

## CHAPTER III.

## PRINCE EUGENE.

THE countess inclined her head in token of assent ; but, as she did so, her eyes rested on the diminutive form of her son with an expression that savored of disdain. The look was unmotherly, and seemed to say, "How can a man of such insignificant appearance be the son of the stately Countess de Soissons?"

And indeed to a careless observer the words were not inappropriate to his dwarfish proportions. His head, which, between his excessively wide shoulders, was perched upon the top of a very long neck, was too large, much too large for his body. His face was narrow, his complexion swarthy, his sal-low cheeks high and sunken. A nose slightly turned up, gave an expression of boldness to his countenance, increased by the shortness of his upper lip, which exposed to view two large front teeth that were almost ferocious in their size. On either side of his high, narrow forehead, his hair, instead of being worn according to the prevailing fashion, was suffered to fall in long elf-locks about his ears. Notwithstanding all these disadvantages, his eyes were so superlatively beautiful that they almost persuaded you into the belief that he was handsome. From their lustrous depths there streamed a meteoric splendor, which, more than words, revealed the genius, the enthusiasm, and the noble soul to which Nature had assigned such unworthy corporality.

Those speaking eyes were fixed upon the countess in tender sadness, while, in a respectful attitude near the door, he awaited her permission to approach.

She languidly extended her hand, and, Eugene coming forward, bent over and imprinted upon it a heartfelt kiss.

"My dear mother then consents?" said he, humbly.

"I know of no reason why I should refuse," replied the countess, carelessly. "Neither am I able to divine wherefore you make your request in a tone of such unusual solemnity. One would suppose that the little abbé has come to invite his

mother to a confession of her sins, so portentous is his demeanor."

"Would I could receive that confession," exclaimed he, earnestly ; "would I could look into my mother's heart and read the secrets there!"

"Indeed! and have you come hither to catechise your mother, then?" said the countess, with a frown.

"No, dear mother, no," cried Eugene, eagerly ; "I have come to ask of you whether I may walk with head erect before the world, or whether I must die because of our dishonor?"

"An extraordinary alternative to present for my decision, certainly ; and I confess that I am very curious to learn how it happens that I can assist you in your dilemma. Speak, then, and I will listen."

With these words the countess threw herself indolently into an arm-chair, and motioned Eugene to a seat. But he only advanced a step or two, and gazed wistfully upon her handsome, hardened face.

"Mother," said he, in a low, husky voice, "the soothsayer La Voisin has been arrested."

"Ah! what else?" asked the countess, with perfect composure.

"Her house is guarded, every corner has been searched, and her papers have all been seized."

"And what else?" repeated the countess.

Her son looked up, and a ray of hope shot athwart his pale and anxious face. "Nothing is talked of in Paris," continued he, "but the strange revelations connected with her arrest. It is said that she not only drew the horoscope of those who were accustomed to visit her, and gave them philters, but—but—"

"But," echoed the countess as her son paused.

"But that she prepared secret poisons, one of which, called '*La poudre de succession*,' was specially designed for the use of those who wished to remove an inconvenient relative."

This time the countess was silent ; her brow contracted, and she shivered perceptibly.

An involuntary cry burst from the lips of her son, which recalled her to a sense of her imprudence.



"What ails you?" asked she, abruptly. "Have you seen a ghost, that you cry out in a voice so unearthly?"

"Yes, mother, I have seen a ghost—the ghost of my father!" And while the countess grew pale, and her eyes dilated with fear, her unhappy son sank upon his knees before her, and clasped his hands with agony of apprehension.

"Mother, have mercy on me, and forgive me if, in the anguish of my writhing soul, I ask you whether you are innocent of my father's death?"

"Has any one dared to accuse me?" asked she, with a scowl.

"Ay! And so publicly, that men spoke of it together as I passed them in the streets to-day. Need I say that I was ready to die of grief as I heard the epithet of murderess applied to the mother who to me has been the ideal of beauty, goodness, and excellence, which my heart has worshipped to the exclusion of all other loves! My brain was on fire as I dashed through the scornful crowd, and made my way to you, mother, here to look upon your dear face, and read in your eyes your innocence of the hideous crime. We are alone with God: in mercy tell me, are you innocent or guilty?"

As he raised his face to hers, the countess saw there such powerful love struggling with his anguish, that her heart was touched, and the angry words she had meditated died upon her lips.

"These are cruel doubts wherewith to assail your mother, Eugene," said she, after a pause. "Follow me, and in the presence of your forefathers you shall be answered."

With a lofty bend of the head, she left the room, followed by her stricken child. They crossed a spacious hall, and traversed one after another the apartments of state which were thrown open to guests on occasions of great ceremony, and led to the grand hall of reception. At the farther end of this hall, under a canopy of purple velvet, surmounted by a ducal crown, were the two thrones which, on the days of these state receptions, the Count and Countess de Soissons were privileged to occupy in presence of their guests, provided his majesty were not of the number. This right they held by virtue of their connection with the royal house of France, and their

close relationship to the Duke of Savoy. At the time of the marriage of his niece with the Count de Soissons, Cardinal Mazarin had obtained from Louis XIV. an acknowledgment of her husband as a prince of the blood, and, by virtue of this acknowledgment, his right to attend without invitation all court festivities, to appear at the public and private levees of the king, and in his own palace to sit upon a throne.

