an immense amusement to the men of the Directory. And more. They hoped steadily from it in the future. But they did not perhaps realize how acutely the enemy was also considering his position. They never understood him! They could not even faintly guess at his ambitions and therefore worked in the dark.

There were strange thoughts behind the pale mask of Napoleon’s face as the horses lumbered on the road that led home and the wheels of his chariot rattled through his reverie. He was wondering, for one thing, whether life or death awaited him in Paris. In his hand was a letter from Talleyrand—his first.

“The mere name of Bonaparte is an aid which ought to smooth away all difficulties,” it began.

Smoother than oil and honey were the calculated elegant phrases. Through Talleyrand and otherwise the Directory was stretching out tender arms to its returning son—glory and honour, garlands, and love, the love of a great people, were promised—and the question in Napoleon’s own mind was were they likely to poison him or no! Had his parting with Josephine in Italy (she was to follow him in a month) been a final one? Never in face of the open enemy had he been more alert than as Paris drew nearer and nearer. Very easily death might lie in wait for him within the Luxembourg or on the Place du Carrousel where the guillotine stood bare in the sun.

His parting with Josephine had been a curious one. She had not dared to resent the arrest of Hippolyte Charles or to give him the faintest handle for

supposing it had troubled her, but, watching, he was quick to see a hurry and anxiety in the look of her, a new carefulness to please.

It was the first sign of failing love that he could thus watch and observe. No longer did she move fairer than human, seen dimly as a hovering goddess through rosy mists rising from his own fervid passion.

She began to be a woman. In other words, truth's cold ray was displacing the light of imagination. He had silenced Paulette furiously—the little jealous greedy minx!—in her criticisms and revelations—but none the less the arrows stuck in his flesh. He saw Josephine—still fascinating, still with graces unsurpassable in his eyes—but faintly autumnal, a little faded beside the radiant bloom of Elise and Paulette, and the younger Italian women who made the military court of Italy and Montebello. Their bright lips and dazzling glances—the audacious surety of youth she had no longer. The light must be calculated and regulated where it fell upon her. The picture, slightly cracked with age, must be set in the most favourable conditions before connoisseurs could find it charming.

When that point is reached, and the stepping stones to it have been such rebuffs and negligences as he had had the result is sure. Kindness remained, for the man had clan loyalty at the bottom of much else. But he knew very surely as those heavy horses drew him away from Italy that though he brought glory with him love never to be recaptured had taken flight into blue infinity and was beyond his reach forever. The glow of dawn had died into dull daylight—shut out of Love's Kingdom it would soon become incredible even to him. Well, there was still a world left with its own enthusiasms—a very different order. Ambition had dispossessed Josephine and promised him satisfactions he never could have had from her. And though the woman had deceived him women remained.

Women—the very word rang harshly in his ears. He had paid so great a price and bought so little in return. To experiment with open eyes, to test and try what they had to give, and whether it was worth the taking—when he had idle time on his hands—that was his object now. Grassini— That had been a strange adventure! He could not as yet explain it to himself—could not understand his own attitude to the singing-woman.

He had sent for her without ceremony, as only a victor may, curious to see whether the silver spell which had thrown its net over him from the platform would persist in an actual meeting. She came, veiled and cloaked, to his headquarters, a prize as much as the fair shrinking statues with exquisite marble limbs, which the slow waggons trailed along the roads to Paris.

She came to sup with him, and the little table was set for them with discreetly veiled lights and the best of meats and drinks in heavy silver plate captured—God knows where—but at his service now, as she was, as half the women in Italy would be if he desired their beauty.

As the carriage lumbered along, with his chin on his breast and sombre eyes staring at the unseen landscape, he could see her—the slight figure wrapped in its disguising purple mantle with the broad hat and veil.

The officer who had brought her in left the room discreetly, and they were alone—she silent as death, he with some inward shrinking in his own heart that no man would have believed if he could have told it.

“May I help you?” he asked and advancing unloosed the collar and loops, while she nervously disengaged the hat with its thick veil. She stood before him with drooped head, the whitest, slenderest figure—a pale rose unflushed by any shade of feeling so far as he could see. O these women! If one could only dive below the surface and know if they were capable of feeling at all! How could one use or abuse them if one did not know that?

He led her to the supper table and waited upon her. And they ate and drank together, and tried to make some sort of talk.

Junot would have had his arm about her in an instant—Marmont have kissed her on the mouth, Duroc plundered all her sweetness in the first hour—for sweet she was apart from the divine voice sheathed in her like a bright sword in velvet. *What* was the coldness that constrained him? Not Josephine—she had flung him back upon himself. No—but some strange inner worship of Love that must be conquered before he could unite body and mind in mere physical passion. That time would come, but now blotting out the beauty of the woman at his feet, he saw a graver more divine beauty—Love himself, heavenly-eyed, wistful, hand at his lips, bidding a last farewell before the white wings melted in the blue. Napoleon shivered with the cold of the spirit at war with the flesh and did not know what ailed him.

He had taken his precautions in case it should be so with a foreboding that he could not have explained. At nine o’clock Marmont stiff and soldierly entered the room where they sat a little apart, she with wondering beautiful eyes fixed on this cold young Alexander of the modern world.

“Despatches from the Directory, General. Important.”

He rose at once, making a gesture of assent, all hurried apologies, ashamed of his shame and hers.

“Can I ever be forgiven? Will you meet me in Paris and let me make my apologies there?”

And so it had been softened with words, smiles, and kisses on a fair hand and a bracelet of sapphires for a fair arm and she had given her promise to meet him in Paris and he knew there would be no hindrance. He had made an image from the stuff of his own dreams and that was dead and Love himself was dead. Only one must allow a little time for the decency of funeral observances. Then let Love go! A soldier must conquer grief and the melancholy of his passions, so he said in his heart.

Therefore it was a very much harder man who came back to Paris, and so the Directory would find it—a man who had cast aside the last hindrance to running the race he had set himself, cold, wary, well-knit and steadfast as death where any obstacle stood in his way. He even smiled a little in his chariot as he thought of Josephine's plea to delay for a month in Italy. It was hard to relinquish queendom—very naturally she felt it!—and her absence would make the arrangements with Grassini very easy. It had come to that.

But she missed something as the result of her decision. Something after her own heart.

Paris went mad over its hero of twenty-eight brief years who had made the name of France one with Victory. Victory! The word was shouted everywhere. The people in transports of delight sang hymns to Liberty and Victory all day in Paris as though the two words had the same meaning!

Could so great a conqueror live in a mere Rue Chantierine? By no means! Forbid it the great heart of France! It must become, and instantly, the Rue de la Victoire, what else?

Honours rained and hailed upon him. The intellectuals greeted him as one whose fellowship was distinction and made him Member of the Institute—that famous Institute whose notice set its members apart on an intellectual Olympus of their own. Nothing was too much for the Victor!

But the crowning ceremony was on the great day when Talleyrand, bland, supple, all hidden eyes and ears, all courtly speech and ocean-deep reserve beneath the dazzle of heartless compliment, presented him to the Citizen Directors in a magnificent *fête* at the Luxembourg which offered every feature that the most perfervidly patriotic imagination could desire.

The rooms were draped with the conquered flags of the campaign—room after room to be paraded through before the final, the most sacred, was reached. For there stood the holy altar of the Motherland and the five-fold majesty of France as represented by the Directors in their gala Roman togas, and Talleyrand prepared with his speech to stir the coldest French heart into flames.

Enthusiasm reached boiling point—breaking into bubbles and froth indeed, when led by Talleyrand the young Commander-in-Chief presented the five Rulers with the Treaty of Campo Formio, which set the seal on his Italian work. It rose to frenzy when the five Directors embraced their hero in turn, and Barras, pointing northward, in the direction of perfidious Albion, exclaimed with Roman majesty:

“Go there, and capture the giant corsair that infests the seas. Go! Punish in London outrages that have been too long unavenged!” And again, a prey to the liveliest emotion, he embraced the hero to the music of enraptured applause.

The exhortation at least was sincere. To engage Napoleon with the English would be the best thing that could happen, and if the English would rid the Directory of their bugbear, much might be forgiven to a detestable people.

But Napoleon, leaving the glare and riot of emotion with his secretary Bourrienne, walking along the streets flaming with flags and garlands in his honour, said meditatively:

“The people of Paris remember nothing, and all this froth will have subsided to-morrow. My glory will be trodden threadbare in a week. And that talk of the English! What can we do against England and her navy? Folly! They want to get rid of me, and this little Europe does not give room for my intentions. I shall turn to the Orient, for great fame comes from there, and only in India can we strike at England. Our roots are there already—the tree may grow. But if I don’t like what I see—then, Bourrienne, pack your trunk for Egypt. The Army those five fools mean for England shall become the Army of the East.”

Bourrienne was dead silent. This, after the glorious reception of the Luxembourg—the plaudits of a nation! Who could fathom the dreams of the man beside him? India! Who could say what worlds unborn were to be conceived in that immense imagination? And the dreams of the poet are destined to become actual on earth.

CHAPTER XI

TOWARD THE STARS

JOSEPHINE made a royal progress through Italy and the south of France to rejoin the lover of whom she was so sure that a month either way could make no difference to her empire. She was happily rid of her two sisters-in-law, who might spend their spite in the bosom of their families and what need she care? Hippolyte, far from facing a firing squad, had indeed been sent back in disgrace to Paris, but with his comfortable speculations and the support of the contractors he had made a fortune which rendered him more agreeable than ever in the eyes of society. There she would meet him again, and with a little necessary prudence things might go very pleasantly. Life was taking an agreeable turn in more ways than one. Napoleon loved her as devotedly as ever; there could be no doubt of that, for she had but to ask and have within certain limits she began to understand, but he no longer plagued her with inopportune protestations and that very objectionable jealousy of possession which desired to shut her up with himself in some mad erotic world of his own.

She flattered herself that her persistent amiability and gentle good sense had at last convinced him of the necessity of temperate calm in all matrimonial arrangements, with a due regard for each other's liberty included. *Her* liberty, that is to say; for it was naturally impossible to imagine that his heart could ever stray from its liege lady, and he had besides settled down so comfortably with her children! He really was fond of Hortense and Eugene and they of him. That would always be an additional bond, she was sure. Napoleon had so kind a heart when one took him in the right way! She felt certain of that. A family party with little excursions and evasions for herself. That was her dream. So it was a happy Josephine who bore down on Paris, fresh from her royal progress where grateful cities headed by perspiring mayors had poured out to welcome her with addresses and gifts, plate and jewels and specimen industries of their towns—quite passable sometimes for use even by such taste as hers.

Paris itself was stirred to its foundations when our Lady of Victories graced it once more. Talleyrand led the van with an exquisitely devised *fête* attended by four thousand guests. One might think he could as well have left out that altar to the Motherland—an altar now becoming decidedly moth-eaten and as old-fashioned as the Republic—but otherwise it was extremely

well done. And it was delightfully agreeable also to her to notice how the Parisian women ran after Napoleon and how coldly he set them aside.

“You don’t care for women at all, Bonaparte,” she said with admiration that was half contempt. “Except for me. That’s true, isn’t it?”

“Certainly I care for you,” he repeated, and went off. He was very little in her famous salon, on the indisputable ground that if giddy people like the Parisians saw a celebrity every day they ceased to see anything remarkable in him. That also was true, and Josephine could understand it. She experienced exactly the same feeling with her own hats, and was compelled to change them nearly as often as the French did their heroes, and for the same reason.

And the news never reached her—indeed she was too busy for news—that Napoleon was often in the company of the beautiful Grassini. His scruples and regrets were the snows of yesteryear, and if the day ever came that she should reproach him few men have a better answer. But Love interested him no longer though sex held its necessary place. A man, be he whom he may, wants certain things from women—no need to give a list of what every man knows. Love he had done with forever. Nor did he ask for intellect in the women who pleased him. His new conception of the sex included the woman of pleasure, the graceful, if a little foolish, ornament of the salons, and the good submissive wife—but it was outraged by anything beyond those borders. He had demanded only heart, not brain, from Josephine and she had refused him. And fidelity. She had refused him that also.

But the women of intellect were, however, attracted by the man who was all brain. The brilliant ugly Madame de Staël, who considered herself queen of all living women by reason of her powers of mind and celebrity as a writer, was drawn by an irresistible attraction to his stern marble face and would willingly have sought a liaison intellectual or otherwise with the one man who baffled conjecture.

Bourrienne, his secretary, found him sitting one day in white wrath, a letter in his hand which would have been worth something to the autograph hunters.

“The fool! The de Staël!” he said in those fierce low tones that Bourrienne knew meant “Set stormy” on the Napoleonic barometer. “What do you think the woman writes to me. To ME! That she admires me more than any man she ever met. That we are certainly created for each other, and that it is only by the error of human institutions that the mild and tranquil

Josephine is my wife. 'A hero must have a soul of fire to unite with his own.' ”

Bourrienne the banal could find no better remark than: “How very odd!”

Napoleon stormed on.

“This is the result of that accursed Revolution that has made every woman a wanton or a fool neglecting her own business. It went to their heads like drink. God send I live to undo its work! Here—the waste-paper basket!”

He rent the letter in four and tossed it away. “I will teach her her place when we meet again,” he added.

She shone, a bright particular star, at the Talleyrand reception, her odd vivacious face surmounted with a somewhat ill-chosen turban and agraffe which filled Josephine with a delightful sense of superiority and humour.

She edged him into a corner and not so much angled as extended her hand for a compliment.

“Citizen-General, you whose opinion the whole world values, who is the first woman in France?”

Who else could he name than the famous authoress, the Corinne of her time?

The grey eyes ran over her like the flashing of cold steel: “Citoyenne, she who has borne most children for the service of the Republic!”

Thwarted, but not conquered, she tried again. “But as much might be said for an animal, General! Who is the woman you most esteem?”

“She who rules her house most wisely. How otherwise? That is a woman’s province.”

And still the intrepid lady persisted.

“And the woman you love most, General?”

What did she expect there? It was certainly inviting disaster.

“My wife. Again, who else?”

It was he who turned on his heel then with a contemptuous indifference which left the famous authoress impotently furious. She had felt the weight of his contempt. She was to feel the weight of his strong arm later.

He had been captured once. He would never be captured again. The memory was too bitter, too humiliating.

After that—as he said in one of his rare and pitiless self-revelations:

“My soul was too strong to lead me into a trap: beneath the flowers I guessed the precipice. That is how women ruin men so that they fall and, broken, can rise no more. My whole fortune lay in my wisdom just then for I was at the parting of the ways. I might have forgotten myself for one hour, but how many of my victories took only an hour or less! I am awake and aware now.”

So lying in the arms of the lovely Grassini, he measured the time he spent on her by the watch, the pleasure she gave him by the jewels and money he paid her in return: no more. One thing alone might have ruffled the cold surface of his thought into emotion. Suppose she had given him a child. Then he would have received her with feeling a little higher than the chilly egotism of his present attitude. Yet the reason of that also was pure egoism—self-distrust. Josephine was barren. The light liaisons in Paris were fruitless as fleeting. This had become an anxious and embittering question with him. Could it be that the privations, sorrows, and maladies of his boyhood and youth had withered the possibility of fatherhood in him, and if so how would it affect those gigantic dreams of the future the full scope of which he dared breathe as yet to no living soul? The bright blood of shame and anger would flush up into his white face when that thought scourged him in solitude.

It was one of the many pangs deep down in his being torturing him with an exaggerated sensitiveness which he began to veil in a curt brutality of manner to those who had the ill luck to displease him. It rankled like a corroding scar.

Meanwhile life went on, garlanded and gay to outward view, but inwardly skirting deadly precipices. At this time his fate was in the balance. One false step and his head would lie in the blood and sawdust of the basket of the guillotine. He had no illusions on that point and acted accordingly.

It became necessary therefore to use the relations of Josephine with Thérèse Tallien and the Directors to the utmost and shape them and her alike for his great ends—and here again Josephine was vaguely conscious of a change in their relations that made even his kindness to her alarming.

“Have Barras often at our house,” he said briefly. “And Gohier. Cultivate the Citoyenne Gohier, his wife; I wish to be on friendly terms with the Directors.”

“You wish to be one yourself?” she questioned. “I should think they would wish that too. Look at the prestige you would bring the Government!”

“I don’t know what I wish. I know what I must have. Friends, friends everywhere. And that is what you can do for me. Open the house, fill it with

people of the right sort, and be charming. No one can do it better.”

Delighted with the commendation, knowing it was true, she exerted herself to the uttermost, and played her part magnificently. If she exceeded it a little here and there in private, can an actress who feels her own part too poignantly be very severely rebuked? The lady who in playing the part of an African princess blacked her whole person was at least a would-be artist. And she was playing for her own hand also. Talleyrand was there perpetually, wholly devoted to her interests, and it had become very clear to Josephine since her return from Italy that she had very important interests of her own to serve.

The first meeting with the mother of Napoleon had been enough to raise her alarms to the highest degree.

Too much occupied himself to be her escort, Napoleon had suggested her paying a visit to that lady now established in Paris and surrounded by a perfect colony of Bonapartes strong in the power of the clan—that feeling so predominant in every Corsican breast! strong in their union against any outsider who might dare to poach on their preserve.

Heavens, what an array for Josephine to face unarmed!

There were his brothers, Joseph, Lucien, and Louis—the two former with scrutinizing wives, Louis still a bachelor, unhealthy in mind and body. There was Jerome, a boy at school, but with an expensive future before him which must certainly be sponsored by Napoleon. There were Elise and Paulette, both married to brave men whose advancement would entirely depend upon a powerful brother-in-law. There was Signora Letizia herself to be provided for as handsomely as possible, and lastly there was the lovely Caroline still at the school of Madame Campan, but to be put out in the world to fullest advantage this year or next. A large and costly family for a young man of twenty-eight! A horrible burden—as Josephine said to Thérèse in the carriage on her way to the first and terrible visit to the assembled clan. If she had realized them from the first she would sooner have died than marry him, let Barras say what he would!

“Dear, it is very hard indeed upon you,” said Thérèse sympathizing, with her kind bright smile. “I hear that Lucien goes about saying the most preposterous things about you. And he has a certain amount of political influence as a Tribune, while Joseph is a Deputy. Indeed, my dear, you must be careful for Bonaparte’s sake as well as your own. Your generous heart makes you too unreserved with others and all the Bonapartes are climbing.”

“Well—what am I to do?” Josephine asked, biting her lips with vexation. “Bonaparte is for ever telling me to make friends and how is one to do it if

one has to be as shut-up and cold as an oyster? Don't I know his detestable family will tear me to bits if they can? O if only I had an adviser!"

"Why don't you take the advice of Talleyrand in these very delicate affairs," Thérèse asked seriously. "I see him constantly at your house and he is kindness and skill itself. You could not do better. He has the manners and finesse of the old courtly *régime*. And you can always confide in me whenever it suits you."

Josephine pressed her hand warmly, would have kissed her but for the beautiful rose tints on her lips which must not be disturbed.

"I will think of it," she said vaguely. "Oh, how simple it would all be but for this gang of brothers and sisters who would eat us to the bone if they could! After all they owe me everything. But for me he would never have had the Army of Italy."

"True, but I should not risk annoying him by spreading that point of view. A man like that does not wish to be thought to depend on his wife," said Thérèse gently, and there was silence until the horses drew up at the fatal door.

In the drawing-room of Signora Letizia exactly the same sentiment passed from lip to lip but with a difference. How simple all would be but for this intervening harpy who had taken possession of the brother, the prop of the family!

Signora Letizia sat in her high arm chair among them all, like the Mother of the Gracchi with whom in the would-be classical jargon of the Republic she was so often compared. With her noble throat and fine face, slightly lined and drawn but full of composed good sense and crowned with masses of black hair tinged with grey, she presented the highest type of the peasant, strong and masterful, thrifty, and far-seeing, not untender but with immense self-control and reticence. Napoleon himself had a wholesome and very natural fear of his mother to the end of his life and of no one else.

Her sons and sons-in-law sat at her right hand, her daughters-in-law at her left—the Corsican custom on days of ceremony, but unfortunately suggesting an appearance of battle array at the best, spears couched and flags flying.

"She is five minutes late," said Signora Letizia slowly, in Italian, the only language with which she was familiar, "which I consider bad manners on such an occasion. I have heard Elise's and Pauline's descriptions of her. Lucien, what is yours? Women are not in all respects the best judges of women."

All eyes turned expectantly to Lucien, even those of the family who already knew Josephine.

“Not only her face,” interrupted Signora Letizia, “but her disposition. I understand she always gives herself the airs of being late, so we have time.”

Lucien looked meditatively at the silver buckles on his shoes.

“I think my sisters went too far in describing her disagreeable traits,” he said slowly. “And, if one is to cross swords with any one, better know their strength as well as their weakness. She really has no mind at all, and no accomplishments—”

“They matter very little to a woman. What she wants is thrift and common sense,” Signora Letizia put in sternly.

“Certainly, my dear mother. Well, my brother’s wife has neither. Her strength is that she has no ill nature. No one with sense could suspect her of that, and Pauline was mistaken there. She is universally kind, for there is nothing to it one way or another. What is her benevolence after all but a slipshod easy good-nature which will always secure friends for her? It’s at every one’s service good and bad. As to beauty—no, certainly not beautiful. Some graceful Creole reminiscences about her figure, and some remains of charm as a woman. *Remains*,” he said emphatically. “Her face has no natural freshness and her teeth are deplorable, but she hides them cleverly with a pretty mouth. She has every art of the toilette at her fingers’ ends and can be attractive still—especially in the evening. But as to—”

A thundering knock at the hall-door composed all stiffly in their seats and shed silence over the assembled family. Steps on the stairs, and the door flung open—an elegant apparition in pale blue framing itself in the aperture. Men and women rose to greet her with the sole exception of Signora Letizia, who remained seated in her high chair, drumming gently with her fingers on the arms.

Joseph advanced and offered his arm—a handsome man with delicate features entirely devoid of his famous brother’s flashing or brooding look of steel and fire; weak, literary and a lover of retirement. Never raising his eyes to his sister-in-law’s face, he led her up to the august seat of Signora Letizia, and remained standing behind her.

Josephine bowed with the utmost grace, and the large wrinkled hand of Signora Letizia was extended and drew her forward to receive the regulation kiss on either cheek, after which the other members of the family greeted her politely. A chair at Signora Letizia’s left hand was offered and accepted while the hard old eyes read every line of her face, pierced the paint,

weighed the probability of the curls being authentic, and finally summed up against the prisoner at the bar. That verdict could be felt. The family sat attentive while the dialogue proceeded in such French as Signora Letizia could muster and Josephine's elegant Parisian.

"My son Napoleon visited me two days ago, my daughter. I thought him looking extremely ill and wasted. A rat could scarcely find a meal on his bones."

Josephine, summoning all her forces, smiled the smile which few could resist.

"He had terrible fatigues in Italy, mother. To march from victory to victory is exhausting and he had many anxieties."

"I am told that he was spared no sort of anxiety and had much about money and the expenses of his household," said the terrible old lady, with an eye hard as a parrot's on the delinquent. But a queen of the salons is not easily worsted in that kind of attack, and Josephine wreathed her neck and fixed large dark blue eyes full of pathos on the accuser. The gaze might have melted a heart of stone but fell blunted off Signora Letizia.

"We had both very great anxieties about money," she said sadly. "The allowances made by the Directory were quite insufficient. Plan and contrive as we would there was always a deficit. He hopes to apply for additional allowances to cover it."

"H'm!" said Signora Letizia. Then, shifting her attack, "Possibly your influence with the Directory, which I understand is very great, may achieve that result."

"It at all events procured him command of the Army of Italy," retorted Josephine, stung into indiscretion by the covert allusion and with more pride than wisdom. She repented her haste even before Lucien's acid tones fell on the listening air.

"I can scarcely imagine that it would be either to my brother's credit or satisfaction if that were to be the accepted point of view. The nation has always believed he was chosen for his merits and—"

"Certainly he was," replied Josephine, now seriously dismayed, "but merit does not always gain its reward, and I was happy—"

"A woman's merits," proceeded the voice of Signora Letizia as calmly as if no one but herself was speaking, "consist in attending to her husband's household affairs, managing them with the strictest economy, and being always ready to take his orders and second them. I recognize no others

except the very necessary one of bearing him a family of which he may be proud. A man of course looks for that.”

Since all present knew there was scarcely the remotest probability of either of these duties being fulfilled, a meaning look pervaded the family, and Josephine, at all times a poor fighter, felt helpless disabling tears mounting to her eyes. The horrible old woman! Every word she said was chosen to wound and achieved its end.

Signora Letizia proceeded unruffled.

“I have had from my son Napoleon an injunction to live with the utmost republican simplicity. So have his brothers and sisters, and we shall naturally look to the wife of the head of the family (for so we all consider Napoleon, though not the eldest) to set us a good example in that respect. No doubt you also have had his commands on the subject.”

Commands! And her cold eye surveyed the blue robe and plumed hat with an expression which could not be misread. It was only left to Josephine to mutter a faint “Yes,” and rise to leave the impossible circle in which she found herself. She had meant to be so kind, so gracious—but what grace or amiability could stand up against the terrible peasant bluntness of that old woman? She muttered some excuse about a business appointment and her hope of returning for another visit before long, but with less than her usual winning grace.

Yet, had she known it, could she have plumbed the depths of the Corsican mind, in that old woman was safety for her. If she could have talked with her as one woman with another, besought lessons in household thrift and anecdotes of Napoleon’s babyhood, consulted with her as to the proper means of averting barrenness and the suitable saints to be invoked to that end, Josephine might have made her way with Napoleon’s mother, and secured an ally against the day of need who would not have failed her. But she thought the whole family detestable, and if it were true that they were noble by extraction their nobility was certainly far from appearing on the surface. In the view of Signora Letizia and according to the clan code the wife of the head of the family was a power indeed if she was true to herself and the clan, and she would have given of her best to Josephine if Josephine could or would have accepted it. Even now her eye softened as the pale elegant woman rose with an expression not difficult to read. Her wrinkled hand half extended itself and though it was withdrawn immediately it had touched her daughter-in-law’s, there had been a plea in the eye, a tremble in the hand, both instantly covered, and the opportunity untaken was unlikely

to recur. She spoke coldly in her really villainous French, every syllable of which was a solecism to Josephine's fine ear.

"If you have an engagement we must not detain you. Possibly you may find more time for my son's mother when you come again. My ways are very simple, but I am attached to my children."

A disconcerting murmur of assent ran through the family as Josephine swept them all with her cordially gracious bow. Joseph, as the eldest, tendered his arm again and at the door she bowed once more and especially in the direction of Signora Letizia. She disappeared, vanquished.

"What did you think, mother? Were we right? And she to go about boasting that Napoleon lives on her influence!"

"A fool to match the *incroyables* parading the streets at this moment," said the wrathful old woman. "Napoleon deserves the fate which will befall him, and so I shall tell him. She's a handsome woman still, for all! But she'll never have children. Too narrow in the hips. Too seasoned. Too old. No!"

"And you should see her favourite Charles!" cried Paulette. "I saw him yesterday. Heavens, such a figure! in a muslin cravat two yards wide, a coat with sticking-out skirts which ended at the hips, and pantaloons each leg of which was wider than my gown. I declare to God, mother, it's true! His hair was in thick ringlets all over his shoulders, and a hat the size of a thimble perched on top of all. For my part, I prefer a soldier however rough he may be. He at least looks like a man."

"And to think," said Elise, "that he should have married an elderly spendthrift like that who will never bring him any children! In my opinion the family should steadily keep before its mind the necessity of a divorce."

There was a deep murmur of agreement, echoed from the women to the men. What right had Napoleon to please himself when they all trusted to him for provision? He must certainly be made to look facts in the face.

But Josephine, fleeing to the refuge of her own house as swiftly as horses would carry her, saw only one fact clearly: that Napoleon's family would one and all be her implacable enemies unless by some means at present undecipherable she could make it the interest, of one or other of them to support her. Interest. That was the one word which would move them—from the horrible old woman in the chair to the gay little laughing Caroline at school—the greed of the peasant was stamped on every face, relentless, unsatiable, cruel.

Napoleon was conscious of the rift but said nothing. He had too much on his mind to shoulder more, and women's quarrels must take care of

themselves. He wished it could have been different. He recognized his duty to his family, and in some odd way which could scarcely be called love felt them indispensable to him. So also was Josephine, and her two children had much of his affection. It would be his duty to set them forth in life to advantage for they were now a part of the clan and in him the clan-spirit was rock-rooted as in the rest. But plans were maturing in his imagination which cast all these matters into the shade. They could wait. The plans could not.

He shut himself up with a few intimates and would go nowhere. His secretary, Bourrienne, respectfully pointed out the merits of advertisement to an angry master.

“Men are so soon forgotten, General, and though your reputation blazes now and applause greets you wherever you go—”

“Do you suppose I don’t understand the situation?” Bonaparte replied, striding up and down as if he wore the seven-league boots. “Let me remain here a month more and Paris will be sick of me. Let me be seen at the theatre three times more and I shall excite no attention. I must be up and doing, gain more notice or drop under and be forgotten. It’s the law of life. You must keep yourself perpetually in the public eye, or some other fellow gets there instead. Pack your baggage, Bourrienne. You will need it before you think.”

“But when you go out, the people crowd to see you, General. No fear of forgetfulness there.”

“They would crowd faster to see me if I were on my way to the scaffold, as I should be if the Directory had its will. No—no. Everything wears out here. This people is as fickle as a mistress. The East—the East for me!”

The very next day, not suddenly, but as the result of long thought, he presented himself before the Directory with plans for the conquest of Egypt as a stepping stone eventually to the possessions of England in India. “We cannot strike at her here because of her powerful navy,” he said, explaining it point by point. “She cannot strike at us in India for want of an army. And surely our ancient glory in India, our possessions there, still magnificent, are worth preservation! Trust me. Give me the men, the money—but I shall want little of that, for we can live on Egypt—and I will return you an account of our doings which shall make the Italian campaign pale and inglorious in comparison. What I have in view, but in all calmness and reason, is Alexander’s conquest of the Orient. Can the Republic hesitate a moment when such glory is laid at her feet?”

Translated into truth, this speech meant several things which it did not apparently contain. It meant categorically:

“I have tried everything. I have sounded my friends as to the possibility of ruining the Directorial government and the time is not yet. There is no opening for me as a Director—and if there were I would not take it. If I could overthrow them and make myself king—but I cannot! Not yet! Then I must dazzle them. I must intoxicate the people with glory. And then . . . and then!”

That was the thought behind the speech, and there were men among the Directors who could read it as clearly as he. But they too were in a cleft stick. They dared not attack the man, for the people adored him. They dared not keep him in Paris because time and Bonaparte in cabal must certainly ruin them. They dared not loose him against England, for those growling watch-dogs of Nelson’s guns were guarding the Channel and the Mediterranean and Bonaparte himself had warned them that the naval resources of France were inadequate.

Thereupon the one thing the Directory could do was to accede to anything he proposed which would get him out of Paris, and Egypt might do as well as anything else, for there too, he might meet ruin, and set them free from the incubus of his existence to pursue their own tortuous way.

So orders flew east and west, north and south, and amid salvos of compliment and benediction the Army of the East set forth to the latest conquest of Egypt—the Achilles-heel of England. And Nelson hawking along the Mediterranean all but captured *l’Orient* with the destiny of Europe on board her, and failing and cursing his ill-luck, stood away to prepare himself for a mightier day now close at hand.

And Josephine, relieved, provided with money which should be sufficient to please even her caprices intensified a hundred-fold by the royal magnificence in which she lived in Italy, felt that a halcyon time of security and enjoyment lay before her and that she could afford to disregard even the assembled family council with its eagle eye on her doings. Thank God Napoleon was gone!

Indeed satisfaction was general and no one knew or cared that from a French prison meanwhile escaped a little known and unconsidered English prisoner of the name of Sidney Smith, who by the irony of fate was to change the world’s history in a manner wholly unforeseen by himself and all the great people rejoicing in the departure of Napoleon.

And so the great wheels of Destiny were revolving slowly and smoothly and the woven web unrolling from them was to bear strange figures as yet unknown in the story of the nations.

CHAPTER XII

THE SPHINX

THUS, journeying to the Orient like Jason and his knight-at-arms in quest of the Golden Fleece, went Napoleon surrounded by his band of kings and princes to be; his eye on the future. To every brain but his that future would have seemed the dream of a madman, but with him, whether he saw himself seated on the Peacock Throne of Delhi with the prostrate English at his feet, or giving law to Europe from the Tuileries, the certainty of absolute power dominated his mind and each day he found men more easy to dispose of and more contemptible. The more one dared, the more certainly one achieved. Every step he took was a scene in the violent drama in which life presented itself to him. That such a man as himself may take life into his hands and shape it as he will was now his creed. Beautiful and desirable he saw it, but always a slave crouching at last under the lash of its master. Men—what were men as obstacles? He had never seen one whom he felt to be his match, and, brought to the test, all had gone down before his perfect lucidity and ruthless power of will. Women—what were women but the slaves of desire? He had forgotten love so utterly that in his world it had no more place. He never gave it a thought. It might never have been.

Pacing up and down the deck, watching the dream-shores glide by where Alexander, Cæsar, and other sounding names had strutted their little day, he laughed, thinking how the insignificant Corsican artillery officer, once himself, had venerated them, on what heights unscalable they had seemed to stand! But that time was past. He saw exactly how and why they had been able to achieve and where a clear-headed man might play the same great part in human affairs. Now they were gone—mere *débris* on the shores of the ocean of Time, and in what were the kings of to-day better than those ancient heroes? They too were vulnerable. The Austrian Emperor? Napoleon had made his armies a football which his young men kicked in glee from field to field. The Pope? Napoleon knew him, not as God's Viceregent on earth, but a feeble old man trembling in the Vatican in terror for his temporalities and spiritualities to boot, quailing before the unchained fury of France. The Directory? He almost laughed aloud as he thought of the Five and the fate preparing for them. And when France was a riderless steed he knew very well who could leap into the saddle and guide her where he

would. France, the woman among nations, would know her master and submit.

Two years ago and he himself had trembled before Barras. His future had lain in that coarse and brutal hand. Now he was twenty-nine and it was Barras who trembled, who had been forced to exult when the safety valve of Egypt opened before the Directory and ridded them of a most dangerous enemy.

No wonder his dreams were vast as he looked over that silent witness of Fate, the blue Mediterranean. They turned first to the East, the rising sun. He said later: "I would have created a new religion. I saw myself in Asia, upon an elephant, wearing a turban, and holding in my hand a new Koran which I myself had composed. I would have united in my enterprise the experiences of two hemispheres, attacking England in the Indies, and renewing by their conquest my relations with Europe." Not only King and Pope, he would end by being a Christ and God if it served his turn. He felt all power centred in his own brain. Its cold lucidity dazzled himself as though it were without instead of within him.

He did not find the voyage long! The persons of the drama had to be considered and set in their places, and beyond men he looked to the vast scheme of things which also should serve him.

Josephine? She did not loom very large in his thoughts now. Her part in the drama was allotted. She was to be kind, submissive and chaste; the dispenser of kindness and vague promises. It would be useful too if with her aristocratic connections she could attract the Royalists. That would be a powerful help in its way. He had read history to some purpose and remembered how the English General Monk had restored Charles the Second in triumph to the throne of England. The French Royalists cleverly handled would be very apt to believe they had a second Monk in Napoleon and help him upward with their own ends in view. Josephine herself believed it. He knew she had Royalist leanings, attracted as all women are sure to be by the glamour of crown and sceptre. Well—let her believe it, and act accordingly, but as for the crown and sceptre—that too might be. With a difference they little expected!

