The Uncrowned King

A TRUE ROMANCE of the '60's
now first put on record by
BARONESS ORCZY

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1935

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NOVELS BY

BARONESS ORCZY

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A Joyous Adventure
Blue Eyes and Grey
Skin o' My Tooth
Sir Percy Hits Back
The Celestial City
The Honourable Jim
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THE UNCROWNED KING

A TRUE ROMANCE of the ’60’s
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LONDON
HODDER AND STOUGHTON LIMITED

The characters in this book are entirely imaginary,
and have no relation to any living person.

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"*For when the one Great Scorer comes*
To mark against your name,
He writes—not that you won or lost—
But how you played the Game."

GRANTLAND RICE.

CONTENTS

HOW THIS TRUE STORY CAME TO BE WRITTEN

I have often wondered if I should live to see the time when I could relate this story of an uncrowned King of France without wounding the susceptibilities of those whose families were involved in the various phases of the amazing drama. Details of the story came to me in a curious way and for years I was under a promise not to publish what had been revealed to me, and now that I am free to do it, I wonder if the story will be believed. There will be many, I know, who will doubt it, and I am ready to admit that some of the happenings are so strange and so fantastic that they seem to belong to the realm of fiction rather than that of history.

But let me tell you how those happenings came to be known to me. On our last visit to Hungary, some time before the war, my husband and I spent a few days in Vienna in the house of a relative, an old uncle whose age was anything between eighty and a hundred; he was a dignified, courtly old man, who in his day had been an important personage in the entourage of the Emperor Francis Joseph. He had reached his anecdotage without impairing his memory and his sense of humour, and many were the stories both grave and gay with which he entertained us, stories of the brilliant and tragic court of pre-war Vienna, of persons and events, of the beautiful Elisabeth, of Napoleon and Eugénie, of Bismarck and Palmerston, of young Disraeli as he was then, of Queen Victoria and the Prince Consort. He had known them all, not only officially, but intimately.

The subject, however, which engrossed him most and on which he could talk by the hour, was that of the Bourbon cause in France. Royalist to the soul, he had, even as a young student, been passionately interested in the mystery which, to this day, has surrounded the personality of the little Dauphin, son of the martyred King Louis XVI and the equally tragic Queen Marie Antoinette. My old uncle was one of those who were convinced that the child did not die in the Temple prison, as the revolutionary government had declared, but that he was rescued through an agency that has remained anonymous and conveyed to Austria, where he lived for years, and subsequently married and had a son. It was about this son that the old man loved to speak.

"The rightful King of France, my dear," he would declare emphatically, "there's no getting away from it. If he had been a different type of man, he would have been crowned at Rheims, and the whole destiny of Europe would have been mapped out differently."

I liked to draw him out, for the subject was an engrossing one. "There is no more tragic figure in the history of the world," the old man would say in his cultured

well-modulated voice, "than that of the Dauphin, this child born and nurtured amidst the pageants and luxuries of Versailles, idolised and petted until the age of five, then torn from the embrace of his parents and his kindred, martyred and buffeted under the domination of rough and cruel warders, tools of the revolutionary government, who desired his death, connived at it, even though they did not actually murder him, asserted that the boy was dead, even though they knew perfectly well that he had been rescued from prison and taken to Austria. This last fact is too well known now to need emphasising: it has been admitted on almost every side. His own family knew it: his sister, the Duchesse d'Angoulême, confessed to her knowledge of it on her death-bed. The two Bourbon Kings, Louis XVIII and Charles X, were well aware of the fact that their nephew was alive—their nephew who was the only legitimate King of France; nevertheless, they usurped the throne which was rightfully his, and he was classed by his own kindred in the same category as the batch of adventurers who sprang up like mushrooms at the time, all claiming to be the Dauphin rescued from the Temple prison."

He paused a moment, leaning back in his chair, his tired old eyes seeming to gaze into a dim and romantic past.

"My Emperor," he said after a few moments' silence, "had proof positive of the rescue. He knew, none better, that the only rightful King of France had lived for years the life of a recluse in the beautiful mountain district of Carinthia, that he subsequently married and had a son. To this son the Emperor Francis Joseph always referred as Louis XIX, King of France, until——"

"Until what?" I insisted, for the old man had paused once more, his thin, firm lips tightly closed as if to guard a secret that had very nearly escaped them. Aware of my eagerness, flattered perhaps by the earnestness with which I listened to him, he took my hand and patted it.

"It is all written down," he said.

"By whom?" I queried at once.

"By Cardinal Beneventy. You remember him?"

I certainly did; as a child I had seen the cardinal, for he was a friend of all my family. He died in the middle 'eighties at a very advanced age.

"He kept a diary. Made notes," the uncle went on; "when he died, he bequeathed all his papers to me. You shall read them some day."

"Why not now?" I begged.

He shook his head.

"Not till after I've gone," he said, "then you shall have them. But," he added solemnly, "not unless you give me your word of honour that you will not publish their

contents till twenty years after my death. I know what you fiction writers are—any game is good enough to fall to your gun. But there are men and women alive to-day, friends of mine, who were involved in the tragedy of King Louis XIX. They would resent it, if secrets were disclosed that were never meant for publicity. So you must give me your solemn promise, my dear, or His Eminence's diary shall be buried with me in my coffin."

I gave the required promise. This was in 1912. The following year I received a registered packet from a firm of solicitors in Vienna. With it came a letter telling me that the old uncle was dead. The packet contained a bundle of papers carefully held together by a purple ribbon and half a dozen seals. There was also a letter, a few affectionate lines written to me by the old man less than a week before he died. Below his signature there was a postscript: "If you break your promise, my ghost will haunt you, and ill-luck will dog your future career."

Funny old man, wasn't he? I kept my promise, of course, and kept it so rigidly that I never broke those seals until the twenty years had gone by. This was last year. The papers were as the old uncle had said, portions of a diary kept by His Eminence Cardinal Archbishop Beneventy, together with a few letters and some loose notes and memoranda set down by him at different times, but chiefly round about 1860. The first cursory glance revealed these to me as documents of extraordinary interest. A series of events had here been put on record by a man of unimpeachable integrity, and though I admit that the whole story sounds like romantic fiction, I don't see how it is possible to doubt its truth. His Eminence was not the type of man who would, for a moment, give credence to hearsay. He was Cardinal Archbishop of Esztergom and was at one time Papal Legate in Berlin, in Vienna and in Paris. Thus he was mixed up in all the political intrigues of the day: he had, as it were, his delicate fingers on the pulse of every actor who took part in the drama which had its beginning in the rescue from the Temple prison of the Dauphin, son of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette.

The letters and the notes were yellow with age, the writing difficult to decipher. It took me days of patient sorting, of reading and re-reading and piecing together the fragments of the diary, before I was able to bring order into chaos. In his notes His Eminence speaks at great length of the rescue of the Dauphin by the mysterious stranger who brought him to the Benedictine monastery of Gmünd in Carinthia where he lived and ended his days. His Eminence was only a child at the time, but the event made a very deep impression on his mind, an impression which he subsequently jotted down in his diary. It is from these fragments that I constructed the first part of my narrative. From the moment that he was old enough to understand what he had

witnessed on that memorable occasion, the Cardinal Archbishop kept in close touch with Louis XVII, the son of the martyred King, and rightful King of France, and through his memoranda and certain letters I was able to trace various events in "His Majesty's" life: his marriage to the Spanish lady and the birth of his son. Other events are historically unimportant.

It is what happened subsequently, after the death of Louis XVII, that is so amazingly interesting. I was able, through various entries in His Eminence's diary, to follow the drama step by step and I have taken the liberty of forming from these fragments a coherent story—the life story not of the rescued Dauphin himself, for that was uneventful, but that of his son, known to a narrow but intensely loyal circle of royalists as Louis XIX.

I must here renew my profession of faith in the absolute truth of that story from beginning to end. The foundation of it rests on the testimony of a distinguished statesman, and of a cleric of the highest possible standing. All I have done was to alter some of the names and to add a few unimportant details. The diary and His Eminence's letters are, of course, in Hungarian, but Hungarian is a very lissom language and I had no difficulty in translating some of the extracts verbatim. Others I have used as the basis for the development of the story, because in several instances they are too full of irrelevant matter to bear quoting *in extenso*. Both in the diary and in the letters I found vivid pen portraits of the uncrowned King of France, of his half-brother, and of their Spanish mother, Madame la Princesse de Bourbon; and I need not insist on the identity of the distinguished statesman and diplomatist, thinly veiled under the pseudonym of Count Friesen.

I wish I could also have retained some of the Cardinal's mordant comments on the people with whom he came in contact, mostly people of high repute in the political and artistic world, and some of august rank. But as in many instances, near relatives of such personages are still alive to-day, I have omitted all passages which might give offence.

BOOK I
INTRODUCTORY

I

On a cold winter's morning in the year 1794 the Reverend Prior of the Dominican order at Gmünd stood in the porch of the monastery church. The monks, fifty or sixty in number, were grouped in a semicircle around him. Their heads and shoulders under the black hoods were lost in the surrounding gloom; only their white robes caught a glimmer of the pale blue light of early dawn, as did also the knuckles of their toil-worn hands, clasped tightly in prayer.

The church clock struck seven. Thin flakes of snow fell from a leaden sky. The wind came moaning and soughing over the snow-clad Styrian Alps and the pine trees on the foothills sighed and shivered and bent their stately crests to the blast. Above the sighing of the trees and the soughing of the wind rose the monotonous voices of the monks chanting their morning orisons. But all the while that they mumbled their prayers, those men in the long white robes, with hands reverently clasped, seemed to be straining their ears as if to catch a sound—the rumble of coach wheels perhaps—the jingle of harness, or the crack of a whip. They prayed, but, intent and eager, they also listened, and the Prior appeared to be listening too, more eagerly than they. It was very cold. The snow fell thicker and faster as slowly the grey dawn chased away the lingering gloom of night.

And suddenly the Prior straightened his tall figure, the black hood fell back from his tonsured head. He craned his neck, listening more intently than before. The murmured prayers of the monks became a mere jumble of incoherent words, for they, too, were craning their necks and listening. Listening! From the remote distance there had come the scarcely perceptible sound of coach wheels and the clatter of horses' hoofs on the hard, frozen road.

The monks continued to mumble prayers, but they only did it with their lips. Mechanically. Inwardly every man was murmuring: "Here they are!" and "At last!" Only the rigid discipline of self-effacement prevented these men from running out into the snow; from running out in order to lessen the distance and the time that separated them from that coach. But the Prior was still standing motionless in their midst. His tall, erect figure looked soldierly even beneath the voluminous, effeminate white robes. And not until the Prior gave the word would any of those men have dared to move. All they did was to crane their necks and to keep their eyes fixed on one spot in the landscape—the edge of the forest, where the winding road emerged out of the thicket.

The rumble of coach wheels gradually became more distinct and all at once a heavy coach, drawn by four bays, came out of the thicket, travelling at a round pace up the road. It appeared and disappeared alternately in and out of clumps of fir trees and intervening cottages, with harness jingling and leather creaking, until, after a few more minutes of anxious waiting, it came rattling on the cobble-stones of the precincts and came to a halt in front of the church porch.

The Prior alone advanced to meet it. A groom jumped down from the box seat and opened the carriage door. A tall man in a magnificent caped coat stepped out of the coach. He had a child in his arms. The Prior approached and took the child from him.

"He is tired now," the tall stranger said, "but he has borne the journey remarkably well!"

The Prior held the child in his arms, closely pressed to his breast; a limp, emaciated little body it was, wrapped in a thick rug; a pale face with sensitive mouth, drooping pathetically at the corners; closed eyes circled with purple, and fair, lank hair falling over the forehead. The Prior gazed on the sleeping child in a kind of ecstasy, whilst two tears coursed down his furrowed cheeks. The snow fell on his tonsured head and covered his shoulders. His lips moved in soundless prayer.

The monks began to chant in unison the hymn which Simeon the Jew intoned close on eighteen hundred years ago:

"Lord now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace . . ."

The tall man gave a light laugh. He took off his hat and glanced down on the child with a look of wonderful tenderness. He drew the rug more closely round the small body which he had saved from torture and death at peril of his life. "Poor little mole!" he murmured in English. Then he turned and went back to the coach. He had entered it and given the order to start before the Prior or any of the monks seemed to be aware that he was actually going. It was only after the groom had slammed the carriage door to, and the horses with much snorting and pawing and jingling of harness started to go, that the Prior seemed to wake out of his trance-like state and to become alive to the duties of hospitality. But it was too late. The coachman had cracked his whip. Before the Prior had time to take a single step forward the coach was on the move, and he remained standing there with the child still in his arms, and the snow covering his head and shoulders, while the coach clattered away on the hard road and was soon lost to view.

II

The monks filed into the church preceded by the Prior carrying the child.

The monks chanted:

"For mine eyes have seen thy salvation . . ."

The Prior went up the aisle and laid the sleeping child on the altar steps.

Through a side door the students of the seminary came filing in. Little black-robed figures of varying ages and sizes: lean, overgrown lads of seventeen and eighteen, schoolboys with a look of perpetual hunger in their bright eyes, and little people hardly out of babyhood who were led by the hand by one of the fathers. They were the seminarists, future abbés, bishops and perhaps cardinals—French, Austrians, Poles, Hungarians, Spaniards, but mostly French and Austrian—all boys of noble birth, for the seminary of Gmünd catered exclusively for the younger sons of aristocratic houses who either had a religious vocation or were compelled to go into the Church for family reasons. Among the tiny tots was Louis Beneventy, the son of the great Hungarian general who fought for Marie Thérèse in the wars of succession, a bright-eyed, sturdy little fellow, future Cardinal Archbishop of Esztergom, Papal Legate and Primate of Hungary, but not yet five at this time.

He remembered it all throughout his long life. The high altar a blaze of lights and groaning under a mass of white lilies and carnations from the rich hothouses of the monastery. The fathers, in their white robes, lined up in the elaborately carved mahogany pews, their shiny, tonsured pates reflecting the sanctuary lights. Then the tall, soldierly Prior at the foot of the altar steps, and the sleeping child wrapped in a rug stretched full length on the topmost step, his fair hair lying in a tousled mass about his forehead. The boys filed past the sanctuary rails while the organ loft murmured an exquisite voluntary of Palestrina. As they passed they made genuflexion, paying reverent homage partly to the altar of God, but partly, also, to the sleeping child—the King of France—Louis XVII by God's own grace.

They filed two by two down the aisle to the corner of the church allotted to them. Here they knelt on the hard stone floor, and clasped their hands which were blue with cold. A solemn silence fell upon the congregation while the organ continued its scarce audible murmur of exquisite harmonies. There were no laymen or outsiders present, only the monks and the young seminarists: less than a hundred and fifty people all told. They were all on their knees now, hands clasped, heads bent, their lips moving in whispered prayer.

Then all at once they rose to their feet. The organ gave forth a terrific crash, like a note of exultation, and the monks chanted the Te Deum "We praise thee, O God . . . !" The Prior remained standing at the foot of the altar steps, his arms outstretched, his eyes fixed upon the altar. Roused by the music, the child stirred,

and raised himself on his elbow; he stared about him with eyes still heavy with sleep. What he saw was so different to what he had looked on of late—the dreary, dank prison-cell, the broken furniture, the dirt and the squalor, that no doubt the poor little mole thought that it was all a dream—a dream of those beautiful days of long ago, the luxury of Versailles, the pageants, the ceremonies when he, the royal Dauphin, was the centre of a crowd of sycophants and worshippers. Dazzled by the lights he closed his eyes again and turning over, went back to sleep.

The King of France slept while a crowd of worshippers gave thanks to God that he had been saved from his enemies and from the hands of all that hated him and his kin.

The picturesque scene remained impressed on the mind of Cardinal Beneventy from the age of five to his dying day.

I

The years rolled on. Louis XVII, King of France, spent them in obscurity within the peaceful walls of the monastery at Gmünd.

For reasons which are not all to their credit, his relatives, including his only sister, chose to ignore his existence. In spite of proofs—some of them absolutely irrefutable—they professed disbelief in the boy's escape from prison, and openly accepted the revolutionary government's account of his death and burial. In point of fact, they classed the legitimate head of their house with the numerous impostors who at this time sprang up like mushrooms, all claiming to be the one and only Dauphin, son of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, escaped from the Temple prison. This was a deliberate as well as a monstrous act of injustice, for the Bourbon family knew well enough that the real Louis XVII was alive, but they put their attitude down to political necessity, and to the question of physical fitness. Undoubtedly the maltreatment which the young King had suffered as a child and the many horrors which he had witnessed did impair his health; those who knew him best went so far as to say that his mind was slightly affected. Be that as it may, Louis XVII himself made no move to establish his claim to the throne, even though he had a number of faithful adherents and many friends who worked ceaselessly on his behalf. His two uncles were successively crowned Kings of France as Louis XVIII and Charles X respectively. The first died childless; the eldest son of the other was also childless and the second was murdered. France for the best part of the nineteenth century was in a perpetual state of political turmoil. One revolution followed another; one form of government after another was set up and swept away. Charles X, the last of the Bourbon kings, was driven into exile. Still the family clung to its original policy and continued to ignore its legitimate head, in spite of the fact that his sister, the Duchesse d'Angoulême, made a solemn declaration on her death-bed that she had known all along that her brother was alive. Perhaps it was impossible after the lapse of time to go back on that policy. Too many lies had been told in the past, too much injustice perpetrated. To confess to these would have brought about humiliation and discredit. And so Charles X, going into exile, abdicated in his own name and that of his eldest son in favour of his grandson, the Duc de Bordeaux, and he it was whom the royalist party, and what was left of the Bourbon family, acknowledged as their legitimate King Henri V by the grace of God, and secretly hoped and prayed for the death of the recluse of Gmünd, their one and only rightful King.

II

Close on forty years had gone by since the Prior of the Dominican order at Gmünd had laid the rightful King of France on the altar steps of the monastery church, while the monks sang a Te Deum to Almighty God. Forty years, during which many sanguine expectations led to bitter disappointment and many fervent hopes ended in frustration. True, there were some loyal hearts who never lost faith in the ultimate triumph of the cause, and men like Cardinal Beneventy continued to toil in that cause, for they believed in its righteousness as they did in that of their religion. He it was who, after his enthronement as Archbishop of Esztergom and Primate of Hungary, brought pressure to bear on the Emperor of Austria and on the Pope on behalf of the claims of Louis XVII, both from the political and the financial point of view.

But time went on. Louis XVII passed from youth to middle age. When scarcely fifty he seemed an old, old man, delicate in health, dispirited and disillusioned: repudiated by his nearest kin, with an ever-diminishing number of adherents, overshadowed by impostors, he appeared content to live his life in solitude and peace, cared for by the monks. He had a serious illness about this time and was tended through it by a highly skilled nurse, the sister of one of the probationers. This lady who was destined to play such an important part in the subsequent history of the Bourbons was Spanish by birth. She was the widow of an English army officer named Bertrand and had one child, a baby boy, named Cyril, whom she brought with her to Gmünd. She had learned the art of sick-nursing in England, and it was generally conceded that her skill and devotion saved the life of the illustrious patient on that occasion.

III

Cardinal Beneventy made note of all these events in his diary and among the entries relating to this particular period I found two which are extraordinarily interesting, because they reaffirm the truth and authenticity of the subsequent drama. In one of these notes he says:

> "Lady Bertrand has certainly an excellent influence over His Majesty's health and spirits. He seems much brighter: more cheerful. He sleeps better and enjoys the food which this devoted lady prepares for him with her own beautiful hands. I thank God for her advent amongst us."

Lady Bertrand! She was the widow of the English army officer. The sister of one of the probationers at Gmünd! She was the trained nurse and devoted lady who came to take charge of the august sufferer and helped him to regain his health and spirits!

The second entry is more remarkable still. It is dated nine months after the other. As a matter of fact, it is the keystone on which rests the whole edifice of this amazing chronicle. To all appearances it is the rough draft of what was evidently a circular letter which His Eminence addressed to various noblemen and gentlemen in France, Austria and Italy, who were affirmed Legitimists. It runs thus:

"My dear Friend

This is to apprise you that His Majesty Louis XVII by the grace of God King of France and of Navarre has this day contracted holy matrimony with Inez di Gama, widow of Sir Mark Bertrand, late Captain of Artillery in the English Army. I had the privilege of pronouncing God's blessing upon this union on Thursday last the 17th of May in the Priory Church of Gmünd. His Majesty deigned to sign the register with his own hand.

"I am my dear friend

"Your brother in God

"Louis Beneventy, Archbishop.

"Gmünd, May 21st, 1833."

IV

For some years after this (he did not receive the Cardinal's hat till much later) Archbishop Beneventy's entries in his diary and records of events connected with the fortunes of Louis XVII are very scrappy. There are many references to the activities of the widowed Duchesse de Berry on behalf of her son the Duc de Bordeaux, whom one section of royalists looked upon as their only legitimate King, and His Eminence's mordant wit does not spare that adventurous and unfortunate lady; indeed, he seems to have derived a certain grim satisfaction from her repeated failures in her son's cause.

Only here and there could I find a few notes concerning Louis XVII and his family—not many, but they are important.

"A son has been born to His Majesty the King of France. God be praised."

"I had the joy of holding Monsieur le Dauphin at the baptismal font. He has been given the names of Louis, Antoine, Marie, Charles, Aimé. Tears came to my eyes when they rested on the future King of France."

"His Majesty is in failing health. The devotion of the Queen Consort to him is marvellous to behold."

"Monsieur le Dauphin has been sick with measles and is making a slow recovery. Alas! he has inherited His Majesty's weak physique. Outwardly he is the image of his mother, but has nothing of her strength of character or of her ambition. Sometimes I wish he was more like his half-brother. Young Bertrand is a fascinating boy. He too is the very image of his mother, but in character as well as in looks. I am sorry for the child as His Majesty detests him, and even his mother seems to have little love for him."

This is the first reference I found in His Eminence's papers to this Cyril Bertrand, and I was left to guess who he was. Later on, however, the Cardinal speaks of him again.

"Young Bertrand shows that he has English blood in his veins, for he is a very fine horse-man, and an athlete. He seems very fond of Monsieur le Dauphin, and does his best to brighten his life for him and to infuse in His Royal Highness a love of outdoor games. Monsieur le Dauphin, I am sorry to say, does not respond very readily to his half-brother's affection. He thinks him rough and rude. The boys are extraordinarily alike, both being so like their mother. But in character they are very different. Young Bertrand is only two years older than Monsieur but is much broader in build and much stronger."

"His Majesty's health has become very precarious. He has had a serious hæmorrhage. The Queen Consort has sent to Vienna for Professor Scanzoni, the greatest authority on lung trouble."

"Young Bertrand has developed a rare talent for painting. I do my best to encourage it."

"Have suggested to His Majesty that young Bertrand be sent to Vienna to study painting under Piloty. But the Queen Consort opposed this strenuously, and His Majesty said some very bitter things about the lad. Strange how the unfortunate boy is disliked by the royal family. I must say I like him. He has some very lovable qualities, though I quite see that his English brusqueness and arrogance must often jar on His Majesty's sensitiveness."

"Professor Scanzoni has diagnosed lung trouble in His Majesty. He declares there is no immediate danger to that precious life."

"Bertrand has run away from home. No one knows what has become of him."

"His Majesty's illness has taken a turn for the worse. Special prayers are daily offered up for him in every Catholic church throughout France and Austria."

The final entry in this set of diaries is dated the 15th of February, 1849.

"The King is dead. Long live the King."

Louis XVII was dead. To every diehard royalist, his son was now Louis XIX, King of France.

Strangely enough after that momentous entry, there is a gap of eleven years during which His Eminence seems to have lost touch with the head of the royal family of Bourbon. At any rate, during those eleven years there is not a single reference to the King of France or to the Queen Mother in any of his notes, letters and diaries. There was nothing that gave me the slightest clue as to what happened after the death of Louis XVII, what became of his widow, or where His Majesty Louis XIX spent those intervening years. Of "young Bertrand" too, not another word.

For many days I was left wondering whether my romantic story would have to come to an inconclusive end. Then suddenly, when I had almost despaired of disentangling the threads of this "strange and eventful history," I came across the loose notes dated 1860, which gave me all the data I could possibly wish for.

And that is how the rest of the story came to be written.

BOOK II
HOW IT ALL BEGAN

I

When next you are in Paris and happen to go one day up the Rue de Clichy—the street which is on the left of the large church of La Trinité—you will come, just before you reach the Place, on a new block of buildings, which look strangely incongruous in this old quarter of the city. They are a portion of the improvements which "le grand Préfet"—as Baron Haussmann was universally called—designed for the transformation of the ancient, insalubrious town into a Ville Lumière—ultra-modern, elegant, exquisite, but no longer picturesque, save in those out-of-the-way parts, which are sedulously avoided by the sightseer.

But in this year 1860 Haussmann had not yet tackled the problem of Montmartre, and where that block of new buildings now stands, there was a kind of Bohemian backwater beloved of artists and poets and of the under-dog. It was known as the Cité du Réaumur, and consisted of a square courtyard hemmed in by low buildings, all in a more or less dilapidated condition. A tumbledown archway gave access to the square. Exactly facing the archway there was a row of studios with tall windows on which lay the grime of ages. On the inside of each window there was a dark curtain hanging from an invisible rod, all crooked and torn. These curtains looked as if nothing on earth would induce them to move either up or down, but as the film of dirt on the windows effectually shut out the interior of the studios from the gaze of the curious, this inefficacy of the curtains did not seem to matter very much. On the right of the courtyard, at right angles to the studios, there was a row of shops, in the windows of which there was a display of miscellaneous articles such as no one could possibly want, boots that didn't look as if they could fit any human foot, chignons that no self-respecting woman could possibly wear, pots of paste and bottles of liquid that defied usage, ribbons of colours that would never match or tone in with any gown. The stories above the shops were occupied respectively by a cobbler, a tailor, a dealer in scrap iron, a chimney sweep, and a barber. The dealer in scrap iron and the cobbler were guilty of the various noises peculiar to their trade; the tailor worked cross-legged on his table, in silence; the chimney sweep gave one loud cry of "Ramoneur," when he emerged from his lair soon after dawn every morning; but no one ever seemed to enter the shops down below, the front doors of which were in the possession of frowsy ill-conditioned cats.

Facing these shops, on the left of the courtyard, there was an eating-house which

called itself, grandiloquently, Restaurant des Trois Rois. It had the reputation of serving once a week for dinner, the best cassoulette Normande to be had in Paris. On that one evening in the week the passer-by who had been curious enough to venture under the crumbling masonry of the archway would be rewarded for his temerity by seeing some of the greatest men in the world of art or literature squaring their elbows to large platesful of cassoulette which they consumed by the uncertain light of gas burners hissing behind round wire cages. That same venturesome passer-by would see at one of the tables by the window Eugène Delacroix, painter of ethereal womanhood, burying his shaggy moustache at intervals in large tankards of beer, and opposite to him Horace Vernet in an old military coat, his chest covered with decorations, his white hair tousled, his chin unshaved, ogling the few women who from time to time dropped into the restaurant for a square meal. He would see Gustave Flaubert, whose recently published *Madame Bovary* had shocked the sensibilities of provincial France, discussing the respective merits of Saint-Emilien and Château-Yquem with Octave Feuillet, whose *Roman d'un Jeune Homme Pauvre* had set the young ladies of two continents dreaming of romance.

And in a corner at a small table, sitting by himself, Alexandre Dumas, the man with the fleshy lips and flat nose which betrayed his negroid origin; whilst in the far corner of the salle the young 'uns, very quiet, very modest, gazing in respectful silence on their elders who had already "got there": Alphonse Daudet with the leonine head, the shabby velvet coat and delicate hands, and young Zola, saturnine, obstinate, with the shoulders of a butcher and a fist fashioned ready to smite.

They came and went, ate and drank copiously, engrossed in the important business of feeding and enjoying life. They entered the crowded salle without taking notice of anyone else there, though they were all friends, comrades together; but in the Restaurant des Trois Rois nobody ever greeted anybody else: the *habitués* just came in, sat down at their accustomed table and ordered their cassoulette without paying attention to any of the other customers. This was Bohemia *par excellence*. The motto above the entrance door might easily have been: "Abandon your manners all ye who enter here!"

They all wore shabby coats, and trousers immensely wide at the hips and tapering down into a tight band round the ankles, greasy black hats with pointed crowns and huge flat brims. They wore their hair long and their beards shaggy. They knew nothing about collars, and their ties were large and floppy. They talked with their mouths full and ate peas with their knife. They were rough, uncouth, quarrelsome, vulgar if you like, but they were giants, these men, giants whom the world did not ignore, and whom posterity will never forget.

"*Eh bien!* Cyril, *mon petit, ça va*?"

The man who spoke had just come in. Contrary to the usage of the place, everyone turned to look at him: he was small and malformed, with legs that were too short and hands that were too big. His eyes were small and his forehead narrow; his lips were thin and betrayed obstinacy allied with pride. He had entered the room with an air that commanded attention, crossed the salle over to a far corner where a young man who wore a very shabby velvet coat with shirt open wide at the neck, sat eating all alone. The newcomer hung up his hat and without more ceremony dragged a chair to the table and sat down opposite the young man.

"*Comment ça va?*" he reiterated.

The other shrugged and replied dolefully:

"*Oh! pas très bien, Monsieur Ingres, vous savez.*"

"Ah, bah!" the great little man retorted, "I rather liked that portrait, you know."

The young man blushed furiously at this praise from the great master, but before he could frame a single word Jean Auguste Ingres had called the waiter and become absorbed in the study of the bill of fare.

"No cassoulette for me to-day, *mon vieux*," he said with a sigh.

"But, Monsieur Ingres," the waiter protested.

"I said no cassoulette," the old artist reiterated. "What else have you got?"

And thereafter there followed a long discussion between the painter of "La Source" and the waiter as to what should take the place of the classical dish.

The young man at the table was apparently forgotten. He waited in vain for another word from the master.

II

Outside it was raining hard. One of those storms of wind and rain for which springtime in Northern France is ingloriously famous. There had been a few warm days in March and the beginning of April had been lovely, but now this treacherous month was going out like a roaring lion, with bitter blasts and cold douches in his train, and the young buds on the chestnut trees which had taken a premature peep at the spring, shivered and shrivelled inside their gummy husks.

Every time a fresh customer entered the restaurant a blast of cold air swept right through the room. But as the room was very much overheated and the atmosphere, consisting of the fumes of hot food, and of drink mixed with perspiring humanity, escaping gas and Camembert cheese, had become very rank, the blast of cold air had its merits.

The dinner-hour was coming to an end, the little terrines stood mostly empty on the tables; empty wine bottles lay on their sides; the waiter brought steaming cups of coffee along, and went the round with an immense bottle of Armagnac covered with the dust and cobwebs of ages. Tongues were now loosened. The talk for the most part among these artists and workers was of one another. Abuse of each other's work, disparaging remarks, sarcastic comments marked the real admiration which all these great men had for one another.

At the table by the window Eugène Delacroix was sipping his coffee, into which he had tipped a large glass of *Fine*. He nodded in the direction where old man Ingres sat eating *Tripes à la mode de Caen*.

"Have you seen Ingres's work this year?" he remarked to Horace Vernet, his table companion, and went on with a shrug: "I don't think it is bad, do you?"

Horace Vernet gave a jump and nearly swallowed a piece of goose the wrong way. When he had done coughing and spluttering he exclaimed hotly:

"Not bad? Not—— Man alive, are you mad or drunk? Ingres is the greatest artist of our century—the greatest genius France can boast of——"

Delacroix did not endorse this opinion apparently, for he remarked, with a slightly contemptuous lift of his bushy eyebrows:

"Are you such an admirer of his draughtsmanship as all that?"

"Not I," Vernet replied with an equal measure of contempt: "Ingres draws like a defective chimney."

"You like his colour then?"

Vernet shrugged.

"Ingres's colour?" he retorted. "Ingres's colour always reminds me of a half-baked *brioche*."

"You are not going to say that his grouping——"

"Don't talk to me of his grouping. His 'Apotheose de Homère' reminds one of the inside of a pantechnicon van."

Delacroix could not help laughing.

"You don't like his drawing, his colour or his composition," he said lightly, "and yet you call him the greatest artist of the century."

"Well," his friend retorted conclusively, "he is. There is no getting away from that."

And he turned his full attention once more to his cassoulette.

A moment or two later he looked over his shoulder and spoke to Alexandre Dumas.

"Just imagine," he said, "that fellow Delacroix, whose women's legs always look

like the hambones of an ill-fed pig, daring to pass remarks on old Ingres's work."

"Jealousy perhaps," quoth old Dumas, who had listened to the discussion with a twinkle in his beady black eyes.

"As you say," Vernet asserted. "Now look at me. I haven't a spark of jealousy in my composition, and I am always ready to pay homage to the genius of my colleagues."

He turned to have a talk with Gustave Flaubert, while Delacroix spoke in his turn across to old Dumas.

"Poor old Vernet," he remarked with a shrug. "He thinks he can paint."

Dumas, that prince of malice, made no comment on that. He half rose from his seat and cast a searching glance across the room.

"Are you looking for anyone?" Delacroix asked him.

"I am looking for Ingres. I am longing to ask his opinion of your latest picture at the Salon."

Ingres rose from the table just then without as much as a nod to his young *vis-à-vis* and came across the room, with a cup of coffee in his hand. He came to a dead halt beside the table at which Delacroix was still sitting. He said without any preamble, and at the top of his voice:

"Draughtsmanship, Delacroix, is the glory of art; to neglect it is to dishonour what we all worship."

He was so excited over this pronouncement of his, that his hand shook and he upset his coffee, not only over the table but all over Vernet's numerous decorations. But this did not worry him in the least. He put down his coffee cup, strode rapidly back across the room, picked up his hat and clapped it on his head and went out of the restaurant without a glance or a nod to anybody. Vernet was still engaged in wiping the coffee off his medals.

"Old camel," he shouted at the top of his voice, as Ingres disappeared through the swing doors.

Such was the Restaurant des Trois Rois in the Cité du Réaumur, in this memorable year 1860.

III

The rain had turned to a regular hailstorm by now. Hailstones as big as peas were driven by the wind against the windows of the restaurant, making a noise like a volley of shrapnel. The wind howled down the chimney of the traditional iron stove that stood in the middle of the room.

Every time a customer went out by the swing doors, he had to cling to his hat and bend his head to the blast. The air that came rushing into the overheated room made everyone shiver and curse.

The young man in the far corner was sipping his coffee. The great man had not deigned to speak to him again. It was a way he had, had old Ingres, throwing a word of praise to a youngster as he would throw a bone to a dog, and leave it at that.

"*Eh bien*, Cyril, *mon petit, ça va*?" and then: "I rather liked that portrait." That, from the great master, was more than he usually bestowed, and Cyril Bertrand, smoking his rank *caporal*, dwelt happily on the recollection of it all. A dog licking a succulent bone, so he thought of himself. His face lit up with a smile that was not altogether happy. Such a good-looking face it was! Pity he wore his hair so long and left his beard unkempt. But that was the fashion in Montmartre, a tidy head or a clipped beard would have been put down as intolerable coxcombry, and the consequences would have been almost disastrous to the wearer. Cyril's hair and beard were of a wonderful warm chestnut colour, seldom met with in Northerners. Yes, he was a good-looking boy, was Cyril Bertrand, the aspiring portrait painter, whose work the great Ingres had "rather liked." Women had told him before now that he was good-looking. They liked his eyes, which were dark, and always seemed to express—so they said—much more than other men's words. They also liked his hands, which were singularly well shaped, and had a firm grip which sent pleasant thrills down one's spine. But no one knew much about him. Nothing really. As far as anyone knew he had started life as a boy in Ingres's studio, cleaning the great man's palette at close of day, and washing his brushes. Presently he took a studio in the Cité du Réaumur and sent a picture to the Salon which was rejected. Nothing unusual in this. Greater men than he had begun their artistic career in this way. He earned a pittance by designing hats and dresses for one of the big emporiums on the Boulevard. Twice a year he sent a picture or two to the Salon, but these invariably came back to the studio, accompanied by the usual polite rejection slip: "The Committee regrets . . ."

But these recurrent failures did not affect Bertrand's good temper. He was a gay, cheerful sort of fellow, who apparently did not ask much of life, or perhaps was content to wait for an opportunity. His sunny disposition made him popular in this shiftless, thriftless crowd of Bohemians: pleasantly boisterous in his cups, he was always ready for any prank, and could always be found in the thick of a row with the *gendarmerie*. The models adored him. Mimi, the cheeky little blonde known as the pocket Venus, declared that though M'sieu Bertrand was rather queer she would

sooner sit to him than to any other artist. When he was in funds he would give you bonbons and flowers and a dinner at a restaurant, but when money was tight or work pressing—oh, la, la!—M'sieu Bertrand was just a slave-driver. As Mimi said, you never knew how to take him, he had such funny fads and fancies, such as his love for the English. Why? Mimi couldn't say. Nor could anyone else. And lots of people and things he hated for no particular reason that one could see: the Bonapartes as a family, all the Bourbons and the whole of the royalist party; and if you happened to mention Spain or the Spaniards, why, he positively seemed to see red. But there, Mimi concluded and shrugged her pretty shoulders: "*Que voulez-vous?* Those artists! Oh, la, la!" She had had to do with them all her life. She was none the worse for their tantrums.

Of late, so Mimi and the other models declared, Cyril Bertrand had been more than usually "queer." It couldn't be that his head got turned through his recent success: that wasn't M'sieu Bertrand's way. And yet, it was funny. That was just the word. Funny. Ever since he had painted that portrait of Mademoiselle Christophe, and got a really big price for it. Ever since he had been patted on the back by the art critics who had seen the picture and been told by them that he was a coming man, Cyril Bertrand had been different. For one thing he was much more silent than he used to be. Silent at times. At others boisterously gay, but with a gaiety that always appeared forced. And if anyone spoke to him while he was at work, or during a meal, he would start and stare, as if he had been suddenly wakened out of a dream.

IV

In a way Mimi and the others were right. Cyril Bertrand was a different man since he had painted the portrait of Véronique Christophe. It had been such a wonderful episode in his life. At first, when he got the commission and before he started to work, he only looked on it as a stepping-stone to artistic success. If it was a success it was going to mean a great deal to him: his foot had barely reached as yet the lowest rung of the ladder of fame, but if he succeeded with that portrait, it would mean climbing, climbing, till one got to the top—or very nearly. That is all he thought about—at first.

It had been a great piece of good luck in the first instance to get the commission. Albert Christophe, said to be the richest financier in Europe, took a fancy one day to a picture hung in the autumn exhibition of the Salon. The picture was signed Cyril Bertrand. Some little time after that Monsieur Christophe called on the artist at the studio in the Cité du Réaumur and offered him a commission to paint the portrait of

Mademoiselle Véronique Christophe, his daughter. She could, he said, only give the artist three sittings, because most of her time was occupied with social engagements, but the sittings could be of long duration and Monsieur Christophe was prepared to pay 7,000 francs for the picture. Bertrand did not know at first whether he should laugh, or throw the visitor out of the room, for he thought that the offer was a cruel joke perpetrated on a poor youngster who had never seen so large a sum as 7,000 francs. But Monsieur Christophe did not look the sort of man who would perpetrate any kind of joke on anyone and within the next five minutes the offer had been accepted and the bargain concluded.

The portrait was now finished. The great Ingres had seen it and said that he "rather liked it." Monsieur Christophe had paid 7,000 francs for it and pronounced it to be an excellent likeness of his daughter. Most of the money and the letter that accompanied it were still in Cyril Bertrand's pocket-book, but at times he would wonder if the whole thing had been real, and not just a dream. A dream? Those three days early in March when spring was in the air and he had sat opposite the most beautiful woman on God's earth, and had striven with all his might to render on canvas some of her charm, her smile, her youth; something of her personality, which at times appeared almost spiritual and at others so very, very feminine and desirable —were those three days a dream? He had worked more strenuously during those days than he had ever worked before. She had only given him the three sittings, as promised, but she sat for four hours each time; four hours with only two very short intervals.

The moment she came into his studio she seemed to him the most beautiful woman he had ever seen in all his life. She was little more than a child, and that was her greatest charm. The youthful look of a schoolgirl taking her first glance at life. An hour later he knew for a certainty that she was the one woman in the world he would ever love. A child and yet a woman. A woman who was still a child. They didn't talk much during the sittings; for one thing Bertrand was never alone with her; there was always the chaperon, without whom no girl in her position would have been allowed outside her own home. But he felt somehow that she understood his mood, and the feverishness with which he worked, so as to make the most of the blessed hours she was able to spare him: and she was a perfect sitter; immobile, but always alive. Her eyes were alive; her mouth; her exquisite hands. Her smile never became set; her glance never turned into a stare.

