

Memoirs of Casanova — Volume 15: with Voltaire eBook

Memoirs of Casanova — Volume 15: with Voltaire by Giacomo Casanova

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CHAPTER XIX

M. de Voltaire; My Discussions with That Great Man—Ariosto—The Duc de Villars—The Syndic and the Three Girls—Dispute with Voltaire—Aix-en-Savoie—The Marquis Desarmoises

“M. de Voltaire,” said I, “this is the happiest moment of my life. I have been your pupil for twenty years, and my heart is full of joy to see my master.”

“Honour me with your attendance on my course for twenty years more, and promise me that you will bring me my fees at the end of that time.”

“Certainly, if you promise to wait for me.”

This Voltairean sally made all present laugh, as was to be expected, for those who laugh keep one party in countenance at the other’s expense, and the side which has the laughter is sure to win; this is the rule of good society.

I was not taken by surprise, and waited to have my revenge.

Just then two Englishmen came in and were presented to him.

“These gentlemen are English,” said Voltaire; “I wish I were.”

I thought the compliment false and out of place; for the gentlemen were obliged to reply out of politeness that they wished they had been French, or if they did not care to tell a lie they would be too confused to tell the truth. I believe every man of honour should put his own nation first.

A moment after, Voltaire turned to me again and said that as I was a Venetian I must know Count Algarotti.

“I know him, but not because I am a Venetian, as seven-eighths of my dear countrymen are not even aware of his existence.”

“I should have said, as a man of letters.”

“I know him from having spent two months with him at Padua, seven years ago, and what particularly attracted my attention was the admiration he professed for M. de Voltaire.”

“That is flattering for me, but he has no need of admiring anyone.”



“If Algarotti had not begun by admiring others, he would never have made a name for himself. As an admirer of Newton he endeavoured to teach the ladies to discuss the theory of light.”

“Has he succeeded?”

“Not as well as M. de Fontenelle in his ‘Plurality of Worlds;’ however, one may say he has succeeded.”

“True. If you see him at Bologna, tell him I am expecting to hear from him about Russia. He can address my letters to my banker, Bianchi, at Milan, and they will be sent on to me.”

“I will not fail to do so if I see him.”

“I have heard that the Italians do not care for his style.”

“No; all that he writes is full of French idioms. His style is wretched.”

“But do not these French turns increase the beauty of your language?”

“They make it insufferable, as French would be mixed with Italian or German even though it were written by M. de Voltaire.”

“You are right; every language should preserve its purity. Livy has been criticised on this account; his Latin is said to be tainted with patavinity.”



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“When I began to learn Latin, the Abbe Lazzarini told me he preferred Livy to Sallust.”

“The Abbe Lazzarini, author of the tragedy, ‘Ulisse il giovine’? You must have been very young; I wish I had known him. But I knew the Abbe Conti well; the same that was Newton’s friend, and whose four tragedies contain the whole of Roman history.”

“I also knew and admired him. I was young, but I congratulated myself on being admitted into the society of these great men. It seems as if it were yesterday, though it is many years ago; and now in your presence my inferiority does not humiliate me. I wish to be the younger son of all humanity.”

“Better so than to be the chief and eldest. May I ask you to what branch of literature you have devoted yourself?”

“To none; but that, perhaps, will come afterwards. In the meantime I read as much as I can, and try to study character on my travels.”

“That is the way to become learned, but the book of humanity is too vast. Reading a history is the easier way.”

“Yes, if history did not lie. One is not sure of the truth of the facts. It is tiring, while the study of the world is amusing. Horace, whom I know by heart, is my guide-book.”

“Algarotti, too, is very fond of Horace. Of course you are fond of poetry?”

“It is my passion.”

“Have you made many sonnets?”

“Ten or twelve I like, and two or three thousand which in all probability I have not read twice.”

“The Italians are mad after sonnets.”

“Yes; if one can call it a madness to desire to put thought into measured harmony. The sonnet is difficult because the thought has to be fitted exactly into the fourteen lines.”

“It is Procrustes’ bed, and that’s the reason you have so few good ones. As for us, we have not one; but that is the fault of our language.”

“And of the French genius, which considers that a thought when extended loses all its force.”

“And you do not think so?”



“Pardon me, it depends on the kind of thought. A witty saying, for example, will not make a sonnet; in French or Italian it belongs to the domain of epigram.”

“What Italian poet do you like best?”

“Ariosto; but I cannot say I love him better than the others, for he is my only love.”

“You know the others, though?”

“I think I have read them all, but all their lights pale before Ariosto’s. Fifteen years ago I read all you have written against him, and I said that you, would retract when you had read his works.”

“I am obliged to you for thinking that I had not read them. As a matter of fact I had done so, but I was young. I knew Italian very imperfectly, and being prejudiced by the learned Italians who adore Tasso I was unfortunate enough to publish a criticism of Ariosto which I thought my own, while it was only the echo of those who had prejudiced me. I adore your Ariosto!”



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“Ah! M. de Voltaire, I breathe again. But be good enough to have the work in which you turned this great man into ridicule excommunicated.”

“What use would that be? All my books are excommunicated; but I will give you a good proof of my retractation.”

I was astonished! The great man began to recite the two fine passages from the thirty-fourth and thirty-fifth cantos, in which the divine poet speaks of the conversation of Astolpho with St. John and he did it without missing a single life or committing the slightest fault against the laws of prosody. He then pointed out the beauties of the passages with his natural insight and with a great man’s genius. I could not have had anything better from the lips of the most skilled commentators in Italy. I listened to him with the greatest attention, hardly daring to breath, and waiting for him to make a mistake, but I had my trouble for nothing. I turned to the company crying that I was more than astonished, and that all Italy should know what I had seen. “And I, sir,” said the great man, “will let all Europe know of the amends I owe to the greatest genius our continent has produced.”

Greedy of the praise which he deserved so well, Voltaire gave me the next day his translation which Ariosto begins thus:

“Quindi avvien the tra principi a signori.”

At the end of the recitation which gained the applause of all who heard it, although not one of them knew Italian, Madame Denis, his niece, asked me if I thought the passage her uncle had just recited one of the finest the poet had written.

“Yes, but not the finest.”

“It ought to be; for without it Signor Lodovico would not have gained his apotheosis.”

“He has been canonised, then? I was not aware of that.”

At these words the laugh, headed by Voltaire, went for Madame Denis. Everybody laughed except myself, and I continued to look perfectly serious.

Voltaire was vexed at not seeing me laugh like the rest, and asked me the reason.

“Are you thinking,” said he, “of some more than human passage?”

“Yes,” I answered.

“What passage is that?”



“The last thirty-six stanzas of the twenty-third canto, where the poet describes in detail how Roland became mad. Since the world has existed no one has discovered the springs of madness, unless Ariosto himself, who became mad in his old age. These stanzas are terrible, and I am sure they must have made you tremble.”

“Yes, I remember they render love dreadful. I long to read them again.”

“Perhaps the gentleman will be good enough to recite them,” said Madame Denis, with a side-glance at her uncle.

“Willingly,” said I, “if you will have the goodness to listen to me.”

“You have learn them by heart, then, have you?” said Voltaire.



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“Yes, it was a pleasure and no trouble. Since I was sixteen, I have read over Ariosto two or three times every year; it is my passion, and the lines naturally become linked in my memory without my having given myself any pains to learn them. I know it all, except his long genealogies and his historical tirades, which fatigue the mind and do not touch the heart. It is only Horace that I know throughout, in spite of the often prosaic style of his epistles, which are certainly far from equalling Boileau’s.”

“Boileau is often too lengthy; I admire Horace, but as for Ariosto, with his forty long cantos, there is too much of him.”

“It is fifty-one cantos, M. de Voltaire.”

The great man was silent, but Madame Denis was equal to the occasion.

“Come, come,” said she, “let us hear the thirty-six stanzas which earned the author the title of divine, and which are to make us tremble.”

I then began, in an assured voice, but not in that monotonous tone adopted by the Italians, with which the French so justly reproach us. The French would be the best reciters if they were not constrained by the rhyme, for they say what they feel better than any other people. They have neither the passionate monotonous tone of my fellow-countrymen, nor the sentimentality of the Germans, nor the fatiguing mannerisms of the English; to every period they give its proper expression, but the recurrence of the same sounds partly spoils their recitation. I recited the fine verses of Ariosto, as if it had been rhythmic prose, animating it by the sound of my voice and the movements of my eyes, and by modulating my intonation according to the sentiments with which I wished to inspire my audience. They saw how hardly I could restrain my tears, and every eye was wet; but when I came to the stanza,

“Poiche allargare il freno al dolor puote,
Che resta solo senza altrui rispetto,
Giu dagli occhi rigando per le gote
Sparge un fiume de lacrime sul petto,”

my tears coursed down my cheeks to such an extent that everyone began to sob. M. de Voltaire and Madame Denis threw their arms round my neck, but their embraces could not stop me, for Roland, to become mad, had to notice that he was in the same bed in which Angelica had lately been found in the arms of the too fortunate Medor, and I had to reach the next stanza. For my voice of sorrow and wailing I substituted the expression of that terror which arose naturally from the contemplation of his fury, which was in its effects like a tempest, a volcano, or an earthquake.

When I had finished I received with a sad air the congratulations of the audience. Voltaire cried,



“I always said so; the secret of drawing tears is to weep one’s self, but they must be real tears, and to shed them the heart must be stirred to its depths. I am obliged to you, sir,” he added, embracing me, “and I promise to recite the same stanzas myself to-morrow, and to weep like you.”



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He kept his word.

“It is astonishing,” said Madame Denis, “that intolerant Rome should not have condemned the song of Roland.”

“Far from it,” said Voltaire, “Leo X. excommunicated whoever should dare to condemn it. The two great families of Este and Medici interested themselves in the poet’s favour. Without that protection it is probable that the one line on the donation of Rome by Constantine to Silvester, where the poet speaks ‘puzza forte’ would have sufficed to put the whole poem under an interdict.”

“I believe,” said I, “that the line which has excited the most talk is that in which Ariosto throws doubt on the general resurrection. Ariosto,” I added, “in speaking of the hermit who would have hindered Rhodomonte from getting possession of Isabella, widow of Zerbin, paints the African, who wearied of the hermit’s sermons, seizes him and throws him so far that he dashes him against a rock, against which he remains in a dead swoon, so that ‘che al novissimo di forse fia desto’.”

This ‘forse’ which may possibly have only been placed there as a flower of rhetoric or as a word to complete the verse, raised a great uproar, which would doubtless have greatly amused the poet if he had had time!

“It is a pity,” said Madame Denis, “that Ariosto was not more careful in these hyperbolical expressions.”

“Be quiet, niece, they are full of wit. They are all golden grains, which are dispersed throughout the work in the best taste.”

The conversation was then directed towards various topics, and at last we got to the ‘Ecoissaise’ we had played at Soleure.

They knew all about it.

M. de Voltaire said that if I liked to play it at his house he would write to M. de Chavigni to send the Lindane, and that he himself would play Montrose. I excused myself by saying that Madame was at Bale and that I should be obliged to go on my journey the next day. At this he exclaimed loudly, aroused the whole company against me, and said at last that he should consider my visit as an insult unless I spared him a week at least of my society.

“Sir,” said I, “I have only come to Geneva to have the honour of seeing you, and now that I have obtained that favour I have nothing more to do.”

“Have you come to speak to me, or for me to speak to you?”



“In a measure, of course, to speak to you, but much more for you to speak to me.”

“Then stay here three days at least; come to dinner every day, and we will have some conversation.”

The invitation was so flattering and pressing that I could not refuse it with a good grace. I therefore accepted, and I then left to go and write.

I had not been back for a quarter of an hour when a syndic of the town, an amiable man, whom I had seen at M. de Voltaire’s, and whose name I shall not mention, came and asked me to give him supper. “I was present,” said he, “at your argument with the great man, and though I did not open my mouth I should much like to have an hour’s talk with you.” By way of reply, I embraced him, begging him to excuse my dressing-gown, and telling him that I should be glad if he would spend the whole night with me.



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The worthy man spent two hours with me, without saying a word on the subject of literature, but to please me he had no need to talk of books, for he was a disciple of Epicurus and Socrates, and the evening was spent in telling little stories, in bursts of laughter, and in accounts of the various kinds of pleasure obtainable at Geneva. Before leaving me he asked me to come and sup with him on the following evening, promising that boredom should not be of the party.

“I shall wait for you,” said I.

“Very good, but don’t tell anyone of the party.”

I promised to follow his instructions.

Next morning, young Fox came to see me with the two Englishmen I had seen at M. de Voltaire’s. They proposed a game of quinze, which I accepted, and after losing fifty louis I left off, and we walked about the town till dinner-time.

We found the Duc de Villars at Delices; he had come there to consult Dr. Tronchin, who had kept him alive for the last ten years.

I was silent during the repast, but at dessert, M. de Voltaire, knowing that I had reasons for not liking the Venetian Government, introduced the subject; but I disappointed him, as I maintained that in no country could a man enjoy more perfect liberty than in Venice.

“Yes,” said he, “provided he resigns himself to play the part of a dumb man.”

And seeing that I did not care for the subject, he took me by the arm to his garden, of which, he said, he was the creator. The principal walk led to a pretty running stream.

“’Tis the Rhone,” said he, “which I send into France.”

“It does not cost you much in carriage, at all events,” said I.

He smiled pleasantly and shewed me the principal street of Geneva, and Mont Blanc which is the highest point of the Alps.

Bringing back the conversation to Italian literature, he began to talk nonsense with much wit and learning, but always concluding with a false judgment. I let him talk on. He spoke of Homer, Dante, and Petrarch, and everybody knows what he thought of these great geniuses, but he did himself wrong in writing what he thought. I contented myself with saying that if these great men did not merit the esteem of those who studied them; it would at all events be a long time before they had to come down from the high place in which the praise of centuries, had placed them.



The Duc de Villars and the famous Tronchin came and joined us. The doctor, a tall fine man, polite, eloquent without being a conversationalist, a learned physician, a man of wit, a favourite pupil of Boerhaeve, without scientific jargon, or charlatanism, or self-sufficiency, enchanted me. His system of medicine was based on regimen, and to make rules he had to be a man of profound science. I have been assured, but can scarcely believe it, that he cured a consumptive patient of a secret disease by means of the milk of an ass, which he had submitted to thirty strong frictions of mercury by four sturdy porters.

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As to Villars he also attracted my attention, but in quite a different way to Tronchin. On examining his face and manner I thought I saw before me a woman of seventy dressed as a man, thin and emaciated, but still proud of her looks, and with claims to past beauty. His cheeks and lips were painted, his eyebrows blackened, and his teeth were false; he wore a huge wig, which, exhaled amber, and at his buttonhole was an enormous bunch of flowers, which touched his chin. He affected a gracious manner, and he spoke so softly that it was often impossible to hear what he said. He was excessively polite and affable, and his manners were those of the Regency. His whole appearance was supremely ridiculous. I was told that in his youth he was a lover of the fair sex, but now that he was no longer good for anything he had modestly made himself into a woman, and had four pretty pets in his employ, who took turns in the disgusting duty of warming his old carcass at night.

