

# **The Village Inn; or, The Adventures of Bellechassaigne**

Henry William Herbert

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On the western outskirts of a little hamlet, situated on the verge of a great forest, not many miles from Vitry, on the high-road leading from Bar le Due to Paris, there stood in the summer of 1653, a large old-fashioned inn, which has long since yielded, like all things earthly, to the consuming hand of time, but which in its day possessed no limited or narrow reputation. So excellent indeed was its accommodations, so celebrated its cuisine, and so remarkable the courtesy of the aubergist, that the cerf blanc of Lagny la Forêt, was known so well to all who journeyed in that district, that travellers would often turn aside from the direct line of their route in order to enjoy its far-famed hospitality. It was a solitary building of considerable size, situated in a spot of singular and romantic loveliness at the foot of three soft green hills, which sloped down easily on every side except the south, with two small glens between them, each watered by a bright and sparkling rivulet, which meeting at their base, swept off in easy curves through a rich level meadow, and joined a more considerable stream at the distance of a quarter of a mile, or perhaps less, to the southward. The summits of two of these green knolls, for they were indeed little more those to the north and west, were crowned by the tall trees of the neighboring forest which covered the whole face of the country for miles in that direction, and many scattered oaks and ashes grew straggling down their sides, the outposts as it were and sentinels of the vast verdant host. The third or eastern hill, unlike its neighbors, was cleared almost entirely of wood and very richly cultivated in meadow-land and pastures, divided from each other by lines of thriving fruit-trees, among which wound a narrow sandy road toward the village, lying just out of sight beyond the summit its tall and lancelike spire standing out clear and sharp against the sky, above the rounded brow. Just in the hollow where the streams blended their bright waters, stood the old inn, a large irregular rambling edifice, with steep projecting gables and latticed windows, no two of them alike; of every shape and size that can be fancied, and a huge oaken porch all overrun with jessamine and woodbine, facing the yellow road. Four or five weeping-willows of vast size grew on the margin of the stream, quite overarching the stone bridge, which spanned it close to the western gable, and bathed the old moss-grown roof with cool and grateful umbrage; while a small strip of garden on either side the door, fenced by a rustic paling and thickly set with sweet-briars and many-colored rose-bushes, completed the attractions of the spot. The stables and out-buildings were all behind the house, concealed from view by the nature of the ground, nor were there any indications that the house itself was one for public entertainment, unless it were an antiquated sign representing the White Stag whence the inn's name, which swung from a cross-piece morticed into the trunk of one of the great willows, and a long horse-trough supplied with living water by a little aqueduct from a spring in the hill-side, with a stone horseblock by its end.

Such was the Village Inn, as it appeared on the evening of a sweet summer's day in the year I have mentioned and a more beautiful or tranquil spot could scarcely be conceived by painter or by poet. The rich green hills touched here by the calm yellow sunshine, and chequered there by the long purple shadows projected from the noble trees, which studded their smooth slopes; the grand and solemn masses of the forest contrasted with the cultivated fields and glowing gardens; the sparkling rivulet; the wide deep stretch of meadow-land before the house with the broad tranquil river flowing brimful with slow and noiseless current; the shadowy woods beyond it robed in the mellow haze of evening; and the bright yellow road winding along in the foreground, combined to form a picture worthy the pencil of a Poussin. Nor were there wanting, at the moment

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we have chosen, figures to animate the scene, and those, too, striking and effective. In the inn porch, having come forth to welcome the guests who were arriving, there stood as beautiful a specimen of a young peasant girl, with her fine black hair smoothly braided on her fair forehead, and her dark eyes and sparkling features all kindled into sudden animation, as could be found at that day in all France. Behind her and within the shadow of the door, an old greyheaded man might be seen slowly coming forward but it was to the space before the door, and to the road beyond, on the side farthest from the village, that their attention was directed for there had just arrived two horsemen, splendidly mounted, though their horses were much travel-soiled and jaded, dressed in rich liveries of scarlet laid down with silver lace, with huge jackboots and feathered hats, and long straight broadswords by their sides. One of these men had already leaped to the ground, and was watering his horse from the trough, while the other had pulled up before the porch, and was in the act of speaking to the peasant maiden, pointing as he did so with his right hand to a coach and six horses driven by three postillions, and followed by four outriders, all clad in the same sumptuous livery which decked himself and his companion. A few minutes only passed before the carriage, a huge square-topped machine covered with gilded carvings, came lumbering down the hill to the door as fast as the efforts of six huge Flanders mares could drag its cumbrous bulk. As it stopped, half a dozen servants of both sexes came rushing out from the inn, while the two men who had arrived before, giving their horses to the hostler, hurried up to let down the steps and open the door of the carriage; and scarcely was this done before a tall old man of an air singularly noble and distinguished, stepped nimbly out and turned round, hat in hand, to help two ladies to descent from the vehicle. And here it will be well to pause for a few moments, to note the appearance of these personages, since it is probable that, ere my story comes to a conclusion, we shall have much to do with them, and feel some interest in their proceedings. The lady who got out the first, was a young girl of some nineteen or twenty years, tall, slender, finely formed, and exquisitely beautiful; it was plain, however, to be seen, that she was or had been quite recently in deep anxiety and sorrow; for she was very pale, almost unnaturally so, and on her brow there sat a grave despondent gloom, and her full dark blue eyes were downcast and suffused, and her fair cheeks displayed the traces of the tears which seemingly had hardly ceased to flow. Her hair, of a bright lustrous brow, fell in profuse and silky masses, unstained by the hideous hair-powder which was just coming into vogue, and all untortured by the implements of the court *coiffeur*, on either side her face, quite down upon her shoulders. She was superbly dressed according to the fashion of the day, in amber-colored satin, profusely trimmed with the point lace of Brussels, nearly a foot in breadth, and bows of rich white ribbon; her feet too, delicately small and shapely, were decked with satin slippers, and she bore in her hand a fan nearly a yard in length, elaborately painted with the story of some nymph or goddess, from the metamorphoses of Ovid. The elder lady, who was indeed considerably advanced in years, though she retained still many traces of a beauty which must have been remarkable in her day, was still a fine and stately looking woman, erect and perfectly unbending, with large black eyes that had a piercing and pervading glance, almost unpleasant to those who met its scrutiny. Her other features, too, though they were all well shaped and not uncomely, were striking rather than attractive; a thin Roman nose and a mouth closely shut, and very strongly marked, seeming to indicate a character at the same time determined and imperious; her manners, notwithstanding this and all her air, were gentle, full of easy grace, and showed that whatsoever was the natural bias of her temper, she had lived long enough in the highest circles of society to learn how to veil the truth, which might have been less pleasing, under a mask of smiles and smooth politeness. She was dressed magnificently in a rich robe of pompadour brocade, all flowered with rosebuds finely embroidered in their natural hues, looped up at both the sides with cords and tassels, so as to show an under-dress of silver tissue; her own gray hair was braided closely about the contour of a high but narrow forehead, and covered partially by a head-dress of splendid lace; she had on highheeled shoes, and carried in her hands a fan even larger than that of her young companion, and a slight cane with a crutch head of gold. It would have been scarcely possible for any casual spectator to look at these ladies without arriving at the opinion that they must have started on their journey very suddenly immediately on quitting some ball-room, or high court-party; for, although it was the fashion of those days for ladies and gentlemen, at all times, to dress in a style suited to their rank, it was evident at a glance from the bare necks and arms of the ladies, their long fringed gloves, and the bright jewels on their hair and at their bosoms, that they were in full evening costume. The gentleman who helped them from the carriage was of an air, as I have said already, of singular distinction; tall and extremely thin, and with a light stoop, the effect of years, as it would seem, on a frame which in its time had been as stately and erect as the mountain pine; there was something military, too, in the precision of his every movement, and chiefly in his

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measured tread, which added not a little to the effect produced by his appearance; it was, however, to his head and the whole cast of his features that he owed most of the respectful admiration which he was wont at all times to encounter; for sure a fairer or more classic head had never been set upon human shoulders nor had lineaments more beautiful bespoke the possession of a benevolent and noble character. His snow white hair, which he wore very long, was parted evenly on the crown, and fell down either cheek in heavy waving lines over the collar of rich Heemskirke lace, which graced his velvet pourpoint. His face was rather pale than florid, but not on that account deficient in the hues of health, with a broad massive forehead, large bright gray eyes, a small and well cut nose, and a mouth singular for the combination it displayed of firm decision with benevolence and even blandness. He was attired in a full suit of lavender-colored velvet over a doublet of white satin which was displayed at the bosom, in the openings of the wide falling sleeves, and in the slashings of the dress, which was much laced with cords and fine embroideries of silver. He wore long hose of silk with silver clocks, shoes with immense rosettes of lavender and silver, a diamond-hilted rapier at his side suspended from a rich white scarf, an amber-headed cane in his right hand, and in his left a hat trimmed with a band of feathers. He bowed to each of the ladies as she left the carriage with that peculiar air of proud humility and deference, which was characteristic of the age in which he lived and which, like many other of the best institutions of our grandsires, is making way for that boorish and abrupt insensibility too often looked upon as manly bluntness of demeanor giving his hand to the elder lady. Then he conducted her, holding the tips of her fingers only, toward the hospitable entrance the fair girl following dejectedly behind her. In a minute or something less after the ladies, a gay-looking soubrette, who had remained to gather up a host of mantles, roquelaures and hoods, tripped down the steps and followed after her superiors; but not until a little incident had taken place, which had it been observed by the elders of the party, would probably have called forth some suspicion against the sweet young being to whom it seemed to impart no small satisfaction. Just as she was entering the porch of the inn, under the shadow of which her parents for such they seemed to be had already disappeared, one of the men in scarlet livery, who had arrived before the carriage, stooped suddenly to the ground as if to pick up something which had fallen; and when he rose again, although his comrad had not observed anything before either lying in the road or in his hand, he held a small embroidered kerchief with golden threads interwoven in the tissue; and immediately running up to the young lady, he gave it to her, exclaiming as he did so, "Your kerchief you have dropped your kerchief, Mademoiselle Louise!" She started as he spoke, and turned round quickly, and her lips moved as if she was about to answer him, and probably would have denied it, had she not caught a quick glance of intelligence in the man's face, which led her to extend her hand and receive the kerchief, as if it had belonged to her. The instant, however, that her fingers closed upon it she seemed to feel something within its folds, and while her eyes sparkled and her whole face lighted up with a joyous expression, she blushed brow, cheeks, and neck, and bosom, as far as could be seen above the corsage, one glow of bright carnation. She tried at once to make some answer to the servant; but instantly became embarrassed and stopped short, while the elder lady, whose attention had been excited by the slight bustle, asked in a shrill voice which had something very imperious in its tones "Louise! Louise! what is to do now, that you loiter so behind? Come hither, come quick, Mademoiselle what were you doing there with Martin?"