When she needed a rest, she would jump down from the platform and come across to his easel; she would stand behind him, while he continued to work; rubbing in the background or touching up a bit of drapery. Her presence there, so close,

intoxicated him. His hand shook, very slightly. But he never looked round at her. Heaven alone knew what would have happened if he did, for by this time he was madly in love. Fortunately for his self-respect and his self-control, the chaperon was always there.

She seldom passed a remark on the picture and he never asked her if she liked it or not. She did say once, in a quaint, grown-up kind of way: "You have the makings in you of a great artist, Monsieur Bertrand." She was standing behind him at the moment, sipping a glass of wine, for she had been sitting for nearly two hours straight on end and was very tired. He had a wild desire then to throw down his palette and his brushes, to put his arms round her, and to say: "I have the makings of a great lover if you will trust yourself to me."

The madness of it all! Véronique Christophe, the daughter of the multimillionaire, was as far removed from the penniless artist as were the stars. But despair in matters of the heart is not part of the equipment of youth—not when youth is in love. Cyril Bertrand began to dream dreams. He would send the picture to the Salon and it would be hung on the line; eulogistic articles on the rising young artist would then appear in newspapers and magazines. Lucrative commissions would come pouring in. After which those dreams took on more definite shape. A penniless youngster could not, of a certainty, aspire to the hand of the richest heiress in France, but a great artist could—a man like Ingres, for instance. Even an international financier, a multimillionaire, would be proud to have an Ingres or a Delacroix for a son-in-law. And so when the blessed hours were finally over, he took to work in real earnest. Heavens above, how he worked! He worked, so as, in time, to become such a great artist that when he entered a room or a restaurant, people would whisper to one another: "Do you see that man who has just come in? That is Cyril Bertrand, the greatest artist of the age. He married Véronique Christophe, the daughter of the financier."

The madness of it all! The blessed, blessed hours spent in dreaming!

He sent the picture to the Salon. It was hung on the line. Eulogistic articles about the coming young artist appeared in newspapers and magazines. And Cyril got himself a dress suit and took to accepting invitations to parties in the hope of seeing Véronique Christophe, of having perhaps the great luck of a few words with her. He seldom had. She was always surrounded by a crowd of young men: smart men, rich men, men with high-sounding, aristocratic names. He went to the opera and sat at the back of the *parterre*, in a seat from which he had a good view of the box in which she sat. He tried to gather up courage to go up and pay his respects. Other men did. Monsieur Christophe's box was always full of callers, during the

entr'actes. But Cyril was shy: he felt that he was clumsy, uncouth, ignorant of the ways of the world. His ready-made dress suit didn't fit him: his tie was never straight. He hated his long hair and shaggy beard, but you couldn't have your hair cut or your beard trimmed if you valued your position in Montmartre.

At last he made up his mind that, come what may, he would conquer his cowardice. They were giving Rossini's new work *Semiramis* at the opera. He booked his usual seat in the *parterre* and determined that he would go up to the Christophe box after the first act. He took great pains with his tie, and dragged an uncompromising comb through his hair. It was mid-July and very hot. Paris had been sweltering all day. Everyone was out of doors. The theatres were doing very little business, and this was the last night at the opera. But the Emperor and Empress had promised that they would be present, so fashionable Paris was sure to be there too. So it was. But the Christophes were not there. Nor were they at the last performance of *Atalie* at the Comédie Française the next evening, nor at the reception at the Italian Legation on the Thursday. Cyril put all his work aside and strolled out to the Bois at the fashionable hour. Véronique was not there. He wandered up and down the Rue de Varennes, keeping the Christophe mansion in sight. She never came. At last, devoured with anxiety, maddened by disappointment, he threw diffidence to the wind and rang the bell of the grandiose house where she lived. He had been too deeply absorbed in his own thoughts and longing to notice that the mansion had a "shut up" air. A man in shirt sleeves and baize apron answered the bell.

"Monsieur left for Baden-Baden a week ago," he informed the visitor, "and Mademoiselle would join him there in a few days. She was staying with a relative till then."

"When will they be back?"

The man shrugged. He didn't know. Monsieur and Mademoiselle were seldom in Paris before November. Sometimes for a few days on their way to their château for the shooting. But he really didn't know. He wished the visitor a very good afternoon.

Cyril Bertrand turned away from the door, like a man who has just been denied access into Paradise. Baden-Baden! The one place in the world in which he would never willingly set foot. A few days ago he would have said that he would sooner die than go to Baden-Baden. His mother lived there, and his half-brother who was, to many, the King of France. No! nothing would have induced him—a week ago—to go to Baden-Baden.

But he went.

I

Baden-Baden!! small city of beauty, of luxury and of dreams! of smart men and beautiful women!

From all accounts it must have been one of the gayest and most fashionable summer resorts in Europe in those days. One spoke of Baden-Baden then as one does of Monte Carlo to-day. It was the precursor, the parent of Monte Carlo. Fortunes were lost and won in the gaming-rooms; thousands were spent in diamonds, dresses and furs. Snobs entertained royalty, and royalty—some, that is—accepted hospitality, and bestowed gracious smiles indiscriminately on duchesses, or millionaires, or professional beauties, so long as they knew how to dress and how to order a dinner.

A perfect galaxy of elegancies, of notabilities, of financiers and snobs of all degrees thronged the beautiful parks for which the little city was renowned, and trod the velvety smoothness of its incomparable lawns. All—or nearly all—the greatest names in Europe were inscribed on the registers of the fashionable hotels. No less a name than that of Napoléon III, Empereur des Français, figures on one of these, side by side with that of Eugénie Impératrice. Leopold I, Roi des Belges, honoured the Hotel Messmer with a lengthy stay year after year, as did also King William I of Prussia and Queen Augusta. Otto Prince of Bismarck spent several weeks every summer in Baden-Baden, so did that super-Parisian the Duc de Morny, and the eccentric Princesse Metternich, with her starchy lord.

Then there were the notabilities in every branch of art, princes of finance and kings of industry: Ernest Meissonier invariably rented a studio for the season in the Werder Strasse, and Puvis de Chavannes could be seen daily drinking the waters at the Hot Springs, his sketch-book temporarily tucked away in his pocket. Henri Murger, already a very sick man, was polishing up the final chapters of his *Vie de Bohème*, whilst Giacomo Meyerbeer capped his many eccentricities one summer by appearing on the promenade dressed in woman's clothes and riding a donkey. Mme Rachel, the great tragedienne, had her young granddaughter Sarah Bernhardt with her one summer, the year that Victorien Sardou wrote his *La Patrie* expressly for her, and there was a very lovely young Italian, by name Adelina Patti, who could be seen daily in the sylvan glades of Lichtenthal, dreaming, no doubt, of coming triumphs whilst gazing with good-humoured envy on the world-famous Jenny Lind.

And all day long in forest walks and down the river bank it was perpetual

chattering and laughter, as if a bevy of birds had been let loose on this enchanting corner of God's earth. At all hours of the day restaurants or cafés were crowded, and there was loud popping of champagne corks and great rattle of crockery and silver; at all hours save for an hour or two in the afternoon, when, tired out with pleasure and drowsy with good cheer, men of the world and women of fashion, crowned heads and creative minds sought in their respective hotels or apartments the quietude of sleep.

II

Should you ever go to Baden-Baden these days, remember to take a short walk, following the avenue with the fashionable shops that are so very attractive until you come to the Leopold's Brücke. Turning your back on the Kurhaus you can then cross the bridge and linger a few moments in order to look along the exquisite vista of the Lichtenthal Allée, with its fine old trees and rich *parterres* of flowers. If you then look to your right you will see, on the slope of the hill, a number of villas nestling coquettishly in bosquets of trees. Their names will bring to your mind pleasant memories of distinguished people who owned or rented them in the palmy days of Baden-Baden, before M. Louis Blanc's roulette wheels and baccarat tables were banished from Germany by Imperial government decree and found refuge and a warm welcome on the shores of the Mediterranean. You will note, among others, the Villa Augusta and the Villa Metternich, the Villa Rossini and, curiously enough, the Villa Montecarlo, which name must surely have been prophetic, as Monte Carlo had not yet been thought of those days.

Tucked away more snugly than any of the others, the Villa Elisabeth is to-day hardly visible from the road: only its red-tiled roof still peeps discreetly above a grove of flowering chestnut trees, now grown to a great size. But in the middle of last century its terraces afforded gorgeous views over the river, the valley and the distant mountains. It was rented every year about this time by an elderly lady and her son, whose names were officially given as M. le Prince de Bourbon and Mme la Princesse, but it was an open secret that M. le Prince was none other than the rightful King of France, Louis XIX by the grace of God, grandson of the martyred King Louis XVI and of Marie Antoinette; own son, in fact, of that most tragic personage in all history, the Dauphin of France, otherwise Louis XVII. Enthusiastic royalists, not only in France but all over Europe, knew well enough that the Dauphin was rescued from the Temple prison, by an anonymous hero and brought to Austria; they also knew that he lived to middle age, that he married a lady of Spanish birth

and had a son, who, in their eyes, and before God, became after his father's death, King of France by right divine.

But in the fashionable French coterie which was always very conspicuous at Baden-Baden—they pronounced it Badenne-Badenne—these facts, true or false, gave no one a headache. Napoléon III was now firmly established on the Imperial throne; Paris under his reign and the sway of Eugénie had become so brilliant that no one wished to be troubled with royalist pretenders and legitimist claims to the throne of France. There had been pretenders already whose claims were as fantastic as their personality was unkingly, so why worry about this one, who was probably as unauthentic as the others? But the society butterflies—male and female—were nevertheless sufficiently interested in Louis de Bourbon, as he was officially called, to make him welcome in their intimate circles.

"Why not?" remarked on one occasion the lovely Duchesse de Mouchy, who was known to be very exclusive in her choice of acquaintances. "One cannot be so particular when one drinks purgative water at Badenne-Badenne as one is in Paris or in one's own château."

And for the past four or five years Louis, King or no King, had been one of the most popular figures in the fashionable world of the chic watering-place. He was affable; he was well-bred and did not overdo the airs and graces of a reigning sovereign. The ladies liked him because he was young and good-looking—the image of his mother, so said the frequenters of that lady's salon—and had a certain grand air about him, distinctly reminiscent of the Bourbons. He had slender aristocratic hands, with which he liked to pinch a rosy cheek now and then or tweak a shell-like ear. He was not averse to hearing a naughty story whispered by a pretty woman's lips; knew how to turn a neat compliment to a lady, or silence with an epigram any ribald remark as to his royalist pretensions. The fact that he was obviously delicate in health only added to his attractions, for his face, innocent of moustache or fashionable whiskers, was of an interesting pallor, and he had the listless manner of a pampered invalid. He looked well on a horse, played a good game of whist and was quite a good dancer. In a word, M. le Prince de Bourbon, as some persisted in calling him, or His Majesty the King of France, as his intimates insisted, was undoubtedly a social success. He was seen on most days—when the weather was fine—in the Kurhaus or the Trinkhalle, and most evenings either at the opera or in the gaming-rooms, where he played high and lost with unruffled good humour, always impeccably dressed, always charming to the ladies and amiable with the men. "Pity," the latter said, "that owing to his pretensions he is not allowed to live in France. He would be a great asset in Parisian society."

On the other hand, in his own salon in the Villa Elisabeth, Louis was King of France and nothing less. Perhaps this was due to his mother's influence. Under her eye he observed the most rigid etiquette. On occasions he held formal receptions, when he would receive his guests sitting on a high, gilt chair that looked very like a throne. The ladies filed past him and swept their curtsies right down to the floor, their voluminous crinolines billowing round them like balloons, while the bows which the men made before him were not unlike genuflexions and partook more of reverence than of simple courtesy. They wore their decorations and some came in full-dress uniform. It was considered a great privilege to kiss the royal hand.

On those occasions Madame, the King's mother, sat beside him on a chair placed slightly lower than his. Though past middle age she was still a very handsome woman; a marvel of dignity combined with graciousness. She was that rare and beautiful thing, a fair Spaniard; her hair, which was turning grey, showed signs of having been a warm coppery gold. But her eyes were real Spanish eyes, dark, velvety, and must, in youth, have been very alluring. She spoke French with a marked Spanish accent.

Who she was by birth nobody knew. In vain did patrician fingers turn over the pages of the *Almanach de Gotha*; the worthy compiler of that social Bible was cryptic on the subject. "Louis XVII," he says in Part I of the *Almanach*, "King of France and of Navarre, only *s.* of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette of Austria. *B.* 1785. *Suc.* his father 1793. *M.* 1833 Inez di Gama, widow of Sir Mark Bertrand, captain in the English army, and has one son." Of Inez di Gama and Sir Mark Bertrand, not another word, nor did any of Madame's friends know anything for certain.

Friends? Madame la Princesse de Bourbon had very few friends. Only one person was ever admitted to what might be termed her intimacy. This was Count Friesen, who was chancellor at the Austrian Embassy in Paris under Prince Metternich. He often came over to Baden-Baden during the summer season, whenever he was on leave, and was a frequent visitor at the Villa Elisabeth.

III

All this was so during the years previous to 1858. But since then things had been rather different. Madame la Princesse de Bourbon was installed, as usual, at the Villa Elisabeth, but Monsieur le Prince was hardly seen at all in Baden-Baden. It was generally understood that his health was none too good and that his physicians had advised a lengthy stay in Switzerland. Certain it is that in the past two years he had

only paid very infrequent and short visits to his mother, and that while these visits lasted he hardly ever went out. He was no longer seen riding down the Allée, and the gaming-rooms at the Kurhaus saw him no more.

The fashionable coterie, as soon as it began to assemble for the season, wagged its head, and predicted the early demise of the young man: "These Bourbons have no stamina," they said, and quickly forgot him. The Bonapartes and anti-royalists, on the other hand, declared that Madame la Princesse de Bourbon was wallowing in Austrian intrigues for the restoration of her son to the throne of France, and that Louis himself spent most of his time now over the border in Alsace where, if the Emperor's police caught him, he would soon be sent to cool his heels, as Napoleon himself had done in his day, in the fortress of Ham.

Be that as it may, one thing was certain and that was that Baden-Baden had seen nothing for the past two years of the uncrowned King of France. But another circumstance in the private life of Madame la Princesse de Bourbon was puzzling the gossip-mongers far more than the absence of her son, and soon sent their tongues wagging nineteen to the dozen. This was the fact that Madame, who was known to be so very exclusive as to whom she admitted to her intimacy and so particular as to the houses she frequented, had recently paid a visit to Baron Albert Christophe, the great international financier, in his sumptuous Villa Marie-Thérèse. She went round his picture gallery, which was famous throughout Europe. She invited him to call at the Villa Elisabeth. Fair gossips said that she had done all this at the instance of Count Friesen, as Baron Christophe was of Austrian nationality. Friesen did not deny the soft impeachment. He only smiled and said something very charming to the fair questioner, as diplomats are in the habit of doing when the fair one is indiscreet.

IV

The pretty chatterers in Baden-Baden had still more to gossip about when they perceived that a certain intimacy seemed thereafter to be established between the austere Princess and the Austrian financier, and when Madame was actually seen driving down the Allée, sitting beside Baron Christophe in his magnificent *calèche*, tongues wagged more furiously than they had ever done before and there was no end to the tittle-tattle.

"That's the third time this week," one lady declared with a solemn nod of her pretty head in the direction where the *calèche* was fast moving out of sight.

"There's something in the wind, you may be sure," commented another.

And the smart Duchesse de Mouchy, who was always in the van of gossip-

mongers, added with a twinkle of her fine eyes: "Milliards in the wind, I should say, my dear. What can one talk to a financier about, except finance?"

The ladies were horrified. They never talked finance. Not with anyone. Not even with Baron Christophe. Finance was not ladylike. Besides, what kind of financial talk could a Princesse de Bourbon carry on with that Austrian?

"Do you mean to say——?" somebody queried vaguely.

The Duchesse shrugged and looked as wise as any pretty woman can look. She said: "Well! A milliard or so would be very useful to the Bourbons. They say that Louis would stand a very good chance just now, for the Emperor is not as popular as he was."

"Bah! Christophe wouldn't be such a fool as to finance any wild-cat schemes of that sort," a stout, florid man asserted pompously; a man with jet-black hair carefully brought crescent-wise over his ears, and jet-black whiskers not altogether innocent of dye. He had once been something in the Ministry and was generally supposed to be in the know.

The lively Duchesse de Mouchy, whose pretty mouth uttered more scandal in an hour than any journalist could invent in a week, gave the ex-Minister a playful prod with her tiny parasol.

"Perhaps you will explain then, my friend," she said with a knowing twinkle in her bright eyes, "why Madame la Princesse de Bourbon goes out driving thrice a week with Monsieur Albert Christophe."

"If you ask me——" a young man began sententiously. He was correspondent to the Paris *Figaro*, and what gossip he did not know was certainly not worth knowing.

"I would as soon ask you, Duprat," the Duchesse put in lightly, "as anyone else."

Duprat bowed from the waist. He evidently took the remark as a compliment.

"Then I would remind you, ladies," he said, addressing the smart throng collectively, "that old Christophe has a daughter whom he adores."

"A very lovely daughter," the pompous Ministerial personage put in with a sigh: "Just out of the schoolroom."

"And the richest heiress in Europe," sighed another.

"We all know that," came in a chorus which filled the air very much like the chattering of a swarm of parrakeets.

Duprat was now the centre of attention. He knew such a lot, the young scandal-monger! So he resumed, complacently:

"You also know, dear ladies, that the old man is worth a couple of milliards, at least."

"That is why I ask you," the Duchesse concluded. "Why this intimacy? Christophe is not likely to give his only child to a penniless, dispossessed prince ——"

"I agree; but a milliard or two can easily turn a dispossessed prince into——"

He paused, measuring his effect. He had reason to be satisfied with the attention he commanded, for the chorus of pretty parrakeets was raised once again.

"Into what?" they asked.

"Into a King of France," young Duprat said solemnly.

"Ah, bah!" "Oh, no!" "Impossible!" were some of the exclamations that greeted this amazing suggestion.

"Why impossible?" retorted the correspondent of the *Figaro*. "Thrones and kingdoms have been bought before now."

"And the French Treasury has an enormous deficit this year," someone commented gravely.

"With the Empress so wildly extravagant."

"If old Christophe were to put down a milliard there's no knowing what the government might not do."

"Do you mean to say——?" a fair chatterer gasped, unable apparently to get any further; another gossip-monger, however, came to her rescue by putting in the unspoken words.

"Do you mean to say that Albert Christophe wants to buy a royal husband and the crown of France for the lovely Véronique?"

"That is what it comes to," replied young Duprat.

"*Quelle horreur!*" exclaimed the pretty Duchesse: "a Jewess!"

"Albert Christophe is not a Jew, Madame," a deep-toned, earnest voice broke in gravely. "He is a financier. An Austrian. But not a Jew."

It was Count Friesen, chancellor of Embassy at the Austrian Legation, who had spoken. He was greeted effusively. Room was made for him to join the smart assembly, for Hugo Friesen was very popular in Baden-Baden society; though no longer in his first youth he was extraordinarily good-looking and gave very smart dinner-parties at the Kursaal; dinner-parties at which if one was privileged to be invited, one met the élite of cosmopolitan society.

Baron Christophe's elegant equipage drove by once more just then at a rapid pace. Carriage à la Daumont. Silver harness. Sombre but very elegant livery. Two elderly people reclined on the cushions. Madame la Princesse de Bourbon, statuesque with a single note of colour in her black attire, a crimson flower tucked into her chignon under her hat, and a small thin man, with sharp features, shrewd

dark eyes and thin compressed lips, the man who was said to control the destinies of Europe by the mere tightening and loosening of his own purse-strings: Albert Christophe, the multimillionaire.

Somehow the whole turn-out was impressive; the beautiful equipage with its air of unostentatious wealth, and the two elderly occupants whose aims and destinies set the smart gossip-mongers talking.

"Where is the beautiful Véronique now?" one of these asked, turning to Count Friesen.

"Staying with a relation in Vienna, I understand. She will be here soon."

"And the future King of France?" the Duchesse asked, not without a touch of malice.

"I haven't seen him for ages," one of the ladies said.

"Nor I."

"No one has seen him for the past two seasons. They say he spends his time in France, doing secret propaganda for his cause. Isn't that so, Friesen?"

But the diplomat assured the ladies that he didn't know.

"Perhaps he has gone to court the lovely Véronique."

"Or to make arrangements for his coronation."

"Or both, since one will depend on the other."

"Don't speak of it," the Duchesse now exclaimed irritably. "*La reine Véronique*. The thought of it gives me goose-flesh."

But there were a good many in the crowd who murmured, thinking of the beautiful daughter of the multimillionaire: "She would make an exquisite Queen."

Hearing which, a man who had been sitting on the fringe of the crowd, all by himself, rose so abruptly that he knocked over his chair and drew from his nearest neighbour a black look and the epithet "*maladroit*." He was a tall, well-built man, who would have been good-looking but for the shock of hair of a warm chestnut colour which hung over his forehead and seemed to have successfully defied comb and brush, and an unkempt moustache and beard which disfigured the lower part of his face.

"Do you know who that was?" someone in the crowd asked no one in particular.

"No. Do you?"

"I have noticed him before. He always reminds me of someone. I can't think of whom."

"Strange you should say that," Count Friesen put in thoughtfully. "I had just the same feeling a moment ago."

"He is an unlicked cub at any rate."

As usual young Duprat, the correspondent of the *Figaro*, who always knew everything, was able to throw light on the subject.

"That unlicked cub," he said, "will be a world celebrity one day."

"Not really?"

"What do you mean, my dear Monsieur Duprat?"

"Who is he?"

"I forget his name," the young journalist went on, "but his portrait of Mademoiselle Christophe in the Salon this spring was one of the pictures of the year."

"Ah! I remember the portrait."

"Marvellous!"

"Admirable!"

"The work of a genius!"

And the society butterflies continued to flutter their wings.

"Do try and remember his name, Duprat."

"Can you bring him to my reception to-morrow?"

Pretty heads were turned to catch another glimpse of the "unlicked cub."

But he had already disappeared.

I

Men like Cardinal Beneventy saw the hand of God in the events that succeeded one another so rapidly on a certain balmy summer's night in Baden-Baden. But philosophers said that it was the Fates who did it all. The Fates, said they, always take a hand sooner or later in the game which we call life, and it is they who cut the thread and thrum of our destiny.

Have it which way you like. Certain it is that when Cyril Bertrand, the rising young artist from Paris, came to Baden-Baden—the place which he detested above all others in the world—and hunted about for suitable lodgings, he finally found what he wanted on the top floor of a small pension up the hill. As it happened—shall we say as God willed, or as the Fates decreed?—a young *prima donna* named Aline Saint-Amand, who was then the star of a café-concert at Strasbourg, but had secured an engagement to sing in *Il Barbiere* at the Baden-Baden opera—had booked a suite of rooms on the first floor of that same pension. This, however, is by the way, as Mademoiselle Saint-Amand's engagement did not take effect till the end of July. The fact is only mentioned here because that simple coincidence happened to be the keystone of the amazing romance which Cardinal Beneventy's diary has revealed, and which, but for that coincidence, would perhaps have changed the destinies of half the civilised world.

But let the events, as they occurred, speak for themselves. This was the beginning of July and Cyril Bertrand was installed on the top floor of the Pension Eglantine, and spent his time gazing on Véronique by day, whenever he caught sight of her, and dreaming of her by night.

She arrived in Baden-Baden a week or so after he did. After that he saw her almost daily riding or driving in the Allée. He saw her at the Kurhaus and at the opera. She was entirely unconscious of his presence. Never once did she glance in the direction where his ears were strained to hear the sound of her voice, or his eyes to catch the expression of her face. To him she was the one woman in the world, who meant for him more than life, more than all the treasures of this earth, more than fame. To gain her love he would have bartered his soul, as Doctor Faust had done to gain his Gretchen. But to her—to the beautiful, the wealthy, the popular daughter of the multimillionaire he was nothing. Nothing at all. An obscure artist who had painted her portrait and been paid for doing it. Nothing more. The three days of intimacy spent in the Montmartre studio were completely erased from the tablets of

her memory.

So much was obvious to the poor fool who worshipped her. Nevertheless he stayed on in this place which he detested; he stayed on, although the torture of seeing daily the woman he worshipped and never receiving as much as a glance of recognition from her, was sometimes more than he thought he could bear. He stayed on even after he had learned from the society parrakeets who sat about under the trees in Lichtenthal Allée, that his half-brother would soon be crowned King of France with the help of Baron Christophe's millions, and that his marriage with Véronique was part of this bargain.

"She will make a beautiful queen," the chatterers had remarked, little guessing that by their cackle they were tearing a man's heart out of his breast. If they had guessed they wouldn't have cared. Indeed it would have delighted them. Made them laugh at the presumptuous fool, "the unlicked cub," who had dared to raise his eyes to the daughter of the millionaire.

He detested the place because his mother lived in it—his mother who hated him—and his half-brother who looked down on him as a lout and a plebeian. How could he help detesting it when Véronique remained so obviously unaware of his presence? He should have gone back to Paris and set to work to consolidate his position in the art world, to make a name for himself, and in hard work to forget his dreams and his folly. But he stayed on just because he could from time to time catch sight of her in the fashionable Allée, in the Kurhaus or at the opera, and because now and then he could hear the ripple of her laughter and the sound of her voice. What a fool he was! What a fool! He knew it and was breaking his heart over his folly. As a matter of fact he was just a man in love and he didn't know—and there was no one to tell him—that the folly of love is wiser than all the wisdom of the ages.

II

Those who knew Véronique Christophe intimately always spoke of her as romantic. "That lucky girl," they said. "She has everything, beauty, wealth, charm, and so romantic!"

That is just what Véronique was: romantic. In those 1860's romanticism was still held to be an agreeable quality in the young, and the young derived a great deal of happiness out of their romanticism. Especially the young women. They revelled in their dreams and in their illusions. The knights of their imaginings accomplished doughty deeds, and love was nothing if not undying. They looked on life as one long vista of halcyon hours spent in the arms of a faithful and ardent lover. Of course they

experienced disappointments. Some of them at least. But they were happy while they dreamed, whereas nowadays there are no disappointments certainly, but only because there are no such things as dreams and no illusions.

There was a time—it only lasted a very little while—when Véronique Christophe dreamed of those three days in the Montmartre studio. She had liked the peace of that ill-furnished, rather airless room, with its smell of paint and of turpentine. Quaint sounds that were heard nowhere else in the city came wafted in through the badly fitting windows; the cry of the chimney sweep from over the way, of "chairs to mend," and "pots and pans." And she liked to watch the artist at work on her portrait, his eyes glowing with the excitement of creation, and that trick he had of brushing his unruly hair back from his forehead; she caught herself wondering what his face would be like without that ugly, ill-kempt beard and moustache which hid the expression of the mouth and the shape of the chin.

Véronique often thought of the artist—afterwards—when she left Paris to stay with relations in Austria. It was quiet there and she had plenty of time to think and to dream. She had seen the portrait again when it was hung in the Salon and she had heard and read most of the favourable comments upon it, spoken by competent critics. Eventually it would find a place of honour in the Christophe mansion in the Rue de Varennes. But she had never set eyes on the artist again. Once or twice when there was talk of art and pictures at his dinner-table Baron Christophe had made some remark about "the hirsute painter" of his daughter's portrait, and then added: "I wonder what has become of him!"

And Véronique also had wondered.

III

But that was in June. Presently July came along and Véronique went on to Baden-Baden to join her father there for the summer season. She had never been in Baden-Baden before. The place with its gaiety and its beautiful surroundings delighted her. The social world, congregated in the fashionable watering-place, at once claimed the beautiful and wealthy heiress, and so the dreams of the Montmartre studio, its peaceful atmosphere, its odours and its quaint sounds, flew away on the intoxicating strains of the Kurhaus orchestra.

At this time Véronique knew nothing yet of her proposed marriage to the dispossessed King of France, although the question had already been mooted between her father, Madame la Princesse de Bourbon and Count Friesen, the Austrian diplomat. The latter was acting on behalf of his Emperor who desired the

marriage because of the financial support it would give to the cause of the Bourbon restoration, a cause which he had very much at heart. Madame la Princesse, though fully conscious of the necessity of this financial support, still demurred. She dubbed the proposed marriage of her son and a commoner a misalliance, and found it repellent to her ambitious ideals. But she had not yet seen Véronique Christophe.

The first time she saw her was early in July at the opera. It was the first night of Meyerbeer's *Robert le Diable* and the audience was more than usually smart. The Emperor and Empress were present, so were Prince and Princess Bismarck and the King of Prussia. Véronique was sitting in her father's box, and during the *entr'actes* she was surrounded by a bevy of young men, the cream of the *jeunesse dorée* of Europe, all crowding round the beautiful and wealthy heiress as flies will round a honey-pot. Count Friesen pointed her out to Madame.

Madame put up her glasses and took a long look at the girl. No doubt she was very, very beautiful; soft brown hair, eyes of a deep violet blue, lips that promised paradise in a kiss. All that was very well; Madame gave whole-hearted, if somewhat grudging admiration to this perfect product of God's creation; but the thought of a King of France, and that King her son, condescending to marry a Mademoiselle Christophe remained for her a revolting thought. A morganatic marriage, yes! Why not? With, of course, the Christophe milliards to back it. But the crown of Marie Antoinette? No! Unfortunately Count Friesen had repeatedly declared that nothing short of a crown for his daughter would induce Baron Christophe to part with his millions.

Madame put down her glasses and turned to her friend. She put the same questions to him which she had asked dozens of times before:

"Baron Christophe is still of the same mind?"

He replied gravely: "Still of the same mind."

"And the girl? What does she say?"

"She knows nothing yet. But as soon as she has had the honour of being presented to you——"

"What do you think she will say?"

"She will conform to her father's wishes, of course. It is not given to every woman to wear a crown."

Madame sighed and remarked dryly:

"And I suppose she is ambitious."

"I don't think that Véronique Christophe is ambitious in the way you mean, Madame; but she is very young and decidedly romantic, and the future, as her father has planned it, will appeal to her not so much for its glamour, as for its romance."

Madame put up her opera glasses again and took another long look at Véronique.

"She certainly is very beautiful!" was her dry comment.

"She will be the most beautiful queen," Count Friesen declared warmly, "France ever had."

But this tribute did not soothe the lady's ruffled nerves. She said testily: "You couldn't imagine former Kings of France, Friesen, lending themselves to such a bargain."

"Former Kings of France, Madame," the Austrian remarked with a light shrug, "did not live in a democratic age."

"I hate democracy," Madame retorted in her harsh, throaty French. "We owe it to our cousin Louis Philippe who thought to win popularity by going about Paris unattended and carrying an umbrella. The Parisians retaliated by dethroning him and sending him back to England, where no doubt he found his umbrella more useful."

And abruptly she returned to the subject which obsessed her: "It does seem awful, you know, Friesen," she said. "This marriage, I mean."

"Necessity knows no laws, Madame," the diplomat rejoined tactfully, "not even those which govern royal marriages. But why awful?"

"The King of France—and the daughter of Albert Christophe——!"

"A man of unimpeachable integrity," Count Friesen said with emphasis, "and of European reputation. And after all——"

He paused abruptly and pressed his lips together. The words that had nearly escaped him had best be left unsaid. What he had been on the point of saying was: "After all, Louis XVII King of France married you, Inez di Gamba, a trained nurse, the daughter of a Nobody, the widow of an English army officer. Then why shouldn't Louis XIX marry Véronique Christophe, the daughter of a multimillionaire." But Friesen was too much a diplomat to allow words to run away with discretion.

Madame drew a quick, impatient sigh.

She said: "If only your Emperor would help us, or His Holiness, we would have no need to contemplate this marriage."

"My Emperor and His Holiness have troubles of their own," the Austrian rejoined gravely. "Neither can afford to deplete his Treasury, while war is in the air."

"But the claims of blood," Madame argued with vehemence, "the blood of your great Empress Marie Thérèse, and of your beautiful Marie Antoinette which flows in my son's veins."

Once more the good-humoured ironical smile flitted round the mouth of the

tactful diplomat.

"Alas, Madame," he said, "the claims of blood are not so powerful as those of the pocket. You have the Emperor's moral support. Everything that diplomacy can do will be done, you may be sure; and if the King of France does succeed in regaining his throne, diplomacy will do everything possible to keep him there. But initially you need money for your campaign—a great deal of money—and Albert Christophe is willing to provide that, under a condition which you must admit is not difficult to fulfil."

"But are you quite certain, Friesen," Madame insisted, "that a morganatic marriage won't satisfy Baron Christophe? We could bestow an important title on the girl—a duchy . . . !"

Count Friesen shook his head emphatically.

"Nothing," he said, "will satisfy Christophe except the crown for his daughter. If he is assured of that . . ."

"Well?"

"The day that the marriage contract between Mademoiselle Véronique and Louis XIX, King of France, is signed, Christophe will place half a milliard in your hands."

"You are certain of that, Friesen?"

"As certain as that I am alive, Madame," the Austrian assured her. "Please have no doubts about that. To begin with, Christophe is a man of his word, or he would never have reached the position which he holds. And then—well!—" and the diplomat gave a knowing little smile—"to see one's daughter crowned Queen of France is worth a few millions when one has so many."

Madame said nothing more for the moment. Her fine eyes roamed from Baron Christophe's box to the *parterre* down below. The call-bell was now tinkling. The audience was filing back into the house. Count Friesen rose to take his leave. Madame extended a gracious hand to him. He kissed it, bowing very low.

"When may I have the honour," he asked, "of presenting Mademoiselle Christophe to your Highness?"

His tone was firm and insistent. Madame gave a little shudder, sighed and withdrew her hand. She was clever enough to know that in the end she must give in. Count Friesen was her friend, but he was above all the servant of his Emperor; and the Emperor of Austria desired this marriage because of the financial support it would give to the Bourbon cause, which he had at heart. "Necessity knows no law," Friesen had said, and also: "Former Kings of France did not live in a democratic age." He was quite right, and Madame la Princesse, who dreamed of the Tuileries

for her son and his coronation at Rheims, could only bow to the inevitable.

"I will receive Mademoiselle Christophe to-morrow," she said at last, "but warn Christophe not to say anything to his daughter till I give him word."

With this, Count Friesen appeared satisfied. He finally took his leave. Already the conductor had given the warning tap-tap on his desk. The orchestra struck the first note of the introduction to the next act. The Austrian felt that he had every reason to be satisfied with the result of his diplomacy.

"Soon the wedding bells will be ringing," he said to himself, and rubbed his fine aristocratic hands contentedly together.

IV

The very next day Baron Christophe and his daughter Véronique were duly invited to take tea at the Villa Elisabeth, and the Baron had the honour of himself presenting his daughter to Madame la Princesse de Bourbon. Véronique had been thrilled at the idea of this presentation. Austrian by parentage, French by birth, and convent-bred, she was above all royalist by conviction. Like a true Legitimist she believed in the divine right of kings, and to her, there was in France but one legitimate King, the grandson of Louis XVI.

The curtsy which she made to Madame la Princesse was deeper far than the one she had made before the Empress Eugénie; this had been perfunctory. A command curtsy which could not be avoided if one wished to take one's proper place in the social world of Paris. But the one before the mother of the King of France was prompted by loyalty and an almost religious deference. Madame's austerity relaxed almost immediately. Already she had appreciated from afar Véronique's beauty and refinement, but in addition to that, the girl's vitality, her youth and her *joie de vivre* made a strong appeal to the mother of a sickly and effeminate son.

Véronique Christophe radiated health and youth. "She will put life into him," the mother thought, and was extraordinarily gracious on this first occasion. Count Friesen had indeed cause to be gratified with the turn events were taking. He watched with immense satisfaction the intimacy which developed between Madame la Princesse de Bourbon and Véronique Christophe after that first interview. The middle-aged, embittered, disillusioned woman took kindly to the young girl on the threshold of life. Véronique's enthusiasm and loyalty were as balm to a soul who had seen so much time-serving, such improbity and selfishness, who had witnessed faithlessness and apostasy. Soon she found herself confiding in the girl and talking to her by the hour of her plans and projects for the future. All sorts of wonderful things

would happen when Louis was King of France. There would be Versailles and the Tuileries and the coronation at Rheims. His Holiness the Pope, she said, would come over for that, and place the crown of St. Louis on the head of Louis XIX. The Emperor of Austria would come too. In fact, there would be a retinue of honour composed of all the crowned heads in Europe.

And Véronique listened to it all, spellbound. She was thrilled to her heart's core. Her romanticism had found satisfying food at last.

But still Madame demurred. Baron Christophe said nothing of the marriage project to his daughter, and Madame did not speak the word, the final word that would clinch the bargain. Not until that day when she and Véronique sat together on the terrace of the Villa Elisabeth, from which they had a beautiful view over the Allée as far as Lichtenthal, and they saw the Emperor and Empress drive by in their *calèche*. Madame, as usual, had been talking of Versailles and the Tuileries.

She said: "One can give splendid receptions at Versailles. It is a wonderful place for entertaining. The grand staircase you know, dear."

"I have never seen it, Madame," the girl remarked.

"No more have I," Madame admitted naïvely, "but I can just imagine how beautiful it will be, with all the great ones of the earth crowding to pay their respects to my Louis."

She dwelt lovingly on her idea that the Pope would come to Rheims specially in order to place the crown of St. Louis on her son's head.

"After all," she said with a shrug, "Pius VII crowned that upstart Bonaparte—a miserable parvenu, not fit to lick my Louis's shoes."

"I have been to Rheims," the girl murmured excitedly. "It will be beautiful."

"I can almost hear the organ pealing the Te Deum; can't you, dear?"

"Yes!" Véronique replied with a smile, "and I can hear the people cheering."

That is when it all happened. In the distance people could be heard cheering. The clamour could be distinctly perceived, coming at first from far away, and then growing louder and louder as it drew near. With the sound of the cheers came that of the rumble of wheels, the clatter of horses' hoofs and the jingle of harness. Véronique jumped to her feet and ran to the balustrade. From here she had a view over the long Allée from the Kurhaus, right away as far as the beautiful Lichtenthal.

"It is Napoléon and Eugénie," she said to Madame.

"The common upstarts," Madame murmured contemptuously.

A magnificent Deaumont came thundering by. From everywhere the crowd had collected to watch the Imperial progress. Most people cheered. A few waved hats or handkerchiefs. Napoléon III was at the height of his popularity and Eugénie at the

zenith of her beauty. She looked radiant sitting in her carriage, with her huge skirts of pale shot silk billowing around her, its numberless flounces and frills overflowing on to the knees of her Imperial lord. A tiny hat, all lace and flowers, sat on her huge fair chignon, and in her gloved hand she held a diminutive parasol which cast a soft pearly shadow over her face.

Véronique sighed and turned back to Madame, whose glowering eyes and set lips betrayed the storm of bitterness and wrath which was raging inside her. Her trembling fingers were tearing away at her lace handkerchief. Véronique came back to her and knelt down at her feet. She placed her soft, cool fingers over Madame's trembling hands.

"It won't be for long," she whispered.

"Please God, it won't," Madame retorted vehemently.

She was making an effort to control herself, to mask her agitation and to still the trembling of her hands. In a measure she succeeded. She held on to Véronique's hands, seeming to derive comfort from them. After a time she looked down at the young, eager face that was held up to her with so much sympathy and understanding; her dark, restless eyes seemed to be searching the girl's very soul.

"Can I trust you, Véronique?" she murmured.

"Madame!" Véronique protested gently.

"You see, I have so few friends whom I can really trust," Madame went on; and there was a note of pathetic wistfulness in her harsh voice now. "There is Friesen, of course. He has our cause almost as much at heart as I have. But one longs to talk to a woman sometimes."

"You would make me very proud, Madame," the girl said softly, "if you would confide in me."

But Madame did not begin to speak at once. She sat still for quite a long while, no longer looking down on the girl at her feet, but gazing out into vacancy. After a time she spoke, but more to herself than to the girl. Her lips moved but her thoughts seemed far away.

"At no time since my dear husband's death," she said, "has the political world been so favourable for us. The Bonapartes are fast losing their popularity at home. They are hated everywhere abroad. The English never could bear them. The King of Prussia is only waiting for an opportunity to declare war against them——"

She paused and suddenly looked down again on Véronique and once more that searching look came into her restless eyes.

"If only we had the money . . ." she murmured and drew a deep, long sigh.

"I am sure my father——" Véronique began impulsively.