Villars was governor of Provence, and had his back eaten up with cancer. In the course of nature he should have been buried ten years ago, but Tronchin kept him alive with his regimen and by feeding the wounds on slices of veal. Without this the cancer would have killed him. His life might well be called an artificial one.

I accompanied M. de Voltaire to his bedroom, where he changed his wig and put on another cap, for he always wore one on account of the rheumatism to which he was subject. I saw on the table the Summa of St. Thomas, and among other Italian poets the 'Secchia Rapita' of Tassoni.

"This," said Voltaire, "is the only tragicomic poem which Italy has. Tassoni was a monk, a wit and a genius as well as a poet."

"I will grant his poetical ability but not his learning, for he ridiculed the system of Copernicus, and said that if his theories were followed astronomers would not be able to calculate lunations or eclipses."

"Where does he make that ridiculous remark?"

"In his academical discourses."

"I have not read them, but I will get them."

He took a pen and noted the name down, and said,—

"But Tassoni has criticised Petrarch very ingeniously."

"Yes, but he has dishonoured taste and literature, like Muratori."

"Here he is. You must allow that his learning is immense."

"Est ubi peccat."



Voltaire opened a door, and I saw a hundred great files full of papers.

“That’s my correspondence,” said he. “You see before you nearly fifty thousand letters, to which I have replied.”

“Have you a copy of your answers?”

“Of a good many of them. That’s the business of a servant of mine, who has nothing else to do.”

“I know plenty of booksellers who would give a good deal to get hold of your answers.

“Yes; but look out for the booksellers when you publish anything, if you have not yet begun; they are greater robbers than Barabbas.”



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“I shall not have anything to do with these gentlemen till I am an old man.”

“Then they will be the scourge of your old age.”

Thereupon I quoted a Macaronic verse by Merlin Coccaeus.

“Where’s that from?”

“It’s a line from a celebrated poem in twenty-four cantos.”

“Celebrated?”

“Yes; and, what is more, worthy of being celebrated; but to appreciate it one must understand the Mantuan dialect.”

“I could make it out, if you could get me a copy.”

“I shall have the honour of presenting you with one to-morrow.”

“You will oblige me extremely.”

We had to leave his room and spend two hours in the company, talking over all sorts of things. Voltaire displayed all the resources of his brilliant and fertile wit, and charmed everyone in spite of his sarcastic observations which did not even spare those present, but he had an inimitable manner of lancing a sarcasm without wounding a person’s feelings. When the great man accompanied his witticisms with a graceful smile he could always get a laugh.

He kept up a notable establishment and an excellent table, a rare circumstance with his poetic brothers, who are rarely favourites of Plutus as he was. He was then sixty years old, and had a hundred and twenty thousand francs a year. It has been said maliciously that this great man enriched himself by cheating his publishers; whereas the fact was that he fared no better than any other author, and instead of duping them was often their dupe. The Cramers must be excepted, whose fortune he made. Voltaire had other ways of making money than by his pen; and as he was greedy of fame, he often gave his works away on the sole condition that they were to be printed and published. During the short time I was with him, I was a witness of such a generous action; he made a present to his bookseller of the “Princess of Babylon,” a charming story which he had written in three days.

My epicurean syndic was exact to his appointment, and took me to a house at a little distance where he introduced me to three young ladies, who, without being precisely beautiful, were certainly ravishing. Two of them were sisters. I had an easy and pleasant welcome, and from their intellectual appearance and gay manners I anticipated a delightful evening, and I was not disappointed. The half hour before supper was



passed in conversation, decent but without restraint, and during supper, from the hints the syndic gave me, I guessed what would happen after dessert.

It was a hot evening, and on the pretext of cooling ourselves, we undressed so as to be almost in a state of nature. What an orgy we had! I am sorry I am obliged to draw a veil over the most exciting details. In the midst of our licentious gaiety, whilst we were heated by love, champagne, and a discourse of an exciting nature, I proposed to recite Grecourt's 'Y Gyec'. When I had finished the voluptuous poem, worthy of an abbe's pen, I saw that the eyes of the three beauties were all aflame, and said,—



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“Ladies, if you like, I will shew you all three, one after the other, why the sentence, ‘Gaudeant bene nati’, was uttered”; and without waiting for their reply, I succeeded in making them happy. The syndic was radiant, he was pleased at having given me a present entirely to my taste; and I fancied that the entertainment was not displeasing to the three Graces, who were kept low by the Sybarite, as his powers were almost limited to desires. The girls lavished their thanks on me, while I endeavoured to assure them of my gratitude; but they leapt for joy when they heard the syndic asking me to come next day.

As he was taking me back to my inn I told him how great a pleasure he had given me, and he said he had brought up the three jewels himself.

“You,” he added, “are the only man besides myself they know. You shall see them again, but I beg you will take care not to leave anything behind you, for in this town of prejudices that would be a great misfortune for them and for me.”

“You are always moderate in your enjoyment, then?” I said to him.

“Unfortunately, that is no merit as far as I am concerned. I was born for the service of love, and Venus has punished me for worshipping her when I was too young.”

After a good night’s sleep I awoke in an active mood, and began to write a letter to Voltaire in blank verse, which cost me four times the pains that rhymed verses would have done. I sent it to him with the poem of Theophile Falengue, but I made a mistake in doing so, as I might have known he would not care for it; one cannot appreciate what one does not understand. I then went to Mr. Fox, where I found the two Englishmen who offered me my revenge. I lost a hundred Louis, and was glad to see them set out for Lausanne.

The syndic had told me that the three young ladies belonged to respectable families, but were not rich. I puzzled my head to think of some useful present I might make them without offending them, and at last I hit on a plan of the most ridiculous nature, as the reader will see. I went to a jeweller and told him to make me three golden balls, each of two ounces in weight.

At noon I went to M. de Voltaire’s. He was not to be seen, but Madame Denis consoled me for his absence. She had wit, learning without pretension, taste, and a great hatred for the King of Prussia, whom she called a villain. She asked about my beautiful housekeeper, and congratulated me on having married her to a respectable man. Although I feel now that she was quite right, I was far from thinking so then; the impression was too fresh on my mind. Madame Denis begged me to tell her how I had escaped from The Leads, but as the story was rather a long one I promised to satisfy her another time.



M. de Voltaire did not dine with us; he appeared, however, at five o'clock, holding a letter in his hand.

“Do you know,” said he, “the Marquis Albergati Capacelli, senator of Bologna, and Count Paradisi?”



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"I do not know Paradisi, but I know Albergati by sight and by reputation; he is not a senator, but one of the Forty, who at Bologna are Fifty."

"Dear me! That seems rather a riddle!"

"Do you know him?"

"No, but he has sent me Goldoni's 'Theatre,' the translation of my Tancred, and some Bologna sausages, and he says he will come and see me."

"He will not come; he is not such a fool."

"How a fool? Would there be anything foolish in coming to see me?"

"Certainly not, as far as you are concerned; but very much so far his own sake."

"Would you mind telling me why?"

"He knows what he would lose; for he enjoys the idea you seem to have of him, and if he came you would see his nothingness, and good-bye to the illusion. He is a worthy man with six thousand sequins a year, and a craze for the theatre. He is a good actor enough, and has written several comedies in prose, but they are fit neither for the study nor the stage."

"You certainly give him a coat which does not make him look any bigger."

"I assure you it is not quite small enough."

"But tell me how he can belong to the Forty and the Fifty?"

"Just as at Bale noon is at eleven."

"I understand; just as your Council of Ten is composed of seventeen members."

"Exactly; but the cursed Forty of Bologna are men of another kind."

"Why cursed?"

"Because they are not subject to the fisc, and are thus enabled to commit whatever crimes they like with perfect impunity; all they have got to do is to live outside the state borders on their revenues."

"That is a blessing, and not a curse; but let me return to our subject. I suppose the Marquis Albergati is a man of letters?"



“He writes well enough, but he is fond of the sound of his own voice, his style is prolix, and I don’t think he has much brains.”

“He is an actor, I think you said?”

“Yes, and a very good one, above all, when he plays the lover’s part in one of his own plays.”

“Is he a handsome man?”

“Yes, on the stage, but not elsewhere; his face lacks expression.”

“But his plays give satisfaction?”

“Not to persons who understand play writing; they would be hissed if they were intelligible.”

“And what do you think of Goldoni?”

“I have the highest opinion of him. Goldoni is the Italian Moliere.”

“Why does he call himself poet to the Duke of Parma?”

“No doubt to prove that a wit as well as a fool has his weak points; in all probability the duke knows nothing about it. He also calls himself a barrister, though he is such only in his own imagination. Goldoni is a good play writer, and nothing more. Everybody in Venice knows me for his friend, and I can therefore speak of him with authority. He does not shine in society, and in spite of the fine satire of his works he is a man of an extremely gentle disposition.”



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“So I have been told. He is poor, and wants to leave Venice. The managers of the theatres where they play his pieces will not like that.”

“People talked about getting him a pension, but the project has been relegated to the Greek Kalends, as they said that if he had a pension he would write no more.”

“Cumae refused to give a pension to Homer, for fear that all the blind men would ask for a pension.”

We spent a pleasant day, and he thanked me heartily for the copy of the Macaronicon, which he promised to read. He introduced me to a Jesuit he had in his household, who was called Adam, and he added, after telling me his name, “not the first Adam.” I was told afterwards that Voltaire used to play backgammon with him, and when he lost he would throw the dice and the box at his head. If Jesuits were treated like that all the world over, perhaps we should have none but inoffensive Jesuits at last, but that happy time is still far off.

I had scarcely got to my inn in the evening when I received my three golden balls, and as soon as the syndic came we set off to renew our voluptuous orgy. On the way he talked about modesty, and said,—

“That feeling which prevents our shewing those parts which we have been taught to cover from our childhood, may often proceed from virtue, but is weaker than the force of education, as it cannot resist an attack when the attacking party knows what he is about. I think the easiest way to vanquish modesty is to ignore its presence, to turn it into ridicule, to carry it by storm. Victory is certain. The hardihood of the assailer subdues the assailed, who usually only wishes to be conquered, and nearly always thanks you for your victory.

“Clement of Alexandria, a learned man and a philosopher, has remarked that the modesty which appears so deeply rooted in women’s hearts really goes no farther than the clothes they wear, and that when these are plucked off no trace of it remains.”

We found the three girls lightly clad and sitting on a large sofa, and we sat down opposite to them. Pleasant talk and a thousand amorous kisses occupied the half hour just before supper, and our combat did not begin till we had eaten a delicious repast, washed down with plenty of champagne.

We were sure of not being interrupted by the maid and we put ourselves at our ease, whilst our caresses became more lively and ardent. The syndic, like a careful man, drew a packet of fine French letters from his pocket, and delivered a long eulogium on this admirable preservative from an accident which might give rise to a terrible and fruitless repentance. The ladies knew them, and seemed to have no objection to the

precaution; they laughed heartily to see the shape these articles took when they were blown out. But after they had amused themselves thus for some time, I said,



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“My dear girls, I care more for your honour than your beauty; but do not think I am going to shut myself in a piece of dead skin to prove that I am alive. Here,” I added, drawing out the three golden balls, “is a surer and less disagreeable way of securing you from any unpleasant consequences. After fifteen years’ experience I can assure you that with these golden balls you can give and take without running the least risk. For the future you will have no need of those humiliating sheaths. Trust in me and accept this little present from a Venetian who adores you.”

“We are very grateful,” said the elder of the two sisters, “but how are these pretty balls used?”

“The ball has to be at the rear of the temple of love, whilst the amorous couple are performing the sacrifice. The antipathy communicated to the metal by its being soaked for a certain time in an alkaline solution prevents impregnation.”

“But,” said the cousin, “one must take great care that the ball is not shaken out by the motion before the end of the sacrifice.”

“You needn’t be afraid of that if you place yourself in a proper position.”

“Let us see how it’s done,” said the syndic, holding a candle for me to put the ball in place.

The charming cousin had gone too far to turn back; she had to submit to the operation. I placed the ball in such a position that it could not fall out before I was in; however, it fell out towards the end, just as we were separating. The victim perceived that I had taken her in. However, she said nothing, picked up the ball, and challenged the two sisters to submit to the pleasant experiment, to which they lent themselves with the greatest interest; while the syndic, who had no faith in the virtues of the metal, contented himself with looking on. After half an hour’s rest I began again, without balls, assuring them that I would be careful, and I kept my word, without depriving them of the pleasure in the slightest degree.

When it was time to part, these girls, who had formerly been scantily provided for, threw their arms round my neck, overwhelmed me with caresses, and declared how much they owed me. The syndic told them that I was going in two days, and suggested that they should make me stay a day longer in Geneva, and I made this sacrifice joyfully. The worthy syndic had an engagement on the following day, and I sorely needed a holiday myself. He took me back to my inn, thanking me almost as heartily as his charming nymphs.

After having enjoyed a calm and refreshing sleep ten hours, I felt myself able to enjoy the delightful society of M. de Voltaire. I went to his house, but I was disappointed in my



hopes, as it pleased the great man to be in a fault-finding and sarcastic mood the whole day. He knew I had to leave on the morrow.

He began by thanking me at table for my present of Merlin Coccaeus.

“You certainly gave it me with good intentions,” said he, “but I owe you no thanks for praising it so highly, as you made me lose four hours in reading nonsense.”



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I felt my hair stand on end, but I mastered my emotions, and told him quietly enough that one day, perhaps, he would find himself obliged to praise the poem more highly than I had done. I quoted several instances of the insufficiency of a first perusal.

“That’s true,” said he; “but as for your Merlin, I will read him no more. I have put him beside Chapelain’s ‘Pucelle’.”

“Which pleases all the critics, in spite of its bad versification, for it is a good poem, and Chapelain was a real poet though he wrote bad verses. I cannot overlook his genius.”

My freedom must have shocked him, and I might have guessed it when he told me he had put the ‘Macaronicon’ beside the ‘Pucelle’. I knew that there was a poem of the same title in circulation, which passed for Voltaire’s; but I also knew that he disavowed it, and I thought that would make him conceal the vexation my explanation must have caused him. It was not so, however; he contradicted me sharply, and I closed with him.

“Chapelain,” said I, “has the merit of having rendered his subject-matter pleasant, without pandering to the tastes of his readers by saying things shocking to modesty and piety. So thinks my master Crebillon:”

“Crebillon! You cite a weighty authority. But how is my friend Crebillon your master, may I ask?”

“He taught me to speak French in less than two years, and as a mark of my gratitude I translated his Radamiste into Italian Alexandrines. I am the first Italian who has dared to use this metre in our language.”