"Nothing, Madame la Marquise," answered Louise, blushing even more deeply than before, and becoming even more embarrassed "Martin was only giving me this handkerchief, which he had just found dropped beside the wheel."

"Let me see, let me see," returned the other; "how could you be so careless as to let it fall? Give it to me, I say; I never saw that handkerchief before."

I know not how it was, that at this moment there was a strange awkwardness in the manner of Louise, whose movements were in general as easy and as springy as the wild doe's. She shifted the handkerchief from her right hand to her left, and actually tripped over a low step in the passage, and was almost upon the point of falling; but she recovered herself with something of an effort, putting her right hand for a moment to her bosom.

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"How very careless you do grow, Louise," cried the old lady, even more tartly than she had spoken previously. "I am sure it is well for us all your father has resolved to visit his chateau this autumn, for had we remained in Paris any longer, your gaucherie would certainly have rendered us all perfectly ridiculous; but, *Mon Dieu*," she continued, "where could Martin have got this handkerchief; it is not mine, I am sure, and I do not remember that you have any of this pattern have you, Mademoiselle?"

The poor girl looked as if she would have fainted, and it was several seconds before she contrived to make some indistinct and dubious answer suggesting that it might possibly be some perquisite or present to Janette the maid; who, coming up opportunely at the moment, and seeing the beauty of the unclaimed article in question, answered, that certainly it was her handkerchief; her cousin Henri, page to the Baron de Beaujeu, gave it her yesterday before they left the city.

This for the time put an end to the contention; but not, as it would seem, to the suspicious humor of the Marquise, who continued to watch poor Louise with jealous scrutiny, until at length the Marquise, calling off her attention by some occasional remark, put an end to the persecution.

In the mean time they had been ushered in through the dark passage, and up several road low steps into the best apartment of the inn a large, low-roofed, square room, with a huge open fire-place at the end facing the door, completely filled by its summer garniture, composed of a huge china jar filled almost to overflowing with gaudy flowers and green foliage. Two large, wide, latticed windows, each one divided by stone-mullions into some three or four compartments, all of which were now thrown far open to admit the mild and balmy breath of summer, looked out across the road, and the deep level meadow, and the broad glistening river, to the still woods and quiet hills beyond. The lattices were all festooned with clear white curtains, and on their ample window-seats were many pots of lavender, and thyme, and rosemary, and other fragrant herbs diffusing a faint, spicy perfume through the chamber. An antique beaufet in the corner of the room, was garnished gayly with half a dozen cups and tankards of old-fashioned silver plate, a posset cup and cover richly gilt, a flagon or two of pewter, polished so brightly that a passing glance might have mistaken the material for the purer metal, and a good store of Venice glasses of all shapes and sizes. A large round table stood in the centre of the room, covered with a piece of tapestry, elaborately wrought in needlework; a heavy sideboard, covered with knife-boxes, and pewter dishes burnished as brightly as the flagon, graced the side opposite the windows; a huge eight-day clock in a black case of old carved walnut, ticked in one corner of the room, while sundry ponderous arm-chairs, with well-stuffed cushions of white dimity, and an immense settee in the chimney-corner, completed the furniture of the apartment, the floor of which was neatly sanded, and all the details redolent of the most precise and careful cleanliness. Such was the room into which our travellers were shown by the "neat-handed Phillis" of the inn; and certainly, to travellers wearied with journeying through the heat and burthen of the day, there hardly could be a more grateful contrast, than between the glare, and dust, and turmoil which prevailed without, and the half-twilight shadows, the pleasant odors, and the absolute tranquillity of that old-fashioned chamber. The little maiden was still busily employed in whisking away some grains of imagined dust which, to her sedulous eye, appeared to have settled on the glass doors of the beaufet, when the Marquis had handed his proud dame to a seat on the settee; and poor Louise, having dropped quietly into a sort of cushioned ottoman, which filled the embrasure of one of the old windows, so soon as the stern eye of the Marchioness had ceased to scrutinize her features, was gazing out upon the fair scenery beyond the road, with a half-melancholy, half-unconscious air that bespoke, certainly, how far her mind was absent from the place which held her body. Yet her eye did dwell languidly upon whatever came before it, and her mind partially took note of passing objects, although, in truth, it was scarce conscious of its own occupation; the swallows which skimmed to and fro above the waving grass, that changed its hue with every changeful air that swept its varying surface, were painted on her retina, as they rose twittering to the eaves hailed by the greetings of their callow young, or sallied forth on darting pinion, pursuing their small insect prey. She saw them, she knew that they were there, and yet she had no more thought of them than had her senses given her no note of their existence. The swarm of bees were revelling with a continued murmur about the blossoms of the jessamine and honeysuckle, and the harmonious buzz came soothingly upon her ear, as did the whisper of the gentle breeze among the pendulous leaves and weeping branches of the willow, and the drowsy tinkle of the

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streamlets chafing against the pebbles on their margin; yet, though she heard them and they soothed her, had she been questioned suddenly as to the nature of the sounds which she was drinking in so tranquilly, she might well have hesitated for an answer.

Meantime she scarce would have been left so long to her own reveries, had not her lady mother been employed in questioning the maid of the inn on that most anxious and engrossing subject, the approaching hour of supper.

"Oh, yes, Madame la Marquise," answered the girl in reply to some foregoing query. "Oh, yes, Madame, we can have it ready in less time than that; but what would madame please to have for supper?"

"Why, as to that, child," answered the old lady scornfully enough, "I suppose there is no choice about the matter: what have you got to give us?"

"Whatever Madame pleases," was the reply, as might have been predicted; but when pressed somewhat more closely, she descended to more minute particulars.

"Madame would choose, of course," she said, "to have some soup and bouilli the pot was on the fire always! And there were trout fresh from the stream, which were judged excellent when roasted on the ashes; and then there were eels, too, from the river, and they could be made ready instantly *en matelot*, or *au tartar*, and then there were pullets young and tender, *aux petits points d'esperge*, and a *pata de perigord*, and partridges *aux truffes*, and *pigeons a la crapaudine*; and then there was patisserie and fruit, and cream and coffee, and as good Bordeaux and champagne as any that was sold in Paris."

The sternness of the Marchioness appeared to be soothed somewhat by the recital of so many delicacies, and it might be readily perceived from the unction with which she issued her directions, accompanied by a few hints as to the proper mode of preparation of this *puree*, or that *consommee*, that a taste for *friandise* was not one of her least weaknesses.

Profuse of promises, the peasant girl departed, and then poor Louise was roused from her luxury of indefinite musings by the shrill accents which she heard so seldom but to chide her.

"Who would have thought, Louise, that at a little country place like this, they should keep such a *menage*; why, truly, I don't see but what we shall sup quite as well as though we had been in the Place de Louvre. I don't think altogether, though, that the girl understood *puree*, when I explained it to her so carefully."

The fair girl started at the words, or at the accents rather, and answered evidently quite at random, not having heard or understood a syllable of what was said to her.

"No! yes I mean madame that is I beg your pardon "

"Why, how now; how now, minion? where are thy wits gone wandering now, I wonder? and what art gazing after there out of the casement? there be no gallants here, I warrant thee "

Her harsh words were cut short by a violent flood of tears, and a fit of convulsive sobbing, into which poor Louise fell instantly at this sharp and unmerited rebuke, and by the quick interposition of the Marquis.

"No! no!" he said. "Madame, my wife, pardon Louise this time, she is fatigued and worn out with this hot and sudden journey; and I am sure that this is not surprising, for I am tired out myself completely. I will go call Janette, *ma mignonne*," he continued, patting her kindly on the shoulder as he spoke, "and thou wert best retire to thy chamber, and take off all these inconvenient ornaments, and lie thee down a little while to rest. I will take care that thou art called to supper."