On either side of the throne-room of the Hôtel de Soissons were ranged the portraits of their ancestors, in armor, in ducal or episcopal robes, in doublet and hose, or in flowing wigs. Silently the mother and son walked by the stately effigies of princes and princesses, until they had reached the farthest portrait there.

With outstretched arms the countess pointed to the likeness of a handsome man, clad in a rich court-suit, which well became his aristocratic figure. As he gazed upon the pleasant smile that illumined a face expressive of exceeding goodness, the eyes of young Eugene filled with tears.

His mother surveyed him with a curl of her lip.

"Tears!" said she. "And yet you stand before the portrait of your father, whom you accuse me of having murdered!"

"No, no," cried her son, eagerly, "I did not accuse, I—I—"

"You inquired," interrupted the countess, disdainfully. "And by your inquiry you insinuate that such a crime by the hand of your mother was not only possible, but probable."

"Unhappily, I have more than once seen La Voisin in your boudoir, mother."

The countess affected not to hear. "Then a son considers himself justifiable in asking of his mother whether or not she poisoned his father; he should do so with the sword of justice in his hand, not with an eyelid that trembles with cowardly tears."

"Mother, have pity on me," sobbed Eugene, throwing himself at her feet. "Do not answer my cruel question, for I read your innocence in the noble scorn that flashes from your eye, and beams from every feature of your dear, truthful face. Pardon me, beloved mother; pardon your repentant child."

"No, I shall not pardon the poltroon who, believing that his mother has disgraced his escutcheon, weeps like a woman



over wrongs which he should avenge like a man. But I forgot. The little abbé of Savoy is not accustomed to wear a sword; *his* weapon is the missal. Go, then, to your prayers, and when you pray for your father's soul, ask forgiveness of God for your heartless and ungrateful conduct to his widow."

"Dear, dear mother, have pity!" sobbed Eugene, still kneeling at her feet.

"Was there any pity in your heart for me when you asked that shameful question?"

"I was demented," cried he; "maddened by the sneers that were flung at me in the streets to-day."

"And, to console yourself, you joined in the popular cry. '*Vox populi vox Dei*,' I suppose, is your pious motto."

"Mother!" cried Eugene, springing to his feet, "crush me, if you will, under the weight of your anger, but do not stretch me upon the rack of your scorn. I am no devotee; and, if the king, my family, and yourself, are forcing me into a career which is repugnant to every instinct of my manhood, pity me, if you will, but do not insult me."

"Pity you!" sneered the countess. "I am a woman; but he who would venture to pity *me*, would receive my glove in his face for his insolence. Go, faint heart! You are fit for nothing but a whining priest, for there is not a spark of manhood within your sluggish breast. No generous blood of the princes of Savoy mantles in your sallow cheek; 'tis the ichorous fluid of the churchman Mazarin that—"

"Mother!" thundered Eugene, with a force that gave the lie to her derisive words—"mother, you shall go no further in your disdain of me, for the blood of Savoy is seething within my veins, and I may, perchance, forget that she who so affronts my father's son, is my mother!"

"You have already forgotten," replied the countess, coldly. "My answer to your infamous charge shall be made not to you, but to your ancestors."

So saying, she bent her steps toward the ducal throne, and seating herself thereon, addressed her son:

"Eugene of Savoy, Prince of Carignan, Bourbon, and Piedmont, bend your knee before the mother that bore you, and hearken to her words."

The prince obeyed, and knelt at the foot of the throne.

The countess raised her arm, and pointed to the portraits that hung around. "You have been witnesses," said she, addressing them all, "to the outrage which has been put upon me to-day by him who inherits your name, but not your worth. If I am the guilty wretch which he has pronounced me to be, strike me to the earth for my crimes, and justify his parricidal words. But you know that I am innocent, and that, with bitter tears, I lamented the death of my murdered husband!"

"Murdered!" exclaimed Eugene. "It is, then, true that he was murdered?"

"Yes," replied the countess, "he was murdered, but not by bowl or dagger."

With these words, she rose, and, slowly descending from her throne, she returned to the spot which she had left, and gazed mournfully upon her husband's portrait. "He was a noble, brave, and gallant prince," said she, softly. "He loved me unspeakably, and wherefore should I have taken the life of him whose whole pleasure lay in ministering to my happiness? What could I gain by the death of the dearest friend I ever had? Ah, never would he have mistrusted his Olympia! Had the envious rabble of Paris defamed me while he lived to defend my honor, it is not your father, Prince Eugene, that would have joined my traducers and outraged my womanhood, as you have done to-day!"

"Forgive me," murmured the prince.

"Yes, my beloved," continued she, addressing the picture, "they accuse me of murdering thee, because they seek my ruin as they compassed thine."