“The first? I beg your pardon, as that honour belongs to my friend Pierre Jacques Martelli.”

“I am sorry to be obliged to tell you that you are making a mistake.”

“Why, I have his works, printed at Bologna, in my room!”

“I don’t deny that, I am only talking about the metre used by Martelli. What you are thinking of must be verses of fourteen syllables; without alternative masculine and feminine rhymes. However, I confess that he thinks he has imitated the French Alexandrines, and his preface made me explode with laughter. Did you read it?”

“Read it? I always read prefaces, and Martelli proves there that his verses have the same effect in Italian as our Alexandrine verses have in French.”

“Exactly, that’s what’s so amusing. The worthy man is quite mistaken, and I only ask you to listen to what I have to say on the subject. Your masculine verse has only twelve poetic syllables, and the feminine thirteen. All Martelli’s lines have fourteen syllables,



except those that finish with a long vowel, which at the end of a line always counts as two syllables. You will observe that the first hemistich in Martelli always consists of seven syllables, while in French it only has six. Your friend Pierre Jacques was either stone deaf or very hard of hearing.”

“Then you have followed our theory of versification rigorously.”



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“Just so, in spite of the difficulty, as nearly all our words end with a short syllable.”

“What reception has been accorded to your innovation?”

“It has not been found pleasing, because nobody knows how to recite my verses; but I hope to triumph when I deliver them myself before our literary clubs.”

“Do you remember any of your version of the Radamiste?”

“I remember it all.”

“You have a wonderful memory; I should be glad to hear it.”

I began to recite the same scene that I had recited to Crebillon ten years before, and I thought M. de Voltaire listened with pleasure.

“It doesn’t strike one as at all harsh,” said he.

This was the highest praise he would give me. In his turn the great man recited a passage from Tancred which had not as yet been published, and which was afterwards considered, and rightly, as a masterpiece.

We should have got on very well if we had kept to that, but on my quoting a line of Horace to praise one of his pieces, he said that Horace was a great master who had given precepts which would never be out of date. Thereupon I answered that he himself had violated one of them, but that he had violated it grandly.

“Which is that?”

“You do not write, ‘Contentus paucis lectoribus’.”

“If Horace had had to combat the hydra-headed monster of superstition, he would have written as I have written—for all the world.”

“It seems to me that you might spare yourself the trouble of combating what you will never destroy.”

“That which I cannot finish others will, and I shall always have the glory of being the first in the field.”

“Very good; but supposing you succeed in destroying superstition, what are you going to put in its place?”

“I like that. If I deliver the race of man from a wild beast which is devouring it, am I to be asked what I intend to put in its place?”



“It does not devour it; on the contrary, it is necessary to its existence.”

“Necessary to its existence! That is a horrible blasphemy, the falsity of which will be seen in the future. I love the human race; I would fain see men like myself, free and happy, and superstition and freedom cannot go together. Where do you find an enslaved and yet a happy people?”

“You wish, then, to see the people sovereign?”

“God forbid! There must be a sovereign to govern the masses.”

“In that case you must have superstition, for without it the masses will never obey a mere man decked with the name of monarch.”

“I will have no monarch; the word expresses despotism, which I hate as I do slavery.”

“What do you mean, then? If you wish to put the government in the hands of one man, such a man, I maintain, will be a monarch.”

“I would have a sovereign ruler of a free people, of which he is the chief by an agreement which binds them both, which would prevent him from becoming a tyrant.”



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“Addison will tell you that such a sovereign is a sheer impossibility. I agree with Hobbes, of two evils choose the least. A nation without superstition would be a nation of philosophers, and philosophers would never obey. The people will only be happy when they are crushed and down-trodden, and bound in chains.”

“This is horrible; and you are of the people yourself. If you have read my works you must have seen how I shew that superstition is the enemy of kings.”

“Read your works? I have read and re-read them, especially in places where I have differed from you. Your ruling passion is the love of humanity. ‘Est ubi peccas’. This blinds you. Love humanity, but love it as it is. It is not fit to receive the blessings you would lavish on it, and which would only make it more wretched and perverse. Leave men their devouring monster, it is dear to them. I have never laughed so heartily as at Don Quixote assailed by the galley-slaves whom his generosity had set free.”

“I am sorry that you have such a bad opinion of your fellow-creatures. And by the way, tell me whether there is freedom in Venice.”

“As much as can be expected under an aristocracy. Our liberty is not so great as that which the English enjoy, but we are content.”

“Even under The Leads?”

“My imprisonment was certainly despotic; but as I had knowingly abused my liberty I am satisfied that the Government was within its rights in shutting me up without the usual formalities.”

“All the same, you made your escape.”

“I used my rights as they had used theirs.”

“Very good! But as far as I can see, no one in Venice is really free.”

“That may be; but you must agree that the essence of freedom consists in thinking you have it.”

“I shall not agree to that so easily. You and I see liberty from very different points of view. The aristocrats, the members of the Government even, are not free at Venice; for example, they cannot travel without permission.”

“True, but that is a restriction of their own making to preserve their power. Would you say that a Bernese is not free, because he is subject to the sumptuary laws, which he himself had made.”

“Well, well, I wish the people made the laws everywhere.”



After this lively answer, he abruptly asked me what part I came from.

“From Roche,” said I. “I should have been very sorry to leave Switzerland without seeing the famous Haller. In my travels I render homage to my learned contemporaries, and you come the last and best.”

“You must have liked Haller.”

“I spent three of the happiest days of my life with him.”

“I congratulate you. He is a great man and worthy of all honour.”

“I think as you do, and I am glad to hear you doing him justice; I am sorry he was not so just towards you.”

“Well, you see we may be both of us mistaken.”



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At this reply, the quickness of which constituted its chief merit, everybody present began to laugh and applaud.

No more was said of literature, and I became a silent actor till M. de Voltaire retired, when I approached Madame Denis, and asked her if she had any commands for me at Rome. I went home well pleased at having compelled the giant of intellect to listen to reason, as I then thought foolishly enough; but there was a rankling feeling left in my heart against him which made me, ten years later, criticise all he had written.

I am sorry now for having done so, though on reading my censures over again I find that in many places I was right. I should have done better, however, to have kept silence, to have respected his genius, and to have suspected my own opinions. I should have considered that if it had not been for those quips and cranks which made me hate him on the third day, I should have thought him wholly sublime. This thought alone should have silenced me, but an angry man always thinks himself right. Posterity on reading my attack will rank me among the Zoyluses, and the humble apology I now make to the great man's shades may not be read.

If we meet in the halls of Pluto, the more peccant parts of our mortal nature purged away, all will be made up; he will receive my heartfelt apologies, and he will be my friend, I his sincere admirer.

I spent part of the night and the whole of the following day in writing down my conversations with Voltaire, and they amounted nearly to a volume, of which I have only given a mere abridgment. Towards the evening my Epicurean syndic called on me, and we went to sup with the three nymphs, and for five hours we indulged in every species of wantonness, in which I had a somewhat fertile imagination. On leaving I promised to call on them again on my return from Rome, and I kept my word. I set out the next day, after dining with the syndic, who accompanied me as far as Anneci, where I spent the night. Next day I dined at Aix, with the intention of lying at Chamberi, but my destiny ordered otherwise.

Aix is a villainous hole where the mineral waters attract people of fashion towards the end of the summer—a circumstance of which I was then ignorant. I dined hastily, wishing to set out immediately for Chamberi, when in the middle of my repast a crowd of fashionable people burst into the room. I looked at them without stirring, replying with an inclination of the head to the bows which some of them made me. I soon discovered from their conversation that they had all come to take the waters. A gentleman of a fine presence came up to me and asked if I were going to Turin; I answered that my way was to Marseilles.

Their dinner was served, and everybody sat down. Among them I noticed several pleasant-looking ladies, with gentlemen who were either their husbands or their lovers. I concluded that I might find some amusement with them, as they all spoke French with

that easy tone of good society which is so attractive, and I felt that I should be inclined to stay without much pressing, for that day at all events.



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I finished my dinner before the company had come to the end of their first course, and as my coach could not go for another hour I went up to a pretty woman, and complimented her on the good the waters of Aix seemed to have done her, for her appetite made all who looked at her feel hungry.

“I challenge you to prove that you are speaking the truth,” said she, with a smile. I sat down next to her, and she gave me a nice piece of the roast which I ate as if I had been fasting.

While I was talking with the lady, and eating the morsels she gave me, I heard a voice saying that I was in the abbe’s place, and another voice replying that the abbe had been gone for half an hour.

“Why has he gone?” asked a third, “he said he was going to stay here for another week.” At this there was some whispering, but the departure of an abbe had nothing interesting in it for me, and I continued eating and talking. I told Le Duc, who was standing behind my chair, to get me some champagne. I offered the lady some, she accepted, and everyone began to call for champagne. Seeing my neighbour’s spirits rising, I proceeded to make love to her, and asked her if she were always as ready to defy those who paid their court to her.

“So many of them,” she answered, “are not worthy the trouble.”

She was pretty and quick-witted, and I took a fancy to her, and wished for some pretext on which I could put off my departure, and chance came to my aid.

“The place next to you was conveniently empty,” said a lady to my neighbour who was drinking with me.

“Very conveniently, for my neighbour wearied me.”

“Had he no appetite?” said I.

“Gamesters only have an appetite for money.”

“Usually, but your power is extraordinary; for I have never made two dinners on one day before now.”

“Only out of pride; as I am sure you will eat no supper.”

“Let us make a bet on it.”

“We will; we will bet the supper.”

“All right.”



All the guests began to clap, and my fair neighbour blushed with pleasure. I ordered Le Duc to tell my coachman that I should not be going till the next day.

“It is my business,” said the lady, “to order the supper.”

“Yes, you are right; for he who pays, orders. My part will be to oppose you to the knife, and if I eat as much as you I shall be the winner.”

“Very good.”

At the end of dinner, the individual who had addressed me before called for cards, and made a small bank of faro. He put down twenty-five Piedmontese pistoles, and some silver money to amuse the ladies—altogether it amounted nearly to forty louis. I remained a spectator during the first deal, and convinced myself that the banker played very well.

Whilst he was getting ready for the second deal, the lady asked me why I did not play. I whispered to her that she had made me lose my appetite for money. She repaid this compliment with a charming smile.



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After this declaration, feeling myself entitled to play, I put down forty louis, and lost them in two deals. I got up, and on the banker saying very politely that he was sorry for my loss, I replied that it was a mere nothing, but that I always made it a rule never to risk a sum of money larger than the bank. Somebody then asked me if I knew a certain Abbe Gilbert.

"I knew a man of that name," said I, "at Paris; he came from Lyons, and owes me a pair of ears, which I mean to cut off his head when I meet him."

My questioner made no reply to this, and everybody remained silent, as if nothing had been said. From this I concluded that the abbe aforesaid must be the same whose place I had occupied at dinner. He had doubtless seen me on my arrival and had taken himself off. This abbe was a rascal who had visited me at Little Poland, to whom I had entrusted a ring which had cost me five thousand florins in Holland; next day the scoundrel had disappeared.

When everybody had left the table, I asked Le Duc if I were well lodged.

"No," said he; "would you like to see your room?"

He took me to a large room, a hundred paces from the inn, whose sole furniture consisted of its four walls, all the other rooms being occupied. I complained vainly to the inn-keeper, who said,

"It's all I can offer you, but I will have a good bed, a table, and chairs taken there."

I had to content myself with it, as there was no choice.

"You will sleep in my room," said I to Le Duc, "take care to provide yourself with a bed, and bring my baggage in."

"What do you think of Gilbert, sir?" said my Spaniard; "I only recognized him just as he was going, and I had a lively desire to take him by the back of his neck."

"You would have done well to have satisfied that desire."

"I will, when I see him again."

As I was leaving my big room, I was accosted politely by a man who said he was glad to be my neighbour, and offered to take me to the fountain if I were going there. I accepted his offer. He was a tall fair man, about fifty years old; he must once have been handsome, but his excessive politeness should have made me suspect him; however, I wanted somebody to talk to, and to give me the various pieces of information I required. On the way he informed me of the condition of the people I had seen, and I learnt that none of them had come to Aix for the sake of the waters.



“I am the only one,” said he, “who takes them out of necessity. I am consumptive; I get thinner every day, and if the waters don’t do me any good I shall not last much longer.”

So all the others have only come here for amusement’s sake?”

“And to game, sir, for they are all professional gamblers.”

“Are they French?”

“They are all from Piedmont or Savoy; I am the only Frenchman here.”

“What part of France do you come from?”



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“From Lorraine; my father, who is eighty years old, is the Marquis Desarmoises. He only keeps on living to spite me, for as I married against his wishes he has disinherited me. However, as I am his only son, I shall inherit his property after his death, in spite of him. My house is at Lyons, but I never go there, as I have the misfortune to be in love with my eldest daughter, and my wife watches us so closely as to make my courtship hopeless.”

“That is very fine; otherwise, I suppose, your daughter would take pity on her amorous papa?”

“I daresay, for she is very fond of me, and has an excellent heart.”

CHAPTER XX

My Adventures at Aix—My Second M. M.—Madame Zeroli

This man, who, though he did not know me, put the utmost confidence in me, so far from thinking he was horrifying me by the confession of such wickedness, probably considered he was doing me a great honour. While I listened to him I reflected that though depraved he might have his good points, and that his weakness might have a pitiable if not a pardonable side. However, wishing to know more of him, I said,—

“In spite of your father’s sternness, you live very well.”

“On the contrary, I live very ill. I enjoy a pension from the Government, which I surrender to my wife, and as for me I make a livelihood on my travels. I play black gammon and most other games perfectly. I win more often than I lose, and I live on my winnings.”

“But is what you have told me about your daughter known to the visitors here?”

“Everybody knows it; why should I hide it? I am a man of honour and injure no one; and, besides, my sword is sharp.”

“Quite so; but would you tell me whether you allow your daughter to have a lover?”

“I should have no objection, but my wife is religious.”

“Is your daughter pretty?”

“Very; if you are going to Lyons, you can go and see her; I will give you a letter of introduction for her.” “Thank you, but I am going to Italy. Can you tell me the name of the gentleman who kept the bank?”



“That is the famous Parcalier, Marquis de Prie since the death of his father, whom you may have known as ambassador at Venice. The gentleman who asked you if you knew the Abbe Gilbert is the Chevalier Zeroli, husband of the lady you are to sup with. The rest are counts, marquises, and barons of the usual kind, some from Piedmont and some from Savoy. Two or three are merchants’ sons, and the ladies are all their friends or relations. They are all professional gamblers and sharp-witted. When a stranger comes here they know how to get over him, and if he plays it is all up with him, for they go together like pickpockets at a fair. They think they have got you, so take care of yourself.”

In the evening we returned to the inn, and found all the company playing, and my companion proceeded to play with a Count de Scarnafisch.