With his consent she was buying a delightful little country place, La Malmaison, and her charming hospitalities there would draw all the moths to the candle. So far he could trust her to play her part in society. No further. And he was determined she should keep herself narrowly within the set limits now. No more flirtations—however innocent. Circumspection. The

future he foresaw must be based on the moralities. He was sick of the licence of the Revolution.

There again he smiled a little to himself, but with a touch of tenderness for the grown-up child he had worshipped too absurdly. He knew he would never find it difficult to be kind to that soft indolent charm so long as she accommodated herself to his will. And he could be sure of that now—she had had her lesson with the fool of a Hippolyte Charles. There would be no more of that nonsense.

Grassini—and the rest? There also he laughed. He had tested himself against the greatest peril in a man's career and had won. He knew now that women would never conquer him. And for the rest he was free. Never had he felt so clean-stripped and ready for fight as in those long days down the African coast with the shadow of the hawking Nelson never far away, and the cowardly Directory left behind him. He drew deep breath, feeling the goodness of life and solitude which within himself was complete.

If Nelson could but have known that Egypt was Napoleon's goal the dream might have ended forever and the world have been spared much grief and glory. But he did not know. He dashed all down the Mediterranean, passed the French fleet in the night, swept into Alexandria before they arrived, and not finding them, ran for the Levant, cursing his ill-luck and so missed his chance, to find it again on a mightier day.

And Napoleon glided into Alexandria in safety, and for a time the golden veil of Oriental mystery dropped and hid him from the French people. News came slowly or not at all, and the Directors fattened on a dying France, and, since the Master of Deeds was absent, words ruled all and passed as well as paper money but with nothing behind them.

But Josephine?

"They tell me," said Barras, lounging in the white and gold boudoir of the Tallien house, "that our friend, the fair Bonaparte, is taking the fullest advantage of the General's disappearance. As to Malmaison, it will certainly be a very pretty place if he ever gets back to enjoy it—and it will cost a very pretty price in her hands. I should like to see that yellow face of his when the bills come in!"

Thérèse threw up her lovely hands.

"You don't know half! Hippolyte is really living there, and the two are making the money fly like dust. She owns to me that she has not the faintest idea of what it is costing, and that she can never have the courage to face Bonaparte if he ever comes back, which she seems to think he never will. He

left her a fine income which Joseph Bonaparte is to pay her, but I can very well imagine that doesn't count. It will scarcely pay for her dresses."

"Joseph? Then she's under the surveillance of the Clan Bonaparte. The poor little Josephine! That won't suit her a bit! She never told me that."

Thérèse laughed her gay rippling laugh.

"She doesn't let it trouble her. She has bought La Malmaison for three hundred thousand francs. I was a little startled when this slipped out with a few other revelations. 'Really?' I said. 'Did Bonaparte settle the price?' 'O no—but he liked the place. I thought it would be a nice little surprise for him!' That was what she said, eating bonbons from a box Hippolyte had brought her. He was lying on the sofa in her boudoir."

Barras laughed immoderately. Not nearly so pretty a laugh as Thérèse's.

"Both will be a nice little surprise for him!" he said at last. "Unless of course he brings back all the loot of the Pharaohs from Egypt. And even then—Charles! Is the woman a fool? Does she never think what the Clan must be writing to Egypt?"

"Do butterflies in July think of the Winter?" inquired Thérèse, wrinkling her pretty little nose with irony. "Egypt is two thousand miles off, and who can tell that the inconvenient Bonaparte will ever come back? A thrust from a man or a dagger, and pouf! Have you not noticed that she and Gohier are as thick as thieves? She sees the coming autocrat in our friend Gohier and intends to be his—Cleopatra! Do you mean to say that you haven't heard the last new plan?"

The brow of Barras darkened and he looked down moodily. Levity on that point did not please him. He had his own fear of Gohier, the wiliest and most astute of old men, to whom life had taught all ruses.

"I wish you wouldn't joke," he said angrily. "If there's anything you know, tell me. I've kept my half of the bargain. You keep yours!"

She grew serious at once. The women attached to the Directory knew their place and kept it in essentials. They helped their men with every scrap of information they could get, smiled, flattered, coquetted, all in the interest of keeping the men to whom they were attached in power, as the women of all political parties do all the world over.

She leaned forward and took his hand caressingly in hers.

"As if I should keep anything from you! It's this. Eugene is with Bonaparte in Egypt—so that's all right. But she means to marry Hortense to Gohier's son."

“Good God!” said Barras. “What a woman! And Gohier Bonaparte’s bitterest enemy! If he comes back! Women! I ask myself daily why we trust them with a sou—much less a secret! For my own part, the news of Bonaparte’s death would be as welcome as flowers in May. But Josephine!”

“She would be just as nice as ever to him if he came back. But a woman—particularly one who spends money like water—must make the best of things as they come. What else is she to do?”

But Barras was musing.

“I’m trying to analyze that woman’s charm—for she has it. What is it, Thérèse? Not beauty like yours!”

“No—I’m too obvious—like a fine summer’s day. Everybody has to acknowledge me. Josephine’s charm is much more subtle. Perhaps it’s her long dark blue eyes always half shut, so that you must admire those wonderful black lashes and charming sweet look of hers that you have to trust in spite of yourself. I may well say ‘trust’ for heaven knows no one else would get such credit as she does. She is literally millions of francs in debt.”

She knew perfectly well all the time that one point in the advantages of Malmaison was that it was conveniently near Barras’s own country house at Chaillot, and that as a result he was quite as much at Malmaison as Hippolyte Charles himself. Well—what then? The code of the Directory did not encourage jealousy either in men or women. One sipped the flying foam of life when it crisped, and cultivated philosophy when it was flat. And after all old ties have power!

“I wish,” said Barras, after a few seconds’ reflection, “that you would let slip to Lucien and Joseph Bonaparte exactly what you have just told me.”

She looked up at him under lashes as beautiful as Josephine’s but curled and audacious.

“And her flirtations also?”

“So far as Hippolyte Charles goes. Yes!”

“And if . . .”

The words died on her lips as a thundering knock rang through the house, summoning a servant in hot haste to the door. The pair in the drawing-room composed themselves into reception attitudes and waited. A heavy step pounded up the stair. A short grey-headed man of unprepossessing appearance and full habit of body stood on the threshold panting so that he could scarcely speak. Gohier. Barras rose instinctively as he spoke from the door:

"I was told you were here, *mon ami*, and drove as hard as my horses could lay leg to ground. News from Egypt!"

Thérèse sprang to her feet: "Another victory? Egypt ours?"

He tried to recapture composure, to hide the delight in his eye as he brought the story out, breathless.

"A most awful disaster. That English devil, Nelson, has engaged the French fleet in Aboukir Bay and practically destroyed it. Bonaparte and his troops are caught in Egypt like rats in a trap. *We* have no means of getting them out. There's an end to the Army of Italy."

As he spoke the knocker thundered again—and Thérèse's "Say no one is in"—inspired by the plea in Gohier's eye—was too late.

But she knew the swift gliding step on the stair, the frou-frou of silk, the subtle perfume that goes before a lovely woman's presence.

"Don't be afraid," said the sweetest voice in Paris. "It's only me. I knew you were all together. Oh, tell me the news."

It was Josephine following the voice and perfume—in a lilac robe which appeared simplicity itself to the two Directors, and to Thérèse the last word of frivolous expense. Her hat, covered with blossoming lilac, shaded those wonderful dark blue eyes filmed with the moisture of suspense and doubly appealing. Her little hands clasped in each other and in the costliest gloves were stretched before her in a plea which either Barras or Gohier might appropriate as they pleased.

Gohier spoke first.

"Compose yourself, dear lady. I know how trying it must be to such sensibility as yours, but the truth is those damned English have won a victory at sea—"

"At sea? But does that matter?"

She slid into the long divan with limp grace, leaning against the purple and gold cushion, in the loveliest attitude of relieved tension. Her head was thrown back as she looked up at the two men, showing the flower-like lines of her throat, white and close-grained as a privet-blossom. Gohier could not keep his eyes off her as he drew up a chair. She looked an exquisite exotic—an orchid from tropical forests, pale and perfumed in the dim light—Thérèse's gorgeous beauty was commonplace beside her elegance—a picture for the common taste, while hers appealed to the connoisseur.

"We consider it a very serious matter," Gohier answered with a pompous pinch of snuff. "Our fleet is virtually annihilated by the damned English.

That man Nelson is a freebooter who should be shot at sight. *L'Orient* is blown up, the— But why harrow ourselves with these lamentable details. All one can say is that Admiral Brueys is a fool and—”

Another thundering knock, another rapid ascent of the stair, and Lucien Bonaparte, pale and perturbed, presented himself with a hurried bow to Thérèse, the hostess.

“A thousand pardons, citoyenne—but I hear of terrible news from Egypt. What is it, citizen Directors? Lose no time, I implore you.”

His jaw was working nervously, and there was a spasmodic twitch of the left eyebrow in moments of stress that weakened the outline of what otherwise was a faded likeness to his great brother—the power subtracted and resolution degenerated into weak obstinacy.

Barras watched him curiously while Gohier took up the pompous strain. “Bad news indeed, citizen Councillor. Our fleet has been defeated and practically annihilated in Aboukir Bay by the English, and the net result is that General Bonaparte and the Army of Egypt are trapped in that country without any prospect of our sending them supplies.”

“I fear,” said Barras mildly, “that all the fine dreams with which your brother fed us are dispelled to some purpose!”

The tone was not exactly that of lament. Much might be read beneath it; for instance the liberty of insult when fear is ended. Lucien shot a keen glance at him and stood, leaning his hand on the table, panting a little as if emotion were held back with difficulty. To him it was a moment nearly akin to despair. Without the Head of their House they were ship-wrecked helpless raffle at the mercy of the Directors; with him, powers. His eye never fell on Josephine obscured in the great cushioned divan and dim rose-shaded lights. He had not the faintest notion she was there. His face flamed on the two Directors.

“Then I tell you to your faces, the two of you, that you sent him to his death and rejoiced to see him go! Such a man as appears only once in ages! You sent him that you might have the field free for your speculations and poltrooneries, and since he went you have sucked like leeches at the throat of France and bloated yourselves with her blood. You and your women and your luxuries! You have kept his wife that you might amuse yourselves with her, and what is his ruin to you?”

There was a faint cry from the divan and he spun on his heel and confronted the white face and staring eyes of his sister-in-law, one hand put

feebly forward as if to defend herself. Forgetting the rest, he turned on her furiously:

“I might have known I should find you here closeted with his deadliest enemies—you who are ruining him with your shameless luxury and wanton behaviour! Are you rejoicing with them now that he can never come back to charge you with the millions of debt you have heaped on him, coining his blood into gold, and your paramour spending it with you? Does not the world see the man actually living with you in the house Napoleon paid for, and your love affairs with these two men who hate him? You faded coquette, who have not even the life and health left to give him the heir he craves! Well may you rejoice if he leaves his bones in the desert, for if ever he returns—”

Emotion choked him. Silence followed his words. Josephine, death-pale, stared at him as though mesmerized. Thérèse, resting her strong chin on her open hand, fixed him with quiet eyes, and the two men were speechless. Barras was the first to recover himself. He rose and made an ironic bow.

“Surely we are all a little premature in grieving for a man who has shown a remarkable power of extricating himself from difficult positions. I venture to predict that we shall yet have the pleasure of welcoming General Bonaparte in Paris, when, unless I am much mistaken, he will make the citizen Councillor regret his false accusations against a wife whom he esteems. Those against ourselves are beneath contempt. Shall we return to business, citizen Director?”

His cool tone restored the power of motion to Gohier. Bowing, they left the room together. Still Thérèse remained watching Lucien in motionless quiet. The scene interested her for more reasons than one. Crossing the room, he placed himself in front of his sister-in-law. He was more composed now and in deadly earnest.

“You had your warning when Charles was disgraced and arrested. One would think any woman of common decency would have left him alone after that. Joseph has warned you again and again that he cannot and will not give you more to waste on your worthless pleasures than your husband’s generous allowance. But you trade on Napoleon’s passion for you. You think he must forgive you everything when you vouchsafe a kiss and a smile of the hundreds you give Charles and these scoundrels of the Directory. Now listen. *I* have letters from Egypt, and you have lost him. You have lost him! There is a lovely woman there—Marguerite Fourés, wife of one of the officers. He has taken a house for her, is seen with her everywhere in public—until even Eugene ventured to remind him of you. Suppose she bears him

a child? And if not—*anyhow* you have lost him! You had a treasure in your grasp and you tossed it away for a fop like Charles—and those two scoundrels.”

He stopped in a white passion, and spat deliberately in the direction of the retreating Directors. When the Corsican was roused in the Bonapartes they reverted singularly and directly to the manners of the People. Then, with a bow to the quietly watching Thérèse, he strode to the door and followed them. His clap of the hall-door sounded like the echo of theirs.

Josephine sank back half fainting on the cushions and for a few moments Thérèse occupied herself with tendering lavender essence and fanning her in silence. Finally she sat up and looked with distended eyes at her friend.

“Now at last you know what the Bonapartes are! I ask you—is it possible to conciliate such animals? I who have pled their cause with Bonaparte whenever any of them wanted anything. And this is their gratitude! I have even given Caroline a string of pearls last week. Oh, Thérèse, was ever any one so shamefully used? As to his story of the woman Fourés, I believe not one word of it. He is mine, heart and soul and body. But what would you do if you were me alone against his poisonous family?”

Thérèse, relaxing her efforts with the fan, looked calmly at her.

“I shall give you advice, chérie, and you will not take it. Oh, yes, you *think* you will [seeing the gesture of denial] but you will have forgotten this scene to-morrow and Charles will be as amusing and the shops as enticing as ever.”

“I know—I know it is very difficult for me to be angry even with a Bonaparte. But I do so value your advice. What would you do? O Thérèse, if you could but know my terror of Bonaparte. He is of a furiously jealous disposition. I laughed at it at first—but not now. I never told you, but after we came back from Italy he drove me from the house because of Charles and gave orders I was never to be let in again. Madame de Châteaurenard took me and smuggled me back into the house and after weeping and entreaty got Bonaparte in the end to drive with me in the Bois de Boulogne to stop the scandal. If you did but know the life I have had! But what would you do?”

“Make friends with them—especially with the mother. Give them no excuse for abusing you. Send Charles to the rightabout. Spend no more on fripperies. Keep out of Gohier’s way and drop your plan of marrying Hortense to his son. For if Bonaparte comes back . . .”

“You don’t mean to say you think it likely?” asked Josephine in terror that no art could disguise.

“I have a wholesome belief in Bonaparte’s falling on his feet always,” said Thérèse dryly. “But, if you don’t agree with me, Gohier is obviously your refuge. In either case I should try to limit my debts to hundreds of thousands instead of millions. I have never known a man who sympathized with any debts but his own.”

“How true! All you say is always true, my own dear friend,” wept Josephine gently. “If I only had your wisdom! But I will do my best. I fear poor dear Bonaparte is in dreadful danger. Lucien never would have dared to rave as he did if there were any possibility of his returning. The only compensation would be that I should be rid of the Bonapartes!”

She got herself away finally to a pleasant evening at Malmaison and the planning of amateur theatricals in which Hortense would take a leading part.

Impossible to keep a long face in such gay and brilliant company as that of the delightful Charles and his friends! And Egypt so far away!

But men went about with grave faces in Paris. With the fleet lost in the battle of Aboukir Bay, with Austria raising her head like a scotched snake, Italy slipping from the grip of France, debasement of the currency, bankruptcy and political chaos at home, they had plenty to think of if they were capable of anything but the formulas of the Revolution.

But Gohier and Barras were glad at heart.

CHAPTER XIII

A BROKEN DREAM

ON BONAPARTE, worn with his anxieties in Egypt, the Battle of the Nile fell like destruction. He knew the command of the sea was still English and his hoped-for glory in India a dream vanished in wreaths of smoke blowing along the careless sea on that dreadful day. He saw himself and his army prisoners in Egypt—rats in the English trap.

Through all his meditations ran the poisoned knowledge that the Directors would rejoice to see the lion's teeth drawn and claws clipped—and that in Egypt his nominal crusade to deliver her from the power of the Mamelukes was seen for what it was—a bare-faced aggression of the French. Conspiracies sprang up like weeds in a night. Right and left he slaughtered the fellaheen, and still they would not learn their bloody lesson and submit. And now a new and terrible danger menaced him. The Turks, seeing his desperate plight after the Battle of the Nile, resolved to make a dash themselves for Egypt—their ancient vassal—and drive the French from the soil of the Pharaohs.

Help from the Directory? No! Napoleon knew better. The Directory was chuckling in Paris, and the best news they could have would be his extinction. What was he to do? He sat revolving it alone, his brain on fire.

"We must keep our heads above the waves somehow until they calm. Time is always on the side of the courageous!" he said aside to Marmont, when his Generals assembled for council with looks betokening wrath and mourning; he, haughty, assured, fixing them with contemptuous eyes.

"*That's* not the way to meet these things," he added aloud. "If you show those faces to the men! Go and look at yourselves in the glass and be shamed! I have a plan—would I have called you otherwise? What am I General-in-Chief for but that?"

They listened gloomily at first but it was not possible to listen long without catching fire at his cold certitude—contradiction in terms as that may seem.

"After all," he added, looking about him at the silent ring of men, "one only enjoys oneself when one is in danger. Life is nothing but a perpetual solving of interesting problems. What would it be without them? I have one

here and believe I have got it. The Turks are advancing on us. I shall meet them on their way and attack their advanced guard in the valleys of Syria.”

Silence, and all the glitter of eyes turned doubtfully on each other. What? Advance into the unknown—an army in the air, as it were? But then—?

The General-in-Chief continued:

“I shall take 12,000 troops with me and leave the remainder to guard Egypt. And let me tell you that if we take Jaffa and Acre, India’s at our feet. You thought it was lost with the ships in Aboukir Bay. I thought so too. I know better now. Syria, gentlemen, Syria! And there will be General Junot returning from Paris to bring us the blessing of the Directory.”

A general laugh ran round the group at the irony of the last words. They knew that to all intents and purposes the Directory had disowned them as if they were pirates—whom they closely resembled in more points than one. So the end of the matter was that the army marched into Syria.

And in Syria Junot returned bringing the blessing of the Directory for what it was worth—and news.

It was a burning hot day by the Wells of Messoudiah and the vertical rays struck on the sand dunes by the sea and turned them into hills of pale molten gold which the hot fitful breeze sent in little spinning whirls and eddies of gold dust every now and then. Two men, Napoleon and Junot, stood in the deepest shade they could get, with the rows of tents glaring before them, a pain to the eyes in the fierce heat.

“And Paris?” asked Napoleon, not a trace of emotion in his harsh voice, as he flicked the dry herbage monotonously with the tip of his cane. He had lifted his hat to cool his forehead in what breeze fluttered in the shade and stood for a moment bareheaded. Junot looked at him with those worshipping dog’s eyes of his. The thought in his mind was how strong, how beautiful—with a stern marble beauty—the man was becoming under the chisel of the terrors and anxieties of the campaign. A terrible fighting face both in and out of war! The haggard lean-faced young general of Italy all strings and nerves was gone; the man was shaping himself from the rough material of youth into the semblance the world can never forget.

The head was superb, and the great forehead matched it, completing the magnificence of its conception with the perfect setting of the eyes, the sharply curved lips slightly drooped at the corners, and the power of the beautiful nose, the strong chin and jaw. A face for a remorseless god who yet could be contemptuously kindly at times if his worshippers would not stupidly obstruct his path with adoration or opposition. A magnetic, fear-

inspiring face, the traces of solitary thought upon it—but no tenderness. Something that suggested the vastness of the desert—wide, mysterious, dangerous, not to be read or understood but followed unquestioning to the gates of doom. No wonder that he struck the world with his image as a coin is struck once and forever in minting.

Junot sighed a little as he looked. He could never know how the mind behind the chilly splendour worked. It was only possible to him to tremble and obey.

“And Paris?” Napoleon repeated. “The same plotting stews as ever? Oh, I know Paris. It weighed on me like a leaden mantle. One may say France, for Paris is France. How much nearer are they to ruin? Is the pear ripe?”

“Ripening, General!” answered Junot, who knew very well what he meant. “Not that I distrust the Republic for a moment. It’s the fools and perjurers who are stultifying her principles, but—”

“Shut up, Junot. Don’t drive me daft with the Directory out here. Their day of reckoning will come. Tell me of the people. Are they content with the devils who are riding them to hell? Are they still the bitted and bridled fools with brains as muddy as the Nile?”

“No, General, no. The Directory has scarcely a friend. A man with a sword and brain could in a day annihilate them and restore the purity of the Republic.”

The beautiful mouth relaxed into laughter at Junot’s republican enthusiasms. He himself knew better what to think of Madame la République and her doings. He knew her brood by this time. But why argue with one who could never perceive things as they were but only as he wished them to be? That fatuity was never Napoleon’s.

“And Josephine?” he said, looking straight into Junot’s eyes. There was an abrupt and painful pause.

Suddenly he turned away from him, looking out over the glaring tents for what seemed a long moment, then turned and faced him again.

“And Josephine?” he repeated. “Speak out. Is it Charles?”

Under those eyes Junot lost his self-possession altogether. He could not help it, never had any means of defence against Napoleon, and was himself a mere creature of nerves owing to the frightful wound upon his head received in Germany in early days of battle. It was throbbing and pulsating now as it often did, even to bleeding, in moments of excitement and what he said he was scarcely responsible for.

“My General, you should know the truth. They are deceiving you in Paris. Your wife—”

“My wife?” Napoleon echoed, with a most misleading composure. Junot, misled, hurried on.

“Bear it with calm, General, with your own courage, for she is not worth your grief. She is spoken of openly all over Paris as the mistress of that contemptible fop, Charles—and not only so, but Barras and Gohier are equally talked of with her. Her name is sunk so that nothing can raise it. How my heart burnt when I saw and heard what I did. And spending money like water on her pleasures, and mocking at the remonstrances of your family. My General, you are betrayed, and it is my duty to tell you the truth that you may avenge yourself.”

Quite suddenly and to the extreme terror of Junot, a change like the breaking up of ice in spring passed over the marble face of the man who listened. He put his hand to his head, slowly and uncertainly, as if the sun or some stronger light dazed him. Was it fancy, or did he sway for an instant? At all events, Junot caught him by the hand.

“Brute, that I am, I should not have told you, and you with the weight of the army on you!” he said. Napoleon looked vaguely at him.

“I think—I will hear no more!” he said. “You are a good friend, Junot, but—leave me!”

Hesitating, lingering, Junot at last moved away and left him in the shadow alone.

He walked there for a long time in solitude until at last Bourrienne drew near for orders, suspecting indeed that something was amiss. Then Napoleon turned on him like a raging lion.

“And you a Judas too—with all the rest!” he said, in a low bitter tone of intense feeling. “You knew and did not tell me. Are all the camp letters full of it? Do they joke about me under every tent? These women—oh, these women! You are an old friend. We knew each other when we were boys, and I thought—I thought—you would not see me wronged in silence!”

Bourrienne protested meekly.

“But what is it, my General? I have known nothing.” His very tone was salt agony poured on a bleeding wound.

“Josephine! You know—the whole army knows her infidelities, and you did not tell me. That she should have deceived me and I two thousand miles away! I will exterminate the whole race of fops and puppies. The dreadful things women are! We love them and they love nothing but themselves.

They don't so much as know a man when they see him and are harlots at heart from the best to the worst."

"But, General, I knew nothing. I had heard a few stories which might easily be false as well as foolish. I beseech you to put the matter out of your head until you return to Paris and make proper enquiry. Besides, what can you do out here in any case?"

"I can write to Joseph and tell him to get me a divorce. A man is not bound to maintain a harlot who betrays him when he is serving his country! She has drawn her last *sou* from me."

Bourrienne interceded, pleaded, and in vain, and the argument raged in the heat and glare of the sand dunes and the blazing sun. After an exhausting hour Bourrienne summed up the unanswerable.

"If your letter, General, were intercepted by the English frigates, as it probably would be, how would you like to be held up to the laughter of Europe and the Directory as a deceived husband? No, no! Wait for letters from your family. Dismiss the idea; then act by the best advice and with consideration."

As suddenly as he had blazed out Napoleon was controlled and cold.

"You are right. The only way is the most certain and that which will annoy me least. Drop the subject. Allude to it no more."

It was dropped, but inwardly he said, "To live is to suffer, and an honest man is always fighting to remain master of himself." The habit of holding colloquies with the hidden self of his own heart grew on him daily now. With whom else could he hold any equal communion? If there were battles without there were certainly battles within also.

Meanwhile tales flew round the army. Many of the officers and men had their letters from Paris, and scarcely one but told of the gay doings of the General-in-Chief's wife with her lap-dog of a man, the two of them pouring out his money and more, like a river of gold.

"But you can't help liking the old girl for all," some of the soldiers' wives added in their written gossip. "If you go to her house and tell her the soup-pot is empty, she won't turn from you sniffing as if you stank, like the fine ladies the Republic has made out of nothing but street mud and blood. No—she's another guess sort. She'll stop and hear you out and maybe kiss your cheek and push a roll of bills into your hand or a cake for Toinette, and tell you to come again if things get bad. She tells every one she's the General's luck and I shouldn't wonder, for he was no great shakes when she took him by the hand. They say the black witches out there where she was

born told her she was to be Queen of France. That's as may be, but she has a heart anyway, so if she does amuse herself a bit, let her, say I!" Thus the letters of the camp.

The view of the officers was naturally different, but whatever it might be Napoleon's stern face repelled comment. He was still writing to his pretty Madame Fourés in Egypt—they knew that and found it very natural.

But she had borne him no child. That thought troubled no one else—who wanted children from a light amour? But to him in his solitude that little fact assumed the proportion of an immense shame and dread. Could it be that he was incapable of children? It sickened him—the mere question. He turned it over in his mind when men thought he was busied with military cares and did not marvel that his brows met in a knotted frown over sombre eyes. His wife; his childlessness. He was sick at heart for both. Because if that were true—for what was he working? True, one must work on, for the night comes swiftly, but with how different a spur. His heart at least knew its own bitterness in these days. To work that all might collapse at death—What man could bear it?

Once in a moment of unbearable agony he complained to the young Eugene of his mother's behaviour. Not uttering the worst: before those candid young eyes that was impossible, but speaking with burning anger of her coquetries, levities, expense—anything to ease his heart of its load, and compel some one, any one, to share its pain.

Eugene looked at him with cool bright eyes.

"General, you are unjust. You condemn my mother unheard. You talk as if you hate her."

That steadied the elder man. He looked inward. Could he waste hate on a thing so worthless? She had not been worth love and now he thought her not worth hate either.

"Hate?" he said slowly, after a long pause. "No—not hate. A man who is truly a man never hates. Did you ever see my anger last more than a few minutes? No—nor ever will. I don't consider persons. They are never worth it. I think only of things, their importance and consequence. Don't give it a thought!"

It reassured the boy—being but a boy he did not understand the implication. And time went by, with a wound unhealed in the breast of Napoleon.

Conquering they marched into Syria, and hope revived as the glittering gold and diamonds of India swam once more in a fierce mirage before their

eyes. They took El Arish and Jaffa, and Napoleon composed bombastic bulletins of the best for Paris—Paris from which they had then had no news for many a long month.

It was at Jaffa that with twenty-five hundred helpless prisoners on his hands he had them all slaughtered to escape the almost insurmountable difficulty of feeding and guarding them. His power and resolution strengthened every day, and not even crime of the deepest could hinder his march toward the red star of his destiny. He cared for little else now. The rest was a dissolving dream.

And there was only Acre left to conquer, the key to the gorgeous East and the humiliation of England—that loathed obstacle, always in the path of glory.

Acre. There was an English garrison, easy, one would suppose, to conquer, and commanded by a man of no very great mark—a man moreover who had been a prisoner in the hands of the French, whose escape from prison there had been taken lightly enough since men do not understand the irony of the Gods—Sir Sidney Smith. He commanded at Acre—that ancient stumbling block in the way of the crusaders to Jerusalem. That that man had much in him of the great strain, however, his famous letter to Nelson shows once and for all.

“This town is not, nor ever has been defensible according to the rules of the art, but according to every other rule it must and shall be defended.” And as he wrote, he did.

On the walls of Acre, with Sidney Smith behind them, Fate met Napoleon once more at the second turning point in his career, with the unanswerable—“Thus far and no farther.” Acre with its broken walls defied him—“that miserable little hole!” as he called it—and there by the help of the great sailor, the destiny of the Orient for a hundred years was decided and decided against him.

He could not take it. Sullen, defeated and decimated by plague and heat, the French army rolled back like an ebbing tide and leaving Syria returned to Egypt, entering Cairo with what poor semblance of triumph it could muster to hide defeat.

“If they had not let that devil, Sidney Smith, escape from France when we had him the Orient, beginning with India, would have been ours,” he told Lucien long after. It was a ghastly blow. “I think my imagination died at Acre. I have never seen the world in the same colours since.”

But news was what he craved. What—what had happened in France during those dark eight months during which no word had reached him or the Army—those months during which he was following the Syrian will-o'-the-wisp to ruin?

How could he learn? An exchange of prisoners with Sir Sidney Smith brought him one day as an act of military courtesy papers teeming with news to stir the blood in the veins of every Frenchman. The enemy, the stolid Englishman, must have smiled ironically in sending them.

Italy—Napoleon's own prize—was lost, the Austrians triumphing, France seething with smothered fury and discontent, the Directory rotten to the core—the Ship of the State labouring on to wreck. Not a word of himself. Forgotten. Possibly they believed him dead.

In a series of lightning flashes he saw the situation where chance clashed with chance and only the instinct which is called genius can disentangle issues. Seeing, he decided instantly. The crossroads were marked and his turned westward. Over France now blazed the red star of destiny. The Orient had slipped into the vanished dreams of yesterday. He sent for Berthier at once—the man whom he most trusted of his band of subordinates who so ill-matched Nelson's "band of brothers." His words were brief.

"The fools have lost Italy. All the fruits of our victories are gone. I must leave Egypt. It is a secret of life and death. Only Admiral Gantheaume, and Bourrienne must be in the secret."

Berthier stared, daring to utter no remonstrance. What? The General-in-Chief leave the worsted army in Egypt to its fate? What would be thought? What said? And France—he was forgotten there. What would be done when he burst on them without orders, permission, or even a thought of his coming? He read the look in Berthier's face and answered it.

"Egypt is a played-out field. I see my way in France at last. I shall take you with me and leave Kléber in command. But silence. The army shall think I am proceeding to the Delta on an inspection tour." He turned on his heel and left Berthier face to face with Bourrienne.

"Desertion!" said Berthier. "We have seen some strange things out here in Egypt, but I did not think to see that. That man sees nothing, thinks of nothing but himself. In different days he would have been called an ego-maniac. But the Revolution has prepared us for everything."

Bourrienne shrugged his shoulders and went off to make his preparation. A thought of Josephine flickered across his meditations like a smile.

CHAPTER XIV

THE MAN OF DESTINY

IN the south a wildly rejoicing triumphing France, flags waving, trumpets blaring, drums thundering their greeting, the air tossing with flags, every throat cracked with shouting welcomes and a thousand welcomes to one man.

Before him anarchy must disperse like the nightmare it was, and the waxing star of the Bourbons wane. He could command, could rule. Had he not proved it in Italy, and was it not known that the worthless Directors had trembled at the force in him before the Orient swallowed him up? Now it had restored him in the day of need. Way—make way for the man of the hour!

So Fréjus, mad with rapture, while Paris went its way expecting no more from that particular week than any other. As for the Parisians they had forgotten Napoleon. Long, long ago it had been rumoured that the Directory had exiled him. A sudden return now would have a touch of magic in it. But it surely could not be! And if the People had forgotten him others had done the same. The Bonaparte clan remembered, but Josephine . . . ?

She had forgotten. Life went its easy way in Paris and nothing could have seemed more impossible than that Napoleon, now silent to all the world for seven months, should emerge, as it were, in lightning, and dismay his friends and enemies alike in great amaze. How describe those hurried startling events?

Frenzy in Fréjus and like running fire along the road. In Paris stagnation.

On that astonishing October evening Madame Permon was indulging her friends with a party for the fashionable game of *loto-dauphin*. It was getting late and the listless talk was of the sins of the Directors and of that lady who provided Paris so liberally with scandal; the wife, or it indeed might well be the widow, of the vanished Bonaparte.

“It is true that the morals of the Revolution were bad and of the Convention worse, but of the Directory it may be said that they exist no longer!” observed the Citoyenne Permon with her serene irony. “I was asked my opinion the other day as to whether Bonaparte’s wife will consent to legalize her liaison with Hippolyte Charles when the news of her husband’s death reaches us. ‘Heavens, no!’ I answered. No man in France knows her

debts and the tastes as Charles does. He would not take Venus herself with Josephine Bonaparte's debts tied to her. He lives on her, not for her."

"Surely there can be no one who would compare the wife of Bonaparte with Venus!" observed Madame de Caseaux. "If she had teeth she might be passable. I will not say good teeth or bad teeth, but simply—teeth!"

Her own were ivory naturally and she smiled delightfully over her little thrust. The audience, conservative of course, in the house of Madame Permon, was not likely to defend the teeth of any friend of the Directory.

But Laurette Permon spoke up. She had grown into a charmingly pretty girlhood in the last year, shining, animated, with all her mother's decision and irony sparkling in the brightest brown eyes imaginable.

"For my part I should rather be like Madame Josephine than any one else I know. She is so absolutely distinguished and elegant. *And* so kind!"

"Too kind!" said Madame de Caseaux acidly. "A little less benevolence in certain directions would— But what's that? Another guest, Madame Permon?"

"Not that I expected!" said the lady of the house with a puzzled air. "Good heavens! he's tearing up the stairs, whoever it is! Albert, is it you?"

It was her son, glowing with excitement, palpitating, almost breathless.

"Good God, what is it?" cried his mother. "If the government had fallen you could not look more important!"

"Guess what news I have!" he answered with dancing eyes. "Guess, one and all."

"The Directors are assassinated!" cried one man, beaming with hope.

"All five! No, too good to be true!" shouted another. "Barras shot?"

"No—then what? The Bourbons landed at Boulogne!"

There was a pause of brilliant expectation and Albert made his announcement, turning his eyes slowly from one to another to see the effect.

"Bonaparte has landed in France."

Stupefaction. One of the men rose.

"Your son is jesting, madame," he said.

Albert laughed aloud.

"Jest? France will find it no jest. The South is in a frenzy. I have it from Guérin. He was at Gohier's, where there was a gay supper-party going on when the news was announced by courier. It—well, it made a sensation!"

He stood, leaning his hand on the back of a chair, with the air of ending the evening, not of settling down to discuss the event. The company appeared to feel it in the same way. They rose, the women put on their wraps, the men helping them almost in silence. The news had had the effect of a bursting bomb, and every one seemed to wish to consider it alone. Indeed of late years it was not every one who had Signora Panoria's valour of discussion when politics held the field.

When Albert had performed the last meticulous duties of politeness he returned to his mother, who was waiting eagerly for him, Laurette beside her.

"There was more, Albert—I saw it in your face. What is it?"

"I thought it better to say as little as possible in public. One doesn't know now what course events may take. But Napoleon's wife was supping at Gohier's when the news came and"—he lowered his voice even then—"she was not as well pleased as might have been expected!"

"Pleased!" cried Madame Permon with her brusque energy. "I should think she would be half dead with terror and well she may! I have a regard for Napoleon though as you know he has offended me more than once, and I declare that woman deserves neither more nor less than divorce, and I hope she'll get her deserts! What did she do?"

"Send Laurette to bed—she's too young for these things," said Albert, "and I'll tell you the rest!"

Laurette rose obediently, with down-dropped eyes, but at the door turned and fixed them in all their brilliance on her brother.

"Albert, did General Junot return with Napoleon?"