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His daughter's tears flowed, as he spoke, the faster; for his kind tones and his fond soft manner contrasted so remarkably with the keen, piercing accents of the lady, that she felt even more acutely than before the harshness of the treatment which, for the most part, she received at her hands; but the soubrette appearing almost instantly at the summons of the Marquis, she made a violent effort to restrain her tears, and recover at least the appearance of serenity. Her father led her to the door, and kissed her forehead tenderly, and bade her be a good child, so all would yet go well; and as her light form crossed the threshold, he looked after her with a saddened, and as it seemed, half-repentant expression of countenance. But when she had gone, and the sound of her steps had ceased to be heard in the echoing passage, he turned short round to the elder lady, and spoke firmly, and even resolutely, although with all the easy and elaborate politeness of a Frenchman.

"Madame la Marquise de Saint Eloy," he said, gravely, "I pray you pardon me when I say that this must not be hereafter. In all matters of importance, I consult implicitly your wishes, and conform to your excellent judgment, concerning the future views and the advancement of mademoiselle, your step-daughter. And as you well know, I gave you a very strong proof of this, when, though it is not at all convenient for me to quit Paris at this time, I resolved at once to follow your advice, and set off directly for my chateau, from Monsieur le Duc de Longueville's great ball, without so much as changing my ball costume for a dress suited to a journey; and all because you judged it wise to separate Louise at once from young Bellechassaigne. I mention this, madame my wife, to show you that I do not speak from any doubt of your discretion; but, when I follow all your wishes and adopt your views regarding her establishment in life, I must expect, at the same time, that my opinions shall receive some respect so far as regards the mode of treating her. Louise is as good a girl as ever lived in all the world tender, affectionate and dutiful "

"Dutiful, too? oh, wondrous dutiful, indeed!" retorted the sharp accents of the stepmother, "when she told me directly, in so many words, that she did love that young adventurer, and never, so long as she lived, should cease to do so; after I had so clearly shown her that he was no *parti!*"

"Yes! wondrous dutiful, indeed, madame," replied the Marquis, repeating the very words of his wife, but without the bitter emphasis of irony which had made her reply so cutting. "Yes, wondrous dutiful, I think. When she promised that she would never see him without permission from yourself, nor ever marry him without our sanction, and that, too, without a murmur or reproach. Yes, I do think it wonderful, madame, the patience and affectionate tranquillity with which she has endured your constant and pardon me, I beseech you, for the word somewhat unnecessary taunts throughout this journey!"

"Oh, you are always so *engoue* with Louise! so taken in and wheedled by that soft, sentimental, hypocritic air. You always make her out a complete martyr and a perfect angel. Now, if she was my daughter, I'd have a *lettre de cachet* in no time, and shut her up close in a convent until she chose to take the man I selected for her."

"But as she is *not your* daughter, madame my wife," returned the Marquis, rather more warmly than he had spoken before, for he was getting heated by her pertinacious opposition, "but mine only, you will do nothing of the kind! But so long as you wish to remain in the country, so that this love, or liking, or fancy, as you call it, may have time to pass over, you will oblige me very much by treating her not only civilly, but kindly, and affectionately, and fondly. You will *oblige me* do you mark me, madame?"

"I wonder, for my part," replied the lady, "why you don't alter your views altogether to suit this pretty puppet, and let her marry, as she wishes, this beautiful Bellechassaigne."

"I do not know," answered the Marquis, with the most perfect sang froid imaginable "I do not know whether it would not be the best way; for he is as fine a youth, most certainly, as any in the country. There is not a braver or a better soldier in all the king's army; and he is nobly born, moreover, and handsome, and accomplished; has everything, in short, but wealth and title to recommend him. I do not know at all whether it would not be the better way. I never had so much objection to the youth; it was to please you, madame, altogether, that I



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determined to break off the matter; and I did not do so, even then, without some compunction; since I had at the first in some degree encouraged young Bellechassaigne. One thing I have to say, however, that if Louise is made unhappy by any taunts or harshness, I will return at once to Paris, and give her to the man whom she has chosen. Besides, it is impolitic, madame, to say the least of it; and tends directly to make her rebel against authority, and either attempt to deceive us, or fly out into open disobedience. Kindness and soft words have a vast effect ever on an affectionate and kindly disposition, and I dare say she will forget him before long."

Just as he finished speaking, the door opened, and the servants entered to make preparations for supper. The table was laid with a snow-white cloth; bright pewter plates with clean napkins, abundance of wineglasses, and several silver tankards, a large gilt salt-cellar, and several long-necked flasks and bottles, were laid in order; and it was evident that ere long the evening meal would be set on the table. The servants, who were of both sexes, continued coming in and out of the room for some moments, and the Marquis, after continuing silent something longer than his wont, looked up, and seeing an intelligent lad standing idly beside the board with his napkin in hand, asked him two or three unimportant questions about the state of the country, the roads, the crops, &c.; and receiving clear and intelligible replies to every one of these, "How are the out-posts of the armies situated now?" he asked. "We are without the lines of Monsieur de Turenne, are we not?"

"Yes, Monsieur," the lad answered, "his head-quarters now are at Arcis sur Aube, I fancy; but his horse are quartered in all the villages between that place and this, but I think none of them are nearer than Mailly or Sommesous."

"And what do you hear tell in this quarter about the Prince of Conde?"

"The last news that reached us, he lay between Commercy and Voye; but four days since there was a rumor that he was marching upon Voye, and yesterday again heard we that some of his videttes had been seen foraging within four leagues of this, and people fancied he might be advancing."

"That might be troublesome that might be very troublesome," exclaimed the Marquis, musingly, and not expecting a reply. "It would not do at all to fall among his riotous troopers before my passports had been sent to him. Better send Martin forward post at break of day, or better still this evening, to go on till he find the prince. But ha! what have we here?"

His exclamation was called forth by the thick clattering tramp of many horses approaching rapidly, mixed with the clang of harness and accoutrements, and all the jingling din of a squadron of cavalry. In a moment more, four troopers trotted past the windows, coming up from the bridge and the forest, in the direction of Turenne's outposts. The men were covered with thick dust, and the horses hot and foamy, though not jaded; and it was evident that they were upon the alert, and in the expectation of meeting with an enemy; for the videttes held their carbines unslung, with their butts resting on their thighs, and their slow-matches lighted. So rapidly, however, did they glance past the casements, that it was impossible for the Marquis, though he looked out with all his eyes, to detect the uniform or colors of the troopers. After a little interval, two other troopers in morions and breast-plates of bright steel, came clanging up the road, and then Saint Eloy marked the white scarfs of the royal horse. Scarcely a moment had elapsed, ere a young subaltern rode by, and close behind him, trotting along as fast as they could urge their horses, in open column, a troop of horse arquebusiers followed. Another interval, and then an officer, wearing a velvet hat with a tall plume of snowy feathers, and a clear burnished corslet, inlaid with arabesques of silver, reined his proud charger through the dust wreaths; a dozen subalterns, with several buglers and a standard, riding close in his rear. After this gorgeous company, two more troops followed, one of the lancers of the royal guard, and the other, like the first, composed of horse arquebusiers: in all, falling perhaps a little short of two hundred men, admirably mounted and equipped, and fitted for immediate service. It did not occupy so long a time for the little band to file past the windows, so rapidly did they spur onward, as it has taken to describe it; for not a man halted, or drew in his horse, or even cast a wistful eye toward the hospitable building, but drove on steadily, each trooper with his every sense directed forward; eye, ear and heart on the alert, and seemingly

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expecting at each turn of the road to fall upon an enemy.

"Heavens!" exclaimed the Marquis, not without some expression of disturbance and dismay "either this is the vanguard of Turenne's advance and he is coming up in force; or what I fear is more likely Condè is moving hitherward, and a light party has been sent out to reconnoiter. They ride too rapidly for an advance *en masse*. Pray God! they meet not hereabouts with Condè's outposts, for it is clear they are not strong enough to do more than fight a retreating skirmish."

Even as he spoke, the keen notes of their bugles came floating down the wind, to the old soldier's ear he caught the import of the call in a moment.

"Ha!" he exclaimed "close up close up! By heaven, they suppose themselves even now almost in front of the foe! Martin, Francois, Eugene one of ye get a fleet horse on the instant, and spur, as if it was for life, after you troop of horsemen find out what duty they are on, and whither they are marching. Carry my greeting to the officer commanding the Marquis de Saint Eloy's greeting and I beseech him let me know if there is any danger, since I am here with ladies. Away with you, away! spare not for spoiling horse—flesh."

The men, who had rushed hastily into the room at their master's summons, obeyed his bidding instantly; and, in less than five minutes from the time when he gave the order, he heard the clatter of the messenger's gallop, as he hurried off to fulfill his mandates. An hour elapsed, and no news came, nor did the messenger return; nor did the supper which had so long before seemed all but actually ready make its appearance on the board. The last rays of the sun poured a broad stream of ruddy light against the casements of the inn; then momentarily died away, fainter and fainter, till the dim gray of twilight had usurped the empire of the skies, and all was dull and gloomy except a few small scattered clouds toward the zenith, which still smiled faintly with an evanescent brightness.