But Madame didn't let her go on. She continued talking, as if to herself, or to some imaginary person on whom the eyes of her turbulent soul were fixed.

"We can succeed. . . . We must. . . ." She reiterated more than once. "The whole army would rally round the flag. The old fleur-de-lys which has led France to glory. The garrison of Strasbourg is ours to a man. What we want is money—money—to carry on."

With her clenched hand she pointed in the direction where the magnificent *calèche*, the beautiful Empress and the cheering were already lost to view.

"Look at that Bonaparte," she exclaimed, "how he schemed and planned to get to the throne. He schemed and planned and succeeded in the end—and what is he?—just a beggarly upstart sitting on the mightiest throne in Europe—the throne that rightly belongs to my son—Louis XIX, King of France."

Whenever Madame la Princesse got herself strung up with excitement, her voice grew almost shrill and the guttural tones of her Spanish accent became more harsh. Véronique squatting on her heels followed her every movement, as she jumped to her feet and stalked up and down the terrace, no longer trying to master her agitation. The girl herself was no less excited. The whole atmosphere evoked by Madame's passionate tirade sent the young blood surging up to her cheeks. Her active brain was already at work, wondering how she could help, what her father would do when she begged and begged. Up to now she had said nothing, she had kept her enthusiasm for the cause of the Bourbons, as well as her friendship for Madame carefully hidden in her heart. But if things were coming to a head then father must help—and would help, she was sure, if he knew just how she felt about it. There was nothing father wouldn't do, if she only begged earnestly enough.

Louis XIX! King of France! Louis the Well-Beloved!! With folded hands and with eyes fixed above, Véronique uttered the most ardent prayer she had ever sent up to God!

"Lord of Lords! King of Kings! Give success to the cause of Thy anointed!"

V

After that day Madame no longer withheld her consent. She gave the word and Baron Christophe told his daughter of the project he had formed for her. Marriage with Louis de Bourbon; her marriage portion, half a milliard, with more to follow, wherewith to finance the royalist cause; and finally the coronation at Rheims, His Holiness placing the crown of St. Louis on the head of the legitimate King of France and the crown of Marie Antoinette on that of Véronique herself.

Véronique was tongue-tied at this news. Well she might be! Queen of France! She was to be Queen of France! This was surely the most stupendous, the most unbelievable thing that could happen to any woman. She closed her eyes trying to visualise what it all meant. In thought she heard Madame la Princesse reiterating all the wonderful things that would happen when Louis was King of France. She tried to visualise Versailles and the Tuileries; the pageants, the receptions; the grand staircase; the ladies with their diamond tiaras, the distinguished men in court dress and uniform. She tried to visualise the wonderful cathedral where former Kings of France had been crowned: the high altar, a mass of flowers, the tall candles, the gorgeous copes, the incense, and His Holiness the Pope holding the crown of Marie Antoinette in his hands.

Oh, it couldn't be real! It couldn't! It was all a dream! Father was mocking her! She would presently wake and realise that it was all a dream.

Father took hold of her hands and drew her to him on his knee. She opened her eyes and looked into his face. Right into his eyes. They had a glow in them. A glow she had never seen in them before. Love, excitement, triumph, they were all there in those kind, deep-set eyes, which had never held a harsh look for her, nor one of deceit. He murmured quite softly: "My little Véronique! Queen of France!" Her eyes pleaded: "Is it really true?" And he nodded in confirmation. After that she felt inclined to cry. She was very young and her nerves had received a rude shock. She laid her head on father's shoulder and cried, and cried, and laughed, while his kindly hand—the hand that had forged the millions which would buy a crown for his daughter—gently stroked the young, dearly loved head.

I

And for Cyril Bertrand there came after that the same sort of miserable days which he had already experienced in Paris. He haunted the Allée and the Kurhaus, he walked out to Lichtenthal, he hung about outside the Villa Marie Thérèse, but never a sight of Véronique did he have. She was not to be seen in any fashionable restaurant; she was not in church on Sunday; she was not at the opera. It was like those dark days in Paris, only much, much worse, because wherever he went, wherever he heard chattering and gossip, her name was always mentioned, and always in close association with that of his half-brother.

"My dear, I know it for a positive fact."

"The most amazing thing that has ever happened."

"The engagement will be officially announced before the end of the season."

"Véronique Christophe and the legitimate King of France!"

"Queen Véronique!"

And the proud ladies of the old régime would then shudder and murmur: "*Quelle horreur!*" whilst those who were more philosophical or perhaps more practical—especially the men—would shrug shoulders and declare: "Better than these Bonapartes at any rate! An Austrian financier and a Corsican attorney! . . . Where's the difference? And here at any rate there will be a milliard to keep the crown well gilded."

Cyril Bertrand could not close his ears to all that gossip. He would have liked to. He would have wished that it had all been mere tittle-tattle, without a word of truth in it. His adorable, adored Véronique, and that backboneless weakling his half-brother. Crown or no crown, it was an outrage! Louis was just as capable of loving as he was of performing acrobatic feats. His Véronique indeed! She was Cyril's Véronique! His, by all the ties which his worship of her had forged around her exquisite personality. He conceived the mad notion of abducting her, forcing his way into the Villa Marie Thérèse, of throwing his arms round her and carrying her away; away to some desert island where there could be no talk of this monstrous marriage, which he, the lover, felt could only mean lifelong unhappiness for her.

But it was no use forcing his way into the Villa Marie Thérèse, for she was no longer there. Baron Christophe, after he had broken the news to his daughter, had sent her away to her relations in Austria. He thought it best that she should be away for a short while from Baden-Baden, where her ears might at times be offended by

the tittle-tattle of her friends, whether good-natured or otherwise. Also he knew from experience that Madame la Princesse was both capricious and queer-tempered. Her manner to Véronique, after the engagement had been finally decided on, was anything but cordial, far different to what it had been at first. On the whole it was best that the girl should go away for a time, and presently an official meeting could be arranged between her and her fiancé! Louis had been kept away by his mother all this time. Madame was no more sure of him than Christophe was of her. Both thought it best that the young people should only meet when their future had been irrevocably sealed.

II

It was after Véronique's departure that Madame summoned her son to Baden-Baden. He came, because to humour his mother in small things was to take the line of least resistance, but he also came for another cogent reason which Madame did not for the moment guess.

The reason was the young French singer, Aline Saint-Amand, who had secured an engagement at the Baden-Baden opera, and who was making her début there in Rossini's *Il Barbiere* on a certain balmy evening at the end of July. The occasion was a brilliant one. The smart little theatre was packed to overflowing. Rossini himself, the composer *à la mode*, had lauded the young débutante to the skies, declaring that she was the finest interpreter of Rosina he had ever heard. She certainly was the prettiest, a fact which may have influenced the old *maestro's* estimate of her performance. But the publicity which this estimate gave to Mademoiselle Saint-Amand had certainly worked wonders for her. For the past week not a seat could be had in the theatre for love or money. The Emperor Napoléon and the Empress had already left Baden-Baden, but there was still a large crowd of rich and distinguished people left, and they mustered that night at the opera in full force. Prince Bismarck was there with his wife. Madame la Princesse de Bourbon was in a box, and so was Princess Metternich and the Duchesse de Mouchy. Baron Christophe was with friends, and there was a large contingent present from the musical and artistic coterie.

In one of the proscenium boxes Rossini sat with a group of sycophants round him, all prepared to split their white gloves in an outburst of vociferous applause.

"*Bravissima, Alina mia!*" the old composer shouted at the top of his voice at the end of the big aria in the second act, and leaning half out of the box he threw an immense bunch of flowers to the young *prima donna*.

Meyerbeer shrugged his shoulders. "*Regardez donc ce vieux maniaque*," he said. "*Il est gaga, ma parole!*"

"He will spoil her for us," Behrer, the manager of the theatre, declared, haunted by the knowledge that an outstanding success on the part of a débutante invariably meant a large increase in salary.

When at the fall of the curtain Mademoiselle Saint-Amand came forward to acknowledge a further ovation from the audience, a shower of bouquets fell at her feet, and among these there was one entirely composed of white lilies. It had been hurled from the left proscenium box by Louis de Bourbon, otherwise Louis XIX, King of France. Seeing which, Madame, his mother, sitting in her box, clutched her fan so tightly that the mother-o'-pearl sticks broke in her hand.

A kindly voice in the rear of the box said with good-natured raillery: "What a pity! It was such a pretty fan."

Count Friesen was paying his respects to Madame during the *entr'acte*. He had watched her growing irritability with an ironical smile on his good-looking face. The smashing of the inoffensive fan, the tap-tap of an impatient foot showed that the lady's nerves were being put to a severe strain.

She pointed with her broken fan to the proscenium box, where the uncrowned King of France had risen from his seat, after he had split his gloves with the violence of his applause. The audience was filing out and he with them.

"He is going to the Saint-Amand's loge," Madame said acidly.

Friesen shrugged, as much as to say: "Why not?"

"The King of France——!" Madame murmured.

"Kings of France, Madame," the Austrian put in with his knowing little smile, "have always been like other men, rakes at heart. Great kings like Louis XIV——"

"But not in public, Friesen," Madame protested. "Not before the public."

"No!" the diplomat retorted dryly, "I suppose the correct procedure in those days was for His Majesty to intimate to the lady of his choice that he desired her company in his own *cabinet particulier*. The lady came, but I don't know that it was any more dignified than the present democratic way."

"Don't talk to me of democracy, Friesen," Madame said irritably, "you know I hate it. Louis had no business to be here at all. He made some excuse for not coming into my box. But Heaven only knows who is shouldering him now in the crowds."

The diplomat made no reply to this. Perhaps he thought that further talk on the subject would, anyhow, be useless. It might even further embitter Madame's ill-temper. So after a few moments' pause he talked of other things, and presently the call-bell sounded, and the audience filed back into the theatre. Madame's fine eyes

roamed enquiringly over the crowd of fashionably dressed young men. His Majesty the King of France was not among them. However, before she could utter the sharp words which obviously hovered on her lips, the conductor had given the warning tap-tap on his desk, and the orchestra struck the first note of the introduction to the third act. The Austrian rose to go.

Madame said: "Let me see you again presently, Friesen!"

"At your service, Madame," he rejoined, and kissed the hand which was graciously extended to him.

"After the theatre then," Madame concluded, "at the villa. I want to tell you just what we have planned."

III

But when Count Friesen presented himself at the Villa Elisabeth after the theatre, he found Madame still in a high state of irritation. As soon as he came into the room and before she even gave him her hand to kiss, she said testily: "He hasn't come in yet, Friesen. That Saint-Amand girl has bewitched him."

The Austrian, however, only shrugged, as much as to say: "What if she has?"

After which he asked: "Where did His Majesty first meet her?"

The wily diplomat knew that Madame's nerves could always be soothed by a reference to Louis de Bourbon as "His Majesty." But this time she refused to be mollified and replied curtly:

"At Strasbourg," then she added: "She was singing there in a café-concert. No one thought much of her. But Louis moved heaven and earth to get her an engagement here. I don't know how he managed it—Behrer is, I think, a friend of his—or else it was that old Rossini. Anyway, he got her the engagement, and this is the result!" A servant in livery brought coffee and liqueurs just then. Madame sat down and took a cup. Friesen noted that it shook—very slightly—in her hand. Standing in front of her he gazed at the picture she presented with undisguised admiration. He thought she looked magnificent. In black as usual. Folds and folds of black velvet trimmed with bows and incrustations of satin were spread over her huge crinoline. The bodice was cut very low. It had puffed sleeves edged with black lace. And rising out of these sable trappings her splendid shoulders and opulent bust looked as if they were carved in ivory. A fine woman, Friesen thought, hard and tenacious. A capable tool for the working of Austrian foreign policy, a policy which was all for peace. The Bonapartes, with their ambition and inherited militarism, were a perpetual menace to the peace of Europe. A young Bourbon king—this Louis who

was rather effeminate and in delicate health—would be the bulwark of pacifism. And this austere woman, his mother, was far too shrewd, Friesen thought, to launch her son into military expeditions that could only end in disaster. She was ambitious for the dynasty, but not for military glory. He studied her agitation. He admired her for this, for he knew how excitable she was, and how capricious. A creature of moods. She would take failure badly, he thought, for she was a regular Spaniard. Even now, in the presence of a servant, she could not entirely disguise her impatience. Her foot tap-tapped against the floor. She took a sip of coffee, then put the cup down. Picked it up again. Took another sip. And all the while her fine dark eyes followed the servant's movements. One could see how impatient she was to be rid of him, and that a peremptory order for him to go hovered on her lips.

A fine woman, yes! An enthusiastic ally and an ambitious one, but could she be trusted to act prudently and wisely if she were called upon to face failure? Friesen wondered, and thoughtfully stirred the coffee in his cup.

At last the servant left the room. Madame drew a deep sigh of relief.

"Sit down, Friesen," she said more calmly, "and don't let us talk any more of that tiresome baggage. Sit down and listen to me. Have some of that Chartreuse. It is very good. Listen, Friesen! I want you to know what we have planned. Then if you have any suggestions to make . . ."

Friesen sat down. He still had the cup of coffee in his hand. He stirred and stirred the coffee in the cup. Thoughtfully. Expectantly.

Madame leaned back against the sofa cushions. She said:

"You know that Louis has spent a great deal of time in Strasbourg this summer. I wished him to feel his way among the garrison."

Friesen nodded, intimating that he knew this. Madame went on:

"Well! we know now that the garrison is ours to a man. Don't doubt it, Friesen. I know what I am talking about. The men are not only loyal, they are enthusiastic. The garrison is made up of two regiments of the line, one regiment of cavalry and the 3rd regiment of artillery. We have a beautiful fleur-de-lys standard on order and it is absolutely certain that these regiments will rally round the old flag. As soon as everything is ready Louis will go back to Strasbourg. He will harangue the men. Their shouts of '*Vive le roi!*' will find their echo all over France——" She sighed; the sigh sounded like one of longing, and she said: "I wish I could be there to hear."

The Austrian sipped his coffee. Put his cup down on the table. Asked: "You had not thought of going yourself?"

Madame said: "No! It would not be wise. If I went too, the authorities would become suspicious. So far we have been able to keep Louis's movements secret—

but it is difficult for a woman to cross the frontier unobserved."

Count Friesen murmured "Quite so!" and thought, but didn't say: "Especially a lady like you."

"Louis always crosses the Rhine at Kehl by the pontoon bridge," Madame went on; "there is little if any risk there." She paused. One might have thought that she was measuring her effect. But she was no actress. She meant every word she said. Her plans had the object of gaining a crown for her son, and there was no play-acting in the way she unfolded them before her friend. She was actually unconscious of the admiration which he had for her, physically. Her purpose was to put into him some of the enthusiasm for Louis's cause which animated her, so that he, in his turn, should communicate it to his Emperor, to His Holiness the Pope and to the whole of Europe. She had long since ceased to be aware that even now, in middle age, she was still beautiful. Excitement added lustre to her dark eyes, and a strangely compelling tone to her voice.

"At Strasbourg," she went on, "Louis will meet General Ruffo and Colonels de Bruc and Noyant and we have great hopes that General Avelane, who commands the 3rd army corps, will also declare himself openly on our side."

Friesen said: "A man like that would certainly be a great asset when your big coup comes off."

"It will come off, Friesen. Do not doubt it for a moment. I don't. I have the faith that moves mountains."

Count Friesen picked up a glass of Chartreuse, sipped it and put it down again. He said dryly:

"So long as it moves the 3rd army corps . . ."

But Madame took no notice of this remark. Friesen was such a kind friend, always deferential and sympathetic: these last rather cruel words of his must have escaped him against his will.

"After Louis has harangued the garrison," she said coolly, "Colonel Noyant will go to the Préfecture with a squad. He will order the Préfet to surrender. They will probably find him in bed, having his morning coffee," Madame continued naïvely, "so he will be at their mercy. As soon as Noyant has dealt with the Préfet he will march his squad to the Mairie and arrest the Mayor."

"And then?"

"And then—and then——" Madame reiterated tartly. "You exasperate me, Friesen. Can't you see that by holding Strasbourg we have in our hands the key to Paris and to France?"

"By holding Strasbourg—yes!" the old diplomat mused.

"Louis will leave Avelane there in command of the garrison. He will march back openly to the frontier with his staff officers and a military escort. The men will await his return at the frontier, but their officers will change into civilian clothes and cross over the border with him. I, in the meanwhile, will have everything ready here for the signing of the marriage contract, and for receiving His Majesty the King of France and his staff in a fitting manner. After the signing of the contract and with Christophe's milliard in his pocket His Majesty will return to Strasbourg, place himself at the head of the 3rd army corps and march to Paris, followed by the acclamations of a multitude happy to see once more the rightful King of France come into his own at last."

Madame grew more and more excited while she talked. She had made her profession of faith. For her, the success of her plan was a dead certainty. And while she spoke, her voice grew louder and more harsh. The guttural Spanish accent became more and more pronounced. Her dark eyes glowed. She rose and paced up and down the room. Then sat down again, holding herself erect, throwing out her fine bust and squaring her shoulders, while the rings on her fingers and the bracelets on her wrists glittered in the candle-light as she threw out her hands in widely sweeping gestures to emphasise some point or other.

Friesen sat silent and thoughtful. He was a diplomat of the old school, shrewd and tactful. It was impossible to guess what went on exactly behind the mask of high breeding and detachment which his good-looking face usually wore.

It was only when Madame appeared to be waiting for him to say something that he asked her when she thought of putting her plan into execution.

She replied: "I don't know yet—as soon as possible, of course, though there is still a lot to think of and to arrange. But I want to hurry things on now that we have got Christophe and the girl in the right mood—Louis must start for Strasbourg to-morrow or the next day—I don't want him to get deeper in the clutches of that Saint-Amand girl."

She broke off abruptly and then went on with a kind of desperate insistence, her dark eyes searching her friend's face as if to force him to put his thoughts into words:

"What I have told you, Friesen, is only the main outline of our plans; but you do realise, don't you, that our last louis will go towards paying for it all? It must be followed immediately by the signing of the marriage contract and Christophe's milliard to help us carry on. Immediately! You understand? The wedding can then take place in Paris, and the coronation, please God, immediately after."

She drew a long, deep sigh. "Anyhow, my friend," she said, "before the year is out, this nightmare of Empire and the Bonapartes will be over and we shall witness

the crowning at Rheims of Louis XIX, King of France."

"God grant it, Madame," the Austrian put in fervently.

It was after this that Madame's mood suddenly changed. She was like that. Hot tempered one moment, cool the next, enthusiastic, irritable; it was impossible to know how to take her. It was a bitter mood that now apparently seized her all of a sudden, for she gave a quick, impatient sigh, and said:

"What we want is energy, Friesen." And she reiterated this two or three times: "Energy—energy—the determination to succeed."

"But," Friesen protested, "His Majesty——"

"A charming young man, eh?" Madame broke in, in a tone of biting sarcasm. "Most popular at a dance or a dinner-party—so good-looking—so amiable! But ——"

She broke off and the expression of her face hardened to something that was almost cruel. She appeared restless; jumped once more to her feet, went over to the window and threw it open. At once the distant strains of the Kurhaus orchestra playing the latest dance tune, came floating in, dreamy, languorous, frivolous, a strange accompaniment to this talk of conspiracies and the destinies of France. Friesen sat in silence, his folded hands pressed between his knees. And Madame la Princesse suddenly turned from the window and came back to him. She sat down again on the sofa, smoothed down the voluminous folds of her dress, picked up a fan from the table at her elbow, and began to ply it in an agitated kind of manner. She was obviously nervy. Thoughts—strange thoughts and reminiscences—were running riot in her brain. And all at once she said:

"You have never seen my eldest son, have you, Friesen?"

The Austrian looked politely astonished.

"I didn't know——" he began.

"That I had another son?" she broke in harshly. "My first husband was an Englishman, you know. As handsome as a marble statue carved by Phidias, and as cold. His idol was Wellington, and I need not tell you what that name means to us Spaniards! Mark was self-opinionated and arrogant, looked on a woman as little better than his dog or his horse. When I rebelled at his exactions he treated me like a disobedient slave, horse-whip in hand. I don't know now if I adored or hated him. I gave him a son, the handsomest boy, Friesen, you have ever seen in all your life. I hate him."

Madame's pale, hard face now wore an almost terrifying expression of malevolence. Her words, spoken with the guttural Spanish intonation, sounded like

the angry growl of a wild cat at grips with its prey. Count Friesen felt extremely uncomfortable, didn't know which way to look or what to say. In all his diplomatic experience he had never encountered so great a fury in any woman. Madame now picked up a lace handkerchief. She crushed it into a damp ball, then started pulling it to pieces. Presently she went on:

"He ran away from home nearly twelve years ago; after he had helped himself to as much of my money as he thought he would require. Three years later I saw him again. He brought me back the money which he had stolen—borrowed he called it. Friesen!" Madame continued, making a visible effort to subdue the harshness of her voice. "He was the handsomest boy I had ever seen; nineteen years old, and the very image of me. And so like His Majesty, except for his stature, which is magnificent, just like his father's. And, like his father, cold, arrogant, self-willed—but a man, Friesen!—a man!—a man!"

Once more Madame was silent. The Austrian, not knowing what was expected of him, would have given a handful of gold for an excuse to slip away. But Madame seemed for the moment unaware of his existence. At last he ventured to ask:

"You have not seen the young man since, Madame?"

"No!" she replied curtly.

"Do you know what became of him?"

"Not directly. But Cardinal Beneventy, whom I think you know, seems to have kept in touch with him. I asked him a question once about Cyril, and His Eminence then said that the boy had studied painting in Paris and was on the way to making a name for himself in the art world."

"Cyril, did you say, Madame?" Friesen asked. "Your son isn't Cyril Bertrand, is he, the young artist who had that beautiful portrait of Mademoiselle Christophe in this year's Salon?"

"Does he paint portraits?" Madame asked coldly. "I didn't know."

"The art world of Paris knows Cyril Bertrand by reputation, I can assure you. I have never met him, but the cognoscenti talk of him as a young man of great promise. No less a man than Jean Auguste Ingres has spoken very highly of him. And to think that Cyril Bertrand is brother to His Majesty——"

"Only half-brother," Madame put in curtly. "Cyril is English, remember. I know that to my cost."

After which, in her usual capricious way, Madame la Princesse allowed the conversation to drift into other channels. Pictures. The opera. The health of Henri Murger and the eccentricities of Meyerbeer. It seemed as if she wished to dismiss deliberately from her mind all thoughts of her two sons, whose respective

personalities had each the power to exacerbate her nerves. Also it was getting late. Count Friesen presently rose to take his leave, and wishing the lady a respectful good night, he bent his back nearly double before her. No one could be more deferential to dispossessed royalty than this representative of the most ancient empire in Europe. He kissed the hand that was graciously extended to him. It was still a beautiful hand, but Friesen could not help thinking, while he held it, how ruthlessly it could strike, if it had the will.

A few minutes later he was standing under the marquise outside the front door of the Villa Elisabeth. The major-domo who had seen him out stood rigid as a statue behind him. Friesen lit a cigarette. His thoughts ran on the interview he had just had with that masterful woman upstairs.

"Masterful and vindictive," he mused; "a modern Medici or Borgia. How she hates that son of hers. She hates him because he is fine and strong, and because her favourite, who is a descendant of effete kings, is nothing but a weakling. Ah, well! weakling or no, my Emperor wants him on the throne of France, so we must all help to get him there!"

And Count Friesen descended the perron steps whistling the latest waltz of Johann Strauss, the strains of which came up to him, together with the scent of heliotrope and late roses from the Kurhaus gardens down below.

I

But during this selfsame hour after the theatre, the uncrowned King of France was settling the destinies of his throne and country in his own way. While his austere mother and the Austrian diplomat were discussing the possibilities of a *coup d'état* which would restore to him the crown of his forebears, Louis de Bourbon spent his time in sitting, figuratively speaking, at the feet of Aline Saint-Amand and telling her in language of varying eloquence how adorable she was, and how little he cared about royal thrones and the crown of St. Louis, if they should prove to be insuperable obstacles to the fulfilment of his most ardent desire. Whereupon, just to please him and because she did feel flattered by the passion which she had aroused in this interesting young man with the kingly air and somewhat mysterious personality, she asked the obvious question:

"And what is your Majesty's most ardent desire?"

Nor was there the slightest suggestion of irony in her use of the august title.

"How can you ask?" His Majesty retorted, and added rapturously: "To have you entirely for my own."

Aline Saint-Amand occupied a suite of rooms in a modest pension high up on the hill, with beautiful views over the Lichtenthal Allée and the river to the edge of the forest far away. The two of them had been sitting opposite one another at the table, having supper. He, in a state of fervid adoration, ate next to nothing. His eyes—the eyes of a man in delicate health—purple-rimmed and feverish, were fixed upon every mouthful which she conveyed to her adorable lips. She was hungry. She was young and she worked hard, both at her music and at other things, and she ate a hearty supper.

But now that the waiter had cleared the table and gone off, they both rose, she to fall in a graceful attitude in a corner of the sofa, and he to sit as close to her as she would let him.

"Once you are King of France, my Louis," she said softly, "the humble little opera singer will be nothing to you."

"I would give up more than the throne of France," he rejoined earnestly, "rather than lose you."

The retort came, quick and not without asperity:

"What about Véronique Christophe?"

"Oh! Véronique——!" was Louis's curt comment on this, and he gave a shrug

just to show how indifferent the matter of Véronique Christophe was to him.

"They say," Aline continued with a doleful little sigh, "that old Christophe has set his heart on his daughter being Queen of France."

"Don't let us waste time," he entreated, "by talking about old Christophe."

"He has millions, so they say."

"I adore you."

"And there's nothing that money can't do," she concluded with another and deeper sigh.

"You are the most beautiful creature on God's earth," he murmured dreamily.

Aline's eyes were of that very rare colour—real china-blue. They were liquid eyes, large and fringed with long lashes. Her eyebrows went up slightly at the corners, near her small, up-tilted nose, giving her glance a perpetually appealing expression—so attractive to a man, especially if he is not of the herculean type. The knowledge that he is being called upon to defend and protect a lovely, helpless creature, gives him a feeling of power and of pride. Aline Saint-Amand always gave the impression that she was weak and helpless and in need of protection, and Louis, delicate in health as he was and somewhat effeminate physically, felt a man when she turned her appealing eyes on him, and adored her for the sense of strength their appeal gave him. She had beautiful soft hands with which she would toy with his hair or pat his wan cheeks. And when he felt her perfumed fingers against his face he would fall into a melting mood, close his eyes and say or do anything in the world she wished. Most undoubtedly he would have renounced all his rights to the throne of France if she insisted.

"What would the world be to me," he murmured, "without you!"

Now Aline Saint-Amand was one of the few women who could pout and not lose her charm. She had studied the art in front of her mirror because she knew that a pretty pout was calculated to melt a man's obdurate heart quicker than anything, especially if it was allied to tearful, appealing china-blue eyes. In the present case this alliance was peculiarly successful.

"You say that, my Louis," she said in a broken voice, "but I know that your head is full of plans—you protest—you swear you love me—but you do make plans—don't you?"

"What do you mean by plans?"

"Plans to leave me"—and two tears contrived to escape from those liquid eyes and coursed down the velvet cheeks—"and become King of France, when you will be as far above me as the stars, and as unattainable."

"I don't make those plans," he protested; "my mother does."

"It's the same thing, my dear!" she said tearfully; "they are all made so as to part you from me."

"I need not go," the young man said, and a sulky, obstinate look marred for the moment the delicate charm of his face.

"Go?" the girl asked. "Where?"

"To Strasbourg."

She drew a long deep sigh and murmured ecstatically: "Strasbourg!"

He drew her as close to him as he could and she nestled against his shoulder. "The place," he said softly, "where I spent the happiest days of my life, where first we met, Aline, and we learned to love one another. I cannot think what it will be like without you."

"Why must you go?" she asked.

"It is part of their plan, you know."

"I know nothing, my Louis. Tell me."

"There isn't much to tell. I am to meet a lot of old bores there, Colonel This and General That. There is to be a lot of flag-wagging and I am to harangue the garrison. The men will shout '*Vive le roi*,' and follow me. A flag embroidered with fleur-de-lys is already on order. Oh! they have thought it all out and planned everything."

"They? Who?"

"Well! my mother for one."

Aline was silent for a moment or two. She snuggled up to him closer, always closer, so that her face was hidden from him by her soft, fair hair, which brushed against his cheek. He felt weary and dispirited, and conscious of the weakness of his will. He felt like a bird caught in a trap. He didn't want crowns and thrones or even milliards. All he wanted was Aline and a life of ease and quietude.

After a time Aline said as gently as she could, though she felt great sobs of self-pity rising to her throat:

"And when you have done all that, my Louis, and when the men have shouted '*Vive le roi*,' you will put your dear name to the contract of marriage with Véronique Christophe. Is that it?"

Louis made no reply. He leaned his head back against the sofa cushions. He was tired. Tired and bored with that crowd of pompous middle-aged men and ex-soldiers who were all over him; who wanted him to do wonderful things for his country's sake, wonderful things which invariably meant getting up early in the morning or haranguing a lot of flat-faced soldiers who, as often as not, when he had finished, did not know if they ought to shout "*Vive le roi*" or "*Vive l'empereur!*" Above all, he was tired of his mother's domination, her perpetual interference with

his pleasures, her opposition to his desire for this lovely girl, whom he longed to have for wife, so that he could cuddle her soft, yielding body and rest his tired head against her sweet-scented shoulder.

"Angel," he murmured dreamily, "don't let us talk any more of those tiresome projects. I would so much rather be making love to you."

The silence in the room, the warmth of this lovely summer's night, the mellow light of the wax candles, suited his mood. Through the open window came the faint sound of the Kursaal orchestra playing the lovely "Blue Danube" waltz. He closed his eyes. Aline disengaged herself gently from his arms, and looked straight at him for a moment or two. There was a strange look in her eyes. Was it love? Well! perhaps! Indecision certainly, and compassion; something of ambition too, for even as an uncrowned king, Louis de Bourbon would be a desirable husband. Princesse Louis de Bourbon would sound well, and would open for her those social doors which were still closed against an obscure young *prima donna*. And Louis assuredly was a tender and fascinating lover. While she continued to gaze on him her look hardened a little. Indecision slowly gave way to obstinacy. There was no weakness of will in Aline Saint-Amand. If she wanted anything very badly, she would soon see that she got it. If she wanted Louis de Bourbon to throw over the crown of France, Baron Christophe's milliards and Véronique, she could make him do it in spite of his tyrannical mother and Austrian intrigues. The question was, did she really want him? A woman's caprice is the most puzzling thing in all the world, a riddle to which even she herself has not always got the key. At this moment Aline Saint-Amand certainly did not know her own mind. Time, she decided, and her own impulse would guide her. She rose and went across the room to where glasses and one or two bottles were ranged on an old-fashioned sideboard. Louis half opened his eyes, and lazily followed her movements. She was standing with her back to him, her white muslin dress billowed round her over a huge crinoline; round her waist she had an immense sash of blue silk ribbon which cascaded down her back to the edge of her skirt. Her chignon, made up of a mass of small curls, looked like live gold in the candle-light; just above her small ear she had pinned a large white camellia. She was adorable.

"Come back to me," Louis murmured softly. And Aline came back. She had a glass in her hand.

"Tokay," she said, and held the glass out to him. "Count Zichy sent me a case of it, straight from his vineyards in Hungary."

Louis took the glass and drank.

"Nectar!" he commented.

"Another glass?"

"Why not?"

She took the glass from him and refilled it at the sideboard. He drank that down too.

"Nectar!" he reiterated and set his glass down. "Now come and sit down by me."

He put out his hands and she put hers in them. He dragged her down to his side. He no longer looked sleepy: his eyes were shining and there were two pink spots on his cheeks. The heady Hungarian wine had roused him from his lethargy.

II

Cardinal Beneventy declares that it was God's will that Cyril Bertrand should make up his mind to go for a long walk on that same balmy summer's night. Yet one wonders if God cares about the petty scramblings and fussiness of His creatures. Their comings and goings must, in His sight, be so like those of a colony of ants whom we, the proud lords of creation, think nothing of scattering and crushing under foot. One wonders. The greatest poet-philosopher of all times says that "there is a destiny that shapes our ends." Perhaps he is right. Who knows?

Certain it is that if Cyril Bertrand had not gone for a long walk that night, things would not have happened as they did, and the whole of contemporary history would have had to be written quite differently. He wandered out along Lichtenthal and past Geroldsau as far as Malschbach, and so back up the hill to the pension where he lodged. It was late when, after the long climb, he came in sight of the unpretentious house tucked away behind a group of acacia trees still in full bloom. Their graceful white pendants sent waves of sweet odour through the air. Overhead banks of heavy clouds were driven by a soft westerly breeze across a sky of intense indigo blue. Between the clouds myriads of stars blinked and peeped. Stars of every colour of prismatic light, red, green, violet. And amidst them, queen of them all, the waning moon, the colour of honey, veiled or revealed her light as the clouds passed over her face and drifted away again.

Cyril came up to the low wall which formed the boundary between the road and the small garden of the pension. A few steps more brought him close to the entrance gate. Looking round he saw a man and a woman standing just inside the gate. They were locked in one another's arms, evidently exchanging a fond good night. Cyril stepped back, discreetly, into the shadow of the trees. The moon at the moment was unveiled and very bright. Her light shone golden on the loving couple. The woman's face was turned up to the light. It was Aline Saint-Amand's face; eyes closed, lips

parted, nostrils quivering, all in an ecstasy of love. Cyril could not see, at first, who the man was; his face was buried in the hollow of the girl's neck, between her throat and chin. All Cyril could see was a mass of chestnut hair, very like his own.

The embrace lasted a long time. Cyril got impatient. He gave a discreet cough, and Aline responded with a little cry. She disengaged herself from her lover's arms, gave him her two hands, which he covered with kisses. She then turned and walked rapidly up the garden path to the house; and as she walked she sent a volley of trills and scales through the silence of the night. The man, whoever he was, remained standing by the gate for a moment. He seemed rather unsteady on his legs, Cyril thought, for he swayed forward once, and then passed his hand across his forehead. Cyril had no wish to meet him, so he waited quietly a few moments longer in the shadow of the trees, until the ardent lover should have recovered his senses sufficiently to open the gate and go away. Aline in the meanwhile had gone into the house; her bird-like notes could still be heard through the open windows. A couple of minutes later she appeared at one of those windows and looked up at the moon. Her face and bust were flooded by the honey-coloured light. Her lover down by the gate put out his arms and murmured: "Aline! Come back!" But probably she did not hear him, for she drew back from the window and pulled the curtains together, and these were so thick that not even her shadow could be seen upon them.

Then only did the man turn. With a rather unsteady hand he opened the entrance gate. And Cyril Bertrand saw that Aline Saint-Amand's ardent lover was his half-brother Louis. At first he didn't believe his eyes. The whole thing was so staggering! So impossible! Louis, his half-brother, was not only the future King of France, he was also the future husband of Véronique, the most perfect of God's creatures, the woman whom he should have worshipped as he would a goddess. And here he was, committing a sacrilegious act on this balmy night, beneath the light of a lover's moon. He was betraying Véronique, a divinity, in the arms of another woman.

It was unspeakable, monstrous, incredible! So monstrous that it kept Cyril for many minutes rooted to the spot, unable to move. Kept him there until he heard the click of the latch and the gate swing back on its rusty hinges. Until he heard a man's footsteps moving away into the distance down the hill. Then only, and as if impelled by a blind impulse, did he start to follow those footsteps down the hill. What he was going to do, he didn't know. What he wanted to do was to take that liar, that betrayer by the throat and so hold him while he poured invectives, reproaches, insults into his face. Whether he would end by killing him, like the vermin that he was, Cyril didn't know. He felt in a dangerous mood, and there was an unpleasant blood-red mist before his eyes. And now a heavy bank of clouds drifted slowly past,

and veiled the light of the moon. Cyril hurried along in the darkness, down the hill in the wake of those footsteps; the footsteps of the man whom he longed to seize by the throat. Demons of hatred and murder were at grips with his soul. He had been nurtured in hatred. Hatred had lorded it over his childhood. His mother hated him, his step-father had hated him; this half-brother of his, the effeminate weakling, had always hated him. He had been fed on hate, been encompassed by hate, until distance and a new life made up of loneliness and privations had at any rate brought him a measure of peace.

But grim hatred's many offsprings were rearing their heads now. The male instinct to kill an enemy urged him on. Like David in the Psalms, he could—had his mind been clear enough for prayer at this moment—have asked God that his enemy's days be few, and that when he shall be judged, he be condemned and his very prayers become sin. Only Cyril did not think of David or the 109th Psalm just now. He was simply hurrying down the hill so as to overtake the man who had lied to Véronique.

And all at once he saw the man stagger and heard a curious sound, like the groan of an animal in distress. Louis had stumbled against a loose stone. He felt himself falling, uttered a feeble cry for help, and came down on his knees. He would have measured his length on the stony ground had not strong arms been suddenly thrown round him; he didn't know whose they were, for it was quite dark. The cool air after the hot room and the pungent Hungarian wine had turned him sick and giddy. He was losing consciousness and closed his eyes just as he felt himself lifted up from the ground and carried quickly down the hill.

III

It is generally said that women's actions are illogical and unaccountable even to themselves. Impulse guides them. Caprice rules them. But when men's actions are ruled by impulse, they become just as illogical, as unexplainable to their own selves, as those of the more volatile sex.

Cyril Bertrand never could account to himself for his action at the moment when his brother, the man whom a moment ago he felt he hated to the point of wishing to murder him, fell on his knees and gave a pitiful groan, calling feebly for help. The same blind impulse which had prompted him to follow in Louis's footsteps, with clenched fists ready to seize him by the throat, suddenly urged him to throw his arms round that pathetic fellow-creature, who looked so weak and so helpless and who groaned like an animal in pain, to lift him from the ground and to carry him along the

dark tree-bordered avenue to the Villa Elisabeth lower down the hill.

The hand of God, says Cardinal Beneventy. Well, of course! Who dares doubt it? The Something Fine, the Something Tender which is in almost every soul must come from God, be that God the God of the Christians or of the Jews, of Hindoos or Chinamen.

Cyril Bertrand then, carrying the inanimate body of his brother, came to the grille of the Villa Elisabeth, where he knew that his mother lived. Here he stopped, trying in the dark to find the latch of the gate or else the bell. There was no light over the grille, and the one under the glass marquise before the front door only shed a feeble light on the perron and the top of some marble steps. Cyril was swearing inwardly at the want of light when the front door of the villa was suddenly opened and two men came out on the perron. Their forms were silhouetted against the brilliant light inside the hall. One of them was obviously a servant; the other Cyril knew well by sight. It was Count Friesen, the Austrian diplomat, whom he had often observed at the opera in Madame's box or in the midst of the fashionable throng in the Allée.

Count Friesen lighted a cigarette, and came down the perron steps whistling the latest waltz of Johann Strauss. Just at the moment the bank of clouds drifted away and the waning moon once more flooded the small garden of the Villa Elisabeth with her honey-coloured light. The Austrian covered the intervening space between the villa and the grille with quick, elastic steps, and came to a dead halt at the gate when he found himself face to face with a tall, hirsute, rather wild-looking, hatless creature whose arms were weighted with a limp bundle that did not look unlike a dead man. His first impulse was to shout peremptorily: "Hello there!" while his hand went to his hip-pocket to feel for the revolver which he always carried with him.

Receiving no response to his "Hello!" he shouted more loudly and more peremptorily: "What are you doing here?" and "What do you want?"

Cyril replied curtly: "He fell down in the road. I picked him up and brought him along. I know he lives here. At least his mother does."

At first sound of Cyril's voice Count Friesen gave a start. He peered at him through the ironwork of the gate. For a long, long time after Cyril had finished speaking the Austrian stood there looking at him. The moon was very bright and he could see every line of the strong, handsome face half hidden by the shaggy beard, and crowned with an unruly shock of chestnut-coloured hair. Cyril returned his glance, frowning, wondering why Friesen, whom he didn't know except by sight, should be scrutinising him in such a curiously intent way. He said gruffly:

"I am not a burglar, nor a beggar. I want to take him in there, that's all."

Slowly, with a kind of mechanical movement, Friesen opened the gate and Cyril

stepped into the garden. The Austrian never took his eyes off him. He seemed like a man hypnotised. The major-domo came hurrying down the drive. He had heard the sound of voices. Friesen heard him coming, but still kept his eyes fixed on Cyril. As soon as the man was close enough to hear he called to him and gave him a few quick orders:

"His Majesty fainted in the road. This gentleman fortunately was passing by and brought him home. Do not alarm Madame la Princesse, but see that His Majesty is immediately put to bed."