"Go to bed, little kitten!" he said, laughing. "Do I know, and if I did would I tell a little girl who should be thinking of her sampler instead of young generals!"

The door shut and he turned to his mother.

"I met Louis Bonaparte on my way here. He was wild with excitement and told me he was off along the Burgundy road to meet Napoleon. 'And now,' says he, 'with what we have to tell him, a divorce from that wanton spendthrift is certain. He has a career before him which nothing but folly about her can ruin. And we shall get his ear first if the luck holds.' That was what he said."

If he expected an outburst of acquiescence from his impetuous mother he was disappointed. She said nothing for a moment, and at last slowly:

“My sympathies are with the Bonapartes—up to the hilt. And yet—because I’m Corsican, I suppose—I have a superstition about it—you know that black woman we have all heard of at Martinique—don’t laugh at me, Albert. There are things even the almighty Revolution doesn’t understand. That woman Bonaparte—have you ever thought of her luck? Think of it! Her people in Martinique—the La Pageries—discredited and poor. I believe a hurricane ruined them and they all had to live in a barn. Josephine and her two sisters could scarcely be said even to be educated at all. Then the aunt—the old Rénaudin—becomes the mistress of the Marquis de Beauharnais in France and determines that one of her nieces shall marry his son. It was to have been Désirée, but—Désirée died. Then it was to be Manette. Manette refused to go to France if they drove her with whips! And so it had to be Josephine.”

“Well, that might happen anywhere!” Albert said philosophically.

“But listen! So Josephine at fifteen becomes the Vicomtesse de Beauharnais. You know all that story and her husband’s accusations against her. Cat and dog! Then the Revolution. Both thrown into prison and heads falling every day. He is beheaded. She—with not a chance of escape. Robespierre beheaded—she is safe.”

“Yes—that was a queer episode,” he answered. “I own it—and queerer still the way Barras took up with her when nearly all the women of the aristocrats went under.”

“Most of them would have starved and did starve sooner than sell their bodies to a brute with a record of blood like Barras!” said Madame Permon with all her energy. “Don’t tell me of her children! Was that the way to support them? And then she gets the army of Italy for her husband and his fortune is made. No—that woman has luck, whatever that mysterious word means, and his hangs on it. The army believes that. I believe it too.”

“I don’t. Napoleon has genius. That’s his luck. Anyhow if the Bonapartes have the start of her this time, we shall see!”

Meanwhile, Josephine, mad with fear, was urging her postillions along the Burgundian road to Lyons. What had seemed impossible was upon her now. Her frightful debts, the installation of Hippolyte Charles at Malmaison, her friendship with Napoleon’s enemies such as Gohier—all, all, must be faced and paid for. The Bonapartes could ruin her, and even to her giddy mind it was impossible to deny that they had reason on their side. Besides what had she done to conciliate them? Nothing. True—there had been no open insult or annoyance on her part. That was not in her easy pleasure-loving nature. She had simply slighted them entirely and trodden her own

primrose path forgetting their very existence as far as was possible. O the defencelessness of women! What man ever had to pay as she was paying now?

So as her berlin crashed on towards Lyons she faced the irrevocable, mad with terror. If she could but reach him first! With what tropical passion she would fling herself into his arms and cling to him with tears and embraces. The fool—the fool she had been! Women must have their pleasures—but need they be so frenzied as to slight husbands in whom all their fortunes are centred? Her mind glanced to her loaded jewel-cases at Malmaison—the plunder of Italy. To surrender that and more! And Hortense not married, and Eugene dependent on Napoleon's mercy for his advancement! She had thought her friendship with Gohier the last stroke of policy—the man who would eclipse the waning Barras—but the sight of his pale dropped jaw when the lion's roar was heard from Fréjus was sufficient to destroy any illusions as to the strength of the opposition awaiting Napoleon in Paris.

The old wretch—the traitor! The last words he had uttered before she left his house to take the road were, “My best advice to you is to get a divorce from Bonaparte and marry Charles! There is no other chance for you! You are in too deep!”

And as the berlin laboured onward she saw the crowded anxious faces of men along the road—heard the shouts of “Welcome to the Liberator of France,” and knew once and for all that ruin stared her in the face; that she had had her golden chance and lost it!

O to meet him—to meet him! Her only chance. After what seemed days of cruel suspense they entered a little town all flaunting with flags and wild with excitement. “He is coming,” her heart said, and seemed to plunge and halt. “Ask them.” She motioned to the postillion at the window. The man leaned down, and an onlooker answered.

“No. The General passed here last night. He took the road to Paris where it debouches from this! Hail to the Liberator! He goes to Paris to down the scoundrelly Five!”

That was the answer, and, O great God, he was galloping to Paris and the Bonapartes while she was pursuing ruin down the southern road! She had but strength to give the order to turn and sank back half fainting in the carriage.

So he reached Paris, and knew that with a little patience and discretion the ball was at his feet. He drove to the house in Rue de la Victoire, not

knowing himself how he should meet the woman for whom now there was only the habit of affection to plead with contempt.

The bird had flown. Empty. Half an hour after his arrival the Clan surrounded him with a Southern warmth of greeting and exclamation.

“She is not here, my dear brother—she is not here. She feared to meet you, and well she might. She has made herself the talk of France. Charles fled from Malmaison only on the warning of your coming. No, she dared not face you with your family like an honest woman.”

That was the cry as they crowded about him,—his mother more reserved than the rest, perhaps remembering in her chilled old heart that a woman may have her temptations. There was a time in her flower of life when slander had not spared the Mother of the Gracchi. But Elise Bacciochi’s handsome dark face was alight with scorn and rage as she gestured the wrongs Napoleon had endured in his absence, and Pauline Leclerc’s little lovely lips, lifted in disdain of women who did not know which way their bread was buttered, breathed venom in her brother’s ear as she gave her greeting kiss. The daughters-in-law stood apart. Not for them to meddle when no one knew what Napoleon’s own silence might portend.

And young Caroline, the clearest, coldest-brained of all the sisters, was silent. Not for her to venture her opinion as yet. But, silently observant, she watched all, and knew the day would come when she should find her own account in it.

The brothers were loud and determined. The fate of the Directory was sealed with the aid which could be given by Lucien, now President of the Council of the Five Hundred, and Joseph prominent in influence in the Council of Ancients. The seed of power was sown everywhere, but nothing,—nothing could be done while this ruinous woman was tied to him. And then in a torrent recommenced the history of her misdeeds.

And still Napoleon was silent with that darkly brooding look of his which none of them could read. He dismissed them at last, dismissing the thought of her also and turning his thoughts to the political conflict. The strong man is he who can intercept at will the communication between his senses and his thoughts. Who was she that she should disturb them?

And the night came and so at last he slept, tired out with his journey, as if neither she nor the Directory existed. Let her return or not as she would, he would know how to deal with her. Perhaps she had made off to Charles.

Her exhausted horses, urged beyond their strength, were pulled up on their haunches at the familiar door in the Rue de la Victoire.

“Has he come?” she gasped to the servant who met her, and seeing the answer, flew from room to room, distracted with terror, searching for him. At the door of her own bedroom at last, she dragged at the handle, almost screaming, “Bonaparte, Bonaparte!”

The door was locked. The door was locked!

All night she lay outside weeping and sobbing, careless who saw her, and Napoleon made no sign. His food was brought to him. Bourrienne was sent for and even the extremity of her agony did not give her courage to force a meeting with that inflexible face. Within she knew her fate was under consideration, but she was helpless.

When Bourrienne entered he found Napoleon cool, composed and decided.

“You know enough not to be surprised when I tell you my mind is made up. I shall divorce my wife.”

Bourrienne was silent.

“You disapprove? That matters nothing to me. I have decided.”

The miserable sobbing of Josephine outside bore a burden to the talk. Bourrienne had had almost to step over her. She lay there, a limp figure in tumbled pink and white drapery like a discarded doll. That was the image that struck him and remained. Feeling dreadfully uncomfortable he had made some faint murmur of apology and protest, but she never raised her head and now the dreary interminable sobbing continued like the rain of a December day. One pitied her as one did an unreasoning child.

“Do you do me the honour to ask my opinion, General?” he said at last, but with unwillingness.

“Should I have sent for you if not? My intention is fixed but I want an outsider’s light on it.”

“Then I shall be courageous in replying. Such as my opinion is it is opposed to your decision.”

Napoleon fixed him with strange compelling eyes which appeared to pierce into the depths of the soul.

“Is a man to ruin his career for a weak fool who has not the strength to refrain from mischief and then can only drench it with infantile tears?”

“Is one to spoil one’s career for such a woman—No. But there are more ways than one of spoiling it.”

“How?”

“Well, General,—I ask you simply this. We are on the eve of great events, which, to say the least, may put you in a very remarkable position in France. Is that true?”

“True.” He was drawing idly with a pencil on a sheet of paper. Bourrienne had the curiosity to glance and saw it was a sketch of the façade of the Tuileries—rough but recognizable. He smiled inwardly. Vaulting ambition! Aha!

“And then?” added Napoleon.

“Then I ask you: Is this the moment to set France and Europe giggling at a charge of adultery with yourself in the rôle of deceived husband? You know—I know—what a storm of laughter it would rouse. Frankly, I consider it might be fatal to your hopes. Those things are not tragic to the outer world. They are simply absurd, and the parties to them ridiculous. If indeed you were the lover! But there Charles would have the advantage of you!”

Silence. Bourrienne resumed earnestly.

“And you are attached to Eugene—I know it—and Hortense is a sweet girl whom you will find immensely improved. A scandal would ruin their prospects.”

The face of Napoleon was like granite. It was in such moments of fixed resolution, be the resolution small or great, that men were compelled to realize its grandeur. It was fixed as a brooding Fate. He pushed the paper from him and rose as if in dismissal.

“You know me. Do you think me likely to saddle myself with a wanton to amuse Eugene and Hortense? In your other arguments there is a grain of truth. From the sublime to the ridiculous is but a step. I own that.”

“I think you, General, also not inaccessible to pity,” Bourrienne ventured, rising also, and preparing to go. He knew his master well enough to be certain that no good was gained by labouring a point. You said your say briefly; it would be either briefly accepted or contemptuously rejected. That was all you could predict in dealing with Napoleon.

“Return to-morrow at ten o’clock, and pray do not fall over the lady on the mat,” Napoleon said with a slight relaxation of the marble lips—the ghost of a smile. Bourrienne went.

For three days the tragedy or comedy (as seen from different angles) continued; Bourrienne on one side, the Clan on the other, Napoleon apparently unmoved between the two, locked into solitude when in the house, Josephine huddled in her room incoherent with weeping, capable only of the unreasoning suffering of an animal, with no plea to offer to the

facts confronting her husband. Finally in a last access of despair she sent for Hortense and Eugene and trembling, hand in hand, the two approached the locked door.

The flute-like sweetness of Hortense's voice made itself heard outside, entreating a hearing, Eugene's strong young baritone seconding it. That moved him.

In Egypt Eugene had justified his descent from the noble blood of France. He had shown himself alike high-spirited and gentle. He and only he had dared to remonstrate when Marguerite Fourés was flaunted openly as the mistress of the General-in-Chief, and her husband, disgracefully despatched to France, was captured by the English and mockingly returned by them as a present to the Army in Egypt. They knew the facts even in the English ships and it delighted them to mock Napoleon and his mistress.

Eugene had glided over the facts with the tact and grace inherited from his graceful mother but he had dared much and yet with consideration for his stepfather. The sound of his voice stirred Egyptian memories in Napoleon. He opened the door, and stretched his hand for that of Eugene, with a flicker of emotion on his face.

"As for you,—have no fear, Eugene. You shall not suffer for your mother's faults. You shall always be my son and I'll keep you with me."

Eugene looked him in the eyes.

"I think that impossible, General. My mother's ill fortune is mine. From this moment I bid you good-bye."

"Hortense?" He turned to her as she clung quivering to his arm with hidden face, too innocent even to understand the charges against her mother.

"Hortense?" he repeated, stroking her light silky curls.

"What can I say but what Eugene says?" she sobbed. "But, O the cruelty of it! Our father died by the guillotine,—and are we to be orphaned again? Well, Eugene, we must bear it."

For half an hour Napoleon fought his battle against the two young things, fighting with the right hand tied as it were, for even his rage would not suffer him to loose his naked charge against their mother, and without that how could he convince them? They both loved her soft yielding gentleness and who could wonder? Had he not loved it with passion himself?

But he said what he could, fighting inch by inch, and at last they stood silent before him.

With a deep sigh and fast falling tears Hortense's little golden head was bowed as if to the earth with shame.

"Let us go, Eugene," she said, "but I shall never forget the General's goodness. I shall always love him. He would stay with us if he could. Fate is against us."

She unloosened her warm young hands and kissed Napoleon's as if in a long good-bye. It thawed some ice in his heart, and the words trembled a little on his lips. They were choked for a moment, then made their way. Youth and helplessness made their plea and not in vain.

"If you insist, children, I will see your mother," he said, but in his heart he thought—

After all, was the woman worth the storm he was raising? Was anything? Were not these the trifles of weak wills, and could not a man such as he go his way and forget, and treat her henceforward as the nothing she really was? He sent for her and endured as she clung to him, his face set like iron. That too was a part of his destiny and no more. For the moment it sickened him.

He was conquered, but not inwardly. The rage of the Clan was terrible when Lucien, coming to see his brother next morning, found him in bed, with Josephine all lace and grace and facile happiness on the pillows beside him. That was her hour of triumph.

She who had conquered in such a battle might well trust her own powers, but none the less she had had a frightful lesson, and all her fears and energies drove her to the resolution never again to give the Clan ground for "its lies and infamies." She would live chaste as a nun and be an exquisiteness with which he could never dispense. The real beginning of their married life should be now, and she would reconquer all the territory she had so madly ceded to the enemy. She could do it and it was richly worth while. She did not know that for dead love there is no resurrection, none on earth. There is endurance and contempt. No more.

So she turned smiling into his arms in a passion of reconciliation and saw no further. She did not know that under the kisses lay something contemptuous, not only of her but of his own weakness—never again to be allowed to deflect him from the way of destiny.

Did she suppose that when they drove abroad together through the streets of Paris his own heart was not echoing what the decent women whispered to each other.

“The slut of the Directory! He should have divorced her and started with clean hands.”

But he could give little thought to her even if she had been worth it; he had other things to engross him now. He had reached Paris on the 16th October, and was swept up instantly on the crest of a wave of intrigue. The five Directors tried to make some feeble capital out of his having deserted the army in Egypt, but all in their hearts knew that the Man and the Hour had met and struck hands. The smoke of much intrigue obscures some of the facts, but amidst uncertainty and subterranean uproar, events marched and on the 18th Brumaire, according to the Revolutionary Calendar, the Directory fell to rise no more. France had a new constitution and Napoleon was her Dictator. That date, the 9th November, 1799, the world will remember while it remembers anything.

CHAPTER XV

THE RULER OF FRANCE

WITH the subtle tact she possessed in perfection when she thought it worth while Josephine argued not at all, put no headstone either to the quarrel or the reconciliation, slipped immediately into the background and devoted herself to oiling the wheels of the machine. As a sinner converted to grace out-tops the naturally righteous in zeal so Josephine in her subjection to Napoleon. Contradiction, negligence, forgetfulness of his wishes, were dead.

“Abra was ready ere I named her name,
And when I called another, Abra came!”

She who had been the despair of her husband with unpunctuality and indolence was always dressed and waiting now when the great man demanded her presence. The perfect wife, one would say, if it were not that human nature, being a little lower than the angels, must always reserve some darling vice to bind its wings to earth lest it should soar untimely to heaven: and there were three with which she could not bring herself to part. Two of them, she felt, leaned to the side of virtue. Jealousy. Is it not the sacred duty of a wife to resent any lapse of her husband's from the narrow path of married chastity and to use that resentment to hedge it in with barriers he can never dare to overleap? It will be readily perceived that her sense of humour was not as strong a point as her sense of colour, for instance. Deceit. Not of course of the black and criminal type, but the little gentle, playful, engaging deceits which do so much for domestic content. She felt that her large experience with men really qualified her to decide when truth was good for them and when they would be more comfortable without that disturbing draught. What the eye does not see the heart does not grieve over is a necessary maxim in any wife's position. But the third—extravagance—she owned to herself and to all the world was or would have been a vice if it had not been so infinitely dear and unavoidable. After all—what could she do? He wished to see her dressed to perfection, yet would not realize that perfection is one of the most expensive things on earth, find it where you will. How could it be perfection otherwise? She was certainly not at the age when white muslin and a blue sash are the last word in the toilette, and art is infinitely more costly than nature. There she could make no promises.

Still, even there she made a faltering resolve to do the best she could if Napoleon would meet her halfway with leniency for past shortcomings. He meanwhile had almost forgotten her existence as a woman except in so far as she could help him in his deep preoccupations, and there he found that in one department she could be very valuable indeed.

For society, in the limited sense of the word, held an important place in his scheme of things. Napoleon had no use for a democracy with its pinchbeck airs and claims. He had seen the Sovereign People at work during the Revolution and had acquired the most scathing contempt for their assumptions and corruptions. The perfect, the benevolent, the deific despot was his conception of the ideal State, and since that despot was at hand it followed that society, disintegrated into a muddy and bloody slush in the Revolution, must be built up again into the graduated ranks which only can form the steps leading up to the glittering apex culminating in the Autocrat himself. One did not say these things as yet—indeed they probably never would be said. But Josephine's subtly useful part would be to appeal to the feminine feelings which make civilized society possible, by insisting on ranks and distinctions and all they imply, and giving vent to all the human emulations which it had been the aim of the Revolution to destroy. Human nature must be loosed from the ridiculous bonds imposed upon it by the cry of Equality and Fraternity. Napoleon himself would attend to that of Liberty! He intended to fix, to stabilize, and it was eminently his view that the best security for fixedness of opinion is that people should be incapable of comprehending what is to be said on the other side. There were plenty to support him. France was weary of the avalanches of opinion and theory let loose upon her by the men of the Revolution. Guidance, authority, the strong hand, were her need, and she should have them.

But Napoleon went warily. Loathing the regicides and the Revolution as he did, every fibre of his being vibrating in unison with law and order, he yet knew that he himself was a child of the Revolution, owing it all, even the position from which he could destroy it, and he guarded all his words and actions with deep dissimulation. He was the First Consul of France, but that position savoured too much of the ruined Throne unless it were flanked by two dummy Consuls who could be shown in public and disregarded in private. He had his soldiers about him, his Lannes, the eagle-leader of cavalry, his Berthier, Marmont, Murat, and plenty more. He could have struck a blow now if he would, but he would not. In his own words "the pear was not ripe. Public opinion must be cultivated, France re-civilized, and then

—"

Meanwhile, the Luxembourg, vacated by the ruined Directors, must be used as the Palace of the Consulate and Napoleon, remembering as in a dream the garrets of his youth, was installed there with his wife and the Consular court about them—she, the waif of the Directory, now the greatest lady in France! That was the first step. The next and natural one was to the occupation of the Tuileries, the ancient abode of the royalty of France.

Blinded and dazzled, Josephine felt each day more strongly the influence of her star, conjoined with Napoleon's but dominant.

"Come, little Creole, come and sleep in the bed of your masters!" he said to her, laughing as he took her by the hand and dragged her into the stately royal apartments of the Bourbons, nervously ready for a bit of tomboy fun to relieve the oppressive majesty of the occasion.

"How wonderful—how wonderful it is, Bonaparte!" she answered, making wide eyes at the cold and glittering splendours haunted by phantoms she could not see. "But—I always knew my fate was to be marvellous. O Bonaparte, I have brought you luck. I know I have. Every one says it. There has never been a danger in my life but some wonderful thing saved me. It is as true as that I stand here." She was looking with distended eyes into his, leaning back from his shoulder in the loveliest pose that she might do it. Partly it was her policy to keep him reminded of her star—she knew the superstitious vein that was his one weakness—and partly events really forced the belief on her. Had any woman had such a life before?

He laughed uncomfortably.

"Well, we are here in any case. Now hear your lesson. You are in the position of a queen here. Play your part. You can do it to perfection. Do it. But remember one thing on your life! The Directory is dead. All your friendships with it are dead also. As to Citoyenne—I mean Madame Tallien—you must never see her again. They belong to the past: you to the future. They are played out."

"Oh, Bonaparte!" Her eyes moistened—her lip trembled. As far as she could care for any one she had cared for Thérèse. Her friendship had saved her in many a difficult moment. She had looked forward to showing her new magnificence to the beautiful audacious creature who once dazzled her weakness with strength, and the loose careless pleasures of the Directory had been delicious to her taste. Her best hope was that the Consulate would repeat them. She had counted on that.

His brow clouded in a moment.

“Take your orders, Josephine. They are the suppliants now. You are done with the Tallien and all that troop. *Done!* From here and now begins etiquette, decency of conduct, decency of dress instead of the indecencies of that half naked hussy. The world is changed. Look about you and realize it. And you are changed with it. You are to lead a new era. But you must lead it as I will, or beware.”

She looked about her at the vast rooms, the groups of waiting courtiers, for they were no less, and sighed; yes, the world was changed! It could never be the same again. Youth was gone and the Directory with it. An autumnal feeling chilled the air for a moment. She moved to meet the ladies appointed to attend upon her, graceful and ready but with a new fear in her heart.

He stood looking out of the great window for a moment alone, and seemed to see the world flying beneath him as though he were carried in air.

CHAPTER XVI

MASTER OF MEN

His combination of audacity and the will to power had placed him on the steps of a throne. It could not be long, he knew, until he was seated upon it with France kneeling before him. Nature declines to lend herself forever to the lie of equality and when the Revolution had played long enough with her painted toy her Master would snatch it from her and break it as he had begun to do herself.

The process was already working. The Roman shibboleths vanished first. Men ceased to call themselves Brutus and Cassius. They regained sanity and blushed to think of late aberrations. Napoleon frowned on such absurdities, they knew. Under his orders women reclaimed the courtesies of polite society. The hideous "citoyenne" vanished, and women in the salon of Josephine became "madame" once more and the fashion spread downwards. The country was like a man awaking from the bad dream of democracy, and stern law and order (the only state of things for which the mass of mankind is fitted) took the place of lawlessness and carelessness of life and property. "Patriots" who troubled the peace were suppressed with a strong hand.

Naturally Gohier and his friends, with those whose interest lay in fishing in troubled waters, went about singing the sanctity of equality and fraternity and bleating insults. They were met at first by an ominous silence. Then speech.

For France had heard and re-echoed the question which Napoleon addressed to the envoy of the former Directory on his return.

"What have you done with this France which I left you so glorious? I left you peace! I find war. Victories—and I find reverses. I left in your treasury the millions of Italy. I find despoiling laws and misery throughout."

There was no answer, nor could be. Strengthening daily, he commanded that the Tree of Liberty planted in the courtyard of the Tuileries should be cut down and its evil memories of folly and bloodshed die with it. Religion, proscribed and ridiculed in the Revolution, began again to raise an almost lifeless head. There was a trembling in the air like the unfurling of the green banners of spring. A hope: a mighty hope. That was his strength.

But the Clan was great in the land. A new aristocracy must be created, for the old lay in bloody graves or dragged out poverty-stricken existence in

exile. And who but they? Paulette's beauty bloomed audacious and, it must be added, disengaged from such plebeian trifles as moral trammels. She shed her lovely smiles where she would, and men crowded to capture one from the sister of the First Consul. Junot, pushed aside, marvelled that his hopes had ever carried him so high as to dream of a kiss on that haughty little mouth already aping the royalty of the Monarchy.

He saw her as often as he wished, for with a reason of his own to drive him, he was haunting the salon of Madame Permon, and that lady was deeply attached to Paulette—the white-limbed child—angel of the Bonaparte family as she first remembered her. The Permons were up in the world now that aristocratic ideas no longer paved the way to the scaffold and madame's parties were much sought after, partly for the reason that one could be sure of meeting one or other of "the reigning family," as the Bonapartes began to be called, within her hospitable doors and Pauline, the petted beauty, glittered at all her gatherings.

Junot stood on one particular evening to see her enter. It was to be a magnificent occasion, for the First Consul and his wife had promised to look in for a few moments at the masquerade and all the officers present blazed in stars and ribbons. He had resolved to face the difficult question of marriage. Had he so far conquered that hopeless passion for Paulette that he might venture to offer himself to Laurette Permon! The one was a glorious beauty, the boast of Paris, the sister of its ruler, far out of reach of any hope save that of a fugitive amourette. The other, a charming girl with something in her bright observant eyes which spoke of more intellect in her little finger than in Paulette's whole lovely body. And there was another point. The First Consul was faithful to his old-time friends. He did not forget that Signora Panoria had slighted him once upon a time and was always a little suspicious when her name was mentioned, but also he did not forget what he and his family owed her, and his debts would always be repaid.

He showed himself at her house; he kissed her little hand; she interested him still. Her daughter would be more to him than other people's daughters. And therefore it was clear that a man who bid for success might do worse! So thought Junot.

Paulette entered, the most beautiful Bacchante ever seen in or out of Thessalian forests. Little bands of tiger-fur confined her glorious hair, secured with clustered golden grapes wreathing the perfectly shaped head. Her robe of purest white had a deep bordering of gold wrought in grapes and vine-leaves, and above it a Greek tunic fell to the knees bordered richly with the same design and girdled below the full bosom with a golden girdle

fastened with blue jewels. No gloves concealed the fair white arms and delicate hands. Where she herself was concerned Paulette was an artist indeed. She was a raging beauty.

A light murmur of admiration ran round the ballroom, a whispering like the frothing of champagne, as the radiant Bacchante advanced with lowered eyelids, languid and sensuous. Would Pan the Goat-footed have forgiven her the languor for the sake of the sensuality? Who can tell? Men and woman alike gazed enchanted.

Perfect. Flawless from head to heel. That was the verdict.

Natural enough, and equally natural the jealousy of the women, outshone and cast into oblivion. They murmured among themselves that such a display of magnificence was impudent, indecent, in a woman who had almost been begging her bread three years ago. Not that they meant it inwardly. Magnificence is always to the taste of women and they grow like flowers in the strong sunlight of wealth. There was not one present who would not have been the reigning beauty and sister of the First Consul had it been possible. As for the men—what did they care? They only stared with insatiate eyes.

The Bacchante, having slowly paraded the room that all might see her woodland graces, refused countless invitations to dance. She feared to disarrange the perfect grace of her perfectly falling robe by the exercise—consideration unworthy of her part!—and retreated with her court to a small brilliantly lit room opening from the ball room. There she posed herself exquisitely on a sofa and prepared to receive adoration. Beautiful! The very dance languished for want of partners, for all the men crowded to see. Who could bear such tyranny? One intrepid lady, Madame de Contades, driven into a very madness of jealousy, at last resolved to see what could be done, defying Pan and all his works and every Bacchante who danced at his heels. Her whole soul was set on the defeat of Pauline and she formed her plan of attack with Napoleonic skill.

She took her seat in the room, attended by Junot who happened to be her partner, and both fed their eyes upon the lovely display on the sofa, the woman as deep in admiration as the man. Pauline arched her swan-neck, glowing in the sunshine of applause, shedding warm beams of beauty and bliss on every eye that met her own—secure as Venus Aphrodite white and rose from the pearly shell which floated her to the happy shore for a world's delight.

“Lovely indeed!” said Madame de Contades audibly, and Junot devoutly echoed her words.

“And could absolute taste go further in a dress!” Madame de Contades resumed.

“And what a figure! Divine! And the complexion. But—”

A pause. Then, swiftly and suddenly the rapier was unsheathed.

“But what a pity—*Mon Dieu*, what a *pity* that such a pretty woman should be deformed by such ears! Dreadful indeed!”

Heavens, what a shiver of scrutiny ran round the assembly in that little room! How every head involuntarily craned forward to see! “Such enormous ears, and such a strange colour!” said the snake-like hiss of the foe. The rapier was buried in the heart of Paulette, scarlet suffused her face and bosom but with no quick wit to aid her beauty she was destroyed on the spot. Every eye sought the weak spot in beauty’s panoply and found it.

Junot perceived the unhappy ears. Two morsels of shapeless white cartilage. No—she should have hidden them. She should indeed! The golden grape-clusters should have drooped and concealed the flaw. His eye travelled further to Laurette standing white and slender behind the beauty in a dress which looked like rose-petals to the uninstructed eye. Her little ears were perfect as small sea-shells of purest nacre. Her lips breathed all the fragrance and innocence of eighteen April years.

That trifling incident ended all doubt. Aiming too high, the whole world searches for the flaw in the great jewel. Better be content with a little less. His mind was made up. No meretricious graces for him. He proposed for her to her mother next day and was accepted.

No doubt the Consulate had its gaieties, its rivalries and splendours, but Josephine sighed the more for the ease of the Directory as ceremony and etiquette claimed her for their own. The audacities and negligences of that delightful time were anathema in the eyes of Napoleon who was rapidly developing a code of alarming austerity for all but himself. Here and there one might still hope to cajole him but with lessening certainty and the little lies which had been only an easy decoration before became a serious profession with Josephine. They were her livelihood now and required a skill which needed serious mental application.

Her terrible debts! How were the facts to be presented to him? She shrank trembling from the very thought. Bonaparte had changed much in Egypt. Though only thirty now, life had set its seal upon him and he was no longer young. There was nothing fluid or malleable left in his hammered steel. Nothing deflected or changed him. He marched straight forward,

trampling every obstacle in his way, and never turned to look back at the trampled.

And who can appeal to perfect intellect, which pierces through and round every circumstance and person, and suspects every impulse not congenial with itself? A terrible antagonist for man or woman, most of all for a woman who had deceived him!

And Fate, or Luck, was beforehand with her. A new and sinister influence disguised in the utmost elegance and courtesy of approach was taking a hand in her affairs.

Talleyrand, the aristocratic, the inscrutable, was often closeted with Napoleon and no doubt for the good of the State, but with his own good pre-eminently in view. An aristocrat to the finger-tips by birth and taste, he had an advantage with Napoleon lacking to others, for Napoleon, hide it as he would, had more than a touch of the *parvenu* showing itself after many fashions and not least in an especially rough and trampling imperiousness with Talleyrand and others who could boast better birth than his own. He had the defiance of self-mistrust where the elegances of social life was concerned and felt its importance cruelly.

They were aristocrats and all the more for that he would make them glad to lick his boots! They understood and complied, sneering secretly—very secretly.

It so happened on one particular day that Napoleon in his cabinet received a visit from Talleyrand, quiet, punctilious, and a curious figure with his distinguished features, greyish-white skin, slender lamed legs and enigmatic air of the courtier and priest: the latter character he would have as willingly shed as a snake its skin, but could not.

Business transacted, he lingered, and Napoleon looked up from the magnificent writing table of the Kings of France.

“Well? Anything more?”

“Citizen Consul, yes. A matter not wholly pleasant, yet easily rectified, and very needful to be met.”

“Call Bourrienne then.”

There was a hint of the imperious in the tone. Talleyrand drooped his eyelids over all expression, and settled into a more comfortable position.

“Better not, yet. The fact is, many creditors of Madame Bonaparte’s have been voicing their eager wish for payment. Annoying, but natural. I think you will agree with me, Citizen Consul, that complaints of that kind may do political harm. Should they not be silenced by payment?”

From under his eyelids Talleyrand observed with pleasure that Napoleon winced. He considered him a coarse brute who by reason of his intelligence must be managed, not driven, but it was agreeable to hurt him in the process where it could be done safely. At that moment it could.

“Undoubtedly, if it were possible. But the Consular Treasury is all but empty and—”

“I am the bringer of good news,” Talleyrand said with his delicate pinch of snuff. “The Senate of Hamburg has just sent apologies for its annoying conduct in the matter of the Irish rebels delivered up to England—those whom we had wished to protect. And they have put a gilt border to their apology—the sum of four million and a half francs. If you thought well—”

Still looking under drooped eyelids, he saw Napoleon’s colour rise and knew that the proposal was highly distasteful but would be accepted because it must. It was a thread the more in the weaving web of Talleyrand’s influence over him, and would please Josephine also, for what she was worth! Smiling inwardly, he reflected that he had killed two birds with one neatly aimed stone. His desire to please her was very strong—for reasons!

“That will do,” was all the master vouchsafed. “Send Bourrienne to me as you go out. He should be in the anteroom now.”

Still smiling inwardly, Talleyrand limped out, and with most excellent gravity informed Bourrienne in a brief word or two of the conversation. Bourrienne hurried in. Never a moment to lose while the pale little Corsican waited! He never looked up from the paper he was reading.

“It is half-past eleven, Bourrienne, and I am off to bed in ten minutes. See Josephine as early as you can to-morrow. Ask her the exact amount of her debts. Let her confess all. I wish to end a thing which must never happen again. But do not pay a *sou* without showing me the bills of those rascals. They are a gang of robbers.”

“True, Citizen Consul. Naturally the bills will be heavy. Malmaison—”

“Get me the facts. Good night.”

And Bourrienne went off praising what God the Revolution had left him that Talleyrand had had the courage to offer the pill and to gild it and that he himself was not implicated.

Next morning he presented himself before Josephine. It could not be very early, for the cares of her toilette consumed many hours, but all must acknowledge that the result was worth the pains. She looked both young and beautiful as she reclined on the stiff inlaid sofa with curling arms—a delicate vision in cloudy white and sunset-blending mauve and rose ribbons.

Bourrienne wondered mechanically what terrific sum the elegance before him might have cost. Double, treble, what another would have paid for it—that he could swear! Josephine’s helpless gentleness awakened the spirit of plunder as surely as the sheep invites the shearer. She looked up tremulously at her visitor, like a pale lily in the very becoming shade of the rose curtains.

“I know you are come about something unpleasant, Bourrienne, I feel it. Spare me, I entreat you.”

“Not at all, madame. Something delightful. Something on which you have expressed fears to me which now can be set at rest for ever. The First Consul intends and is willing to pay all your debts. Every *sou* is to be settled.”

For a woman whose movements were slow and graceful she may be said to have jumped. She clasped her slender hands with an expression of delight, sitting bolt upright.

“O Bourrienne, you dear good friend! What do I not owe to you! I never could have had the courage. Thank heaven! I shall be grateful all my days, and I shall show it in every way in my power. And you are to manage it all? Splendid, magnificent! Now I shall know peace. I have been in agony night and day.”

This was a little difficult for Bourrienne to believe, having seen her the very soul of pleasure and gentle gaiety at the dinner and dance the night before—playing the part of the Queen of the Tuileries as to the manner born. Why should she not top the part? Setting aside her natural attitude, she had served her novitiate in Italy.

“Indeed, madame, I know well it has been an anxiety, and your relief must be very great, but I fear it cannot be managed between you and me. The First Consul requires a statement of the debts, exact in every detail.”

A faint shriek escaped her. She covered her face with hands loaded with diamonds and sank back on the sofa.

“Never. I never can. There is no more to be said. I would die sooner than that Bonaparte should know the facts.”

Silence. Then a muffled voice from beneath the diamonds. “Who told him? Who spoke of the subject? You?”

“Not I, madame. Talleyrand. He has much influence with the First Consul. You know that. But indeed I assure you a statement must be presented. The debts will not be paid else.”

Another silence. It became painful, and Bourrienne looked at his shoes. Her hands dropped slowly and revealed Josephine in deep meditation. “You

are a good man, Bourrienne. You would not deceive Bonaparte?"

"No, madame, I should prefer not to. Would you?"

"I? I have not the courage of a mouse! But, if I were to make a statement to you, would you put it before him! *You* would not be deceiving him then."

The man could hardly repress a smile at the woman's feeble ruse. Yet it had its charm of helplessness. It was not impossible by any means to understand her power of disarming her terrible husband. But it did not disarm Bourrienne. Risk being found out by Napoleon? No, not for her nor a thousand like her. His air was seriousness itself.