In the mean time, Louise, who had retired to a large and comfortable bedchamber, immediately above the parlor that her parents occupied, well fitted with all appliances of the toilet, which had become so universal in that land of luxury, had laid aside indeed the stiff paraphernalia of her full ball costume; had braided her hair simply round her beautiful head, and wrapt her glowing person in a loose robe of rich white silk, made without any ornament whatever, but drawn in closely round her slender waist, whence it swept down in full and ample draperies even to the clasp of her light slipper. Thus comfortably and unceremoniously dressed, when she had bathed her face, discolored by the trace of recent tears, and all her forehead in the pure cold water, she quietly dismissed the soubrette, who seemed inclined to linger in the room, on the pretext of laying by the dress which she had taken off; and desiring not to be disturbed until the supper was upon the table, composed herself apparently to sleep upon a large soft couch or ottoman beside the window. It was but for a little while, however, that she retained her recumbent attitude; for scarcely had the footsteps of the maid died into silence, when she jumped up lightly from the sofa, and treading softly as though she stepped on rose leaves, crossed the room to the bed whereon her ball dress had been negligently cast at the moment, when she took it off; and after searching a few seconds in the folds of the corsage drew out a small square note, written in a fine manly hand, and fastened by a fold of white floss silk secured by a little seal of perfumed wax. Louise gazed on the superscription for a moment, and pressed it once and again to her lips, before she broke the envelope, and read for we must bid defiance to good breeding and peep over her shoulder, as she peruses the few lines it contained, with eyes that literally seemed to overflow with delight as follows:

"Soul of my soul adorable Louise and so the blow is stricken and so the prejudices and the malice of that step—mother are to prevail against us. You are to be torn hence I learn, even before *you* know it; even from this very ball room, lest I should by mischance discover whither, and seeing you again discomfit these atrocious schemes against our peace. I heard it from a sure hand just as we finished our last dance, and hurrying straight to the Duke, my uncle, obtained an order to mareschal Turenne I mean, you know to give me the command of the videttes and guides, who will be pushed out in advance, as far almost as to your father's chateau. I have succeeded; and I write this, with one foot in the stirrup we shall meet, and that very soon, be sure of it, my

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angel and oh! Louise, if you would but adopt my counsel, if you would but go frankly to your father, he who is everything of kind and generous and noble, and tell him all your feelings, all your sad sufferings under that tyrant beldame all would go well with us. I know it, and you, Louise! you know it too! yet weakly tremble at the thought, and for one hour of doubt and of solicitude risk the endurance of long years of agony. Or if you dread too much the influence brought to bear upon that dear good father's mind, from that empoisoned source why not, Louise why not? you understand although I write it not at length why not take one bold honest step, and wronging no one, make two hearts happy for all ages? Think of this think of this, my angel and think of one, who, though his body be afar, is near you ever in the spirit. I will be near thee on thy route I will be near thee in thy father's park I will look on thee, it may well be, often, when none shall dream that I am nigh! And thou, Louise, wilt thou remember

Bellechassaigne.

"Hotel de Longueville, – *Juilliet 28me, 1653.*"

"Never, oh, never!" she exclaimed "never will I forget thee, for a moment. Alas! alas! how can I? Yet better, oh! far better were it for both, if we could both forget. Oh! why, just Heaven, why did my own sweet mother die, and leave her poor Louise to be a slave to her ah, me! how far dissimilar successor!" and, as she spoke, she wrung her hands in a strong burst of passionate anguish, and, throwing herself at length on the ottoman, buried her face in its downy cushions, and remained there for a long time silent, and motionless, and, to all appearance, lifeless. Not a limb quivered; not a muscle stirred in all her shapely form; and so stagnantly and slowly did the blood, which was wont to thrill so passionately through each living artery, now trickle, drop by drop, along her veins, paralyzed as they were, and numbed by overpowering grief, that scarcely a pulsation could be seen to tell that she was living. An hour, perhaps, passed thus, and still Louise lay there, unchanged in her position, although sleepless; and seemingly inanimate, although, in truth, distracted by the wild conflict of contending passions by that internal war, far fiercer than the strife of the most furious elements of nature that dread internal war between the elements of man, which rends and wears the body, even as the intestine fires cleave and consume the crust of the volcano. A thousand balanced feelings balanced so equally, that, of a truth, the battle was obstinate, and long, long doubtful were raging for the mastery within. On the one side, strong love love, which she once had fancied not to be all unsanctioned by her surviving parent love stronger than that of life love, giving a mighty confidence, a certain hope, by its intensity, that it and the soul it animates shall last and live beyond the grave young, holy, pure, unselfish love! and to aid that eternal power, outraged affections, and warm feelings slighted and repressed, and the keen sense of wrong small, petty, stinging, daily–recurring wrong the bitterer that it *was* small and petty! and the want irrepressible, and in the female breast, quite uncontrollable the want of *something* whereon to lavish that deep flood of tenderness and passion, which wells up hourly, nay, momentarily as copious, but at the same time as pure, and cold, and unsullied, as the spring that leaps exultingly from the impassive granite in the heart of every perfect woman. All these all these and gratitude besides, and indignation to abet it, and fast–rising pride, were mustering to arms gathering a puissant host, to hurry her into the arms of Bellechassaigne! And what was *there* what to withhold her? What? The affection for the one living parent the wild, half–superstitious veneration for the dearer dead the dread of the world's censure the awe that fortifies so strongly to a child the command of a father the spell of womanhood the guardian genius of the sex, in trial, trouble, or temptation bashfulness modesty the whiteness of the soul of a pure, innocent maiden; and these, though seemingly the weaker these, in the end, won the hard conflict. She rose from off the ottoman, and cast herself upon her knees, and prayed long, fervently, and deeply, and sincerely. She prayed for succor from on high that succor which is promised to all those who ask it truly succor against herself against the wishes of the flesh the deceitful imaginations of her own heart. She prayed, that, if indeed it were a sin to love so fervently that dear Bellechassaigne, grace might be given her to see the sin, and strength to conquer the temptation; but she prayed farther, "But, if it be no sin, mighty Lord and Father, if it be no sin to love him, after Thee, beyond all things that are or can be to love him not with wild and inordinate passion, but with calm moderation and maidenly affection, then, then, oh Lord! look down with favor on our love, and clear away the clouds that lower above us, and soften, I beseech thee, the hearts of my parents, that they may now relent toward us. Grant, oh, good Lord! if it may be

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so, grant that I yet may be his wife, and live with him, in righteousness and honor, to praise and glorify Thy name, which is, and was, and shall be, from everlasting unto everlasting!"

She arose from her knees; and arose, as those who pray with true piety and from the soul must arise ever, refreshed, and soothed, and strengthened. A quiet hope, that better days were coming, settled down on her spirit "like a gentle dew from Heaven;" a confidence that seemed not to be of the earth, or earthly, gained every moment on her mind; and, as she stretched herself once more upon the sofa, she felt not only tranquil and of good courage, but actually happy and at peace. Gradually her eyelids closed above her deep blue eyes, and she sunk into a sweet, healthful slumber; and ere long she smiled as she slept, and whispered some low words in a well pleased and happy tone, but there was no ear there to mark their import; nor, had there been any listener nigh, would he have easily interpreted those accents, so faint they were and indistinctly tuneful. This time, however, she did not remain long in that position; for, within about a quarter of an hour, the clattering tumult of the passing horsemen, which had so much disturbed her father, startled her likewise from her slumbers. The six first troopers had ridden by with all their clanking din, before she was sufficiently awake to understand what was the matter; the youthful subaltern who led the first troop of the arquebusiers was the first object that met her eye, and I know not how it was, nor wherefore, but, as she saw the soldiers hurrying along in open files, all looking anxiously ahead, it flashed upon her instantly that this quite unexpected march was, in some sort or other, connected with the note she had so recently received from her true lover; and she threw the lattice of her window open, and gazed out eagerly upon the pageant which swept by so rapidly. The first troop passed; and then joy! joy! he in the velvet hat and snowy plume he with the glittering breast-plate, and the white scarf all dusted over with bright golden fleurs de lis he whose tall, blood-bay charger curved his fierce neck so proudly to the bit joy! it was Bellechassaigne! And their eyes met, with a deep, thrilling glance, and a quick, flashing smile; and she waved her white hand to the bold gallant of her choice; but he bowed not, nor moved his high-plumed hat, nor waved a mute salute: nor gave he any token, save in that glance that penetrated to her very heart, and in that brilliant and exulting smile, that he had even marked the lady who leaned out, with her whole soul in her eyes, from the inn window.