"Who, dear mother, who?" cried Eugene, passionately. "Who are the fiends that murdered my father and calumniate my mother?"

"They are Louis XIV.," exclaimed the countess, "his minister Louvois, and his two mistresses, De Montespan and De Maintenon."

"The king!" echoed Eugene, in a voice of such fury, that his mother turned her eyes from the portrait, and stared at him with amazement.

"You hate the king?" said she, hurriedly.



"Yes," said Eugene, his eyes flashing fire; "yes, I hate him."

"And why?"

"Do not ask me, mother; I dare not say wherefore I hate the king."

"Then I will tell you why. You hate him because you believe the scandalous reports which my enemies have spread throughout Europe as regards my relations, in years gone by, with Louis. You believe that your mother was once the king's mistress, and that, to hide her shame, she borrowed the name of the Count de Soissons."

Eugene made no reply.

"Ah, why have I no son to shelter me from these infamous suspicions! Why must I live and die under such false and disgraceful imputations?"

"Then, it is not true?" cried Eugene, joyfully. "You did not love the king, mother?"

"Yes, I did love him," said she, calmly, "and loved him as an Italian alone can love."

Eugene groaned, and covered his face with his hands.

"I do not deny the love," continued the countess, "for it was all the work of Cardinal Mazarin. He brought me from Italy, and bade me win the king's heart and become a queen; and when he did so he added a recommendation to me to be a good, dutiful niece, and never to forget who it was had helped me to a crown. I saw the youth whom the cardinal desired me to love: the handsomest, wittiest, and most accomplished cavalier in France. I obeyed but too willingly, and Louis became the idol of my life."

"Then it is true that my mother was beloved by the king?" said Eugene, sternly.

"Beloved by him, but never his mistress!" returned the countess, proudly. "Yes, he loved me as I did him, with the trust, the strength, the passion, that are characteristic of a first love. I was ambitious for him as well as for myself, and would have had him a monarch in deed as well as in name. I led him away from the frivolous regions of indolent enjoyment to the starry realms of poetry, art, and science; and, had Louis ever risen to the fame of Numa, I should have merited

that of Egeria. But this conflicted with the ambition of the cardinal. He had no sooner comprehended the nature of the influence I exerted over his royal tool, than he poisoned his ear by insinuating that ambition, not love, was the spring of all my efforts to elevate him to the level of his magnificent destiny. Poor, weak Louis! He was anything that Cardinal Mazarin chose to make him; so at the word of command he ceased to love, and went to make an offering of his accommodating affections to Marie. She made him take an oath never to look at me again."

"Did he respect the oath?"

"Just so long as he loved Marie. I need not tell you that I suffered from his inconstancy. I was inexpressibly grieved; but pride upheld me, and Louis never received a word or look of reproach for his faithlessness. Meanwhile your father offered his hand, and before I accepted it he was made acquainted with the history of my heart. I concealed nothing from him, so that he was at once the confidant of my past sorrows, and their comforter."

"Thank you, dear, dear mother," said Eugene, tenderly. "In the name of all your children, let me thank you for your noble candor."

"I married the Prince de Soissons, and here, in presence of his assembled ancestors, I swear that I have kept unstained the faith I pledged him at the marriage-altar. Let the world belie me as it will, Olympia Mancini has ever been a spotless wife. So true is this, that Louis, when he had abandoned Marie, and had tired of his queen, returned to me with vows of a love which he swore had been the only genuine passion of his life; and when, as my husband's loyal wife, I repulsed the advances of his sovereign, that sovereign became my bitterest enemy. Not even after he had consoled himself with the insipid charms of that poor, flimsy creature, La Vallière, did Louis relent; his animosity, because of some witticism of mine on the subject of his hysterical mistress, has pursued me throughout life; not only me, but every member of my family. For a mere epigram I was banished from Paris, and your father stripped of a lucrative and honorable office. We managed after a time to return to court, but my enemies were more



powerful than I. Through the jealousy of the Marquise de Montespan I was a second time banished ; but before we left, your father fought two duels with noblemen who had circulated the calumnies which the marquise had originated concerning me. The Duke de Noailles was wounded, and the Chevalier de Grand Mercy killed. Although the challenges had been honorably sent and accepted, the Count de Soissons was summoned before the king and publicly rebuked. Oh, let me speak no longer of the contumely we endured during those bitter days ! My husband died, blessing me, and cursing the selfish monarch who had ruined us both."

Eugene clinched his hand. "I shall remember the curse," cried he, "and it shall be verified if God give me strength, mother!"

"Yes, avenge us if you can, Eugene, but, until the day of reckoning come, we must be politic and wary. Be silent and discreet as I was, when, on being allowed to return to Paris, I humbled myself for my dear children's sake, and not only swore to write no more epigrams, but went in person to sue to Madame de Montespan for pardon and protection!"

"Mother, is it possible ! Far better had it been for us to die obscurely in some provincial village, than purchase our admission to court at the price of such humiliation as that !"

"No, no—I had sworn to be revenged upon my persecutors, and no plan of *vendetta* could I carry out in a provincial village. Do you remember what I told my sons on the day of our return to the Hôtel de Soissons ?"