"Madame, I cannot deceive you respecting the disposition of the First Consul. He believes that you owe a considerable sum and is willing to discharge it on condition that you never run into debt again. You will probably have to endure some bitter reproaches and a violent scene, but the scene will be just the same for the whole as for a part. And remember—if you conceal any of your debts the creditors will make a fuss and it will come to his ears and then—woe betide you!" Bitter tears filled Josephine's eyes and trickled over her rouge without, however, disturbing the surface. Since she wept so often it must at least be recorded that she did it very gracefully, though the results were naturally a little trying to autumnal beauty. Rouge deserves much consideration, and it was one of Napoleon's axioms that two things become a woman very well—tears and rouge. Few men have had better opportunities for an opinion on both, and since Josephine knew this her rouge was her first preoccupation.

But neither moved Bourrienne, though he affected pitying sympathy.

"Alas, I am right, madame. Trust to me. Reveal all. The result will be the same. You will hear but once the disagreeables he will let fly, but if there are reservations they will be always coming up."

She stanchd the tears with a cobweb of lace and quietly dabbed the rouge.

"To think I am here in the Tuileries, virtually in the position of a Queen of France, and subject to these misfortunes! At this moment, Bourrienne, believe me or no, I don't possess fifty francs in the world. I am as poor as a beggar in the street. I see what you say is true and naturally I am all frankness. My notion of married life is that all should be perfect openness, but when one is dealing with harsh facts— Oh, Bourrienne, Bourrienne!"

He shook his head dolorously; she resumed:

"If only I were strong-minded—but alas! I shall never be that! I can never own all—never! Now, Bourrienne, swear to keep my secret unless I

release you.”

He swore.

“Then I owe about two million francs, but I shall only confess six hundred thousand, and the rest I shall pay off little by little as I get money. I shall have no more debts. Never—never again.”

Even Bourrienne could hardly restrain a gasp as the amount was mentioned, and nothing to show for it but woman’s frippery and a house for which Napoleon had allotted less than three hundred thousand francs.

“My God, madame, how appalling! Indeed you are right! You can never confess that,” he said almost involuntarily. He knew whatever happened he himself would not face Napoleon with such figures. His wrath let loose devastated all before it—the just and the unjust fell alike, and Bourrienne had no notion of perishing for Josephine.

“I told you—I told you so!” she cried in violent terror. “Isn’t it awful? We could never tell him. The bills terrify me. Look at them!”

She thrust a fluttering pile into his hands. Some for eighty or ninety thousand francs—some for less.

“Lord, madame!” cried Bourrienne in blank dismay. “But do you admit that these are correct? Lord bless me!—thirty-eight new hats of enormous cost in one month, besides eighteen hundred francs for heron plumes! Do you wear out two hats in one day?”

“My dear Bourrienne, a woman must clothe herself, and Bonaparte would be the first to rage if I made myself a scare-crow. What am I to do? You will see, I know, that we can’t tell him the truth. It would be positively wicked to disturb his mind when he has so much to think of. We cannot be so selfish!”

Bourrienne threw up his hands in despair. She brought another lapful of bills and the argument drizzled on for half an hour of gentle tearful persistence on the part of Josephine and frantic, fruitless gesticulation on Bourrienne’s. Finally he capitulated.

“If I undertake to manage this matter to the best of my ability, madame—and God only knows if I can!—will you give me your sacred promise to live within your very handsome allowance and get into debt no more?”

She replied with the most persuasive gentleness and a winning smile to melt a heart of granite. Certainly when Josephine besought she was irresistible. Her whole exquisite body spoke for her.

“My friend, can you doubt me? After this terrible lesson can you suppose I would risk my happiness again? No—that is done with. I will wear my old hats cheerfully, and if Bonaparte objects I will ask him to buy me a new one like a *bonne bourgeoisie*. I give you my promise. And you will tell him the debts amount to six hundred thousand francs?”

And again the argument was resumed but with her star in the ascendant. If ever a star was worked to the limit of its possibilities it was hers. But she did not trust it in vain.

He promised and had the satisfaction of seeing the adorable Josephine restored to smiles and contentment. Not so himself.

The unfortunate young secretary proceeded to Napoleon’s cabinet, and feeling himself between the devil and the deep sea, met the piercing flash of those terrible blue-grey eyes as best he could.

“The debts?”

“A terrible sum, Citizen First Consul. Six hundred thousand francs. But will you remember this includes the purchase of Malmaison, and I am desired by Madame Bonaparte to offer you her sacred promise that she will never again place herself in such a position. You can rely on that. And also such as the debts are it has been an organized system of plunder by the tradesmen, of which the blame is not hers. Of this I can assure you!”

Vain—impossible to record the wrath of Napoleon! He was far too shrewd either to believe Bourrienne, or to shift the onus of solving the problem from the secretary’s and Josephine’s shoulders to his own. Therefore he raged at the appalling sum of six hundred thousand francs until Bourrienne thanked his protecting stars that he had not named the true figure. He retired, battered and exhausted by the pelt of epithets, to summon the tradesmen and deal with them—the more sternly because of the punishment he himself had just undergone.

He was accustomed in later life to refer to that episode as his private Marengo—so great and unexpected was his victory!

“I spared neither threats nor reproaches,” he told Josephine, “I overwhelmed them. I would not permit them to utter a word. Figuratively, I held in one hand the warrants for their arrest (for they knew the First Consul capable of any discipline) and in the other the notes for their payment. They chose the latter with groanings which cannot be uttered, and I settled the whole affair for six hundred thousand francs. But, madame, I warn you gravely. Do not presume on this success. It cannot recur. And if your debts

do, it will not be I who can dare to stand between you and the consequences.”

She almost fell upon his neck and embraced him, so great was her joy and gratitude.

“My good Bourrienne! The thieves! They were lucky to get a *sou*!”

“When I tell you, madame, that one villain accepted thirty thousand for a bill of eighty thousand, I trust you will see how you have been robbed.”

“Indeed I do, my friend. And now you see it was not my fault at all. You do me justice at last. I only spent six hundred thousand francs, which is nothing at all out of the way. Admit it!”

Bourrienne groaned in spirit, but was silent. What use to remonstrate?

“There is another little matter, Bourrienne,” continued Josephine softly. “Sit down by me, my friend, and remember it is only to your kind ear I would breathe it. You know my position with the Bonaparte family. Nothing could be more distressing. They are one and all my bitter enemies.”

Bourrienne nodded. He found this confidence interesting, for in such troubled waters a man who has his own interest at heart may well fish successfully.

“I need support among them—and therefore when General Murat asked Napoleon for the hand of Caroline and was scornfully refused I threw all my influence on his side. Caroline was frantically in love with the great handsome brute of a Murat and I resolved to help her. Of course, *privately*, I feel it is only a Bonaparte who could stomach the son of an innkeeper with manners to match his origin and the conceit of twenty reigning belles, but that is *her* look-out! I gave Bonaparte no rest day or night, and at last, the man being a very gallant soldier, he agreed as you know—so that Caroline owes me eternal gratitude and I have one friend in the nest of vipers.”

Bourrienne slowly shook his head. An excellent judge of character he recognized in Caroline, young as she was, the clearest and most ruthless intelligence in the family, after her brother’s. He was very sure that no such weakness as gratitude would stand in her way. He said nothing, but Josephine read the gesture. A faint flush deepened her rouge.

“It is my nature to be kindly and I hope Caroline will remember it. She ought. I have a further intention, Bourrienne—again solely for the ear of a friend whom I trust above all others.”

Bourrienne assumed an air of the deepest feeling, knowing perfectly well that whoever Josephine happened to be addressing was at that moment

the friend she trusted above all others. It naturally followed that no intention of hers remained a secret long. She continued seriously.

“Yes, my friend, it has become clear to me that if some of the Bonapartes are not attached to my interests they will never cease their efforts to ruin me. I must unite my family with theirs. I destine Hortense for Louis Bonaparte.”

Blank astonishment was his first emotion. The dark melancholic suspicious young man and the bright-cheeked blue-eyed girl full of laughter and hope and young delight in life, dear to all who knew her, touching even Napoleon’s stern egotism into pleasure in her flower-like grace! Could her mother think such a thing possible?

He said slowly after a moment:

“He will not refuse, madame. The First Consul’s favour is precious and Mademoiselle de Beauharnais has your own charm. But—with your dislike of the family—and Louis is by no means the most favourable specimen of them—is it—well, is it a *possible* arrangement?”

She was eager in a moment as he had seldom seen her.

“Possible? *Necessary*, my friend! I have no children. I don’t give up hope, but so it is. Now if Hortense and Louis have a son—there is an heir of Napoleon’s blood and mine! He is attached to Hortense. But let us speak no more of this now. Consider it and give me your support. What I want to say is that Caroline’s marriage has led up to an affair of the utmost importance. Could you imagine it? Bonaparte has taken my festooned diamond necklace for a wedding present to her. Actually took it out of my jewel casket on the plea that he could afford nothing on account of my debts! I ask you! I live under a tyranny! Any impartial person must admit that?”

“And have you no redress, madame?” asked Bourrienne, willing to shift the talk to lighter subjects until he should have time to consider.

“Redress? Bonaparte? No. But I have a plan. Bourrienne, my dear friend, I have discovered that my jeweller Foncier has the most magnificent pearls belonging to Marie Antoinette. I never saw more perfect colour, shape and water. And such a bargain! A mere trifle of 250,000 francs. Dirt cheap, as you see. Well—it would have been madness to let such a chance slip and I went off to Berthier—the Minister of War can do everything as you know, and he is an old friend of mine since the Italian days. . . .”

She was sitting up erect now, dropped fan and sparkling eyes, so pretty that Napoleon himself might have softened. Bourrienne, profoundly interested, never gave a thought to the woman. Thank God she had pitched on Berthier this time!

“What happened, madame?”

“He bit his nails, but he did it. Ah, there’s nothing like a true friend! Didn’t I promise you I had done with debt? He got the money through the contractors for the war hospital service, and look here!”

From beneath the sofa cushion she pulled out an exquisite jewel casket of blue velvet. Within it lay a pearl necklace of perfect water—the creamy tints melting into pale rose in the iridescence—a queen’s jewel indeed.

“Paid for and mine!” she cried joyfully. “But now, Bourrienne, comes *your* turn. I daren’t wear it. Napoleon is the most awful busybody ever created. He knows all my necklaces and I shall get into frightful trouble if I show it. He would be furious about the contractors. And I *must* wear it—what woman could have the fortitude to lock this darling thing up? And tomorrow there’s a large party here. O my friend—O Bourrienne!” She clasped her hands in lovely pleading.

He protested with words and gestures. Let it be Berthier this time. He himself had done his part. She looked at him tragically, her hands still praying for his help.

“O Bourrienne! You whom I always trust. And such a simple thing! He will ask me where I got my pearls and I shall say I have had them a long time. I want you only to stand near me and support what I say.”

“But, madame,—I have a character to lose,—I entreat,—I—” She laid her hand playfully over his lips.

“If you give yourself time to think you will never, never betray a friend who trusts you. You are incapable of brutality.”

But Bourrienne fled like Joseph from the wife of Potiphar, though with another species of chastity to protect, resolving to pledge himself to nothing.

On the next evening the hosts assembled to receive the guests, Bourrienne in attendance on his master.

Josephine glided into the magnificent salon, shimmering in white satin heavily embroidered in silver: about her beautiful neck the pearls of that unhappy Queen whose miseries might have made her shudder to wear them. Could even a frivolous woman forget that the sharp edge of the guillotine had sheared through the throat where they once lay in moonlight beauty? Especially one who had so nearly shared the same fate.

Napoleon’s quick eye sprang to attention at once.

“Where did you get those pearls? I don’t remember them.”

“O *mon Dieu!* You have seen them a dozen times. It is the necklace which the Cisalpine Republic gave me. I generally wear it in my hair.”

Her eyes on his were blue and smiling as a sky in June.

“But surely—”

“O you forgetful one! Ask Bourrienne. He knows them.”

Bourrienne nearly choked. No one suspected Josephine of intellect, but tact, developed into cunning, may very well supersede it. He was fairly caught. The cold searchlight of Napoleon’s glance swept him.

“Well, Bourrienne, what do you say? Do *you* recollect the necklace?”

“Yes, Citizen First Consul, I have certainly seen it before. I know it perfectly.”

Napoleon turned away, dismissing the matter, and Bourrienne shot an angry glance at Josephine’s mischievous smile. He had enough risks of his own to run—as had every one in attendance on the great man. He would certainly run no more for her.

But Napoleon had no time for pearls and other follies of women from that night for many a day to come. To justify the First Consul of France to Europe as the Superman he claimed to be, Italy must be reconquered, the Austrians humbled to the dust. Blood is the wave that floats a conqueror to the level of a throne and in his stern preoccupations there was no room for anything but the will to power in France and out of it, which day by day possessed him to the extinction of all lesser feelings.

He was now about to perform one of the most amazing feats of his amazing life—to pour his soldiers from the very height of the Alps down to the plains of Italy, while all the breathless world wondered, and before him was victory winged and splendid. He was to return the arbiter of Europe. What time had he for Josephine and her trivialities? She was now nothing. He was all. And his romance was shaping—a world’s epic written in blood and steel. Neither God nor man could hinder him.

CHAPTER XVII

THE EMPEROR

ONE summer evening in the softly falling dusk Signora Letizia sat in the splendidly furnished salon of the house her son had given her in Paris. She was dressed very simply, but with the stateliness which suited the sternly handsome outline of her features, in a dress of black velvet, relieved with yellowish old lace about the bust and sleeves. Her old friend, Signora Panoria, sat beside her, and Laurette, the three weeks' bride of Junot, with Pauline the beautiful on a sofa a little behind their elders listening to their talk—if Paulette could be said to pay attention to anything but the little hand-mirror of tortoise-shell and gold in which she slowly surveyed her face feature by feature, absorbed as a poet in his dream. The talk was Italian—the house language of the four, as it might be called, though Laurette was possibly more French-fluent than Italian.

“Yes, it is very luxurious. I look about me,” said Signora Letizia continuing the talk slowly, “and ask myself: Am I happier here than in the Casa Buonaparte in Corsica? One of those pictures in the big gilt frames—fat naked women bad for any Christian to look at—would have kept me and my brood in food for a year. More! Do I like to look at it? No, I don't. Do I like these gim-crack gilt chairs and the awful cold of this big draughty room? No, I don't. Or to see my three girls naked to the waist every evening and spending every *sou* Napoleon gives them on their backs? No, Signora Panoria, I don't! And I get no sympathy from any of them. Napoleon doesn't understand a bit what I feel about it. He may learn too late one day. Napoleon doesn't know everything which he imagines he does.”

Madame Permon looked at her friend with her little subtle smile. It had always been a mystery to her how a simple rather dull nature such as her friend's—direct and obstinate—could have produced the haughty complications of Napoleon. And the other children were by no means of the same stuff; earthenware where he was porcelain. Could there have been anything in the rumour which thirty years before had connected the beautiful Letizia's name with that of the aristocratic de Marbœuf, Governor General of Corsica? Who could tell? It might account for several perplexing traits in Napoleon's character. But surely, no!—the idea grew comic as she looked at the rock-faced woman so much older in appearance than herself. That elderly dress was ridiculous, if one cared! But Letizia Bonaparte did not care

one straw. She ploughed on her way doggedly, and never asked herself what people thought of her. She simply believed them to be ignorant and wrong-headed and they concerned her no more.

“But surely after all those tremendous victories in Italy and the magnificent success of the Consulate, your mind must be at rest, Signora Letizia? He came back from Italy the greatest soldier of all time. His passage over the Alps with the army for his pounce on the Austrians will never be forgotten. And Marengo. When was there ever such a victory? Every foe but England at his feet, and peace made even with England. And France the first nation in Europe. Italy our own again. Law and order restored in France. Napoleon First Consul and the other two only dummies, for nobody thinks or speaks of them. What more could any mother wish?”

“There’s nothing safe in this world but a good sum of money invested in the funds. A soldier’s booty is light come, light go, and that’s what all my family is depending on. Elise, Pauline, Caroline, all married to men tied to Napoleon’s coat-tails. If he goes, they go. The same with the boys. I ask you, can Joseph, Lucien, Louis, earn an honest *sou*? And Jerome is becoming a regular little profligate already that wants a sound spanking daily. And Napoleon himself— What has he to count on? His wife pours money away as a cook pours potato water down the sink—an elderly slut that will never bear him a child. And the other consuls will ruin him as sure as I sit here. It’s all jealousy and plotting and what’s one man against two?” Signora Panoria still smiled her little Mona Lisa smile full of irony and finesse.

“You may trust Napoleon with the consuls, my friend. *Dio mio*, the question is, can you trust the two consuls with *him*! He’s the big pike that will swallow the other two fish. Gobble, gobble, and one fish where there were three!”

Signora Letizia turned a stony eye upon her.

“I’d have you know, Panoria, that all my boys are good Republicans and Napoleon perhaps the best. He won’t upset the Republican constitution. Certainly he likes his own way, but I taught him to knock under when he must. Eh, Paula?”

Paulette, studying the effect of a slow smile in the hand glass, agreed hastily. No one opposed the Mother of the Gracchi in her own family—excepting Napoleon, and he seldom. Paulette twittered her contribution to the talk.

“The day after he was made First Consul, he said to Lucien, ‘Now we must rebuild and do it solidly.’ He says he means to make France the first

country in the world, and he's doing it, I should say! What is there to bother about?"

"Much you know about it, my little Paulette!" answered Madame Permon, smiling. "I understand Napoleon much too well to doubt either his powers or intention. He's a fatalist, Signora Letizia, and fate has him by the shoulder. Haven't I heard him say—haven't you?—'We must be greater in spite of ourselves. It's wise and politic to do what fate decrees and go where the march of events leads.' Where do you suppose it's leading him?"

Signora Letizia almost snarled with irritability.

"Straight into bankruptcy and ruin if he keeps on with that wife of his. Do you know what her debts amounted to that Bourrienne cheated Napoleon into paying? Well, I *do*. The creditors howled like dogs over their losses. And she's almost as deep in debt again. She made the money fly while he was risking his life in Italy. No more lovers now, I know. I suppose there comes a time when every woman tires of that folly and she's mortally frightened of Napoleon's divorcing her. But she's a fool in grain and—"

"Even her everlasting smile is only to spare herself trouble," cried Paulette with animation worthy of a new *toilette de bal*. "Does she really care for the people she caresses into liking her? Not she! Half the petitions they give her for my brother she forgets! A man the other day left his tailor's bill with her in mistake for his petition, and she told him next day that she and Napoleon had read it with utmost pity and his fortune was made! Even I haven't the heart for that. But it never will last. Napoleon is no Saint Anthony now, and Caroline encourages him—he makes half his appointments at her house. She gets his ear that way."

Signora Letizia turned an annihilating eye on Paulette, and her rose-pink toilette with hat crowned with ostrich plumes to match framing her flower-face.

"You three fools do your share to ruin him! I wouldn't say it except before Signora Panoria, who knows you as well as I do. But let me tell you the day will come when you will be glad your old mother wasn't dazzled by all this show of prosperity. No—not for a minute."

She turned to Madame Permon.

"People call me avaricious because I don't flaunt about in diamonds like the rest of them—but you know me better, Panoria. A woman with a family must keep the stocking full as best she can. Especially with a leech like Josephine to suck us white."

The door opened on the last word and a man stood framed in the space, looking quietly at the little group of women. Napoleon. For a moment he did not even smile. He was considering them and their possibilities for mischief as he always did every one nowadays. Then the smile obediently cloaked suspicion and he advanced, speaking his strong ugly Italian.

“Mothers before even friends! How are you, mother mine? And my fair foe, Madame Permon? And Madame Loulou—how is Junot? And Paulette? *Dio mio*—what a hat! Well—I like to see women dress well. Josephine knows that. I come with a bit of news for my mother, ladies.”

Madame Permon rose instantly.

“Come, Laurette. The First Consul wishes most naturally—”

He caught her hand.

“Now, now, madame! This is a family occasion, and an old friend is one of the family. Caroline and Josephine are on their way here. Stay!”

“I really beg—”

“No, Signora, no. Do you suppose I mind the spiteful tittle-tattle against my government which you allow in your salon? Women’s little tongues—I allow for them! They are weak enough to be harmless!”

Panoria’s eyes sparkled dangerously.

“There’s not a word in my salon but what you might hear, First Consul. Believe it or no! Laurette!”

The door opened and Josephine billowed softly in; she had always the movement of a wave lapsing gently on smooth sands,—the perfect curve,—the soothing monotonous music. Making courteous reverence to Signora Letizia, she flattered either unresponsive cheek with a kiss, and glided to a chair. Before she could speak the door opened again to disclose Caroline Murat with the air of a happy child and cheeks of pure rose velvet belying the cool calculating spirit underneath.

“What is it, what is it, Napoleon?” she cried. “Murat sent me here, and I made the horses fly. Signora Panoria, how beautiful you look! And my little bride Laurette! Tell us what the news is, Napoleon! Quick!”

The long room was darkening as evening settled down outside, filling it with a strange quiet like still water. As he walked up and down after his fashion, hands locked behind him, silence fell on the women and all watched him keenly, thrilling with expectation.

He began, still continuing his march, slowly, more as if thinking aloud than addressing others—speaking very low but clearly.

"I may say that since I have been First Consul I have restored France from the chaos of the Revolution. They tell me when I visit the Departments that the people say with one voice: 'The only thing now left us to wish is a good harvest. We have all else.' Well, that is true. I have re-established religion by my Agreement with the Pope. I have put education on a sound foundation. I have made the sword of France terrible. I resolved they should say I was a great ruler in peace as a great leader in war. Again—well! May one look for gratitude? I did so look—the French people has a heart and a great one—"

He paused, turning so that he commanded the little group, dim in the dusk.

"To-day, *mesdames*, the Council of State offered me the Consulate for life, with power to name my successor."

There was a silence so breathless as to be painful, though probably only two women there forecasted the vast future even with the hazard of a guess.

Paulette sprang up with a little cry and ran towards her brother, hands outstretched. Caroline fixed her searching eyes on Josephine in the shadow of the curtain, but could see nothing. She had withdrawn deeper into the darkness.

Madame Permon struck the necessary note of commonplace yet with a shade of embarrassment clouding her perfect aplomb. She advanced towards Napoleon cordially but with the utmost deference.

"I congratulate the First Consul with all my heart but I congratulate France still more. I rejoice to have been present to hear this excellent news, and I go now that the family may rejoice together. Laurette!"

Laurette, timidly following her mother with bright eyes dimmed with awe, murmured her little unintelligible felicitations. To think that Junot was the follower, the friend of this mighty ruler and that he had given Junot the magnificence of a dowry for herself! Could one be grateful enough to such an Olympian Jove, sovereign of France for life? She cast a glance back into the shadowy room before the door closed, as she glided out after her mother.

The family, left alone, was still silent for a moment as though to give the guests time to get out of hearing.

Then Caroline said eagerly:

"And did you accept the right to appoint a successor, brother?"

He resumed his march, not looking up—his hands locked behind his back.

“Not I. The pear is not ripe. Besides why should I? I have no children.”

The sharp bright eyes all focused on the shadow where Josephine sat, but there was no sound from her. The mother broke the silence.

“One cannot refuse to rejoice at any distinction, but I don’t like grandeur that swells people with pride and spendthrift notions. This is an occasion for plain speaking. I beg, Napoleon, that you will make your brothers and sisters understand that you are not going to pour out money on them like water. A rainy day—”

Caroline interrupted in her high clear voice.

“I should think we might have the decency to say we are pleased. I, at all events, am pleased and proud, brother, and Murat will be. He has a heart to love and honour you, and so have I.”

She went up and kissed him on the cheek, eyes sparkling with joy.

“O if I were a man to help you!” she said. “Lucien and Joseph and Louis are men of gelatine, not marble. Words, words! Well, brother, I must go and rejoice with Murat. If you only had a son how perfect it would all be! That is a disaster and no less.”

“Indeed, yes,” followed Paulette’s pretty twitter.

“That’s the stumbling block everywhere for you. If—”

Suddenly Josephine could endure no longer. It had become unbearable. She broke out, her voice like a breathless sob, choking, hoarse, but insistent, clamouring her right to be heard.

“Blame God for it—not me! You call me the barren woman—O yes—I know—I know! And yet I have tried to be kind to you. I never stood in your way, any of you. The barren woman! Look at my beautiful Hortense—my beautiful Eugene? Am I barren? No—no, and—”

Caroline’s cool voice topped the situation.

“Ah, sister, you were younger then!” and there followed the silence of one who has had a blow in the heart. Caroline laughed aloud, glancing triumphantly at the rest. But even that insult could not break down Josephine’s feeble protest. A minute passed and the voice sobbed on.

“If a woman’s husband is unfaithful to her every day—is it her fault if she is barren? Look at home in your own family for the fault! Not me, not me. I could have children like the rest if I were decently treated. No, I will go and leave you to yourselves and you can abuse me as you will. I have never known a day’s peace since Bonaparte rose in the world. Not one. You

work like worms underground to ruin me— Do you think I am blind and deaf? Cruel—Cruel! What have I done to you?”

She came out of the shadows, like a wraith in her white straight dress and made for the door. No one stirred and she went out of the room with her hands before her, feeling the way like a blind woman. And again there was silence.

Napoleon called aloud harshly.

“Get the lamps lit. It gives one the blue devils—this dusk. Well—France is easy enough to rule after the women of one’s family! Women—”

He let himself go then. The deep underlying coarseness of his nature came out wherever sex asserted itself in him either in sensuality or in any kind of oppression where women were to suffer, and he spoke like a foul-mouthed man of the people, abusing his sisters as well as his wife. They listened, mute, to his accusations of unchastity and extravagance.

“I have put ladies of the noble families to wait upon my wife, to teach you all how to behave, for God knows you don’t know it,” he ended. “Hard lines on a man who must drag his family as well as himself up out of the mud! But no airs with me! And treat my wife with decency because she *is* my wife. No other reason—but that’s good enough for you and for her. Do you suppose I should let her or any other stand in my way a day unless I wanted her? And, while I want her, lick her shoes and be thankful!”

The door slammed and he was gone. The scene was over.

“And you may both of you get home too,” said Signora Letizia. “At my age I want peace. And you had better consider what will become of you if your folly sets Napoleon against you. *I* haven’t enough money to go round. Tell Elise I said this. Good night.”

Josephine, borne by swift horses, made her way back to her own apartments at St. Cloud feeling as if the fiends of retribution were on her heels. Life had indeed changed for her with Napoleon’s accession to power. Pleasure and luxury with a steady flow of money, though never enough for her needs, were delightful enough during long absences in Italy and Egypt, but terrible in his presence though irresistible to her as his dram to a drunkard. Her life bewildered but enchanted her.

And that dreadful childlessness! What had she left undone? Corvisart, the skilful physician, had sent her more than once to the waters of Plombières. He watched her health daily, found it sound, could give no reason why a happy childbirth should not release her from her dread, and by all his conclusions strengthened the certitude in her own heart that it was

Napoleon and not she who was to blame for their tragic disappointment. That was the chief agony of his amours to her. Suppose any of them should make him the father of a child he could believe to be his own? His own it need not necessarily be, for women are capable of all deception, she thought. But if he believed it! Then—then indeed, her star was set, and herself flung to the Clan to tear in pieces with the joy of long hatred.

The young and brilliant Madame de Rémusat was on duty in her boudoir when she reached it wearied almost to death. She sat composedly reading by a shaded lamp, very high-bred, quiet and self-controlled, a rather remarkable type of the Frenchwoman of great family. Even now—perfectly familiar by use—Josephine had a little awe of those very clear and quiet eyes, judging the world by such different standards—even inconveniently direct and simple with the simplicity of perfect breeding. Race spoke in every motion of her face and hands.

But yet one could confide in her—one could be sure she would not “tell,” as the children say. That quality of honour certainly had its conveniences in the Consular Court.

She rose, as Josephine entered, with her graceful little reverence, then stood on duty.

“You are tired, madame?”

“Yes—I must go to bed as soon as I can. I have been visiting my mother-in-law. There we heard the news of the First Consul’s being offered the Consulate for life.”

“They are crying it about the streets, madame. That is very great and good news. It is the position of a king.”

The very word stirred the cold agony in the heart of Josephine. She sat looking at the other woman with that pitiable self-pity which has no help for itself or others—a kind of inertness of suffering.

“Who knows that better than I? And when I heard it—I thought my heart would break. Kings must have heirs. I am a coward—I don’t pretend to be anything else, but there is no suffering—no experience however terrible I would not undergo to get clear of that reproach. You have children, madame. Do you think it is my fault? I have had children as all the world knows, and Corvisart says my constitution is sound.”

She looked with pitiful pleading at the happy young mother. The young great lady returned her tortured gaze serenely.

“Who can tell, madame? I really think the doctors know very little about it. But surely you rejoice in the First Consul’s triumph?”

“What have I to rejoice in? What is my life? The stiffness of etiquette is closing round me like ice. Under the Directory people knew how to enjoy themselves without restraint but this court is like a barrack and even the women have to march at the word of command. We are all slaves. Own it, for you know it!”

So Josephine, with the lack of prudence that won and alarmed all about her. When she needed sympathy she grasped for it without a thought.

“We are certainly well disciplined,” the other said reflectively, “but, madame, surely that is a wholesome reaction from the licence of the Revolution? I respect the First Consul’s aim.”

“Licence!” Josephine’s voice was a wailing complaint. “But look at himself. Look at his intrigues. I cannot have a passable woman about me but he makes her his own. In that room of his with the secret stair, you know as well as I what goes on. And to talk of the licence of the Directory! At least people then did not pretend to be better than they were. Bonaparte is always preaching about setting a good example and yet look what he does! We live in an atmosphere of hypocrisy now, and are we any the better? Does it really impose on the people?”

“I don’t consider it hypocrisy, madame. Rulers must discourage immorality publicly whatever they do themselves. I think it was the fault of the Directory that they preached what they practised—made it the rule of life.”

Josephine’s pale cheeks flushed. Perhaps any shaft at the Directory glanced too near. She drew her *cachemire* about her, shivering a little as if with cold.

“I am so tired I must go to bed. No *tric-trac* to-night. And pray have a message sent to Bourrienne desiring him to come and see me to-morrow morning. And have the First Consul told I have gone to bed when he returns from the house of Madame Bonaparte *mère*.”

They still slept together in the old *bourgeoise* fashion. The woman clung desperately to that bond. She had impressed on him that her light sleeping would be a protection in case of any attempt upon his life, and two narrow escapes from the spectre of assassination which is the nightmare of rulers made her words apposite. And when he was weary she would read him to sleep with that sweet-flowing voice of hers. He liked that *bourgeoise* fashion well enough still. It was familiar and had a touch of homely comfort to see her face on the pillow beside his. He felt as one may with an old retainer who has faults which one excuses. After all one might go further and fare worse! But her jealousy was a frightful nuisance—especially to a man who

felt that his needs and even his amusements transcended all the laws of custom and morality. The bond was wearing very thin now and she knew it.

Visiting her mother next day, Madame de Rémusat met Talleyrand, now possessed of enormous influence with Napoleon. With the freemasonry of the noble caste she frankly asked his opinion of the Life Consulate.

“Is it true greatness or are we dazzled by a false glitter of military success?” she asked. “Can your keen insight respect him?”

Talleyrand looked at her through narrowed lids, his thin lips set in a smile not mirthful.

“Does one ever respect any one? The good are too dull to be respected. The bad— Setting aside respect, I think Bonaparte the greatest force of this or any time. He means to be Emperor . . . You see that? A fine military title, he thinks. He objects to the title of King, and it has lamentable associations.”

“I guessed it long ago. Is it desirable for France—or ruin?”

He stretched his weak lamed legs before him, staring at the bright shoe-buckles.

“Desirable, what else? I was a revolutionary myself. One had to be at that time, but it went to the head of most men like a strong drug and France wallowed in the gutters. She needed a sharp medicine to restore sanity and she will get it. The patient will have a blood-letting that will bring down her fever. Our friend will see to that! But after—”

“Can he last?”

“I said a sharp medicine. Do people live on a medicine? And there is always England. Do you suppose Bonaparte himself believes in that set-out of flat-bottomed boats which is to conquer her? When the lords of the land meet the lords of the sea—the sea conquers. It is eternal. The land shifts and changes. But we shall see. Least said soonest mended. How does madame take the Life Consulate?”

“With great terror. I pity the poor woman. She has much to suffer.”

“Every dog has his day. She had hers and misused it. Not that I think it would have made any difference in the long run. That calf-love, and for such a woman, could not last. If you are a friend, tell her to hide her jealousy. She is pulling the bond too tight and it will break. The man is a brute. The ablest brute I ever saw and therefore must win, for he has no prohibitions. Not one. It will be interesting to see how Josephine will counter the demand for a child. If he flies higher I shall never be surprised if he suggests a supposititious child to her. But the truth is that he himself may be incapable of children. There is always that possibility and that is his own private fear

and his wife's safeguard. Fouché and I are watching. We hear of no result of any of the amours. So best! If the brute ever has a child of his own he will be unendurable. His megalomania will drive him to the mastership of the world. Talk to me from time to time, my child. We may be mutually useful."

From that interview Madame de Rémusat went very slowly and thoughtfully away. A woman of the aristocrats had much to consider in casting in the lot of herself and her family with the mushroom court.

The aristocrats could never be true friends of his. As he himself said: "An aristocracy is cold. It never forgives. It has no bowels." And neither Talleyrand nor the Rémusats forgave, any more than the regicides and men of the Revolution and Directory from whom the Master could not conceal his contempt.

So the palace was full of spiders spinning their webs of intrigue, each with his own golden fly to catch, and above them all sat the Man with the Broom whose despotic will could sweep all the webs into ruin, and above him—what? God, or Destiny, or Nothingness?

He said himself:

"The greater one is the less free-will one has: one depends on events and circumstances. I declare myself the most enslaved man in the world. My master has no pity, and by my master I mean the Nature of Things."

The Nature of Things. It is against this that the Gods themselves fight in vain, and humanity hopelessly.

That night a light foot outside Josephine's door—a girl in an agony of terror rushing to her mother for help.

"Mother, mother, the First Consul has told me I am to marry his brother Louis. O mother—mother!"

She had nothing to say but the one wail—"Mother, mother"—no other appeal on earth or heaven but that. For a long time it lasted. Yet Josephine, putting her arms about her, shedding tears herself, did not waver. Hortense, with hidden face blurred and swollen with weeping, went slowly away at last uncomforted knowing that there was no help for her. She too must be the victim of fate.

"Your child will be the First Consul's heir. It will save us all." Those were the words ringing in her ears and against them no appeal.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE IMPERIAL FAMILY

WHEN the offer of the Life Consulate was made the offer of Imperial dignity was at hand and few doubted its acceptance. In Egypt, with the ageless silence of the deserts before him, measuring his own force against that of nature and the treachery of men and women, Napoleon had stood at the parting of the ways. That choice comes to all great men. He might dedicate his enormous powers to the true service of France or loose them in blind obedience to the Nature of Things which takes no heed of what men call good or evil on its merciless way.

“It slayeth and it saveth, nowise moved
Except unto the working out of doom.”

And, choosing, he became and henceforth called himself a Man of Destiny. Why not? He had no love for France, no true tenderness for any living soul. Little rags of habitude with Josephine and his own family hung about him, very easily to be discarded if in any way they menaced his vast dream. He believed in himself as the Superman as he could never believe in God. “I am not as other men, and the laws of ordinary men have nothing to do with me,” he said. But a stern new law was to bind the Law-maker.