It must be here remembered that the age of which I write was one which, although it had looked upon the dawning of a purer and more intellectual civilization than the benighted centuries that had preceded it, was nevertheless addicted much to superstition; portents and dreams still received faith almost implicit; and although miracles were not, by the better and more cultivated classes supposed to be of general or every-day occurrence, they were not deemed by any means impossible, or their existence contrary to the religious doctrines of the day. When, therefore, we consider that Louise was a young, ardent, inexperienced girl, full of romance and sentiment, and above all, but recently emancipated from the convent; where she had been educated, it is true, in all the graces and accomplishments of the period, but where she had been no less carefully instructed in all the wild and fabulous legends of the calendar, until her fancy had been seriously excited, and her mind imbued deeply with a species of superstitious piety, vague indeed, and indefinite, but powerful and capable of effecting, if unchecked by reason, material injury to her fine, enthusiastic, artless character when we consider this, I say, we shall find it in no wise extraordinary, that after the conclusion of her fervid prayer and appeal to Him who governs all things, she should have been more than half-inclined to believe that her petition had found favor above, and that the appearance of her lover, Bellechassaigne, in a manner so unaccountable and at a moment so unexpected, was neither more nor less than a sign vouchsafed to her from on High, betokening that her love for that dear object was pure and pardonable in the eyes of Heaven, and such as she might yield to without any impropriety or sin. She clasped her hands, and turned her fine eyes upward, swimming in heartfelt tears of tenderness and gratitude, and breathed a few brief words of ardent and impassionate thanks to Him who, as her fancy and mistaken zeal suggested, had given her so strange a token of his protecting love and approbation. A sweet, calm hope possessed her, and more than this, a confidence that by some means or other, she knew not nor even cared to conjecture what, the consent of her parents would be gained, and her union ere long brought about with the object of her young affections. A minute or two only had elapsed, however, before she heard the voice of her father raised far above its wonted tones, and summoning vociferously his attendants; much clattering to and fro of heavy boots over the stone floors of the hall and passages ensued, and, by-and-by, the clang of hoofs attracted her attention to the window, and she saw one of the scarlet-liveried servants gallop away as hard as his horse could carry him, as

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if with the intent of overtaking the troopers, who had now been out of sight nearly ten minutes. Here was fresh cause for wonder and excitement; and poor Louise lay on her sofa trembling between hope and fear, and breathlessly expecting the solution of her doubts, her wishes, or her terrors. At one time she imagined, that by some sudden and mysterious process, the heart of her father had been changed; and that the messenger had been dispatched to recall her exiled lover, and that perhaps, before an hour the sentence of non-intercourse would be revoked, and she permitted to avow her love, sanctioned by the consent of her parents, even before the world. Anon more gloomy fancies supplanted those bright visions; she now remembered that the voice of the Marquis had not been merely loud and hasty, but angry and excited; and she began to apprehend that in the appearance of Bellechassaigne, whom she could not doubt that he had perceived, he had suspected some clandestine understanding, and sent a hostile message, perhaps a deadly cartel, to call him to account for some imaginary wrong committed or intended. Thus she continued harassing herself with quick succeeding fancies, each one as void of any rational foundation as was its predecessor, until the sun had set, and the gray shades of night had swallowed up the last faint gleams of twilight. Still nothing was heard by her of the messenger; and so intensely had she watched, that she felt more than certain that he could not have by any possibility returned without her learning his arrival. While she was musing thus, a fresh sound called her to the window; it was the distant jar of wheels and horses' feet, coming up rapidly from the direction of Paris, and, as she looked out, she could readily perceive the dark and massive outlines of a huge square-topped carriage, like that in which she had herself arrived some hours before, surrounded by a large party of mounted serving-men, coming across the little bridge, and lumbering into the inn-yard. Immediately a dozen or more of the servants of the inn rushed out with links and flambeaux, which, wavering to and fro with their broad crimson glare, rendered the little esplanade before the door, and the road on both sides for many yards' distance, as bright as at noonday, though with a light by no means so pure or pervading. By this illumination, Louise was readily enabled to distinguish the smallest details of the carriage and its several appointments; and it was one which she knew, alas! but too well already; and from whose coming thither she augured nothing good, but much of suffering and persecution. The vehicle itself was splendid, even for that age of sumptuous and uncalculating luxury, all carved work, and rich gilding, and plate glass, surmounted by a large ducal coronet. Its horses, eight in number, were noble Norman grays, and the attendant horsemen, who could not have been fewer than ten or a dozen men, were mounted gallantly, and gorgeously appareled in liveries of light blue cloth, profusely laced with gold. Even before the carriage-door was opened, Louise foresaw the face and figure which would meet her reluctant gaze; her fears were even too prophetic. The steps were lowered, and forth came a small slight person, with a countenance singularly repulsive, and a form positively frightful. He was young, it is true, yet his pale features were already marked with many a deep-indented line and furrow, engraved there either by cares, or sickness, or the fierce brand of fiery passions. His brow was low and narrow, and somewhat receding, and it alone, of his whole face, was altogether polished and unwrinkled. He wore his own light hair, uncurled and undisguised by powder, in lank and straggling masses, around a face which varied from it but a little in the shades of its sallow and unchanging color. His eye the one redeeming character of that unpleasing countenance was large and clear, and very piercing, with something of an intellectual expression, which was confirmed, however, by nothing in brow, lip or nostril; for his nose was a thin sharp aquiline, and his mouth coarse, thick-lipped, and indicative of sensuality alone unqualified by anything of fire, or firmness, or decision. A sort of smile would, indeed, at times play across the pale ill-favored lineaments, but played across them only as it seemed to render them more unprepossessing, if such a thing were possible, than when they were at rest and motionless. For it had this peculiarity that the mouth only was distorted, as it were, by that ghastly sign of sneering and ungenial mirth, the eyes remaining cold, and clear, and passionless, and all the other features retaining their accustomed character of selfish, soulless apathy. His person was, as I have said, if possible, more hideous than his features; for he was very short, and so thin as to convey the idea of emaciation; he stooped much, with narrow shoulders, one of which was, moreover, oppressed by a hump of considerable magnitude. He had, besides, a weak contracted chest, arms singularly long, and garnished with huge claw-like hands; thin shapeless legs, knock-kneed, and terminated with splay feet, out of all proportion to his slight frame; and small unmuscular limbs. Such was the face, and such the form of the young man who stepped with an air of important dignity out of his gorgeous carriage; nor though a quick cold shudder of inexpressible disgust and loathing ran through the frame of the lovely girl, who, all unseen herself, was watching his descent, undoubtedly called forth by his appearance did he seem to be at all aware that his exterior was disagreeable, much less that it

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was hideous almost to a miracle; for he was arrayed magnificently, even beyond the magnificence of the most gorgeous court of earth a distinction which could not fail to be accorded to that of France, even in the earliest years of her fourteenth Louis. He wore a closely-fitting *just-au-corps* of peach-colored velvet, all covered with embroideries wrought in seed pearls and silver; his loose slashed breeches were of the same material, with fringes at the knees as there were likewise at the sleeves of his jerkin above a foot in depth, of the finest Brussels point. A dozen chains of jewelry and gold were twisted round his neck, and two or three great stars of brilliants bedecked the left breast of his coat, which was of purple silk brocade, lined, slashed and faced with genuine cloth of gold. A diamond, worth the ransom of an earl, attached his snowy plume of ostich feathers to the low-crowned flapped hat which he carried in his left hand, and the hilt of his rapier and the buckles of his velvet shoes gleamed in the torchlight masses of glorious brilliants. After this sumptuous personage, another individual made his exit from the vehicle, and one of widely-different appearance and demeanor. He was a larger and an older man, though not far past the middle age of his sex, dressed in the plain dark habiliments of an abbe of the French church. In person, this dignitary was tall, above the ordinary height of men, not being less than six feet two or three, and stout in proportion. In his younger days he must have been evidently a person of uncommon symmetry, and of strength proportionate to his stature, but as he had advanced in years he had grown somewhat corpulent and bulky, although not to a degree that could by any means have been termed unwieldy. His hair originally had been as dark as the raven's wing, but it was now so mixed with silvery tresses that it was nearer the tint which is called iron-gray than to any other color, although his eyebrows still retained their pristine hue unaltered. His features, like his form, were large and massive, with a brow singularly noble and expansive, which, indeed, formed by far the chief attraction of his countenance. His eye, which was of a deep and lustrous gray, was large, and open; but for the most part, it had a heavy, almost dull, expression, that seemed to indicate an indolent, and, perhaps, sleepy character; although at times a wild and flashing gleam would break out through the clouds that ordinarily hung about it, telling of fiercer passions and a more keen temperament than could have been suspected beneath that calm and somewhat somnolent exterior. The other features of the churchman, although large and, as I have said, massive in their outlines, were well-proportioned and attractive, and might have been termed handsome, but for a certain coarseness about the mouth and chin, which detracted not a little from the contour of the whole. The coloring of his head was rich and agreeable; his air and manners, exhibiting a graceful union of dignity and ease, were evidently those of a man who had mingled largely with his fellows, seen much of the great world, and learned to respect himself without encroaching on the self respect of others.

When Louise had perceived the young man, whom I have essayed to describe above, she wrung her hands bitterly; and a painful expression of distress and terror fell on her beautiful and speaking lineaments, while that sharp shivering chill of horror, which has been mentioned, shook every muscle of her frame; but when she saw the finer form of his companion following him from the carriage, the aspect of despair for it was almost such that blanched her face passed away somewhat, and a milder shade of sorrow took its place, and sat settled there, like a gray cloud on a fair landscape. Much bustle and confusion followed the arrival of the new comers; doors shut and opened, and loud voices were heard everywhere, and servants hurried to and fro, carrying trunks and baggage; but ere long this din passed away, and then, by the sounds of conversation which came up from the parlor underneath her chamber, Louise was made to understand that the object of her unconcealed abhorrence, with his companion, had been admitted to join the party of her parents. For some time longer she lay pale and languid, buried in bitter sorrow on her sofa; but after perhaps half an hour, the soubrette, who had accompanied her from Paris, threw the door open, and bustled into the apartment, followed by two damsels of the inn, one bearing a pair of tall wax lights, which she deposited on an old fashioned cabinet of ebony before a huge japan-framed mirror, the other carrying a large ewer of hot water, and sundry other necessaries of the toilet.

"Will it please you to rise now, mademoiselle," cried the girl, as she entered, in gay ringing tones, as if she had to announce the most agreeable intelligence in the world; "will it please you to rise now, and array yourself. Supper will be served in ten minutes, and the young Duc of Noirmoutier and the Abbe Du pont de Meillerie have arrived here just now, and will take supper with Madame, and Monsieur le Marquis. Your lady mother desires, Mademoiselle Louise, that you will let me dress your hair, and array you to the best advantage."