"Ay, mother, that do I. You said : 'Bow your heads in ostensible humility, but never forget that the Bourbons have robbed you of your inheritance. Never forget that if you are poor, it is because on some idle pretext of a conspiracy that never could be proved, Louis XIV. sequestered the estates of the Counts de Soissons.' These were your words, and you see that I have not forgotten them. They are the steel on which I have sharpened the hate I feel for the King of France. And now that its edge is keen, why may I not lift it against the man who belied my mother, and murdered my father ? Oh mother, mother, why will you force me to become a priest ?"

"What else could you become ?" asked Olympia. "The

king is your guardian, and he it is that from your childhood has destined you for the church."

"I hate this garb," exclaimed Eugene, touching his cassock. "My vocation is not for the priesthood, and, if I am called upon to utter compulsory vows, I feel that I shall disgrace my cloth. Dear mother, loosen the detested bonds that bind me to a listless and contemplative life ! Gird me with a sword, and let me go out to battle with the world like a man !"

The countess looked disdainfully at the diminutive figure of her son, and raised her shoulders with contempt. "You a soldier !"

"Yes !" exclaimed Eugene, passionately. "Yes ! My soul abhors the cloister, and yearns for the battle-field. While you have fancied that I was studying theology, I have been poring over the lives of great commanders ; and, instead of preparing my soul for heaven, I have trained my body for earthly strife. Look not so compassionately upon my stature, mother. This body is slender, but 'tis the coat of mail that covers an intrepid soul, and I have hardened it until it can bid defiance to wind or weather. With this arm I curb the wildest horse, nor will its sinews yield to the blow of the most practised swordsman in France. I have studied the science of warfare in books ; my life has been one long preparation for its practice, and I cannot, will not relinquish my day-dreams of glory."

"There is no help for it, I tell you. All princes of the blood are wards of the king ; your royal guardian has chosen your profession, and you must either submit or bear the consequences of his wrath."

"What care I for his wrath ? Let him give me my freedom, and I will promise never to seek my fortune at his hands."

"At all events, wait for some favorable opportunity to rebel, Eugene. We are poor and dependent now, and your brother's scandalous marriage has forever marred our hopes of seeing him heir to the duchy of Savoy. To think of a Prince de Carignan uniting himself to the daughter of the equerry of the Prince de Condé ! What a disgrace !"

"My brother consulted his heart and not his escutcheon,"



replied Eugene, with a smile. "He followed the example of his father, and may God bless him with a wife as beautiful and as virtuous as his mother!"

The countess, who had begun to frown at Eugene's apology for his brother, could not resist this filial flattery. She gave him her hand, which he kissed devoutly.

"You no longer believe me guilty, my son?" said she. Eugene knelt and murmured: "Pardon, dear, dear mother! My life will be all too short to expiate my unworthy doubts, and to avenge your wrongs."

"Avenge them, but do not exasperate the king. Imitate Richelieu and Mazarin, and the priest's gown will no longer be distasteful to you. They were great in the field and in the cabinet, and both possessed more than regal power, for both were the rulers of kings."

Eugene was about to reply, but Olympia raised her hand in remonstrance, and continued:

"I exact of you, for a time at least, *apparent* submission and perfect silence. When the hour is ripe for retaliation, you shall strike, and repay me for all that I have endured at the hands of the king. But, for the present, breathe not the name of Louis above a whisper. I have a deadlier foe than he to encounter now. Louvois, Louvois, I dread above all other men; and if you have the strength of a man in your arm, Eugene, let the force of its vengeance fall upon the head of him, whose animosity is more potent than that of all my other enemies united."

"It shall crush him and all who seek to injure you, mother. Revenge!—yes, revenge for your wrongs, for my father's death, and for *my* bondage!"

"Ay, revenge, Eugene! A man may wear the garb of an ecclesiastic with the heart of a hero, and to your brave heart these Princes of Carignan commit my cause! Come, let us leave our ancestors to their grim repose. May they lend their ghostly aid to the arm that wields the carnal weapons of our righteous vengeance!"

As she turned to leave the gallery, the train of her blue satin dress became entangled in the claws of the lion which supported the throne. Eugene stooped hastily to release it,

and, instead of dropping it again, he smiled affectionately upon his mother and placed himself in the attitude of a page.

The countess looked pleased at the attention, and said, "Have you learned, among your other accomplishments, to be a trainbearer?"

"Yes, mother, I have learned to be *your* trainbearer, but to no other mortal would I condescend to do such service."

But Olympia was not listening. She was day-dreaming again, and the substance of her dreams was as follows:

"How soon, perchance, the court of France may bear my train along, while I, victorious and exultant, crush the head of my enemies beneath my heel! I feel the glow of the philter as it courses through my veins, warming the blood that shall mantle in my cheeks, kindling the fire that shall flash from my eyes! The hour is nigh when I am to make my last supreme effort for mastery over the heart of Louis: if I fail—I have an avenger in Eugene, who—"

At this moment an outcry was heard in the streets, and as Olympia opened the door of her cabinet, she was confronted by her steward, who, unannounced, stood pale as death before his astonished mistress.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### THE RIOT.