The Nature of Things impelled him to actions he had never contemplated. He who had loathed and ridiculed the bloody murder of royalty in the Revolution himself ordered the murder of the Duc d’Enghien, the Bourbon prince entrapped into his power. That deed sent a cold shudder through the civilized world, but he strode on unheeding, and if he flinched at his own deed did not show it. The Monarchists needed a lesson. They had got it, and no more need be said. If any courageous man had told Napoleon that he had become the slave of his success he would have laughed, and yet nothing in the world was more true. The fetters were about his hands and feet.

And France, like a woman who has found her master, surrendered herself wholly to him.

So on May 18th, 1804, the Imperial dignity was solemnly offered to the former little Corsican lieutenant of artillery now aged thirty-five, and he too sat among the Cæsars. He received it with concealing calm, and the members of the Senate marching to the salon of Josephine proclaimed her

Empress of the French and were received with her own uncomprehending and faultless grace. The little Creole—child of the tropic island of Martinique—the nobody—she too sat in the seat of her masters, a crowned slave ankleted and braceleted with great jewels.

Was she happy? No—but dazed, stunned by astonishment at the destiny thrust upon her. Outside a great thunderstorm broke with the roaring of lions let loose and people murmured of the perilous omen, but she did not hear it. Her mind was travelling the strange stages which had led her to the throne, that glittering goal which she had never foreseen.

“Your Majesty!” said her courtiers, and were shy and awkward over the disused words which the Revolution had made penal.

Hortense, now wife of Louis Bonaparte and mother of a son born nine months after her marriage, was left alone with her mother when the crowd of unaccustomed courtiers had taken themselves off, after playing their parts absurdly enough. They sat in the boudoir of the Empress, and she had dismissed her women for suddenly her heart had cried out for some known thing to cling to in this immense strangeness and the deluge of change.

Hortense knelt before her, thin to transparency, frail as a sheathed flower-bud, her head on her mother’s knees. Outside the dusk was tangling itself like smoke in the trees of St. Cloud dripping with thunder-rain. Josephine smoothed her daughter’s bright hair in silence. All words seemed inadequate to the event.

Hortense spoke at last, without raising her face.

“Mother, do you get any happiness from it?”

How could she tell, she who knew her mother’s passion for luxury and magnificence, the pliable nature lending itself with equal laxity to laughter or tears? What could she believe who had seen so much sacrificed to what she herself thought so little? All she knew was that at the age of eighteen her girlish gaiety was petrified in her never to rise again from that living death of splendour. Could it mean any more to any one living? The answer was stumbling and hesitating as Josephine stared at the rain outside.

“I don’t know. Of course it’s wonderful. An Empress! I can’t fix my mind on it and see it clear. It breaks into sparkles when I try to think, and dazzles me. Yet I knew it was coming. But happiness? In Italy and at the Tuileries I learnt how to receive people. Still . . .”

“I was not thinking of that,” Hortense said, with bowed head.

“I know. You were thinking—am I still frightened because I have no child? Not nearly so much. I almost died of terror when the Empire was

spoken of. But now—your boy, Hortense. Look how Napoleon pets him. He would have adopted him already but for the Clan. The Bonaparte blood. He is the heir. And these wretched Bonapartes cannot ruin a child of their own family. Your happy marriage, Hortense. That has saved us—you and Eugene and me.”

“My happy marriage!” she echoed faintly. “I tried not to grudge my life for you and Eugene, but—do you know what Lucien, Caroline and the rest are spreading now? I heard it yesterday.”

“No. What?” whispered Josephine in quick terror. The Clan overhung her like a nightmare.

Silence. She put her hand under the girl’s face and raised it, but the eyes were shut like those of a mask, with blue swollen shadows underneath. Only the eyelids twitched with pain. Hortense tried to speak but the words choked in her throat. She swallowed them down and tried again, weakly.

“They are saying that little Napoleon is Bonaparte’s child, and that you connived at and hurried the marriage. Louis says he believes it too, and my life is—*dreadful!*”

Hot colour flooded Josephine’s cheeks. She flung her arms about Hortense and clasped her to her breast, pressing her face down upon it as if to shut out the light of day. How could she think and reason like other people when such tossing waves of emotion were always breaking in her brain? One thing after another. She got no rest—none! The only way was to grow callous if one could and forget them in other things, except when she gave it all up and turned to buying the idle toys the tradesmen of Paris brought to the daily bazaar in the room she kept for them. That helped her—was her opium. Even now at the back of her mind there fluttered the toilettes an Empress must have. Leroy—his perfect taste. He would know! That was the under-layer of thought. On the surface—Hortense.

She said passionately:

“The brutes—the liars! They none of them believe it.” Her tone was not natural even in her own ears. “Louis doesn’t believe it?”

“No—but he pretends to and he said to me: ‘You’re only a Bonaparte now. Our interests are yours! Those of your own people concern you no more.’ And then—he spoke of women vilely. It is frightful the way those Bonaparte men speak of women. Does the First Con—the Emperor?”

“Not before you, my child. He says you force him to believe in virtue. But Louis—”

Hortense looked at her with wearied blue eyes—the depths almost vacant of thought—like one driven past realization of her woes. She answered mechanically.

“He says he will watch me always and that I am to come here very little because he hates you and Eugene. But there’s no use talking of it. Done is done. All I say is—was it worth it—was it worth it for this?”

She pointed to the window. Outside there was a great *fanfare* of trumpets, a shout—Napoleon returning from the review—The Emperor.

“What does all that help one?” she said.

They stared into each other’s eyes in miserable silence—and then Hortense rose heavily and began to gather up her cloak. Josephine put out imploring hands.

“Your husband will be an Imperial Highness, *ma fille chérie*. Bonaparte has told me. Nearly a million francs a year to begin with. Everything the world can give you. Everything—”

The unhappy girl collected herself.

“Everything but love and peace. The only two things I want. We have never had them—never. You will see that when this second child is born it will be made a misery to me like all the rest. I hope you will be happy, mother. You will have all you want.”

If it was a reproach it was so gently said that it did not sting. Josephine clasped her again and overwhelmed her with kisses. There was a box of lovely things for the child. Avrillon would find it—would—

Hortense with her gentle cold kiss got herself dutifully away. She could be heard exchanging brief greetings with the Emperor in the anteroom. Then he came in alone, and flung himself into the armchair by the window.

“Hortense looks like a ghost. What’s the matter? I suppose Louis has been running after some other woman. Wives should get used to that, and you should tell her so. Why God made women such fools, if he did make them, only God knows!”

It was the God dethroned by the Revolution to whom he referred. None other was present to his mind then or ever. Beyond was only a vastness with which one could not concern oneself practically, though it made an imposing hinterland for the romance of his dream.

She could not answer for the moment, unable in a wild confusion of ideas to decide whether to reveal or hide what Hortense had told her. If she could think it would set the Clan in its true light, break the bond between

him and them. But would it? He thought himself indebted to Lucien to a certain extent for two years' spade-work in smoothing his road to the throne, and if he meant to parcel out Europe among a band of servile kings his own family would be wanted.

He did not notice her flushed silence, jumped up, went to the window to watch the last swinging files of soldiers disappearing into the dusk. Everything was at an end. The first day of the Empire was all but done, going down in a sunless sunset and weeping rain. He turned and looked sharply at her.

"Hey, *Madame l'Impératrice*, you look rather glum too! You'll have plenty to think of, getting ready for the coronation. Let it go no further yet—but I intend to bring the Pope to Paris to crown us. Everything must be done to make it brilliant. The French like tinsel."

Tinsel—the Pope! Even the immediate alarm postponed itself to that tremendous suggestion. Crowned, and by the Pope in the face of Europe! No more talk of divorce for the woman consecrated and blessed by the holiest hands in the world! If that were to be—oh, if it were—the load of anxiety it would roll from her heart!

"Bonaparte! But he will never come!" she said, her large eyes distended with astonishment. "You mean we must go to Rome. But then—"

"Rome? Not I!" he answered, with his harshest laugh, and his legs stretched out before him. "He will come where I bid him. He has felt the whip before and since Marengo. No—get ready your prettiest gimcracks and look your best. The old Courts shall see what the new Court can do. And tell Hortense she will be an Imperial Highness before she can turn round. And tell *me* what is the matter with her?"

Hurriedly calculating consequences but unable to forecast them, she told him, supporting herself on the back of the chair she stood by. Silence followed. Not a word for what appeared a long time. He was revolving it in that great massive head of his which she believed held as many wisdoms and projects as the globe of the world itself. One might see thoughts indecipherable passing across the glooms of his eyes sombre and still, he motionless as a sculptured Cæsar. Suddenly, while she waited in panting alarm, came an irrelevance, as it seemed.

"The people adore me. Paris went mad over me to-day, and Paris is France. Laplace said, 'Thanks to the genius of the Emperor the whole of Europe will soon be one immense family, united by the same religion and the same code of laws.' That is true. For a long time I have seen it. What an Empire! What an Empire!"

Could it be possible that absorbed in his thoughts he had not even heard her? She could never have the courage to repeat it—never. It might be he deliberately chose to ignore it. He was evidently considering something in the depths of his mind.

With what suspense, what terror she waited for the end! Suddenly again he was surveying her with his unfathomable smile—neither angry nor perturbed—only smiling like a gleam on the surface of unfathomable ocean.

“Tell Hortense not to worry herself. She has no reason to. For the future I foresee I must have an heir, and if the people believe that Hortense’s eldest son is mine also they will be the readier to accept him as of my blood. You may yet have cause to bless my family’s skill with the lie, Josephine: Hortense also. A man is worth nothing who cannot lie at need, and this lie may be exceedingly useful to us all.”

Words died on her tongue. He laughed and, pulling her ear gently as a sign of good favour, left the room.

The only thought clear-cut in her mind at the end of that exhausting day was that his acceptance of the Imperial dignity instead of pushing forward the question of divorce had silenced it for ever. The heir was assured, and who would dare to set aside the Empress, acclaimed by France, crowned by the sacred hand of the Pope? Her star again! The very event she had most dreaded had secured her position. So it had always been: so it would always be—triumph snatched out of defeat.

Many changes crowded upon the Empress and her *entourage* now. An imperial Court? Then indeed the old etiquette of the Kings of France lying under the dust and ashes of the Revolution must be exhumed and revived. Let Madame Campan be sent for in hot haste from the school she had set up to educate the aspiring demoiselles of the Revolution in the manners of their betters. She had been in close personal attendance on Marie Antoinette, Archduchess of Austria, Queen of France. No other than she could advise on the formation of the Empress’s court and the sacred etiquette which must hedge her divinity from the public, and indeed from her own depredations—for dear indeed to the heart of Josephine were the easy manners of the Directory, the good-natured familiarity of her circle with her and with every one else. That certainly must end, and the Empress of the French set aloft in cold grandeur ray only condescensions and distant urbanities from her splendid height—moralities also, for, except for his own distractions, Napoleon was resolved that his court should set an example of all the virtues. It would be a political master stroke to set the former court of France in shadow by the moral brilliance of his own.

With some alarm the easy-tempered Creole saw the walls of glass ascending about her through which envious eyes might look but familiarity never approach. Yet there were compensations. It was much to be an Empress. It was almost more to realize how utterly and for ever she had eclipsed the Bonaparte sisters. And not only herself but Hortense also had outsoared them. Joseph and Louis had become Imperial Princes and swaggered about Paris a little too vividly in their new glories. And Hortense and Julie, their wives, were Imperial Princesses to be beheld through long vistas of awe, and the uncle of the Emperor, Fesch, now blossomed out into a rose-red cardinal, had already been appointed ambassador to the Vatican, no less astonished at his own dignity than resolved to make the best financial use of it.

Lucien had taken himself off to Italy in high dudgeon at the anger of Napoleon on the revelation that on the death of his first wife he had taken to himself a second nobody, a divorced Madame Jouberton, who had already borne him a child. This folly was inexplicable to Napoleon.

No decorations—no newly founded Legion of Honour crosses and ribbons for the man who had so little respect for the skyward progress of his family! Let him decamp until he came to a saner state of mind and agreed to marry the princess whom the family match-maker had in his Imperial eye. And to crown or uncrown all, the wretched Jerome, lieutenant on board a French man-of-war, had unluckily in America wedded on the spur of a boy's passion a Miss Patterson—Patterson!—of Baltimore!

What could be done with people who possessed no sense of their own dignity or that of an Imperial brother?

As to the sisters—it was difficult for Napoleon to decide whether they were admissible as Imperial Highnesses. Elise had married Bacciochi, an extremely stupid and unmannered person. Caroline—her Murat, of whom she was already tired, a mere general. Paulette, whose dull Leclerc had died in San Domingo, leaving her a more than merry widow, had already achieved a scandal with Prince Borghese, a Roman noble of wealth and jewels untold, and at her brother's stern command had married him. Really and in truth the sisters were a little difficult to place as Imperial Princesses in spite of possessing all the beauty and vanity necessary to play the part, and their morality was beyond even Napoleon's power of control.

“Let them wait while I consider!” was the ultimatum of the Master.

Could Josephine ever forget that first dinner of her new glory when a family party with a few intimate courtiers were to celebrate the occasion at St. Cloud?

Ushered majestically into the new salon, preceded by their resounding titles called from room to room by attendants gay as macaws in the brand-new court uniform, came the brand-new Princes Joseph and Louis with their imperial wives—Julie with her air of calm *bonhomie* and kindness unchanged by grandeur, Hortense slender and pale as a frosty spring in her robe of silver brocade and pearls. Paulette was unable to be present, Elise and Caroline (stiff with jewels and wrath), the humbly named Mesdames Bacciochi and Murat, stood together by the window, unable to hide their consuming envy when the imperial ladies entered and the Empress followed dressed in a taste which eclipsed all others.

Caroline might be fresh and fair as the garland of blush roses that wreathed her golden hair. Her lovely colour owed no aid to art, her lips were smooth and crimson with youth and beauty, her eyes sparkled under angrily dropped lashes. But Josephine's toilette stamped Caroline's own rose and gold brocade as *bourgeoise*, unimaginative, dull. All eyes followed the elder. The Empress wore a classic robe of silver lama shining like a water-fall, a wreath of vine-leaves and black grapes upon her beautifully poised head. Vine-leaves and black clusters upon the straight-falling folds of silver. Great pearls upon her throat, about her arms, and falling from her ears. The black and silver, the pearls, were an effort of genius, and when the Emperor entered the room where all waited he looked at the Empress with a reminiscence of long-ago Italy in his quick dark glance.

He turned to Julie and Hortense:

"It gives me pleasure to welcome your Imperial Highnesses on this happy day!" and Elise and Caroline, pale with jealous fury, must stand by and watch the perfect court curtsy swept by Hortense, learnt from Madame Campan, who had seen the Queen of France thus greet her King. Alas, the Bonapartes had not been born de Beauharnais, reflected Caroline, biting her rose-red lips and observing that the Emperor's bow to the Empress savoured more of the camp than the Court and was no match for the fluent grace which acknowledged it with homage in every line. These abominable Beauharnais! Eugene, standing a little behind his mother, smiling and composed, a young French nobleman in word and action, had the unfortunate effect of flurrying the two Imperial princes into rage as visible as their sisters'. Hateful! When would the Clan be rid of these insufferable intruders!

But Napoleon rayed joy on all. The sun of Empire was shining in its strength and the triumph of his wife and her children delighted him at the moment because they had been his choice.

It tickled his cruel sense of humour amazingly to see the sulky wrath of Murat, whose wife remained a simple madame. True, he himself had been created a Marshal of France, but what then! Even that part he could not top with dignity. With his handsome coarse face, oiled dark ringlets falling on his shoulders and theatrically splendid dress he looked more like a king in a cheap melodrama. Even the prescribed uniform, in itself flamboyant to vulgarity, could not keep pace with the exuberance of his scheme of decoration.

“The brute!” he whispered apart to his Caroline. “Have I not earned it? Would he be where he is but for me and men like me! Sit through the dinner with as much patience as you can! I swear it shall be set right if I have to kick him off the throne!”

But this counsel of wisdom, the Caroline of twenty-two unwise years could not obey. The Emperor speaking across her addressed Hortense as Princess, and trembling with rage and choking down a glass of water, Caroline burst into angry tears. Looks of embarrassment ran round the table followed by timid excuses. It was the heat of the room, the agitation of the day! Napoleon, smiling maliciously, repeated the indirect insult. Elise lifted a haughty head and spoke in a sharp whisper:

“You had much better command yourself, sister, and not give our enemies the satisfaction of seeing their darts have points.”

“Points?” echoed the Emperor, smiling disagreeably. “But have you not considered, madame, how very little claim to honours women can possess who have not even sufficient manners to hide their feelings of pique from the servants at a dinner table? Titles should at least be saved from ridicule.”

Elise rose in her place.

“If Your Majesty imagines that your own sisters are not qualified to wear titles as well as yourself—”

“Be silent for God’s sake,” murmured Bacciochi under his breath, pulling his wife down into her seat by a tug at her blue velvet robe. With a furious glance at him she obeyed and relapsed into a silence as sulky as Murat’s.

But if the dinner was extraordinary, far more so was the gathering of the Clan next day, where, released from the presence of Josephine and her children, the sisters of Napoleon gave him their opinions of his conduct.

France was at his feet, Austria broken, Prussia humbled, Russia trembling,—only England and the women of his family dared to speak their

minds to the conqueror, and England not being in a position to do so at the moment, Elise and Caroline took their opportunity.

“How could you, how dared you so humble my sisters and me in the face of the world? Was it the part of a brother? Surely you might see that you lowered yourself in lowering your family. As if any one—”

But here without permitting Elise to finish Caroline dashed into the fray.

“If we had ever been faithless to you, as your wife has been faithless, one might understand these insults, but when have we deserted your cause?”

“Or aided it?” the Emperor interposed coolly. “Never! Indeed, on the contrary, I think I may truly say you have had very fine picking so far out of my successes. You would scarcely have got so far by yourselves. How much did those pearls and diamonds cost, and who paid for them?”

But Caroline’s excitement drove her beyond listening to reason or authority, and Napoleon’s smiling tranquillity gave her courage.

“Strangers to be loaded with honours, and *such* strangers! We to sit like charity children enduring their airs with meekness! I can tell you, Sir, that my husband—”

Suddenly Napoleon rose to his feet. His eyes drove lightnings at her. His voice was low and penetrating.

“Really, mesdames, to hear your follies, one would suppose I was robbing you of the inheritance of the King our father. Now hear *me*. I am the master. The master, you understand! Where I will, I give dignities. Where I will I withhold them.” Changing his voice suddenly to the lion’s roar, he shouted:

“Be silent, you hussies, or I’ll teach you manners!”

Caroline collapsed in a faint. Josephine, in her salon at the other side of the wall, remarked amiably to Madame de Rémusat:

“These Bonapartes! They were born to make thrones ridiculous! Not that I mean the Emperor. Oh, no! The family. Quarrelling again!”

Madame de Rémusat looked at her gravely.

“They have much influence with His Majesty if they knew how to use it, Madame. I believe he will yield to their wishes.”

She was right. A few days later the music of “Imperial Highnesses” greeted all Napoleon’s sisters wherever they went, and, thus encouraged, at yet another meeting, and this time with more show of reason, the Clan determined on the boldest attack yet made on the Empress. They had

requested a special audience with Napoleon to consider the question of the Empress's coronation and the seal it must set upon her marriage.

Behold then the Clan assembled. Prince Joseph, the elder brother, commissioned to express the general opinion, came forward from the seated circle of brothers and sisters whose eager eyes dogged him, and addressed the impassive face his brother turned upon him.

"Sire, you will hear the voice of your family when it speaks formally and with mingled affection and duty, both inspired by a wish not only for your welfare but for that of the country."

He paused to clear his throat, and Napoleon, looking up out of those deep marble caves of his eyes, said slowly:

"I am well aware at all events that family interference generally promises unpleasantness. Are the honours I have heaped you all with insufficient? I hope your Imperial Highnesses will not be too modest to state your further wishes."

Colouring sharply, Prince Joseph still controlled himself. Too much was at stake for the indulgence of ill temper. He spoke again, conscious of Caroline's sharp eyes boring into his back.

"Sire, we, having heard that the Pope is to crown you and your wife and, having received orders to attend the resumption of Mass in the Palace, see that religion is to be restored and enforced upon the people. That is a stroke of policy, and whatever we may think of it we have nothing to object. But we would have Your Majesty remember that the Pope's coming to Paris will be the signal for great religious enthusiasm among the backward and ignorant, who will take Your Majesty's having chosen him to crown you as expressing your own opinion of his great position."

"That is very true. I mean it so," Napoleon said, relaxing a little.

"Yes. But if he is to crown Josephine [The steady gaze holding Joseph fixed and darkened.] it will make her position so secure that however much in future you might need to discard her in favour of a wife of great or royal family—and for the sake of France it might be needful—you could never do it. You would be bound by your own act. Acknowledge her thus and the game is over."

All the heads craned forward—lips apart with interest, eyes glittering. How well—how well Joseph was putting it! Yes, that was the way! The family thrilled like one man behind him.

He looked a weak reflection of Napoleon as he faced him—like and yet unlike. Nothing of the terrible fire and force, the clenched marble beauty of

the younger brother. A dullish man with an overweening sense of his own importance and the pretty little artistic hobbies which crowded his leisure at Morfontaine—the beautiful country house Napoleon’s meteoric success had given him.

Napoleon answered with his always deceptive calm.

“Did you ever know me bound by any one’s act—even my own? Leave me to judge, Joseph. I am capable of doing so, I assure you.”

Joseph came a step nearer, holding out clasped hands before him.

“Brother, I speak as a brother, and therefore with a true heart and against my own interest. You have no child and if you die I am your natural heir, and to what a splendid heritage I know well. But I have no thought of myself. I wish for your own, the Empire’s and all our sakes, to see you surrounded by sons of your own. I asperse my sister in no way when I say—Let the barren woman be only a witness of the ceremony, so that if the moment comes when she must be discarded for the country’s sake and yours you may not have to regret that you sealed the bond by crowning her with yourself in the face of the world!”

“Yes, yes!” cried the shrill Caroline. “Look what you have done for her already! If she had either honour or gratitude she would offer to retire herself.”

Joseph silenced her with difficulty. That was not the way with Napoleon. He was resting his head on his hand with the darkly brooding look which sealed him apart when he sent his soul through the invisible. Joseph made a quick sign to the rest. “Leave me with him!” it said, and rising quietly, they slipped away, thrilling with hope, and left the brothers together.

Madame de Rémusat ran trembling to tell her mistress of this ill-boding conference. To her surprise Josephine received it calmly.

“Do I care, madame? Not I! Let them do their worst. It is Bonaparte’s fault, not mine, that we have no children, and while he knows that he will never divorce me. Where would be the good? And besides—those assassins have spoken too late. The Pope has been told he is to crown me. And I too have my plan.”

Next day she appeared at the first distribution of the Cross of the Legion of Honour, and even her critic, the grave young Madame de Rémusat, did justice to her unruffled beauty on that great occasion.

In the full light of day and burning sunshine she appeared in a robe of rose-coloured tulle, sprinkled with silver stars and cut very low. Her head was wreathed with diamond wheat-ears. And, so said Madame de Rémusat,

the brilliant dress, her perfect grace and elegance, the charm of her smile, the sweetness of her face, made such an impression that all who saw declared the Empress outshone all the lovely young women of her suite.

Was this courage in the woman who was fighting daily for more than her life?

No—merely the child's grief or joy of the moment, and behind it the reckless cast of the gambler on the die she was throwing in her "plan." Josephine at least believed in her star whatever Napoleon might do with his.

CHAPTER XIX

THE SUMMIT

PARIS *en fête* as it had never been before. Paris rejoicing, dazzling in beauty, hanging entranced over the shining baubles restored to her adoration. The Coronation! The coming of the Pope! Not that popes as popes counted for much. Voltaire and Rousseau and the Revolution had guillotined any reverence for Prelates in the Parisian mind. But he was a sovereign of sorts. He was legendary, traditional, and it was a proud thing to think that he could be dragged at the chariot wheels of French glory and whistled up to do the crowning of her Despot who had insulted him so pitilessly in Italy. Talleyrand, who had been a priest himself in days that now seemed long ago, whom Napoleon had compelled in the interests of the respectability of the Empire to marry his lovely mistress, looked on with malicious ridicule at all the performers in the drama from the Pope downward. He knew the back of the glorious tapestry which showed so magnificent from the front. He knew the history of the last squabble between the sovereigns, the loathing resistance of the Pope, the plotting of the Clan, the shabby vulgarity which underlay even Napoleon's lonely and towering genius. And even that he did not fear. As rats and time working together may gnaw away the supports of a palace so he knew that he and Metternich, the cunning Austrian diplomat, working together and subterraneously, might very well hope to put an end to this monstrous glare of power darkening the sun. Meanwhile—patience and gentle unending flattery. Sometimes Napoleon saw through him and resisted coarsely, violently, but Talleyrand accepted every mood with submission and worked and waited, making himself indispensable, understanding and enduring all.

He and Metternich were aristocrats born and bred. They understood each other even in their mutual distrust. They knew things Napoleon could never know, things that swayed kings and statesmen. They would help him, smiling and flattering him always, to be the architect of his own doom.

Talleyrand found incessant amusement in the details of the coronation. Napoleon's scornful pride in the religious rites so pompously planned was full of cynical interest for the watcher. As a man, the young general of the Revolution ridiculed them. As Emperor, he felt their support and bowed his laurelled head before a Church Militant whose generalship equalled his own,

at least for the time, and must therefore be acknowledged. But he would sometimes explode in Talleyrand's presence when restraint grew unbearable.

"I see the mockery in your eye, but is it possible you don't understand my position? I have sprung up suddenly from the common herd and am conscious of my isolation. Naturally I must sway men by their beliefs. I throw out anchors on all sides and while men are stupid enough to believe in God he must be considered. Personally I have always found that when a man begins to think about God he has nothing more to do on earth. If I had believed in God, could I have done what I have?"

Talleyrand replied with an excellent gravity:

"Of course Your Majesty could not. And undoubtedly men must always be moved by their own standpoint. No other touches them. Let us by all means have the rites!"

And still he watched, studying every movement of the man.

The Emperor had got the Pope to Paris to swell his glory but really hardly knew what to do with him. His very manner to His Holiness was an unconscious insult. Not thus—not thus, had the Successors of St. Peter been treated by a trembling world!

It amused Talleyrand also beyond measure to see the white spirituality of the Pope's face turned upon Napoleon,—the majestic meekness of his submission, and to read the thoughts which lay behind it. Talleyrand had not been a priest for nothing, and he could read the Pope's certainty, for it was his own. Napoleon's sovereignty would pass with the thunder of his cannon. It would drift away with the dissolving smoke of his guns, but the throne in the Vatican would endure, founded on the rock, a living power when Napoleon and his doings were dead history. For an Idea is immortal—the Material a shadow.

It was amusing also to observe the rough soldiers, the Marshals of France, "Napoleon's banditti," as Talleyrand called them, foaming and fuming at the religious ceremonies and the decorum required of them at the Coronation Service in Nôtre Dame. How they had sworn to all the devils when they were marched to Mass at Court! They could see nothing but the absurdity of it; and again and again growled in groups together. Could not the General crown himself, if he wanted crowning? What had an old shaveling like the Pope to do with it? They had even chaffed Napoleon. "Confess, General, that your chief wish is for the little phial of holy oil," and though Napoleon had replied with an obscene jest, the fact remained that he did desire it and passionately, and Talleyrand smiled his own smile at the thought and his memory of Napoleon as the young general of the

Revolution. Human nature! Could a man do other than laugh at the spectacle! The irony of the gods is the drama of humanity.

It was amusing too to hear from Fouché, the revolutionary Minister of Police, exactly how much had been paid and what measures taken to secure the roars of applause along the route. Nothing was to be left to chance. Nothing. Talleyrand and Fouché understood one another very well, and both would serve Napoleon excellently as long as it served them to do so, no longer. But all the time both were up for the highest bidder and though the Bourbons were at present too poor to buy such costly articles, the time would come.

The crown of Talleyrand's amusement would have been an interview proceeding that moment at Fontainebleau, if he could have known it. He only learnt it later and then with an artist's delight in a clever move—a traitor's delight in the subjugation of Napoleon. And the contriver, the subjugator, was Josephine!

For in the quiet of the room set apart for the Pope's audiences at Fontainebleau that devout daughter of the Church besought a private interview with His Holiness and threw herself at his feet all tears and blushes.

"Holy Father, I beseech your counsel on a matter very wounding to my conscience. How dare I receive the sacrament of Coronation from your holy hands—for to me it is no less!—unless my conscience is clear and sound?"

"My daughter, no. You cannot!" the Pope replied, with his kindly smile. "That would not be possible. And to consult me is an honourable motion worthy of your exalted station. Sit beside me and open your heart."

He extended his hand to bid her rise, but she knelt. It was more fitting the tale she had to tell.

So, bowed before the Supreme Pontiff, face veiled in slender hands, Josephine spoke, and as she spoke the expression of the old man above her, beautiful in its still whiteness, relaxed into astonishment. This revelation he had certainly not looked for—far otherwise!

For, kneeling at the feet of God's Viceregent on Earth, her heart pounding in her bosom, knowing that she staked her all on this attempt, the Empress sobbed out that her conscience was troubled concerning her marriage with her husband. It had taken place in the evil days of the Revolution, under the wicked Directory, and it had only been a civil contract. No blessing from the Church had sanctified it. She could not but fear that the absence of that blessing might have entailed deprivation of the

blessing of children. But in any case in these circumstances could or ought she to enter upon the Coronation—she who in the eyes of the Church dared not present herself as the wedded wife of Napoleon?

The Pope meditated in deep silence while the small sobbing voice continued its tale of shame. To him it was no less. The revelation placed him in a position of crucial difficulty. Acute in his knowledge of human nature as none but a churchman can be acute, he saw very well that Napoleon's forced courtesies indicated no promise that the future might not hold greater ignominies for the Papacy than the past. He knew that every shouted blessing from the French awoke the Emperor's sleeping jealousy to angry watchfulness as he heard it. Could he—dared he interfere? Not for himself the consideration of danger. No—but the heritage of St. Peter, the interests of the Church, were in his hands, not to be risked lightly.

The hush continued so long that at last Josephine raised tear-drowned eyes, and looked at him with agonizing supplication. He saw no Empress at the moment—that was irrelevant and forgotten. He saw a penitent woman, with whom there was but the one way to take—the way of the Master. And, seeing that, there remained no more doubt. He spoke, without fear or hesitation.

“Daughter, you have done well to consult me. You are right and I respect your scruples. No woman living in a state of legal concubinage as you are should dare to present herself before the Altar. There is little time to lose and immediately steps must be taken. Depart in peace. Leave the issue to me.”

She flung herself before him and kissed the cross on his white silk slipper.

“Holy Father, I thank and bless you. I have been too neglectful of religion. I have sinned. It shall not be so in the future. I promise—I promise!”

He pronounced a blessing upon the penitent, and she rose, penetrated through and through, for the moment, by the august compassion of the face above her.

Religion! Perhaps after all there was something in it, something one could lean on when things went wrong. Perhaps the Revolution had not been altogether so wise and clever as Barras and the rest had thought. Women needed a helping hand—needed it terribly. If only there were not so much to think of, she could see herself a crowned and devout daughter of the Church and nothing could be more suitable to her position. If only— But what in heaven and earth would Bonaparte say?

What would he say? For once his game was thwarted, his skill outdistanced, and by the person from whom he least expected it. It was as though a pink-eyed white rabbit, peeping nervously between the trees, should sit up and dare a lion. But she had won. She had sheltered herself behind the majesty of the Church Universal, and there and at the moment he must submit. There was no other way.

He was summoned to a private conference with the Pope and in the light of the silver lamps, the Pontiff, angelically white and serene, briefly and simply put the case before him. Not for all the cannon of the Grand Army, not for all the world's wealth and power would he desecrate his high office and crown the legalized concubine of the Emperor, the woman who in the eyes of the Church was less than nothing. There must at once be a religious marriage by a duly qualified priest or the Empress would remain uncrowned.

He said his say and remained silent, his thin hands with the Fisherman's Ring folded on his white cassock. He did not appear to think it admitted of argument. Indeed in ending he said mildly:

"I do not argue. The matter is decided."

For the first time Napoleon stood face to face with the unalterable in human decision.

Many thoughts met and parted in his brain in that strange moment. Hatred of the need of submission, fury with Josephine, gloomy certainty that Joseph had been right in his remonstrances and that he would have saved himself by admitting her only as a spectator of a purely military coronation. Certainty also that it was now impossible to change the programme. The rites and ceremonies were fixed to the last detail, the fickle people rejoicing at the prospect of seeing a beautiful Empress beside him and all the distinction which women lend to a spectacle. And the very decencies of the newly founded court were at stake. What reason could he give to France and the world if he broke through it all? None.

He looked at the old man sitting calmly before him unhurried by any tumult of passion, fixed in his own decision, careless of the Emperor's, and knew himself conquered. He had counted of late on the irregularity of his marriage with her as a weapon for future use, if he should need it. That weapon was now broken in his hand.

He spoke with a suppressed bitterness to which no torrent of words could have done justice.

"Fate is too strong for even such a man as I. Your Holiness's ultimatum must be accepted because I have no choice. But the matter must be secret as

death. Arrange it when and how you will. I have no more to say.”

What use of words when the game is lost? A lesser man might have threatened or pleaded. Not so Napoleon. But there was a look in his eye and about the rigid lines of his mouth before which some men might have trembled. He did not forget it when the day came that he could revenge himself with impunity.

The Pope surveyed him with his tranquil smile. He also saw further than the words carried them and though he accepted the acquiescence it did not dupe him.

“You do well, my son. You will not regret it. I have considered the matter, and respect your desire for secrecy. The best procedure will be that an altar should be erected in your Cabinet and that your uncle, his Eminence Cardinal Fesch, should perform the ceremony! Thus there can be the privacy that you and the Empress will naturally desire. Your Majesty agrees?”

“I agree.”

He could bring himself to utter no more, and feigning not to see the Pope’s hand raised in benediction, he strode out of the room. He would not see Josephine nor any one in that moment of defeat. Called for, needed on all sides, he went out into the private garden and walked up and down in the dark on the long path, brooding as he did before a battle—alone, most utterly alone.

Yet after a while softer thoughts stole in among the hard calculations. After all—he had meant to crown her; no secret marriage could bind him more than that great public union. And could he better her? She was all winning pliant grace and softness except for a petty woman’s jealousy which he would break in her some day. “I win battles, but you win hearts,” he had said, laughing, and it was true. Wherever she went she was popular, except with his hard self-seeking family, whom his own hardness perfectly understood.

Poor little Josephine—a woman through and through. Her very faults sprang from that captivating femininity and were even loveable. And she had brought luck with her. The Army believed that firmly. There were moments when he himself believed it, so strange had been his fortunes since they met. And then—childless. But she had borne two children to Beauharnais, two children for whom he himself had a strange cold affection. If they had but been his own! With Eugene as his true heir, gay, gallant, and honourable, what a dynasty might he not have founded! His desire for children was vague yet fierce, and yet—no woman of all his mistresses had made him a father. He believed at last that the fault was his, and, thinking

so, what profit to hold himself up to the ridicule of Europe by a second childless marriage? Was there hope still? Josephine was only forty-one and women have been fruitful at later ages than that, and if she also were to remarry and have children about her, what would his position be then? The world's laughingstock! Poor little Josephine—she asked no better now than to love him. Why should she not be wholly happy on her great day?

His thoughts wandered on and became vague and indecipherable even to himself, but they were not wholly merciless, that he knew. It might alter their relations for the better—set a tenderer note in the disharmony of their life. The artist in him saw from a distance what married life might be—craved for it at moments as a thing beautiful and desirable though out of reach, craved for it as a part of the eternal harmony of things and lost it as Josephine never could. The man leading, the woman setting herself to him,

“As perfect music unto noble words.”