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"Oh, no! no, no! Janette," replied poor Louise "Oh, no! my head aches now worse than it did when I came up hither to lie down; I have not slept ten minutes. Go, tell Madame la Marquise that I beseech she will excuse me; I am quite sick quite sick, indeed! and if I must come down to supper it will be utterly impossible for me to travel any farther on our way to-morrow."

"Oh, no! mademoiselle," answered the girl, pertly; "Madame says it will do you good; and she *desires* you will come at once. So come! come, Mademoiselle Louise!"

"And I *desire* you, Janette," replied Louise, "to go at once and do my bidding whatsoever Madame la Marquise wishes, *she* can direct me to perform but I receive no orders, and tolerate no insolence from my own maid. Go and do as I tell you, without answering; and then come back and make me ready for such a night's rest, as I may obtain for I will lay me down directly."

The soubrette left the room without more words, although she continued muttering in a low sullen key, as long as she was within hearing; and slammed the door behind her with a degree of violence, that made the windows shake and rattle in their frames.

In a few minutes, however, before Louise had in the least degree recovered from her embarrassment, her father entered the chamber quietly. "What ails thee," he said in a soft tone, that at once melted the momentary obduracy which had grown up in her bosom from the sense of undeserved persecution. "What ails thee, my Louise? art indeed ill at ease? for, if so, we will send back instantly to Vitry for a physician; or is it only that thou art fatigued, and perhaps vexed, and a little pettish?"

"No! father dear father," she exclaimed, restraining her fastfalling tears by a mighty effort; "it is not altogether that I am sick, though my head does ache, and I am very tired; nor am I in the least pettish. But oh! my father, you know not, nor can you fancy, what your poor Louise daily suffers. Oh! I have held my peace and curbed my tears, and seemed to smile when misery was gnawing at my heart strings; and all, that I might not disturb thy peace but it must out! it must out now, or my reason will give way, and I shall go mad; now God forgive me! but I sometimes almost wish I were mad now! I have been foolish, perhaps very foolish in giving up my love to young Monsieur de Bellechassaigne; but I perchance had never done so, but that *you* suffered us to meet so often, and seemed to smile upon us, before your marriage and when I knew you and my mother disapproved, I promised that without your consent I never would hold intercourse with him, or see him any more; nay, father interrupt me not; for I must speak out that you may know how sorely I am tempted. For the past year or more, Madame la Marquise has never ceased to urge me to employ every means of hard and bitter persecution so to compel me to receive the loathsome and abhorred addresses of this Due de Noirmoutier, who has but now arrived. I know not if it be *your* will that I should wed him. She tells me that it is so; but be it so, or not, I cannot no! I cannot, though death itself, or, what were yet more terrible than death, your curse were the alternative. If it be so pity, oh pity, father; pity and pardon your poor child, whom you once loved so dearly; pardon her for the sake of her who"

"Cease! cease, my child!" cried the old man in a thick husky voice, raising her from her knees, upon which she had fallen during her vehement and eager pleading; "cease, dear Louise, to plead against a phantom; I never heard of this; I never dreamed of it, believe me! Even if *you* were willing, I should have been averse to such a marriage; and now I pledge you, my dear girl, my word of honor that you shall not be persecuted on this score at all. I will take order with that straightway. Moreover, a voice negative I think I have a right to exercise in such a matter; but, though I differ from most parents herein, and from many far wiser than myself, I do not judge it good to force a girl to wed against her inclination; however, should you be persecuted any more, I will put once for all a stop to it, and give you myself to Bellechassaigne. But now you must allow Janette to alter your dress somewhat, and then come down with me to supper. Nay, make no answer now for it is better that you should meet this precious youth at once, and so set matters where they should be. I will go now and say a few things to Madame, your mother!"

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"Stay, father, stay one moment," answered Louise, "for I cannot, when you are so kind to me, in any wise deceive you; or hide anything that you should know. I have received a note from Monsieur de Bellechassaigne, since we have been here at this inn "

"Nay, my girl, that was wrong I am displeased at that; such compacts are unmaidenly, unfeminine; in all respects wrong, and disgraceful!"

"But, father, my dear father," interposed Louise, "there was no compact in the case; nor did I know one word about it, until I actually had it in my hand; nor did I then suspect from whom it came, till I had opened it. I did not, I assure you, father," she added, speaking very eagerly and quickly, "or surely, after my promise to you, I would not have received it. I have not answered it, nor will I although I could have done so when he passed"

"Passed! *who* passed?" asked her father, suddenly pausing with the open note in his hand for her answer.

"Why, Monsieur de Bellechassaigne surely," she replied "Did you not see him with the soldiers that rode by just as the night was falling? I thought you sent a servant after him!"

"Ha! was that he? I marked him not," he added, casting his eyes rapidly over the young man's letter. "Well, well!" he said, when he had finished reading the epistle "we will think more of this hereafter. He ought not he ought *not*, however, to have so much as hinted at a clandestine marriage; such unions, my Louise, can be in no case honorable to the female; and what is more, believe me, they are but very rarely happy. So, that was he, who rode as the commander of those horsemen! I would give no small sum to know the meaning of that movement. Francois, too, whom I sent to bring me word, returns not! Well, I suppose we shall soon learn the reason. Now, then, I will go speak with the Marquise; and in the mean time, I will pray you make yourself ready to come down, when I return to fetch you."

"Oh, yes! dear father," she exclaimed, "depend on it, I will be ready. Janette, Janette come hither girl come hither girl, and help me."

And as the soubrette entered, she observed instantly that the whole air and character of the fair girl's expression was completely altered; and that a cheerful and gay smile had effaced the blank aspect of despondency, nay almost of despair, which had lowered so oppressively over her bright and glowing features.

Meantime the Marquis had descended to the little parlor, where the newcomers with his lady—wife, were seated near the hearth, engaged in lively conversation, while several servants were busily engaged in setting the various dishes of the long—delayed supper on the neatly furnished board. After a few words addressed to the company in general, the noble old man bowing profoundly to his guests, entreated their pardon for asking leave to lead Madame la Marquise into the next apartment, having a few words to say to her privately. The venerable abbe and the young duke arose upon the instant, and would have left the parlor, but the Marquis objected with an air so determined, that without rudeness they could not persevere; and then, assuring them that he would not be absent many minutes, retired with his imperious lady, who seemed to be in no small degree annoyed by the occurrence; leaving the Duc de Noirmoutier not without something of an indistinct and vague idea that he was in some sort connected with this secret interview. What passed, however, between the Marquis and his lady, was left for the moment altogether in the dark; for though they were only in the next room, and though the partition was so thin that they who remained in the parlor, could hear distinctly the raised tones of the lady's voice, it still was too thick to permit of their distinguishing words or phrases; and, to encrease the difficulty, the abbe began to talk very rapidly, in a full sonorous voice, the moment the first notes of the private conversation reached his ears, as if it had been for the very purpose of hindering his younger and far less scrupulous companion from hearing what might chance to be in progress. This did not last, however, very long, for in a few minutes the Marquis and the lady returned to the room the latter looking very much discomposed, and even angry; and sailing straight across the little parlor to the young duke, whom she drew aside into the deep embrasure of one of the windows, holding



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him there in deep and earnest conversation, while her husband again withdrew for a moment in search of his daughter: and in a little while introduced her blooming with all the loveliness of hope—renewed, and of a heart far lighter than she had experienced for many a month before.

As Louise entered, the Duc de Noirmoutier advanced to meet her with a singularly disagreeable smile playing upon his thick lips and pallid features, and he extended his hand as if to take hers; but she, not seeming to notice the movement, dropped him a deep and very formal courtesy, without the slightest change of air or expression, and leaning still upon her father's arm, moved round the small apartment and received the greetings of the venerable churchman, near whom she took her seat, with evident and real pleasure. The young man followed close behind her, as if he had not marked the very palpable rebuff with which she had met his overtures; and continued to press upon her his attentions, with something, it is true, of the air of one who has a right to tender such, and to believe them acceptable; although at the same time, there was nothing positively objectionable in his manner, nor anything that could be taken hold of as forward or presuming. The tact, however, with which that beautiful young girl met and frustrated his half—patronizing, half—pretending courtesy, was perfect; and it indeed seemed almost wonderful, that one so young, so innocent, and, as one would have thought, so inexperienced should possess all the decided calmness and easy nonchalance of manner, which were, perhaps, the only things in the world that could have effectually put down the youthful Duke's presumption. She answered, it is true, to all his light and flowing compliments, but with an air so cool and unembarrassed, that it was evident that she regarded them as matters of mere every day civility; she never smiled at one of the gay and somewhat flippant jests with which he seasoned his discourse; and though she did him the civility of turning her head round when he addressed her, as he sat on her left—hand side a little way behind her, yet whenever he ceased speaking, she answered as briefly as possible, often in monosyllables, and then turned back quite unconcerned to resume her conversation with the abbe. Bold though he was, and well schooled, hardened I might say in the world of fashion, confident, proud and haughty, it could not yet fail to be noticed that the Duke was considerably annoyed, if not positively embarrassed by her indifference, and it was a relief to him, as well as to Louise, when the last dish was set upon the table and it was announced that the supper was all served. Then, as in duty bound, Noirmoutier handed the Marchioness to her seat, and placed himself beside her, while Louise taking the proffered hand of the churchman, was seated on the opposite side of the table. The meats were excellent, the cooking unexceptionable, the wines such as could not have been excelled in the metropolis still there was little mirth and much constraint in the party which was assembled to partake those dainties. The second course was, however, scarcely set upon the table, before an interruption took place which brought all the group, ladies and gentlemen alike, to their feet in an instant. It was the distant sound distant indeed, but not so much so as to be mistaken for aught else of a carbine shot, followed immediately by the reports of another and another; then a quick scattering discharge, and then a regular platoon. Immediately upon this the loud and clanging gallop of a horse at full speed came down the hill from the direction of the village, ceased as the animal was pulled up at the door of the inn; and was succeeded instantly by the clatter of a horseman's heavy boots approaching the door of the parlor. The hands of the gentlemen fell, as it were, instinctively to the hilts of their rapiers, as they threw themselves between the ladies and the entrance; but their defensive attitude relaxed as the door opened, and the figure of the servant whom St. Eloy had dispatched so long before to seek for tidings of the troops, presented itself at the aperture.