"WHAT, in the name of Heaven, is the matter?" exclaimed she. "Whence these discordant yells without, and how comes it that you enter my private apartments without a summons?"

"I trust your highness will pardon my boldness; the case is too urgent to admit of formalities, and I come to receive your instructions as to—"

Here the voice of the steward was overpowered by the yells of the populace without, and for several moments the countess and her son stood in speechless amazement, waiting an explanation. "What can it mean?" asked she at last.



"Your highness," replied the trembling steward, "the court is filled with an infuriated mob, who rushed in before we had time to close the gates."

Eugene, with an exclamation of dismay, would have darted to the window, but the steward raised his hand imploringly.

"Do not let them see you, prince," cried he. "They have torn up the pavement, and with the stones have shattered the windows of the lower story."

"Then it is a riot," said the countess, "and the *canaille* of Paris have rebelled against the aristocracy."

"Unhappily, your highness, their anger is directed exclusively against the Hôtel Soissons, and, if I judged by the number of our assailants, I should say that all Paris has joined in the attack. Not only the *canaille* are here, but, as I was hurrying to the *corps de garde* to ask for protection, I saw more than one well-dressed personage descend from his carriage and come thither to increase the number of our enemies."

"I understand," said the countess, setting her teeth, "the anger of the mob is directed against *me*."

"Mother," whispered Eugene, "they must be the same men whom I met in the streets, and whose jeers drove me thither to add to your misery the stab of my unfilial doubts."

"Did you say that you had sent off for guards?" asked she of Latour.

"Yes, your highness. I went at once to the headquarters of the *corps de garde*, and the officer of the day promised immediate succor."

"It will not be sent," returned Olympia. "But hark! What tumult is this?"

"They are battering the palace-doors," said Eugene, who, in spite of the steward's entreaties, had approached the window and was looking down upon the mob. The palace de Soissons fronted the Rue Deux Écus, from which it was separated by a tall iron railing. The enclosure was filled with a throng so dense that there was scarcely room for them to move a limb; and yet, in their regular assaults upon the palace-doors, they seemed to be obeying the commands of some unseen chief.

Eugene surveyed the scene with something of that calm but powerful interest which possesses the soul of a commander about to engage the enemy.

"The multitude increase," said he. "If they continue to press in much longer, the court will be so thronged that no more missiles can be thrown."

At that very moment the windows were assailed by a hail-storm of stones, one of which fell at Olympia's feet. She touched it with the point of her satin slipper, remarking as she did so, "This is a greeting from Louvois."

"For God's sake, your highness, be not so rash!" exclaimed Latour, as a second stone flew over the head of the prince, and shattered part of a cornice close by.

Eugene had not moved. He heeded neither steward nor stone, but stood with folded arms, looking upon the terrible concourse of his mother's accusers. His face was very pale and resolute; it expressed nothing beyond stern endurance; but the eye was threatening, and the dwarfish figure had expanded until the abbé was forgotten, and in his place stood the implacable foe of Louis XIV.

"Yes," said he, "I was right. The crowd is so dense that they now threaten one another, and, unless they force the entrance to the palace, they will be crushed by their own numbers."

"They will never force the entrance," said Latour. "The door is barred and bolted, and they may bombard it for a day before they ever make an impression upon the stout plates of iron with which it is lined."

"Ay," replied Eugene, with a smile. "Catharine de Medici knew how to build a stronghold. She knew from experience what it is to face an insurrection, and took her precautions accordingly. We owe her a debt of gratitude for our security—Good heavens!" cried he, interrupting himself, "they have found means to send us another salvo."

A shower of stones came rattling toward the very window where he stood, one of which struck the countess on the shoulder and caused her to wince.

Once more Latour besought her to take refuge in another apartment.



"You have said that they cannot force the entrance; what do you fear?" said she.

"I fear the stones, your highness."

"Then I will prove to the rabble that I, no more than Cardinal Mazarin, am to be terrified by stones," returned Olympia, approaching the window and placing herself at the side of her son.

The multitude, as they recognized her, broke forth into a wild shout of abhorrence.

"Look! there is the woman who murdered her husband, and would have murdered her children too!" "There is the wretch who would have poisoned the king!" "There stands the accomplice of La Voisin!" "And while her tool languishes in prison, she has no right to breathe the free air of heaven!" "Away with her to the Bastille!" "To the Bastille, to the Bastille!" "No! let her be burned for her crimes!"

"Louvois! Louvois!" murmured Olympia, her brow reddening with humiliation.

Another yell from the besiegers was silenced by a loud voice, whose words of command rose clear above the tumult.

"I knew it," said Eugene, "they have a leader. There is a method in these manifestations which shows that they are not the disconnected efforts of a many-headed monster."

"Great God! And the guards are not even to be seen!" cried Latour, who stood with folded hands, murmuring snatches of prayer for help.

"Nor will they be seen," added Olympia, in a low voice.