He could see it like a vanishing dream very far off—a thing impossible now.

“It is as an artist I love it,” he thought, alone in the dark. “I love it intellectually. I would not put myself out for a day to secure it. The thought of it is more beautiful than the reality could ever be, as art is often more beautiful than nature. I love it as an artist loves his violin, because I could produce sounds, tones, harmonies, from it which would move and influence men. But love would never influence or change me. What could I do with it? And with Josephine—ridiculous! To feel it would have been to possess qualities which would have made my career impossible. It is by my brain I live and though it tells me things are lovely to look at, I look and smile and pass on and admire them as a picture hanging on the wall. It will always be that.”

Yet, even so, the thought made him less angry than Josephine had expected and she had less reason to slink away in terror after the first meeting with him than she feared.

“Clever little Creole! So you won your way! But don't try your luck again!” he said. And that was all. She could not guess why.

Two days before the coronation Rémusat, with his wife, waited on the Empress with the glorious diadem she would wear on her great day. Eight branches of diamonds, four of them fronds of palm, four leaves of myrtle, met beneath a globe surmounted by a cross. The band was set with enormous emeralds. On the forehead hung great diamonds glittering like falling water.

She took the glorious thing in her hands, and looked at it lovingly and with exquisite delight, then laid it aside.

“Beautiful, most beautiful. But, O my faithful friends, I have something to tell you far more beautiful and near to my heart. What do you think? Will you believe it? And yet it is true. This morning—this happy morning—before an altar set up in the Emperor’s cabinet, Cardinal Fesch married us according to the rites of the Church, and with His Holiness’s advice and approval! Look—look at my treasure!”

She opened a little golden casket beside her, and displayed the marriage certificate signed by the Cardinal and witnesses. Her pride and delight glittered about her like rays of sunshine. Surely the happiest woman in France that day was the Empress!

“That shall never leave me while I live!” she added, beaming on the stupefied pair, mute with alarm before the state secret thus suddenly flung at them, almost terrified at sharing it. Napoleon might command secrecy but Josephine was incapable of it. A look, a tone of sympathy, and all her joys and sorrows came tumbling out to be discussed from every angle. It would be in every mouth by nightfall even though they should say nothing.

“My good, good Bonaparte!” she cried, her eyes as bright as the diamonds. “Oh, how he loves me! And to think I doubted it. Oh, madame, how wise, how right your advice has been. Stay with me always and help me! And what he has to put up with! Only think!—that odious foolish Joseph declared only yesterday that nothing would induce him to let his wife carry my train—the Empress’s train! Who is she, I ask you, that she should dare to refuse? And Elise and Caroline are as bad. They are biting and scratching like wild beasts because they must do it. The fools—the fools! So Bonaparte told them they must either behave themselves and do as they were told or clear out of public life altogether. That brought them to what senses they have!”

The friendly Rémusats rejoiced with her. It was impossible to like the Bonapartes. It was as impossible to dislike Josephine. None but a Bonaparte could perform that feat. Her joy was simple and natural as that of a child. She chattered with equal pleasure of the beauty of the toilettes of the obstinate three as of her own, devoid of all jealousy.

“Caroline will look most beautiful—that lovely complexion of hers! And Elise—even my Hortense cannot outshine them. If Julie were as good-looking they would be a perfect quartette.”

She turned and looked longingly at the diadem.

“I did intend not to put it on—not to let it touch my head until before the altar—not until his hands crowned me. But I can’t wait—I must *just* see how it looks. Don’t you want to see it, madame?”

Laughing with the gaiety of a child, she caught the splendid thing up and, turning to the long mirror which had reflected the beauty of Marie Antoinette, crowned herself and turned to face them, her arms stiff by her sides like a doll.

Bright sunshine filling the room caught its own splendour in the diamonds and shot dazzling rays about her. She blazed upon them, magnificent as a young dawn rosed and golden. Youth returned to her, pride and joy flattered her. Safety knelt at her feet promising life-long greatness. The two standing there were dumbfounded by the radiance of the woman. For the moment she made all her wonderful life the natural result of victorious charm. It could not be otherwise—it never would be.

The sun passed beneath a cloud, the light died in the diamonds. The Empress took off her crown slowly and set it aside. But her friends had seen what none would see again—the perfect blossom of joy and pride and beauty.

Nôtre Dame in its dim vastness of tapestried walls and pillars receding into the unknown and mysterious dark with isolated lights on that December day. The tribunes, the seats crowded with all that was great and beautiful in France. Waiting, waiting. The priests and prelates in splendid vestments grouped by the mighty door. A breathing music filling the air with small silver drops of sweetness. The music hovering in suspense like all else.

Silence. His Holiness comes, and the organ composing itself into majesty gathers up the voices into thundering affirmation of homage.

“Thou art Peter!”—the Church on earth laying its homage at the feet of the Ruler, as he advanced and ascended the throne prepared for him, surveying the gorgeous assembly with eyes which saw through the fleeting show to the Unchanging. So he also waited the passing pleasure of the Emperor.

Thunder of guns. The Imperial procession nearing. The breathless hush and thrill as every head in the great congregation turned to see the approach. In the gilded glass coach sat the Emperor with the Empress beside him and his two brothers, Joseph and Louis, before them. The crowds cheering, waving, bowing, saluting, all along the way.

Napoleon, human for a moment, fixed shining eyes on Joseph.

“If our father could see us now!” he said, and Josephine, leaning towards him, pressed his hand. *That* she could understand and love. For an instant they sat hand in hand like children. The brothers stiff in velvet and gold were silent, and the Imperial pair drew apart again, bowing to the shouts and applause.

But there was no human feeling visible in the stately figures throned on the dais in the sight of all. Napoleon sat like an image in heavy robes of velvet and ermine. A wreath of gold laurel leaves circling his head made him an Augustus Cæsar and the stern Roman beauty of his face drew all eyes even from the jewelled Empress.

Yet on this day when she most needed loveliness it came at her call.

She wore a magnificent robe of silver brocade embroidered in gold with the Napoleonic bees and eagles, gold and silver rippling about her superbly. From her shoulders hung the royal train of crimson velvet incrustated with gold, and over and about it all played the glitter of the Crown diamonds of France come to this most unexpected use. What would Marie Antoinette enthroned at Versailles have said had she been told that a little Creole running wild in the tropic forests of Martinique would wear those emblems of the great history of the French Kings?

But they set off the Creole well! Laurette Permon, seated as became Junot’s rank, fed her eyes on that most royal figure, wishing her mother had lived to see the apotheosis of the Bonapartes. For Madame Permon was now but a memory.

“The Empress does not look a day over twenty-five!” she whispered to the lady who sat beside her, and it was true. Excitement, magnificence, and the terrible splendour of her position restored her lost youth, and she rayed beauty brighter than her diamonds upon the upturned eyes of thousands while slowly and with alternations of chanted prayer and music the ceremony proceeded to its climax.

The Pope arose and anointed the Emperor with the triple unction on the head and hands.

“Diffuse, O Lord, by my hands the treasures of your grace and benediction on your servant, Napoleon, whom in spite of our personal unworthiness, we this day anoint Emperor in Your Name.”

The Emperor received the unction with an air of pious devotion. That was well, but as the Pope was about to raise the Crown of Charlemagne from the altar, Napoleon snatched it from him and with a magnificent gesture crowned himself. He had won it; who but he should place it where it

should be! His generals could have shouted for joy and pride. Bravo the little Corporal!

That is the supreme moment which one of the painters of that great scene has preserved. The Emperor standing forward, white, defiant, and yet with an awful joy shining from his face, his hands raised with the crown above his head. The audience watched spellbound. That too was a part of his dream dreamed long ago in solitude—the epic he had thundered forth to the world from the black throats of his guns. It was done. He stood there alone—crowned Emperor of the French.

But Josephine. She rose from her throne and descended the steps, her great mantle trailing heavily behind her. The princesses gathered up its enormous weight and followed, Hortense and Julie carrying their share of the gorgeous folds. Not so Elise and Caroline. Almost bursting with spite, seeing a chance to humiliate the Empress on the day of her glory, they let the great weight drop on the marble floor so that she could scarcely totter under it. She could not advance. In the nervous excitement she turned upon them furiously, in a sharp whisper:

“How dare you! Lift it! The Emperor watches you.”

They flashed back fury, and let it drop lower, until Napoleon made a step forward.

“Lift it!” he said. The voice, the look, were enough and in terror the women supported the weight of velvet and gold and permitted the Empress to advance and kneel before her sovereign.

What thoughts passed through her mind in that moment? What memories of the boy she had despised and wearied of? What memories of unbelief and faithlessness? What is fiction compared to the truths of life?

Bright tears fell on her clasped hands as she raised them rather to Napoleon than to God. He took the crown prepared for her and placed it first on his own head, then on hers, within the tiara of diamonds, lingering a little as he adjusted it as if to promise her that she should wear it gracefully and lightly. Then rising, she stood beside him at the supreme moment of her life, crowned Empress of the French.

Did he believe for a moment that he had conquered the Nature of Things? Did she feel how much she owed him? Most surely, no. Great emotions exist only in great souls. But there was an awe sooner to die in her soul than in his, as they stood facing their tremendous destiny. Together and for a moment they tasted content.

That night after much tenderness and graciousness with the woman he had crowned Napoleon stood beside his bed, divested of all trappings, wearied with the long day. One attending upon him heard him murmur a few words—deep thought for an instant speaking unconsciously aloud:

“To whom shall I leave all this?”

But Josephine did not hear.

CHAPTER XX

LIFE THE IMPLACABLE

LIFE declines to remain perched on a pinnacle fronting the rising sun. Even for crowned heads it descends to shadowed ways and muddy valleys, and Napoleon found himself still Napoleon in spite of the sceptre. In his effort to rise to the height of his office he became more and more despotic. Men and women were forced to realize that the man was lost in the Emperor and he demanded not courtiers but slaves. Therefore at his court the vices of slaves displayed themselves. Gaiety and grace vanished and society deployed like a regiment of soldiers under the eye of a martinet. It suited him well enough for he knew no better and felt himself dreaded, which was his notion of power. Yet even he felt the unutterable tedium of the result and withdrew more and more into the habit of silent musing alternated with violent outbreaks of temper which drove all the satellites scampering to cover from the thunder. Not the reverie of old days when he lost the present in dreams of a glorious future, but harsh and terrible breedings on the humiliation of opposing men and nations. His dream was broken and realities faced him.

Yet if France hoped that his ambition was now glutted she was the more mistaken. "I am only at the beginning," he said, and fell back into his dark dreams, analyzing, dissecting, choosing, one by one the means and men to be used when the hour struck, judging all men by the light of his secret suspicions, all women by the warp which Josephine and the women of the Revolution had given him. Tyranny is the fruit of the tree of anarchy, and the men who had spat upon the Monarchy of France and the old institutions now paid for their little hour of freedom and crawled in the dirt before Napoleon. He would take no less. His amours, his only relaxation, had become a scourge for those connected with them. Murat and Duroc were allotted the duty for providing for his pleasures on his campaigns. At court all the world flung themselves into the task of diverting him. Difficult task! Alike for men and women, as Talleyrand said, their task was to amuse the unamusable, and he had no scruple in telling them they had failed. And Josephine, released from one terror by the marriage, was handed over to another. She knew too well the office of Murat and Duroc, was perfectly informed as to the nature of Caroline's and Paulette's good-nature in lending their houses for assignations and lived in agony that her last rag of influence, that of long habit and household ease, would disappear.

Still, anything was more endurable than the torture of his amours at home. There she must see, must know, and indeed he took care she should, boasting to her of his conquests; harsh, pitiless, violent, savagely surprised that she should dare any objection.

“You object! Do you forget what I had to forgive? Do you suppose I have forgotten? Do you mean to make yourself absurd over the most natural thing in the world? I am not an ordinary man. I live above morals and customs. If you have the good of my unique character in one direction you must put up with it in another.”

Morally he lived from hand to mouth, taking the thing which pleased him at the moment, and amid the petty vanities and pretensions of the court where the one unchallengeable thing was luxury, the vices of the old court thrived, the same but coarsened, like servants masquerading in the magnificence of their masters, divested entirely of the grace and wit which had given them their wicked exquisiteness in the days of the French Kings.

All moved with military precision under the piercing eye of the Commander-in-Chief, the women dragooned unsparingly also. There were some who laughed at the absurdities involved but even they must march in public and smile as best they could in private, for vengeance fell swift and sure on offenders.

“And on the whole we are rather proud when we succeed in pleasing the Tyrant,” said the secret-eyed young Madame de Rémusat to her friend Talleyrand, “though of course I own it pricks our vanity sometimes to hear the sneers at our expense from the noble families who have not surrendered to his gold.”

They were standing, she and Talleyrand, watching the presentations of the evening to the Imperial pair, Josephine magnificent in jewels, suave and smiling, dispensing sunshine and ease, the Emperor cold and alarming with his masking face, standing stiffly by her. Watching also, by Madame de Rémusat, stood the Duchesse de Chevreuse, a young woman representative of the noblest blood in France, who had consented to bow her neck to the yoke and figure in the Empress’s suite, provided she were allowed to temper the despotism with epigrams. Napoleon bore much from her for it delighted him to know that a name starring the pages of history should swell his glory by its servitude. But money could buy that as all else. He mocked and bullied and bought.

The Duchess wreathed her long throat, smiling with irony. She was a brilliant red-haired beauty with a skin of ivory, highly ornamental when

robed and jewelled on state occasions. With bitter sarcasm she laughed to Talleyrand.

“They really are the funniest people I ever beheld. I didn’t know such people existed. Josephine’s manners are all right though of course she was never received by the Queen and had no court experience. But the sisters—the awful appalling sisters! Their good looks make them doubly impossible. Their amours—oh, madame, even amours can be made improper and prudishness desirable by such manners! And the men to whom they give themselves. Murat, the ostler! And Junot! His wife is a pretty little coquette as greedy for money as a monkey for chestnuts, but Junot with his amours, slobbering over Napoleon or at the feet of Caroline is nauseating.”

“Caroline Murat knows what she is about, all the same, madame,” said Talleyrand, with his delicately malicious smile. “Junot is Governor of Paris, and if our Imperial brother is killed in any of the new wars Junot will hold Paris for us while we make our Murat Emperor in his turn! That woman has ambition and plotting enough for an archbishop in that pretty head of hers and would sell either her body or soul to gain her ends. But they are coarse wenches—the sisters—coarse in grain, and the Marshals are too much for even Napoleon to stomach though he can’t do without them.”

“I know nothing funnier,” said the Duchess, “than to see one of them come in hail-fellow-well-met smacking of the old days in Italy and to see Napoleon turn him to the rightabout with one of his frowns. They *creep* before him. And they remind him of everything he wants to forget.”

“After all, we also crawl,” observed Madame de Rémusat with philosophy. The Duchess laughed, her clear unaffected laugh.

“Not I! Did you hear what happened the other day? I was wearing my Mathilde of diamonds, and as you know they make rather a show. Napoleon trotted up to me on those short neat legs of his which with his fat little figure always remind me of a well-turned-out pig in tights. ‘Holá, madame! Magnificent! Are they real?’ I looked at him—I can look, you know!—and said, ‘Really, I’m not sure. But they’re quite good enough for *here*!’ Heavens! You should have seen his face! He swallowed it, shot daggers at me and walked off to bully some one else. No, I laugh at the brute!”

Talleyrand smiled and snuffed.

“Take care, my pretty lady. You’ll get yourself exiled from Paris. There’s no superfluous chivalry about our Master.”

“Do I care!” she answered with a little toss. “How long do you give the comedy to last, Monseigneur?”

“Do I know? And if I knew should I tell? What are *you* thinking of so gravely, madame?” He turned to Madame de Rémusat. She spoke slowly, weighing her words.

“I know the surface is very amusing; often I can hardly hide my smiles. But underneath—no! It is too interesting. Bonaparte is the most interesting thing I ever saw, and once I believed in him utterly. I thought him a great man. Now I know he is not great at all—only supremely clever. It is such a magnificent intellect and yet completely blind of one eye. He understands nothing of goodness nor men’s ideals and therefore cannot believe in their existence. Did you ever know him to admire a fine action? Never. At once he is on the track of the base motive. I have seen it lead him into frightful mistakes—that blindness to one whole side of human nature!”

Talleyrand took a deliberative pinch of snuff from a tortoise-shell box with Napoleon’s miniature in diamonds.

“A very acute remark, madame. It is perfectly true that one can never dominate a man until one understands and uses all his weak points, and principle is certainly one of them. Did you ever hear our Master boast that his uncle predicted that he would rule the world one day because as a child he lied with such preternatural skill? But I cannot agree there. He lacks finesse. I can always tell when he lies.” Madame de Chevreuse laughed:

“You may say that. So can I. But his amours are the drollest. He commands a woman to his arms as he orders his soldiers to advance, and they also obey. You had a terrible scene with Josephine the other day, I hear, madame. Some one shut up with Bonaparte in his pleasure room. Do tell us what happened.”

Madame de Rémusat lowered her careful voice.

“You know who. I’ll call her Rosemonde. We were all sitting in Josephine’s salon when Rosemonde glided gently out. I knew by the turn of her shoulders that she was up to mischief and so did Josephine. After about ten minutes she beckoned me and whispered, ‘I can’t bear this. I shall clear up my doubts now, this very minute. You stay here and say the Emperor has sent for me.’ ”

The Duchess burst into clear laughter.

“She’ll never be royal, never! Queens are better behaved. They know that kind of thing is the cross which surmounts the crown. Well?”

“I tried to stop her, but out she went—she can never control herself. In about half an hour she came back. She sat down to her embroidery frame—that poor frame could tell such tales of family upsets if it would!—and I saw

tears falling. Presently she pushed it aside and called me. Out we went, I following, and the moment we reached her bedroom the storm burst. 'All is lost. It is too true. He was not in his Cabinet, so I climbed the back stairs to that hateful room. The door was locked and their voices inside. I knocked and called out that I was there, and, oh, the fright I gave them! I hammered away and after a while they had to let me in and then I told them what I thought. I said—' "

"I would have given a year's income to behold that scene," Talleyrand said with his ironic gravity. "But the woman will ruin herself."

"She will indeed. She said, 'Rosemonde began to cry.' They always do! 'And Bonaparte flew into such a rage that I escaped for my life. He will follow me here and there will be a frightful scene.' I was more sorry for her than I can say. You two mockers don't feel it, but I like Josephine. I said, 'If he knows you have told me, Madame, all is over. Let me go, you must bear it alone. Be submissive!'" "

The Duchess fanned herself languidly—with bright eyes laughing above the sticks of the fan.

"Heavens, what a man and what a woman. It's like a scene in a public-house. Impossible to say which has the worst manners in such matters. But go on!"

"I retreated to the salon, and there was Rosemonde, pale as ashes, talking at random, mad to know if I were in the secret. And presently there arose a fearful smashing and crashing and roaring from the apartment of the Empress. Rosemonde called for her carriage and fled. Afterwards, drowned in tears, the Empress told me all was over. He had smashed the furniture, had told her he was sick of her and she must leave St. Cloud. He would have a wife who would bear him children."

Talleyrand laughed voicelessly.

"The objection to that course is that he is not by any means certain where the fault lies. And to be the mockery of Europe in a barren second marriage is more than he dares. I believe him to be impotent and he believes it too."

"But proceed, madame."

"Oh, I called the poor Hortense to the rescue. But what could she do? She said sighing: 'My husband has forbidden me to interfere. And after all why should I? My mother will lose a crown, but she will gain peace. She has none now. Go away yourself, madame, for two or three days, and leave them to themselves. It's the only chance.' So I went away, and when I came back

they were friends again—with a difference. It is never the same after one of those scenes. She is a most unhappy woman, if it were not for the consolations of dress and money. And those she could have away from him. He would have to provide for her handsomely. The people always like those easy good-tempered women who never ask what anything costs and flatter you all the time.”

The Duchess laughed again.

“These people!” she said, with elegant disdain. “I shall get myself exiled soon. It is really unbearable. One might catch the infection of vulgarity if one stayed here. Imagine waking up one day and finding oneself like Caroline!”

Life was at times entirely unbearable to Josephine. As far as she was concerned Napoleon had thrown off all pity and decency in his amours. Egypt had planted the seed of despotism in him, power had watered it. In the sunshine of empire it rushed to the sun, and every day made him more of a tyrant. She had conquered him once; she should know now who was master. Wedded wife, crowned Empress, she must learn her place as the first of his slaves. No more! She could be of little use to him now—Her only part was to apply balm to the wounds whether of the heart, the purse, or self-esteem which Napoleon was always dealing to those about him, and to blazen her wrongs to all who would sympathize.

Even the serenity of Madame de Rémusat was troubled when one day the Despot demanded a private interview. What could it be? Love or anger? Dismissal or reward? The preamble might mean either. She went with a fluttering heart to the room where the Emperor stood alone by the window like a judge awaiting the prisoner. He turned abruptly, forgetting to ask her to be seated, and his manner at once relieved her of any suspicion of tenderness in the interview.

“I have work for you, madame. Woman’s work. You can carry it out perfectly well if you choose. Do you choose?”

“Sire, you must permit me to hear what it is before I pledge myself.”

She stood looking calmly at him; experience had taught her that an air of tranquil indifference was the only hope of taming the lion as far as to secure the sheathing of his claws. Even then the teeth would show occasionally and the growl be heard preluding the roar.

Fixing her with daunting eyes he began curtly.

“You are the confidante of my wife’s jealousies, madame. I dislike it, but recognize that she might have chosen a worse. Do you accept the

compliment?"

"I wait, Sire."

"Exactly! Your tantalizing reserve always! Well—but I know you sympathize with her. Women always stand together. Do you deny that?"

There was more than a hint of bullying in the question, but breeding and training did not flinch.

"If you mean that I pity Her Majesty—yes, Sire, I do. Whether she suffers with or without cause I pity her, for she suffers."

His half contemptuous glance was full of astonishment. That a mere woman should dare to take part against him! He was about to burst in vituperation, but commanded himself.

"And yet you have good sense!" he said.

"I hope so, Sire."

A pause. He shifted his ground and launched a fresh offensive.

"What I wish is this, madame. That you should employ your good sense in convincing the Empress that I am wearied of these foolish jealousies. Wearied, you understand. To have a woman about one perpetually spying, suborning the servants, looking at every passable woman with the black suspicion of jealousy, making perpetual scenes of violence or tears. All this must end and you must tell her so. It is not possible that you approve of it?"

"I do not approve of any spying, Sire,—but perhaps if there were less cause—"

He looked at her with fury, which, suddenly passing into humour, exploded in laughter.

"You little audacity! You rebuke me! Where did you learn such manners? What is it you wish? Pray oblige me with a sermon!"

"I wish the Empress, Sire, to observe the manners of the Queens of France who never permitted themselves to express suspicion whatever they might feel. And I wish Your Majesty—like the Kings—"

"Not to give cause for suspicion? Come—that's a good one! What about the du Barry, the Pompadour, Louise de la Vallière, and all the rest of them?"

"Sire, you did not permit me to finish my speech. These ladies certainly existed and had their office. All I wished to say was—but perhaps I had better not."

"Oh, yes, madame. Pray favour me with your instructions?"

The words were mocking enough, but he was smiling his peculiarly beautiful smile. It softened every harsh line into charm, and smiling responsively the little great lady proceeded seriously.

“Ah, if Your Majesty could always look like that! Well—I will answer. I was about to say that I wish Your Majesty would resemble the Kings of France, who certainly never permitted themselves to discuss these matters with their queens.”

“You little baggage. How do you know what they discussed? So the Empress complains, does she? Well, tell her that I am not an ordinary man and the laws of morals and customs were never made for me. She must adjust herself to that. And tell her too that I intend henceforth to occupy a separate bed-chamber. It is more suitable to court etiquette and it will save a good deal of annoyance. I have lived like a good *bourgeois* husband to please Josephine. Henceforward I will please myself. What do you think of that, madame?”

The black eyes were fixed on the ground, and only a little glimmer through black lashes was visible.

“I think you will please yourself, Sire. I also think—indeed I *know*—that this separation will make a great deal of talk throughout France and fix all eyes on the court. It will give rise to very injurious reports.”

“Then your wisdom advises against it, madame?”

“My wisdom having spoken is silent, Sire.”

He also was silent a moment, looking at her with meaning, then pinched her ear with rough good humour and turned laughing away.

“Ah, you are a woman and you all back each other! The audience is ended, Madam Wisdom. Tell Josephine my intention and advise her to make the best of it. It’s her own doing.”

Released, she fled to the Empress, feeding her dog with macaroons, and launched the bomb which half broke her heart. That night and henceforth the Emperor slept in his own imperial bed-chamber and the Empress slept alone. The court whispered in corners. On all was a sense of coming events.

And great events were imminent. Terror and wonder rode the air in that year of thundering victories for Napoleon, when his dark dream roared aloud at last in battle flame and crash of kingdoms.

At Austerlitz, “the Battle of Three Emperors,” the Tsar and the Austrian Kaiser led their armies in person, and the French drove them before them like chaff on a gale. Prussia, rushing to the rescue of her friends, was broken at Auerstadt and Jena, and trampling over hecatombs of corpses, Napoleon

entered Berlin. The battle of Friedland wrote a bloody Finis on the campaign and peace with Russia left him the actual ruler of Europe. He crowned himself King of Italy with the Iron Crown of Lombardy.

Surely it would end now! France, bleeding at every pore, was slowly draining out her life-blood in her sons. Where veterans had marched, beardless boys now sprang to the colours. There was peace and it must last. The Emperor, the Man of Destiny, he would know the bitter need of the country and give her a lasting peace.

Talleyrand, doubtless with his own ends to serve, yet speaking the truth for once, warned him that war-fatigue was spreading in the provinces, that if he had ambitions, France had no more. Rest, rest, that was what she implored of her master. How could he rest?

The Court was coruscating more brilliantly daily on his return. Avalanches of titles descended on the deserving; the plunder was divided lavishly. Joseph was made King of Naples; Louis, King of Holland. Jerome, the profligate little fop, separated from his beautiful American wife, was wedded to the daughter of the King of Württemberg and made King of Westphalia. Elise, swelling with pride, was made sovereign Duchess of Tuscany, and Caroline's rage at her sister's exaltation secured for her own white brow the sovereign circlet of the Grand Duchy of Berg. And the lovely Paulette? To secure a miniature throne for her beauty France was compelled to a little war. But surely it was worth it?

"It is not a great thing to be sure!" said Laure Junot. "But then even a mole-hill seems too much for her to govern. If there were kingdoms in the air as in the times of the sylphs she might be wrapped up in a rose and azure cloud nicely perfumed, and sent to rule those fortunate regions where the sceptre is a stem of flowers."

Failing a kingdom in Cloud-Cuckoo-Land, she was enthroned as reigning Duchess of Guastalla, and Laurette herself, amid a shoal of duchesses became Duchesse d'Abrantes after a terribly narrow escape of a very different title.

"I really meant to make Junot Duke of Nazareth," said Napoleon, tweaking her little pearl of an ear. "But I was afraid he might get called Junot of Nazareth and that might not be quite smart enough for you."

"Heavens, what a comedy!" said the very differently titled Duchesse de Chevreuse, joining Madame de Rémusat one night in the great ballroom. "Look at that!"

With her fan she indicated Caroline, grossly magnificent in a cuirass of diamonds, detaching a rose from among the jewels and presenting it to Junot who received it with the grace of a dog snatching a biscuit.

“And *that!*” proceeded Madame de Chevreuse, motioning to the Duchesse de Dantzig, wife of a Marshal who had begun life in a station impossible to be mentioned at the Tuileries.

Even Madame de Rémusat laughed at the large billowy lady casting noisy greetings to her.

“Shall I ever forget yesterday!” she said behind her fan. “You know she came to thank the Empress for the duchy, and the usher, not knowing of the promotion, announced her only as ‘Madame la Maréchale.’ The Empress was really shocked at the mistake and advanced with her best grace to meet her. ‘How is the Duchesse de Dantzig?’ Madame swung on her heel to the retreating usher. ‘Hey, my lad! what d’ye think of *THAT!*’ she shouted after him. The whole company burst out laughing, the duchess herself the gayest of any. I must own we grow a trifle ridiculous.”

“Well, but I like that far better than Caroline,” said Her Grace de Chevreuse. “At least it’s real, which is more than you can say for the Grand Duchess of Berg. When will it end, you ask? Whisper—and I’ll tell you. When England is ready. Then the comedy or tragedy, whichever you like to call it, will be hissed off the boards, and a new piece be put on. And I, for one, shall be glad. I am tired of these actors.”

England. She was the thorn in the side of the Emperor, the cloud which darkened his day. England, brooding across the narrow sea—she whose home like a grey gull’s was on the wild and tossing waves. Not for one moment did the glitter of his court blind his eyes to that tremendous fact. How could there be peace while she prospered?

So, in 1806, blinded by fate, he resolved to take the nation of shopkeepers by the throat—her commercial system, through which ran her life-blood. He declared the British Isles to be in a state of blockade. Trade with them was forbidden. As they had flung him off the seas he would fling them from the land. Every Englishman was an outlaw, a prisoner of war.

From St. Petersburg to Trieste every port was closed to England. The Emperor had commanded the Tsar (and the Tsar obeyed) to close the Baltic; the Channel, the Mediterranean and the Atlantic were already closed. Not even America must remain neutral. She too had her stern orders. What then could England hope?

That she did not disclose. Time would show.

There were times when Napoleon would have been glad to have Lucien at his side—a dreamer, as Madame Permon had said long ago, but a man who sometimes dreamed true. What would he say to the new-gilt family grandeurs? What to the resolution to defy England to the death?

“He has intellect!” said Napoleon, one evening sitting alone with his silent old mother. “I shall give him a throne, possibly Spain, and have him at hand. Of course he must give up the detestable female he has married, but then—”

“Let him alone—let him alone!” said Signora Letizia. She was slowly and securely investing her money in diamonds and portable securities as the blaze of glory strengthened. “Let him be, Nabulione! He is the only sensible one among you. He and I know it can’t last. You are tempting God and daring the saints. How can you escape punishment for your treatment of the Pope? Robbing him of his States as you have done!”

He told her to be silent, but the only person who did not fear him was his mother. She lifted her head, and her fine stern features, so like his own, faced him.

“I tell you, Nabulione, let Lucien alone! His wife has borne him children like a decent woman. Yours is a barren jilt. How can your work last when you die and have none to follow you? Get yourself a wife who will give you children, and even then go slowly or you will be flung out. And let Lucien alone!”

Outwardly he frowned and commanded silence. Inwardly his mother’s words troubled him for awhile, for down in his own nature was a grain of fear of the Unknown which had so mysteriously and terribly exalted him. But he told her roughly to pay her respects to the Empress in his absence and to order Caroline to have done with Junot. She was making a fool of him and a scandal of herself.

But for the time he left Lucien in peace. That could wait until after the next campaign.

To Josephine he wrote half tender, half mocking letters from the field of battle, very unlike the letters of Italy.

“Great Empress. Not a single word from you since your departure from Strasburg! You have gone to Baden, Stuttgart, Munich, and not a word! Deign from the height of your grandeur to concern yourself a little with your slave, Napoleon.”

He was willing to make her happy at the moment—for reasons. But it did not deceive her.

CHAPTER XXI

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

"I DO not hate liberty. I pushed it out of my way when it obstructed my path, but I understand it. I was brought up on thoughts of it."

True, but in the course he took it obstructed him so often that at last he came to hate it with a violent and bitter hatred, and England as its sign and standard-bearer he hated with all the power of his gigantic intellect and cramped soul.

England! Across the narrow seas she stood fearless. She had denounced him always when he trampled upon freedom. At first through such men as Fox she had commended the strong hand he laid upon the Revolution staggering gorged with blood. She, who had acquired experience in her deliberate rejection of the Stuarts and all their works commended the consummate power with which he rescued from the revolutionaries the fragments of Law and Order and rebuilt them into a Palace of the People.

But when in the delirium of megalomania he aimed to make himself the Tyrant of the World, England loosed against him, not only her own weapons of the wind and seas but the irresistible forces of the Nature of Things which endures tyranny for a day only that it may see it the more utterly swept away from the loathing face of the earth. With him it had come to that pass that he determined to dominate Europe and the Orient as a step to world dominion and felt in himself the power to conquer and rule. Yet the Powers invisible had declared against him. "Thus far and no further and here shall thy proud waves be stayed." That writing was on the boundaries of Spain, the waves of the narrow Channel. And he could not read it. But England was to be the instrument of vengeance and guessed it. She represented the middle way—the mean of Government—Napoleon the extreme, and the antagonism resolved itself into a duel to the death between the two principles. Here the keen eye of Talleyrand pierced to the essential truth and saw in it a presage of Napoleon's ruin.

"Tremble at the possibility of the Emperor's success over the English!" he whispered to the wise and silent Madame de Rémusat. "For, if the English constitution is destroyed, understand clearly that the civilization of the world will be shaken to its very foundations."

Standing alone, isolated in Europe, all ports closed against her, England did not despair: on the contrary she gathered courage.

Yet the plight of Europe might strike terror to the stoutest heart. Spain was for the moment helpless at Napoleon's feet and he had grasped his booty with all the zest of the bandit. Another crown had rolled to his feet, and the protesting Joseph, recoiling at every step, had it forced upon his head to make him another of the vassal band of kings who were to build their vassal palaces in Paris and swell the triumph of the despot. Portugal too was brought to heel, crouching under the French lash, and like Ajax, Napoleon might fling his hand to heaven and defy the thunder. It was silent for the moment in its aerial chambers.

Meanwhile a secret but far more penetrating joy and triumph had befallen him—amazing, held in his own heart for awhile and known only to those who could not be kept from the mystery. A matter that was to reverberate through all the world in its consequences—for that too was a thing uncontrollable by the Emperor. It began in Poland; in Warsaw. There, while he awaited the moment of complete victory at Friedland, lingering in winter quarters at the Palace in Warsaw, word was sent to the Polish nobles that some young and beautiful woman of their number must be found to amuse the leisure of the Emperor. And they swallowed the insult because when conquerors command slaves obey. Who were they to deny his will?

A ball at the Palace with the charming Polish women assembled in their unrivalled and seductive grace, touched with Oriental languor. The mazurka with its fire and melancholy had just been danced to a wild and touching music and the Emperor, standing for an instant alone, saw, alone also, a young woman of grave and startling loveliness. Golden-locked and white as a pearl from pure sea deeps, her dark blue eyes were fixed on him in meditative interest. Immediately he beckoned Duroc.

"Who is that exquisite creature in white? A pearl of women! The most perfect blonde I have ever seen. The other women are pretty. She is loveliness itself."

"Sire, it is Madame Walewska, wife of the old Count Walewska. Lovely indeed, and her disposition is said to be as lovely as her face. But, Sire, I fear she is a modest woman, no coquette—certainly not to be taken by storm, and her people are powerful. Such women demand courtesy."

Napoleon laughed his peculiar inward laugh and pulled Duroc's ear.

"Present her."

The girl of twenty-two was presented and shrank away terrified at the ardour which pursued her from that moment. The man, the Emperor, terrified her alike, and whatever her friends or he might desire there was a citadel in her own heart only to be surrendered to Love the Lord of all. That was a divinity she had never known except in dreams—married at fifteen to a man as old as her own grandfather.

At the end of the first evening the Emperor, left respectfully alone with his partner, was pleading his love with the arrogance of the victor, and she, head turned away, opposing a pearly shoulder to his entreaties.

“Can Your Majesty believe me a lure. I never thought—”

“Marie, I am alone in the world. I honour you. I love you. They tell me, what I have seen for myself, that your soul is as beautiful as your face, and also that you have no tie which keeps you from me. Trust me. Come to me, I entreat you.”