The major-domo was too much upset to do more than murmur feebly: "*Oui*, Monsieur le Comte!" He made to take the inert body of his royal master in his arms, but Cyril would not allow him to do that.

"I'll carry him to the villa," he said curtly.

He followed the major-domo along the drive, up the perron steps and into the hall. Louis was slowly returning to consciousness. Cyril put him down in an arm-chair, and, without bestowing another glance on him or the major-domo he turned on his heel and went back to the grille.

Count Friesen was still there, leaning against the gatepost and smoking a cigarette. He took a step forward as soon as he saw Cyril approaching. Cyril frowned at sight of him; he would have gone past him without a word, but Friesen stood deliberately in his way.

"You will have to tell me who you are, you know," he said courteously, but very firmly.

"I have told you," Cyril replied, "that I am not a beggar. The man fell down and I picked him up. That's all."

"I know all that," the Austrian rejoined quietly, "and as a matter of fact I need not have asked. Your name is Cyril Bertrand, isn't it?"

"How did you know?" the other retorted.

"I count Jean Auguste Ingres among my friends," the other replied gravely.

In a moment the glum expression fled from Cyril's face. A look of boyish eagerness came into it.

"He spoke of me?" he asked.

"In enthusiastic terms. He says you have a great future before you. . . ." And Friesen added with a smile: "If you will only work."

"Isn't that wonderful?" Cyril murmured. "Fancy his remembering a botcher like me!"

"He didn't speak of you as a botcher. And Jean Auguste Ingres is not lavish with his praise."

Cyril said nothing more. He remained absorbed in the happy memories the name of the great artist had evoked; the blessed, blessed hours in the studio at Montmartre; the portrait which Ingres had "rather liked." Of everything else he appeared unconscious. In the distance a church clock struck midnight. The night now was wonderfully peaceful and silent. The Kurhaus orchestra had already ceased to play, and the fashionable throng had gone home to bed. The air was perfectly still, sweet scented with the intoxicating odour of acacia and heliotrope. It was the sort of night when even pagans turn their thoughts to the possibility of a creative God. The golden moon brought into bold relief the marble balustrades and ornamental vases that adorned the Villa Elisabeth and painted their shadows a deep indigo. Count Friesen glanced up to a row of windows, where the lamps had just been lighted and shadowy forms could be seen against the blinds, passing to and fro. His Majesty was, according to orders, being put to bed. The diplomat gave a quick, impatient sigh and then turned once more to the somewhat wild-looking but essentially manly figure before him.

He sighed again and said after a moment or two:

"Well, Monsieur Bertrand. I am afraid it is getting late. But we must meet again; that is," he added graciously, "if you will allow me to come and see you."

"You are very kind," Cyril rejoined, "but I have only a small room in a second-rate pension."

"May I ask where?"

"The Villa Eglantine, higher up this hill."

"Oh! Then you have a charming house-mate, I think. The young singer who created such a furore in Rossini's opera this evening, Mademoiselle Saint-Amand." Then, as Cyril offered no remark to this, he went on with his usual courtesy:

"Don't let me keep you standing here any longer. You are an early bird on these lovely mornings no doubt. But I shall probably come and knock at your door some time to-morrow, and we'll talk of our mutual friend in Paris."

And so they parted. But they did not meet again the next day. In the early morning Count Friesen received a summons from Vienna and he was obliged to leave Baden-Baden for the Austrian capital by the noonday train. He sent a regretful apology to Monsieur Bertrand at the Villa Eglantine. Nor did these two meet till many days had gone by, and many, many events had occurred which neither of them, not even the shrewd diplomat, foresaw at the hour of parting.

The hand of God, said Cardinal Beneventy. The inexorable Fates, declared the unbelievers—those who believed in the Fates and not in God. Who shall say if the Great Creative Spirit does really intervene in the petty affairs of men, or merely allow

the forces which some call the Fates to take a hand in the game which men call life?

None of us will ever know until it is too late to tell the others—those whom we have left behind—and they probably would not believe us even then.

BOOK III
WHEN AUTUMN CAME ALONG

I

Letter despatched by special courier from His Majesty Louis XIX by the grace of God King of France to Madame his mother:

"Strasbourg,
"September the 12th, 1860.

"MADAME AND BELOVED MOTHER,

"The kindest woman on earth is writing this under my dictation as I am so tired I can hardly hold a pen. We are still in Strasbourg, in a most uncomfortable inn which calls itself the Hotel des Colonies, supposed to be the best in the town. I hardly closed my eyes these past two nights. The bed is hard and narrow, the sheets coarse and the pillow feels as if it were stuffed with potatoes. Both mornings I have been up at dawn. The first day they brought me a flag which they said you had ordered. It was white and embroidered with fleur-de-lys. Then a crowd of old curmudgeons turned up and we held a preliminary conference in a stuffy room in the hotel. The whole of my staff was present; you know their names better than I do. They talked a lot, and in the intervals of talking, they sniffed and coughed and blew their noses. I only listened. As a matter of fact it was no use my saying anything as they had settled it all among themselves. At dawn the next day we were to take possession of the headquarters of the 12th regiment of artillery, then march to the other end of the town and occupy those of the 38th of the line. Then a detachment of troops were to go to the Préfecture under the command of Colonel Ruffo—I think that is his name—and arrest the Préfet and any other members of the municipality who were not friendly to us. Nobody was quite clear as to what we should do after that, whether we should proceed at once to St. Dié where General Avelane, Commander-in-Chief of the district, was presumably waiting for us with two regiments of artillery, three of cavalry and two regiments of infantry—so, at least, they all hoped; or whether we should stay where we were and send a courier to General Avelane to join us with his regiments in Strasbourg. Also whether we should issue our royal proclamation straight away or wait till we got to Paris.

"Interminable discussions followed which wearied me to death. In fact

the conference lasted the whole day, with very short intervals for exceedingly scrappy and abominably cooked meals. They were in the midst of a heated discussion when the last of four candles guttered and flickered out. No other candle could be procured at that hour. We were in total darkness, and the conference was dissolved. This morning again at dawn another Colonel whose name I forget, went, in full dress uniform, to artillery headquarters and ordered the adjutant to muster the men. I arrived a quarter of an hour later. The whole regiment was in the courtyard under arms; the band was there in full force. The Colonel with sword drawn stood in the centre of the quadrangle. Another fellow in uniform walked in front of me carrying the flag, and behind me stalked Ruffo looking very uncomfortable in a uniform which was much too tight for him. As soon as I came to a halt the Colonel spoke to the men:

"'Soldiers!' he shouted at the top of his voice, 'the French Empire no longer exists. Napoléon the usurper has fallen. God save the King!' This of course was a lie, unless Napoléon has recently fallen from his horse or down the staircase. But anyway the men responded with a loyal shout: '*Vive le roi!*' I said a few words to them about St. Louis and my grandfather. The band struck up the 'Marseillaise,' which selection seemed to me a singular want of tact, but I suppose they meant well. I took hold of the flag. A young lieutenant came forward and knelt on one knee. I gave him the flag, and the men again shouted '*Vive le roi!*' A few at the back of the square made a mistake and shouted '*Vive l'empereur!*' I don't think they all knew who I was.

"It was still dark and very cold. We marched through the town, with the band playing the march from *Le Prophète*, and the young lieutenant—I don't know his name—waving the flag about. Some of the windows in the streets were thrown open and men in their night caps and women with tousled hair looked out to see what the noise was about. We reached the headquarters of the line regiment. An old General—whose name I think is Louvelu—was in the yard in full-dress uniform ready to receive me. Ruffo whispered something in my ear about its being wonderful that the General had declared himself openly on our side. But I was not surprised because I knew that Mademoiselle Saint-Amand had worked for this end. Did I tell you that she never left my side during the whole of this trying day? From dawn till noon she was with us, marching, shouting, talking to the officers and encouraging them.

"The 38th regiment was as enthusiastic in shouting '*Vive le roi!*' as the artillery. I had no idea Napoléon and the Empire were so unpopular. The General offered us déjeuner for which I was thankful as I had had nothing all morning except a cup of very bad coffee. While we were at meal, Ruffo detailed twenty men to go with him to the Préfecture. They intended to arrest the Préfet, the sous-Préfet and I don't know whom else; but they didn't succeed. It seems the Préfecture was strongly guarded by troops—I don't know what troops—and Ruffo and his men had to come back. He said that he wished to avoid an armed conflict at this stage of our expedition.

"After déjeuner there was another dreary, interminable conference, at which it was finally decided that we should send a courier to St. Dié, telling General Avelane to bring his regiments along here to Strasbourg. They all said that it would be safest for me to remain where I was. It seems they had information that the whole countryside is simply infested with spies of Napoléon's secret police, bent on getting hold of me and shutting me up in some fortress or other. By this time I was so tired that I would certainly have collapsed altogether, had it not been for the kindness and attention bestowed on me by Mademoiselle Saint-Amand, whose devotion to me will electrify the whole of France, when it becomes known.

"She says, and I feel she is right, that what I want now is rest, or by the time Avelane turns up I shall not be fit for anything. Her home is not far from here at Steigand. She has a house there and a secluded garden. She has kindly invited me to spend a few days there with her, because she feels that in the quietude of the country, she can nurse me back to health and strength. I have decided to accept this generous invitation and we leave for Steigand in an hour's time. We shall drive down in the berline as it is only a matter of thirty kilometres, and we must live in hopes that Napoléon's spies won't be on our track. I am sure that a lengthy sojourn in a fortress would be the death of me. As soon as I hear that General Avelane has arrived at Strasbourg, which should be in three days' time at latest, I will return there and in every way carry out the programme which you have mapped out for me. I know you have arranged that I am to meet Mademoiselle Christophe at a reception which you propose to give at your villa on the 23rd, that is eleven days from now. Frankly that marriage with the Austrian flapper appeals to me less and less as time

goes on, in spite of its attendant milliard. It will be a great sacrifice to make for a problematical crown.

"*Au revoir, maman.* I will send you a telegram as soon as I am back at Strasbourg. I could then leave for Baden-Baden on the day following. If you don't hear from me by the 17th at latest, you may conclude that Napoléon's spies have got me, and that I am either a prisoner in their hands, or that I have been killed by them and left in a ditch.

"Your dutiful son,

"Louis."

II

When the long letter was written and the envelope duly addressed, the beautiful hand that had penned it all was stiff and tired. It had to be kissed, and kissed again and fondled.

"How good you are to me," the weary King of France murmured ecstatically; whereupon the beautiful hand patted his cheek, and stroked his hair, and the appealing blue eyes threw him a look which sent him straight to heaven.

Aline smiled to herself, as well she might. This King of France was not going to break his heart, if he lost his throne. She folded the letter, put it in its envelope, and then said in a matter-of-fact, business-like tone of voice:

"I'll see about getting it sent at once to the post."

"Ring for the valet, my beloved," His Majesty rejoined dreamily—and added, putting out his arms. "Come and sit by me!"

"I will in a moment," she responded, and blew him a kiss with the tips of her fingers; "but I'll see about this letter first. It is very important, you know. No, don't ring," she went on, when Louis stretched out an arm in the direction of the bell-pull. "I'd sooner go myself. Put your feet up, and have a rest. I won't be long."

And before he could protest again, she had skipped out of the room.

Louis gave a great sigh of contentment. He stretched his long, lean body out on the sofa, and gave his thoughts free rein. At last all this marching and parading would be over—for a few days at least—and this stay in this impossible hotel where his meals were badly cooked and badly served, and the wine was like vinegar. In a few hours he would find rest and peace in the house of his adorable Aline. She would minister to him like a perfect angel. His bed would be lovely and soft; his morning coffee like nectar and ambrosia. Five, perhaps six days of bliss before the awful moment when he must leave her and be presented to his future wife. Oh! if it were

not for the Christophe milliard and that miserable crown of France, which he didn't really want, how happy he could be with Aline. But there was his mother! And all those old curmudgeons. Between them they would make life impossible for him. And Louis fell to wishing—praying almost—that Napoléon's spies did get hold of him and shut him up, out of the way of his mother and the curmudgeons and the Christophes, and keep him locked up till there could no longer be a question of this hateful marriage. Then he could let Baron Christophe and his daughter and all Jew financiers and old curmudgeons go to the devil, and he could be free to marry Aline.

Was she not the most adorable thing on earth? She looked adorable just now with her little feet peeping out from under the arc of her crinoline, like a pair of wee mice . . . and then her eyes . . . her mouth . . . her kiss . . . !

Thus dreaming of Aline, His Majesty the King of France fell comfortably asleep.

III

Outside the room Aline Saint-Amand came to a halt, leaning against the door, one hand still resting on the knob, the other closed over the letter which she had written at Louis's dictation. She looked down on it, obviously troubled and uncertain. Frankly at the moment she didn't quite know what she was going to do. She was not sure of herself, nor what she really wanted.

Even in these dim and unlovely surroundings she made a picture which would have gladdened the heart of any lover of beauty. The gas bracket above her head threw fantastic lights and shadows on her corn-coloured hair, her velvet-clad shoulders and huge, unwieldy skirt. Not even the egregious fashion of the day, the ridiculous crinoline, the tight bodice and over-trimmed dress, could detract from the grace of her figure and the perfect line of her pose. Her lips presently parted in a smile, even though the troubled look still lingered in her blue eyes. At one moment those eyes filled with tears. She gave a kind of impatient shrug and with the back of her hand she brushed the tears impatiently away.

After that, she went downstairs.

The way down led into the hall of the hotel. On the right were large swing doors, glass-panelled with the legend painted on them in gilt letters: *Entrée du café*. Aline, still holding the letter in her hand, pushed open the swing doors and went in. Immediately opposite another swing door gave on the Place outside. On each side of this door there was a deep recess, backed by tall windows, and in each recess there were leather-covered seats and a table. On the right was the counter on which stood the usual array of bottles, glasses, mugs and the tea and coffee urns. The

cashier, an obese woman of the type usually met with in French cafés, presided over a desk, on which rested an immense ledger. She was busy knitting when Aline entered the café, and only gave a casual look to the newcomer. There were leather-covered seats ranged round the other walls, and in front of the seats a row of tables. In the centre of the room there were more of these seats and more tables and chairs. The Café des Colonies could apparently accommodate fifty or more customers, but at this hour it appeared almost deserted. Only at one of the tables in a corner of the room, was there a party of men playing dominoes and drinking ale, and the only waiter present stood talking to the fat woman at the desk.

At first it seemed to Aline that there was only that one party there, but presently she spied a man sitting alone in one of the recesses by the opposite door. She made straight for him. He was dressed in dark clothes, and leaned his elbows on the table. He had a tray of coffee things in front of him and was smoking a cigar. He had his head turned away at the moment, looking out on to the Place, where passers-by loomed out of the darkness, hurried past and disappeared once more in the night. At sound of the swish of Aline's skirts over the tiled floor the man looked round quickly and rose. He pulled a chair straight, inviting her to sit, which she did.

"What will you have?" he asked. "Coffee? It is quite good."

"Nothing, thank you," she replied.

She rested her elbow on the table and her head on one hand. Her fingers were buried in the masses of her chignon. She suddenly felt very tired and closed her eyes; her pretty mouth drooped at the corners.

"I wish you would have a glass of *Fine*," the man said, "it would do you good."

She shook her head, but he took no notice of that and called to the waiter.

"A glass of *Fine* for Madame," he ordered.

The waiter brought the brandy and poured some out into a small glass; he would have taken the bottle away again, but the man curtly ordered him to leave it.

Mechanically Aline picked up the glass, sipped the brandy, made a wry face and put the glass down again.

"It will do you good," the man reiterated, "you are tired."

"I suppose I am," Aline said listlessly. "I worked all through August and since then I have been on the go over this business for—let me see—nearly a fortnight—I am not used to that sort of racket and I haven't slept a wink since we've been here."

"You won't regret it, my dear," the man commented dryly.

"I am not so sure," Aline retorted. She took another sip of brandy. Her hand, which still held Louis's letter, rested on the table. The man pointed to it.

"What have you got there?" he asked.

She dropped the letter on the table. "A letter," she replied curtly, "he has written to his mother. At least, he dictated it. I wrote it. Four pages, my good Toulon. I believe I have got writer's cramp from it."

The man Toulon picked up the letter. The envelope was not gummed down. He took the letter out and read it through; then put it back in its envelope, gummed it down, and slipped it in his coat pocket.

"No harm in it," he said, "but it mustn't go just yet. I'll post it all in good time."

He finished his coffee and took a pull at his cigar.

"Now about the money," he said a moment or two later.

She looked up at him, and the troubled, tearful look came into her eyes.

"It is a dirty game I am playing, Toulon," she said with a melancholy little smile; "he is such a nice boy—just like a child—and he trusts me——"

"But, my dear friend," Toulon retorted with some impatience, "you are not going to hurt him. No more are we. Listen to me," he went on gravely: "Does that nice boy, as you call him, wish to be King of France, or does he not?"

"No," Aline replied after a second's hesitation. "I don't think he does."

"Does he want to marry Véronique Christophe?"

This time the answer came without any hesitation. "No! I am sure he does not."

"Very well, then?" And Toulon shrugged and turned up his hands in the manner peculiar to Latin races.

Aline made no reply at all this time. She sat with her arms folded over the table, and stared out of the window into the busy Place outside. People coming and going. Men in uniform, men in town coats, men in blouses. Women dressed in the latest mode and women with shawls over their heads. Now and then a cab or a carriage went clip-clopping over the cobble-stones.

Rain had begun to fall, in heavy drops which the autumn squall drove against the window panes. From time to time a customer would come into the café, holding on to his hat, and as the door swung round the draught would sweep through the overheated room and flutter the waiter's apron, or the pages of the cashier's huge ledger.

The man Toulon put down his cigar, touched her arm with the tips of his fingers, forcing her to look straight across to him.

"Just recollect a moment, my dear," he said suavely, "what it is I am asking you to do. You will leave here in an hour's time, shall we say? You will be on your way to your charming house at Steigand. Somewhere along the road your berline will be met by a police patrol. Your coachman will be ordered to halt. An officer in uniform and a couple of men will come to the door of the carriage. You will scream and faint,

or otherwise behave in the manner peculiar to ladies of sensitive nerves, while the officer will request Monsieur le Prince de Bourbon to descend. If he offers resistance—which I am sure he won't—the men will lay hands on his august person. But they are not going to hurt him. I give you my word of honour that they won't. There will be another carriage on the spot, and he will be conveyed to the fortress of Dyck, where he will be made most comfortable and be looked after with paternal care, but only for a few days—say a fortnight at most. You will then proceed on your way to your house at Steigand, where you will be laid up with an attack of nerves, following on the shock which you will have sustained. To every enquiry, every question put to you, you will give the same answer; that you know *nothing*, beyond the fact that your berline was stopped on the high road, by whom you know not; that you fainted with terror, and when you came to, His Majesty the King of France had disappeared. Nobody will believe you, of course. They will all think that you two turtle-doves have eloped together. The Christophe marriage will be broken off, which is what we both want; I because it will leave the Bourbons penniless to continue their campaign, and you because you can then marry the nice boy yourself."

Toulon paused after this long peroration which he had delivered from end to end in a smooth, unctuous voice. Nor did he indicate by the slightest glance that he had noted the heightening colour in her cheeks while he put the matter so clearly and succinctly before her, or the rising glow of excitement in her eyes. He waited a moment or two now, in order, probably, to allow his words to sink in. He took up his cigar and relighted it. He poured himself out a glass of *Fine* and sipped it. His movements all the time were deliberately slow. Finally he added in conclusion:

"Remember, too, my lovely friend, that for your simple acquiescence in this little game, you will receive the very handsome reward of twenty-five thousand louis. A marriage portion, my dear," Toulon added significantly, "not to be disdained even by a prince."

Aline drew a deep sigh. Her eyes were really glowing now. She put her hands up to her cheeks, which were burning hot. She said: "You have a way of putting things before one, haven't you, my friend?"

He shrugged.

"I only wanted you to realise how simple is the whole affair. You took to exaggerating the importance of your role in it. Remember, my dear," he added gravely, "that I could carry the whole thing through without your help, and if I ask it ——"

"It is," she broke in, speaking now as determinedly as he did himself, "it is because you want, first of all, to keep the whole thing a secret. What you want, in

fact, is my silence."

"Am I not ready to pay half a million for it?" he asked blandly.

"It is worth it," she responded with sudden vehemence, "and you know it. If I were to bruit the whole thing abroad, Baron Christophe would soon mobilise his milliards to get Louis out of your clutches, not to mention the Emperor of Austria. Bribery can do a lot, and when Louis is out of Dyck and back in Baden-Baden, where will you be, my friend? Just where you are now, scheming and plotting to get him back again. But you wouldn't find it so easy another time, with no Aline Saint-Amand to help you, would you now?"

"Perhaps not," he admitted dryly. "As you say, I should be where I am now. Even the crown of France would be where it now is, but Louis de Bourbon would still be on the eve of being united in holy matrimony to Véronique Christophe in exchange for her papa's milliards."

Then, when at these last words of his, spoken in a harsh and sarcastic tone, Aline's appealing blue eyes filled with tears, and some of the colour fled from her velvety cheek, he went on, suave and honey-tongued once more:

"There! there! don't let us quarrel. We both have need of one another. I want you to be my little friend, my ally, all for your good, and the good of our mutual friend, Louis. I want your silence, so that I can keep him out of the way, until that marriage is broken off, and you want the twenty-five thousand louis which will enable you to marry the penniless prince. Come!" he went on and stretched out his hand to her across the table: "Which is it to be, friendship or rivalry?"

After a moment's hesitation, she put her hand in his.

"Friendship," she said, "but on one condition."

"Name it."

"That I am not cut off from communicating with Louis while he is at Dyck."

"You shall write to him every day," he assured her, "and I will see that he gets your letter; and every day the governor of the fortress shall send a courier over to you with a report or a letter from the prisoner."

"Then I agree," she said finally and conclusively.

He raised her hand to his lips.

"You will never regret it," he responded. "When do you start?"

"In half an hour," she replied. "Don't forget Louis's letter to his mother."

"I will post it—let me see—this is Tuesday—I will post it Friday."

"Splendid!" was her last word to him, after which they parted, the best of friends.

I

In the boudoir of the Villa Elisabeth, Madame sat shivering in front of the fire. She had read her son's letter through three times. It had come by post a quarter of an hour ago. The date on the letter was the 12th. To-day was the 16th. Four days! And the postmark was undecipherable. But no letter from Strasbourg would be four days in the post. A delay, yes, of twenty-four hours. But not four days. Madame had spent these four days in an agony of anxiety, waiting for this letter, whilst Louis had idled away his time, at this place—Steigand—in the arms of an abominable baggage. And how astute he had been over this whole affair, throwing dust in his mother's eyes. Madame remembered how, before he left, he had said to her: "Do not worry if you get no news from me. My correspondence will certainly be watched, so I shall not write." And she had agreed to this measure of prudence, though she knew that to be without news would mean for her an agony of suspense.

And now this! The first time she read the letter through she did not understand it. Louis could never have written it, so she thought at first. She read it through again, and then once more. After which she rang for her secretary, Monsieur Nocé, and asked him to go over at once to the Hotel Stephanie and beg Count Friesen to come over and see her at his earliest convenience.

"Tell His Excellency, my good Nocé," she said, "that an important letter has come from His Majesty."

Nocé gone, she sat down and waited. There was nothing to do but to wait. The poor woman felt just as if she had received a heavy blow on the top of her head. For the moment, she was quite dazed, wondering whether she was crazy or dreaming. She held her son's letter crumpled in her hand, and stared down at it as if it were something weird and ununderstandable. Her son's letter. A letter written or dictated by the King of France, speaking of events on which rested not only the future of his country and of his throne, but the destinies of the whole world. A letter flippant in tone, full of cheap sarcasm and childish complaints—the letter of a "penny-a-liner" written for a third-rate comic journal! Madame read it through again, in the spirit of a wounded man gloating over his hurt.

When Count Friesen came, obedient to her call, he found her sitting on the sofa with that crumpled letter in her hand, her face the very mask of despair.

"Read this, Friesen," she said, "read it!" and held the letter out to her friend. He took it from her and went over with it to the window, for the afternoon was drawing

to a close and the light was waning.

When he had finished reading he smoothed out the creases in the paper, folded up the letter and held it for a moment or two in one hand, tap-tapping the other with it. Madame said nothing for a long time. A lackey came in, put fresh logs on the fire and went out again. Though September was young yet, it was cold and damp to-day. The fire blazed up and lit up Madame's rigid figure on the sofa. Her face was expressionless, more cold and dead-looking than marble. Friesen moved towards her, and at the sound of his footsteps she looked up.

"Don't tell me what you think, Friesen," she said dully. "I know."

The Austrian drew a chair close to her and sat down. He still had the letter in his hand.

"Throw that abominable thing in the fire," Madame said with sudden vehemence. "I shall go mad if I see it again."

But Count Friesen did not throw the letter into the fire. He slipped it inside his coat pocket while Madame was looking another way.

"If the Emperor were to see it," she went on after a moment or two, "I should die of shame." And then she questioned him in a tone akin to despair: "What are we going to do, Friesen? What are we going to do?"

"There is very little we can do, Madame," the Austrian replied, "except wait."

"Wait!" she echoed with intense bitterness. "Wait for a telegram which will not come. Oh! that woman, Friesen. That woman! Why does God allow a chit like that to thwart the destiny of France? I knew she would be our evil genius. You remember I told you, that night at the opera. She has bewitched His Majesty and is making a fool of him!"

She paused a moment, and then asked a little more calmly: "What is your idea about General Avelane? Do you think he will join in with his army corps—or will he go back on his word?"

"He never actually gave it," was Friesen's dry comment. "Did he?"

"No, I suppose not. But do you think we can count on him——? Do you?" she reiterated insistently, as if she longed to hear something, a word, that would put courage into her.

But Friesen said nothing. It was impossible to put into words what was going on in his mind. Impossible to tell this ambitious and doting mother that the insuperable barrier to the success of her schemes was Louis himself. How could a cause have the least chance of success with so supine, so self-indulgent a weakling at its head?

Madame continued to murmur softly, as if talking to herself:

"To-day is the sixteenth . . . Saturday. . . . A week from to-day Louis and

Véronique Christophe are to meet. . . . She expects it. . . . Christophe is ready. . . . Saturday next. . . . Eight days. . . . And if Louis is not here, Friesen," she suddenly cried, almost screamed, at the top of her voice, "what will happen then?"

Friesen sat quite still, moodily staring into the fire. What he saw in the flickering flames was not encouraging. All he said was: "You will surely receive a telegram, Madame, before the day is out."

He tried to speak cheerfully, reassuringly, to infuse, into what he said, hope which he was far from feeling. He was intensely sorry for this woman—so full of energy and ambition and cursed with a son who at such a moment could write such a letter. He himself had a good deal at stake in this affair; a diplomat's pride in the success of an important political move. The Emperor of Austria desired the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy in France for many reasons: sentimental reasons, family reasons as well as political necessities, but he had no faith in the man whom the French Legitimists had proclaimed as their King; his cause had been greatly discredited by his mother's various schemes and expeditions, all of which had ended in disaster. She was old now and disheartened; had not moved on her son's behalf for nearly thirty years; it would be difficult, if not impossible, to revive enthusiasm for a cause that was now admittedly forlorn. So thought His Majesty the Emperor of Austria, who for various reasons desired the restoration of the Bourbons, and turned his attention to the somewhat effete but perfectly legitimate grandson of Louis XVI.

Count Friesen, on the other hand, had perhaps more selfish desires on the subject. If he succeeded in winning hands down in this elaborate political game, planned and undertaken by him under the very nose of his chief, the astute Metternich, it would mean a brilliant future for him, whilst failure might lead to obscurity. But with him it was a case of personal ambition. For this woman success or failure meant life, and more than life—the future of France and of her son. And no one knew better than Count Friesen how near failure was at this hour.

There was a discreet knock at the door. The lackey came in again. This time with the lamps. Madame ordered him impatiently away. She wanted the darkness at this moment, she wanted to hide the many conflicting emotions that showed all too plainly on her face. Hope, fear, bitter, bitter disappointment, scorn for one she loved more than anything in the world, rage against fate that had made him weak and futile. Not even this friend, this ally, this partner in all her schemes, should know what she felt at this hour. The humiliation. The awful, awful shame.

"Perhaps you had better go now, my friend," she said after a time. "We can do nothing now, can we?"

"Nothing, as you say."

"I only wanted you to know. That's all."

"We must hope for the best," he said encouragingly, and rose to take his leave.

"The best?" Madame murmured drearily. "While we sit and wait to hear whether that grasping jade has slackened her hold on him. Not much best in that, is there, Friesen?"

She gave a shudder and drew nearer to the fire. She felt very cold. Stared into the flames. Rubbed the palms of her hands one against the other. She seemed to have forgotten Count Friesen's presence altogether, and he stood by, waiting, uncertain whether to say something more or leave her alone with her thoughts. He gave a discreet cough. She pulled herself together, and stretched out her hand, which Friesen kissed. It was very cold.

"I'll come in later," he said in the end, "to see if you have further news."

"You are a kind friend to me, Friesen," Madame said impulsively. "I don't know what I should do without you. Give up hope, perhaps, which I haven't done yet. God is not going to let us down because of the knavery of a greedy hussy. He has too much sense of humour."

II

Outside the front door, under the marquise, Count Friesen lighted his cigarette and mused:

"What a woman! Heavens above, what a woman! If the Duchesse de Berry had half her brains she would have got her son on the throne of France before now. But this Spanish Amazon . . . By gad! What can the Almighty have been thinking of when He gave her that contemptible son? That other one now!" he added, musing, as he went rapidly down the drive and presently came to the gate where, some six weeks ago, he had first met and parted from that curious, arresting personage, who was so like the King of France. Outwardly, that is. The same features, the same colour of eyes and hair. But what a contrast in other ways to the effete weakling whose latest monkey trick had effectively lost him his crown. And the diplomat called to mind Madame's significant words when she had spoken to him of her eldest son: "But a man, Friesen, a man!"

Truly the decrees of Providence are often quite ununderstandable.

III

Count Friesen went back to the Villa Elisabeth in the evening. He found

Madame sitting by the fire, gazing into the flames. He wondered if she had moved at all during the last few hours, if she had just sat there all this time gazing into the flames, seeing pictures there, perhaps, of a royal crown, a throne, the face of her son, or that of a fair and lovely girl—the grasping jade who had been chosen by God to thwart the destinies of France.

There had been no telegram and it was too late by then to expect one.

"The wire may have been delayed," the Austrian said, trying to appear hopeful. "I will be at the post office when the bureau opens in the morning."

It would have been useless to talk of rest to this troubled spirit. Friesen went away with a heavy heart. It was pathetic to see this ambitious woman nerving herself to face failure. Her whole life had been a failure, but this, he felt, the last, would finally break her. He hoped that she had an efficient maid who would look after her and that she would get some sleep.

The telegraph office opened for business at eight o'clock in the morning. Count Friesen was on the spot punctually to the minute, asking if a telegram had come overnight for Madame la Princesse de Bourbon. None had come. He waited in the bureau for over an hour in case one came through. None came.

Madame greeted him with the words: "Something will have to be done, Friesen, or I shall go mad."

"Something shall and will be done, Madame," the diplomat responded. "Before I went to the telegraph office, I had already made up my mind, that if there was no wire from Louis before midday——"

"There won't be," Madame broke in dully; and she added, with bitter sarcasm: "The King of France is enjoying a well-earned rest in the villa of Mademoiselle Saint-Amand at Steigand."

"And that is where I shall be to-morrow," Friesen said gravely.

"Friesen!" Madame exclaimed. "What do you mean?"

"Just what I said, Madame. There is a train for Strasbourg at three o'clock this afternoon. I shall go by that, and to-morrow I shall hire a carriage, drive to Steigand, find the villa, and bring His Majesty triumphantly back to Baden-Baden with me."

"You really think of doing that, Friesen?" she insisted.

"Why, of course," he replied with a kindly smile. "We must have him here *coûte que coûte*. Saturday next will be on us before we know it, and we are not going to put such an outrage on Mademoiselle Christophe as not to produce her royal fiancé at the appointed time."

"That's it, Friesen, that's it!" Madame exclaimed, and for the first time for many

hours a wave of colour flooded her cheeks and a hopeful glow lit up her dark eyes. "You are right! Oh! so right! You mustn't think," she went on steadily, "that I didn't think of going to Steigand myself. What kept me back was the certainty that my going there would be no use. No use whatever! In affairs like these, a mother's role always turns to ridicule. Can you see me imploring that hussy to give me back my son, and France her King?"

She jumped to her feet, as alert as a young girl, now that this hopeful vista had been opened out before her. She paced up and down the room. Up and down. Then came to a halt before her friend.

"I didn't think you would do this for us, Friesen," she said, and her harsh Spanish voice quivered slightly with emotion.

"I am not afraid of ridicule," he rejoined smiling.

"And you won't allow that baggage to practise her wiles on you?"

"Oh! I am too old a stager for that."

"She'll fight you with all sorts of weapons."

"I am not afraid of any of them."

"And you will bring Louis back here? To me?"

"I promise you, I will."

And when a quarter of an hour or so later, the diplomat took his leave, he was saying *au revoir* to a woman wholly transformed from the dejected, despairing one of a short while ago. Madame, buoyed up by hope, looked twenty years younger than she had done yesterday. Her eyes were bright, her lips moist and red; there were two bright spots on her cheeks. But for her sense of dignity she would have thrown her arms round this kind friend's shoulders and kissed him on both cheeks.

The day was fine. Neither rain nor autumn wind. A brilliant sunshine spread a mantle of gold over the trees of the Lichtenthal Allée, and threw myriads of sparkling diamonds over the rippling stream. It was, in fact, one of those beautiful late summer or early autumn days, when trees and flowers seem to rouse themselves from the first sense of drowsiness caused by long days of drought and heat, and display in all their gorgeousness those treasures of colour and of fragrance, of which a pitiless sun had vainly tried to deprive them. In the formal beds of the Allée, crimson dahlias flaunted their showy petticoats above pyramids of vivid green, petunias unfurled their crumpled skirts and late roses hid their enfeebled hearts in the depths of sweet-scented petals.

Madame had thrown open the window of her boudoir, which commanded a view over the drive. She called to her friend when she saw him hurrying along towards the gate. He looked back and waved to her with a gesture that in itself was

expressive of hope.

I

"Bois-Joli" was the name of the small property which Mademoiselle Saint-Amand owned on the main road between Martaban and Steigand, some thirty kilometres south-west of Strasbourg. The house was of the usual style found in the country districts of France, two-storied, white-washed, grey-shuttered, surrounded by a small garden none too well kept and enclosed by a low wall with a grille which gave directly on the road.

Count Friesen alighted from the coach which he had hired at Strasbourg. He had made an early start, had lunched at Martaban, and arrived at his destination soon after two o'clock in the afternoon. Everyone in the neighbourhood, it seems, knew "Bois-Joli." The driver had made no difficulty in finding it, and when his fare looked somewhat dubiously at the unpretentious house and asked: "Is this Mademoiselle Saint-Amand's place?" he answered: "But yes, monsieur. Mademoiselle Saint-Amand has lived here all her life. Her father and mother both died in this very house. It came to Mademoiselle through them, and she always comes down here when she is not singing at the opera. Ah, monsieur!" the man went on with enthusiasm, "you should hear her. A nightingale, I tell you."

Friesen ordered the man to give his horses their nosebags and to wait for him.

"I shall not be long," he said, "as I want to get back to Strasbourg to-night."

"I can take Monsieur back as far as Martaban," the driver responded. "Monsieur can then hire a berline there for the rest of the distance. My horses wouldn't be up to the double journey."

Friesen said "Quite so!" and turned back to the grille. It was on the latch, and going through it he found himself in a small garden, with the front door of the house immediately opposite. He paused a moment with the vague notion of getting into the atmosphere of the place. The house certainly was unpretentious. It did not suggest a place where a lady of the town might entertain an exalted personage. The paths would have been better for some weeding; the creepers over the trellised arbour should certainly have been cut; the shutters badly needed a coat of paint. Nevertheless there was something distinctly attractive about the place. It had atmosphere. Poesy. Romance. Above all it had an all-pervading serenity. Friesen crossed the garden path feeling that he would have a tough fight to drag Louis out of this abode of peace in order to fling him back into a world of turmoil and politics, of high finance and conventional alliances, all presided over by his austere mother.

He rang the front door bell. It gave forth a hollow jangle, almost as if it resented being disturbed out of its habitual quietude. The door was opened by a stout middle-aged woman, the regular type of Alsatian peasant, large-proportioned, flat-faced and smiling from ear to ear. Just by looking at her, Friesen, who, like all Austrians was a connoisseur in culinary matters, knew by instinct that she was an excellent cook. She seemed to exude an air of good food and well-constructed sauces. Some cooks do. She was rather confused on seeing an elegantly dressed gentleman at the door. She picked up the corner of her apron and folded it up crossways, as if she wished to show to this high-hatted visitor that she wore a clean blue print dress underneath.

"Monsieur will excuse me," she murmured even before Friesen had time to open his mouth; "the valet de chambre is out, and Marie is dressing, that is why I——But what can I do for Monsieur?"

"You can just show me in," Friesen replied, smiling benevolently at the old body; "and tell Mademoiselle Saint-Amand that Count Friesen desires the honour of presenting his respects."

"I will, Monsieur. At once. Mademoiselle is in. Will Monsieur give himself the trouble to enter?"

She waddled off, leaving Friesen standing in the hall. He put his hat down on the table, took off his overcoat, and looked about him, as he had done in the garden. The house too had atmosphere, one of serenity and of rest. The old cook had gone shuffling up the stairs; for a time her heavy footsteps could be heard clanging on the carpetless marble steps. A door upstairs was opened and shut again. But after that not a sound disturbed the quietude of the place. The hall itself was square with the circular stairs at one end of it and a gallery along two of its sides. The walls were white with pretty Louis XV panelling. Two or three old-fashioned portraits on the wall, a round table in the Empire style, a marble statue of a Hebe, all gave an air of old-worldliness to the home of this ultra-modern young *prima donna*. A large white cat was asleep on a high-backed chair, and a scent of lavender hung on the air.

A few moments later the old cook came shuffling back down the stairs. Her large flat face looked troubled, almost tearful, as if she had received a scolding from her mistress. Friesen would not have been astonished if she had brought him the message that Mademoiselle declined to see him. However, she brought nothing of the sort, but her voice sounded more gruff and less inviting when she spoke the classical phrase: "Will Monsieur give himself the trouble to enter?"

She threw open one of the doors which gave on the hall, and ushered Count Friesen into a pretty drawing-room, closing the door behind him. The room was

rose-coloured with softly faded hangings and that same air of old-worldliness which had charmed him in the hall. But he had no time to take in all his surroundings, for in less than two minutes Aline Saint-Amand came into the room. She appeared entirely self-possessed and smiling. Dressed in perfect taste and in the latest mode as usual. She looked the picture of health and in the best possible spirits. To see her come forward with outstretched hand and a smile of welcome all over her pretty face an unseen observer would have declared that the Austrian diplomat was the person in the world she most desired to see.

"Your Excellency!" she exclaimed in her habitual bird-like tone. "What a delightful surprise! How charming of you to run me to earth in my funny little lair."

And when Friesen had kissed the delicate hand so graciously extended to him, she led the way to the large square bay where a couple of downy arm-chairs invited a tête-à-tête.

"Do sit down," she went on lightly. "I hope you have brought me lots of news from my dear Baden-Baden. . . . But first of all, tell me what would you like—you must be tired and hungry—I have some perfectly delicious Tokay——"

Friesen sat down. In answer to her hospitable offer he put up a protesting hand.

"Nothing, dear lady, I thank you. My visit must only be a short one, I am sorry to say. I must go back to Strasbourg this afternoon——But first of all, do tell me—how is His Majesty?"

She frowned, looking terribly puzzled, as if he had asked an impossible, abnormal question.

"His Majesty?" she queried vaguely. But the very next moment her manner changed completely. She clapped her hands together and exclaimed in a tone of acute distress:

"Ah, then you haven't heard!"

"Heard what?" he retorted, and now it was his turn to frown and to look puzzled.

"His Majesty is not here——He was coming to spend a few days here with me ——He was very tired and he needed rest. But—oh! I can't tell you," she went on while her eyes filled with tears and her voice shook with emotion. "It is too, too dreadful——"

"In God's name, what has happened?"