Eugene was glancing now at his mother, now at her persecutors. As his eye wandered from one to another of the uplifted and angry faces below, he saw two men somewhat elevated above the rest, who with their outstretched arms were giving the signal for a fresh onslaught. No demonstration, however, followed the command, for the people had gravitated into one solid body, of which no portion was capable of independent action.

"Now," thought the prince, "now would be the opportunity for retaliation. If I had but the means!—Latour," con-

tinued he, aloud, "do the iron gates of entrance open within or without?"

"Without, your highness."

"So that if we could get access to the street, we might cage up these base-born villains, might we not?"

"Yes, your highness; but he who shuts the gates must undo the chains by which they are fastened back."

"Who has the keys?"

"I, your highness. I have them now upon my person."

"There are outlets by which you could gain access to the gates without facing the people?"

"Certainly, your highness," began Latour; but his words were drowned in another outburst of howlings from the maddened mob, and another discharge of stones whizzed through the air, crushing the mullions of the windows to splinters, and dashing their fragments of shivering glass into the very faces of the unfortunate besieged.

"If the guards would but come!" said Latour, reiterating for the twentieth time his doleful refrain.

"Since it appears that they have no intention of coming," replied the prince, "we must e'en take this matter of defence in our own hands. Hasten, Latour, to the street—undo the fastenings, and quick as thought lock the gates!"

"But, your highness, do you suppose that I shall be suffered by that infuriated crowd to lock or unlock the gates at pleasure?"

"Never fear; their faces are all turned toward the palace. You will have accomplished the thing before they know that you have undertaken it. Take two other men with you, who, as soon as you release the chains, must fling the gates together, while you relock them. Now be dexterous, and you will have performed no unimportant feat of strategy."

"I will do my best, your highness."

"Before you go, summon the household to my presence. How many men are there at home to-day?"

"Twelve, your highness."

"Enough to settle with two thousand such wretches."

Latour darted away on his double mission, and the prince turned to his mother, who, undaunted and defiant, still stood



before the window contemplating her assailants, giving back look for look of scorn and abhorrence.

"May I beg of my dear mother permission to absent myself for a while?" said Eugene.

The countess looked round with inquiring eyes. "Whither would you go, my son?" asked she.

"I wish to give some orders to the domestics, to arm them, and assign to each man his post."

"Where will you find weapons, my son?"

"I have among my effects a small collection of fire-arms. They are all in good order, and all loaded. I have nothing to do but distribute them, and place my men."

The countess smiled. "In good sooth, I begin to believe that you are fitter for a soldier than for a churchman. But you are not in earnest when you speak of using fire-arms?"

"Why not? We are attacked, and, obeying the laws of necessity, we defend ourselves. Unfortunately, we are forced to remain on the defensive; I only wish I had an opportunity to attack."

"But what means that new outbreak of fury?" asked the countess, returning to the window.

"It means," cried Eugene, joyfully, "that Latour has been successful, and the gates are locked. The ruffians have discovered the snare, and they howl accordingly. Now to my garrison; I must station it with judgment, for it is not numerous."

"I will accompany you, my son," said the countess. "I would not miss the sight of the first exploit of my future cardinal, him who promises to unite in his own person the wisdom of Mazarin with the prowess of Richelieu!"

The servants were assembled in the hall, whither they had taken refuge from the stones and splintering glass, that were flying in the palace windows. They were not a very valiant-looking body of troops, but their commander made no comment upon their dismayed faces. He merely counted them and spoke to his valet.

"Darmont, conduct these men to the armory, and provide each one with a musket. Let them handle the guns carefully,

for they are heavily loaded. Bring me my pistols also. And now, away! and return quickly."

Silently, and, to all appearances, not much edified by these recommendations, the domestics followed Darmont, while Eugene returned to his station at the window.

"Not only have they a leader," said he, "but I believe that they were instigated to make this attack, mother."

"No doubt of it," replied Olympia; "and since Louvois has dared so much, we may infer that he has the sanction of the king for his brutality."

"Look!" cried Eugene, catching her arm, "there is the leader!—that tall man in the brown suit, with bright buttons, who stands upon the stone seat, near the gates."

"I see him," returned the countess. "He is speaking with two men who are directly in front of him. This person looks familiar to me: I have surely seen that tall figure and those wide shoulders before. If his hat were not drawn so far over his brows, and we could but see his face, our doubts as to the source of this outrage would speedily be solved."

"He has been giving instructions, for the two men are addressing the crowd. I fear we must look out for another bombardment."

And so it seemed; for the mob, having recovered from their momentary fright, were evidently preparing for action. Hundreds of brawny arms, each one of which grasped a stone, were raised into the air; while as many stooping forms were seen, crouching close to the ground, that they might leave room for the slingers to hurl their missiles without impediment.

"That is a good manoeuvre," said Eugene. "Their leader understands strategic warfare. They are ready, and await the word of command. It comes! Stand back, mother!"