His own tone, his eagerness, startled Napoleon. It was strange that this woman awaked something in him which faintly resembled those long-ago days of agony and longing for the soul he could never reach in Josephine. He knew very well now what he had only feared then, that she had come to him battered and stained by the crimes of the Revolution and the carnival of licence which followed it. What event is there that does not leave its mark? And even now he knew that she clung to the tastes of those hateful days. Her wasteful extravagance and indolent lenient views of right and wrong, her slipshod kindness and evasions, sickened him at times though he took his own licence with a vengeance. Women should not be like that—something in him protested. Whatever men might do—they should be a refuge—from what? Well, she was what she was, a woman much older than himself and steeped in the atmosphere that most he hated; the licence of the Revolution. Unreasonable to blame her! But this girl with blue eyes pure as skies of dawn, sweet and cool as primroses in spring awoke a touch—no more!—of the lost romance which he had pursued through so many sordid amours only to find it evading him eternally. If it cost him two months’ idleness he would possess her. He knew it that first time of meeting, for the craving was as fierce as thirst in the desert—to snatch something from her, to heap her with something he had thought he could never give again to gain the unattainable.

But no. She bowed, smiled faintly with eyes so deeply shadowed that he could read in them nothing but a wistful melancholy which excluded him from all her secrets and shrank away shuddering. What should he do—how deal with her? He shrank from the clutch of the conqueror, though even that might come if she resisted. Duroc was a better type of man than Murat.

Duroc might understand the way in which such a woman should be treated. It was therefore Duroc whom he would employ in the future.

Duroc had his own opinions. Would not another serve as well? These charming Polish women! They were not frivolous like the yellow-haired Germans whom one could understand and win in an hour, half sickened by their sugary sentimentality. The Polish women had read and thought. Their brilliant talk was flavoured with knowledge not obtruded but delicately spicing it with exotic charms hinting at mysteries only to be shared by the favoured one. Marie Walewska had, in short, decorated her beauty with a soul, and the unassuaged hunger in Napoleon for new experiences craved to taste that manna of Paradise. He approached her again and again, but she answered the almighty Emperor very briefly and coldly and turned away to make room for another pretty woman with cool decision which left him baffled and burning. He wrote to her next day.

“I have seen only you. I have admired only you. I desire only you. A very prompt answer to calm the impatient ardor of N.”

Far too much in the style of the ravisher for the woman who had so much to give. A prompt answer? She returned no answer at all. He saw her fair and aloof at a soirée next day and though she obeyed the customs of the world in the homage she paid the Emperor, he could very well read the distance in her eyes. Worse than distance. Proud repulsion.

Strange feelings stirred in his breast—feelings which he had thought dead in Egypt, buried in the sands with the mummied Pharaohs. Her face hovered before him at night with cold down-dropped eyelids and golden lashes sealed on a pale cheek frozenly distant and sweet. In his wild impatience he could not believe that any woman should dare to make him suffer and withhold relief.

He wrote again, sending the letters through Duroc.

“Have I displeased you? I have still the right to hope the contrary. You take away my rest. Oh, give a little joy, a little happiness to a poor heart all ready to worship you. Is it so difficult to give a reply? You owe me one. There are moments when too high rank is a burden, and that is what I feel. How can I satisfy the needs of a heart hopelessly in love which would fling itself at your feet and finds itself stopped by the weight of lofty considerations paralyzing the most ardent desires? Oh, if you would! Only you can remove the obstacles which lie between us. My friend Duroc will clear the way. Oh, come, come! All your wishes shall be gratified. Your native land will be the dearer to me when you have had pity on my poor heart.”

Ardent, but also not without cunning. The brain of Napoleon could not sleep even when his heart waked. The cold-hearted beauty is to be reminded that rank is laid aside for her loveliness' sake. It is an Emperor who pleads. Not only so. She is to recall that the fate of her motherland Poland is in the balance and that the decision lies in the hollow of her white hand. There are women who would die for their country—so we are told. Will this one live for hers?

Summoning Duroc, Napoleon pierced him with the eagle glance which commanded understanding and obedience.

"You will comprehend," he said briefly, "that this letter is to command success with Madame Walewska. If it is not answered in the way I desire I shall write no more. Do not tell her this, but enable her to realize that I have come to the end of my pleading. For more I have neither time nor inclination. Do this with delicacy, but do it. Also convey to her what she should understand already, that the question of the partition or consolidation of Poland lies in my hand. Now go. That is all."

Duroc saluted and went in deep meditation. It was his opinion that however much a man might scoff at the chastity of women, one was occasionally to be found who accounted at least for the origin of the legend so far lost in the mists of antiquity. And such a blue rose he was inclined to account Marie Walewska. To him, witness of the Emperor's many amours with as much romance in them as a barrack-room jingle of Moll and Sue, it was both strange and interesting to see the new fire kindled in that cold heart, angry at its own subjugation and the woman's resistance, wounded in pride, stabbed in the belief in the power of his imperial rank and fame. Was it really love at last he wondered—or one of the many counterfeits. And if she yielded, would she fall to the level of the rest and be left to bitter shame and regret in a month? And if she refused, what revenge would the Conqueror take upon her and her country? Napoleon was as capable of littleness as of greatness. Indeed, in him they moved on the same orbit and always side by side. Greatness of the intellect, magnificent and unmatched. Littleness of the heart and of all its nobilities and generosities. To this bankruptcy had Josephine and power brought him!

It was four o'clock on a freezing January day and the sodden daylight was sinking into darkness. Duroc had come through narrow streets bedrabbled with mud and snow, wounded men crawling about them like torpid flies abandoned to a bitter winter, the tragic aftermath of brutalized power and ambition. Some sense of the futility of it all, of the meaninglessness of the world as man makes it, was borne in even upon

Napoleon's henchman as he looked about him, sighing, before he was ushered into the salon where the Countess Walewska received her guests.

The contrast! It was warm as July, the warmth perfumed delicately by rare exotics in tall jars of porcelain and Venetian glass powdered with colour. Great logs burned on the wrought-iron brackets and sent a flicker of blue and smouldering flame over the high ceiling and panelled walls. Only one silver lamp on a low table by the fire threw dim light over a book illuminated with Persian miniatures and jewelled arabesques, and the golden head bowed above it.

She was so absorbed that she did not hear his footfall on the thick Oriental carpets that silenced it, and instinctively he moved very quietly as a man does in entering the deep shadows of a church. For a moment he had halted by the door, uncertain whether he should intrude, and so noted the slender whiteness of her figure in firelight, the grace of the hand with a sparkle of diamonds supporting her chin. What tale could she read, romantic, sordid, glorious, shameful as her own might be if she so chose? She looked up and rose quietly, apologizing with grace and pointing to a chair.

"But I had told my people I would see no one to-day and therefore I expected no one. My only excuse."

There was a delicate hint in her tone which he might interpret as he would. Could it mean that the Emperor himself would have been refused if he had come? That his messenger might have been turned from the door? Duroc coloured with anger. Her cheek was lily-pale, her calm unruffled.

"I apologize, madame. It is your due. Your people told me they were not certain you were receiving to-day, but I ventured to plead a message from the Emperor and was therefore admitted. I will retire as soon as I have discharged my commission."

"If it is an invitation, General, my husband thinks that the gaieties we have shared in lately have been too much for my strength. I join him to-morrow at our house in the country."

"Indeed?" he paused on a doubt. It was very easy to read between the lines of that simple speech, so unheard of in his experience. She sat looking not at him but the fire, the warm light turning her hair to burning gold, her cheek to ivory. Had he the courage to present the letter and add the message of Napoleon? For a moment he loathed the office—saw it as it was, shameful, half rose to leave her in her firelit quiet. Only—he feared Napoleon. Duroc, who could face the charging field with a smile, knew well

that there was a certain look in Napoleon's eye he could never face. Something in him crawled when it was turned upon him.

But he could not dress up his errand in fine phrases. Her innocent quiet forbade that insult. It was only possible to be brief, military, brutal, to discharge it and go. After all—women! Who could tell that she might not be inwardly far other than she seemed?

He rose automatically from his chair and faced her.

“Madame, I have the honour to bring you a letter from the Emperor.” He laid it on her open book and continued:

“And I am to remind you in reading it that a true heart inspired the words—”

She interrupted gently:

“The Emperor's heart is concerned with things too high for a woman as lowly as myself. I do not move in his sphere. Oblige me by returning the letter to him. There is no answer whether read or unread.”

She pushed it towards him across the broad illuminated page, and rose with an air of ending the interview. They stood, the table between them, and he saw how small and slight she seemed, fragile and perfect as the bell of a lily. These were not the charms that had hitherto captured the Emperor. And yet—he could understand. She had the white grace of a young tree in a winter dawn, veiled in snow and crystal, pencilled on a fading background of grey. Altogether lovely.

“I beg you will read it, madame,” he said with sudden earnestness. “The Emperor—frankly, I dare not return to him if you refuse so much as a mere reading. Surely you will realize that in the present position of Poland—” Even he felt the disgrace of his utterance.

“That is a threat,” she said slowly and without anger. Indeed he could not decipher her mood. It was unusual in the extreme, and ambushed in the most delicate softness. She looked away from him into the heart of the fire, then turning stretched her hand for the letter.

“It is evident I must read it,” she said. “Well—I would do more than that for my country.”

He bit his lip as she broke the seal. What a speech with which to receive the Emperor's approach! And yet—she seemed to move in some white world of her own where perhaps emperors had not the significance which they bore in Europe. Her eyes, her very attitude, seemed to say this.

Reading slowly to the end, she put it down.

“A written answer is scarcely necessary. I see the threat and the bribe. My ‘wishes shall be gratified.’ My ‘native land will be dear’ to the Emperor. Return this answer. My native land has demanded many sacrifices from her women, but not this. My wish is—no, nothing high-flown. Simply to live at the level of self-respect custom demands from a Polish lady. If I wish more I do not include it in my reply. That is all.” She seated herself with a final air as though the interview were ended. Colouring and biting his lip, he turned to go with the feeling of slinking from her quiet presence.

As he did so an unseen door opened and an elderly man and woman came hand in hand into the room and stood before him. Marie Walewska grew a shade paler, rising to meet them and stretching out a beseeching hand in dead silence. Duroc knew them well, the father and mother of the most beautiful woman in Warsaw.

The mother took her hand, stooping over her, and hiding her face from Duroc. The man spoke out loudly, harshly.

“Sir, my daughter does not intend to return an answer so slighting. She has not reflected. There are far wider considerations in this case than a woman’s wish, and there is a higher type of honour even for a woman than what commonly goes by the name. That letter of the Emperor’s must be left for family consultation and I shall request you to carry no message to the Emperor other than that a reply will be sent to-morrow conveying due appreciation of his gracious condescension.”

He darted a challenging, angry look at his daughter as he spoke. Only silence answered him. Her head drooped lower on her hands. The angry voice resumed:

“In these terrible days a woman must consider many things. Her country may make great and unusual demands upon her, which when she has considered she will answer with pride. What is the life of a flower compared with immortal glory, my daughter? What is there you could not sacrifice for Poland if you recognized her voice?”

“If I recognized it, nothing!” she said faintly. “But, father, I hear only yours.”

He turned at once to Duroc.

“Leave us alone, sir, and carry the message I gave you to his Imperial Majesty. Go now—time presses.”

Duroc turned at the door and glanced back for a moment. She sat between them, a figure of the most touching beauty, bowed with an infinite resignation and submission.

When he gave the message to Napoleon his quick brain seized the situation instantly.

“Iphigenia, and the stern black-bearded kings resolved to sacrifice her! Well—the sacrifice shall not be in vain. I keep my word even to the reluctant bargainer, but she shall learn her lesson.”

Next day came a few words from her written on plain paper and sealed.

“The Countess Walewska will wait upon the Emperor at ten o’clock to-night if such is his pleasure.”

“Not even her writing!” he said, tossing it to Duroc. “Well—let her come. I hear the husband went down yesterday to the country.”

That was all. He submerged himself in the daily torrent of business military and political. Letters from Paris, from England, from sovereigns, from his family—from Josephine. . . . A letter of hers lay open before him.

“That must be answered!” he said. “Wailing and weeping as usual and wants to join me. Have it conveyed to her how impossible it would be, apart from the letter I am about to write. Here—a pen.”

He wrote rapidly in his insanely illegible writing.

“Your letter has reached me. It is impossible to allow women to make such a journey as this—bad roads, miry and unsafe. Return to Paris; be cheerful and content there. Perhaps even I shall soon be there. I have laughed at what you say about your having taken a husband that you might be with him. I thought in my ignorance, that the wife was made for the husband, the husband for his country, his family and glory. Pardon my ignorance. One is always learning from our fair ladies. Adieu, my dear. Think how much it costs me not to send for you. Say to yourself, ‘It is a proof how precious I am to him.’ Napoleon.”

Italy and its passion lay a long way behind him now. There was a fiery gulf fixed between those letters to Josephine and this, and many other faces had since dimmed hers in his busy brain. In life the body travels many leagues, but the heart on orbits wider than that of the outermost star.

At ten o’clock on the following night Marie Walewska sat in the magnificent rooms prepared for her in the palace, solitary as if in a fairy tale. Enchanted hands had spread the table with silver and sparkling glass and set wines and delicate meats and fruits for an elfin princess’s delight and had then vanished into thin air. Silence. Even the winter gale outside had sighed itself to sleep and only soft-winged snow was eddying down upon a quiet city.

From the room she sat in opened another with a bath of sculptured marble, communicating with a great bed-chamber draped with purple velvet and magnificence, and over all silence brooding immeasurably. Faint lamps stood about and in each room burned huge fires. These preparations by unseen hands had something alarmingly sinister to her loneliness.

Had she expected an eager lover on the heels of those eager notes?

Silence, and increasing terror. She loosed her great furred mantle, dropped her furred hood, because they were unbearable in the warmth and so stood like an unsheathed lily, white and trembling in the fire-glow. Already the golden clock on the marble mantel was pointing to half-past ten. And time went by, heavy footed.

Napoleon in his cabinet, working with Meneval, his secretary, piles of papers before them, was notified by a secret sign from Duroc that the bird was caged. He looked up quickly and dropped his head again. "The matter can wait," he said, and resumed his dictation.

That was his revenge. She should know that no slave of love had crept to her feet no matter what he might write to gain his end. No woman had ever boasted, should ever boast, that she had one hair's breadth of influence over him—this woman least of all for whom he had unbent in a manner which corroded his very soul with angry pride. She should kiss his feet before he had done with her.

Duroc stood waiting.

"I have no orders to give. We shall work late to-night, Menevalot!" he said, using a diminutive of the secretary's name in sign of excessive good humour. Duroc went out without a word.

At one o'clock, kneeling, weeping, broken with shame, Marie Walewska flung on her mantle, ready to rush out into the snow if any sort of flight were possible. She opened the door with blinding tears streaming from her eyes and looked out upon an empty corridor with a heavy shut door at the end. She rushed at it and tried it. Locked. And if even she had held the key the interminable corridors through which Duroc had led her would have baffled her. What unseen eyes might be watching her agony with mocking delight? Stung by the thought she turned and fled again into the room where the untouched meal lay on the table. The clock soundlessly moving recorded a quarter past one, and every second appeared to stamp her with its own record of shame. The windows? Oh, better far to hurl oneself to the moonlit snow so far beneath and be forgotten. She tried the shutter. Locked and bolted. Broken, beaten, she fell into a chair, covering her face with her hands, a prisoner of shame.

As the clock on its journey reached half-past one, the Emperor opened the door softly, and stood looking at her. She rose, deadly pale, supporting herself by the back of her chair, not trembling now, frozen with terror at the inhumanity of the man into whose hands she had given herself. He came towards her, his arms behind him in his favourite attitude, and stood looking coolly into her eyes.

“I have kept you waiting, madame.”

She motioned something dumbly.

“It was necessary that I should. Do not imagine that my interest in you has lessened, but all who approach me must learn the lesson of submission. You have learned it now. You will not mistake me again. Come—eat and drink with me. I am hungry and you are exhausted.”

He put his arm about her and led her with a kind of rough tenderness to the table. She fell half-fainting against his shoulder, conquered in body and soul, utterly at his mercy. That night she lay in his arms, sleepless, tortured, conquered. But if he had won her, she also had won him, so far as any woman’s empire could exist in that cold and preoccupied heart. He could not do without her night or day. She made a home for him in the heart of battle, and with a rush like the breaking of spring upon the world she realized at last what she might be to him and loved him with all her subjugated heart and soul. His tyranny was love’s ardour and the splendid arrogance of a man above all others. She took her orders laughing for joy, kissing his hands, her arms about him, glowing with life and awakened youth, adoring her master, blessing God that he had ravished her. A very woman. She was to join him at the Castle of Finckenstein and during those two months of winter quarters she would live in his arms and who should dare warn the Empress and break their peace?

Meanwhile he wrote to her:

“Marie, my sweet Marie! My first thought is for you, my first longing to see you again. You will come again. You promised me. If not, the eagle will fly to you. I shall see you at dinner a friend tells me. Deign then to accept this bouquet; let it become a mysterious link which shall establish between us a secret union in the midst of the crowd surrounding us. When my hand presses my heart you will know it is filled with thoughts of you, and for answer you will press your bouquet closer. Love me, my lovely Marie, and never let your hand leave your flowers.”

When Napoleon chose to captivate either man or woman it seemed that each must respond. She loved him, she sacrificed all for him, and henceforward his people were her people and his God her God—himself.

Her aged husband repudiated her; she was unable to achieve for her country the promised good. She had been robbed and cheated and still she loved with adoring tenderness the man who had robbed her of all—yet had given her all. For, on a certain day, she came to him with news to tell—news which declared itself in every line of her lovely trembling body, her face thrilling and sparkling with tears and smiles of radiant joy and pride, the moment of perfect union for lovers, restoring the lost Eden hovering on the horizon since the world's begging.

But even she could not understand the immensity of the joy that flashed across his face as he heard her words and hearing knew that the very meaning of the world was altered before him.

“If it is true—” he said, and choked on the utterance.

“It is true—it is true as heaven,” she cried, “and I shall have given you your first-born son. Oh, what have I done to deserve this joy of joys!”

She knelt before him clasping slender arms about him.

He stared at her, pale as death, his hand on the table shaking like a leaf.

“My son!”

She wreathed herself upward to his breast, her heart beating on his in the certainty of rapture shared to its inmost vibration of delight. She could not know that in the eyes that stared beyond her were visions of dynasties and empires and splendours and pomps in which she and hers had no share.

At last a coldness in the silence touched her. She made a motion to draw herself away and then and not till then he clasped her to him with passionate tenderness. The world blossomed before him new and glorious and she was the giver of the gift.

Her love had sealed the fate of Josephine—Josephine who was weeping almost as one despairing over the death of the child who stood between her and ruin—the little Napoleon, son of Hortense. For the child who was the hope of France was dead and her own hope with him.

Later, Napoleon brooding deeply, went southward to meet Lucien at Mantua and tempt him with a choice of the crowns and kingdoms of Europe. His own way was opening clear before him now. Lucien's record of that scene is strange and significant.

He struck a great blow with his hand in the middle of the immense map of Europe extended on the table. “Choose! I am not talking in the air. I dispose of all this. Do you want Naples? Italy?—the most beautiful jewel in my crown? Eugene is but Viceroy, and he hopes I shall give it to him or at least leave it to him if he survives me. He will be disappointed for I shall

live ninety years. I must, for the consolidation of my Empire. Besides, Eugene will not suit me in Italy after his mother is divorced. Spain? It is falling into the hollow of my hand. Would you not be well pleased to reign there? Once for all, what do you want? All you can wish is yours on the sole condition that your divorce precedes mine.”

Lucien stared bewildered. Divorce? Then was it fixed. Had the Clan prevailed? But, however that might be for Napoleon, Lucien preferred his wife and children to a crown. Always a dreamer, an idealist, as Madame Permon had announced long before!

Reasoning from a very different point of view from his mother’s, he also had no belief in the duration of his brother’s Empire. He realized what the other did not, that the Nature of Things stood with set face against it.

Steadily he refused. He would not abandon his wife and family. Rather would he take refuge in the New World—in the land of liberty, America, from all the tyrannies in which Napoleon was chaining Europe.

“I will not leave them.”

That was the end. The Emperor as formally refused to accept them.

“Everything for Lucien divorced. Nothing for Lucien without divorce.” That was the ultimatum.

So they parted, tears standing in the eyes of Lucien, Napoleon’s dry and bright. He was returning next day to Paris where his son lay on the bosom of Marie Walewska.

THE TWILIGHT OF THE GODS

WHEN NAPOLEON returned to Paris after the campaign which laid all Europe at his feet, in all the world was no man so eminent. Alexander, Tsar of Russia, whose gay smiles covered so many and deep reserves—the Russian Bear turned into a lap-dog of France—the trampled King of Prussia and his sad and lovely wife, Queen Louise, with uncounted constellations of lesser stars, were his courtiers at the famous gathering of Tilsit, and of all the Kings and Princes, whether of his own creation or otherwise, none was too great to do him reverence.

The fumes of homage mounting to his brain drugged it against the truth of things and intoxicated him with a fatal intoxication. How could he, who had so attained, doubt the heights above him or his own infinite wisdom? Outwardly he had the pose of scorning adulation. Inwardly it moulded his every thought and deed, deafening him to the voice of facts, sealing him irrevocably into the prison of his own selfhood—a self against the world. And above all, it sharpened his hatred of England, the one Power who stood aloof, calm and disdainful of “the upstart tyrant,” driving him onward frantically to her destruction.

Did Josephine guess the doom that drew near her other than as the dread that had overshadowed her life since Napoleon spread his eagle wings? At all events she was left in the dark as long as possible. In his opinion the time was not yet. With Marie Walewska by him, he wrote to his wife with the cunning of a lover, blinding her eyes with half confidences.

“The Queen of Prussia dined with me yesterday. I had to be on the defence against some further concessions she wished me to make to her husband, but I was very polite and yet held firmly to my policy. The Queen is really charming. She is full of coquetry for me; but don’t be jealous. I am an oil-cloth over which all that can only glide. It would cost me too much to play the lover.”

Yet if he hoped to blind Josephine to his passion for Marie Walewska he was deceived. An Empress can always find courtiers who will spy for her and she knew and trembled, but not a word did she utter to Napoleon. Madame de Rémusat and others who had long since perceived that she was steering her frail bark to destruction had warned her that the sands were

running out, that only perfect acquiescence in all his amours could save her. This she had painfully learned to give and he repaid her by coarse and careless confidences, but neither to her nor to others did he speak as yet of the mother of his son. He could not be faithful to Marie, nor to any, but she carried a different atmosphere with her which he acknowledged.

“Her character is as lovely as her face,” he said one day, studying a miniature set in pearls from which her fair beauty and serene blue eyes looked into his. That passion had shaken what hold Josephine had upon him—the hold of habit more than anything else since those fatal days in Italy and Egypt when the poor little Creole threw aside the birthright of his love for such a mess of pottage as Hippolyte Charles, Barras and Gohier could offer her.

Now it was gone.

“Suddenly, as rare things will, it vanished.”

The Clan rejoiced, though discreetly, in the Walewska amour and its sequel, for Lucien sent speeding among them the words of the Emperor at Mantua. He related how Napoleon had spoken of divorce and of his wife as none ever yet had heard him. With black brows frowning above set lips he had said:

“She has a reputation for good-nature, but you know, brother, she is far more malicious than is generally supposed, although I own she has no nails for her husband. But the shadow of divorce has made life very constrained between us. Only imagine what my life must be! This wife of mine pickles herself in tears every time she has indigestion, because she says she thinks herself poisoned by those who wish me to marry somebody else. It is perfectly hateful.”

It was coming, coming, and come it must, for Napoleon realized as all about him realized that the consolidation of Europe under the power of France could not even be achieved, much less survive himself, unless there were a son of his blood to inherit, and now that the frail barrier of a child's life—the son of Hortense—was swept away, now that he knew himself capable of children, the end stared Josephine in the face.

Before he returned to Paris, the first blow was struck.

Entering the room of the Empress one morning, Madame de Rémusat found her pale with terror, almost frenzied, standing and clinging to the back of her chair with shaking hands.

“Do you know—can you guess the terrible thing which has happened? The private passage between the Emperor's apartments and mine is closed.

They have built it up! This is the end!”

The lady-in-waiting stood petrified with amazement, for the moment unable to reply. There could be no attempt at consolation; the meaning was too clear. But the quick brain and sense of honour, of *noblesse oblige*, which comes from high birth and tradition, could not be content with the floods of tears and lamentations in which Josephine’s grief dissolved. An instant more and she threw herself on her knees before the sobbing Empress.

“Madame, if it is inevitable as I believe, Your Majesty has now the great and shining opportunity of your life. You can place yourself on a height where you will command not only the Emperor’s homage, but that of the whole world. Never had any woman so glorious a chance. Take it, I beseech you!”

“I will—I will. Oh, what is it?” cried Josephine, flinging away a soaked handkerchief for another to dry her streaming eyes. “You will see that I will do anything, anything, to expose Bonaparte’s cruelty and perfidy to the world. Oh, if I only had a clear head like his—then I could have shamed him again and again. There are things which if I told—horrible things!—about his sisters. Ah, if you knew what he is!”

Sobs stifled her. The young woman who knew very well some of the stories which had had their origin with Josephine brushed all this helpless nonsense aside with impatience disguised as earnestness.

“Yes, Madame—but I did not mean that. Your Majesty could never consent to humble in the person of the Emperor the France which made you Empress. What you should now do is this—you know the determination of the Emperor to separate himself from you. Retire to-morrow with your ladies to Malmaison and write from there to the Emperor, declaring that you restore his freedom to him. That fine gesture may restore the first love of the Emperor or it may decide him to accept the sacrifice, but in any case when henceforward he thinks of nobility your name will be in his heart.”

The very tears suspended in her eyes, her lips apart, the Empress stared into the glowing face of her lady-in-waiting. For the moment she positively believed her insane, so far, so high, was this counsel from the habitual round of her own thoughts. But when she realized that she was sane and in earnest, the pettish indignation of which alone she was capable, swept her for a moment into suspicion and volubility very unlike her usual gentle languor.

“What, madame, you dare thus to advise me? And am I to throw away all the future of Hortense and Eugene as well as my own? A mother to ruin her children? With Bonaparte, give an inch and he takes an ell. He is capable of driving me out with the pension of a grocer’s wife if he wants the money

for his new Empress. I should be a lunatic if I did as you advise and if I did not know you so well I might suspect— No. He crowned me in the face of the world. He must drive me from the throne in the face of the world, and take the consequences. I know him. You don't."

Madame de Rémusat rose and stood sedately before the Empress. She saw her own folly in talking a language of which Josephine knew not even the alphabet, and her emotion subsided as quickly as it had risen.

"Then, Madame, I see only one alternative. Remain where you are, acknowledging that you cannot decide upon your own fate. Profess yourself always ready to obey but positively determined to have the Emperor's direct orders before you descend from the throne."

Josephine drew herself up.

"That's better, but all the same I shall fight every inch. I shall let him know—"

"What, Madame, and be dragged, shrieking and struggling as it were, from the Palace? Oh, Madame, you have been an Empress. You . . ."

"I shall consider what you have said. I know how kindly you mean, but how can you—can *any one*, understand the misery those accursed Bonapartes are inflicting on me. It is they. And this new mistress. This Walewska. He has taken a house in Paris for her and wishes to be free with her, and Caroline encourages him in all the horrors he does."

With despairing patience Madame de Rémusat tried to accommodate herself to the understanding of this woman who could never be an Empress at heart.

"Madame, Your Majesty mistakes. This is not the question of a mistress. Think of them no more. You may weep to lose the position of the Emperor's wife. That position may certainly gratify pride, but to be his mistress must be a bitter lot. Is his a nature to compensate a weak and loving woman for her sacrifices? Or to afford an ambitious one the means of exercising power? You know as well as I."

But at the moment the Empress knew nothing but that her world was falling in ruins about her.

On his return he sent for Madame de Rémusat and spoke with brief decision.

"I speak in confidence and the certainty of your understanding for your intelligence has not been lost upon me. The divorce is resolved. My private feelings must yield like everything else to public policy. Cheer the Empress; convince her of this and of my continued friendship. Assure her that the

provision made for her shall be all she can wish. Let her show an example of cheerful submission in the eyes of the world and be tranquil. In a word, infuse some of your own resolute good sense into her, and you shall never have cause to regret the valuable assistance you will thus give her. I will make you a very great lady and you shall have an important position about the new Empress.”

Again that emotion which policy should have controlled but in which race and breeding triumphed overcame the young court lady. Her head went up; bright eyes met his and dared them.

“Sire, I like the good things of this world as well as another, but—if the Empress goes into retirement I shall follow her. She has been kind to me and —”

She could say no more, and turned slightly as if to leave him. He stepped between her and the door, compelling her to face him, and for the first and last time in her life she saw Napoleon moved by emotion in another. The strong line of his lip quivered, the marble calm of his features relaxed into a kind of appealing gentleness indescribably touching.

“Madame, you are right. You rebuke me. I honour you.”

That was all. The scene passed in a breath. She was sweeping her curtsy at the door and the Emperor had turned from her to the window. As she went swiftly along the corridors to her rooms she said in her own heart:

“Perhaps he would have been a better man if he had been more loved, and above all loved in a better way.”

That evening she had a few words with Talleyrand, in the embrasure of one of the great draped palace windows.

“So it is settled at last!” he said, with that glance in his eye cold as January sunshine. “Did I not tell you that when we knew we could have sons like other people it would make history? And Madame Walewska has altered the course of history for this means much more than one pretty lady instead of another on the throne. We are nearing the end. I would not barter my salary for all the son will inherit. Not I! Now, who will be Empress?”

“The end!” she breathed. “And with Europe at his feet!”

“My child, you forget. There is always England. And now that he has annexed Spain—for it amounts to that—he has laid himself open not only to the censure of the world but to the fleets and armies of England. He will live to curse the name of Spain.”

She could not take her eyes off the strange grey face with its mocking eyes and the little laugh scarcely to be heard.

“But, Monseigneur, you encouraged him in the Spanish adventure. I have heard you say—”

He brushed that aside.

“It remains now for him to take a princess from a great power, to believe that that alliance will secure its fidelity in his day of need and—pouf!”

He took a pinch of snuff and turned away, leaving her with a sinking sensation of terror that she had never known before. It was as though great shadowy events were slowly enveloping the Palace with their wings. She had hoped—who had not hoped!—that when war had consolidated the power of France, Napoleon would be transformed into the beneficent sovereign, great in peace as in war, and a long era of calm glory stretch before France, bleeding from every vein of her sons in these tremendous wars. But if terrors, vague, darkening, vast, were closing in upon them what dreadful things might not the ruin of the Emperor mean? The downfall of civilization in Europe—and what else?

But the proceedings for the divorce went ruthlessly on, and as it drew nearer and nearer frantic grief and terror possessed Josephine.

It was on the last day of a chilling November that Napoleon, leading her into a room alone, and himself almost unnerved, told her his decision with what calm he could muster. Was it a touch of human pity or only the stupefying change which it would mean to himself in all accustomed forms of life? Who can tell? Memories, cruel and tender, battling in his mind broke up even his iron self-control into a shuddering dread of the uncertain future.

Quick as lightning she detected the weakness and threw herself at his knees.

“Beloved, you cannot, you cannot dismiss your wretched wife whose only fault is that she has been too much a woman and has loved you to adoration. Can you drive me out into the cold mocking world to satisfy your cruel family, whom I would have won if I could? I have tried—I pleaded for Lucien, for Caroline. You know—you know! And will you sacrifice me to their hate? Oh, you cannot!”

Despairing of giving her the larger view, she who never had seen life from any but her own standpoint, he lifted her to his knee, folding her in his arms.

“Dearest, do I think of them for one moment? I swear to you, no. It is that I must have an heir or all I have done falls into ruin. See with me, for me, for only one moment. Can you believe I put you from me for anything less? Be just to me, Josephine. I have done much for you. You shall be my

friend always. It is my work my work. All I have gained is lost if I leave no son behind me.”

She drew herself so far out of his arms that she could look into his face—her own wan and haggard, a pitiful sight indeed, beauty forgotten, the shadow of age asserting itself in cruel triumph. He saw it and in the quick notions of his thought alike hated himself for seeing it and rejoiced that he would be free of her soon.

“Now I will tell you,” she said, trying to steady her voice and still the trembling in her hands. Their eyes met and held each other as each looked into the other’s soul. “Last night when I was alone—after such grief as—oh, your cold heart!—you never, never understand—I remembered a crystal ball given me long ago. I was told the Orientals see strange things in it. No, don’t draw away! Listen!—I shall not trouble you much more. Before I resolved to marry you, when I had the power and you owed all to me, I looked in it one night alone and I saw two stars—two great stars—rise from the depths of the crystal and mingle and shine together. I saw it! and so it has been. I brought you everything, you know—you know!”

Her fingers were gripping his shoulders. She was speaking with fixed and terrible energy so unlike herself that it held him rigid. He stared back at her wordless.

“And last night when I was alone, late, and your room shut off from mine, never to be opened again—I said, ‘I will look into the crystal.’ And I got it, and I looked into it, all alone. Listen! Up from the deep came swimming the great red star—bright! bright! And I thought—it is only one now. Mine is lost in it for ever. But as I looked, I saw it break up slowly and it was two. Two as I saw it long ago. My star and yours. And as I looked . . .”

Her voice trembled so that for a moment she could not speak. He put his two hands up and grasped hers by the wrists to steady her. “Go on!” he said.

“You will think I lie to save myself, but God knows it is true. I say it to God, not you. I saw the two stars, and the red star flickered out and died. It was dead. Dead. But the other—the pale star—grew and grew, and lit the crystal like a moon. Oh, beloved, think what you do. Think before it is too late! Fortune came with me. It will go with me.”

She collapsed on his shoulder like a dead woman. But his mind was a storming sea. For the moment that meant nothing to him. “My star!” How often he had boasted it. The Army—He had heard by many a camp fire in many a thunder of applause—“the Star of the Emperor.” But hers—hers also? Mere contemptible superstition. Yet men believed it. If it had

influence? Oh, folly, folly, was he growing old, or weak, or brain-diseased, that such a thing could hold him for a moment from his purpose? But how could he think clearly with her dead weight in his arms, her ruined face on his shoulder? For many minutes he remained silent, supporting her, until reason regained sway over the tumult in his mind—but had it conquered or was it only that he knew things had gone too far and no retreat was open, even if he had wished it?

He strengthened his clasp about her.

“Josephine, this is madness unworthy of us both, and we must talk alone no more. It is good for neither of us. I will send Hortense to you and she will tell you all I intend and hope. Never, never for a moment imagine yourself forsaken. The stars are still one and it was a lying crystal that told you otherwise. Stay here and rest.”

He disengaged himself as gently as he could, laying her on the long sofa and drawing a cover over her, for she trembled with cold of the body and the bitter chill of the soul. He stood a moment looking down upon her, then turned away and went off to Hortense, with a second ordeal to confront there.

He found her calm and infinitely sad, with a melancholy dignity repelling the brusqueness with which he safeguarded his own composure.

She stood frail as a wisp of morning mist, supporting herself against the great window as she spoke.

“Sire, you tell me tears will do no good. Have I wept. Has Eugene? You say the divorce is necessary to the safety of the Empire. We accept it. We shall follow our mother into exile. For me there is little to lose. You know my marriage was political. It was to give you an heir of your own family, and the wretchedness it brought upon me you know. That too was a sacrifice to your Empire. My son is dead. My second son has not won your favour. We have played our parts in vain, Eugene and I, like our mother.”

She spoke without bitterness, and her grave submission struck home to him in every sense of rectitude and justice. He stared at her in bewilderment.