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The Chevalier Zeroli offered to play faro with me for forty sequins, and I had just lost that sum when supper was served. My loss had not affected my spirits, and the lady finding me at once hungry and gay paid the bet with a good grace. At supper I surprised her in certain side-glances, which warned me that she was going to try to dupe me; I felt myself safe as far as love was concerned, but I had reason to dread fortune, always the friend of those who keep a bank at faro, especially as I had already lost. I should have done well to go, but I had not the strength; all I could do was to promise myself that I would be extremely prudent. Having large sums in paper money and plenty of gold, it was not difficult for me to be careful.

Just after supper the Marquis de Prie made a bank of about three hundred sequins. His staking this paltry sum shewed me that I had much to lose and little to win, as it was evident that he would have made a bank of a thousand sequins if he had had them. I put down fifty Portuguese crowns, and said that as soon as I had lost them I should go to bed. In the middle of the third deal I broke the bank.

"I am good for another two hundred louis," said the marquis.

"I should be glad to continue playing," I replied, "if I had not to go at day-break"; and I thereupon left the room.

Just as I was going to bed, Desarmoises came and asked me to lend him twelve louis. I had expected some such request, and I counted them out to him. He embraced me gratefully, and told me that Madame Zeroli had sworn to make me stay on at least for another day. I smiled and called Le Duc, and asked him if my coachman knew that I was starting early; he replied that he would be at the door by five o'clock.

"Very good," said Desarmoises, "but I will wager that you will not go for all that."

He went out and I went to bed, laughing at his prophecy.

At five o'clock next morning the coachman came to tell me that one of the horses was ill and could not travel. I saw that Desarmoises had had an inkling of some plot, but I only laughed. I sent the man roughly about his business, and told Le Duc to get me post-horses at the inn. The inn-keeper came and told me that there were no horses, and that it would take all the morning to find some, as the Marquis de Prie, who was leaving at one o'clock in the morning, had emptied his stables. I answered that in that case I would dine at Aix, but that I counted on his getting me horses by two o'clock in the afternoon.

I left the room and went to the stable, where I found the coachman weeping over one of his horses stretched out on the straw. I thought it was really an accident, and consoled the poor devil, paying him as if he had done his work, and telling him I should not want

him any more. I then went towards the fountain, but the reader will be astonished by a meeting of the most romantic character, but which is yet the strict truth.



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At a few paces from the fountain I saw two nuns coming from it. They were veiled, but I concluded from their appearance that one was young and the other old. There was nothing astonishing in such a sight, but their habit attracted my attention, for it was the same as that worn by my dear M—— M——, whom I had seen for the last time on July 24th, 1755, five years before. The look of them was enough, not to make me believe that the young nun was M—— M——, but to excite my curiosity. They were walking towards the country, so I turned to cut them off that I might see them face to face and be seen of them. What was my emotion when I saw the young nun, who, walking in front, and lifting her veil, disclosed the veritable face of M—— M——. I could not doubt that it was she, and I began to walk beside her; but she lowered her veil, and turned to avoid me.

The reasons she might have for such a course passed in a moment through my mind, and I followed her at a distance, and when she had gone about five hundred paces I saw her enter a lonely house of poor appearance that was enough for me. I returned to the fountain to see what I could learn about the nun.

On my way there I lost myself in a maze of conjectures.

“The too charming and hapless M—— M——,” said I to myself, “must have left her convent, desperate—nay, mad; for why does she still wear the habit of her order? Perhaps, though, she has got a dispensation to come here for the waters; that must be the reason why she has a nun with her, and why she has not left off her habit. At all events the journey must have been undertaken under false pretences. Has she abandoned herself to some fatal passion, of which the result has been pregnancy? She is doubtless perplexed, and must have been pleased to see me. I will not deceive her expectations; I will do all in my power to convince her that I am worthy of her.”

Lost in thought I did not notice I had arrived at the fountain, round which stood the whole host of gamesters. They all crowded round me, and said how charmed they were to see me still there. I asked the Chevalier Zeroli after his wife, and he told me she was still abed, and that it would be a good thing if I would go and make her get up. I was just going when the doctor of the place accosted me, saying, that the waters of the Aix would increase my good health. Full of the one idea, I asked him directly if he were the doctor in attendance on a pretty nun I had seen.

“She takes the waters,” he replied, “but she does not speak to anyone.”

“Where does she come from?”

“Nobody knows; she lives in a peasant’s house.”

I left the doctor, and instead of going towards the inn, where the hussy Zeroli was doubtless waiting for me, I made my way towards the peasant’s house, which already



seemed to me the temple of the most blissful deities, determined to obtain the information I required as prudently as might be. But as if love had favoured my vows, when I was within a hundred paces of the cottage I saw the peasant woman coming out to meet me.



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“Sir,” said she, accosting me, “the young nun begs you to return this evening at nine o’clock; the lay-sister will be asleep then, and she will be able to speak freely to you.”

There could be no more doubt. My heart leapt with joy. I gave the country-woman a louis, and promised to be at the house at nine exactly.

With the certainty of seeing my dear M—— M—— again I returned to the inn, and on ascertaining which was Madame Zeroli’s room I entered without ceremony, and told her that her husband had sent me to make her get up.

“I thought you were gone?”

“I am going at two.”

I found her still more enticing in bed than at table. I helped her to put on her stays, and the sight of her charms inflamed my ardour, but I experienced more resistance than I had anticipated. I sat down at the foot of the bed, and told her how fervently I loved her, and how unhappy I was at not being able to give her marks of my love before I left.

“But,” said she, laughing, “you have only got to stay.”

“Give me some hope, and I will stay till to-morrow.”

“You are in too much of a hurry, take things more quietly.”

I contented myself with the few favours she granted me, pretending as usual only to yield to violence, when I was obliged to restrain myself on the appearance of her husband, who took the precaution of making a noise before he came in. As soon as she saw him, she said, without the slightest perturbation, “I have persuaded the gentleman to stay till the day after to-morrow.”

“I am all the more pleased to hear it, my dear,” said the chevalier, “as I owe him his revenge.”

With these words he took up a pack of cards, which came as readily to his hands as if they had been placed there on purpose, and seating himself beside his wife, whom he made into the table, he began to deal.

I could not draw back, and as my thoughts were distracted I kept on losing till they came to tell me dinner was ready.

“I have no time to dress,” said the lady, “so I will have my dinner in bed, if you gentlemen will keep me company.”



How could I refuse? The husband went out to order the dinner, and feeling myself authorized by the loss of twenty Louis, I told the hussy that if she would not give me a plain promise to make me happy that afternoon I should go away when I had had my dinner.

“Breakfast with me to-morrow morning. We shall be alone.”

After receiving from her certain earnestness of her promise, I promised to stay on.

We dined by her bedside, and I told Le Duc that I should not be going till the afternoon of the next day, which made the husband and wife radiant. When we had done, the lady said she would like to get up; and I went out, promising to return and play piquet with her. I proceeded to reline my purse, and I met Desarmoises, who said,

“I have found out the secret; they gave her coachman two Louis to substitute a sick horse for his own.”



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"It's a matter of give and take," said I; "I am in love with the chevalier's wife, and I am putting off my departure till I have got all I want out of her."

"I am afraid you will have to pay pretty dearly for your pleasure. However, I will do what I can for your interests."

I thanked him smilingly, and returned to the lady, whom I left at eight o'clock under pretext of a violent headache, after having lost ten louis to her. I reminded her of her promise for next morning at nine o'clock, and I left her in the midst of the company.

It was a fine moonlight night as I walked towards the peasant's house, where I was to see my dear M—— M—— once more. I was impatient to see what the visit, on which the rest of my life might depend, would bring forth.

I had taken the precaution to provide myself with a pair of pistols, and my sword hung at my side, for I was not wholly devoid of suspicion in this place, where there were so many adventurers; but at twenty paces from the cottage I saw the woman coming towards me. She told me that the nun could not come down, so I must be content to enter through the window, by means of a ladder which she had placed there for the purpose. I drew near, and not seeing any light I should not have easily decided on going up, if I had not heard the voice I thought I knew so well, saying, "Fear nothing; come." Besides, the window was not very high up, and there could not be much danger of a trap. I ascended, and thought for certain that I held my dear M—— M—— in my arms, as I covered her face with my ardent kisses.

"Why," said I, in Venetian, "have you not a light? I hope you are going to inform me of an event which seems wonderful to me; quick, dearest, satisfy my impatience."

The reader will guess my surprise when he learns that on hearing her voice close to me I found that she was not M—— M——. She told me that she did not understand Venetian, and that I did not require a light to tell her what M. de Coudert had decided on doing to save her from her peril.

"You surprise me; I do not know M. de Coudert. What! Are you not a Venetian? Are you not the nun I saw this morning?"

"Hapless one! I have made a mistake. I am the nun you saw this morning, but I am French. In the name of God keep my counsel and begone, for I have nothing to say to you! Whisper, for if the lay-sister woke up I should be undone."

"Do not be afraid of my discretion. What deceived me was your exact likeness to a nun of your order who will be always dear to me: and if you had not allowed me to see your features I should not have followed you. Forgive the tenderness I shewed towards you, though you must think me very audacious."



“You astonished me very much, but you did not offend me. I wish I were the nun in whom you are interested. I am on the brink of a fearful precipice.”

“If ten louis are any good to you, it will be an honour for me to give you them.”



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“Thank you, I have no need of money. Allow me to give you back the louis you sent me this morning.”

“The louis was for the country-woman. You increase my surprise; pray tell me what is the misfortune under which you labour, for which money can do nothing.”

“Perhaps God has sent you to my aid. Maybe you will give me good advice. Listen to what I am about to tell you.”

“I am at your service, and I will listen with the greatest attention. Let us sit down.”

“I am afraid there is neither seat nor bed.”

“Say on, then; we will remain standing.”

“I come from Grenoble. I was made to take the veil at Chamberi. Two years after my profession, M. de Coudert found means to see me. I received him in the convent garden, the walls of which he scaled, and at last I was so unfortunate as to become pregnant. The idea of giving birth to a child at the convent was too dreadful—I should have languished till I died in a terrible dungeon—and M. de Coudert thought of a plan for taking me out of the convent. A doctor whom he gained over with a large sum of money declared that I should die unless I came here to take the waters, which he declared were the only cure for my illness. A princess whom M. de Coudert knew was partly admitted to the secret, and she obtained the leave of absence for three months from the Bishop of Chamberi, and the abbess consented to my going.

“I thus hoped to be delivered before the expiration of the three months; but I have assuredly made a mistake, for the time draws to an end and I feel no signs of a speedy delivery. I am obliged to return to the convent, and yet I cannot do so. The lay-sister who is with me is a perfect shrew. She has orders not to let me speak to anybody, and never to let my face be seen. She it was who made me turn when she saw you following us. I lifted my veil for you to see that I was she of whom I thought you were in search, and happily the lay-sister did not notice me. She wants me to return with her to the convent in three days, as she thinks I have an incurable dropsy. She does not allow me to speak to the doctor, whom I might, perhaps, have gained over by telling him the truth. I am only twenty-one, and yet I long for death.”

“Do not weep so, dear sister, and tell me how you expect to be delivered here without the lay-sister being aware of it?”

“The worthy woman with whom I am staying is an angel of goodness. I have confided in her, and she promised me that when I felt the pangs coming on she would give that malicious woman a soporific, and thus we should be freed from all fears of her. By virtue of the drug she now sleeps soundly in the room under this garret.”



“Why was I not let in by the door?”

“To prevent the woman’s brother seeing you; he is a rude boor.”

“What made you think that I had anything to do with M. de Coudert?”

“Ten or twelve days ago, I wrote to him and told him of my dreadful position. I painted my situation with such lively colours that I thought he must do all in his power to help me. As the wretched cling to every straw, I thought, when I saw you following me, that you were the deliverer he had sent.”



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“Are you sure he got your letter?”

“The woman posted it at Anneci.”

“You should write to the princess.”

“I dare not.”

“I will see her myself, and I will see M. de Coudert. In fine, I will move heaven and earth, I will even go to the bishop, to obtain an extension of your leave; for it is out of the question for you to return to the convent in your present situation. You must decide, for I can do nothing without your consent. Will you trust in me? If so, I will bring you a man’s clothes to-morrow and take you to Italy with me, and while I live I swear I will care for you.”

For reply, I only heard long-drawn sobs, which distressed me beyond words, for I felt acutely the situation of this poor creature whom Heaven had made to be a mother, and whom the cruelty of her parents had condemned to be a useless nun.

Not knowing what else to say, I took her hand and promised to return the next day and hear her decision, for it was absolutely necessary that she should decide on some plan. I went away by the ladder, and gave a second louis to the worthy woman, telling her that I should be with her on the morrow at the same hour, but that I should like to be able to enter by the door. I begged her to give the lay-sister a stronger dose of opium, so that there should be no fear of her awaking while I talked with the young nun.

I went to bed glad at heart that I had been wrong in thinking that the nun was M—— M——. Nevertheless the great likeness between them made me wish to see her nearer at hand, and I was sure that she would not refuse me the privilege of looking at her the next day. I smiled at the thought of the ardent kisses I had given her, but I felt that I could not leave her to her fate. I was glad to find that I did not need any sensual motive to urge me to a good deed, for as soon as I found that it was not M—— M—— who had received those tender kisses I felt ashamed of having given them. I had not even given her a friendly kiss when I left her.

In the morning Desarmoises came and told me that all the company, not seeing me at supper, had been puzzling itself to find out what had become of me. Madame Zeroli had spoken enthusiastically about me, and had taken the jests of the two other ladies in good part, boasting that she could keep me at Aix as long as she remained there herself. The fact was that I was not amorous but curious where she was concerned, and I should have been sorry to have left the place without obtaining complete possession of her, for once at all events.



I kept my appointment, and entered her room at nine o'clock exactly. I found her dressed, and on my reproaching her she said that it should be of no consequence to me whether she were dressed or undressed. I was angry, and I took my chocolate without so much as speaking to her. When I had finished she offered me my revenge at piquet, but I thanked her and begged to be excused, telling her that in the humour in which she had put me I should prove the better player, and that I did not care to win ladies' money. So saying I rose to leave the room.

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“At least be kind enough to take me to the fountain.”

“I think not. If you take me for a freshman, you make a mistake, and I don’t care to give the impression that I am pleased when I am displeased. You can get whomsoever you please to take you to the fountain, but as for me I must beg to be excused. Farewell, madam.”

With these words I went out, paying no attention to her efforts to recall me.