"Well! Francois, well?" exclaimed the Marquis, "what now; what is the matter and why have you been so long?"

"Oh! my lord," answered the man, "I have made all the haste I could, but the soldiers had got so far the start of me, and rode so hard, that I did not overtake them till they were near the crossroads that lead to Bar le Due and Ligny; and just as I came up with them, a body of the Prince's cravattes came pouring down the former road, and charged the horse—harquebusiers, and they were at it in a moment; and it was not till a long time had passed, and the King's troops had driven back the Prince's men, that I could get speech of the leader, Monsieur de Bellechassaigne. And just then reinforcements came up, and a fresh skirmish took place, and the royalists have had to retreat, fighting every half mile, till they are now in the village just beyond the hill, which they are hard set to defend, seeing that the prince is pushing on his infantry, but Monsieur de Bellechassaigne bade me say that you need not be frightened, for he could hold the village till daylight to—morrow and he said likewise, he hoped you

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would not think of moving hence to-night, unless your horses were quite fresh for he had reason to believe some bodies of the enemy's cavalry had moved on his left flank, and were even now between us and the marechal's head-quarters, which were advanced as it appears, to Sommesous last evening, and will be at Vitry by noon to-morrow!"

"Peste!" said the Marquis, drawing a deep breath, as the man finished speaking "this is indeed bad news we are it seems in the very midst of it; and I suppose, to make things pleasanter yet, we shall have a general action here to-morrow or the next day, and no means have we, that I can see or think of, by which to get to the rear. Hey, Duke? I do not see what we can do but take the advice of the King's officer."

"Nor I, *pardieu*," replied the Duke, "though I, for one, would not if I could help it but not a horse of mine could have budged a mile farther when I came here, and now that they have got stiff and cold, it would be madness to attempt it."

"Well, then we must make the best of it if it come to the worst, we have between us at least twenty men, well armed and resolute, and we can surely make the house good until some officer comes up from whom we may obtain protection. Now ladies dear, will it so please you to withdraw to your chambers," he continued, "and leave the Duke and me to set about some preparations for defence."

As pale as death, but perfectly composed and quiet, Louise rose from her chair, and courtesying deeply to the party, was led by the abbe, uttering every word of consolation and encouragement that he could think of, to the door of the apartment, where he was joined by the Marquise, who was much more visibly alarmed than her fair daughter-in-law, and who lacked the calm resolution which enabled her to bridle or at the least conceal her feminine apprehensions. The young Duke followed them into the passage, quite up to the stair foot, while the Marquis was talking eagerly to the landlord of the inn; and to her great surprise, just as they parted, Louise beheld her mother-in-law turn round and grasp him by the arm, whispering as she did so, many words in his ear, of which she only caught this sentence

"Be sure that this is your time, and if you do not help yourself, you have none but yourself to blame for it!"

The Duke raised her hand to his lips, and bowing over it with an air of half derisive respect, made answer

"I *am* sure of it I *am* sure of it, dear lady fear nothing, then, but betake yourself to sleep as quietly as may be!" and with the words he turned away, and joined the Marquis and the abbe, who were taking all the steps necessary for barricading the doors and windows of the inn, and maintaining a fit watch and ward during the hours of darkness. A couple of sentinels had been already posted at brief intervals toward the village, both within hearing of the door, which was open, although guarded so that it might be securely fastened at a moment's notice. Meantime the firing which had been heard at intervals during the whole time that had elapsed since the first shot, began to slacken the scattering discharges, which probably proceeded from the skirmishers of the enemy appearing to recede very rapidly before the heavy platoon firing of the horse-harquebusiers, and the whole uproar sinking at last into absolute silence.

By this time the broad summer moon had risen high above the tree-tops, and was pouring down over all the face of the country a mellow lustre, that, if it was not so bright as the garish beams of day, rendered all objects perfectly distinct and clear for nearly half a mile's distance.

It was now nearly midnight, and the Marquis was beginning to talk of letting the men lie down to sleep upon their arms, and retiring himself to get some rest, when the sounds of horses coming down from the village reached his ears, and immediately afterward the challenge of their sentinels. The answer seemed, however, to be satisfactory; for the riders, five in number, came dashing up to the door of the inn a subaltern and four lancers of the guard. The officer leaped to the ground as he saw the gentlemen who stood in the door-way, and touching the peak of

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his casque,

"The Marquis de St. Eloy, I have the honor of addressing?" he said in a voice of inquiry; and, as the old man bowed his affirmative "Well! sir," he went on, "I am to say to you, from Monsieur de Bellechassaigne, that he has beaten off the enemy completely; and has no fear that he shall be attacked again to-night. He has found, also, two old field pieces in the place, and mounted them, so that if they should press on again, he is quite sure of holding the hill till such time as I can bring up reinforcements from head-quarters. Meantime he begs you not to move, for all that you need apprehend is some attack of a small outparty, which may get round and assault the house in the rear, from the hope of plunder, such as you can yourself beat back. Monsieur de Turenne will be here in force by noon to-morrow, and then you can send on a trooper to the Prince and get your passport to move through his army; and now, good-night, Monsieur le Marquis;" and with these words he sprang to his saddle, and rode off, followed by his orderlies, as hard as his horse could carry him.

"So then, Duke," said St. Eloy, as the officer left them, "we may just as well betake ourselves to bed; leaving these good fellows to bestow themselves on those couches and settees with their arms about them; and let them set a sentry at the door in the rear, and relieve him regularly."

"So be it, Marquis," answered the other, "go you to bed at once, and I will see to the rest;" and as the abbe with St. Eloy lighted their candles from the lamp in the hall and retired up the staircase to their chambers, he remained for several minutes in conversation with his principal attendant, and then he likewise withdrew, and for several hours all was still in the house and silent. For the first hour or two one of the Marquis's men held the watch; but just as the distant clock of the village struck two, he roused one of the Duke's servitors, who took his place at the door with shouldered carbine, while the other wrapping himself closely in his mantle, stretched himself out on the parlor floor among his slumbering fellows, and was soon buried like the rest in deep and dreamless sleep.

Half an hour passed quietly, and by this time the regular and heavy breathing of the last sentinel announced to his successor that he was for the moment fast asleep; and now, setting his carbine quietly down in the corner by the door, the man who was upon the watch left his post and stole silently on tip-toe to the door of the parlor, in which all the serving men of the marquis were asleep together his own companions occupying the hall in which he was posted. With stealthy caution he now closed the heavy oaken door upon the sleepers, locked it, and dropped two ponderous bars across it, succeeding thus in making them all prisoners without the slightest sound or cause of suspicion. This done, he quietly aroused the duke's head valet, who stole immediately up stairs, and in a little while came back, accompanied by his master fully dressed, and armed with pistols in his belt, and wearing a dark riding cloak cast over his gay clothing.

"Do the men understand, Le Fort?" whispered the duke; "it would be utter ruin to have a mistake now!"

"*Our* men do, monseigneur, and for the rest, they are all well secured, and can do no harm any way; but night is wearing on, we must be speedy."

"Be it so, then," answered the duke, and with the word he passed out silently from the door, which the sentinel had unbarred, and crossed the yard to the stables, accompanied by his valet; who speedily brought out two horses ready saddled, on which he and his master mounted, and rode cautiously away, keeping them entirely upon the greensward, which sent forth little or no sound beneath the hoofs, up the deep gorge by the side of the streamlet, in the rear of the vilage inn. "Are you quite sure, Le Fort are you quite sure," said the duke, just as they turned the angle which concealed them from the buildings, "that you understood perfectly the spot to which the peasant boy alluded?"

"Oh! perfectly, monseigneur, perfectly. I know every inch of the country hereabout, too; I was born within a mile of the church there. I will stake my life on it, that we find them within half an hour there are three hundred of them, with your good friend Monsieur de Loris."

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"Put to your spurs, then," said the duke, and in another moment they were lost to sight among the scattered trees that clothed the dell, sweeping down from the outskirts of the forest.