Mademoiselle pulled herself together. She wiped her eyes with a dainty lace handkerchief and brushed a few unruly curls from her forehead. She leaned forward in her chair, and clasped her hands together, as if trying to keep her emotion under control. She said:

"His Majesty was kidnapped on the high road, by the police spies of Napoléon ——"

"Kidnapped?"

Friesen was frowning, almost glowering into the pretty flushed face before him. It was impossible to say whether he was horrified, puzzled or merely doubted the lovely lady's sanity.

"We were travelling quietly in the berline," she went on. "It was just getting dark —twilight, you know——The coachman pulled up for the lackey to get down and light the carriage lamps. When suddenly a number of dark figures emerged from I don't know where. They seemed to me to have sprung out of the earth. They presented pistols at my servants' heads. Others came to the door of the carriage. I was terrified. I thought they were a band of highway robbers. I just remember His Majesty getting hold of my hand. After that I must have fainted. When I came to, my old coachman, who has been in my service for years, was at the carriage door. I couldn't see him in the dusk, but he kept calling: 'Mademoiselle! Mademoiselle! Are you hurt?' When I opened my eyes I realized to my horror that His Majesty was gone."

"Then what did you do?"

"I shouted to the coachman and the lackey. I asked them which way the ruffians had gone. I ordered them to run after them—I was so distracted, I feared I was losing my reason——"

It seemed as if she could not keep back her tears. Her lovely blue eyes swam in them; they rolled down her soft, round cheeks. And now she appeared to lose complete control over her emotion. Convulsive sobs shook her delicate body. She buried her face in her hands and gave way to a regular deluge of tears.

Somehow Count Friesen had the conviction that she was lying. He didn't say anything for a moment or two, waiting until this paroxysm of sorrow—real or false—subsided. As soon as Aline appeared a little more calm, he asked quietly:

"And where is His Majesty now?"

She made an effort to swallow her sobs, and to dry her tears with that dainty lace handkerchief which was nothing but a small wet rag by now. In a quivering voice she replied: "I don't know!" and reiterated once or twice: "I don't know! I don't know! That is what is breaking my heart—he was so tired—so ill—he needed careful nursing. If I only knew that those brutes were treating him kindly——"

"Those brutes? What brutes?"

"Why, the police——!"

"How do you know that it was the police?"

Her answer came very glibly: "Pierre, my coachman, recognised some of the men——"

"What? In the dark?"

"It wasn't quite dark——I thought I told you that it was dusk——"

"I see. . . . Well, and didn't Pierre do anything at all to defend His Majesty?"

"How could he? He and Antoine, my other man, were held all the time at the point of a pistol. Besides—you know what people of that class are like—they are terrified of the police. Pierre is no coward but he is old, and Antoine wouldn't say 'Bo' to a goose. He was frightened out of his wits. The men bundled His Majesty into a carriage and drove away at a tremendous speed."

"In which direction?"

"Back towards Strasbourg. We should have had to turn before we could follow them. And by that time they would have been far out of reach——"

She had everything quite pat, and Friesen was more and more convinced that she lied. The question was, was she being paid to lie, or did she do it on her own account? In other words was she in the pay of Napoléon's police and had she helped to engineer this coup? Or was she merely keeping Louis in hiding—in this house or elsewhere—so as to make it impossible for him to marry Véronique Christophe? Either contingency was possible. Friesen was already wondering how he could force the truth out of her. He had many years of successful diplomacy behind him, but experience had taught him that where a clever or an ambitious woman pits her wits against the most astute diplomatist in the world, he has not the faintest chance of out-manœuvring her. And he had already come to the conclusion within the last quarter of an hour that Aline Saint-Amand was both clever and ambitious.

He had made no further remark after her last statement; he remained quite still, measuring his forces, reflecting on his next move, his next words, on which so much would depend. To gain time he took his cigarette-case out of his pocket.

"May I?" he asked.

"Why, of course," she replied. At once she rose and went across the room to get a box of matches. Friesen thought how graceful she looked, how beautifully she was dressed in pale green taffeta shot with mauve, with a wide sash of purple velvet round her slim waist, and a bunch of dark violets in her fair chignon. Trained though he was by his calling in the art of concealing his thoughts, the diplomat could not altogether disguise the admiration for her beauty which his eyes expressed. Her every movement was perfect as she glided back towards him; as she struck a match —one of those abominable French matches which emit atrocious fumes of sulphur;

as she held it above her head till it had finished its spluttering, and as she finally stooped to light his cigarette. Louis had spoken of her as adorable, and she certainly was that. Had he been a simple commoner he could have indulged his infatuation, and been lover and husband to this beautiful creature, but as Madame la Princesse had very properly said, it was not for this ambitious jade to throw herself athwart projects framed for the future of a dynasty and the destiny of France.

Aline Saint-Amand with her inimitable grace fell back into the downy arm-chair opposite her visitor. Without seeming to do so, she contrived to arrange the folds of her voluminous skirt to their best advantage. She also allowed the distinguished diplomat a peep at the tip of her dainty shoe. She leaned back against the cushions of the chair, folded her hands together, fingered a diminutive lace handkerchief which somehow or other had replaced the wet rag of a while ago, and drew a deep, deep sigh which still sounded like a sob.

Count Friesen took two or three puffs at his cigarette, before he spoke again. And presently he put the question:

"Can you form any idea, Mademoiselle, of His Majesty's whereabouts?"

"I can't," she replied dolefully. "I can't. Would to God I could. Do you think I would remain here contentedly if I could——"

"Quite so," he put in quietly.

Again he waited a moment or two, studying her face, trying to probe what went on behind that mask of ostentatious sorrow. Then he said very slowly and quietly:

"There are those in high places, who would make it worth your while to—shall I say?—find out."

At once she sat up straight; the picture of indignation.

"What do you take me for, Excellency?" she demanded.

"A very clever young lady," was his gentle reply.

She screwed up her eyes, looked at him quizzically for a few seconds. He returned her glance. It was a challenge from one adversary to another, the measuring of swords in preparation for a fight. On the diplomat's face there was the first suggestion of an ironical smile. For those few short seconds he thought he had won the day. Then Aline Saint-Amand rose from her chair very slowly; it was an obvious intimation of dismissal, forcing him to rise likewise. But though the intimation was obvious, her face was wreathed in smiles.

"Do not let us quarrel, Excellency," she said, and allowed those appealing blue eyes of hers to rest sorrowfully upon him; "we were such friends at Baden-Baden ——And," she added, "are we not allies in the cause we each have at heart, the welfare of His Majesty the King of France?"

She stretched her hand out to him with the gesture of a queen dismissing a courtier. What could he do but bend his back and kiss the rose-tipped fingers? He was too great a gentleman, too experienced a diplomat, not to know that he had lost the fight.

Aline Saint-Amand rang the bell. A moment or two later a man-servant threw open the door, and after a last deep bow to his victorious adversary, Count Friesen went through into the hall. The door into the rose-coloured drawing-room had remained wide open. Friesen wondered if, unseen by him, Mademoiselle was watching his exit out of her house. He had been in it less than an hour. The servant helped him on with his overcoat, handed him his hat and stick and opened the door for him to go out.

At that moment an agitated cry came from somewhere at the back of the house: "Mademoiselle! Mademoiselle!" and the fat old cook, moving with astonishing rapidity, appeared in the hall, brandishing what was obviously a letter. "The courier has just come from Fort Dyck." She almost ran in her excitement. At the drawing-room door she was met by Aline Saint-Amand. But not the same Aline with whom Friesen had had the passage of arms just now, not the self-possessed Aline with the winning smile, the appealing eyes and tear-stained cheek, but a wrathful, not to say shrewish Aline, who looked as if she would have liked to take a stick to the unfortunate old cook. She snatched the letter out of the woman's hand and as she did so she met Friesen's glance as he was on the point of leaving. He smiled and bowed once more, and as quick as a flash of lightning her expression changed; she was again the Aline of a while ago, sorrowful, inviting sympathy in her helplessness and distress. And while it seemed as if fickle chance had suddenly turned the tables against her, there was something in that sudden change of expression which took the edge off Friesen's sense of victory.

II

That same evening Count Friesen was back in Strasbourg and there took the night express for Paris. It was a long and fatiguing journey. None too comfortable either. But Friesen had so much to think about, the situation had become so complicated that he would not have slept that night even in the downiest of beds. True, he had emerged triumphant out of his interview with Mademoiselle Aline; that is to say, he knew that her story was partially true, that Louis had really been kidnapped by Napoléon's secret police—a fact which he had disbelieved at first—and that he was now incarcerated at Fort Dyck. So much, the old cook's sudden

appearance with the letter from there, and Aline's equally sudden flash of temper, had revealed to him. Nor was he in any doubt now that the whole thing had been engineered with the lady's connivance, or at any rate with her consent. But what her aim and object was in this game of hide-and-seek he could not determine to his own satisfaction, experienced though he was in every kind of political intrigue.

Was her motive solely one of money? Had she been bribed heavily enough to induce her to betray her royal lover? Or had she some other designs conceived for her own advancement? Here certainly was a problem, which a mere man could not even attempt to elucidate.

Anyhow there the situation was; delicate in the extreme and one that might demand diplomatic intervention.

"I had better see the chief," Friesen decided within himself.

His train left at eight. So he had a couple of hours before him. He sent his valet into the town to search for a reliable courier, while he sat down and wrote a few lines to Madame.

> "I not only have hope" [he wrote], "but the assurance of success. Do not lose heart. His Majesty is safe and well and I shall certainly be in touch with him within the next two or three days. We still have close on a week before us in which to bring all matters to a happy issue. I am off to-night to Paris, as I want to talk over the affair with Prince Metternich. He has such a wonderful brain, and also he would resent not having been consulted in this delicate affair. Should you desire to communicate with me, my secretary, who is still at the Hotel Stephanie, is entirely at your disposal. He will send your letter by special courier in the sealed Embassy post-bag.
>
> "With deepest respect I am,
>
> "Your obedient servant,
>
> "Hugo Friesen."

The valet had engaged a trustworthy courier to take this letter at once to Baden-Baden. A fast train left Strasbourg soon after seven o'clock, arriving at the German watering-place three hours later. Madame la Princesse would surely still be up, and the courier had orders to rouse the household at the Villa Elisabeth. If anything untoward or unexpected had occurred in the last twenty-four hours, there would be time for Madame to write a letter and send it round to the Hotel Stephanie, where His Excellency's secretary would still be at work. The Embassy courier would then

leave by the morning express for Paris, and Friesen would get Madame's letter the same evening.

I

On the late afternoon of the day following his interview with Mademoiselle Saint-Amand, Count Friesen was on the station platform of the Gare du Nord in Paris, awaiting the arrival of the express from Baden-Baden. Punctual to the minute the train steamed into the station. The Embassy courier stepped out of a first-class compartment. Friesen accosted him and asked if there was a letter for him. There was.

Leaving the courier to look after himself and the rest of the mail-bag, he jumped into a cab and drove back to the Hotel d'Espagne, where he was staying. He sat down in his comfortable sitting-room to read Madame's letter. The envelope contained two letters; one was Madame's own, evidently written under the stress of great emotion. The other was an enclosure, and was signed Albert Christophe.

Madame's was quite short.

"My dear Friend,

"Your letter has put heart into me. I assure you it was sadly needed. The last few hours have been a positive nightmare. You can judge of this for yourself from the enclosed letter which I received this morning from Christophe. I do not know if he suspects that there is anything amiss. I shouldn't wonder if certain gossip had reached his ears. Perhaps he is only anxious for his daughter's sake to hurry things on. Anyway, I feel happier now that I have your letter. Once I have my Louis here, away from that woman's influence, I'll soon make him see reason. As for myself, I do agree with Christophe. The sooner the contract is signed the better it will be for all of us.

"I am,

"Your grateful friend,

"Inez de Bourbon."

Baron Christophe's letter, on the other hand, was a long one. It was dated from Vienna and was couched in friendly, even deferential terms; but it was firm in its tone and very much to the point. Christophe was tired of delays and anxious about his daughter, who, though tremendously flattered and thrilled at the prospect of her marriage to the King of France, felt hurt at the idea that she was on probation, being weighed in the balance, as it were, while His Majesty was making up his mind

whether he would have her or no.

The financier then went on to say:

"Knowing that your views on this grave matter coincide with mine, and as our respective decisions are quite irrevocable, I have now come to the conclusion, in my daughter's interest, that the sooner her engagement to His Majesty is made public the better it will be for all of us. As things now are I feel that we run the risk of Véronique changing her mind. She is very young. Her emotions are easily stirred. Any day she might meet a man who would capture her affections and so work on them that all our projects suddenly came to naught. I know, Madame, that you will approve of what I have done. The first meeting between His Majesty and my daughter is to take place as arranged at your villa on the 23rd next. As the father of the future bride it was my duty to provide for the signing of the marriage contract and I have just completed all arrangements that it shall be signed that selfsame evening at your house, before the required witnesses, after which formality I shall have the honour of placing in His Majesty's hands my banker's draft for five hundred million francs.

"In anticipation of that happy evening I have already taken steps to have the engagement officially announced in Vienna, in Paris, in Rome and in Berlin. I am proud to say that His Majesty the Emperor of Austria, His Holiness the Pope, and His Majesty the King of Prussia are all sending special envoys to represent them on the great occasion.

"Need I add that September 23rd, 1860, will be the happiest day of my life, as I hope and believe it will be equally so with you.

"I am, Madame la Princesse,

"Your humble and devoted servant,

"Albert Christophe."

When he had finished reading these two letters, Count Friesen sat musing for some considerable time, staring into the lamplight. If he had put his thoughts into words, this is what he would have said: "Old Christophe must have planned all this some time ago. He couldn't have made all these complicated arrangements in so short a time. Obviously he has heard gossip and he does not trust either Madame or His Majesty the King of France. Well! I don't blame him. Who would be fool enough to trust these Bourbons?" He also would have added: "Six days in which to put backbone into a weakling, and reason into a beautiful and rapacious woman's

head. Well! We shall see what the chief has to say about it all. Here is his chance of justifying his reputation of being the greatest diplomatist of all times."

But Chance once more took pleasure in embroiling the threads of all these peoples' destinies, for when Count Friesen called at the Austrian Embassy that evening, he learned, to his chagrin, that "the greatest diplomatist of all times," Prince Metternich, was absent on leave for three weeks.

"That means going straight back to Strasbourg," Friesen muttered with a deep sigh of self-pity, "and working this out alone, and only six days to do it in! Six days to get a political prisoner out of a French fortress and drag him, willy-nilly, across the frontier! Well! More difficult problems than these have been solved before now, but not in the face of a woman who means to have her own way—and not," he added to himself, "single-handed."

He rose from the comfortable chair in which he had been sitting. "Well!" he went on musing, "since Fate, it seems, has willed it, let's see what the other man has got to say."

II

It was a beautiful autumn evening. One of the finest Paris had experienced this September. Parisians were all out like flies, on the river, in the Bois, dining at outdoor restaurants, under the trees or vine-clad arbours. But as it was "cassoulette" day at the Trois Rois, the restaurant had been as crowded as it usually was on those occasions. They had all been there for dinner, the great ones of the Parisian artistic and literary coterie: Delacroix and Jean Auguste Ingres, Charles Gounod and Georges Bizet, Alexandre Dumas and Gustave Flaubert and a multitude of other lesser lights. But now they had finished their cassoulette, drunk their coffee, paid their bills and gone. For them Bohemia was just an interlude. The fashionable world, back from having drunk the waters of foreign spas, demanded toll of their time. The author of *Madame Bovary* was due at a soirée given in his honour by the Duchesse de Mouchy. The painter of "*La Source*" had promised to meet Prince Soltikoff at Tortoni's. The creator of *The Three Musketeers* was expected to put in an appearance in Madame Alphonse de Rothschild's box at the Français. One by one they passed through the swing doors out into the Square. Once past the archway and in the Rue de Clichy, the majority of them picked up cabs—some of them had their carriages waiting for them—and were wafted into the fashionable world where dwelt princesses and duchesses and financiers who bought their pictures and read their books.

Cyril Bertrand was also thinking of going—not into the fashionable world wherein he had no part, but back to his studio, where a cheerful fire would be smouldering in the small iron stove, and where a capacious chair was ready for him, together with a pair of well-worn slippers and the latest novel of young Dumas. It was then close on nine o'clock. Cyril had risen from the table and was reaching for his hat when a man came in through the swing doors and walked straight up to him with outstretched hand. Cyril did not recognise him at first, not until a pleasant voice said lightly:

"They told me I should find you here. I am in luck!"

It was Count Friesen. Cyril, who was genuinely delighted to see him, said simply: "So am I," and shook warmly the hand that was cordially extended to him.

"Have you had dinner?" he asked.

"Everything, thanks," the Austrian replied. "What I would like is a chat with you."

Cyril looked ruefully about him. Most of the customers had gone. The waiters had that air peculiar to them of wanting to shoo the remaining ones off. Some of the lights had already been turned out. After the gaiety of a while ago the place looked dark and uninviting.

"If you didn't mind a ramshackle, musty studio——" he said to his friend.

"Mind?" the other retorted gaily. "I should love it. Let's go."

The two men went together across the Square. The *femme de ménage* let them in and brought a lighted lamp into the room. A nice warm glow came from the small iron stove. Cyril drew a couple of cosy arm-chairs before it and invited his friend to sit down and to smoke.

"I am afraid I haven't any cigars good enough to offer you," he said, "but perhaps you prefer a cigarette."

"Thanks! I won't smoke just now. I am not much of a smoker at any time."

He sat down, and Cyril said: "You won't mind if I light my pipe?"

"I'd like you to," Friesen responded. "It makes you look more English."

This remark made Cyril smile. "I hope not to my detriment," he said.

"Most decidedly not. As a matter of fact, it is to the English side of you, my friend, that I am going to appeal to-night."

"Appeal?"

"Yes! I came to see you this evening with the intention of asking your help in a very delicate affair."

"I am glad," was Cyril's simple reply to this.

Friesen now was watching him intently, studying the face which he already knew

well, trying to guess what effect his distinctly extravagant proposal would have on this curiously arresting individual of mixed blood and mercurial temperament. Cyril was still standing, intent on lighting his pipe; the flickering match lit up the outline of the brow, square and straight, and the quivering, sensitive nostrils. A strong face, Friesen thought, the face of a man who would love and hate intensely, who would be capable on occasion of sublime sacrifice or satanic revenge. Well! the die was cast. There was no going back now. Friesen before he came to-night had made up his mind as to the very words he was going to use, so, after a short moment of reflection, he said quietly:

"The affair concerns your brother—or half-brother—His Majesty the King of France."

Cyril only said "Oh!" to that. He blew out the match, sat down, puffed away at his pipe, and waited in silence, his face quite expressionless, for his friend to continue.

"Your brother—or half-brother—my good Bertrand, is at this moment in a perilous position. It is just on the cards that even his life is in danger. At best his whole future, the future of his race and the royalist cause are gravely imperilled, unless energetic measures are taken on his behalf. You understand me, don't you?"

"Not exactly," Cyril replied; "but in any case I don't see how the future of the Bourbon family is going to interest me."

"Don't misunderstand me, my friend," Friesen made haste to protest. "I am not going to appeal to you on the grounds of dynasty or royalist cause. As you say, these are not likely to interest you. I merely want your help—and I need it badly, I assure you—on humanitarian grounds."

"That sounds funny!" Cyril remarked dryly.

"Not so funny as you think. Let me tell you what has happened. His Majesty has been in Strasbourg on what one might call propaganda work. The garrison there being known for its royalist tendencies, the King wished to talk to the men, to interview the officers, to rally as many as he could round the old fleur-de-lys flag. As you know, perhaps, every pretender to the throne of France, both Bourbon and Orleans are, by law, exiled from their country. His Majesty knows that quite well, yet he did not hesitate to court the danger of arrest and imprisonment for the sake of his cause and of his rights. Unfortunately, the inevitable did happen. He was tracked by Napoléon's secret police, taken prisoner and conveyed to the fortress of Dyck, where he now is."

Cyril had listened in silence to all this. Pulling away at his pipe, and staring at the red glow of the stove, he seemed absorbed in thought. The diplomat had measured

his words well. He knew that it would not be through mere compassion for a helpless weakling that he would enlist the assistance of this virile, somewhat embittered dare-devil. He therefore dwelt more particularly on the dangers which had beset His Majesty when he went to France; dangers which he had deliberately faced. As it was impossible to guess what effect this first exposé of the situation had had on his friend, who continued to smoke and to muse in silence, Friesen went on after a moment's pause:

"I told you that it is just on the cards that His Majesty's life—your brother's, my dear Bertrand—is in danger. He is very delicate; his lungs are affected as his father's were. A long detention in a dank fortress will surely be the death of him. Quite apart from His Majesty's great importance in the political arena of to-day, it seems to me a terrible, an inhuman thing to allow a young man to perish miserably in prison, away from his mother, his kindred and his friends, all of them powerless to save him. Directly I heard of the awful catastrophe I rushed over here to consult with my chief at the Austrian Embassy. You may or may not know that my Emperor is deeply interested in the future of His Majesty, who, of course, is his near kinsman. The political aims of my government all tend towards the restoration of the Bourbons to the throne of France. So I wished first of all to put the case before Prince Metternich, so that he might set our diplomatic machinery to work for the immediate release of His Majesty the King. Unfortunately His Excellency is away on leave."

Once again Friesen paused. His next words, he knew, would be the turning-point of this interview. Everything would depend on how Cyril Bertrand took them. But as nothing could be gained by postponing the momentous issue he said quietly after a second or two:

"And so I came to you."

This time Cyril burst into loud laughter.

"To me?" he exclaimed: "Why in the world——? Well! If that isn't the best joke I've heard for many a day. Even supposing," he went on more seriously, "I cared a brass farthing what happened to my half-brother, or to the whole lot of the Bourbons for that matter—even if I was fool enough to care, what could *I* do?"

Friesen looked at him keenly. Cyril's first outburst of hilarity had quickly turned to one of bitterness. Well, even bitterness was better than indifference. Apparently it did not prove discouraging to Count Friesen, who resumed with seeming irrelevance:

"You are more English than French, my dear Bertrand, and I am sure you are well acquainted with the wonderful literature of your father's country. Tell me, have you ever read a book by one of your most distinguished writers of to-day, Charles Dickens—a book which he published last year called *A Tale of Two Cities*?

"Certainly I have," Cyril replied, frowning, slightly puzzled for the moment.

Friesen said: "A wonderful book, with a thrilling episode in it. Well!" he went on slowly, "do you see why I asked you that question?"

Cyril obviously did. Not at first. But gradually it broke upon him like a light that is slowly turned higher and higher. He returned his friend's glance with a still puzzled and questioning look as much as to say: "Am I mad or are you?" But Friesen looked grave. Solemn even. No one could doubt, least of all Cyril, that he meant all that he had left unsaid.

"Please don't think for a moment," Friesen hastened to add, speaking more lightly, "that I would presume to suggest your sacrificing your life for a person or a cause which, as you rightly say, is nothing to you. All I am doing is to propose for your consideration what I would call a first-class adventure, which I am certain will appeal to you, first of all because you would be the means of actually saving a life which is precious to many, and also chiefly because, as I say, you are more English than French, and first-class adventures always make a strong appeal to your nation."

There was an old-fashioned clock up on the wall; it ticked and ticked sixty times and more before either man spoke again. The sounds of the world outside, the rumble of cab wheels, the clatter of horses' hoofs on the cobble-stones, the laughter or chatter of passers-by hardly reached this backwater of the busy city. The only sounds that broke the silence in the dimly-lit studio were the ticking of the old clock and the gentle soughing of the south-easterly breeze round the old-fashioned square.

All at once Friesen said: "The first time I ever saw you, I was struck by your extraordinary resemblance to His Majesty the King of France. All you need do is to shave and have your hair closely trimmed. That would be quite enough to deceive the governor and warders of Fort Dyck. By virtue of my diplomatic status I can get permission to visit the prisoner. I suggest your coming with me and, if necessary, changing clothes with His Majesty. You could then remain in the fortress while His Majesty walked quietly out of it with me. Your detention there would only be a matter of a day or two, a few hours perhaps. As soon as the prison authorities had discovered the substitution you would, of course, be released. My government would certainly see to that. Anyway I don't suppose that this slight spice of danger would deter you. And I would pledge my country's honour that your life would be safe. Now, do you understand?"

Cyril gave a short laugh.

"I do," he said, "but——"

"What?"

"Will you forgive me if I say that I don't quite see the object of all this play-

acting. You say that Prince Metternich could set machinery going that would effect my brother's release. You also say that Prince Metternich is away on leave. Well, surely you can communicate with him, or better still with your government; you can set machinery going too, without having recourse to—what shall I say?—that rather fantastic stratagem. Then why not?"

"Because unfortunately time is dead against me."

"How do you mean? Time?"

"His Majesty must be back in Baden-Baden by next Saturday or——"

"Or what?"

"Or he will lose his throne."

Cyril gave a shrug, which plainly reiterated what he had already said, namely that he did not care one brass farthing about that.

"Yes! I know! I know!" Friesen rejoined with a short, impatient sigh; "you do not care. *C'est entendu.* His Majesty is nothing to you. Your half-brother and no more. Good. But what about the girl?"

Cyril gave an involuntary jump. "The girl?" he queried, frowning.

"Why, yes! Véronique Christophe. Think of the awful position the unfortunate girl will be in."

"What the devil do you mean?"

"Just what I say. Mademoiselle Christophe is officially engaged to His Majesty. All the principal Chancelleries of Europe have been apprised of the fact. The Emperor of Austria, His Holiness the Pope, the King of Prussia, to name only a few, are sending special envoys to represent them at the signing of the marriage contract, which ceremony will take place in your mother's house in Baden-Baden on Saturday next. Now just think of the position if His Majesty does not put in an appearance on that occasion. Think of the gossip, the scandal all round the poor girl publicly insulted by being jilted at the eleventh hour. I won't even speak of her affections, of the romantic love which she feels for her unknown fiancé, or of her girlish ambition, all of which will receive such a terrible, such a humiliating blow."

Then as Cyril remained silent, staring thoughtfully into the lamplight, Friesen went on with great earnestness:

"If only for the girl's sake, my dear Bertrand, lend me a hand in this. Think of her standing before the world in the humiliating position of a woman jilted. Already His Majesty's name has been linked by all the gossip-mongers of Europe with that of Mademoiselle Saint-Amand. If the marriage doesn't take place—and, mind you, old Christophe will never forgive the insult, he is the most obstinate man you can meet in a day's march—the whole world will say that Véronique was jilted because of the

pretty *prima donna*. And she was to have been Queen of France! Think what that means, and how the crowd of harpies, envious of her beauty and good fortune, will jeer at her and gloat over her discomfiture. Véronique Christophe is a high-mettled girl. I do believe that the humiliation will half kill her."

The old clock went ticking on sixty and a hundred times and still Cyril remained silent and thoughtful. His eyes went roaming round the old studio where Véronique had sat for her portrait, where he had lived through those blessed, blessed hours which could never have their like again. With characteristic piety he had left everything just as it was after the last sitting. The platform was in its old position, with the piece of shabby carpet on it and the stool on which her prettily-shod foot had rested. There was the chair on which she had sat—the only nice piece of furniture in the room. He had bought it on purpose for the portrait, and gone two days without his dinner, and pawned his overcoat and his watch to pay for it. The easel was still on the same spot where it had stood when she came close to it in order to look at the picture. And on a small table nearby was the wineglass, just where she had put it down. Except for dusting and cleaning no one had ever been allowed to displace any of these things. The old *femme de ménage* who had charge of the studio did indeed think one day that Monsieur had gone mad, for he fell into a fury just because she had washed a wineglass and put it away in a cupboard. Monsieur took it out of the cupboard and replaced it upon the table, and threatened her with instant dismissal if she ever moved it again.

And now when the blessed name Véronique fell from his friend's lips, Cyril's glance wandered around the studio, as it so often did, and he felt as if suddenly something of her had come back; as if her sweet spirit had returned to fill the musty old place with the exquisiteness of her personality.

And then he thought of her as Friesen had described; thrown over by her fiancé, laughed at, humiliated, the prey of evil-minded gossips, and the thought was so intolerable that he nearly cried out in vigorous protest at the bare possibility of such an outrage.

It was Friesen's turn now to watch in silence. He watched his friend; scrutinising the thoughtful face, the earnest eyes which quite involuntarily had revealed the secret that Cyril had thought for ever buried in his heart. Friesen would not have been the shrewd diplomatist and experienced man of the world if he had not guessed that secret. It was for him an altogether new phase of this extraordinary situation. It had never entered his mind that Cyril Bertrand might be in love with Véronique Christophe; that the artist had succumbed to the fascination of the sitter. But obviously this was the case. There was no mistaking the light that suddenly flashed in

Cyril's eyes when first the girl's name was mentioned, nor the meaning of that vague, contemplative look in his face now. Well! That was all to the good. Friesen had so much at stake in this affair, both for his own sake and that of his Emperor, that the thought of exploiting his friend's heartache in order to gain his ends didn't strike him as inhuman. Anyway that is what he now determined to do. Cyril's love for Véronique would be a magnificent lever wherewith to force his hand; nor had Friesen any doubt now of the success of his plan. He leaned back in his chair with a sigh of satisfaction. It is always pleasant to feel that a well-laid scheme has not "gone agley." He took his cigarette-case out or his pocket, struck a match, lit a cigarette and threw the match down again. But Cyril never moved. He stared into the lamplight or let his eyes roam round the dark corners of the room. He seemed entirely oblivious of his friend's presence.

After a time Friesen asked: "Well! What do you say?" But he had to ask the question three times before he had an answer. The old clock had ticked five times sixty seconds before Cyril appeared to come back from the land of dreams.

"Eh? What?" he queried in the tone of a man suddenly wakened out of sleep.

"What do you think of my 'fantastic stratagem' now that you know all its consequences?"

"I still think it fantastic," Cyril replied slowly, "but——"

"But what?"

"I will go to Fort Dyck with you to-morrow."

"I knew you would," Friesen rejoined simply. Then added gravely: "Your word on it?"

"My word of honour."

Friesen rose and so did Cyril. Friesen stretched out his hand, and Cyril put his in it. The Austrian took a kind of comprehensive look at his friend as he stood there before him, straight and tall, scarcely taller than his brother but of splendid build. And holding on to that hand—the hand of an artist, but also of a fighter—he thought: "What a fine king he would have made! Why should Nature have been so erratic in apportioning her gifts?"

Aloud he said: "I think I'll be going now. But I'll call in to-morrow about nine. Unfortunately we cannot go by the morning train, as I must see about getting an order to visit the prisoner in the fortress, and the bureaux don't open before ten. If I go without an order we should have endless trouble and delays. But the night express gets into Strasbourg in the forenoon, and there is a local train which will take us to Leissen, within a driving distance of Fort Dyck. I don't know at what time it gets in, but it doesn't matter if we do get in late. It will be all to the good if we pay

our visit in the evening."

He shook Cyril once more warmly by the hand.

"I am going away a happier man," he said, "than when I came." And he added more earnestly: "I haven't said anything about risks in this affair——"

"Need you?" Cyril broke in, smiling.

"Only because I want to assure you that my government will see to it that you will not suffer in any way through it. Beyond a few days' detention——"

"I shall find the barber's shop closed," Cyril broke in once more, "if I don't hurry."

"All right! All right! I won't say any more."

Laughing he took his leave. At the door he turned finally to his friend.

"Mind!" he said lightly, and put up an admonitory finger, "a close shave and a good crop."

I

But Cyril did not go out again that evening. He spent a long, long time staring into nothingness, buried in thoughts, thinking of Véronique—of Véronique mourning for the loss of her dreams, of Véronique weeping with humiliation, of Véronique, always of Véronique. The thought that he could save her both from sorrow and humiliation was very sweet—bitter-sweet, perhaps—because anyway she was lost to him, so what did anything else matter? His word was pledged to his friend, and he did not regret his promise. She would be happy. She would—perhaps—be Queen of France one day. Queen Véronique, married to a miserable softling who didn't even appreciate her beauty, who only cared for the money that her fond father would give him. Or for his throne. Lover-like, with the arrogant foolishness of youth, Cyril thought: "If the throne were mine, I would barter it for her love."

At one time during the night he actually went to bed. Whether he slept or not he didn't know. He most certainly dreamed. Stupid, senseless dreams that made his heartache worse when finally he woke. He got up early and went round to the barber's at eight o'clock. When, half an hour later, he looked into the glass, he hardly recognised his own face. "Am I really like that effeminate brother of mine now?" he said to himself. The barber who had shaved him and cropped his hair remarked facetiously: "If Monsieur has committed a crime, he can easily evade the police. No one would know him now and I won't say anything."

II

When Cyril got back to the studio he found a telegram waiting for him. The *femme de ménage* had laid it on the table beside his breakfast tray. A telegram! That was funny. Cyril couldn't remember ever having received a telegram before. And at this hour, too! It must have come overnight, and not been delivered till the morning. He fingered the folded bit of blue paper, turning it over and over between his fingers. Somehow he was half afraid of opening it. He didn't believe that it was actually intended for him. Indeed, he half hoped that it was not.

The *femme de ménage* came in just then with a basket full of wood for the fire. At sight of Cyril she gave a scream, and dropped the basket. The wood made a terrible clatter, falling on the floor. Cyril didn't know at first why she should stare at him so, with round, terrified eyes. Then he remembered. Of course, she had not recognised him; thought, perhaps, that he was a burglar, or at best a stranger. He

laughed, that merry, infectious laugh of youth, which the old woman had not heard often of late.

"You don't know me, do you, Angèle?" he asked.

"N-n-n-no, monsieur," Angèle replied stammering, very confused and frightened, wondering perhaps if this strange man would proceed to murder her presently.

"It's me all right enough, though. Monsieur Bertrand, you know, Angèle, who paints the pictures and makes a mess in the studio."

He suddenly remembered the telegram and went on:

"Pick up the wood, my good woman. I am quite harmless; I promise not to attack you from the rear. And then you can tell me who brought this telegram."

Angèle, still doubtful, with one eye on this strange monsieur with the smooth face and the tidy hair, proceeded to gather the wood back into the basket. She murmured, partly to herself: "What a pity! What a pity! Such a beautiful silky beard! And such a lovely colour! And so becoming!"

When she had put the basket down in its regular place beside the fire, and cleared up the mess on the floor which the wood had made, she said:

"The postman brought the telegram for Monsieur, of course; not five minutes after Monsieur had gone out."

"He was quite sure it was for me?"

"But yes, monsieur. It has your name and address on the outside."

So it had. "Cyril Bertrand. Square Réaumur No. 14," was clear enough. There was no doubt the telegram was for him. The *femme de ménage* went out, with a parting admonition to Monsieur not to let his coffee get cold; and Cyril tore open the flap of the missive with fingers that were anything but steady.

The telegram was worded in English and this is what it said:

> "Have to acquaint you of the sudden death of Lord Longueville, following an accident while shooting. You are his next of kin. Please come immediately. Carben and Houston, Solicitors, Lincoln's Inn Fields, London."

Cyril read those few words three times before he as much as began to take in their meaning. He laid the blue paper out on the table, and smoothed out its creases. Then he sat down, poured himself out a cup of coffee, broke his roll and buttered it. Took a bite. Read the telegram through for the fourth time and tried to co-ordinate his thoughts.

Firstly the signature. "Carben and Houston, Solicitors." Cyril remembered that years and years ago, when he was a mere lad, come to Paris to seek his fortune in the art world, he had had some communication signed Carben and Houston, Solicitors. He didn't remember, however, what the communication was about, or why those London solicitors had taken the trouble to find out where and how he lived. But they did find out at the time—through the police perhaps—and that was all about it.

Secondly the name "Longueville." Lord Longueville. Cyril knew that somewhere in England he had a cousin, a nephew of his father's whose name was Francis Bertrand, and who was Lord Longueville. But neither he nor that cousin had ever taken any notice of one another. Cyril had never troubled his head about any Lord Longueville. He didn't even know if Francis was married, if he had any children, if he was rich or impecunious. He didn't know where he lived or what he did with himself. Apparently he spent some of his time in killing things and now, seemingly, an accident while shooting had made an end of him. But did this fact affect him, Cyril Bertrand, in any way? Certainly not. Why should it? The man was dead and that was all there was to it. Why these London solicitors should have gone to the lengths of sending a telegram—which, by the way, must have cost a mint of money—Cyril couldn't imagine. That is, he couldn't imagine, just at first. Presently, while he drank his coffee—which, by the way, was no longer hot—it all dawned upon him.

"You are his next of kin," the telegram said, which meant that through this accident while shooting, he, Cyril Bertrand, the impecunious artist of Montmartre had suddenly become a person of consequence—a man with a title—with money, perhaps—anyway, Somebody. Well! What of it? What in the world did it matter? A little while ago—how long? a few months or an eternity?—it might have made all the difference in the world. Véronique then was not engaged to his half-brother—a wretched weakling, but, nevertheless, according to a great many people, King of France—she had not then been promised that one day she would be queen, she was hardly out of the schoolroom then, she was heartfree. Oh, yes! Then, it would have made a difference. If this miserable telegram had come in the immediate wake of those blessed, blessed hours, he, Cyril Bertrand, could have gone down on his knees before the rich financier's daughter and offered her a historic name, a title, some fine old castle, probably, in England, to which she would gladly have come as his wife. Oh, yes! It would have been all right then. But now?

Cyril's next impulse was to throw the damned thing into the fire. "Please come immediately." Here was impertinence!! He was not coming immediately. Perhaps he wouldn't come at all. Let Carben and Houston and the lot of them all go to the devil

for aught he cared. Anyway, he wouldn't come until after he had redeemed his promise to his friend; not till after he had gone with him to Fort Dyck and played the role of a farcical Sidney Carton, so that the most perfect of God's creatures might bestow her priceless favours on an effete and weak-kneed kingling. With an almost savage oath he crushed the blue paper in his clenched hand, ready to throw the miserable thing into the fire, when he heard a light, elastic step cross the stone-paved corridor that lay between his studio and the outside door.

The old clock was just striking nine. A pleasant voice called out: "Here I am!" as the studio door was thrown open, and Count Friesen came in.

Cyril stuffed the ball of blue paper into the drawer of the bureau.

III

Count Friesen had called out: "Here I am!" and closed the door behind him. He took off his hat, put it down and then called again: "Here I——" but this time he paused with mouth agape and eyes nearly starting out of his head. Then he broke into loud laughter.

"Splendid, my dear fellow! Splendid!" he exclaimed and took hold of Cyril by both shoulders. "Your own mother wouldn't know you."

Cyril came down from the clouds. He shrugged and passed his hand over his lips and chin. "Oh!" he said, "yes, this good old beard is gone! I have already scared old Angèle out of her wits. Is it all right?"

"Absolutely perfect. How did you sleep?"

"Very well."

"Liar," said Friesen gaily. "I don't believe you slept a wink. I know I didn't. Seriously though," he went on more soberly, "don't try and meet any of your friends. We don't necessarily want your metamorphosis to become the talk of the town."

"It won't," Cyril rejoined lightly. "I am not of sufficient importance to cause a stir anywhere. But I won't go to my usual haunts. In fact, I shan't go out at all to-day. I have a few things to do. . . ."

"Good. I am just going to see the Minister of the Interior, whom I know personally, and who will give me the order I want. Our train is at 6.15 from the Gare de l'Est. I'll call for you here at a quarter before six. We have a nasty night journey before us and a racketing day to-morrow, so I shall take it very quietly all afternoon: and I advise you to do the same."

So the two friends took leave of one another for the day.

At 6.15 that same afternoon they started on their way. The following morning

they stepped out of the local train on the platform of Leissen, the small wayside station which was within a drive of Fort Dyck. The night journey had not only been wearisome, it was also very dirty. But the travellers had had a couple of hours' wait at Strasbourg. They had washed and they had breakfasted before they took train for Leissen. Here they had a hasty, but otherwise excellent luncheon, and by putting a few very casual questions to the station-master and to the drivers of the ramshackle vehicles in the yard, Friesen found, to his satisfaction, that nothing was known locally of any new or exalted prisoner in the fortress. Ostensibly he and Cyril Bertrand were tourists interested in the natural beauties of the countryside and in its ancient buildings. Cyril had also provided himself with a portable easel and materials for sketching, and anyway there did not seem to be the slightest danger of their arousing the suspicion of the village constabulary. Friesen had the order from the Minister of the Interior in his pocket, so everything so far was plain sailing.

They hired one of the ramshackle flies and desired to be driven to Fort Dyck.