I found the inn-keeper, and told him that I must leave at three o’clock without a fail. The lady, who was at her window, could hear me. I went straight to the fountain where the chevalier asked me what had become of his wife, and I answered that I had left her in her room in perfect health. In half an hour we saw her coming with a stranger, who was welcomed by a certain M. de St. Maurice. Madame Zeroli left him, and tacked herself on to me, as if there had been nothing the matter. I could not repulse her without the most troublesome consequences, but I was very cold. After complaining of my conduct she said that she had only been trying me, that if I really loved her I should put off my departure, and that I should breakfast with her at eight o’clock the next day. I answered coolly that I would think it over. I was serious all dinner-time, and said once or twice that I must go at three o’clock, but as I wanted to find some pretext for staying on account of the nun, I let myself be persuaded into making a bank at faro.

I staked all the gold I had, and I saw every face light up as I put down about four hundred louis in gold, and about six hundred francs in silver. “Gentlemen,” said I, “I shall rise at eight o’clock precisely.” The stranger said, with a smile, that possibly the bank might not live so long, but I pretended not to understand him. It was just three o’clock. I begged Desarmoises to be my croupier, and I began to deal with due deliberation to eighteen or twenty punters, all professional gamblers. I took a new pack at every deal.

By five o’clock I had lost money. We heard carriage wheels, and they said it was three Englishmen from Geneva, who were changing horses to go on to Chamberi. A moment after they came in, and I bowed. It was Mr. Fox and his two friends, who had played quinze with me. My croupier gave them cards, which they received gladly, and went ten louis, playing on two and three cards, going paroli, seven and the ‘va’, as well as the ‘quinze’, so that my bank was in danger of breaking. However, I kept up my face, and even encouraged them to play, for, God being neutral, the chances were in my favour. So it happened, and at the third deal I had cleared the Englishmen out, and their carriage was ready.

While I was shuffling a fresh pack of cards, the youngest of them drew out of his pocket-book a paper which he spewed to his two companions. It was a bill of exchange. “Will you stake the value of this bill on a card, without knowing its value?” said he.



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“Yes,” I replied, “if you will tell me upon whom it is drawn, and provided that it does not exceed the value of the bank.”

After a rapid glance at the pile of gold before me, he said, “The bill is not for so large a sum as your bank, and it is payable at sight by Zappata, of Turin.”

I agreed, he cut, and put his money on an ace, the two friends going half shares. I drew and drew and drew, but no ace appeared. I had only a dozen cards left.

“Sir,” said I, calmly to the punter, “you can draw back if you like.”

“No, go on.”

Four cards more, and still no ace; I had only eight cards left.

“My lord,” said I, “it’s two to one that I do not hold the ace, I repeat you can draw back.”

“No, no, you are too generous, go on.”

I continued dealing, and won; I put the bill of exchange in my pocket without looking at it. The Englishmen shook me by the hand and went off laughing. I was enjoying the effect this bold stroke had made on the company, when young Fox came in and with a roar of laughter begged me to lend him fifty Louis. I counted them out with the greatest pleasure, and he paid me them back in London three years later.

Everyone was curious to know the value of the bill of exchange, but I was not polite enough to satisfy their curiosity. It was for eight thousand Piedmontese francs, as I saw as soon as I was alone. The Englishmen had brought me good luck, for when they had gone fortune declared for the bank. I rose at eight o’clock, some ladies having won a few louis, all the others were dried up. I had won more than a thousand louis, and I gave twenty-five to Desarmoises, who jumped for joy. I locked up my money, put my pistols in my pocket, and set out towards the meeting-place.

The worthy peasant woman brought me in by the door, telling me that everybody was asleep, and that she had not found it necessary to renew the lay-sister’s dose, as she was still asleep.

I was terrified. I went upstairs, and by the light of a single candle I saw the wretched, veiled figure of the nun, extended upon a sack which the peasant woman had placed along the wall instead of a sofa. The candle which lighted this dreary place was fixed in a bottle.

“What have you decided on doing?” said I.



“I have decided on nothing, for an unforeseen incident has confounded us. The lay-sister has been asleep for eighteen hours.”

“She will die of convulsions or of an apoplectic fit to-night if you do not call a doctor, who may possibly restore her to life with a dose of castor oil.”

“We have thought of that, but we did not dare to take that step for fear of consequences; for whether he restores her or not, he will say that we have poisoned her.”

“I pity you, upon my soul! Indeed, I believe that it is too late, and that a doctor could do nothing. One must obey the laws of prudence and let her die. The mischief is done, and I see no remedy.”



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“At any rate, we ought to think of her soul and send for a priest.”

“A priest would do her no good, as she is in a perfect lethargy; her soul is safe enough. Besides, an ignorant priest would find out too much, and would tell the whole story either through malice or stupidity. It will be time to call a priest when she has ceased to breathe. You must tell him that she died very suddenly; you must weep a great deal, and give him a fee, and he will think only of calming your grief, and nothing about the sudden death.”

“Then we must let her die?”

“We must leave her to nature.”

“If she dies I will send a messenger to the abbess, who will dispatch another lay-sister.”

“Yes, and that will give you another ten days. During that time you may be delivered, and you will confess that every cloud has a silver lining. Do not grieve so, but let us endeavour to submit to the will of God. Send for the country-woman, for I must give her some hints as to her conduct in this delicate matter, on which the honour and life of all three may depend. For instance, if it were discovered that I had come here, I might be taken for the poisoner.”

The woman came, and I shewed her how necessary it was for her to be prudent and discreet. She understood me perfectly, perceived her own dangerous position, and promised that she would not send for the priest till she was certain of the sister’s death. I then made her accept ten louis in case of need.

Seeing herself made rich by my liberality, she kissed my hands, knelt down, and bursting into tears promised to follow my advice carefully. When she had left us, the nun began to weep bitterly, accusing herself of the murder of the lay-sister, and thinking that she saw hell opening beneath her feet. I sought in vain to calm her; her grief increased, and at last she fell in a dead faint on the sack. I was extremely distressed, and not knowing what to do I called to the woman to bring some vinegar, as I had no essences about me. All at once I remembered the famous hellebore, which had served me so well with Madame and, taking the little box, I held it to her nostrils. It took effect just as the woman brought the vinegar. “Rub her temples,” said I. She took off her cap, and the blackness of her hair was the only thing that convinced me it was not my fair Venetian. The hellebore having brought her to her senses, she opened her large black eyes, and from that moment I fell madly in love with her. The peasant woman, seeing that she was herself again and out of danger, went away, and taking her between my arms I covered her with fiery kisses, in spite of her continuous sneezes.

“Please let me put on my veil again,” said she, “or else I shall be excommunicated.”

I laughed at her fears, and continued to lavish my burning kisses on her face.

“I see you do not believe me, but I assure you that the abbess threatened me with excommunication if I let myself be seen by a man.”



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“Fear these bolts no longer, dear, they cannot hurt you.”

But she sneezed more violently than ever, and fearing lest her efforts might bring on her delivery I called the woman again, and left the nun in her care, promising to return at the same hour on the next day.

It would not have been like me to leave this interesting creature in her distress, but my devotion to her cause had no merit, since I was madly in love with this new M—— M —— with black eyes; and love always makes men selfish, since all the sacrifices they make for the beloved object are always ultimately referable to their own desires.

I had determined, then, to do all in my power for her, and certainly not to allow her to return to the convent in the state she was in. I concluded that to save her would be an action pleasing to God, since God alone could have made her so like my beloved, and God had willed that I should win a good deal of money, and had made me find the Zeroli, who would serve as a shield to my actions and baffle the curiosity of spies. The philosophers and the mystics may perhaps laugh at me, but what do I care? I have always delighted in referring all the actions of my life to God, and yet people have charged me with Atheism!

Next morning I did not forget the Zeroli, and I went to her room at eight and found her asleep. Her maid begged me to go in quietly for fear of awakening her, and then left me and shut the door. I knew my part, for I remembered how, twenty years before, a Venetian lady, whose sleep I had foolishly respected, had laughed at me and sent me about my business. I therefore knew what to do; and having gently uncovered her, I gave myself up to those delicate preliminary delights which sweeten the final pleasure. The Zeroli wisely continued to sleep; but at last, conquered by passion, she seconded my caresses with greater ardour than my own, and she was obliged to laugh at her stratagem. She told me that her husband had gone to Geneva to buy a repeating watch, and that he would not return till next day, and that she could spend the night with me.

“Why the night, dearest, while we have the day before us? The night is for slumber, and in the day one enjoys double bliss, since the light allows all the senses to be satisfied at once. If you do not expect anybody, I will pass the whole morning with you.”

“Very good; nobody will interrupt us.”

I was soon in her arms, and for four hours we gave ourselves up to every kind of pleasure, cheating each other the better to succeed, and laughing with delight each time we convinced each other of our love. After the last assault she asked me, in return for her kindness, to spend three more days at Aix.



“I promise you,” I said, “to stay here as long as you continue giving me such marks of your love as you have given me this morning.”

“Let us get up, then, and go to dinner.”

“In company, dearest? Look at your eyes.”



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“All the better. People will guess what has happened, and the two countesses will burst with envy. I want everybody to know that it is for me alone that you are remaining at Aix.”

“I am not worth the trouble, my angel, but so be it; I will gladly oblige you, even though I lose all my money in the next three days.”

“I should be in despair if you lost; but if you abstain from punting you will not lose, though you may let yourself be robbed.”

“You may be sure that I know what I am about, and that I shall only allow ladies to rob me. You have had some money out of me yourself.”

“Yes, but not nearly so much as the countesses, and I am sorry you allowed them to impose on you, as they no doubt put it down to your being in love with them.”

“They are quite wrong, poor dears, for neither would have kept me here a day.”

“I am delighted to hear it. But let me tell you what the Marquis of St. Maurice was saying about you yesterday.”

“Say on. I hope he did not allow himself any offensive remarks.”

“No; he only said that you should never have offered the Englishman to be off at eight cards, as you had as much chance as he, and if he had won he might have thought that you knew the card was there.”

“Very good, but tell the marquis that a gentleman is incapable of such a thought, and besides I knew the character of the young nobleman, and I was almost sure he would not accept my offer.”

When we appeared in the dining-room we were received with applause. The fair Zeroli had the air of regarding me as her property, and I affected an extremely modest manner. No one dared to ask me to make a bank after dinner; the purses were too empty, and they contented themselves with trente-quarante, which lasted the whole day, and which cost me a score of louis.

I stole away as usual towards evening, and after having ordered Le Duc not to leave my room for a moment during my stay at Aix, I went towards the cottage where the unfortunate nun was no doubt expecting me anxiously. Soon, in spite of the darkness, I thought I made out somebody following me. I stopped short, and some persons passed me. In two or three minutes I went on again, and I saw the same people, whom I could not have caught up if they had not slackened their pace. It might all be accidental, but I wanted to be sure about it. I left the road without losing my reckoning, feeling quite sure of finding my way when I ceased to be followed; but I soon felt sure that my steps were



dogged, as I saw the same shadowy figures at a little distance off. I doubled my speed, hid behind a tree, and as soon as I saw the spies fired a pistol in the air. I looked round shortly after, saw no one, and went on my way.

I went upstairs and found the nun in bed, with two candles on the table.

“Are you ill?”

“I was ill for a time, but praised be God! I am now quite well, having given birth to a fine boy at two o’clock this morning.”



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“Where is the child?”

“Alas! I did but kiss him once, and my good hostess carried him away I know not where. The Holy Virgin heard my prayers, for my pains, though sharp, were soon over, and a quarter of an hour after my delivery I was still sneezing. Tell me whether you are a man or an angel, for I fear lest I sin in adoring you.”

“This is good news indeed. And how about the lay-sister?”

She still breathes, but we have no hope that she will recover. Her face is terribly distorted. We have sinned exceedingly, and God will punish me for it.”

“No, dearest, God will forgive you, for the Most Holy judges by the heart, and in your heart you had no evil thoughts. Adore Divine Providence, which doeth all things well.”

“You console me. The country-woman assures me that you are an angel, for the powder you gave me delivered me. I shall never forget you, though I do not know your name.”

The woman then came, and I thanked her for the care she had taken of the invalid. I again warned her to be prudent, and above all to treat the priest well when the lay-sister breathed her last, and thus he would not take notice of anything that might involve leer in disaster.

“All will be well,” said she, “for no one knows if the lay-sister is well or ill, or why the lady does not leave her bed.”

“What have you done with the child?”

“I took him with my own hands to Anneci, where I bought everything necessary for the well-being of this lady and for the death of the other one.”

“Doesn’t your brother know anything about it?”

“Lord preserve us—no! He went away yesterday, and will not be back for a week. We have nothing to fear.”

I gave her another ten louis, begging her to buy some furniture, and to get me something to eat by the time I came next day. She said she had still plenty of money left, and I thought she would go mad when I told her that whatever was over was her own. I thought the invalid stood in need of rest, and I left her, promising to return at the same hour on the following day.

I longed to get this troublesome matter safely over, and I knew that I could not regard myself as out of the wood till the poor lay-sister was under the sod. I was in some fear



on this account, for if the priest was not an absolute idiot he must see that the woman had been poisoned.

Next morning I went to see the fair Zeroli, and I found her and her husband examining the watch he had bought her. He came up to me, took my hand, and said he was happy that his wife had the power to keep me at Aix. I replied that it was an easy task for her, and a “bravo” was all he answered.

The chevalier was one of those men who prefer to pass for good-natured than foolish husbands. His wife took my arm, and we left him in his room while we proceeded to the fountain. On the way she said she would be alone the next day, and that she would no longer indulge her curiosity in my nocturnal excursions.



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“Oh! it is you who have had me followed, is it?”

“No, it is I who followed you, but to no effect. However, I did not think you were so wicked. You frightened me dreadfully! Do you know, sir, you might have killed me if your shot had not luckily missed.”

“I missed on purpose, dearest; for though I did not suspect that it was you, I fired in the air, feeling certain that that would be enough to scare off the spies.”

“You won’t be troubled with them any more.”

“If they like to follow me, perhaps I shall let them, for my walk is quite innocent. I am always back by ten.”

While we were at table we saw a travelling carriage and six horses drawn up. It was the Marquis de Prie, with a Chevalier de St. Louis and two charming ladies, of whom one, as the Zeroli hastened to inform me, was the Marquis’s mistress. Four places were laid, and while the newcomers were waiting to be served, they were told the story of my bet with the Englishman.

The marquis congratulated me, telling me that he had not hoped to find me at Aix on his return; and here Madame Zeroli put in her word, and said that if it had not been for her he would not have seen me again. I was getting used to her foolish talk, and I could only agree with a good grace, which seemed to delight her intensely although her husband was present, but he seemed to share her triumph.

The marquis said that he would make a little bank for me, and feeling obliged to accept I soon lost a hundred louis. I went to my room to write some letters, and at twilight I set out to see my nun.

“What news have you?”

“The lay-sister is dead, and she is to be buried tomorrow. To-morrow is the day we were to have returned to the convent. This is the letter I am sending to the abbess. She will dispatch another laysister, unless she orders the country-woman to bring me back to the convent.”

“What did the priest say?”

“He said the lay-sister died of a cerebral lethargy, which super-induced an attack of apoplexy.”