“And can you think—does Eugene believe that I am repudiating my two children whom I have treated so tenderly? Hortense—Hortense—you cruelly misjudge me. You shall never leave me. You and Eugene and your children are my care. And your mother, she shall retire covered with glory and splendour—nothing too much to give her. She shall have the position of a reigning Empress. Has she thought otherwise? I never dreamed that she

could. Run to her, Hortense. Don't waste a moment, and tell her—assure her of what I say.”

Hortense did not fail in her errand.

“Mother,” she said beseechingly, grasping the trembling hands in hers, “let me tell you what this really means. You have not understood. You can, if you please, stand on a pinnacle beside the Emperor—and at the worst you will have peace. Has this been peace? Never!”

“Never. Never.”

“But you can have it now. Another woman will shoulder your burdens and be miserable in your place. Oh, if it were my fate—how I should rejoice! God send it to me some day, and keep me from dying of envy when I see you free, honoured and happy, and rid of those terrible Bonapartes.”

It won her mother at last—that strange point of view to which certain things in her own heart answered. It gave her courage to meet the inevitable day and to use her sorrow as an aureole to win the world's sympathy.

Napoleon had kept secret, except from Talleyrand and certain great officers of state, what his intentions were as regarded the position of the retiring Empress, and the Clan assembled in the salon of the Emperor vibrating with delight and excitement to gloat over the downfall of the detested Creole. They sat in a semicircle, dressed in full court costume, handsome strong men and women. There were the brothers, King Louis, the husband of Hortense, King Jerome of Westphalia, King Murat of Naples, with his wife, the crowned and sparkling Caroline. King Joseph was absent endeavouring to govern the Spanish kingdom violently thrust upon him by Napoleon, but his mild and gentle queen, compassionating Josephine and dreading the scene, sat concealing her face as best she could with her fan. Pauline and the stern old mother were beside them. The Arch-Chancellor and Minister of State were present, and Napoleon sat wrapped in gloomy silence, waiting the moment. In the centre of the room was placed an armchair and before it a small table with a golden inkstand.

A door opened and Josephine entered between Hortense and Eugene, pale but clinging desperately to composure, endeavouring to fix her mind on the good which the pressure of Hortense's hand assured her lay beyond the moment's agony. She and Hortense alike wore simple white dresses, divested of all ornament. She moved softly and with her wonted grace to the solitary chair, her children standing behind her.

Then rising with military precision Napoleon addressed the Arch-Chancellor.

“The political interests of my monarchy and the desires of my people require that I should leave behind me heirs to my love for my people. For many years I have given up hopes of children by my marriage with my well-beloved wife the Empress Josephine: and this it is which induces me to sacrifice the dearest affections of my heart. I have nothing but praise for the devoted attachment of my very dear wife. She has enriched thirteen years of my life. She was crowned by my hand, she shall always retain the rank and title of Empress, but above all it is my desire that she shall never doubt my feelings towards her nor regard me as other than her best and dearest friend.”

Dead silence as the monotonous voice faltered and halted, and the family staring in dumb amazement and mortification knew that speech had failed him and saw in the working of his face that the joy that filled their hearts was not all joy to the Emperor. No degradation awaited the woman they had thought to triumph over. Her pale quiet acceptance of grief set her still enthroned above the pin-pricks of their hate, and she looked down upon their blunted malice. She rose, holding a little paper in her hand, and reading from it in a voice which even in their jealous ears was sweet. At first it did not falter.

“With the permission of my husband, august and beloved, I declare that since I have no hope of bearing children to satisfy the needs of France, I rejoice to give him the highest proof of love and devotion ever given. All I possess is from his goodness. From my throne I have received nothing but love from the French people. I show my gratitude by consenting to the dissolution of a marriage which is an obstacle to the welfare of France. . . .”

She paused on the word, breathless, then uttered faintly: “I can say no more.”

The Secretary of State took the paper with reverence from her hand and read her renunciation to the end.

The Act of Separation was read, and, rising, Josephine with gentle dignity and in a voice which scarcely trembled pronounced the oath of acceptance, then, taking the pen, she signed it. All was over: they who had been one were divided for ever.

The terrible ceremony was ended and she who never failed in grace and sweetness when they were demanded had endured it with submission which touched for a moment even the hearts of her foes. Not a movement, not a breath fluttered the air as she arose for the last time and, taking the arm of Hortense, moved slowly from the room, Eugene following, head bowed, hiding his face as he went.

It was done—so far as outward show and the will of man could break the bond. But all was not ended.

That night, when Napoleon lay in his bed, empty by his own will, quivering himself under the sense of shock and change, the door opened and Josephine felt her way as it were blindly towards him. Her face was swollen with weeping, her steps tottered as she stood irresolute, a little apart with clasped hands, as though chilled into a statue of grief. Then with a great and bitter cry the ice broke up in her heart, she flung herself upon the bed, clasping him to her for the last time on earth.

Locked in each other's arms with kisses salt with tears they recalled and dismissed the past for one brief hour.

It ended, and she went as she had come, leaving the chamber silent as death, and Napoleon hidden in the darkness.

Next day, veiled from head to foot, Josephine entered her carriage and took the road to Malmaison, leaving behind her things that neither could estimate in that strange moment.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE IMPERIAL BRIDE

EMOTIONS were fleeting, the great fact remained, and with the dissolution of the marriage Europe watched every movement of the Emperor, every smile or silence of Talleyrand. The Empress Josephine also was watched with intense curiosity. It was known that scandal itself could not complain of the treatment she had received. Her appanage was magnificent. Malmaison, near Paris, the Château of Navarre in the country, the Élysée Palace in Paris, were hers. The Emperor wrote friendly notes to her, saw her occasionally but not alone, treated her with consideration. If she wept over trifles, that was a habit and troubled no one for she now belonged to the past. And there were substantial consolations and interests. The day after the divorce she said to Madame de Rémusat:

“Black is always becoming to me. I have resolved to wear it for a year. Desire Madame Bertin to come down. And I beg you to find out whether the Walewska is in Paris. We can mingle our tears and shall understand one another.”

Petrified, Madame de Rémusat obeyed, and Marie de Walewska and her child were soon favoured guests at Malmaison. As several of the Empress’s readers had held the same position with regard to Napoleon there was quite a congenial little society of mourners. Josephine took a half curious, half jealous interest in the approaching marriage, and followed every fluctuation of purpose with little confidences and nods and winks to her court.

“I am in favour of the Austrian Archduchess. You will see the Emperor will take my advice!” and so forth. Meanwhile her debts flourished in rank luxuriance as of old. He would have to pay them now.

For his part, Napoleon inclined to the magnificent advantages offered by the Russian Princess. Austria had lain at his feet ever since he began the skyward rush of his career. Russia stood mysterious and unconquered behind her veil of snows.

And had not the young Tsar been his bosom friend when they had met and negotiated at Tilsit? Gay and simple-hearted as a boy, he could refuse nothing to his friend Napoleon! Seated in the theatre among surrounding kings when the famous actor Talma pronounced the words: “The friendship of a great man is a gift of the gods,” he had risen impulsively and clasped

Napoleon in his arms before the applauding crowd. He would be overjoyed, proud to give his young sister to his friend and mingle the blood of the Romanoffs with that of the Bonapartes. There was not by any means the same cordiality in the stiff, frigid Austrian Emperor who could never forget his defeats. Alexander the Tsar was all warmth and affection. And what an ally against England with his gigantic army, his fierce and terrible Cossacks!

England. That hated name could not even be eliminated from his bridal discussions with Talleyrand, who entered (in his own reserved way) with such sympathy into the glorious future opening in the new alliance.

Many were the occasions when in the council of State the qualifications of the rival princesses were discussed. There was a brutal frankness as to the physical merits of either, for the birth of an heir was of the first consequence, the other advantages secondary, yet not to be neglected.

“I have much to consider,” the Emperor told the assembled ministers. “The isolation of England is not working as it should; far from it. The feeling of patriotism, even in France, is so weak that English goods at enormous prices pour in and fortunes are made by dastards who have no regard for my laws. My whole system depends upon the ruin of England. Now a family alliance with the Tsar will give us control through Russia and adjacent kingdoms of ports invaluable to me. His huge army also will march at my orders. What has the Austrian to offer which can be weighed against this?”

Talleyrand and Fouché looked at each other in silence. Napoleon continued:

“The savage folly of the Spaniards in refusing allegiance to my brother demands anxious thought, for there also England is pouring in armies under Lord Wellington and the English ships patrol the coasts of Spain and Portugal as if they were their own. With the Russian army to hold the field for us in Europe we should be free to concentrate a far greater battle array in Spain. In my opinion, even setting aside the Tsar’s warm personal regard for me, a Russian princess is the need of France, and my purpose is to ask the hand of the Grand Duchess Anna.”

There was towering pride in the glance he flung round the council. How far and remote the half-starved military student at Brienne, the little Corsican captain, from the Emperor who believed he conferred honour on the Grand Duchess by considering her! It was the very madness of power.

Something of the same thought, mingled with the hatred and contempt of the supple for the strong, lurked behind the perfect self-control of Talleyrand as he prepared to reply.

“Sire, you know best, and your personal friendship for the Tsar may be the strongest guarantee for the marriage. Your remarks about the failure of the league against English commerce are painfully true. It may yet be enforced, but if it cannot be the outlook is grave in the extreme.”

Fouché interposed smoothly.

“As a matter of fact until every human heart can be inspired with honour and patriotism such a league as that against England is bound to fail. I said so at the time it was proposed and if the Russian marriage . . .”

“*You* to talk of honour!” cried Napoleon, the thundercloud black upon his brow. “You, the scum of the Revolution. . . .”

The high officials looked one upon the other in silence. The outbreaks were becoming more furious as time went on; the despot more ruthless. Seeing nothing but the end to be attained, he trampled ruthlessly on all that lay between—men’s pride, and vanity, their honest self-respect,—every human feeling must give way to his will.

Fouché answered nothing. That bloody record of his in the Revolution Napoleon kept for a whip to scourge him, exactly as he kept the record of Talleyrand and all others with whom he had to deal, rejoicing in their dishonour since it gave him a lever by which to move them. But Talleyrand and Fouché were moving to their goal also and daily seeing it draw nearer as Napoleon’s Tower of Babel dared the skies with its conglomeration of alien peoples horded and herded under the French flag.

He took up the word smoothly as Fouché subsided.

“Sire, if the Russian marriage would allay our anxieties it would be welcome. But what of Spain—Spain is an open wound draining our strength away and even among our allies it is felt that we are outraging freedom across the Pyrenees. I understand the Tsar at Tilsit expressed himself. . . .”

Napoleon sprang to his feet, every passion in him unleashed, his growing distrust of Talleyrand breaking into a fury of flaming words:

“You—you! You to speak of Spain! You are a thief, a coward, a man without honour: you have all your life been a traitor to your duties. You have deceived and betrayed everybody. Nothing is sacred to you; you would sell your own father. I have heaped you with gifts and there is nothing you would not undertake against me. For the past ten months because you thought, rightly or wrongly, that my affairs in Spain were going astray you have been shameless enough to say to all who would listen that you blamed my doings there. *You!* . . . You who put it into my head and egged me on. What are you aiming at? What do you wish? What do you hope? You

deserve that I should smash you like a wineglass, but I despise you too much to take the trouble.”

There was stupefied silence when the furious voice ceased.

Talleyrand, leaning against the marble mantelpiece, bore it as a statue might bear the pelting of hurricane rain. Under lowered lids he shot a glance at Fouché, and then his serene voice dropped like pellets of ice into the midst of the astonished circle.

“What a pity that so great a man has been so badly brought up! Shall we now resume our business?”

After, as though no whirlwind had passed over their heads, he uttered a few words signifying the acquiescence of the council in any determination of the Emperor’s as to his proposals to Russia. It was decided that they should be sent to the Tsar.

Napoleon, stunned by this colossal impudence, adjusted himself as best he might to the defeat. Talleyrand was indispensable.

As the ministers passed sedately down the grand staircase Fouché slackened his pace to Talleyrand’s lame gait, and offered his arm as a support—a very natural movement. They followed the others at a distance.

“That was a pretty show!” he said in a low voice. “You bore it well, my friend. You encouraged him to the Russian alliance. You are sure of the Tsar?”

Talleyrand feigned to negotiate the stairs with more than his usual difficulty.

“I was in the Tsar’s inmost confidence at Tilsit. He would no more give his sister to Bonaparte than to the beggar in the street. His scorn of the offer will drive the upstart mad and into the arms of Austria. Which is what Metternich desires. They want some one about the brute just now who will influence him to Austria.”

“And then?”

“Then—if you knew the Austrian Emperor you would know that in the day when Bonaparte most needs and trusts his father-in-law he will desert him. Spain was the beginning of the end, the Austrian marriage is its consummation. Why, even Louis—his own brother—as King in Holland can bear his arrogance and tyranny no more. Whom the Gods will to destroy they first make mad.”

“That is a very appropriate saying and well worthy of your wit, my friend,” said the bland ignorance of Fouché. “Well, the Bourbons will soon

be cheering up. Is it true that Josephine has her finger in the Austrian pie?"

Talleyrand laughed his inward laugh.

"Very true, my friend. Metternich wrote me that she and Hortense had both made pronounced overtures to his wife concerning the Archduchess Marie Louise which were referred to the Austrian Emperor. Heavens, what a woman! My wise little Rémusat tells me that Josephine is saying that if she herself wanted to marry again the Emperor would not object. She says that it would not have occurred to her at the moment but he himself suggested at the time of the divorce that she should marry that handsome young Mecklenburg-Schwerin who was smitten with her charms a year or two ago. She believes, she says, that the prince has since written to him asking for her hand."

"Good God!" said Fouché, actually startled. "But would Bonaparte—"

"Bonaparte! He would kill a dog which attempted to leave him for another, even if he had discarded it. And his cast-off wife—the Empress! No, my dear Fouché. We only amuse ourselves at Malmaison with these little vanities. Again what a woman! But she matters nothing now. By the way, Dr. Corvisart tells me that Bonaparte is in a rotten state of health really, and that that accounts for the rages and vacillations. We shall see what we shall see!"

If there were anything upon which Napoleon counted it was the eagerness of the Tsar for the alliance. The first opportunity would bring his joyful acceptance. On that basis his pride was firmly established.

Delays. Excuses. Letters to be shown to the Council very painful to the Emperor's vainglory. That was all.

"The Grand Duchess is so young. The Tsaritsa Mother cannot immediately reconcile herself to the idea of parting with her."

And so forth over months. Wounded in his savage pride, Napoleon cut the negotiations short—left them unfinished. Let them keep their Grand Duchess if they would. The Austrian was crawling to his feet, plotting, endeavouring to influence even Josephine, every one, everything to gain acceptance for the Archduchess Marie Louise. But in the heart of Napoleon was stored and hidden a deep implacable vengeance against his false friend the Tsar. He should never have trusted the Russian Bear, he said.

"When he shows as seeking quarter, with paws like hands in prayer,
That is the time of peril—the time of the truce of the Bear."

Marriage bells. Salvos of guns, plaudits, flattery, congratulation and splendour filled the eyes and dazzled the imagination of Europe during the

months which succeeded. Never was an august marriage so quickly carried to its enchanting end. Whatever the Tsar had intended his anger was increased by finding his sister so carelessly set aside. That sore rankled and was to bear bitter fruit in more ways than one.

In the bride's feelings no one interested themselves, least of all her father and family. She was the spoil of the Conqueror, the pledge that war between France triumphant and Austria conquered should be ended. Let her prepare her smiles and charms for the delight of her master. It was not recorded amid the rejoicings at the French court that one of the Austrian statesmen had whispered to another:

"Politics make this marriage and politics can unmake it." But Talleyrand in conclave with Metternich knew and smiled. It was coming—coming!

Caroline, Queen of Naples, the proud and happy Caroline, was sent with an Imperial retinue to escort her new sister-in-law to the arms of the Emperor after the marriage by proxy had taken place. Bursting with vainglory and dignity she went as representative of the Emperor.

The infatuated bridegroom awaited her with rapture in Paris. Over Napoleon himself had passed the softening and disintegrating change of luxurious living and absolute power and it showed itself in relaxation of the eternal watchfulness of the wild beast in the jungle. He could collect himself as magnificently as ever at the alarm, but meanwhile trifles delighted his baser sense of power.

Even the splendid trousseau prepared for the Empress (who could wear none but the clothing of the country she would reign over) must be spread out before him at the Tuileries, and all, even to the linen, was packed under his own gloating eyes. Always uneasily conscious that he was not born in the purple, he overdid his part. Could an upstart do sufficient honour or lavish enough of gold and jewels on the daughter of the Cæsars? But he affected a gay indifference all the same. His valet, Constant, standing by his shoulder in these congenial surroundings, the Emperor picked up a little gold-embroidered shoe and with it struck his cheek a light blow.

"See, Constant, that is a shoe of good omen. Have you ever seen a foot like that? This is made to be held in the hand."

The marriage by proxy had taken place in Vienna, but as the bride of nineteen years drew nearer on her long progress to France his exaltation grew and swelled into a very madness of possession, the daughter of the proudest of Emperors to grace his bed.

He rained letters upon her approaching carriage.

Equerries foundered their horses carrying them and the love-gages of shot game and flowers, and Marie Louise returned shy maidenly replies carefully considered and dictated for the use of a girl whose office was to win her husband over to Austrian interests or at least to lull his vigilance while the inevitable was proceeding. The Fates must have smiled over the weaving of that bridal web to be dyed later in the crimson of the heart's blood of France.

The Emperor cursed daily the ceremonies which kept the bride from his arms. He was to meet her at Compiègne, but when he heard the glad news that her heavy carriage had reached Soissons, his feverish desire burst all bounds.

“*Ohé*, Constant, order a carriage without liveries and come and dress me! Quick!”

Laughing immoderately, nervous and resolute in a breath, he had resolved to storm the fortress, for who should bid the conqueror delay his bliss? With the coquetry of glory he had himself dressed in the dress of the Little Corporal, the gray coat he had worn at the terrible victory of Wagram, and in a moment more the horses were galloping along the road to the meeting.

At the village of Courçelles the last courier preceding the carriage of the Empress passed the porch of the village church where Napoleon was sheltering from the torrential rain.

Holá, the carriage of the Empress! He should have stayed apart from her. The ceremony at Vienna constituted no legal marriage according to French law. But who and what shall stand in the way of the Emperor? The Imperial carriage is halted, the startled bride, flushed and agitated, looking out to see who comes. Her hand clasps the radiant Caroline's, who cries aloud:

“Madame, it is the Emperor!” as the door is flung open, and he clasps the girl shrinking in his arms.

Shrinking, but in a moment she recollects her orders and obeys. Looking at him from under blond eyelashes, she raises the diamond-circled miniature of her husband-to-be which lies upon a fluttering bosom, looks attentively at it and then at him.

“Sire, it is not flattered!” she says in her guttural German-French. Enchanting!

Again he overwhelmed her with his embrace. Was the speech dictated? Probably, but that did not occur to him.

The bride had the beauty of her nineteen years, fair hair, eyes blue and shy. She had a well modelled figure and carried herself like the royal young woman she was. Her hand and foot were exquisite, and youth and blooming cheeks and lips charmed all eyes as she moved and turned her faint infrequent smile on those to whom it must be granted. Her mind was cold, slow and heavy, but to Napoleon what could seem amiss in a woman who was alike the daughter of an Emperor and his own possession? Who could expect him to delay in snatching all his rights, and if they did what need he care? A woman should be enchanted by such eagerness! Caroline's chaperonage was ruthlessly set aside.

"I cannot leave you, sweet wife. I will not leave you!" he whispered on reaching Compiègne, and to Marie Louise, brought up in utter ignorance of every fact of life, not swift of perception nor delicate in feeling, there appeared no reason why he should. She resigned herself stolidly to the inevitable whatever form it might take. Had not her father bid her be docile and obedient in all things to the Emperor, at once her husband and her sovereign? That night the Emperor spent at Compiègne in the company of the Empress taking every husband's right from a somewhat stolid bride. Was he afraid some fate might drag her from him before he had made her wholly his and he could boast that the daughter of a most royal house had lain in his arms, submissive as the Walewska and a hundred more?

"Marry none but a German. They are fair, fresh, and blooming as roses," he cried in boastful rejoicing to some of the men of his suite next day.

So the marriage was consummated and months later when thundering guns announced the birth of an heir born King of Rome those whom Napoleon had trampled beneath his feet might well believe the very Fates fought on his side. Surely the Pope in his imprisonment, divested of his temporalities, must have doubted in certain moments of the Eternal Justice, must have sent up his appeals to its Bar with less than untroubled faith! For the man solemnly excommunicated by the Church Catholic seemed but to wish and the magnificent fulfilment lay at his feet in such power as the world had never seen.

Yet could he, could any one have guessed the anxieties crowding on Napoleon their marvel would have been that one man could support the burden of the world upon his shoulders. At times the Titan was weary to death, with the teeth of a mortal disease fastening in his heart, and a new thread, though a golden one, in his cares, love of his little son. Perhaps the only true love of his life since the far-off passion for Josephine. To his new wife he was never faithful. Emperor's daughter though she was, guarded

with the jealousy of a Turk from any contact with men, she was only the jewelled head of the harem. But with the child he was all human.

The little one lay in his arms to be covered with kisses during the long silent raptures of fatherhood that he permitted himself. He daily worshipped his small perfection. If they brought dispatches of world-import to be signed the protecting arm was not loosened—he clasped the child to his breast and signed as he could. Dismissing thoughts of wrath and ambition, he would put the child on the floor and lie beside him, playing with him, laughing, re-entering the lost kingdom of childhood; and every caress, every thought of love, was to be a new flame in the hell he had provided for himself and built up with painful care in year after year.

No doubt there was the tincture of human vanity in it all, pride in the heir, gross triumph in the visible pledge of a dynasty which should impose his will upon the world when he was gone. But there was beauty in it also, true fatherhood, a softening like a pure spring breaking from rock, and those who saw marvelled.

But agony, for he could not shut his eyes to the terrible black clouds working up to darken his own and the child's destiny. How could there be peace with every European nation groaning under the embargo he had laid upon English goods? What did they care for his little King of Rome? France could not exist without English commerce. Holland, headed by the angry King Louis, his brother, ran and received ships night and day across the narrow seas from England. The Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, Russia, the Scandinavian countries, all did alike. Who could restrain the Mistress of the Seas from sending her merchandise where she would, or other lands from paying tenfold prices for it? Even in Napoleon's own palace his courtiers, the Empress and himself, subsisted on smuggled English coffee and other necessities for which, writhing inwardly, he was obliged to issue his permit.

Political economy was too strong for the Emperor, perhaps because he had never troubled to acknowledge her as a factor in his designs. And meanwhile the Tsar was false to that impulsive and delightful friendship at Tilsit. Could it be because Talleyrand, the Arch-Deceiver rather than the Arch-Chancellor, had whispered soft treacheries to him at the later meeting at Erfurt? How could there be agreement when the Tsar and Napoleon each lusted for Constantinople and Poland? And meanwhile England, Argus-eyed, was watching on every billow, holding out golden baits to all who would join her in the Holy War against the Tyrant of Europe, doubly dangerous now that his dynasty was assured. Not only so but even the baton of war seemed to tremble in his grasp. In Spain England had put forward a

general named Wellington, who seemed to be more than a match for the Marshals of France. Spain—the scene of his grossest injustice! Talleyrand smiled and sent his private speeding couriers across Europe to Metternich in Vienna.

So the thunder was banking up in a livid sky while in Paris all was gaiety and grandeur and the Emperor here and the Empress there and the little King of Rome the pivot of it all—the secured blessing of France. Of Paris perhaps, not of France. In 1811 eighty thousand conscripts contrived to elude military service. New recruits were marched to the barracks chained and under guard. The passion to die for Napoleon and his dynasty seemed to be on the wane. The Bourbon stock began to rise slowly in the market.

In very great fear France lay sick and bleeding before the altar of the Juggernaut whom she had set there for her worship. The promised reign of Liberty had become a Red Terror—of another sort than that of the Revolution but as dreadful. And as the huge score mounted the Day of Reckoning drew so near that the throbbing of its wings might be heard like thunder beating up against the wind.

The trumpets shouting *réveil* called France once again to war. Fainting and bloodless, she staggered to her feet, still desperately responsive to the call of her Master, struggling to obey. She looked about her dazed. The end was upon her. She was at last to dare the Tsar in his winter snows.

CHAPTER XXIV

EPILOGUE

The End

WITH the horror of the mad invasion of Russia the reign of Napoleon draws to its tragic close, brief in the span of history as the flutter of a painted butterfly in bright air. Him too the winter was to ruin, for the Tsar ever retreating before him into the fastnesses of the North confided his defence to the awful powers of nature. Even now men reading may tremble at the awful story of the French retreat before the spears of ice and snow and famine. It is a tragedy of the ages with the fruitless valour of many, the despair of all, and the sullen agony of Napoleon face to face with doom.

There remains but to call the roll of the spectres of the Empire before they vanish, each to his own place.

When the last struggle was over and the Allies banded against Napoleon as the outlaw of humanity entered Paris, Austria marched with them, aided by the secret subsidies of England. In his despair Napoleon cried aloud that it was impossible—the Austrian Emperor could never see his daughter and grandson dethroned. But there was no answer. Marie Louise had been a temporary sacrifice to lure him into false security that he might place his trust in the Austrian alliance, and when her use was ended the stolid Austrian wife returned to her own people taking her child with her, and he never saw her again. The Allies, in concert with her father, allotted her the Duchy of Parma in place of the Empire of Europe, and a blond German general, Count Neipperg, was put about her by Metternich to win her confidence and keep her attention from the caged eagle in the prison of the little island of Elba. Her adultery with him, the children she bore him and her marriage with him when the breath left Napoleon's body are matters of history.

“Spain and that marriage have been my ruin. The marriage was an abyss covered with roses,” groaned Napoleon when in the madness of despair he tried to poison himself at Fontainebleau and, having abdicated, lived to endure a fate more terrible. For the Nature of Things having used him as it does all who obey it blindly cast him aside when he had served its purpose and left him broken. So, cutting his claws, the Allies sent him to play the shadow-sovereign in Elba, and his Marshals, the props of his power, were

scattered; some entering the service of the Allies, some shot for fidelity to Napoleon. Lannes and Duroc had been killed in the last tremendous battles, Junot had long been a suicide, Bernadotte a traitor. And Napoleon himself escaped from Elba to meet the phantasmal Hundred Days of power, to see his red star set for ever at Waterloo and to enter the living tomb of St. Helena. His reign had lasted from December 1804 only to his abdication in April 1814, few years indeed, but crowded with what incalculable consequences for Europe!

And Josephine?

The lady who entertained the Allied sovereigns with most grace and charm when they entered Paris in a blaze of triumph was—Josephine, supported by Hortense. The necessary decorations must have added an hour more to the daily six hours given to her toilette.

“I must be attentive to the Tsar,” she said plaintively to the widowed Laurette Junot. “He really rules the Allies, even the English, and now they are going to put the Bourbons on the French throne again it will depend on him whether they respect my pension and whether they will allow me to keep the title of Empress. And Hortense wants to be Duchesse de St. Leu now she is no longer Queen of Holland. They can’t expect me to give up *everything*! It would kill me to lose my title, and at all events if I can be nothing else I may be Duchesse de Navarre. Only imagine—the newspapers the other day simply described me as ‘the mother of Prince Eugene.’ As if I were nothing more in the world. Impertinence!”

So the Tsar was constantly entertained at merry expeditions and banquets at Malmaison and distinguished courtesies were offered to the King of Prussia. The Tsar came gladly and often and to him Josephine grew confidential in her griefs and hopes. With her soft voice, gentle autumnal beauty and Creole languors he thought her a sweet woman and assured her that she really had no cause for fear. He would protect her interests and would see that everything was done for her. The woman whom Napoleon had rejected, who had so bitter a grievance against him, could not be displeasing to the Allies. Certainly she had good cause of complaint—that is, if one did not trouble to balance their accounts. Even if one did, Josephine had undoubtedly given out that she would have offered to join him in Elba if it had not been for the prior claim of Marie Louise. It was truly lamentable that an influenza with a poisoned throat cut short her career just at a moment when it was so full of interest and adventure. Yet even there she had good fortune. In the reign of her grandson, Napoleon the Third, nothing could be simpler than to represent that she had died of grief

for the misfortunes of Napoleon and thus add another ray to the Napoleonic legend and the aureole of Josephine herself—our Lady of Victories. Such at least the Army had always considered her. “We never had a day’s luck since he chucked the old girl!” they groaned amid the horrors of the Retreat from Moscow.

Indeed her luck was to outlive her. The prophecy of the crystal was to be fulfilled.

But the red star of the Bonapartes had set and Europe breathed again. Their kingdoms fluttered away like hectic leaves before an autumn frost.

Joseph, lately King of Spain, escaped as “Monsieur Bouchard” to New York, whence he made his way to Philadelphia to spend his life at Lansdowne, Fairmont Park. Lucien, whom the glitter of the Empire had never dazzled, sheltered with his family for some years in England and finally made his home in Italy, where he died. Louis, former King of Holland, after many wanderings also settled in Italy, where he lived apart from Hortense and so ended that ill-starred marriage. He did not survive to see the accession to the throne of France of his putative son, the Third Napoleon.

Jerome, having wedded a royal wife (Princess Catherine of Württemberg) after Napoleon had enforced his separation from his American wife, Miss Patterson of Baltimore, fared better than most of the Clan. His Princess was faithful to the end. He lived to see the Second Empire and to hold the rank of a French Prince.

Elise, Grand Duchess of Tuscany, was hunted from her government by the Allies and lived and died obscurely in Italy.

Caroline, wife of Murat, was the family traitress. She forced her husband to join the Allies. The reward he earned for his treachery was to be lined up against a wall and shot in an obscure village in Calabria. She lived on in Italy almost without means of existence, raging at the injustice of fate, marrying finally a General Macdonald and dying like Napoleon and Elise of internal cancer.

It is strange that the butterfly of the family, the lovely Paulette, showed more courage and fidelity in misfortune than her sisters. She, as the wife of an Italian Prince of great descent, preserved her rank and wealth. But when Napoleon fell she visited him in Elba. She sent him all her jewels in aid of his cause, and they were captured at Waterloo, and, still undaunted, she offered many times to join him in St. Helena—a record to efface many levities. She died of consumption, still lovely, still vain and charming, in Florence and only her beautiful naked statue by Canova survives to

perpetuate the Venus of the Bonapartes. Who can see it without recalling the horrified utterance of a lady of the Court:

“And you did not feel uncomfortable, madame?” with Paulette’s serene rejoinder:

“Mon Dieu, why should I? The room was warmed to summer heat.”

She lies in the great Church of Santa Maria Maggiore, all her little vanities laid away like a child’s toys when night darkens the nursery.

Signora Letizia betook herself to Rome with her devotion to the Pope and the savings so painstakingly collected during the Empire. She was, however, willing at all times to share them with Napoleon. Her amazing life had prepared her for any stroke of fate and means to pay her way constituted to the last her sole satisfaction. Her long life ended in Italy sixteen years after the Emperor’s. His reign had always seemed to her a Corsair’s adventure and there could be no surprise in its ending.

In a very different vein is the ending of the Eaglet, the long-desired King of Rome, heir to such greatness and grief, the phantom Napoleon the Second.

His grandfather, the Emperor of Austria, granted him the title of Duke of Reichstadt and he was for his brief twenty years a pensioner at the Court of Austria watched and guarded with lynx-eyed care lest the Napoleonic flame should break from him and, burning all before it, kindle unquenchable fire in France. Indeed it smouldered in him like an agony; even the dull Austrian admixture of his contemptible mother could not quench it. When the two Marshals of France, Marmont and Maison, met him in Vienna, they trembled with memory and fear. There were the living eyes of Napoleon sunk in marble caves and burning with the same passion. To them the likeness was cruel and poignant. They knew, as did Metternich and Talleyrand, that if he had lived he might, nay must, play a great part. But death was good to him and perhaps to the world also when it laid him away in the Quiet from all the plotting. So ended the blood of Napoleon.

But the star of Josephine lived and lives in her descendants. It is the irony of Fate, who indeed is mistress of irony, that the little Creole’s grandson, son of Hortense, should sit upon the unquiet throne of France exactly as he would have done had the famous divorce never taken place. After the unhappy years of the second Empire his only son by the beautiful Eugénie died by the hands of savage Zulus in Africa fighting for the English.

But Josephine's blood is still royal through Eugene, her son. His eldest daughter married the Crown Prince of Sweden and her descendants still sit on that throne. His second daughter became Empress of Brazil; the two remaining wedded German princes of royal houses and one received Imperial rank in Russia. If these descendants point to the triumph of her star can they be contradicted?

What words can close so marvellous a history as that ending in the glories of war, the trivialities of the Tuileries and St. Cloud, the slow tortures of mental and physical decay in St. Helena?

Napoleon's littleness is seen in peevish outbursts and desperate clinging to the shadow of power when the reality was dead. But immortal greatness survived the brutalizing influences of the life of a despot and Dictator of Europe. It gives strange glimpses of what the man might have been if destiny had had pity on him. There were then flashes of heroic generosity in him—a rock-hidden jewel which misfortune wrought into splendour.

From the lonely rock of St. Helena his thoughts and words flew home white-winged across waste ocean. For Marie Louise no word of reproach, for Josephine kindly memories. For his traitors, whom he had heaped with riches and honours, the plunder of Europe, this estimate, calm and wise as the utterance of a Socrates:

“You do not know men. They are difficult to understand when one wants to be just. Do they know themselves? Can they explain themselves? Most of those who abandoned me would never have suspected their own defection perhaps if I had continued to be fortunate. Our final ordeals are above all human strength. And then, I was abandoned rather than betrayed. There was more weakness round me than treachery. It was a St. Peter's denial with tears and repentance close at hand. And who in all history had more partisans and friends than I? Who was more popular and more loved? No. Human nature might have shown itself in an uglier light and I might have had more cause for complaint.”

“They know not what they do.” Had he himself known what he did? Probably never. He was driven on a great wind along the blind ways of destiny—the ruler of Gods and men.

And what man has ever summed up or understood the child of the Revolution, the lover of Josephine, the mightiest tool of fate who ever inhabited man's flesh? None, not even Goethe, coldest and clearest mind of his century. He wrote:

“An inaccessible being. An epitome of the world. With him the light which illumines the mind was never extinguished for an instant.”

What? Not in the bickerings with his women and his family, the brutalities and treacheries, the lies, pretensions and tyrannies culminating in the ruinous Austrian marriage? No. Goethe also fails before the inexplicable. It is only Shakespeare who is great enough to bow his head before the Mysteries and own that human nature is beyond deciphering.

“We are such stuff
As dreams are made of.”

Only the Gods know the building of vision. But if the dream dies the influence survives. The sins and sorrows of Europe may many of them be traced to Napoleon's, but if some day it is at rest in a vast union it may well be because he so beheld it in a dispersing dream.

For he wrote this:

“In my way Europe might soon have become a single nation and any man wherever he travelled might have felt he was in his native country all the time. This amalgamation will come sooner or later by the force of circumstances; the impulse is there, and I believe that after my fall and the disappearance of my system no lasting equilibrium will be possible except through the amalgamation and confederation of the great nations.”

It is possible to suppose that had the mighty driving force of Napoleon's passion for Josephine run in a different channel and to different ends he might himself have been the man to realize and make actual the great vision of peace on earth, seen dimly now in a receding future.

“If you ask me in general what will be the end of the conflict, I answer, Victory. But if you ask me in particular, I answer, Death.”

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *The Thunderer (A Romance of Napoleon and Josephine)* by Elizabeth Louisa Moresby (as E. Barrington)]