There had been some heavy rains in the district in the past few days, but to-day the sun was showing to the sodden world just what it could do in the way of brilliance and beauty, even though autumn was already knocking at the door. The air was soft and had in it the tang of wet earth and of damp vegetation. In this high altitude there had already been a few night frosts and the leaves of beech and plane and sycamore were turning to gold. Far away the heights of Kaisersberg and St. Diedler rose from out the sea of pines, dense, dark masses which a giant hand had covered with a coating of rich purple, trenchant against the intense blue of the sky. Down below, the turbulent Breusch sent a multisonous gurgle echoing upwards and around as if it tried to drown the tinkle of the little church bell calling the faithful to Vespers. It was a day and a sight that would gladden the heart and eye of any man with a feeling for poesy, but even Cyril's eyes were blind to all the beauty of it, whilst Friesen's glance was fixed on a height in the near distance, where the ruined towers of Fort Dyck could be seen peeping out now and then among the pines.

Soon the carriage left the small township behind and began the ascent up the mountain-side. The road wound through the forest and the gradient was fairly steep. The driver put his horses at foot pace, and the two men got out of the carriage, glad to stretch their legs and to enjoy to the full the soothing scent of the pines.

Half an hour's climb brought them up to the castle. Seen at close quartets it looked neither imposing nor picturesque. With the characteristic vandalism of the time, the French military authorities had taken it over, restored the main portion of the buildings without any regard to style or historic associations, and with nothing but utilitarianism in view. Two old towers had alone been permitted to fall into ruins.

Originally built of red sandstone and mantled in ivy, they did to a certain extent retrieve the barbarism of the rest of the building.

The approach to the main entrance wound through a narrow street of small houses, sordid in appearance, in the doorways of which groups of children and a few women stood gaping at the carriage as it came up the hill-side, and at the two strangers whom they took to be tourists come to view the castle. Friesen ordered the driver to wait at a convenient spot, and he and Cyril then made their way to the front gate. Sentry stood at the gate. Friesen exhibited the official document, which bore the stamp of the Ministry of the Interior and gave him the entry into the castle, and the two men were allowed to pass inside. Here they were met by a sergeant in uniform, and to him also Friesen exhibited the official document. The sergeant muttered something which was ununderstandable, and went off in the direction of the courtyard, leaving the two visitors standing under the archway of the gate.

A few moments later, the sergeant came back, this time with a young lieutenant, also in uniform. The lieutenant had the document in his hand. He gave a military salute and asked: "Monsieur le Comte Friesen?"

"*C'est moi*," Friesen replied: "and this is Monsieur Bertrand, my private secretary." He pointed to the paper in the officer's hand. "I have this order from Monsieur le Ministre himself. I presume it is in order?"

"Perfectly in order, Monsieur le Comte," the lieutenant replied, "but evidently Monsieur le Ministre didn't know that the prisoner in question is no longer with us."

Friesen frowned. "How do you mean? No longer with you?" he asked.

"The prisoner was only here five days. Yesterday the Commandant had orders from the Chief of Police to release him. Two officers of the secret police arrived in a carriage to fetch him and they drove away with him. It was some time in the forenoon."

"And where did they take His—er—the prisoner to?"

The lieutenant smiled. "They had secret orders, Monsieur le Comte. Even if I knew I could say nothing."

That, of course, was obvious. All Friesen said was:

"Can I see the Commandant?"

"Why, certainly, Monsieur le Comte," was the prompt reply.

The young officer escorted the two visitors across the yard to the Commandant's quarters. Friesen was doing his best to hide his mortification. Here was an eventuality that he had not even thought of when he planned his "fantastic stratagem," and it now looked as if the whole edifice of his policy would tumble about his ears, unless the Commandant proved communicative—which, frankly, was

not very likely. As for Cyril, he was partly amused, and partly sorry for his friend; there was a certain element of grim humour in the way Fate had so unexpectedly cut through the thread and thrum of the clever diplomatist's pet schemes. Cyril knew that Friesen would be terribly mortified if they went agley. After the marvellous ingenuity which he had displayed in the devising of his plan, to see it all fall to the ground owing to this unexpected turn in the wheel of chance, would mean, Cyril knew, a serious set-back to his friend's hitherto successful career. Strangely enough his thoughts over this turn did not immediately fly to Véronique, and what the failure of Friesen's plan would mean to her. If indeed there was going to be a failure.

The Commandant, a starchy old fellow, for whom military discipline and the prestige of the army were nothing short of religion, was extremely amiable. He knew what was due to the representative of a great and friendly Empire, even though such a representative had the misfortune of being a mere civilian. But the visitor being an "Excellency," Colonel Bouchard received him with a military salute; offered him and his "private secretary" a chair; and even went to the length of suggesting that he would be honoured if Monsieur le Comte and Monsieur Bertrand would drink a glass of wine with him.

Friesen very courteously declined the wine and went at once to the point. He had an order from Monsieur le Ministre himself to visit the prisoner in the fortress. Was it a fact that that same prisoner had been released the day before by order of the Chief of Police?

"Secret orders," the Commandant put in somewhat curtly. "Yes, Monsieur le Comte, that is so."

"Then perhaps," Friesen continued in as matter-of-fact a way as he could, taking it for granted that of course the Commandant would immediately comply with his request, "perhaps you would kindly let me know where—er—your late prisoner now is."

Whereupon Colonel Bouchard adjusted his tunic which already sat upon him like a glove and said sternly:

"I have already had the honour to inform Your Excellency that the orders which I received from His Majesty the Emperor's Chief of Police were secret orders."

And his attitude while he spoke was so uncompromising that Friesen realised at once that there was nothing more to be done. To argue further would only have entailed further rebuke from the old soldier who obviously was within his rights, and a consequent loss of dignity. So he said nothing more. A moment or two later he rose to take his leave. Colonel Bouchard accompanied him to the door, saluted the

representative of the great and friendly Empire, and with a sigh of satisfaction closed the door behind him.

And that was all about it.

IV

Except for one remark which fell, with a deep sigh, from Friesen's lips, the drive back was carried on in silence. Less even than before did the two men take note of the beauty of this glorious autumn afternoon with the sun slowly sinking behind Kaisersberg and throwing a gorgeous mantle of crimson and gold on the crests of the stately pines and the leaf-laden branches of beech and sycamore, softly quivering under the kiss of the evening breeze. On the east side the line of mountains and rocks glowed with an exquisite rose-coloured radiance, and down in the valley the Breusch, stained with the same exquisite hue, gurgled gently on.

But what was all this beauty to men engaged in the difficult task of disembroiling the tangled threads of their own destiny? Cyril thought sorrowfully of his disappointed friend, and Friesen thought of something else. Of something that caused him to say presently:

"I don't think I should mind so much, either for His Majesty or myself—though, frankly, I am terribly disappointed—but I can't help thinking of that beautiful, unfortunate girl. God only knows what the disappointment and humiliation will mean to her!"

I

"God only knows what the disappointment and humiliation will mean to her."

Friesen's words, spoken to the accompaniment of a deep, compassionate sigh, echoed and re-echoed in Cyril's brain till he wondered if he was going mad.

The two men had been obliged to seek for lodgings in Leissen, as there was no local train back to Strasbourg until the following morning. They found simple but clean and fairly comfortable quarters in a small hotel close to the railway station, and here they were sitting at supper in a small private room, with a good fire burning cheerily in one of those large porcelain stoves peculiar to the countryside. They were served by a trim Alsatian girl, who presently, when they had finished eating, cleared some of the things away and brought in a tray with a jug of steaming hot coffee, and a bottle of old Armagnac.

Neither Friesen nor Cyril had said much during supper. Both men were absorbed in distinctly gloomy thoughts, and neither of them noticed how silent the other was. Friesen thought of his threatened career and Cyril thought of Véronique: "God only knows what the disappointment will mean to her."

They drank their coffee in silence. They hardly noticed when the trim Alsatian, small and blonde below the huge black taffeta bow on her head, came to clear away the remnants of supper and the abandoned coffee-tray. Clearly she was accustomed to complimentary or facetious remarks from the customers of the hotel, for she looked across with a pout at these two, who had drawn their chairs close to the stove and smoked on in silence—one a cigarette, the other a pipe—without turning round once to look at her. And so, after she had collected the supper things, seen to the lamp and put wood on the fire, she gave a shrug indicative of contempt and left the two surly bears to themselves.

And the silence between the two men persisted for over an hour. Leissen was a sleepy little town. Her citizens went to bed early, and soon after nine o'clock scarcely a sound from outside disturbed this prolonged silence. Just the ticking of the cuckoo clock, and its call every quarter of an hour; a call which seemingly passed unheeded, for neither of the two men made any movement when it came. Cyril smoked one pipe after another and stared into nothing at all, in the manner he had acquired of late. And Friesen smoked one cigarette after another and began by staring into nothingness. But after a time he turned his glance on his friend and stared at him. And he continued to stare and stare. And if Cyril had returned his glance at

any time he would have seen that the gloom on his friend's face was slowly passing away, as if one veil of grey after another was being lifted from it, whilst two red spots made their appearance on his cheeks, and a curious light began to glow in his eyes.

The cuckoo called out ten times, and Cyril, waking from his dreams, rose and knocked the ashes out of his pipe. The fire was burning low. The air began to feel chilly. He gave a slight shudder, as if he was being shaken by ague. A superstitious person would have said: "Someone is walking over my grave."

"I think I'll go to bed now," he said.

But Friesen seized him by the coat sleeve and dragged him down again into his chair.

"No, you won't," he said gravely; "you are going to listen to me first."

Cyril shrugged and retorted dryly:

"There is nothing more to say, that I can see."

"Oh, yes, there is," Friesen rejoined, "we are not going to be beaten quite so easily as all that, old chap."

He paused a moment or two and then added with more than usual earnestness: "And we are not going to allow the life of a sensitive woman to be made permanently wretched by ridicule."

"In God's name, man!" Cyril burst out involuntarily, "don't speak of that, or I shall go mad and commit a murder or something."

"But I am going to speak of it," was the Austrian's firm rejoinder, "and I give you my word that after you have listened to me, you will no longer wish to murder anyone or to commit suicide."

"What in the world are you driving at now?"

"At a way which I have found out of this terrible impasse—if you will listen to reason and give me your help."

"Another of your fantastic schemes?" Cyril retorted with a shrug.

"All right," Friesen went on good-humouredly, "jeer away as much as you like. So long as you agree to listen I don't care."

As Cyril made no comment on this, his friend resumed after a few seconds, speaking in quiet, slow, impressive tones:

"I have no doubt whatever in my mind—never had—that the whole farce of His Majesty's imprisonment was engineered by Aline Saint-Amand. Her attitude, and every word she spoke to me that day when I saw her proved it to the hilt. I dare say that Napoléon III is as anxious as anybody to be rid of this perpetual menace of a popular rising in favour of the Bourbons, but I am equally certain that he wouldn't

like to be embroiled in a quarrel with my Emperor, and he knows quite well that Austria would never allow His Majesty the King of France to be kept a prisoner in such a place as Fort Dyck. With the example of Louis XVI or the Duc d'Enghien before him, my Emperor would soon move heaven and earth to have His Majesty released from prison. You see what I mean, don't you?"

"Yes, I do," Cyril replied with some impatience. His friend's dissertations on the subject of "His Majesty the King of France" always appeared to him both futile and infinitely boring. But Friesen took no notice this time of the other's sullen mood.

"Of course one knows all these things," he went on quietly. "I did. And that is how I came to put two and two together, and I came to the conclusion first that Napoléon III did not wish to hold His Majesty a permanent prisoner—it would lead to a number of European complications which certainly would not fit in with France's policy—and secondly, that nevertheless there was some reason for his arrest. Well! the reason was not far to seek. Baron Christophe's millions, figuratively speaking, jumped to my eyes. The fact that Véronique's marriage portion is to be half a milliard is of course well known to the secret police, and it is pretty obvious that Napoléon has no wish to see those millions finding their way into the coffers of the Bourbon faction. What more simple, then, than to put a stop to the marriage with the financier's daughter, by keeping His Majesty locked up in Fort Dyck long enough to create such a scandal that the marriage would become an impossibility. Now do you see?"

Cyril broke into loud and prolonged laughter.

"I see," he said with good-natured sarcasm, "that you have reasoned out the position to your own satisfaction. Haven't you, old man?"

"It will be to yours too, I promise you. All you have to do is to put two and two together as I did. You will then see how valuable Mademoiselle Saint-Amand's co-operation was in all this. His Majesty's open admiration for her, and the gossip this has already created everywhere, will provide the necessary scandal if he does not appear in time for the signing of the marriage contract. Baron Christophe will put his millions back into his own pocket and poor Véronique will be left to mourn both a husband and a crown. But let me tell you this, my dear Bertrand, and you know I never talk lightly of such things: I cannot say for the moment if His Majesty has been transferred to another fortress or merely been handed back to the tender care of the lovely Aline. But I take my solemn oath here and now that in either case I will have him back——"

Friesen paused a moment to allow his words to sink in. Then he added impressively: "But unfortunately not within the next forty-eight hours."

Cyril had re-lit his pipe. He had listened attentively to his friend's long disquisition. With his thoughts fixed on Véronique he longed above all to have the same faith in Friesen's power to put things right for her, as Friesen had himself. He didn't want to pooh-pooh his plans or to jeer at them. He wanted to see the way clear for an issue out of this impossible situation. And his friend's optimism, his persuasive eloquence had begun to put heart and hope into him when those last few words: "But not within forty-eight hours," seemed to dash those hopes once more to the ground.

He murmured, partly to himself: "Not within forty-eight hours? Well? What then?"

"What then?" Friesen responded in a tone ringing with enthusiasm. "Why, just this, my friend. That I believe in God's hand in all this—or in Fate if you like to call it so. God created you the very image of His Majesty, that you might take his place to-morrow."

"I?" Cyril exclaimed. "You are mad!"

"Not I," Friesen retorted with the same boyish enthusiasm, "it is the simplest thing in the world. A role to play for one evening—a few hours—a contract to sign—a cheque for a few millions to receive—then a feigned illness—retirement while I find His Majesty and bring him back, willy-nilly, to step into his own shoes again."

"Impossible!" Cyril asserted hotly.

"Why?"

"I should be known——"

"I swear that you will not. Except for one evening at the opera in Baden-Baden in July, His Majesty has not been seen in public for nearly two years."

"But—my mother. . . ."

"I will prepare her—she will agree—she has too much at stake to refuse. . . ."

"And—and Mademoiselle Christophe. . . ."

"She has never yet met His Majesty. . . ."

"But . . ." Cyril continued to protest in a vague confused manner. He was bewildered, swept off his feet, dumbfounded at the audacity of the suggestion.

"Don't tell me you are afraid," Friesen put in with a laugh.

Cyril shrugged. "Afraid!" he echoed.

"Well, then?"

"You say quite glibly that there will be a contract to sign——"

"Well?"

"Do you mean to suggest that I should forge my brother's name?"

"Why not?" Friesen queried blandly. He dived into his breast pocket, and

brought out his letter-case. He selected one letter which he held out to Cyril:

"Here is a letter from His Majesty, signed by him: 'Louis Rex.' You are an artist —expert with pencil and with pen—an hour's practice will be sufficient—and His Majesty, I promise you, will not deny the signature——"

"The forgery, you mean. . . ."

Friesen shrugged. "Why not?" he said again. And as Cyril did not take the letter, he put it back into his case, and the case into his pocket.

"A forgery," Cyril insisted, "at the foot of a marriage contract? The whole contract a forgery. . . ."

"Why not?"

"In order to hoodwink a man into handing me over a cheque for several millions?"

"Why not?" Friesen reiterated once more. "All these will be just temporary measures——"

"With which to deceive a woman. . . ."

"For a few hours—and for her ultimate happiness."

Cyril said nothing more for the moment. He puffed away at his pipe, and inside his brain Friesen's last words went round and round: "For her ultimate happiness!" Also those other words which Friesen had spoken during the drive back from Fort Dyck: "God only knows," he had murmured then, "what the disappointment will mean to her."

If only this deception "for her ultimate happiness," did not entail the forgery of his brother's name. A criminal act, which any honest man would condemn. Yet Count Friesen, Chancellor of the Austrian Embassy, an honest, upright gentleman if ever there was one, did not condemn it. He had said "Why not?" with a careless shrug. "Why not?" But then Friesen was a diplomat and in diplomacy the axiom held good that the end justifies the means. "Why not?" but Cyril's inner consciousness, his code of honour, inherited from his English father, told him plainly the reason why not. Because to forge a signature, be the excuse what it may, is an act unworthy of a man of honour—the act of a criminal. And Friesen knew quite well what was going on in his friend's mind. He knew quite well that here was the stumbling-block on which his last and best-laid scheme stood a good chance of being wrecked. The only real stumbling-block, because as far as the main scheme was concerned Cyril Bertrand had already capitulated. He had argued the point, raised objections, but in principle he had capitulated. Friesen had easily demolished his arguments and his objections, until the question of the signature was raised, after which all he could say was a bland "Why not?"

Véronique, of course, was Friesen's strongest card. Véronique and Cyril's love for her. Men had done worse things than forgery before now for a woman's sake. The question was, was Cyril Bertrand that type of man, or was he one of those who would echo the words of the poet: "I would not love thee half so well, loved I not honour more"? Who shall say? Friesen was a sound psychologist, but even he could not have said for certain. Well, perhaps it would be as well to let matters rest for the moment, to let the riddle and its solution roll round and round in Cyril's brain. To allow dreams of Véronique, her happiness and likely sorrow, to haunt Cyril's wakeful night. Friesen said genially: "Sleep on it, my dear Bertrand. Tell me your decision in the morning. That will give us time to complete our arrangements, or to wire the bad news to Baden-Baden."

He went as far as the door, and had his hand on the latch when a sudden thought appeared to strike him. He searched through a number of letters which he kept stored in his pocket-book. Presently he found what he wanted, and placed one letter down on the table.

"I would like you to read that, old man," he said, "before you finally make up your mind one way or the other."

After which he nodded a last good night to Cyril and went out of the room.

The letter which he had left on the table was the one which Baron Christophe had written to Madame. One passage—the end one—Cyril read through more than once. Baron Christophe had written:

> "In anticipation of that happy evening I have already taken steps to have the engagement officially announced in Vienna, in Paris, in Rome and in Berlin. I am proud to say that His Majesty the Emperor of Austria, His Holiness the Pope, and His Majesty the King of Prussia are all sending special envoys to represent them on the great occasion."

And every time when he had finished reading that paragraph, Cyril caught himself murmuring the words which Friesen had spoken during the drive back from Fort Dyck: "God only knows what the disappointment and humiliation will mean for her."

II

They met the next morning at breakfast, in their comfortless sitting-room, each knowing that the other had hardly slept a wink all night. Friesen had been kept awake by gloomy thoughts; failure of his pet scheme, a serious set-back to his

career; reproof, perhaps, from his Emperor, censure from his chiefs. It was a dismal outlook, and he tried in vain to forget his anxiety in sleep. At one time he thought of going to the next room and restarting his argument with Cyril. He knew quite well that his friend would be wide awake, and he hoped that inspiration would come to him, as to the best reasoning to use to convince an obstinate man. But he soon changed his mind. Cyril was an obstinate man of the worst possible type, for he never argued for long. Once he had said all that he thought necessary, he would lapse into a state of complete muteness, out of which the most eloquent pleading in the world could not drag him. On the whole, Friesen thought, it would be best to get his friend thoroughly tired after a sleepless night, and so find him, perhaps, more amenable.

But events have a way, sometimes, of turning out quite differently to what one expects. Greatly to Friesen's astonishment his friend, who obviously had also spent a sleepless night, was extraordinarily brisk and alert in the morning. His eyes were certainly circled with dark rings, but there was a glow in them that was either caused by fever or excitement. The first words he spoke to his friend were in the nature of a bombshell. Friesen almost staggered under it. For the first second or two he wondered if he was really awake or still dreaming.

Cyril said: "Well, my friend, I have thought it all over, and I will do what you suggest."

When he saw Friesen's almost comic bewilderment, he burst out laughing.

"Don't look so scared," he said. "I mean it. I'll go with you to Baden-Baden and for the space of one night I will be, in effect, His Majesty the King of France."

It was on the tip of Friesen's tongue to ask: "And you will sign the marriage contract?" but he refrained. On the whole he thought it would be best to let sleeping dogs lie. So all he said was:

"I knew you would, my dear fellow. It really was the only thing to do for the girl's sake."

The blonde Alsatian brought in the breakfast-tray. They both sat down to excellent coffee and fresh rolls, and then drew their chairs close to the big stove, in which a cheerful wood fire was blazing. Cyril lit his pipe, and Friesen his cigarette. They smoked in silence for some time. Friesen said: "Our train for Strasbourg does not leave till three o'clock. Unfortunately we missed the early morning one. Five o'clock. I forgot to ask the maid to call us. The point is can we catch the night express to Baden-Baden——"

"It doesn't matter if we don't, does it?" Cyril said casually.

"Not really," Friesen replied. "We can anyhow get to Baden-Baden in time for

your mother's reception."

"Ah, yes!" Cyril remarked, "the reception!"

"For the signing of the contract. It is customary in France. *La soirée du contrat*."

The maid came in to fetch away the coffee-tray. She asked if the fire was all right. Cyril said: "No, put a log on, will you?"

The girl did as she was told, and went out, carrying the tray. When she had gone, Friesen said:

"I think that log was a mistake. It is too hot in here already."

"I am sorry," Cyril rejoined, "I am afraid I spoke inadvertently."

He opened the door of the stove and glanced into the fiercely blazing fire. He laughed and said: "I am afraid it is going to be a lot hotter directly. She has put a huge log on."

"I'll open the window," Friesen decided. He rose and went over to the window. At that moment Cyril was saying: "Don't trouble to do that. This is the easiest way."

And before Friesen realised what his friend was doing, the latter had thrust a hand into the fire and dragged out the blazing log.

"Bertrand!" Friesen exclaimed, horrified, "are you mad?"

"No! Only a fool!" Cyril retorted. He had already dropped the log. An acrid smell of scorched flesh filled the room, and Cyril was obviously fighting an inclination to lose consciousness. Friesen tugged violently at the bell, and then ran for his brandy flask, which he held to Cyril's lips. The little maid came running into the room.

"Quick! A doctor!" Friesen commanded. "My friend here has burnt his hand badly."

"No! no! not a doctor," Cyril contrived to say with a wry smile. "Give me another drop of brandy, there's a good fellow, and I'll go round to the local chemist, who will bandage me up."

And that was the end of the incident. The local chemist dressed Cyril's badly injured hand. It was the right one.

That same afternoon at three o'clock the two friends left by the local train for Strasbourg. Cyril had his right arm in a sling. Otherwise he seemed gayer than he had been for a long time. But Friesen remained very thoughtful all day.

"I suppose it's the English blood in him," he commented to himself. "They are all mad, those English!"

I

Extract from the diary of His Eminence Louis Beneventy, Cardinal Archbishop, Primate of Hungary, under date September 24th, 1860:

"It was a wonderful evening. So wonderful that somehow my thoughts turned back to the great day in Gmünd when I saw the Prior of the Dominican Fathers walk up the aisle of the Priory chapel carrying the King of France in his arms. I was five years old then, I am an old man now, but last night I felt young again, because I witnessed the marvellous workings of God's will.

"We all assembled in the salon of Madame la Princesse half an hour before the ceremony of signing the contract was timed to take place. There were present on this great occasion His Eminence Monsignor Gomini representing His Holiness the Pope, His Excellency Count Friedrich representing the Emperor of Austria, and Prince Remiroff representing the Grand Duke of Baden. There were also the representatives of other European monarchs, friendly to the Bourbon cause: representatives of the Kings of Prussia and of Bavaria, of the Czar and of the Queen of Spain, members of the great aristocracy of Austria, of Italy and of England. I cannot recollect all the names, but I do assert that the presence of these eminent personages in the salon of Madame la Princesse on that memorable evening bore testimony to the interest and sympathy felt throughout Europe for the cause of His Majesty the King. Indeed, the reception rooms of the Villa Elisabeth were so crowded that it was difficult to make one's way through the forest of immense crinolines, which seem to me to grow in size year after year. I must admit that the ladies of the fashionable world do wear these monstrosities with much grace and distinction, and that, to my mind, it is a beautiful and modest fashion.

"Of course we were all of us on tenterhooks to see His Majesty, for he was practically unknown to all of us. Even I, who had seen him more recently than anyone else there, had not done so for close on seven years. He was still a growing lad then, in delicate health, but I had heard lately that he had greatly improved in physique after his long sojourn in Switzerland.

"Punctually at nine o'clock Madame made a solemn entry into the room. I was glad to see that she was saluted by every one of her guests with the honours usually accorded only to royalty. She was very pale, and appeared to me to be suffering from nerve-strain. But she was equally gracious to everybody. Many enquiries were of course made after His Majesty's health. To all these Madame replied that His Majesty had greatly benefited from the long rest he had enjoyed in Switzerland; that he was better in health than he had been for years and, in fact, had put on quite a bit of flesh, which was both becoming to him and reassuring to his mother and loyal friends.

"To some of us Madame explained that His Majesty had met with a slight accident to his hand, through the sudden going off of his sporting rifle when he was out shooting a day or two ago. Madame spoke lengthily on this subject with the Mayor of Baden-Baden and with the French vice-consul, explaining that His Majesty might not be able to hold a pen in his injured hand, and asking what could be done about the signing of the contract. Both the gentlemen gave her the same assurance, namely, that so long as His Majesty made any kind of a sign at the bottom of the document, the contract countersigned by two witnesses would be perfectly legal, and His Majesty could complete it later on, when his hand was healed, by appending his august signature.

"Then Baron Christophe was announced. He came in with his daughter on his arm. I am an old man, but I must confess to being almost dazzled by the beauty of Mademoiselle Christophe. Never have I seen anything more lovely than she looked when she advanced into the room with perfect grace of movement, and exquisite modesty of mien. She made a deep curtsy before Madame and would have kissed the hand that Madame extended to her had not that gracious lady drawn the blushing girl to her heart and kissed her fondly on both cheeks.

"But all this brilliancy and splendour paled before the glamour which spread over the assembly when the great double doors were thrown open and a stentorian voice announced: 'Ladies and gentlemen! His Majesty the King!' A kind of gasp went round the room, something like a deeply drawn sigh, and we all gazed with a look akin to reverence on the King of France. Truly a kingly figure, so we all thought, I am sure. The last time I had seen His Majesty was some seven years ago. He was in delicate health then, he stooped slightly, and there seemed to be perpetual lines of

fatigue in his otherwise handsome face. But he looked, I am happy to say, quite different now. Full of vitality and energy and, if I may say so, of *joie de vivre*. He had certainly put on flesh, or rather muscle, for he even appeared taller to me than he had done before. His extraordinary resemblance to Madame his mother was also more marked. He had her wonderful dark eyes and the rich chestnut hue of her hair, which when she was younger had been the delight of her august husband. Strangely enough, when I made my obeisance before him, my thoughts took a very strange turn. They flew to his half-brother the son of Madame by her previous marriage with the English army officer. His name was Bertrand —Cyril Bertrand—a fine upstanding boy he was—but very wilful and queer-tempered. I wonder what has become of him, and considering that I have lost sight of him for a dozen years and more, I wonder why I thought of him just then.

"His Majesty had his right hand swathed in bandages, and carried that arm in a sling. So it was his left hand that we and all his devotees were permitted to kiss. I thought he looked pale, and guessed from an occasional glance in his eyes that his injured hand was causing him pain.

"But there was a wonderful moment when Baron Christophe advanced with his daughter, to present her to His Majesty. Never shall I forget the sight, nor will anyone else who was there. That kingly figure standing rather apart from everyone else. Madame la Princesse stately and austere a few paces behind him, and the radiant figure of the young girl advancing to do homage to her royal fiancé. She was dressed all in white with one white camellia in her soft brown hair. I didn't know which of the two young faces impressed me most. There was a certain look of wonderment in both; a look as of a wondrous revelation—I was going to say, ecstasy. On the whole the girl's face expressed the greatest joy. She looked as if a sublime happiness had suddenly been revealed to her, while His Majesty's handsome face irradiated overpowering love. And this I thought strange, for I knew that this was the first meeting between His Majesty and his bride-elect, and never in my long life had I seen love become at first sight so complete and so immense. Mademoiselle Christophe made a deep curtsy before the King. He took her left hand in his and kissed its fourth finger, and then without a word, only with a glance of infinite love, he slipped the betrothal ring upon it. He put his arms round her and kissed her on the forehead. I don't think there was a

dry eye in the room. I know my old eyes were full of tears. Just as sixty-five years ago in the Priory chapel at Gmünd the monks had intoned the 'Nunc dimittis' when the little King of France was laid upon the altar steps, so did I long to hear this brilliant assembly now, repeat the inspired words: 'Now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace. . . .'

"His Majesty remained for a time in conversation with Mademoiselle Christophe. Madame la Princesse joined them after a time, also Count Friesen, the Austrian Chancellor of Embassy, who had accompanied His Majesty. The conversation in the room soon became general. Several personages including the representatives of foreign monarchs were introduced to His Majesty. I too had the honour of a lengthy talk with him. Presently the Mayor came up, also the French vice-consul with the request that His Majesty would deign to hear the marriage contract read through before putting his august signature to it. His Majesty laughed most heartily. 'But, my good man,' he said, 'I cannot hold a pen.'

"The Mayor then explained to him what he had already told Madame la Princesse, that if His Majesty would just put a cross at the bottom of the document where his name should come, it could then be countersigned by the witnesses, and thus made perfectly valid and legal. His Majesty gave a light shrug and turned to Baron Christophe: 'If you are satisfied, Monsieur le Baron. . .' he said.

"'Of course I am satisfied, Your Majesty,' Baron Christophe replied. 'A cross from your maimed hand is worth more than any signature in the world.'

"His Majesty, Baron Christophe and Mademoiselle Véronique then went to the table on which a large legal document lay spread out. The Mayor took up the document and began to read it aloud so that everyone in the room could hear. I don't, of course, remember the exact wording of it. It was couched in the usual terms that pertain to all marriage contracts in France. Two phrases, however, stand out clearly in my memory; both caused a prolonged 'Oh!' to come from the lips of all those present. One of them referred to the bride's marriage portion. It was no less than half a milliard of francs which Baron Christophe undertook to place this very evening in the form of a banker's draft in the hands of His Majesty the King of France. The other contained His Majesty's promise that his wife would share on terms of perfect equality the throne and crown of France with him.

"I am trying to remember more of what happened on that memorable evening; but everything was so wonderful and so dazzling that I can hardly trust my memory. I do remember His Majesty bending over the table. A pen had been put into his maimed hand, and Madame la Princesse was asked to guide it, in making a X at the bottom of the document. I couldn't take my eyes off his face during this brief ceremony, for it wore an expression I could not possibly define. Had the occasion not been so solemn I could have sworn that a smile curled round His Majesty's lips. And to me the smile seemed to be more ironical than gay. But of course I must have been mistaken. I had the honour of being one of the witnesses to the signature of the august bridegroom. The other, I understood, was to have been Count Friesen, but at the last moment when he was about to take the pen from me, Madame came quickly forward, took the pen out of my hand and held it out to Monsignor Gomini with a few gracious words. His Eminence took the pen and countersigned the contract and again I saw that strange smile curling round His Majesty's lips.

"It was now the turn of the bride to sign the contract; her father countersigned it and Count Friedrich and Prince Remiroff witnessed the two signatures. Even while they did so Baron Christophe dived into the breast pocket of his coat and took out from his letter-case a small oblong piece of paper which represented his daughter's marriage portion, no less than half a milliard—a fortune for the Bourbon cause.

"After that my recollections of the rest of the evening are nothing but a blur. I was very tired, and felt relieved when His Majesty gave the signal for breaking up the party. I was standing quite close to him when he took leave of Mademoiselle Christophe. I tried not to hear what those two said to one another; they were already lovers, and their 'good night' or 'farewell' was not intended for other ears than theirs. But I did hear His Majesty whisper the word 'To-morrow'; and I saw the loveliest blush slowly mount to Mademoiselle's cheeks."

BOOK IV
WHEN THE GREAT SCORER COMES

I

Baron Christophe had, of course, to be let into the secret, or he would have been anxious, but his joy was so great at seeing the happiness of his darling child, that he didn't think of etiquette or of the social rules that in 1860 governed the conduct of engaged couples. He even went to the length of starting out with Véronique and her royal fiancé and accompanying them some short distance beyond the gate of the Villa Marie Thérèse, so as not to arouse astonishment and comment among his domestics.

Véronique had confided the project to her father the evening before, on their return from the grand reception at the Villa Elisabeth.

"Louis wants me to go out in the country with him for the whole day. He says Baden-Baden stifles him," she explained rather diffidently, because she did not know how father would take to the idea.

All he said, however, and did it in a tone of gentle reproof was: "Louis! My dear child!"

"I mean His Majesty, of course," Véronique rejoined demurely.

"We must not forget that, must we?" father concluded in his gravest tones.

He was so happy, so happy, for he had reached the pinnacle of his ambition; the millions which he had amassed through sheer hard work and brain power had brought happiness as well as splendour to the daughter who was the only love of his life. He thought His Majesty greatly improved not only in health and general appearance, but also in something more subtle and indefinable.

"Somehow he has become a man," he said complacently to himself. "A big transformation in a little over a year."

As a matter of fact, the great financier had only seen His Majesty once—the previous year in Baden-Baden when first the vague project of seeing his daughter crowned Queen of France began to stir in his active brain. The project soon ripened, and this past summer he had broached it to Madame la Princesse, who demurred just sufficiently to keep the rich Baron in his place, but not too much so as to put him off altogether. And now it was all accomplished and not only was his darling Véronique dazzled, not only was she happy, but she looked in a fair way of becoming enamoured of her royal fiancé. "And no wonder," thought Baron Christophe, "for a more kingly and at the same time more attractive man I have never seen."

The young people waved a joyous *au revoir* to father when he parted from them at the bottom of the Maria Viktoria Strasse. They were like two children who have been given a holiday.

"We won't be home before six," Cyril had said. "Promise you won't be anxious."

"I'll promise to try," Christophe retorted with a smile.

He soon lost sight of them, for they walked very fast. They were anxious to leave Baden-Baden as quickly behind them as they could. Baden-Baden and its social *milieu* stifled them. What they wanted was to be away from the world, from people, to be alone together in the forest, with only the pine trees and a few birds for company. The sky was a brilliant blue. The scent of autumn was in the air. They were young and they were in love. He knowingly, for he had loved Véronique Christophe, he reckoned, all his life, but she unconsciously, not understanding her own heart, or that feeling of ecstasy which made the sky seem more blue, and the sun more golden.

They almost ran as far as the old Nunnery and here they turned off to go up the pine-clad Caecilienberg. They didn't talk. Not really talk. Just an occasional "Am I walking too fast?" from him and a protesting "Oh no!" from her. "Are you tired?" he asked more than once.

"Not yet. Only rather warm. But isn't it lovely?"

He didn't look at the sky or the golden vistas through the intervening pines, nevertheless he said "Lovely!" and that was because he was looking at her.

She had on a little lace affair over her brown hair. It didn't prevent the curls from escaping out of their gossamer bonds, nor stop the mountain breeze from playing with them. Her dress was all muslin and lace with bows and sash of a soft shade of green. She carried a tiny parasol which threw a pearly shadow over her face; and on her feet she had little boots of bronze kid, which reached up to above her ankles.

"My God! isn't she lovely!" Cyril murmured to himself. And he had to put his hand up to his throat for he felt somehow as if he were choking.

Véronique remembered that His Majesty was reputed to be delicate in health, and although this delicacy was certainly not apparent in this lithe and stalwart man beside her, she felt remorseful at having walked so fast and perhaps tired him. He certainly didn't look tired, and seemed to be enjoying the walk as much as she did. Still, she must not be selfish, she thought, and hoped that he would ask her again if she was tired.

He did, after a time, and she said: "Yes, rather!"

They came on a small clearing where a few trees had been cut down, and some of them had been left lying on the ground almost as if they had been intended for seats for lovers to sit on. Rather uncomfortable seats they were, and Cyril looked ruefully at Véronique, and Véronique laughed gaily in his face.

"It is rather uncomfortable," she admitted. She was no coquette, and certainly she was as innocent as a child, and like a child she wriggled on the hard seat till, unconsciously, she was dangerously near to him. Dangerously, because here they were, alone in the middle of the stately, silent pines, their sole companions a yellow-breast robin, inquisitive after the manner of his kind, and a squirrel who had strayed far from his home among the chestnut trees down below and paused half-way up the stem of a pine to look on them with tiny, beady eyes.

They were silent, these two, for a long, long time, she tracing patterns in the mossy ground with her tiny parasol, and he gazing at her, wondering how it came to pass that God created such perfect loveliness and then allowed it to be close enough for him to kiss. Naturally, the moment came soon enough. She happened to look up at him, slightly puzzled by his long silence, for Véronique Christophe was very, very young, and had no experience of lovers and lovers' ways. She looked up at him, and encountered that gaze which every woman knows how to interpret, however young and inexperienced she may be; a blush rose slowly to her cheeks, and the next moment she was in his arms, and his lips taught her the first lesson of love.

And Cyril Bertrand was an excellent teacher, for he had loved her for æons of time, and it was in anticipation of this one supreme moment in life that he had acted the lie which Count Friesen had suggested to him. It was solely because he knew that if he played his part in this political intrigue, the moment would surely come when he could hold Véronique in his arms, and teach her how good a thing is love, and how good it is to kiss.

The squirrel, astonished at the doings of these strange humans, scampered away from tree to tree, but the yellow-breasted robin was more sophisticated, for this clearing, which was his haunt, was a favourite meeting-place of lovers, so he just went on scouting for his dinner in the moss-covered ground.

II

After a time—he hadn't had his fill yet, but she had just succeeded in disengaging herself from that over-tight embrace—he asked her the question which comes to the lips of most lovers:

"Véronique, tell me; have you ever loved before?"

She replied: "No, I don't think so," and she said this in such a way that all in a moment the male instinct of jealousy was aroused in him.

"How do you mean, you don't think so?" he asked.

She looked up at him with eyes that mirrored the blue out of the sky.

"Because," she said hesitatingly, "I did rather like a man once—I mean I liked him better than I had ever liked any man before—except father, of course."

These last few words did certainly alleviate the sting caused by the others. But the sting was there, nevertheless, and Cyril had winced, for it had touched him on the raw. Does not every lover hug the belief that he is first in the field, and that he will always be the only one? And in her candour and innocence Véronique had just admitted that she "did rather like a man once."

"And do you still," he asked in a fairly steady voice, "like him better than any other man?"

"Oh!" she said with a light shrug, "he never thought of me in that way . . . and so . . ."

"He didn't make love to you?"

"Oh, no!"

"What a fool!" was Cyril's curt comment.

She laughed.

"He hadn't time," she said. "He was absorbed in his painting."

"His painting?"

With that gesture which was habitual to him, Cyril put his hand up to his throat. He was actually choking.

"His painting?" he echoed hoarsely. His voice was so strange and his gesture so alarming that Véronique was frightened.

"Why? What have I said?" she murmured.

"Nothing! Nothing!" he hastened to assure her, and added with a laugh: "Only what the English call a frog in my throat. Do you know what it is?"

She nodded, but still asked anxiously: "Is it all right now?"

"Quite all right. But tell me what did this man paint. The man whom you rather liked, I mean."

"He painted my portrait."

"Oh?"

"It was a beautiful portrait. Everyone said so. It was hung on the line in the Salon last spring. You didn't—I mean Your Majesty——"

"In heaven's name don't call me that," he broke in roughly. So roughly, indeed,

that it made her laugh.

"Why not?" she asked and then added demurely: "Father would scold me if I did not. And . . . I don't very much like the name of Louis."

"I hate it," he said emphatically. "But do go on telling me about the portrait and the man who painted it. What was he like?"

Once more she turned her merry blue eyes upon him and looked him squarely in the face.

"Well!" she said slowly. "To be quite frank he was rather like Your M——; I mean, he was rather like you."

"Is that flattering for me?"

"Oh no! Because the likeness was only to there." And she put her small, gloved hand across her face just below the nose. "The rest of his face was all hidden by a very ugly beard."

"And yet you liked him?" he insisted.

"I only said 'rather'; for my portrait was finished in four days and I have never seen the artist since."

"And you never will either," Cyril rejoined curtly.

"No. Perhaps not."

"You wouldn't care, would you?"

"No," she murmured softly. "Not now."

"When you are Queen of France . . ."

"I didn't mean that—only," she said.