“Very good, very good.”

“I want him to say fifteen masses for her, if you will let me?”



“Certainly, my dear, they will serve as the priest’s reward, or rather as the reward of his happy ignorance.”

I called the peasant woman, and gave her the order to have the masses said, and bade her tell the priest that the masses were to be said for the intention of the person who paid for them. She told me that the aspect of the dead sister was dreadful, and that she had to be guarded by two women who sprinkled her with holy water, lest witches, under the form of cats, should come and tear her limb from limb. Far from laughing at her, I told her she was quite right, and asked where she had got the laudanum.

“I got it from a worthy midwife, and old friend of mine. We got it to send the poor lay-sister to sleep when the pains of child-birth should come on.”



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“When you put the child at the hospital door, were you recognized?”

“Nobody saw me as I put it into the box, and I wrote a note to say the child had not been baptized.”

“Who wrote the note?”

“I did.”

“You will, of course, see that the funeral is properly carried out?”

“It will only cost six francs, and the parson will take that from two louis which were found on the deceased; the rest will do for masses to atone for her having had the money.”

“What! ought she not to have had the two louis?”

“No,” said the nun, “we are forbidden to have any money without the knowledge of the abbess, under pain of excommunication.”

“What did they give you to come here?”

“Ten Savoy sols a day. But now I live like a princess, as you shall see at supper, for though this worthy woman knows the money you gave her is for herself she lavishes it on me.”

“She knows, dear sister, that such is my intention, and here is some more to go on with.”

So saying I took another ten louis from my purse, and bade the country-woman spare nothing for the invalid’s comfort. I enjoyed the worthy woman’s happiness; she kissed my hands, and told me that I had made her fortune, and that she could buy some cows now.

As soon as I was alone with the charming nun, whose face recalled to my memory the happy hours I had passed with M—— M——, my imagination began to kindle, and drawing close to her I began to talk of her seducer, telling her I was surprised that he had not helped her in the cruel position in which he had placed her. She replied that she was debarred from accepting any money by her vow of poverty and obedience, and that she had given up to the abbess what remained of the alms the bishop had procured her.

“As to my state when I was so fortunate as to meet you, I think he cannot have received my letter.”

“Possibly, but is he a rich or handsome man?”



“He is rich but certainly not handsome. On the contrary, he is extremely ugly, deformed, and over fifty.”

“How did you become amorous of a fellow like that?”

“I never loved him, but he contrived to gain my pity. I thought he would kill himself, and I promised to be in the garden on the night he appointed, but I only went there with the intention of bidding him begone, and he did so, but after he had carried his evil designs into effect.”

“Did he use violence towards you, then?”

“No, for that would have been no use. He wept, threw himself on his knees, and begged so hard, that I let him do what he liked on the condition that he would not kill himself, and that he would come no more to the garden.”

“Had you no fear of consequences?”

“I did not understand anything about it; I always thought that one could not conceive under three times at least.”

“Unhappy ignorance! how many woes are caused by it! Then he did not ask you to give him any more assignations?”



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“He often asked me, but I would not grant his request because our confessor made me promise to withstand him thenceforth, if I wished to be absolved.”

“Did you tell him the name of the seducer?”

“Certainly not; the good confessor would not have allowed me to do so; it would have been a great sin.”

“Did you tell your confessor the state you were in?”

“No, but he must have guessed it. He is a good old man, who doubtless prayed to God for me, and my meeting you was, perhaps, the answer to his prayers.”

I was deeply moved, and for a quarter of an hour I was silent, and absorbed in my thoughts. I saw that this interesting girl's misfortune proceeded from her ignorance, her candour, her perfect innocence, and a foolish feeling of pity, which made her grant this monster of lubricity a thing of which she thought little because she had never been in love. She was religious, but from mere habit and not from reflection, and her religion was consequently very weak. She abhorred sin, because she was obliged to purge herself of it by confession under pain of everlasting damnation, and she did not want to be damned. She had plenty of natural common sense, little wit, for the cultivation of which she had no opportunities, and she was in a state of ignorance only pardonable in a nun. On weighing these facts I foresaw that I should find it a difficult task to gain those favours which she had granted to Coudert; her repentance had been too bitter for her to expose herself to the same danger over again.

The peasant woman returned, laid the table for two, and brought us our supper. Everything was new—napkins, plates, glasses, spoons, knives, *etc.*, and everything was exquisitely clean. The wines were excellent, and the dishes delightful in their simplicity. We had roast game, fish, cheese with cream, and very good fruit. I spent an hour and a half at supper, and drank two bottles of wine as I talked to the nun, who ate very little.

I was in the highest spirits, and the woman, delighted with my praise of her provision, promised I should be served the same way every evening.

When I was alone with the nun, whose face filled me with such burning recollections, I began to speak of her health, and especially of the inconveniences attached to child-birth. She said she felt quite well, and would be able to return to Chamberi on foot. “The only thing that troubles me is my breasts, but the woman assures me that the milk will recede to-morrow, and that they will then assume their usual shape.”

“Allow me to examine them, I know something about it.”

“Look!”



She uncovered her bosom, not thinking it would give me any pleasure, but wishing to be polite, without supposing I had any concealed desires. I passed my hands over two spheres whose perfect shape and whiteness would have restored Lazarus to life. I took care not to offend her modesty, but in the coolest manner possible asked her how she felt a little lower down, and as I put the question I softly extended my hand. However, she kept it back gently, telling me not to go any further as she still felt a little uneasy. I begged her pardon, and said I hoped I should find everything quite right by the next day.



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“The beauty of your bosom,” I added, “makes me take a still greater interest in you.”

So saying I let my mouth meet hers, and I felt a kiss escape as if involuntarily from her lips. It ran like fire through my veins, my brain began to whirl, and I saw that unless I took to a speedy flight I should lose all her confidence. I therefore left her, calling her “dear daughter” as I bade her farewell.

It poured with rain, and I got soaked through before I reached my lodging. This was a bath well fitted to diminish the ardour of my passion, but it made me very late in rising the next morning.

I took out the two portraits of M—— M——, one in a nun’s dress, and the other nude, as Venus. I felt sure they would be of service to me with the nun.

I did not find the fair Zeroli in her room, so I went to the fountain, where she reproached me with a tenderness I assessed at its proper value, and our quarrel was made up in the course of our walk. When dinner was over the Marquis the Prie made a bank, but as he only put down a hundred louis I guessed that he wanted to win a lot and lose a little. I put down also a hundred louis, and he said that it would be better sport if I did not stake my money on one card only. I replied that I would stake a louis on each of the thirteen.

“You will lose.”

“We will see. Here is my hand on the table, and I stake a louis on each of the thirteen cards.”

According to the laws of probability, I should certainly have lost, but fate decided otherwise and I won eighty louis. At eight o’clock I bowed to the company, and I went as usual to the place where my new love dwelt. I found the invalid ravishing. She said she had had a little fever, which the country-woman pronounced to be milk fever, and that she would be quite well and ready to get up by the next day. As I stretched out my hand to lift the coverlet; she seized it and covered it with kisses, telling me that she felt as if she must give me that mark of her filial affection. She was twenty-one, and I was thirty-five. A nice daughter for a man like me! My feelings for her were not at all of a fatherly character. Nevertheless, I told her that her confidence in me, as shewn by her seeing me in bed, increased my affection for her, and that I should be grieved if I found her dressed in her nun’s clothes next day.

“Then I will stop in bed,” said she; “and indeed I shall be very glad to do so, as I experience great discomfort from the heat of my woollen habit; but I think I should please you more if I were decently dressed; however, as you like it better, I will stop in bed.”

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The country-woman came in at that moment, and gave her the abbess' letter which her nephew had just brought from Chamberi. She read it and gave it to me. The abbess told her that she would send two lay-sisters to bring her back to the convent, and that as she had recovered her health she could come on-foot, and thus save money which could be spent in better ways. She added that as the bishop was away, and she was unable to send the lay-sisters without his permission, they could not start for a week or ten days. She ordered her, under pain of the major excommunication, never to leave her room, never to speak to any man, not even to the master of the house, and to have nothing to do with anybody except with the woman. She ended by saying that she was going to have a mass said for the repose of the departed sister's soul.

"I am obliged to you for having shewn me this letter, but be pleased to tell me if I may visit you for the next week or ten days, without doing hurt to your conscience; for I must tell you I am a man. I have only stopped in this place because of the lively interest with which you have inspired me, but if you have the least objection to receive me on account of the singular excommunication with which you are threatened, I will leave Aix tomorrow. Speak."

"Sir, our abbess is lavish of these thunders, and I have already incurred the excommunication with which she threatens me; but I hope it will not be ratified by God, as my fault has made me happy and not miserable. I will be sincere with you; your visits are my only joy, and that joy is doubled when you tell me you like to come. But if you can answer my question without a breach of confidence, I should like to know for whom you took me the first time you saw me; you cannot imagine how you astonished and frightened me. I have never felt such kisses as those you lavished on me, but they cannot increase my sin as I was not a consenting party, and you told me yourself that you thought you were kissing another."

"I will satisfy your curiosity. I think I can do so as you are aware by this time that the flesh is weak, or rather stronger than the spirit, and that it compels the strongest intellects to commit faults against right reason. You shall hear the history of an amour that lasted for two years with the fairest and the best of all the nuns of Venice."

"Tell me all, sir. I have fallen myself, and I should be cruel and unjust if I were to take offence at anything you may tell me, for you cannot have done anything with her that Coudert did not do to me."

"I did much more and much less, for I never gave her a child. If I had been so unfortunate I should have carried her off to Rome, where we should have fallen at the feet of the Holy Father, who would have absolved her from her vows, and my dear M—— M—— would now be my wife."

"Good heavens M—— M—— is my name."

This circumstance, which was really a mere coincidence, rendered our meeting still more wonderful, and astonished me as much as it did her. Chance is a curious and fickle element, but it often has the greatest influence on our lives.



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After a brief silence I told her all that had taken place between the fair Venetian and myself. I painted our amorous combats in a lively and natural manner, for, besides my recollections, I had her living picture before my eyes, and I could follow on her features the various emotions aroused by my recital. When I had finished she said,

“But is your M—— M—— really so like me, that you mistook me for her?”

Drawing from my pocket-book the portrait in which M—— M—— was dressed as a nun, I gave it to her, saying,

“Judge for yourself.”

“She really is; it might pass for my portrait. It is my dress and my face; it is wonderful. To this likeness I owe all my good fortune. Thanks be to God that you do not love me as you loved her, whom I am glad to call my sister. There are indeed two M—— M——s. Mighty Providence, all Thy least ways are wonderful, and we are at best poor, weak, ignorant mortals.”

The worthy country-woman came up and have us a still better supper than on the previous night. The invalid only ate soup, but she promised to do better by the following evening.

I spent an hour with her after supper, and I convinced her by my reserve that she had made a mistake in thinking that I only loved her as a daughter. Of her own accord she shewed me that her breast had regained its usual condition. I assured myself of the fact by my sense of touch, to which she made no opposition, not thinking that I could be moved by such a trifle. All the kisses which I lavished on her lips and eyes she put down to the friendship for her. She said, smiling, that she thanked God she was not fair like her sister, and I smiled myself at her simplicity.

But I could not keep up this sort of thing for long, and I had to be extremely careful. As soon as I felt that passion was getting the upper hand, I gave her a farewell kiss and went away. When I got home Le Duc gave me a note from Madame Zeroli, who said she would expect me at the fountain, as she was going to breakfast with the marquis's mistress.

I slept well, but in my dreams I saw again and again the face of the new M—— M——. Next day, as soon as I got to the fountain, Madame Zeroli told me that all the company maintained that I ought to have lost in playing on thirteen cards at once, as it was not true that one card won four times in each deal; however, the marquis, though he agreed with the rest, had said that he would not let me play like that again.

“I have only one objection to make to that—namely, that if I wanted to play in the same way again he could only prevent me by fighting for it.”

“His mistress swears she will make you play in the usual way.”

I smiled, and thanked her for her information.



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When I got back to the inn I played a game of quinze with the marquis, and lost fifty louis; afterwards I let myself be persuaded to hold a bank. I put down five hundred louis, and defied fortune. Desarmoises was my croupier, and I warned the company that every card must have the stake placed on it, and that I should rise at half-past seven. I was seated between two ladies. I put the five hundred louis on the board, and I got change from the inn-keeper to the amount of a hundred crowns, to amuse the ladies with. But something happened. All the cards before me were loose packs, and I called for new ones. The inn-keeper said he had sent to Chamberi for a hundred packs, and that the messenger would be back soon.

“In the meanwhile,” said he, “you can use the cards on the table, which are as good as new.”

“I want them new, not as good as new. I have my prejudices, and they are so strong as to be invincible. In the meanwhile I shall remain a spectator, though I am sorry to keep the ladies waiting.”

Nobody dared say a word, and I rose, after replacing my money in my cash-box. The Marquis de Prie took the bank, and played splendidly. I stood beside Madame Zeroli, who made me her partner, and gave me five or six Louis the next day. The messenger who was to be back soon did not return till midnight, and I thanked my stars for the escape I had had, for in such a place, full of professional gamblers, there are people whose eyes are considerably sharper than a lynx's. I put the money back in my room, and proceeded on my usual way.

I found my fair nun in bed, and asked her,

“How do you feel to-day, madam?”

“Say daughter, that name is so sweet to me that I would you were my father that I might clasp you in my arms without fearing anyone.”

“Well, my dear daughter, do not fear anything, but open your arms to me.”

“I will; we will embrace one another.”

“My little ones are prettier than they were yesterday let me suck them.”

“You silly papa, you are drinking your daughter's milk.”

“It is so sweet, darling, and the little drop I tasted has made me feel so happy. You cannot be angry at my enjoying this harmless privilege.”

“Of course I am not angry; you delighted me. But I shall have to call you baby, not papa.”



“How glad I am to find you in better spirits to-night!”

“You have 'given me back my happiness, and I feel at peace once more. The country-woman told me that in a few days I should be just the same as if I had never seen Coudert.”

“That is not quite true; how about your stomach, for instance?”

“Be quiet; you can't know anything about such things, and I am quite astonished myself.”

“Let me see.”

“Oh, no; you mustn't see, but you may feel.”

“All right.”

“Oh! please don't go there.”

“Why not? You can't be made differently from your sister, who would be now about thirty. I want to shew you her portrait naked.”



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“Have you got it with you? I should so like to see it.”

I drew it out and gave it to her. She admired it, kissed it, and asked me if the painter had followed nature in all respects.

“Certainly,” said I. “She knew that such a picture would give me pleasure.”

“It is very fine. It is more like me than the other picture. But I suppose the long hair is only put in to please you?”

“Not at all. Italian nuns are allowed to wear their hair as long as they please, provided they do not shew it.

“We have the same privilege. Our hair is cut once, and then we may let it grow as long as we like.”