A crash was heard, but not a stone had been aimed at the windows. "Ah, I understand," cried Eugene. "They are trying to force the door, and so obtain their release. Thank Heaven! Here comes the garrison, a handful of braves who, I hope, are destined to change the fortunes of the day.—Now," continued he, advancing to meet them, "listen to me. There are twelve of you, and the hall has seven openings. Leave the



central window free, and station yourselves two at each one of the other six. Throw open the casements, cock your guns, and be ready for the word of command. Darmont, give me my pistols."

With one of these in either hand, Eugene stationed himself at the window in the centre, while his mother stood by his side.

"They are about to favor us with another volley," said the prince. "Neither they nor their leader have as yet remarked the changed aspect of the palace-windows."

"The hat of the leader is purposely drawn down, and, while he succeeds in concealing his features, he loses sight of the danger which threatens from above. So much the better for us; but I do long to have a sight of his face," returned the countess.

"You shall have your wish," replied Eugene, with a smile. "I will knock off his hat, and your curiosity shall be gratified."

"How will you manage to do that?"

"You shall see," said he, raising the pistol that he held in his right hand.

He fired, and when the smoke had cleared away, the face of the leader was exposed to view. The ball had struck the hat, which had fallen, and now a pair of dark, sinister eyes were glaring at the spot whence the insult had been sent.

"Have a care," said the prince, leaning forward and addressing the crowd. "If you send another missile against these walls, I will have twelve of your lives!"

The men, who were just about to fling their stones, paused and stared at one another in dumb perplexity.

Their leader, pale with rage, gave the word of command.

Eugene heard it, and called out in clear, defiant tones: "If the leader of this riot attempt a repetition of his order, I will break his right arm."

"Another volley, men!" shouted the chief.

A second report from the window was heard, which was answered by a yell from below. Eugene's ball had pierced the elbow of the leader, and the dismayed crowd had made a hasty movement toward the gates.

"Do you not see that there is no egress for you except through the palace? Look at the murderess there, instigating her whelp to new crimes! She exults over your weakness, and laughs at your panic. On! on! Batter down the doors!"

"On!" echoed the mob; and their stones were flung with such frenzy against the palace-doors, that its very walls trembled.

"Fire!" called out the sonorous voice of Eugene, and in another moment might be seen the sinking forms of twelve of the rioters, while, among the others, some were pale with fright, and a few cried out that they would be revenged.

"Revenge is for those whom you have insulted and attacked," replied the prince, deliberately. "You have made a cowardly assault upon a noble lady, and not one of you shall leave this place alive!—Make ready! Take aim!" continued he to his men.

The click of the locks was distinctly heard, and in the crowd each man fancied that one of those carbines was aimed at his own head. The mob was losing heart; not even their leader was to be seen or heard. He had taken refuge in a sheltered corner of the court, where his wounds were being bound up by his lieutenants. Inconspicuous as he was, however, the sharp eyes of Olympia had followed him to his retreat. Not for one moment did she lose sight of him; she was determined to solve the enigma of his identity. As the last bellicose words of Prince Eugene rang through the ears of his dismayed followers, the wounded ringleader flung back his head with such sudden haste, that its masses of dark, tangled hair were entirely thrown aside, and the face that was revealed by their removal, caused the countess to start and utter an exclamation of surprise. As Eugene was about to give the command to fire, his mother caught his arm, and whispered in his ear:

"My son, I now think that I can tell you the name of yonder caitiff there, and, if I have guessed rightly, it were better for us to cease hostile demonstrations, and capitulate."

"Capitulate!" cried the prince, indignantly. "Capitulate with the rabble! Who can be this man that has so suddenly cowered the heart of my noble mother?"



"I think that he is the son of Louvois," whispered she.

"Ah, the presuming Barbesieur, who would have given his name to a Princess de Carignan?"

"Yes—the same. His beard is dyed, and he wears false locks, but, spite of his disguise, I feel sure that it is Barbesieur. And I warn you, Eugene! harm not a hair on his head, for he is the favorite son of the mightiest man in France—mighty and vindictive. Kill as many of the rabble as you will; but give positive orders to your men not to touch Barbesieur Louvois."

"I ought to command them to fire on no other man, for he is responsible for the acts of every rioter here."

"That would be to cast your entire family into the very jaws of destruction. These men who call me murderess, could not be made to believe that I have the tenderness of a mother for my children; but you, Eugene, who know how dearly I love you all, you can understand that no revenge would be sweet that was purchased at the expense of my children's welfare. Spare, then, I implore you, the man who holds your destinies in his unfriendly hand."

"So be it," sighed Eugene, and he went from man to man, saying in a low voice, "Direct your fire toward the left." He then took his station at the central window, and, raising his arm, called out a second time: "Make ready! Take aim!"

The multitude heard, and their exceeding consternation found utterance in one prolonged shriek of horror.

"Do not fire!" screamed a hundred voices. "Do not fire! We are defenceless!"

The order was countermanded, and the self-possessed defender of the beleaguered palace advanced his head and contemplated the ignoble faces of his enemies.

"You acknowledge yourself baffled, then? You are willing to retreat?"

"Ay!" was the ready response of every rioter there.