Cyril could have groaned aloud. His self-restraint was playing him false. It would fly to the winds of heaven in a moment or two. Undoubtedly within the next few seconds he would once more have had this lovely creature in his arms. He would, I think, have lifted her off the ground then and there and carried her away to some mountain fastness up on the Klosterberg, and defied the whole of Europe to take her from him. At any rate, that is what he thought he would like to do, if reason had not had a last say. Reason whispered that Véronique Christophe had only rather liked the man who painted her portrait; she had not liked him even as she loved her father, and pretty soon she would learn to hate him for depriving her of her kingly fiancé and of the crown of France. She was such a child. She had only learned the first lesson of love. A very elementary lesson; the sweetness of a kiss; and like a child she would soon resent its sweetness and sigh for the lost throne.

Desperate difficulties need desperate means to combat them. This solitude was the enemy of self-control. Prosy surroundings, the consciousness of everyday life were the only shackles that could hold passionate love in check. Although he called

himself a fool for his pains, Cyril jumped to his feet and with a gay, infectious laugh he said:

"And now shall we go and get some lunch?"

She didn't rise all at once. Somehow she was conscious of disappointment and she threw him a look of childlike reproach which very nearly upset the apple-cart of his self-control once more.

Fortunately for the said apple-cart, she rose, patted her skirt, her hair and diminutive bonnet, and asked coolly:

"Where shall we go?"

III

He took her up Klosterberg to the small restaurant which commands such magnificent views over Lichtenthal and Geroldsau and the fringe of the Black Forest. Here they sat under a creeper-covered arbour on wooden benches, at a table spread with a red and white checked cloth. They ate ham and liver sausage and potato salad, and drank a golden Munich beer. They were waited on by a jolly Bavarian maid, with blonde plaits down her back, red of face and broad in the beam, who smiled benignly on them as she did on all the young couples who frequented the restaurant. They chattered and they laughed; made silly, childish jokes at the expense of their fellow-diners; the corpulent shopkeeper from Carlsruhe with his strapping wife and numerous progeny who ate smoked sausages and sauerkraut, which they washed down with numerous tankards of beer; the solitary poet with long hair, who sipped Rhine wine out of a long-stemmed glass and consumed large slices of chocolate cake while wooing the Muse with paper and pencil; and the two lovers, who giggled and kissed, ate off the one plate and drank out of the one mug.

Cyril and Véronique were just like two children on a holiday; two children forgetting that presently they would have to go back to school and mind their p's and q's. They talked nothing but nonsense because their hearts were light, and because, childlike, they lived for the present without care or thought for the future. Cyril related amusing incidents of Ingres, the great artist, who fancied himself as a lady-killer, and of Horace Vernet and his many decorations, some of which he wore pinned to the tails of his coat, and had sat on, on one occasion, with disastrous results to his comfort. And Véronique gave an account of Princesse Metternich dancing the can-can and of the Duchesse d'Arlington trying to manœuvre her portly figure and immense crinoline up a narrow winding staircase and remaining stuck in the middle, whence it took four lackeys to extricate her.

There was only one interval of seriousness in this day of childlike thoughtlessness of the morrow. It came after they had finished their lunch, and the plump Bavarian maid had placed the tray of steaming hot coffee before them. Cyril took a cigarette out of his case. He reached for the matches, but Véronique forestalled him and lit the cigarette for him. Their faces were very close one to the other, and their eyes met in one of those happy glances of which only lovers possess the secret. It was the sort of glance that provokes a kiss! Fortunately or unfortunately, there were so many indifferent observers near, that Cyril was forced to resist the provocation. But he could not keep back the question which had been hovering on his lips for the past half-hour; the egotistic question on which he loved to dwell.

"Tell me more about the portrait-painter whom you liked better than any man—except your father."

She gave a light shrug.

"Don't let us," she said, "talk about him."

"Why not?"

"There is such a lot I want to say to you. Far more important things than that silly schoolgirl fancy."

"It was only a silly schoolgirl fancy, then?"

"Why, of course," she replied with a demure little smile.

How sweet she was! How sincere! And how unconscious that she was hurting him. Hurting him terribly! Women—good women—have a way of dealing these cruel blows in sheer ignorance, in sheer childish guilelessness. The others try to hurt, they do it deliberately because they are coldblooded, but somehow their darts fail in their effect. It takes a good woman—a saint—to be really cruel.

A silly schoolgirl fancy! And he had been fool enough to think—What!—God only knows—men in love are such arrant fools! However, a man, even a man in love, if he be not made of putty, must pull himself together. Cyril gave a wry smile, which he hoped she would not interpret, and then said:

"And what are the important things you are going to say to me?"

She clasped her pretty hands together and looked eager and enthusiastic.

"I want to talk about our projects."

"Projects?"

"Why, yes! I am so terribly ignorant, you know. Father never would talk of outside things to me—things that I would have been terribly interested in, if only he had tried to explain them."

"What things?"

"Well! Politics, I mean."

He couldn't help laughing. Politics! In these days of class-war and rising democracy what had this artless child to do with politics? She said, reproachfully:

"Don't laugh! I am very serious!"

"Politics are unclean, mostly," he remarked dryly.

"I know. At least, I have heard men say so. And that women must keep aloof from them. But . . ."

She waited a moment, not knowing quite how to go on. She was a product of her generation, the generation that reviled Georges Sand or George Eliot as unsexed, and kept a woman in perpetual subjection first to her father and then to her husband. And Véronique was still a little shy of her royal fiancé, when he didn't make jokes about the shopkeeper from Carlsruhe and his strapping wife, or about the great Ingres and Horace Vernet's decorations, when he looked serious, almost sad, as he did now. However, he seemed to be waiting for her to go on, and after a second or two she gathered sufficient courage to say softly:

"But when I shall have the immense privilege of being Queen of France . . ."

"Yes?"

"I shall want to hear everything about our people. Your people and mine. I mean to make it the aim of my life to know all about their wants, to see that every man, woman and child in France is made happy—as happy, or almost, as I shall be myself. I know I am talking foolishly, but ever since I knew that I was to be so greatly honoured by—by becoming your wife and sharing your throne, I have dreamed that one day, when I am gone, the people of France will speak of me as 'good Queen Véronique,' in the same way that you will be known to history as 'Louis the Well-Beloved.'"

He sat with his head resting on his hand. Looking at her—wondering how much more of this he could stand. Her artlessness, her faith, shamed him to such an extent, that he very nearly blurted out the whole truth then and there. He just longed to take hold of those dear little hands of hers, to look straight into her eyes and to say: "I am nothing but a liar, and a cheat. For the sake of this one day, which was promised me, I agreed to play this vile comedy. I am no king, I have no right to hold your hand. I am only the wretched portrait-painter for whom you had once a silly girlish fancy. Now I am going out of your life, and by another piece of abominable trickery you will become the wife of an effeminate weakling who will certainly make you Queen of France, but who will never give you a moment's joy, or cause you to feel the rapture of love."

And while this wild confession nearly burst out from his overburdened soul, his glance became so intense and almost wild that Véronique, frightened and shy, felt

that she had gone too far, that he disapproved of what she had said, that he was, in fact, one of those men who, like her father, would not allow a woman to discuss any but the most trivial subjects. She gave a nervous little laugh, and made a casual remark about the lateness of the hour, and so the spell was broken. Cyril was free once more from the obsession which would have robbed him of these last hours of joy.

They paid their bill and wandered back through the woods. Instinctively they avoided the clearing where memory would have been too insistent for their peace of mind. The late afternoon was exquisite, with just enough of the tang of autumn in the air to make it soft and balmy, a soporific to lull remorse on the one side, and dissipate shyness on the other. Once more they became children wandering hand in hand through fairyland. They didn't speak of thrones or of kings, of father's millions or the people of France. Nor did the words "I love you" rise from their hearts to their lips. The one interval of seriousness was forgotten in the last hour of this unforgettable afternoon. It had been the golden day of their lives, a day in which every hour had meant a new joy, and revealed a new happiness. Véronique was happy because she looked on the blessed hours as the forerunners of others equally full of joy; and Cyril was happy because of her happiness, well knowing that the greatest joy the future could possibly hold for him would be the memory of this golden day.

I

During the course of that same afternoon Count Friesen received an urgent summons from Madame.

"Put everything aside, my dear friend," Madame had written in haste and almost illegibly, "and come."

Friesen was, of course, accustomed by now to these urgent messages, which usually were supplemented by weird references to a yawning grave or the wide open door of a lunatic asylum. In this case he felt pretty sure of what the trouble was about. Cyril had told him of his intention to defy all etiquette and propriety by spending a long day in the country alone with Véronique. Friesen had done his best to dissuade him, for he foresaw trouble of some sort, but Cyril was obstinate.

"I'll either do that," he had said with absolute finality, "or cut my stick and run."

What Friesen had foreseen did actually occur. Madame, unaware of Cyril's determination, had probably worked herself up into a state of frenzy at his prolonged absence. And that, the Austrian decided within himself, was all that the pother was about.

Nevertheless he went.

II

He found Madame la Princesse in one of those states of excitement with which he alone knew how to cope. When he was announced she was pacing the room up and down, and to him she looked as if she was verging on a nervous collapse. The valet de chambre who had shown him in made haste to retire. Madame then sank into an arm-chair, and with a shaking hand she held out at arm's length what looked like a letter—looked like one because she had crushed the paper into a ball.

"Read it, Friesen—read it . . ." was all she seemed able to say.

Friesen took the shapeless mass, sat down, unfolded it and smoothed out the creases against his knee. The letter, he had guessed at once, came from His Majesty the King of France. No one but he had the power of throwing Madame into such a state of agitation, and, frankly, what the eminent diplomat now read nearly threw him —even him—off his balance.

The letter was written from the Villa Eglantine, Baden-Baden.

Villa Eglantine? Surely—Friesen frowned, thinking of Aline Saint-Amand: then he continued to read:

"Honoured and Beloved Mother" [the letter began],

"Do not be astonished to learn that I am back in Baden-Baden. I arrived here yesterday too late for the distasteful ceremony which was to tie me for life to a woman whom I have never seen and could not possibly love, and which, I know, was intended to keep me in the forefront of a cause with which I have no sympathy. Beloved mother, try and think of me not as the uncrowned—never to be crowned—King of France, but only as your son, who comes to you craving for your love and your indulgence. I have had plenty of time to think things over in the past few days while complete rest and peace which I had never known before made me see the future more clearly. God, my dear mother, did not create me with the intention that I should ever be a ruler of men. That was so obviously not His purpose when He made me weak of will and delicate in health. I could no more rally waverers to our cause than I could lead an army or plunge into political intrigues, nor could I marry a woman whom I did not love. I should only bring misery to her, and disgrace on our dynasty.

"All this may mean bitter disappointment to you, for I know how deeply you have the success of our fortunes at heart. But a man cannot go against his own nature, and my nature only craves for peace and quiet in the arms of a woman to whom I can give my heart. If I followed your commands, I should be laying the foundation of a whole edifice of misery and disappointment for you. I should, in the end, break your heart and cause you to be ashamed of your son and of your King.

"What happened here in the last few days I do not know. I do know that Count Friesen, probably at your behest, has been doing his best to drag me firstly out of the fortress where Napoléon's police kept me a prisoner for three days and then out of the solitude where I was happy in the company of the one woman who thoroughly understands me, and condones all my weaknesses.

"Do not, I beg you in all respect, try to deter me from doing what I earnestly believe is the only right thing to do. I have decided to abdicate in favour of my cousin the Duc de Bordeaux, the only rightful and legitimate King of France, who will from now onwards be looked up to by all our adherents as the head of the house of Bourbon, and will, with God's help, and your co-operation, be crowned one day in Rheims Cathedral. I herewith append a copy of the proclamation I propose to send to all the

Chancelleries of Europe. It would make me happier if, after reading this letter, you would send me your approval. I came to Baden-Baden hoping that you will allow me to plead my cause with you in person. In the meanwhile I have written this letter in all respect and affection. All I crave for now is your love.

"Your dutiful son,

"Louis."

III

Friesen had read the letter through with unswerving attention. Parts of it he re-read more than once. Now he dropped the hand that held it. He looked up and saw Madame lying back in her chair, her head against the cushion, her eyes gazing up at the ceiling, her face paler than the lappets of old lace fastened under her chin.

Though he had years of successful diplomacy behind him, Friesen was entirely at a loss what to say. How to begin to speak to this woman, who had just received the death-blow to her pride, to her ambition, to the dearest hopes of her life! The trouble was that what Louis said in this long letter was true. So very, very true. Neither God nor Fate had destined this vacillating, irresolute weakling to lead an army, to rally waverers to a moribund cause and to wear the crown of St. Louis. He was just a very nice boy, with no vices in his composition save those of incurable laziness and self-indulgence. There was no man in France less fitted to be her King than this effete scion of a noble race. And what was more pathetic than anything else was the fact that his own mother was well aware of this fact, and that she was even now breaking her heart over him.

To gain time Count Friesen glanced perfunctorily at the draft of the proposed proclamation. There was nothing unusual in it; it was worded in much the same way as Charles X's abdication some fifteen years ago. Friesen felt, with the instinct of the shrewd diplomat, that it would have a very bad effect on the minds of foreign rulers and ministers who had up to now been supporters of the royalist cause in France. Vaguely he wondered what his own Emperor would think about it all, and how far he would blame him, Friesen, for what would be nothing short of a scandal. Louis's name would inevitably be coupled with that of Aline Saint-Amand. There would be tittle-tattle among the gossip-mongers, and democracy, though still in its infancy, would delight in the mud freely slung at royalty. That the uncrowned King of France was deep in the toils of the lovely *prima donna* could not for a moment remain in doubt. He had even gone to the length of being under the same roof with her.

Friesen could have groaned aloud with mortification, for at once the image of Cyril Bertrand rose before his mind. The man out of all others who was so very much a man, whom any adherent of the Bourbon cause would willingly acclaim as the head of the family, was here in this very town. The enthusiasm which his mere appearance last night had provoked, proved beyond a doubt that his personality in itself would rally any number of loyalists to his flag.

It did seem like the irony of Fate that these two half-brothers should be so alike in face and features and so immeasurably unlike physically and temperamentally. Friesen cursed Fate for having shuffled the cards with so much partiality, giving all the attributes of manhood to one, and to the other nothing but a birthright which he was ready to sell at the demand of a woman. No doubt that if at this moment Friesen had suddenly found himself face to face with the lovely Aline he would have tried to wring her pretty neck.

Perhaps he did groan aloud, or was it merely that his expressive face betrayed something of what he thought and that Madame, happening to glance at him just then, saw or guessed what went on inside his clever brain? Certain it is that she said suddenly:

"It is the only thing to do, Friesen."

The Austrian pulled himself together. He had the feeling that he had been dreaming. He asked:

"What is, Madame?"

"That man must keep up the role—I hate him, but he must. Don't you see?" she went on, as Friesen, bewildered, not quite understanding, could do little else but gasp.

"Can't you see," Madame reiterated in a dull, toneless voice. "Can't you see that he must."

Friesen protested: "But Madame——"

"There are difficulties, I know," she went on slowly. "I have been thinking about them ever since I received that abominable letter. But I can contend with them all, because I think he will be willing."

"He?" Friesen asked.

"I mean my son Cyril, of course. You saw him last night——"

"Certainly I did."

"When Véronique Christophe curtsied to him?"

"I stood a little way behind, so I couldn't see his face——"

"I did. And I know how to read a man's face." She paused a moment, then added gravely: "Friesen, that son of mine is in love with Véronique Christophe."

"He certainly is," Friesen admitted.

"Had he met her before?"

"He painted her portrait. You remember, Madame, I told you."

"So you did. I had forgotten. Anyway, it confirms my impression of what I saw last night. Cyril Bertrand is in love with Véronique. He will be only too ready to continue to play his kingly role, until——"

"Until what, Madame?"

"Until we can bring His Majesty to see reason." Then as Friesen, by his silence, seemed to intimate that he had not much hope of that, she went on: "We can do it, Friesen, you know. You and I. Our influence against the wiles of that minx Saint-Amand. Baron Christophe's millions dangled before his eyes—and hers. They haven't a sou between them. Even if she was bribed to inveigle His Majesty into this absurd proclamation, the money wouldn't amount to much and Louis has extravagant tastes. We can do it, Friesen, you and I," she reiterated vehemently, "and we must."

Friesen said nothing. He remained thoughtful, absorbed in reflections over Madame's new suggestion. She was a resourceful, masterful woman. No doubt about that. If she was laid in her coffin, she would devise a plan for rising out of it. Dead, she would be as dangerous as she was living. And she was terribly dangerous just now. A masterful woman, thwarted in her ambition and with her back to the wall! Friesen could not help wondering of what madness or crime she would not be capable. Presently she said:

"I'll give you a quarter of an hour, Friesen, to think about this. Don't speak to me. Close your eyes and think. After that we'll talk further about it."

Friesen was not by any means weak in character; he would never have attained the prominent position which he held in international diplomacy if he had not been a man of firm purpose and of equally firm determination. But somehow this imperious woman held sway over his will. She was so determined to get what she wanted that by sheer argument she would compel him—and most men—to see eye to eye with her. It was wonderful to see her now, leaning back in her chair against a bright-coloured cushion, the black of her gown setting off the pallor of her face. Her eyes were closed. She had commanded her friend to think over her project and she left him to think in perfect silence, apparently incurious as to which way his thoughts would tend. Around her firm mouth there were some hard lines, which to Friesen suggested cruelty. She hated her eldest son, but smarting under the shame brought upon her by her favourite's letter, she was at this moment ready to sacrifice even him on the altar of her ambition.

Obedient to her command Friesen remained absorbed in thought. And the Boule clock on the chimney piece ticked fifteen times sixty before Madame spoke. When the quarter of an hour had gone by, she said:

"Now tell me your objections."

Friesen waited a moment before he replied. Then he said:

"Well! Frankly I don't think that Cyril would do what you want!"

"How do you mean?"

"I mean that after to-day he will cut his stick and run."

"What makes you think that?"

"For one thing, he said so to me this morning, and then—well! He is English—and you know what the English are—obstinate on a point of honour. . . ."

"Hard and obstinate," Madame rejoined. "You are right there, Friesen. And don't I know it? I was married three years to one of them. But you cannot get away from the fact that Cyril did agree to the deception. . . ."

"Only for the one short occasion—to avoid the scandal which would have covered the poor girl with ridicule. As you said just now—he is in love with her . . ."

"He would have signed His Majesty's name to the marriage contract. A forgery, Friesen. But for the accident to his hand, he would have done it; so his honour cannot be quite so ticklish as you imagine."

"Are you quite sure, Madame," Friesen put in dryly, "that it was an accident?"

Madame threw him a quick, enquiring look, but gave him no direct reply, and presently she said:

"Cyril has Spanish as well as English blood in his veins, and, in Spain, when a man is in love . . ." She ended with a shrug that spoke volumes. Then she went on:

"If Cyril's refusal is your only fear, you can dismiss it, my friend."

"It is not only that."

"What, then?"

"The game would be so terribly dangerous."

"Why?"

"There is the Saint-Amand girl, for one thing. She could give us away at any moment."

"I can deal with the Saint-Amand girl," Madame retorted with even more than her usual energy. "It is a risk, I know, but I can deal with her."

"How? Bribery? which invariably leads to blackmail."

"Not bribery only."

"Threats?"

"Of a certain kind."

"You won't tell me?"

"I will, presently. Any other objection?"

"Any day, any hour, someone might find out. And we should be in such a terrible position if they did."

"How can they? No one but Cyril himself could do that and is he likely to, I ask you. Besides, it would only be for a day—or two. We can bring His Majesty to reason, and anyhow, I can deal with him and that minx. I know I can. He is at the Villa Eglantine with her. I will send Nocé to watch until she goes out. Then you can go and see him, Friesen. You will. I know you will. You have a great deal at stake, too, haven't you? His Majesty will be alone, and you can make him see reason. You are so clever, Friesen, you will know just how to put the case before him. When he understands that he and his Aline will be paupers, that they won't have a sou between them, beyond a small allowance which I might be persuaded to make personally to His Majesty, you will find that he will sing a very different tune. And so will that greedy baggage. She doesn't know that Louis has no private fortune of his own, and that we have been subsisting for years on allowances made to us by friends abroad and adherents at home. Well, after the scandal of an abdication we may take it that those allowances will cease, and all I shall have to live on will be the small fortune which my English husband left me, not enough to keep His ex-Majesty in luxury. . . ."

Madame paused a moment to draw breath, for she had spoken vehemently and at great length. Friesen had listened to her in silence. She didn't tell him anything which he didn't know already. After the death of Louis XVI, his present Majesty's grandfather, the revolutionary government of France had confiscated the whole of his private property. After the revolution and the fall of the Empire, Louis XVIII, as the acknowledged head of the family, took possession of it and Friesen knew quite well that the Emperor of Austria had been the chief financial support of Louis XVII first and of Madame and her son subsequently. That support would be automatically withdrawn, or at any rate substantially curtailed, if His Majesty retired into private life.

"You know that what I am telling you is true, don't you, Friesen?" Madame insisted after a time.

Friesen nodded. "Yes!" he said. "I know."

"And you will know just what to say to His Majesty?"

"If I can get to see him . . ." Friesen said dubiously.

"You must see him, Friesen, you must. For all our sakes. And after you have talked to him, you must bring him round to see me. And once I have him here

between these four walls . . .”

Madame gave another of her expressive shrugs, and Friesen was forced to admit within himself that if His Majesty could be got back somehow under her influence, she could again, as she had so often done before, twist him round her little finger. It was only the question of Cyril Bertrand and what his view would be of the new situation, which still remained a doubtful quantity. Putting, however, that question aside for the moment, Friesen now asked:

“What is the position exactly at the moment?”

Madame did not reply immediately. She was intent on studying her friend’s face, trying to find in it an expression of wavering, of a tendency to give in to her arguments. A short sigh of satisfaction found its way through her firm lips, for she thought she had detected certain signs of weakening in Friesen’s attitude. He seemed ready, at any rate, to discuss the proposition, and Madame, conscious of her own powers of persuasion, felt that she would, in the end, gain her point. For the moment and in order to gain time, she merely echoed:

“The position?”

“Yes,” Friesen said. “You had the last word with Cyril yesterday before the reception. I suppose you discussed the position with him. What did he say exactly?”

“Well! All he condescended to say to me was that in order to save a grave scandal which would chiefly affect an innocent girl, he was willing for one evening to play the part of his half-brother, the King of France.”

“That is, of course, what was originally understood between us.”

“Yes. He told me. He said that the suggestion came from you, but that he had been quite willing to fall in with it. I then assured him that it would only be for the one evening. I thought at the time that that was all it would amount to. He then said that he very much objected—in fact that he flatly refused—to forge his brother’s signature to the marriage contract, but that fortunately—he said ‘fortunately’—an accident to his right hand had made it impossible for him to hold a pen.

“I never questioned whether it was an accident or not,” Madame hastened to add, when she saw a curious expression flit over Friesen’s face. “Last night,” she went on, “I prepared the way with all our important friends for the story we shall have to tell to-morrow, namely, that His Majesty is suffering a great deal of pain from his injured hand, that he had developed a temperature and the doctor whom we called in immediately feared that the wound was becoming septic. He begged His Majesty to keep to his bed, so as to stave off serious complications.”

“And what did Cyril say to that?”

“He just laughed. You know his ugly way. But he raised no objections. I don’t

suppose he wishes to be seen in public again."

"Not in public. But, of course, the representatives of our foreign friends will want to pay their respects before leaving. Cyril will have to see the Papal Nuncio and Cardinal Beneventy—also Prince Remiroff and Count Friedrich. Did you tell him that?"

"No, I didn't. But I'm sure he won't object. He seemed amused, I thought, at the whole thing. And perhaps he had it in mind that he would see Véronique again. Anyway, that is the position, Friesen. And now what do we do next?"

"What about a line to His Majesty?" Friesen suggested. "He will expect some sort of answer to his letter. If he didn't get it, he might do something rash."

Instantly Madame rose. "You are right," she said, and went across to her bureau. "I'll send him a few non-committal words."

She sat down and wrote a few words, read them through, strewed sand over the wet ink, but before she slipped the note into its envelope, she brought it across to show Friesen.

"I think that will do," she said. "I didn't mention your coming visit, of course."

Friesen read the note through. It was quite short. Madame had written:

> "I shall hope to see you to-morrow. In all circumstances you can count on your mother's love and understanding."

"Perfect," was Friesen's curt comment.

Madame addressed the envelope to "His Majesty the King of France." She rang the bell and gave the letter to the major-domo.

"Take this letter yourself," she commanded, "to the Villa Eglantine and give it into His Majesty's own hands. No one else's," she emphasised sternly.

When the man had gone, Madame drew a deep sigh of relief, and sank back with something like a groan into the capacious arm-chair. She seemed wearied to death. Friesen allowed her to rest for a few moments, with her eyes closed, her handsome head pillowed against the cushion. Then he broached the question of Cyril Bertrand.

"I shall have to have a talk with Cyril before I see His Majesty," he said.

Madame raised her head and looked at him enquiringly.

"Why on earth . . . ?" she asked.

"I must know what his attitude is going to be. It's no good——"

"My good man," Madame broke in with obvious impatience, "have you been in diplomacy all these years and yet know so little about human nature? Tell any man in

love that he can spend another day or even another hour with his beloved, before parting from her probably for ever, and see if he will say 'Yes,' or 'No, thank you, I have had enough.' But have a talk with Cyril by all means. You see, I am so sure of the result."

Friesen glanced up at the clock. It was just past six and the light was beginning to wane.

"He'll be back soon," he said, then added: "You will let me see him alone, won't you?"

"Oh! of course," Madame replied coolly. "I have no wish to see him more often than I need."

Friesen rose to take his leave. Madame stretched her hand out to him, and when he stooped to kiss it she held on to him, and said gravely:

"Remember one thing, my friend, when you talk to Cyril and also to Louis. I have the identity papers of both my sons, their birth and baptismal certificates. Nothing easier in the world than to change these. So Cyril need have no fear. You understand? I mean, in case Louis changed his mind—when it is too late. It all depends on me—not on him. Unless he listens to reason within the next twenty-four hours, he will become officially the son of my English husband, who—listen to me, Friesen—has been foolish enough to impersonate his younger brother in order to gain the favours of Mademoiselle Saint-Amand. Now do you see how the baggage can be dealt with? And how ready she will be to turn her back on His Majesty when she is made to understand that situation. It is my version of what has happened, and I will not swerve from it one iota. All the papers, mind you, will be in order and they will show that the man whom she has inveigled into her toils is my first-born, Cyril Bertrand, and that it is Cyril who is the son of Louis XVII King of France. God knows how I shall hate him for that, but I will make the sacrifice for the sake of the dynasty. You do understand, don't you, Friesen?" she insisted.

Friesen assured her that he did. "For the sake of the dynasty?" He could not help smiling to himself, wondering if she really thought that he believed in her disinterestedness. However, he said nothing more now, and finally took his leave. He felt very like a conspirator taking leave of his accomplice. He was going to lend himself to her schemes. This much he knew, for she was a masterful woman, and had won him over to her point of view, chiefly because it coincided with his own desire in the matter. But he wondered if he had done right. There is a good old German proverb which says that "he who says A must also say B" and that was Count Friesen's position. He had been the prime mover in the original deception, and now he was wallowing in the intrigue up to his neck and could no longer draw

back. He did not doubt for a moment that Cyril would agree to carry on; at the same time he was not blind to the fact that the game was going to be dangerous. Things had gone wonderfully smoothly up to now, but at any moment some unforeseen circumstances might bring the deception to light, and if such a mischance were to happen, the disgrace and scandal would spell ruin to him, as well as to the Bourbon cause. Ridicule would deal a death-blow to the cause, but the scandal would assuredly put an end to the public career of Count Friesen, the distinguished representative of a great Empire; and the only issue for him out of the disgrace would be a bullet through his head.

I

Friesen went back to the Villa Elisabeth later in the evening. He asked to see His Majesty and was shown into Cyril's private room.

As soon as the Austrian came in, Cyril exclaimed:

"Friesen, I am the happiest man on earth!"

"The devil you are!" was Friesen's smiling retort.

"Sit down, old man, and have a drink," the other went on gaily. "What will you have?"

"An English drink," Friesen replied and pointed to a bottle of Scotch whisky which stood on a tray on the table, together with a couple of glasses, wine and mineral waters. A table-lamp shed a pleasant light around. A nice fire roared in the big German stove. There was a cosiness, and an air of intimacy about the whole place. Friesen, feeling very hopeful and very much at home, sat down, while Cyril, who was humming softly to himself, poured out whisky and soda for him. Now Friesen was one of those men who had the faculty of noticing everything and keeping his observations to himself. In this case he saw that the hand with which his friend poured out the whisky shook slightly—very slightly. Also that there was a flush on his forehead and a warm glow in his eyes.

He took the glass which Cyril now handed to him whilst he queried with a soupçon of gentle irony:

"And what have you been doing with yourself, to be the happiest man on earth?"

Cyril was standing by the table. He too had a glass in his hand and was gazing into the bubbles that rose sparkling to the surface. After a moment or two he said with a quick, short sigh:

"I have laid up a store of memories which will last me as long as I live."

"And they are sufficient to make you happy?"

The other gave a light shrug, emptied his glass at one draught, and sat down. He offered Friesen a cigarette, took one himself and set a match to both. For a few moments the two men smoked in silence, each buried in his own thoughts. Cyril had not yet replied to Friesen's last question. But presently he said:

"Happiness is a relative term, isn't it?"

"It is," Friesen admitted, "but what about you?"

"Well! I have answered your question. Haven't I?" Cyril retorted with a disarming smile.

Friesen continued to smoke in silence. He was surreptitiously watching this man, whom he had in such a short while taken to his heart as a friend. The face was easy enough to read. There was nothing subtle in its expression. Introspection. Communion with self. Retirement into that world of memories of which he had spoken. He looked perfectly happy. All this was clearly depicted in Cyril's expressive face, nevertheless Friesen didn't quite know what to make of him. After a while he rejoined:

"You say that you have answered my question. I suppose you mean that you answered it when you told me that you were the happiest man on earth?"

"That is what I did mean."

"And I begged leave to wonder whether any man—especially a man like you—can find happiness in memories alone."

"If there's nothing else——"

"There is always something else, you know, Bertrand," Friesen said with sudden earnestness.

"In some cases, I dare say."

"In yours most decidedly."

To this Cyril made no answer. Clearly his mind was not entirely fixed on what Friesen was saying; his thoughts were roaming along paths that wound in and out of the realm of chimera and fantasy. Friesen tried to drag them back to the land of reality. Knowing what a queer temperament he had to deal with, he began the attack by putting one question very quietly and very gently:

"Have you realised, Bertrand, that it rests entirely with you, whether your happiness in the future is going to rest on mere flimsy memories, or on a much more secure foundation?"

Cyril frowned, then laughed and asked:

"What the devil do you mean?"

"I mean that there is no reason whatever why the present state of things should not continue—indefinitely."

Again Cyril frowned, more puzzled than before.

"I suppose I am more dense than usual, old man, but would you mind not talking in riddles?"

"I am not talking in riddles. And I am perfectly serious," Friesen rejoined gravely. "Listen. Your half-brother is in Baden-Baden. His mother and I are in touch with him, and I don't mind telling you that not only is he not in a fit state to take up the position which you have kept warm for him, but that he never will be. Frankly, I was very nervous last night as to what impression you would make on the crowd at

your mother's reception. You are extraordinarily like your half-brother certainly, but there is always, in cases of this sort, a certain something which makes the one man different to any other, and I was terribly afraid that among the crowd last night there would be someone who would detect that certain something, which to my eyes, for instance, makes you so very different to His Majesty. I won't flatter you," Friesen added with a short laugh, "by telling you in what that difference consists. Thank Heaven no one suspected it, not even Cardinal Beneventy, who has known you and your family for years."

He paused a moment, then as Cyril said nothing, he went on after a time:

"I am not asking you to do anything that is going to hurt anyone. I give you my word that there is no one less desirous of leading a lost cause, or of occupying a precarious throne than the uncrowned King of France. He wrote to his mother this morning. I wish I had the letter to show you. He declares his intention of abdicating in favour of his cousin the Duc de Bordeaux. He calls himself 'the uncrowned—never to be crowned—King of France.' He says that his only desire is to spend his days in obscurity in the arms of the one woman who understands him, and so on, and so on, *ad infinitum*. So you see that you need have no scruples on his score. On the contrary, you would confer the greatest benefit upon him, and also upon your mother, by taking over the leadership of the royalist cause, which under His present Majesty's chieftainship is in grave danger of a collapse. So much for your half-brother. As for Mademoiselle Christophe——No, don't interrupt till I have done," he went on as Cyril, at mention of the girl's name, gave a kind of gasp, and looked almost savagely across at his friend. "I must speak of her, and you've got to listen. The facts are quite simple in her case. I am neither so dense, nor so old, as not to have guessed something of what happened to-day. For one thing I saw last night that you were already in love with that exquisite child. Again I won't flatter you, but I imagine that by the end of to-day she is no longer indifferent to you either. She is romantic and your personality must come very near to what she has conceived would be her ideal mate. Just imagine her disillusionment if, within a few hours, she found herself in the arms of a weak, backboneless creature with no more power to give her love for love than a jellyfish. And now I have done. For one thing I am hoarse from so much talking. It is the longest speech I have ever made in my life; but I do want now to ask you in all fairness what possible harm there can be in a substitution—a deception if you like—which will secure your own happiness and the happiness of the woman you love, and will render an incalculable service to a legitimate and, if I may say so, a holy cause."

II

Long after Friesen had finished speaking, a kind of ominous silence held sway in the cosy, lamp-lit room. Cyril had said nothing, had scarcely made a movement after that sudden gasp of protest when Friesen uttered Véronique's name. At first mention of "His Majesty the King of France," all the light seemed to go out of Cyril's eyes. It seemed as if an invisible grey veil had been thrown over his face, changing its youthful colour to one of dead ashes. His world of happy memories seemed all at once to have crumbled to dust. His half-brother! Almost he had forgotten in the past golden hours that there was such a person as the real, the legitimate, King of France. His half-brother! So aptly described by Friesen as a jellyfish; a weak, effeminate, backboneless creature on whom Véronique, when thrown into his arms, would begin to look at first with bewilderment, then with bitter disappointment, indifference, and finally with contempt.

This was the first thought that flashed through Cyril's mind when Friesen spoke of his half-brother. And it was this thought which suddenly dimmed the light in his eyes and turned the fresh glow in his face to the colour of dead ashes. Véronique was in love with love's dream. The awakening would be nothing short of a cataclysm. But what could he do? Fate had caught him in a snare out of which he could never free himself as long as he lived. Friesen had spoken of happiness. But there was no question of happiness in this. A few days ago, perhaps, before Friesen came to him with his fantastic plans and embroiled him in this inextricable web. Back in his studio in Paris he might have had the hope that with the lapse of time would come a measure of forgetfulness. If he had never seen Véronique again, save as the central figure in a royal procession; if he had never thought of her again save as the future Queen of France, he might, in time, have found relief from torturing thoughts of her.

But now! What had the future to offer him? Instinctively he looked across at Friesen. His friend. The complacent diplomat who saw no harm in the deception which he had engineered and which suited the tortuous plans that would bring about the triumph of one cause, as against that of another. Was Friesen right after all? What harm could come of grasping with both hands at this mirage of happiness which his friend dangled so tantalisingly before him? He cared nothing and less than nothing for any crown or throne, and common sense told him that the royalist cause in France was more dead than any dead thing on earth. Neither he nor anyone else had the power to revive it. But happiness did not mean a crown to Cyril Bertrand; it meant, first of all and all the time—Véronique.

III

How long the silence had lasted between the two men it is impossible to say. Cyril had not uttered a sound since Friesen had first spoken of the King of France. Indeed, he seemed to be quite unconscious of Friesen's presence. He had forgotten everything since the moment when a grisly spectre had risen up before him—the spectre of Véronique's disillusionment and unhappiness.

After a little time, Friesen ventured to speak again:

"There won't be any difficulty in the way, you know, Bertrand," he said.

Cyril looked at him with the bewildered air of a man just roused from heavy sleep.

"Sorry!" he muttered vaguely, "I didn't quite catch . . . What did you say?"

"I just wanted you to know that things will be made as easy for you as possible."

"What things?"

"Well, for instance, you need not be seen in public for a bit——Your hand, by the way—how is it?"

Cyril looked down at his bandaged hand with a kind of vacant stare.

"I don't know," he said.

"That sounds all right, at any rate," Friesen responded as cheerfully as he could—he was feeling far from cheerful at this moment, because he really didn't know what to make of Cyril and how the whole thing was going to work out. "Anyway," he went on, "we can put it about that you are suffering a good deal of pain, that the doctor is anxious about you and has recommended you to keep to your room for a day or two, as he fears that further excitement might cause the wound to become septic. In this way you need not face another crowd, only one or two of the foreign prelates and envoys who will pay their respects before taking their leave. That will be quite easy, won't it?"

"Oh, quite!" Cyril retorted, and he threw back his head and laughed. "But do tell me," he went on more seriously, "does His Majesty the King of France—the real one, I mean—know anything about this farce that is going on?"

"Not yet," Friesen admitted, "but he will presently."

"You are going to tell him?"

"His mother is."

"He might spoil sport, you know."

"He won't be allowed to."

"Who will prevent him?"

"His mother—and yours."

"And you mean to tell me, that she—my mother and his—is willing that I, whom she hates, shall usurp the rights of the son whom she worships? You are not serious, are you?"

"I never was so serious in my life. Your mother has been a wonderful ally to me; she knows that I am working under orders from my Emperor, and she has put her personal feelings aside for the sake of the cause and of the dynasty."

Friesen paused a moment, and then said with grave earnestness: "Bertrand, you must do this for me."

"For you? Why, what can you gain by this cruel farce which, mind you, should never have been started—never would have been started, if I had not been such a sentimental fool?"

"You happened to be a friend to me," Friesen rejoined, "and now . . ."

"Now I just stand before you and before myself as a liar and a cheat . . . If you only knew how I loathe myself for it all. . . ."

"That is sentimental sophistry, if you will forgive my saying so. What you have got to think of is not your own point of view but the future of a woman who loves you and whom you love. Her happiness and yours. All of which you can attain by the sacrifice of what is after all mere exaggerated and selfish point of honour. You have got to think of Véronique Christophe, of your mother—because in whatever way she may have wronged you in the past, she is your mother, after all—of your brother . . . of me, if you like, and not only of yourself."

"You have got to think of Véronique Christophe . . . of me, if you like, and not only of yourself."

Friesen allowed this new train of thought to do its work. But it was in vain that he tried to guess what went on in Cyril's mind. Everything, he knew, would depend on what hold his love for Véronique had on his temperament. The diplomat had seen too much of human nature, too many frailties and too many moral wrecks not to know that when a man is in love—really and unmistakably in love—the question of right or wrong, of expediency or the reverse, becomes relegated into the background. One thing must also be remembered and that is, that to Count Friesen there was nothing integrally wrong in what he suggested. As he had said a moment ago: "No harm was being done to anyone": certainly not to Louis who would welcome with joy the thought that he would be free from the trammels of royalty, and from the domination of his mother, and free to live his life with the woman of his choice, in peace and obscurity. The harm would come if the truth ever came to light. But Madame's way of dealing with it—unscrupulous as it was—minimised every

kind of danger, and since last night when there was not the faintest doubt in the mind of any one present—and most of them were clever and shrewd, the élite of royalist partisans—what danger there was had become entirely negligible.

Still Cyril said nothing and Friesen was left wondering. It was close on ten o'clock now and not a sound from the outside broke the silence of this solemn moment. A restless clock ticked the time away with a kind of fussy rapidity. It was a funny old German clock. All face, and with a small pendulum that worked in front of that face. Friesen fell to watching that ceaseless motion. He was as it were hypnotised by it. Its monotonous ticking sound seemed to echo the "Yes? No?" of his own thoughts.

Then suddenly something made him turn and glance up at his friend, and he saw that Cyril was looking at him, and smiling . . . that disarming smile of his. . . . And now he gave a shrug and then said lightly:

"Have another drink, old man."

No. It was not possible to read the man's thoughts. More especially as now he began to talk of other things. Politics. Music. The latest play. The actress *à la mode*. He poured out another glass of whisky for Friesen, and one for himself, and Friesen tried in vain to bring the conversation back to the one momentous topic. But in vain. The other eluded him every time, switched over at once to trivial small talk.

Only at the end, when Friesen realised that he would get nothing more out of Cyril that night, he took his friend's uninjured hand and grasped it with a cordiality that was more eloquent than words.