“Then you have long hair?”

“As long as in the picture; but you would not like my hair as it is black.”

“Why, black is my favourite colour. In the name of God, let me see it.”

“You ask me in God’s name to commit a sin; I shall incur another excommunication, but I cannot refuse you anything. You shall see my hair after supper, as I don’t want to scandalize the countrywoman.”

“You are right; I think you are the sweetest of your sex. I shall die of grief when you leave this cottage to return to your sad prison.”

“I must indeed return and do penance for my sins.”

“I hope you have the wit to laugh at the abbess’s silly excommunications?”

“I begin not to dread them so much as I used to.”

“I am delighted to hear it, as I see you will make me perfectly happy after supper.”

The country-woman came up, and I gave her another ten louis; but it suddenly dawned upon me that she took me for a madman. To disabuse her of this idea I told her that I was very rich, and that I wanted to make her understand that I could not give her enough to testify my gratitude to her for the care she had taken of the good nun. She wept, kissed my hand, and served us a delicious supper. The nun ate well and drank indifferently, but I was in too great a hurry to see the beautiful black hair of this victim to her goodness of heart, and I could not follow her example. The one appetite drove out the other.



As soon as we were relieved of the country-woman's presence, she removed her hood, and let a mass of ebon hair fall upon her alabaster shoulders, making a truly ravishing contrast. She put the portrait before her, and proceeded to arrange her hair like the first M—— M——.

"You are handsomer than your sister," said I, "but I think she was more affectionate than you."

"She may have been more affectionate, but she had not a better heart."

"She was much more amorous than you."

"I daresay; I have never been in love."

"That is strange; how about your nature and the impulse of the senses?"

"We arrange all that easily at the convent. We accuse ourselves to the confessor, for we know it is a sin, but he treats it as a childish fault, and absolves us without imposing any penances."



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“He knows human nature, and makes allowances for your sad position.”

“He is an old man, very learned, and of ascetic habits, but he is all indulgence. It will be a sad day when we lose him.”

“But in your amorous combats with another nun, don’t you feel as if you would like her to change into a man?”

“You make me laugh. To be sure, if my sweetheart became a man I should not be sorry, but we do not desire such a miracle.”

“That is, perhaps, through a coldness of temperament. In that your sister was better, for she liked me much more than C—— C——, and you do not like me as well as the sweetheart you left behind you at the convent.”

“Certainly not, for with you I should violate my own chastity and expose myself to consequences I tremble to think of.”

“You do not love me, then?”

“What are you saying? I adore you, and I am very sorry you are not a woman.”

“I love you too, but your desire makes me laugh; for I would rather not be turned into a woman to please you, especially as I expect I should not think you nearly as beautiful. Sit down, my dear, and let me see your fine hair flowing over your beautiful body.”

“Do you want me to take off my chemise?”

“Of course; how handsome you look without it. Let me suck your pretty breasts, as I am your baby.”

She granted me this privilege, and looking at me with a face full of pleasure, she allowed me to press her naked body to my breast, not seeing, or pretending not to see, the acuteness of my enjoyment. She then said,

“If such delights as these were allowed friendship, I should say it is better than love; for I have never experienced so great pleasure as when you put your lips to my bosom. Let me do the same to you.”

“I wish you could, but you will find nothing there.”

“Never mind; it will amuse us.”

After she had fulfilled her desire, we spent a quarter of an hour in mutual embraces, and my excitement was more than I could bear.



“Tell me truly,” said I, “amidst our kisses, amidst these ecstasies which we call child-like, do you not feel a desire for something more?”

“I confess that I do, but such desires are sinful; and as I am sure that your passions are as high as mine, I think we had better stop our agreeable employment; for, papa dear, our friendship is becoming burning love, is it not?”

“Yes, love, and love that cannot be overcome.”

“I know it.”

“If you know it, let us perform to love the sweetest of all sacrifices.”

“No, no; on the contrary, let us stop and be more prudent in the future, lest we become the victims of love. If you love me, you should say so too.”

With these words she slipped gently from my arms, put back her beautiful hair under her cap, and when I had helped her on with her chemise, the coarseness of which horrified me, I told her she might calm herself. I told her how sorry I felt to see her delicate body frayed by so coarse a stuff, and she told me it was of the usual material, and that all the nuns wore chemises of the same kind.



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My mind was in a state of consternation, for the constraint I had imposed on myself seemed much greater than the utmost pleasure I could have gained. I neither determined on persevering in nor on abandoning the pursuit; all I wanted was to be sure that I should not encounter the least resistance. A folded rose-leaf spoiled the repose of the famous Smindyrides, who loved a soft bed. I preferred, therefore, to go away, than to risk finding the rose-leaf which troubled the voluptuous Sybarite. I left the cottage in love and unhappy, and as I did not go to bed till two o'clock in the morning I slept till mid-day.

When I woke up Le Duc gave me a note which he should have given me the night before. He had forgotten it, and I was not sorry. The note came from Madame Zeroli, who said she would expect me at nine o'clock in the morning, as she would be alone. She told me that she was going to give a supper-party, that she was sure I would come, and that as she was leaving Aix directly after, she counted on my coming too—at any rate, as far as Chamberi. Although I still liked her, her pretensions made me laugh. It was too late now to be with her at nine, I could not go to her supper-party because of my fair nun, whom I would not have left just then for the seraglio of the Grand Turk; and it was impossible for me to accompany her to Chamberi, as when I came back I might no longer find the only object which kept me at Aix.

However, as soon as I had finished dressing, I went to see her and found her furious. I excused myself by saying that I had only had her letter for an hour, but she went away without giving me time to tell her that I could not sup with her or go to Chamberi with her. She scowled at me at table, and when the meal was over the Marquis de Prie told me that they had some new cards, and that everybody was longing to see me make a bank. I went for my money, and I made a bank of five hundred louis. At seven o'clock I had lost more than half that sum, but for all that I put the rest in my pocket and rose from the table.

After a sad glance in the direction of Madame Zeroli I went to the cottage, where I found my angel in a large new bed, with a small but pretty bed beside it which was meant for me. I laughed at the incongruity of these pieces of furniture with our surroundings, but by way of thanking the thoughtful country-woman I drew fifty louis from my purse and gave them to her, telling her it was for the remainder of the time the lady was with her, and I told her to spend no more money in furniture.

This was done in true gamester fashion. I had lost nearly three hundred louis, but I had risked more than five hundred, and I looked on the difference as pure profit. If I had gained as much as I had lost I should probably have contented myself with giving her ten louis, but I fancied I was losing the fifty louis on a card. I have always liked spending money, but I have never been careless with it except in gaming.



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I was in an ecstasy to see the face of my M—— M—— light up with delight and astonishment.

“You must be very rich,” said she.

“Don’t think it, dearest, but I love you passionately; and not being able to give you anything by reason of your unfortunate vow of poverty, I lavish what I possess on this worthy woman, to induce her to spare nothing for your comfort while you are here. Perhaps, too—though it is not a definite thought—I hope that it will make you love me more.”

“How can I love you more than I do? The only thing that makes me unhappy is the idea of returning to the convent.”

“But you told me yesterday that it was exactly that idea which made you happy.”

“I have changed my mind since yesterday. I passed a cruel night, for as soon as I fell asleep I was in your arms, and I awoke again and again on the point of consummating the greatest of crimes.”

“You did not go through such a struggle before committing the same crime with a man you did—not love.”

“It is exactly because I did not love him that my sin struck me as venial. Do you understand what I mean?”

“It’s a piece of superstitious metaphysics, but I understand you perfectly.”

“You have made me happy, and I feel very grateful to you, and I feel glad and certain of conquering when I reflect that your situation is different to mine.”

“I will not dispute it with you, although I am sorry for what you say.”

“Why?”

“Because you think yourself in duty bound to refuse caresses which would not hurt you, and which would give me new life and happiness.”

“I have thought it over.”

“Are you weeping?”

“Yes, and what is more, these tears are dear to me.”

“I do not understand.”



“I have two favours to ask of you.”

“Say on, and be sure you will obtain what you ask.”

CHAPTER XXI

End of My Adventure with the Nun from Chamberi—My Flight from Aix

“Yesterday,” said the charming nun, “you left in my hands the two portraits of my Venetian sister. I want you to give them to me.”

“They are yours.”

“I thank you. My second favour is, that you will be good enough to take my portrait in exchange; you shall have it to-morrow.”

“I shall be delighted. It will be the most precious of all my jewels, but I wonder how you can ask me to take it as a favour, whereas you are doing me a favour I should never have dared to demand. How shall I make myself worthy of giving you my portrait?”

“Ah, dearest! it would be a dear possession, but God preserve me from having it at the convent!”

“I will get myself painted under the costume of St. Louis of Gonzaga, or St. Anthony of Padua.”

“I shall be damned eternally.”

“We will say no more about it.”



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She had on a dimity corset, trimmed with red ribbon, and a cambric chemise. I was surprised, but politeness did not allow me to ask where they came from, so I contented myself with staring at them. She guessed my thoughts, and said, smilingly, that it was a present from the countrywoman.

“Seeing her fortune made, the worthy woman tries every possible way to convince her benefactor that she is grateful to him. Look at the bed; she was certainly thinking of you, and look at these fine materials. I confess I enjoy their softness extremely. I shall sleep better to-night if I am not plagued by those seductive dreams which tormented me last night.”

“Do you think that the bed and the fine linen will deliver you from the dreams you fear?”

“No doubt they will have a contrary effect, for softness irritates the passions. I shall leave everything with the good woman. I do not know what they would say if I took them with me to the convent.”

“You are not so comfortable there?”

“Oh, no! A straw bed, a couple of blankets, and sometimes, as a great favour, a thin mattress and two coarse sheets. But you seem sad; you were so happy yesterday.”

“How can I be happy when I can no longer toy with you without making you unhappy.”

“You should have said without giving me the greatest delight.”

“Then will you consent to receive pleasure in return for that which you give me?”

“But yours is innocent and mine is not.”

“What would you do, then, if mine and yours were the same?”

“You might have made me wretched yesterday, for I could not have refused you anything.”

“Why wretched? You would have had none of those dreams, but would have enjoyed a quiet night. I am very sorry the peasant woman has given you that corset, as otherwise I might at least have seen my little pets without fear of bad dreams.”

“But you must not be angry with the good woman, for she knows that a corset is easy to unlace. And I cannot bear to see you sad.”

With these words she turned her ardent gaze upon me, and I covered her with kisses which she returned with interest. The country-woman came up to lay the pretty new table, just as I was taking off her corset without her offering the least resistance.



This good omen put me in high spirits, but as I looked at her I saw a shadow passing across her face. I took care not to ask her the reason, for I guessed what was the matter, and I did not wish to discuss those vows which religion and honour should have made inviolable. To distract her mind from these thoughts, I made her eat by the example I set, and she drank the excellent claret with as much pleasure as I, not thinking that as she was not used to it it would put her in a frame of mind not favourable to continence. But she did not notice this, for her gaiety made her look prettier than before, and aroused her passions.



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When we were alone I congratulated her on her high spirits, telling her that my sadness had fled before her gaiety, and that the hours I could spend with her would be all too short.

“I should be blithe,” said she, “if it were only to please you.”

“Then grant me the favour you accorded me yesterday evening.”

“I would rather incur all the excommunications in the world than run the risk of appearing unjust to you. Take me.”

So saying, she took off her cap, and let down her beautiful hair. I unlaced her corset, and in the twinkling of an eye I had before me such a siren as one sees on the canvas of Correggio. I could not look upon her long without covering her with my burning kisses, and, communicating my ardour, before long she made a place for me beside herself. I felt that there was no time for thinking, that nature had spoken out, and that love bade me seize the opportunity offered by that delicious weakness. I threw myself on her, and with my lips glued to hers I pressed her between my amorous arms, pending the moment of supreme bliss.

But in the midst of these joys, she turned her head, closed her eyelids, and fell asleep. I moved away a little, the better to contemplate the treasures that love displayed before me. The nun slept, as I thought; but even if her sleep was feigned, should I be angry with her for the stratagem? Certainly not; true or feigned, the sleep of a loved one should always be respected by a delicate lover, although there are some pleasures he may allow himself. If the sleep is real there is no harm done, and if it is put on the lover only responds to the lady's desires. All that is necessary is so to manage one's caresses that they are pleasant to the beloved object. But M—— M—— was really asleep; the claret had numbed her senses, and she had yielded to its influence without any ulterior motives. While I gazed at her I saw that she was dreaming. Her lips uttered words of which I could not catch the meaning, but her voluptuous aspect told me of what she dreamt. I took off my clothes; and in two minutes I had clasped her fair body to mine, not caring much whether she slept on or whether I awoke her and brought our drama to a climax, which seemed inevitable.

I was not long uncertain, for the instinctive movements she made when she felt the minister that would fain accomplish the sacrifice at the door of the sanctuary, convinced me that her dream still lasted, and that I could not make her happier than by changing it into reality. I delicately moved away all obstacles, and gently and by degrees consummated this sweet robbery, and when at last I abandoned myself to all the force of passion, she awoke with a sigh of bliss, murmuring,

“Ah! it is true then.”



“Yes, my angel! are you happy?”

For all reply she drew me to her and fastened her lips on mine, and thus we awaited the dawn of day, exhausting all imaginable kinds of pleasure, exciting each other's desires, and only wishing to prolong our enjoyment.



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“Alas!” said she, “I am happy now, but you must leave me till the evening. Let us talk of our happiness, and enjoy it over again.”

“Then you do not repent having made me a happy man?”

“No; it is you who have made me happy. You are an angel from heaven. We loved, we crowned our love; I cannot have done aught to offend God. I am free from all my fears. We have obeyed nature and our destinies. Do you love me still?”

“Can you ask me? I will shew you to-night.”

I dressed myself as quickly as possible while we talked of our love, and I left her in bed, bidding her rest.

It was quite light when I got home. Le Duc had not gone to bed, and gave me a letter from the fair Zeroli, telling me that it had been delivered at eleven o'clock. I had not gone to her supper, and I had not escorted her to Chamberi; I had not had time to give her a moment's thought. I was sorry, but I could not do anything. I opened her letter which consisted of only six lines, but they were pregnant ones. She advised me never to go to Turin, for if I went there she would find means to take vengeance on me for the dastardly affront I had put upon her. She reproached me with having put her to public shame, said I had dishonoured her, and vowed she would never forgive me. I did not distress myself to any great extent; I tore up the friendly missive, and after I had had my hair done I went to the fountain.

Everybody flew at me for not having been at Madame Zeroli's supper. I defended myself as best I could, but my excuses were rather tame, about which I did not trouble myself. I was told that all was known, and this amused me as I was aware that nothing was known. The marquis's mistress took hold of my arm, and told me, without any circumlocution, that I had the reputation of being inconstant, and by way of reply I observed politely that I was wrongfully accused, but that if there was any ground for the remark it was because I had never served so sweet a lady as herself. She was flattered by my compliment, and I bit my lip when I heard her ask in the most gracious manner why I did not breakfast sometimes with the marquis.