"You swear to desist now and forever from your infamous attack upon this palace? You swear never more to make use of vituperative epithets toward the family of the deceased Count de Soissons?"

"We swear, we swear! Open the gates! Let us out! Let us out!" was now the universal cry.

"Not so fast. Before you have my permission to retire, I must have unequivocal, outspoken evidence of your repentance and conversion. You have presumed to asperse the good name of the Countess de Soissons. Take back your injurious words, and cheer her now, right lustily. Cry out three times, 'Long live the noble Countess de Soissons!' and, if your acclamations are to my mind, I will open the gates."

The reply to these conditions was a greeting so enthusiastic and so unanimous, that you would have sworn the mob had assembled before the hôtel to tender to its inmates a popular ovation.

"Miserable *canaille*!" muttered their chief; "they are base enough to hurl their stones at *me*, if that beardless manikin up there should require it of them, as a peace-offering to his immaculate mother!"

"I told your excellency that you could not trust them," replied the companion on whose arm he was leaning. "It is a dangerous thing to be identified with any action of theirs."

"You were right, François. Give me your arm, and let us try to reach the gates, so as to be the first to escape from this accursed man-trap."

"You have cheered the countess but once," cried Eugene to the multitude. "Do you wish me to renew our strife?"

"Long live the noble Countess de Soissons!" was the prompt reply. And, without waiting for a third suggestion, they shouted again and again, "Long live the Countess de Soissons!"

Olympia's flashing eyes rested proudly on her son. "I thank you, Eugene: you have avenged me effectually. All Paris will be filled with lampoons on the ridiculous repulse of the valiant Barbesieur and his followers."

Eugene made no reply. His eyes were fixed upon the personage whom they supposed to be the son of Louvois, and the prince knew perfectly well wherefore he seemed in such nervous haste to reach the gates.

"He hopes to escape without recognition," muttered Eugene, "but I must have a word with him before we part."



"Open the gates!" clamored the populace anew; then suddenly there was a cry of alarm which was echoed from man to man, from group to group, until it shaped itself into these words: "The guards! The guards!"

## CHAPTER V.

BARBESIEUR LOUVOIS.

THUNDERING down the street came a troop of horsemen, who halted directly in front of the palace-gates.

"Louvois' spies have been reporting the failure of his son's warlike expedition," remarked Olympia, and the guards whom we had vainly called to our help, have come in hot haste to protect our assailants."

By this time the officer in command was at the gates making vain efforts to open them.

"What does this signify?" asked he. "And what is this multitude about in the court of the Hôtel de Soissons?"

"Look at the palace-windows and the palace-doors, and you will read your answer there," replied Eugene. "I closed the gates against a furious and misguided mob; but we have come to terms, and I am about to liberate them. I crave your indulgence for these poor fellows: they have been deceived, and knew not what they did, and I hope that you will make good the forgiveness I have extended to their fault, by allowing them to go hence without molestation."

"If so," replied the officer, "I shall be happy to confirm your highness's clemency by carrying out your order for their release."

"Is it possible," asked the countess of her son, "that you are in earnest? You intend to suffer those wretches to go away unharmed! Because I asked your forbearance for one man, shall this vile horde be snatched from the hands of justice!"

"Do you suppose that justice has any intention of overtaking them?" asked Eugene, with a significant smile. "Believe

me, dear mother, I do but anticipate the object for which the guards were sent, and spare myself and you the humiliation of publishing to the world that neither law nor justice takes cognizance of the wrongs of the Countess de Soissons. These men have come hither to succor our enemies, not us."

"Ah, my son, I begin to appreciate you. You have inherited the sagacity of your great uncle," returned Olympia.

"Open the gates! open the gates!" cried the rioters.

"Will your highness be pleased to send some one to release your prisoners?" asked the captain of the guardsmen.

"I shall be there myself, in a moment," was the reply.

"You!" exclaimed the countess. "Would you expose yourself to the vengeance of the populace, Eugene?"

"They will not molest me. Barbesieur Louvois has reached the gates, and I must greet him ere he goes.—Come, Latour and Darmont, and show me the way by the private staircase. The rest of you keep your posts and be watchful, for the struggle may be renewed, and it is just possible that I may have to order you to fire.—And now shall I conduct my mother to her boudoir?"

"No, my son, I remain here to observe what passes below, nor will I retire until I shall have seen the ending of this curious spectacle."

Eugene bowed and withdrew. "Go before, Latour," said he. "I am unacquainted with the private inlets and outlets of the palace."

Latour obeyed, saying to himself: "They may well make a priest of this virtuous youth, who knows nothing of the secret windings of his own hotel. His father and his brother were wiser than he; and many a night have they gone in and out on visits of gallantry, when they were young enough to be as squeamish as he, or old enough to have reformed their ways."

"Give me the keys," said Eugene, as they emerged from the side-entrance. "I will unlock the gates, and when I cry 'Halt!' do you seize upon a man whom I shall point out to you as he attempts to force the passage in advance of his confederates."

"Let us alone for holding him fast, your highness."