"I wonder whether you realise," he said, "what a tremendous lot I have at stake in all this. Somehow I have an idea that you will play the game. You are English, Bertrand, more English than you realise yourself, and one always trusts an Englishman to play the game."

He didn't say anything more. Cyril held on to his hand for a moment or two. The same rather puzzling smile still hung around his lips. It was a funny little smile, not altogether gay, nor at all sad. He had pulled the bell just before and the major-domo came to the door just then, and stood there waiting to show His Excellency out. The last sight Friesen had of his friend was of his tall figure silhouetted against the lamplight. A kingly figure. A true friend. An upright and honourable gentleman. But ever after Friesen remembered that funny little smile. At the moment he sighed and turned away for Cyril's head was bent and his whole figure immobile. He had a glass in his hand and was gazing down on the bubbles. Somehow he reminded Friesen of a statue he had seen in the spring Salon this year. It was the work of the rising young sculptor Auguste Rodin who had named his work "Tristesse et Sourire."

I

The next morning, long before the fashionable world was astir, street-cleaners, scavengers, road-menders and such-like folk saw the tall figure of a man standing in the roadway immediately facing the grandiose villa occupied by Baron Christophe, the Austrian banker, said to be the richest man in Europe. All those good folk knew nothing of the grave events which centred around that beautiful villa. They knew nothing of Bourbon claims to the throne of France or of the intrigue which was to enrich that cause with half a milliard, and place on the head of a commoner the crown of Marie Antoinette. If one of them cast more than a hurried glance at the cloaked figure which stood facing the Villa Marie Thérèse at this hour of the morning, it was because the figure was good to look at; a fine, manly figure of a man, who gazed up at the windows of the villa so persistently that one road-mender remarked, smiling, to his mate: "A lover, what?" and the other retorted with a shrug: "An unhappy one, I should say."

Cyril had slept little that night. A man who is faced by the greatest problem of life, cannot hope to woo sleep successfully. And the greatest problem of life for any man or woman is when the choice has to be made between love—real love, not the shams of to-day—and a point of honour. This choice now lay before Cyril Bertrand. It was his hand, and his only, that held the balance. On the one side a life of joy, of luxury, of love, happiness not only for himself but for an exquisite child-woman who loved him and would find happiness in his arms. And on the other a harrowing life of deceit. The spectre of dishonour, unseen by all, but ever present before his own consciousness. Friesen had dubbed that spectre a selfish, exaggerated sophism. And Cyril was left to solve his life-problem as best he could, alone.

II

He began the day by wandering down the lane as far as the Villa Marie Thérèse. He had called himself a sentimental fool, and he probably was. At any rate the present generation would call him so . . . although while the human race subsists and men are creatures of flesh and blood and not of putty, there will always be sentimental fools in the world, fools, that is, who are wiser far than all the sophisticated wiseacres that are fool enough to sneer at sentiment. So much for that, and for Cyril Bertrand's folly in going in the early dawn to gaze on the shuttered windows of the Villa Marie Thérèse. He desired nothing so much as a last look at

the child-woman whom he had learned to love so tenderly and so passionately. A last look. A farewell look, and then away into a world in which she would have no part. A world which would be immeasurably dreary and drab, but a world in which one played the game.

By all the rules of romance, she should presently have opened her window, drawn by the irresistible magnetism of his glance, and he, Romeo-like, should have climbed over the intervening wall and from below her balcony have poured out into her willing ear the full measure of his love in words of rapture and ecstasy. Or else he should, like a timid lover, have been content to remain unobserved while he filled his mind with memories of her by gazing at the exquisite image she presented. But neither of these things happened. True the shutters of the Villa Marie Thérèse were thrown open one by one, but the one head that this sentimental fool longed to see did not appear at any one of them. And so, after a time, and with an extra measure of contempt at his own folly, he went away.

His way lay in the direction of the Villa Eglantine, brimful of memories: the house lower down the hill where he had lodged, when first he came to Baden-Baden, and before he had fully realised that Véronique Christophe was destined for the King of France and not for him. He came in sight of the gate beside which, on that night in July, he had seen the King of France in the arms of Aline Saint-Amand, and had then felt such a surge of hatred rise within him because of this appalling treachery that it drove him to the point of fratricide. Close by was the spot where Louis reeled and fell with a cry like that of an animal in pain, and where he, Cyril, moved by an unexplainable impulse, had gathered the man he so hated in his arms and had carried him to the Villa Elisabeth. Here he had met Count Friesen for the first time. The hand of God? Surely not. For nothing but cruelty, and heartache, and lies had come out of it all. Rather was it the spindle of Fate, the relentless scissors of the three grim sisters, that in that instant cut the thread and thrums of his destiny.

Cyril Bertrand paused a moment in sight of all these places, musing perhaps on all the strange events that followed on this first encounter with his half-brother. He was thinking of calling at the Villa Eglantine because he had made up his mind to speak with Louis, but there were servants at the villa who had perhaps been waiting at this very moment on the King, and at sight of Cyril, his very image, might through sheer stupidity, terror or amazement, precipitate a crisis which had at all costs to be avoided. While he stood for a moment in the road, debating with himself what he should do, he saw Louis himself come out of the gate arm-in-arm with Aline Saint-Amand. They turned to walk up the hill in the direction of the Villa Elisabeth. The two of them appeared very gay, chatting and laughing, and coming to a halt

occasionally to exchange a hug or a kiss.

Cyril decided to follow. At the next crossroads, the young couple on ahead came to a final halt. They took affectionate leave of one another, after which Louis turned up the road on the right, in the direction of the Villa Elisabeth, whilst Aline continued on her way, intent probably on lengthening her walk. Cyril waited a moment or two till she was out of sight, then he too turned up the road in the wake of His Majesty the King of France. A distant church clock struck nine just then. It was later than he thought. No wonder he felt both tired and cold. He had been out since early dawn, wandering he knew not how far, nor how long he had stood gazing at the shuttered windows of the Villa Marie Thérèse. The morning was fresh and he had had no breakfast. The leaves of sycamore and beech were beginning to lose their warm tones of burnt sienna and gold, and turning to a sadder, a more sober brown. The fallen leaves made a melancholy swishing sound under the wanderer's feet. The sound was reminiscent of a chorus of sighs.

By the time Cyril had reached the gate of the Villa Elisabeth, Louis had already gone in. The villa was all opened up. The gardener was at work sweeping the paths. The front door was wide open, but the major-domo, who usually stood there with his nose in the air, and his hands behind his back surveying weather conditions, was not at his post. He had probably gone to usher His Majesty into the presence of Madame la Princesse. This suited Cyril's book admirably, for he had during the past thirty-six hours become fairly well acquainted with the internal geography of the villa. The only trouble that might arise would be if he met one of the indoor servants, who by some mischance had already caught sight of Louis himself.

Trusting to luck, however, he gave the gardener the slip, went quickly up the garden path. He reached the inner hall of the villa, just at the moment when a door on the floor above was being discreetly closed. The next moment he caught sight of the major-domo's feet descending the wide circular stairs. Chance favoured him, for he had just time to slip behind one of the doors that gave on the hall. A minute or so later the major-domo reached the bottom of the stairs, crossed the hall, and once more took up his accustomed position in the entrance door, with nose in the air and hands behind his back, indicative of complete detachment from everything that went on inside the villa.

Cyril now emerged from his hiding-place, ran up the stairs, and the next moment he was knocking at his mother's boudoir door.

In response to his knock he heard something like a scramble proceeding from inside the room. A murmur of voices, followed by the opening and closing of a door. Clearly Louis had been with his mother, and been summarily ordered out again.

Now a harsh, familiar voice called out: "*Entrez!*" Cyril pushed open the door and entered the room.

III

Madame la Princesse was alone. She was sitting at her bureau, ostensibly writing a letter, but obviously she had only picked up her pen a second ago. Her cheeks were flushed, and the hand that held the pen shook visibly. All of which was a clear indication that the interview with her beloved son had been of a somewhat stormy character. Now, at sight of Cyril, she jumped up from her chair like a dart. Her trembling lips framed the one word: "You?" but did so in a tone that betrayed her agitation, her annoyance, and something like fear.

Cyril closed the door behind him, then remained standing with his back to it.

Madame queried testily: "Well? What do you want?"

"Where is Louis?" was Cyril's curt retort.

"His Majesty's whereabouts do not concern you," Madame replied coldly; "and perhaps you will tell me by what right you are here."

"No right at all," he replied. "I wish to see Louis. He was here a moment ago. Why did he run away?"

"What do you want with him?"

"I will tell him when I see him."

"And I shall not let you see him till I know what you want with him. Do you imagine that you can force your way into the royal presence——"

"Oh, for God's sake," Cyril broke in roughly, "stop that business. Mine is too serious for all that rubbish."

"And now you are impertinent," Madame retorted haughtily. "I don't know what you want to say to His Majesty that you cannot say to me. Are you afraid——?"

"I am not afraid."

"Then why this secrecy?"

"There is no secrecy," Cyril now said with growing impatience. "I wish to hand over to my brother Louis, the banker's draft which Baron Christophe gave me the other night—not to me, that is, but to the King of France."

"Well? What about it? You can give the draft to me."

"I will give it to no one but to the King of France," Cyril concluded obstinately.

Before Madame could utter another word, the door at the further end of the room was thrown open and Louis himself appeared under the lintel. He did look a strange figure indeed, did the uncrowned King of France. His eyes looked bleary

and tired; his cheeks were flushed and the hand which clung to the door-knob looked moist and shaky.

"That is quite right," he said with a short, inane laugh, "and our royal mother is all wrong. You hand the nice little draft over to the King of France, old man. It is made out in our august name, I fancy."

Cyril had thrown one glance at his mother. She was standing quite still, very pale, frowning, obviously puzzled and vaguely terrified of something—she knew not what. Her fine eyes wandered restlessly from one face to the other. It was the first time she had seen her two sons standing face to face with one another, since they had become men. Of course, in some ways the resemblance was remarkable. The features were the same. Eyes and hair the same colour. There was even a certain resemblance in the build, and the tone of voice was the same. But there was a Something very, very different between the two, and no one knew better in what that difference consisted than Madame, their mother. Her frown deepened, she bit her lips and passed her handkerchief over her forehead.

In the meanwhile Louis had stepped further into the room. He came to a halt beside his brother, and put out his hand.

"Well?" he said, with the same kind of bashful laugh, "that nice little draft? Where is it?"

Cyril dived into the pocket of his coat, and took a slip of paper out of his letter-case. Both Louis and Madame watched him with eager eyes while he turned it round once or twice in his hand, looking at it.

"Give it to me," Louis insisted.

"In one moment," Cyril now said gravely. "Before I do, I want you to give me your most solemn assurance, your oath in fact, that you will always love and honour the gracious lady who has consented to be your wife."

He was looking his brother squarely in the face while he said this. Somehow he did not like the expression in Louis's eyes.

"You heard what I said," he demanded, "didn't you?"

"You shouted loud enough," the other retorted. "But may I ask what concern it is of yours, and who the lady is of whom you speak so loudly and so eloquently?"

"I made a promise to Mademoiselle Véronique Christophe in your name. I saved you from disgrace and her from humiliation. I also saved your precious cause from collapse by acting a lie before Baron Christophe——"

"I didn't ask you to do all that, did I?" Louis broke in sullenly.

"No. And that is part of the tragedy of it all. But we won't argue about it. It was done in your name and at your mother's desire, and that is all there is to it. But it was

done, and, therefore, before I hand this draft over to you, I want you to swear to me that the innocent lady who is involved in all these schemes and all these lies, will never be made unhappy through you."

Louis looked at his brother for a moment or two. And then threw back his head and breaking into loud and prolonged laughter, he said:

"Well! If that isn't the funniest thing I ever heard in all my life!"

But Madame was apparently unable to control her temper any longer. She said acidly:

"It is the most insolent thing I ever heard." Then she added, turning brusquely on Cyril: "I suppose you are in love with Véronique Christophe yourself."

She wanted to say something more, something more cruel and biting that would really hurt, but Louis now broke in:

"Don't worry the poor man, mother," he said, still laughing. "I am going to give him the assurance he wants, and then we shall all be happy again, and have no more rows. Look here," he added, turning to Cyril and speaking seriously and solemnly, "I give you my word of honour that my life in future shall be spent in making the charming lady who has consented to be my wife, the happiest woman on earth. Now are you satisfied?"

Cyril, without a word, handed the draft to His Majesty the King, who took it from him, glanced at it, slipped it into the breast pocket of his coat, and then strode across the room. He came to a halt at the door, which was still wide open, turned once more to Cyril and said lightly:

"It is all such damn' nonsense, you know. Because I am never going to marry the gracious lady with whom you are in love, for the very good reason that I am married already and bigamy does not accord with the laws of France."

"Silence, Louis!" came in an agonised cry of protest from Madame, a cry that amounted to a shriek.

But His Majesty only laughed again, that same inane, affected laugh.

"Why should I be silent?" he queried blandly. "It will be known all over Europe presently that Louis XIX is no longer King of France, but just a happy man, married to the woman of his choice, the exquisite, the beautiful Aline Saint-Amand. And I swear to you here and now that I will always love and honour that gracious lady who has consented to be my wife."

He stepped back into the next room and closed the door behind him with a bang. Cyril, not unlike a maddened wild beast at that moment, took one leap in the direction of that door, but Madame was too quick for him, and interposed her tall, majestic figure between him and the murderous project that was only too apparent in

every line of his face. She said nothing. It was only her eyes that spoke, and Cyril, looking straight into them, suddenly felt all his rage, his hatred of her, fall away from him. For the first time in his life he felt a twinge of tenderness for her. It was tenderness born of pity. He was immensely sorry for her, as sorry as he would have been if he had seen a fine and noble animal wounded and bleeding. A look of hopeless misery came creeping over her handsome face; her eyes lost their lustre, her cheeks became grey, her lips appeared bloodless. She swayed slightly on her feet and Cyril instinctively put out his arms to steady her, but she drew away from him as if he had been a noxious beast.

But that mood only lasted a few seconds, and quite suddenly her whole attitude changed. Within a few seconds she was a transformed woman, and Cyril's pity for her gave place to complete amazement. She really was wonderful! The way she recovered herself, her air of authority, her domination over the catastrophic mischance appealed to Cyril's manliness, and roused his profound admiration. She just raised a handkerchief to her lips, and all trace of their quivering immediately vanished. And when she spoke, her voice, though perhaps more harsh even than usual, was perfectly steady.

"This is all sheer nonsense," she said coolly. "His Majesty has been inveigled into this by a designing woman. The marriage is entirely illegal, and the whole thing will be put right in a few days. In the meanwhile we will carry on in the way we have begun. You had better wait here, while I send someone round for Count Friesen. We will then hold council together, as to what action we had better take in the immediate future."

But Cyril shook his head gravely.

"You must count me out of your council, Madame, and out of all your future schemes."

"What do you mean?"

"That I am leaving Baden-Baden this afternoon."

"You are not serious."

"I was never so serious in all my life," he rejoined earnestly. "A man is not likely to joke when he sees the structure which he has built up at the cost of his honour fall to pieces like a mass of dirt."

"Aren't you talking rather high-falutin' twaddle?" Madame queried acidly.

"Perhaps I am. And I know I am tiring you. So I will go, if I may."

He turned to the door, but Madame checked him.

"Where are you going?" she asked peremptorily.

"First to Baron Christophe," he replied.

"To——" Madame gasped. She put a hand to her throat as if she were choking. But with characteristic energy she quickly recovered herself and said quite calmly:

"You are going to betray us."

"I am going to tell Baron Christophe the truth."

"If I thought you would do that," she retorted coldly, "I would kill you now."

"I wish you would."

Madame gave a contemptuous shrug.

"You are a fool, Cyril," was all she said in response: "or else mad like your father."

"I am English like my father. And in England men do not look on complacently when they see a good woman sacrificed for the ambition of politicians. I am not going to see Véronique Christophe made a pawn in the game which you are already turning over in your mind. I know that she will suffer—terribly, in her pride and in her affections, when she realises how she has been deceived and lied to, but that will be nothing to the lifelong agony she would endure if she were tied to a miserable skunk like my brother Louis."

Another contemptuous or angry retort hovered on Madame's lips, but her shrewd common sense came to her rescue just in time. She was quite clever enough to understand that she would gain nothing with this obstinate son of hers, either by passion or threat, and she was past-master in the art of changing her tactics as opportunity demanded. Past-master too in the art of suddenly changing her expression of face and the very tone of her voice. She did both now. Her whole face softened, her voice became gentle, almost appealing.

"Listen, Cyril," she said. "What is the use of our quarrelling like this? You attribute all sorts of evil motives to me, and, I am sorry to say, that we have never known each other intimately enough for you to understand me. . . . No!" she hastened to add when she saw an expression of bitterness flit over her son's face, "don't sneer. I assure you I know a great many more things than you give me credit for. For one thing I know that Véronique Christophe loves you just as much as you love her. . . . Don't interrupt me," she insisted. "I mean every word I say. Here are you two young people, fond of one another, whom a lucky chance has brought together. You want to spend your lives together, don't you? You wouldn't be human if you did not. Well! Your future together rests with you, and with me. That banker's draft can be stopped, of course. Louis will only be too happy to give up all claims to the throne of France, to Véronique Christophe and to her father's millions. All he will want will be an adequate sum of money to keep him and his egregious Aline in comparative luxury. On the other hand, you have already been accepted by a large

number of influential persons as the son of Louis XVII, and the rightful King of France. Nothing can shake you from that position, so long as you hold your tongue. I am too deeply involved in the whole affair not to hold mine, and so is Count Friesen."

She broke off at this point, and crossed over to her bureau. Cyril hadn't said a word. He just watched her while she opened a locked drawer and took out from it a bundle of papers. Out of these she selected a couple of documents, and with a hand that shook slightly she held them out for her son to see.

"These," she said, "are your birth and baptismal certificates, yours and Louis's. From this moment, the one in the name of Louis Antoine Marie Charles Aimé de Bourbon will be yours, and the other in the name of Cyril Arthur Bertrand will become Louis's. So you see," Madame concluded, "how simple and how safe it all is."

She still held the documents out to Cyril, and when he made no movement to take them, or even to look at them, she thrust them in her excitement, almost into his face, so that he had to step back to avoid her striking him with them.

"Why won't you look at them?" she insisted: "you don't mean——?"

The expression on her face supplied the end of the phrase. Incredulity first, then fear, then towering passion. Half choking, she murmured:

"In Heaven's name, on what grounds?"

"That a life of dishonour, of lying, of filching what is not yours, can only lead to tragedy in the end."

"But Louis is longing to abdicate."

"In favour of his cousin who will become the rightful King of France, but not in favour of Cyril Bertrand, the son of an English officer who would sooner have seen that son dead than living a life of dishonour."

"Honour?" Madame sneered. "Dishonour? Big words, my son! Selfish, egotistical words! What about the unfortunate Véronique and her future of humiliation and sorrow? Is that nothing to you?"

"Nothing to me?" he retorted. "Only my lifelong punishment for having lied to her."

And he was gone before Madame could stop him, or utter another word.

I

Twenty-four hours later Cyril was in Paris. He went straight to his studio in the Square Réaumur. He had wired to the *femme de ménage* from Strasbourg and she had got the place ready and cosy for him. A cheerful fire roared in the iron stove; his slippers were being kept warm beside the fire, and the petrol lamp shed a pleasant, subdued light in this room which at one time had meant peace, joy, and contentment for the young ambitious worker.

Now all it meant, all it would ever mean, was the memory of past joy and vanished quietude. Tearing himself away as soon as he could from Angèle's effusive and rather noisy welcome, he went into his tiny bedroom and started unpacking his suit-case. Would he ever settle down again, he wondered, to work, to cadge for commissions, to accept rejection or acceptance slips from the hanging committee of the Salon, with an easy and philosophical shrug? Would he enjoy his chats with Mimi, the little model, give her bonbons and take her down to the Restaurant des Trois Rois to share his cassoulette with him, after a hard day's work? He couldn't help smiling at the thought, for he knew that things would never be the same again. The spirit of Montmartre, the gay, careless spirit had fled from him never to return—at least so he thought at the moment. He had taken one quick comprehensive glance round the studio. Angèle, remembering past scoldings, had left everything in the same old order, the easel in its usual place, the platform with the rare Louis XV chair and the shabby bit of carpet and the empty wineglass on the table. How could the gay, careless spirit return when it would be met by this array of mute objects which bore testimony to the fact that things would never be again as they were before? Memories of the past were no longer happy. They were bitter and hurtful and raised demons of rebellion against Fate and a longing for revenge.

With a shrug and a sneer Cyril had glanced round the studio, the only home he could have offered, even if he had the mind, to the girl-woman who had dreamed of becoming Queen of France one day: "good Queen Véronique." He had been the King for a day and a night. For one whole blissful day he had tasted the ecstasy of love. He had held in his arms the most perfect of God's creations, and dreamed a dream that in itself was Nirvana. And now he was just a poor struggling unknown artist with nothing to offer but immeasurable love and the service of a lifetime, and he was left wondering whether the great Italian poet was right when he said that "sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things."

II

It was an "off-night" at the Restaurant des Trois Rois. The crowded evenings, when all that was notorious and distinguished assembled round the wooden tables, and ate homely fare washed down with thin wine or beer, had not yet started. Most artists were still away painting in the country. Other great men were paying visits in their patrons' châteaux, killing things by day and gossiping or playing whist by night. Cyril sat down at his accustomed table in the far corner of the room and ordered a *tournedos* and fried potatoes. There were two or three other men in the restaurant —men whom he knew—but in Montmartre one doesn't do more than nod to acquaintances when one isn't in the mood for gossip. Two strangers were sitting at a table close by. Young men, obviously English art students. Cyril listened perfunctorily to their talk. He loved the sound of English, loved everything in fact that was English, for the sake of the father whom he had never known, but whom, for some unaccountable reason, he had secretly worshipped. He had made great efforts to learn the language, at first from books, and in the past he had made as many friends as he could among the English art students who frequented the studios of Julien or Jean Paul Laurens.

The two young men talked about many things: pictures, books, London life, a law case which had filled the columns of *The Times* with sensational details for the past few days—one of them had apparently studied law at one time until he had found that he had an art vocation. And that is where the Unseen Hand of God pointed the way to Cyril Bertrand. The young man, speaking of the law case, mentioned the solicitors who were acting for one of the parties. They were names unknown to Cyril, but the address of the firm was in Lincoln's Inn Fields. The words struck Cyril's consciousness all in a moment. "Of course, Lincoln's Inn Fields," the man had said in reply to a question from his friend. And this set up a train of thought in Cyril's mind. A trail, long since lost. Where had he heard or seen those three words? Lincoln's Inn Fields?

It was not till he got back to the studio that he remembered. I suppose it will seem almost unbelievable that he should have forgotten. But heavens above! what a lot of things had happened since he had received that telegram from the unknown London solicitors. And it had made no lasting impression on his mind. The very morning the telegram arrived Count Friesen had come along with the fantastic proposition which had culminated in so much shame and such appalling disaster. Since that morning Cyril had been King of France for thirty-six hours. He had also been the happiest and most miserable of men.

Now he searched among a litter of papers which he had thrown into a drawer before starting with Friesen for Strasbourg and Fort Dyck. He found the telegram all right enough.

> "Have to acquaint you of the sudden death of Lord Longueville following an accident while shooting. You are his next of kin. Please come immediately. Carben and Houston, Solicitors, Lincoln's Inn Fields, London."

That is what it said. Well! Why not? London was a long way from Baden-Baden and it might be easier to forget over there than here where everything reminded one of the past. In London there would be nothing. The people he would meet had probably never heard of an uncrowned King of France, and if they had they would probably smile and speak of other pretenders to that problematical crown, who had all turned out to be adventurers unworthy of serious consideration. And if those same people had heard of Baron Christophe they would surely not know that the great financier had an exquisite daughter who was eating out her heart now with shame and disappointment. London? Why not? And why should one not be called Lord Longueville, instead of Cyril Bertrand? One name was as good as another, and, after all, what did it all matter? So long as one had something to do, something that would help one to forget.

Something that would help one not to be a weakling, to be a man, and to play the game.

And so Cyril Bertrand, the unknown struggling artist, packed up his suit-case once more and the next day crossed over to England.

I

Extracts from the diary of His Eminence Louis Beneventy, Cardinal Archbishop, Primate of Hungary, under date September 26th, 1860:

"It is with a shaking hand and a heavy heart that I am now putting on record the events of this very sad day. Looking back on the last entry I made in my diary, I can hardly believe that little more than forty-eight hours have gone by since then. Two days ago I made note in this same book, of my thoughts and impressions on that wonderful evening at the Villa Elisabeth, when I saw His Majesty the King of France plight his troth to the exquisite daughter of Baron Christophe and listened with a gladsome heart to the terms of a marriage contract which surely, I thought then, would receive the blessing of God. Never shall I forget that evening, and its memory will always be one of the happiest of my life, in spite of what has occurred since then. Never shall I forget that handsome kingly figure, the strong earnest face, the eyes that glowed with love, the lips that seemed incapable of lying. To see such an ideal—for it was an ideal—shattered, has nearly broken my heart. Through Baron Christophe—himself a broken-hearted man—I learnt early this morning that the handsome, earnest face, the noble brow and firm lips, were merely a mask to cover cruelty and deceit. His Majesty the King of France, whom may God forgive and save, has deceived us all, and broken the heart of an innocent and deeply-wronged woman.

"Thirty-six hours after the signature of the marriage contract, Baron Christophe received an urgent intimation to stop payment of the draft for half a milliard which he had handed over to His Majesty the King of France, as His Majesty would be unable to make use of the money in the manner Baron Christophe had intended that it should be used; also that His Majesty could not fulfil his promise to marry Mademoiselle Christophe, he having contracted a legal marriage with the young prima donna Aline Saint-Amand. The original intimation had come from Count Friesen, and Baron Christophe communicated it at once to me.

"Directly I heard I sent an urgent message to Count Friesen, begging him to come and see me, but my messenger failed to find him, nor could I get in touch with him the whole of this day. I was left to ponder on the

power which the devil exercises over certain souls that are noble in themselves, but are rendered weak through the wiles of designing women. Such a soul was that of His Majesty the King of France. Long experience has taught me to measure human character and human frailties, and I may safely say that never in my life have I seen a man whom I would have trusted so implicitly as I would His Majesty, as I saw him that night. And never in my life have I been so completely deceived.

"Later in the day, as I still failed to get in touch with Count Friesen, I performed the painful duty of calling on Madame la Princesse de Bourbon, the unfortunate mother of an unfortunate son. On enquiry at the Villa Elisabeth I heard, to my sorrow, that Madame was very ill, that two doctors were in attendance, and great anxiety was felt for her future health. I spoke to one of the Sisters of Mercy who were attending Madame, and from her I gathered that the noble lady had had a severe heart-attack, which necessitated her keeping to her bed.

"God forgive me, but I felt rather thankful that I was relieved from the prospect of such a painful interview. I sent a note round to Baron Christophe intimating that if my ministration was likely to be a comfort to his darling daughter, my time and service were at his disposal."

II

"September 27th, 9 a.m.

"I slept little last night and spent many hours in prayer, imploring God's mercy for His erring son, the King of France, and His goodness and loving kindness for those who, at this hour and through no fault of their own, are in sorrow and great adversity. More especially did I commend to His Fatherly Goodness, that poor child Véronique, on whom the weight of an immense affliction has fallen more heavily than on any one of us. I shall hope to see her later in the day, after my necessary interview with Count Friesen, for I have already received a very kind note from Baron Christophe, begging my presence by his daughter's side during the hour immediately following the terrible and, alas! inevitable revelation of the treachery which has been perpetrated against her.

"11 a.m.

"Count Friesen has just gone. He was with me over an hour, and has

left me in a state of bewilderment impossible to describe. He came to tell me the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, and it took him nearly an hour to persuade me that I was listening to the truth and not to the product of a fanciful imagination. The man whom I saw on that memorable evening at the Villa Elisabeth was not the King of France, but Cyril Bertrand, the son of Madame and her English husband. The man who had repudiated all his obligations, broken the heart of an innocent woman, foresworn his duty and smirched his crown was the real, the only legitimate King of France, Louis XIX, by the grace of God. To get these two facts into my head has meant a terrific effort for me in my declining years. What effect the revelation of them will have in the Chancelleries of Europe, on the mind of His Majesty the Emperor of Austria and of His Holiness the Pope, it is impossible to foresee. Count Friesen showed me the draft of a proclamation to be signed by His Majesty the King of France, renouncing all his rights present and future to the throne and crown of his forebears, in favour of his cousin, the Duc de Bordeaux, Comte de Chambord, henceforth Henri V, King of France. I could but approve of this step, although Count Friesen begged me most earnestly to use all my influence with Cyril Bertrand to continue the deception so successfully carried through the other evening. He argued that this could only be for the good of the cause and could not possibly injure or harm anyone. I thank God, however, that although I have been something of a diplomat all my life, I have never become a slave to the tortuous ways of diplomacy. Right has always seemed to me to be nothing but right, and wrong, nothing but wrong, even though it did no harm to anyone.

"But quite apart from my own feelings in the matter, I was quite convinced in my mind that the man before whom I had made obeisance on that fateful evening, who had stood before me then, proud, earnest and loyal, would never consent to lead a life of deception. He had, unfortunately, been misled by sophistry and specious arguments, perhaps also by sentiment, into starting a deception which, alas! has carried its punishment along with it. I thought of him in his loneliness, sorrowing, regretful and ashamed, but was glad to hear that Count Friesen, travelling with him as far as Strasbourg yesterday had tried hard, and tried in vain, to persuade him to deviate further from the path of rectitude and honour.

"God in his Fatherly Goodness grant him comfort and peace."

"6 p.m.

"I am more convinced than I ever was before that the finest creation of God is a good woman. I have spent a very happy hour with one this afternoon, and feel morally and mentally all the better for it. I must confess that after my interview with Count Friesen I felt terribly depressed. Things in the world appeared dismally out of tune. People whom I have liked and esteemed were in grave trouble. I saw nothing but tears, heard nothing but sighs around me, and when I said my prayers in the early part of the afternoon, I implored God's help in the hard task which I had before me, that of bringing comfort to that sorely afflicted child.

"To my astonishment I found her serene, almost cheerful. She was sitting on the floor in front of the fire by her father's knee. He had just told her the whole truth, and when the servant showed me into the room, she was sitting quite still, holding on to her father's hand and looking into the flames. Baron Christophe rose to greet me, and she, very alert, jumped up, made me a pretty curtsy, and dragged a comfortable chair close to the fire for me. We all sat down, Véronique resuming her place on the floor beside her father's knee. There was an engaging smile round her pretty mouth and her deep blue eyes looked more excited than sad. I began speaking first to her father then to her, hoping that I should find the right words in this terrible emergency. But Véronique herself quickly reassured me.

"'I know just what your Eminence is going to say,' she said gravely, 'but it won't be necessary. I don't want to be consoled or pitied. I am not unhappy.'

"'Thank God for that my child,' I said. 'You are very young, and your heart has not been wounded as deeply as I feared. Time is all in your favour——'

"Here Véronique broke in very quietly, and, as I could see with earnest conviction:

"'It is not a question of time,' she rejoined. 'Time will probably never bring anything different into my life. Perhaps I shall not wish it. I don't know. But I am not unhappy. I never shall be. You see,' she went on, and her dark eyes took on a strange, inward glow, 'I have not really been wronged. My King has not wronged me. My King loves me and he has

done no wrong.'

"What answer could I give to this naïve, this sublime profession of faith? The last thing in the world I would ever wish to do, would be to disturb the serenity of this loving soul.

"After a time I took my leave. Certainly of us three, the child herself was infinitely the most cheerful. Even when she took leave of me, she clung to my hand, her lovely eyes sought mine, and her lips murmured softly once more, the formula of her trust and her faith:

"'My King can do no wrong.'"

I

"Gmünd, September 23rd, 1862.

"This is a date I do not care to recall. It brings back memories that make my tired old heart ache with a desire which I know to be sinful—the desire that the joy and the hopes of that never-to-be-forgotten evening had been continued, and that the world had never known the tragedy that underlay it all.

"Two years have gone by since then. I can scarcely credit it. Time runs away so quickly when one is getting old. So many things have happened during those years, and I myself have been so helpless with gout that for months on end I failed in my self-imposed task of keeping my diary up-to-date. Thank God I am very much better now, and will make amends for past neglect.

"His Majesty the Emperor Francis Joseph is sending me to Paris on a special mission, the success or failure of which will have the greatest possible influence on the religious life of our friends in France. The few days I am spending here in prayer and self-communion are a preparation for my difficult task. During the past two years I have seen little or nothing of those who were my fellow-actors in the past tragedy. Baron Christophe alone came to see me last winter while I was in Vienna. I was happy to hear from him that Véronique has lost nothing of her serenity and of her faith. He had taken his daughter for an interesting voyage to Egypt during the autumn following the tragedy, and after that he settled down with her in the beautiful château he owns in Bohemia. But she has really seemed so well during all this time and so strangely happy, that he had decided to resume his normal life with her in Paris next winter. I couldn't help noticing, however, that whenever he spoke of his daughter, he appeared puzzled, as if there was something about her he could not understand.

"Madame la Princesse de Bourbon, I am sorry to say, has never recovered from the grave shock her son's conduct caused both to her health and to her spirits. She continues to live in Baden-Baden in the Villa Elisabeth, as she finds the curative waters there very beneficial, but she never leaves her room, and a Sister of Mercy is in constant attendance

upon her. I understand that His Majesty the Emperor of Austria, with his usual generosity, makes her a handsome allowance, which enables her to live quietly, in comparative comfort.

"Of his former Majesty the King of France I am not permitted to speak. He lives in Holland, so I am told, and his wife has sung with considerable success both in Berlin and at The Hague. Every loyal Frenchman, who believes in the divine right of Kings, has sworn allegiance to Henri V, the one and only legitimate King of France, whom may God guard and bring one day to the throne of his forbears. By tacit consent, the name of Louis XIX is never mentioned in royalist circles."

II

"Paris, November 9th, 1862.

"In the artistic *milieu* in which it has been my great good fortune to move there had been quite a good deal of talk about a beautiful picture which was on exhibition in one of the smaller art galleries in the Boulevard. It was a landscape, which art connoisseurs over here tell me could easily rank with some of the finest work of French paysagists. The talk at once awakened my deepest interest for I was told that the picture was signed Cyril Bertrand, a name that had already been favourably noted a couple of years ago through a remarkably fine portrait by the same brush of Mademoiselle Christophe, the daughter of the great international financier.

"I am an old man and I consider that my sacred calling gives me certain privileges, denied perhaps to others. I went to the gallery where Cyril Bertrand's picture was exhibited. I asked to speak to the manager and asked him to put me in touch with the artist whom I had known ever since he was a child. To my astonishment M. Petit, the manager, was strangely reticent, and with all the respect due to me, he firmly declined to give me the assistance which I sought. But though I am an old man, I am still wilful and obstinate. And standing before the picture signed Cyril Bertrand, recalling the fine, kingly figure before whom I had once made obeisance, I made up my mind that, undaunted by M. Petit's reticence, I would at all costs get in touch with the lad.

"Some people might think it sinful to act as I did then. But my conscience never pricked me for what I did do, and I am sure it would

have been very uneasy if I had done wrong. I paid a second visit to M. Petit's gallery, and instead of speaking with him personally I interviewed his clerk—a nice young fellow only too ready to accept the present of money I offered him, if he gave me valuable information concerning Monsieur Bertrand.

"What he told me was indeed astonishing. He showed me the last letter which the firm had received from the artist. It was dated from a place in England, where he lived, and his name was not Bertrand at all. He was Lord Longueville, and to all appearances a great gentleman, with plenty of money, a dilettante with a talent for painting which almost amounted to genius. I was bewildered. I know quite a good deal about England and its peerage, and that it often happens that a *cadet de famille* of one of the great houses will see his name changed three and four times, as older members of the family happen to die, and he becomes first the heir with a title of his own, and ultimately ends by being the head of the house. But I never knew that Sir Mark Bertrand, Madame's first husband, had any connection with the peerage. The letter was luckily written in French as I, alas! do not know a word of Shakespeare's tongue, and from it I gathered that Cyril would be coming over to Paris in about a fortnight's time. It ended with the words: 'I shall of course stay at my old studio in the Square Réaumur.'

"The young clerk put me *au fait* where the Square Réaumur was; anyone in the Square, he said, would tell me which was Monsieur Bertrand's studio. With many expressions of goodwill I gave him five louis, and went away quite satisfied with what I had done. All this occurred in the middle of last month.

"November 10th.

"I was too tired yesterday to continue writing and I didn't want to slur over any of the events of the past three weeks. After my second visit to Monsieur Petit's gallery, I prayed to God to guide me and to help me in the task I had set to myself. On my knees I thank Him now for His guidance and His aid.

"I began by seeking out my old friend Baron Christophe who had already taken up his residence in his fine mansion in the Rue de Varennes. He came to see me at my hotel and at my special request he paid me a second visit, this time bringing his daughter with him. Véronique was as

engaging, as young, and with it all as serene as before.

"I didn't mention Cyril, of course, nor his picture, but could not help speculating whether she had been to the gallery Petit or not. But we did speak of many things. I tried to interest the child in several serious questions, all of which obviously appealed to her. She was remarkably intelligent, and after this first visit she appeared extraordinarily grateful and flattered when I asked her to come now and then to cheer an old man in his solitude.

"She came again and again, and we had many intimate talks together on religion, on art, on social problems, so that before a fortnight had gone by we had become firm friends.

"On the third of this month I drove over Clichy way, dismissed my *voiture* at the entrance of the Square Réaumur, and went in search of my old friend Cyril Bertrand. Monsieur Petit's clerk had not prepared me for the surroundings in which I should find him. Those surroundings might almost be called squalid: the houses and the studio itself appeared more like the quarters of a struggling young artist, than those of a wealthy dilettante. The door was opened by an amiable and obese woman who told me that Monsieur Bertrand was out, and also that he never received visitors. However, a louis went a long way towards removing that objection, and also the fact that my winter coat, happening to gape at the moment, displayed the purple buttons of my cassock, and so over-awed the worthy woman that she nearly fell down on her knees, and only recovered herself sufficiently to usher me into the studio, where there was a cosy fire, and a certain atmosphere which strangely enough evoked before my mental vision just that same kingly form, and open, loyal countenance, which I had hoped to find.

"Cyril came in half an hour later. He received me with very obvious joy. I could not detect the slightest *arrière-pensée* in his fine eyes, or in the smile with which he greeted me. We talked of many things. I made him relate to me the circumstances under which he had become the head of a distinguished family. This he did quite frankly and again without *arrière-pensée*. When I have a little more leisure I will note all these circumstances in this little book. Never once were the names of Baron Christophe and of his daughter mentioned by either of us. But we spoke of Madame la Princesse and of His ex-Majesty, also of Count Friesen who had been transferred lately to the Austrian Legation in London, and

whose friendship Cyril apparently valued as highly as he had done before.

"We parted the best of friends, Cyril giving me his promise that he would come and see me at my hotel the very next morning. I went away somewhat saddened, for I had found him very changed. He looked older, very much older, and somehow he gave one the impression of a man who had done with life, and who only eked out the remaining years that were granted him, without looking forward to either joy or peace. He loved his art, but deprecated the success he was enjoying. Palette and brushes, I guessed, only helped him to forget.

"He came to see me two or three times, and very obviously enjoyed the intimate terms into which we both fell after his very first visit. As with Véronique I talked to him of many things, but unlike Véronique he appeared only dispassionately interested. I always encouraged him to call on me in the mornings, because my afternoons were devoted to Véronique.

"But three days ago I sent him word that I was engaged during the morning but begged him to come in the late afternoon.

"Véronique was with me. It was four o'clock. My sitting-room in the hotel looked exceptionally cosy. The chambermaid had, at my request, put bowls of roses on the tables. There was a cosy wood-fire burning in the open grate, and a soft rose-coloured shade tempered the light of the lamp. Never had I seen the child look more lovely, and I thanked God for having inspired me to do the one thing which has brought lifelong happiness to two loyal and trusting souls. She and I were talking over a charitable organisation which Baron Christophe had endowed recently, when the door was opened and Cyril came in. Véronique who had been gazing into the fire looked round and then rose all in a moment like a dart. He never moved but she advanced towards him, and as she did so she caught my eye and said:

"'I 'I knew that my King loved me and had done me no wrong.' Whereupon I went as noiselessly as I could out of the room, but before I had reached the door she was already in his arms."

THE END

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Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.
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[The end of *The Uncrowned King* by Baroness Emmuska Orczy]