“I was afraid of disturbing him,” said I.

“How do you mean?”

“I should be interrupting him in his business.”

“He has no business, and he would be delighted to see you. Come to-morrow, he always breakfasts in my room”



This lady was the widow of a gentleman of quality; she was young, undoubtedly pretty, and possessing in perfection the jargon of good society; nevertheless, she did not attract me. After recently enjoying the fair Zeroli, and finding my suit with the fair nun at the height of its prosperity, I was naturally hard to please, and in plain words—I was perfectly contented with my situation. For all that, I had foolishly placed myself in such a position that I was obliged to give her to understand that she had delighted me by her preference.



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She asked the marquis if she could return to the inn.

“Yes,” said he, “but I have some business in hand, and cannot come with you.”

“Would you be kind enough to escort me?” said she to me. I bowed in assent.

On the way she told me that if Madame Zeroli were still there she would not have dared to take my arm. I could only reply by equivocating, as I had no wish to embark in a fresh intrigue. However, I had no choice; I was obliged to accompany her to her room and sit down beside her; but as I had had no sleep the night before I felt tired and began to yawn, which was not flattering for the lady. I excused myself to the best of my ability, telling her that I was ill, and she believed me or pretended to believe me. But I felt sleep stealing upon me, and I should have infallibly dropped off if it had not been for my hellebore, which kept me awake by making me sneeze.

The marquis came in, and after a thousand compliments he proposed a game of quinze. I begged him to excuse me, and the lady backed me up, saying I could not possibly play in the midst of such a sneezing fit. We went down to dinner, and afterwards I easily consented to make a bank, as I was vexed at my loss of the day before. As usual I staked five hundred louis, and about seven o'clock, though two-thirds of the bank had gone, I announced the last deal. The marquis and two other heavy gamblers then endeavoured to break the bank, but fortune turned, and I not only got back my losses but won three hundred Louis besides. Thereupon I rose, promising the company to begin again next day. All the ladies had won, as Desarmoises had orders to let them play as they liked up to a certain limit.

I locked up my money, and warning my faithful Spaniard that I should not be coming back, I went to my idol, having got wet through on the way, and being obliged to undress as soon as I arrived. The good woman of the house took care to dry my clothes.

I found the fair nun dressed in her religious habit, and lying on the small bed.

“Why are you not in your own bed, dearest?”

“Because I feel quite well again, my darling, and I wished to sup with you at table. We will go to bed afterwards, if that will give you any pleasure.”

“It will give me pleasure if you share in my delight.”

“Alas! I am undone, and I shall doubtless die when I have to leave you.”

“Do not leave me, sweetheart; come with me to Rome; and leave the matter in my hands. I will make you my wife, and we will live happily together ever after.”



“That would be too great a bliss, but I could never make up my mind to it; say no more about it.”

I was sure of spending a delicious night—in the possession of all her charms, and we stayed an hour at table, seasoning the dishes with sweet converse. When we had done, the woman came up, gave her a packet, and went away again, wishing us good night.



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“What does this packet contain, darling?”

“It is the present I have got for you-my portrait, but you must not see it till I am in bed.”

“I will indulge you in that fancy, although I am very curious to see the portrait.”

“You will say I am right afterwards.”

I wanted to undress her myself, and she submitted like a lamb. When she was in bed, she opened the packet, and shewed me her portrait, naked, and very like the naked portrait of M—— M——. I praised the painter for the excellence of the copy he had made; nothing was altered but the colour of the hair and eyes.

“It isn’t a copy,” she said, “there would not have been time. He only made the eyes and hair black, and the latter more abundant. Thus you have in it a portrait of the first and also of the second M—— M——, in whom you must forget the first. She has also vanished from the clothed portrait, for you see the nun has black eyes. I could shew this picture to anyone as my portrait.”

“You do not know how precious your present is to me! Tell me, dearest, how you succeeded in carrying out your plan so well.”

“I told the country-woman about it yesterday morning, and she said that she had a foster-son at Anneck, who was a miniature painter. Through him she sent the two miniatures to a more skilful painter at Geneva, who made the change you see for four or five Louis; he was probably able to do it in two or three hours. I entrusted the two portraits to him, and you see how well he did his work. The woman has no doubt just received them, and to-morrow she may be able to tell you more about it.”

“She is really a wonderful woman. I will indemnify her for the expense. But now tell me why you did not want me to see the portrait before you were in bed?”

“Guess.”

“Because I can now see you in the same posture as that in which you are represented.”

“Exactly.”

“It is an excellent idea; only love can have given it you. But you must wait till I am in the same state.”

When we were both in a state of nature, exactly like Adam and Eve before they tasted the fatal apple, I placed her in the position of the portrait, and guessing my intention from my face she opened her arms for me to come to her; but I asked her to wait a moment, for I had a little packet too, which contained something she would like. I then



drew from my pocket-book a little article of transparent skin, about eight inches long, with one opening, which was ornamented with a red rosette. I gave her this preventive sheath, and she looked, admired, and laughed loudly, asking me if I had used such articles with her Venetian sister. "I will put it on myself; you don't know how I shall enjoy it. Why didn't you use one last night? How could you have forgotten it? Well, I shall be very wretched if anything comes of it. What shall I do in four or five months, when my condition becomes past doubt?"



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“Dearest, the only thing to do is not to think of it, for if the damage is done, there is no cure for it; but from my experience and knowledge of the laws of nature I expect that our sweet combats of last night will probably have no troublesome consequences. It has been stated that after child-birth a woman cannot conceive afresh without having seen something which I expect you have not seen.”

“No, God be thanked!”

“Good. Then let us not give any thought to the dismal future lest we lose our present bliss.”

“I am quite comforted; but I can’t understand why you are afraid to-day of what you were not afraid yesterday; my state is the same.”

“The event has sometimes given the lie to the most eminent physicians. Nature, wiser than they, has exceptions to her rules, let us not defy them for the future, but let us not trouble ourselves if we have defied there in the past.”

“I like to hear you talk so sagely. Yes, we will be prudent whatever it costs. There you are, hooded like a mother abbess, but in spite of the fineness of the sheath I like the little fellow better quite naked. I think that this covering degrades us both.”

“You are right, it does. But let us not dwell on these ideas which will only spoil our pleasure.”

“We will enjoy our pleasure directly; let me be reasonable now, for I have never thought of these matters before. Love must have invented these little sheaths, but it must first have listened to the voice of prudence, and I do not like to see love and prudence allied.”

“The correctness of your arguments surprises me, but we will philosophize another time.”

“Wait a minute. I have never seen a man before, and I have never wished to enjoy the sight as much as now. Ten months ago I should have called that article an invention of the devil; but now I look upon the inventor as a benefactor, for if my wretched hump-back had provided himself with such a sheath he would not have exposed me to the danger of losing my honour and my life. But, tell me, how is that the makers of these things remain unmolested; I wonder they are not found out, excommunicated, or heavily fined, or even punished corporeally, if they are Jews as I expect. Dear me, the maker of this one must have measured you badly! Look! it is too large here, and too small there; it makes you into a regular curve. What a stupid the fellow must be, he can’t know his own trade! But what is that?”



“You make me laugh; it’s all your fault. You have been feeling and fondling, and you see the natural consequence. I knew it would be so.”

“And you couldn’t keep it back a minute. It is going on now. I am so sorry; it is a dreadful pity.”

“There is not much harm done, so console yourself.”

“How can I? you are quite dead. How can you laugh?”

“At your charming simplicity. You shall see in a moment that your charms will give me new life which I shall not lose so easily.”



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“Wonderful! I couldn’t have believed it!”

I took off the sheath, and gave her another, which pleased her better, as it seemed to fit me better, and she laughed for joy as she put it on. She knew nothing of these wonders. Her thoughts had been bound in chains, and she could not discover the truth before she knew me; but though she was scarcely out of Egypt she shewed all the eagerness of an enquiring and newly emancipated spirit. “But how if the rubbing makes the sheath fall off?” said she. I explained to her that such an accident could scarcely happen, and also told her of what material the English made these articles.

After all this talking, of which my ardour began to weary, we abandoned ourselves to love, then to sleep, then to love again, and so on alternately till day-break. As I was leaving, the woman of the house told us that the painter had asked four louis, and that she had give two louis to her foster-son. I gave her twelve, and went home, where I slept till morn, without thinking of breakfasting with the Marquis de Prie, but I think I should have given him some notice of my inability to come. His mistress sulked with me all dinner-time, but softened when I allowed myself to be persuaded into making a bank. However, I found she was playing for heavy stakes, and I had to check her once or twice, which made her so cross that she went to hide her ill-temper in a corner of the hall. However, the marquis won, and I was losing, when the taciturn Duke of Rosebury, his tutor Smith, and two of his fellow-countrymen, arrived from Geneva. He came up to me and said, “How do you do?” and without another word began to play, inviting his companions to follow his example.

Seeing my bank in the last agony I sent Le Duc to my room for the cash-box, whence I drew out five rolls of a hundred louis each. The Marquis de Prie said, coolly, that he wouldn’t mind being my partner, and in the same tone I begged to be excused. He continued punting without seeming to be offended at my refusal and when I put down the cards and rose from the table he had won two hundred louis; but all the others had lost, especially one of the Englishmen, so that I had made a profit of a thousand louis. The marquis asked me if I would give him chocolate in my room next morning, and I replied that I should be glad to see him. I replaced my cash-box in my room, and proceeded to the cottage, pleased with the day’s work and feeling inclined to crown it with love.

I found my fair friend looking somewhat sad, and on my enquiring the reason she told me that a nephew of the country-woman’s, who had come from Chamberi that morning, had told her that he had heard from a lay-sister of the same convent, whom he knew, that two sisters would start at day-break in two days’ time to fetch her; this sad news, she said, had made her tears flow fast.

“But the abbess said the sisters could not start before ten days had expired.”



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“She must have changed her mind.”

“Sorrow intrudes into our happy state. Will you be my wife? Will you follow me to Rome and receive absolution from your vows. You may be sure that I shall have a care for your happiness.”

“Nay, I have lived long enough; let me return to my tomb.”

After supper I told the good woman that if she could rely on her nephew, she would do well to send him at once to Chamberi with orders to return directly the lay-sisters started, and to endeavour to reach Aix two hours before them. She told me that I might reckon on the young man’s silence, and on his carrying out my orders. I quieted in this way the charming nun’s alarm, and got into bed with her, feeling sad though amorous; and on the pretext that she required rest I left her at midnight, as I wanted to be at home in the morning since I had an engagement with the marquis. In due course he arrived with his mistress, two other ladies, and their husbands or lovers.

I did not limit myself to giving them chocolate; my breakfast consisted of all the luxuries the place afforded. When I had got rid of my troublesome company, I told Le Duc to shut my door, and to tell everybody that I was ill in bed and could not see any visitors. I also warned him that I should be away for two days, and that he must not leave my room a moment till I came back. Having made these arrangements, I slipped away unperceived and went to my mistress, resolved not to leave her till half an hour before the arrival of the lay-sisters.

When she saw me and heard that I was not going to leave her till she went away, she jumped for joy; and we conceived the idea of not having any dinner that we might enjoy our supper the better.

“We will go to bed after supper,” said she, “and will not get up till the messenger brings the fatal news that the lay-sisters have started.”

I thought the idea an excellent one, and I called the woman of the house to tell her of our arrangements, and she promised to see that we were not disturbed.

We did not find the time long, for two passionate lovers find plenty to talk about since their talk is of themselves. And besides our caresses, renewed again and again, there was something so mysterious and solemn in our situation that our souls and our senses were engaged the whole time.

After a supper which would have pleased a Lucullus, we spent twelve hours in giving each other proofs, of our passionate love, sleeping after our amorous struggles, and waking only to renew the fight. The next day we rose to refresh ourselves, and after a good dinner, mashed down by some excellent Burgundy, we went to bed again; but at



four the country-woman came to tell us that the lay-sisters would arrive about six. We had nothing now to look for in the future, the die was cast, and we began our farewell caresses. I sealed the last with my blood. My first M—— M—— had seen it, and my second rightly



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saw it also. She was frightened, but I calmed her fears. I then rose, and taking a roll containing fifty louis I begged her to keep them for me, promising to come for them in two years, and take them from her hands through the grating of her terrible prison. She spent the last quarter of an hour in tears, and mine were only restrained lest I should add to her grief. I cut off a piece of her fleece and a lock of her beautiful hair, promising her always to bear them next my heart.

I left her, telling the country-woman that she should see me again the next day, and I went to bed as soon as I got home. Next morning I was on the way to Chamberi. At a quarter of a league's distance from Aix I saw my angel slowly walking along. As soon as the lay-sisters were near enough they asked an alms in the name of God. I gave them a Louis, but my saint did not look at me.

With a broken heart I went to the good countrywoman, who told me that M—— M—— had gone at day-break, bidding her to remind me of the convent grating. I kissed the Worthy woman, and I gave her nephew all the loose silver I had about me, and returning to the inn I had my luggage put on to the carriage, and would have started that moment if I had had any horses. But I had two hours to wait, and I went and bade the marquis farewell. He was out, but his mistress was in the room by herself. On my telling her of my departure, she said,

“Don't go, stay with me a couple of days longer.”

“I feel the honour you are conferring on me, but business of the greatest importance obliges me to be gone forthwith.”

“Impossible,” said the lady, as she went to a glass the better to lace herself, shewing me a superb breast. I saw her design, but I determined to baulk her. She then put one foot upon a couch to retie her garter, and when she put up the other foot I saw beauties more enticing than Eve's apple. It was nearly all up with me, when the marquis came in. He proposed a little game of quinze, and his mistress asked me to be her partner. I could not escape; she sat next to me, and I had lost forty Louis by dinner-time.

“I owe you twenty,” said the lady, as we were going down.

At dessert Le Duc came to tell me that my carriage was at the door, and I got up, but under the pretence of paying me the twenty louis the marquis's mistress made me come with her to her room.

When we were there she addressed me in a serious and supplicating voice, telling me that if I went she would be dishonoured, as everybody knew that she had engaged to make me stay.



“Do I look worthy of contempt?” said she, making me sit down upon the sofa.

Then with a repetition of her tactics in the morning she contrived that I should see everything. Excited by her charms I praised her beauties, I kissed, I touched; she let herself fall on me, and looked radiant when her vagrant hand found palpable proof of her powers of attraction.



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“I promise to be yours to-morrow, wait till then.”

Not knowing how to refuse, I said I would keep her to her word, and would have my horses taken out. Just then the marquis came in, saying he would give me my revenge and without answering I went downstairs as if to come back again, but I ran out of the inn, got into my carriage, and drove off, promising a good fee to the postillion if he would put his horses at a gallop.