It wanted, perhaps, an hour of the earliest dawn, the moon had set long since, and all the world was buried in the deepest gloom, when a large body of armed men, not less than two hundred in number, filed down the gorge by which Noirmoutier and his servant had departed; and silently deploying into line, surrounded the whole courtyard and rear of the village inn with a cordon of musketeers; this had been scarcely done, when the leader of the party, a tall, soldier-like man, wearing the red scarf of Burgundy, rode down the valley, accompanied by two or three other officers, and the French duke. These, when they reached the sentinels, dismounted likewise; and, giving their horses to men, walked straight up to the back door, accompanied by thirty or forty musketeers, with their matches lighted, and their guns in readiness for instant service. The door was opened for them instantly by the sentinel on duty, and the whole party entered, the Burgundian officer leading, with his sword drawn in his hand, and calling aloud as he crossed the threshold, "Surrender, all of you, surrender! Down with your arms! quarter to all who yield death to those who resist!"

The servants of the Duc de Noirmoutier, who had sprung to their feet at the noisy summons with their weapons ready for none were in the secret of their master's treason except the sentinel and his own valet seeing their master, as they imagined, in the hands of the enemy, and themselves quite outnumbered, threw down their arms at once, and were led out as prisoners into the court-yard.

The Marquis of St. Eloy's men, however, who had been locked into the parlor, made several desperate efforts to break out; and at last firing a carbine through the keyhole, shattered the lock to pieces, and then finding that the door was barred from without, wrenched it off the hinges, and pulled it down bodily into the middle of the room. This done, in spite of the reiterated threats of the enemy to pour in their fire, which, however, they in truth dared not do, lest they should alarm the troops of Bellechassaigne, these gallant fellows threw in a close volley from their carbines, bringing down three or four of the assailants, and filling the whole hall with smoke and gunpowder. Lucky it was for them that, while the enemy were clearly designated for their aim by the bright light of the lamps under which they stood, they were themselves in utter darkness, so that the answering volley, which the musketeers now poured in, despite their orders, had no effect whatever, not even wounding one of their number.

By this time, the marquis, startled from his sleep by the loud summons, had seized his arms, and hurried down the stairs, sword in hand, after searching in vain for the duke in his chamber. His quick and practised eye perceived at once the hopelessness of reance, and discovered the means by which the surprise had been effected; he walked, therefore, directly up to the Burgundian officer, and tendered him his sword, saying, "I am your prisoner, sir, if you make war on non-combatants and peaceful travellers. I see that I have the honor of addressing myself to a gentleman, so that I scarce need ask that the ladies may be courteously entreated! For this low traitor," he added, shaking his hand at the duke, "I will know how to deal with him hereafter!"

"Nay, nay, my excellent friend," replied Noirmoutier, "this is a little hard, seeing that I too am a prisoner!"

"A prisoner! tush! sir, tush! do you think to fool a man who had bled twenty times for his king, ere you were in your cradle? Be silent, lest I pluck you by the beard, and shame my manhood by laying hands at one time on a cripple and a coward! And you, sirs, he continued, turning toward the parlor in which his servants were ensconced, "lay down your arms; come out and yield you prisoners."

His orders were immediately obeyed; but he saw instantly that two of his men were missing, and within a moment a loud shout from the musketeers without announced that they had escaped by the window, and two or three muskets shots were fired at them, as they ran up the hill toward Bellechassaigne's quarters, until he leader of the party rushed out of doors and hastily commanded his men to cease firing.

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"And now, sir," said the Burgundian officer, "my name is De Loris, and I will promise you on the word of a gentleman and soldier, good treatment and all honorable courtesy; but I regret to add that I must hold you prisoners, and remove you from this place straightway to head quarters. The duke's coach here shall be made ready for the ladies, and this venerable churchman," he added as the abbe descended the stairs "The gentlemen and servants must ride, or go with us on foot, and we must be gone, too, within half an hour at farthest."

"I pray you, sir," the marquis interposed, "suffer at least my own carriage to be made ready; it is here close at hand; my men will make it ready in five minutes."

"It cannot be it cannot be," returned the officer, "we have not time to attend to scrupulous whims like these. Monsieur le Duc's was made ready before we entered, and *pardieu*, we have not a second to lose. Now, sir, will you bring down these ladies? or shall I send an orderly to fetch them?"

"Be sure, Monsieur de Loris," answered the old man as he turned to go seek the ladies, "Be sure I will live to repay this courtesy!"

"Cousin," exclaimed the abbe, turning to the young duke, "cousin of Noirmoutier, if you have done this thing, you are not only a disgrace to our name and race, but to the very land you live in. Out on it! out on it! a traitor and a liar!"

"Psha! cousin abbe," answered the young man with his soft sneering smile. "Psha! cousin, I doubt not in the least that you will lend your aid to-morrow to tie the knot between me and this coy young lady!"

"Never, sir, never " he began to answer, when he was interrupted by the clear calm voice of Louise, who was just beginning to descend the stairs, leaning upon her father's arm, when she caught the words "Never!" she cried, clear as a silver trumpet, "Never I will die sooner!"

"Come, come! no more of this," continued De Loris, "bring up the carriage there; fall in, fall in, front and rear! look to the prisoners!" and already the heavy vehicle came lumbering up, with many a creak and groan, when the sharp clatter of many horses' feet rang suddenly in the court-yard, blent with the jingling of spurs and harness.

A loud shout and a scattering volley followed, and then a clear high voice, "Charge, gentlemen of France! Down with the dogs!" the shrill notes of a bugle pealed close at hand, and then the tramp of hoofs, the clash of blades, the war cry and the death groan were tumultuously and awfully mingled. The musketeers who were within the building rushed out at once with De Loris at their head, but it was all too late, they were outnumbered, and in an instant were driven back into the hall, before the headlong rush of Bellechassaigne and his dismounted troopers. "Down with your arms!" he cried, "it is no use to contend longer! I have two hundred men at the door, and your command, Monsieur de Loris, is cut to ribbons; thirty are prisoners, the rest slain outright or wounded; besides which," he continued, as a loud flourish of cavalry trumpets came down the wind from the direction of Vitry, "there comes De Flamarin with all the royal horse. Are you my prisoner, sir?"

"I have no choice," replied De Loris, "and it is no disgrace " he would have gone on, as he gave up his sword to the young royalist, but as he spoke the word, Bellechassaigne interrupted, "No, sir, as you say, it *is* no disgrace to fail in such attempts as this the dishonor is to have made them!"

"Do you dare, sir, insinuate " exclaimed De Loris furiously, when again Bellechassaigne cut him short.

"At present, sir, you will do well to remember that you are a prisoner, and that as such my hands are tied toward you. When you shall be at liberty, if you should be disposed to take exception at my words, I will not balk you. Orderly officer, remove your prisoners!"

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"Am I one of the number, Monsieur de Bellechassaigne," cried the Duke of Noirmoutier.

"No, sir," returned the other, shortly, "for I have no commission to apprehend cheats or swindlers; it is his majesty's police who deal with gentry of that order, not the life guards of France!"

"And do you mean, sir, to apply those terms to me?" asked De Noirmoutier.

"Yes, duke," returned the other, "and I shall add some other terms that probably will please you little better if you remain here troubling me much longer."

"You shall hear from me farther, sir, to-morrow," replied the duke, moving with a very bad grace to his coach which was still standing near the door, with his servants clustered round it. "Come, abbe, this scene is growing tedious. Are you not coming?"

"I doubt that very much," answered Bellechassaigne to the first part of his speech. "Men who will stoop to do such things as you have done to-night, have very rarely spirit to resent the calling of those deeds by their right names. I shall be glad, however, to find myself mistaken, and to discover that you at least possess courage!"

"No, sir," the abbe answered, sternly, "no, sir, I am *not* coming, and never dare you to address me any more. And you, Monsieur de Bellechassaigne, will do extremely wrong if you give him the meeting; but I talk foolishly, for he will never ask it. Psha! he has no more courage than he has honesty or honor!"

But the subject of his indignation tarried not to hear his remarks, for he had already entered his state coach, and, his men springing to their saddles hastily, had driven off as fast as he could go toward Bar le Due and the Prince of Conde's outposts.

"And now, Monsieur le Marquis," said Bellechassaigne, "I ought to crave your and your lady's pardon for thus intruding on your presence all blood and gunpowder, with these wild troopers; but I must trust my motives to defend me. I was aroused by the shots I heard, and was getting under arms, when your men, who escaped, came up and told me what was going on. Thank God! I was in time to save you from these gentry of the prince's. And now let me assure you, you are quite in security. Monsieur de Flamarin is close at hand with a thousand horse or better; and the marechal will be here before noon. I wish you, therefore, good repose, which you must need, I am sure, after this night of tumult and disturbance. I will leave one troop in the out-buildings here, for your protection. In the mean time I must send off the prisoners to my quarters, and but upon my honor here comes de Flamarin I must begone, farewell "

And he was hurrying already from the room, when the marquis cried out, "Hold! hold for a moment, I beseech you; there have been many mistakes, I perceive, between us, but I have ever deemed you a gentleman and cavalier of honor. I owe you now my life, or liberty at least; and what is more, my lady's and my daughter's honor; and now by one act, to prevent any more misapprehension, and to express to you the greatness of my gratitude, I can, I fancy, do nothing better for both parties than to give you *this* " and with the words he placed the slender fingers of Louise in the hand of her bold lover "We will," he added, "send for a notary to Vitry, to draw the contract up to-morrow. I doubt not the marechal himself will be one of the witnesses, and our good abbe here will see to the solemnities. And now, good night, and never, I hope, may we have reason to regret our meeting here in this village inn."

THE END.