

nor any other member of the court circle appeared, to silence the apprehensions or soothe the wounded pride of the haughty Countess de Soissons. But late—very late—when she had relinquished all hopes of another arrival, the doors were flung open, and the usher, in a loud voice, announced: "His highness the Duke de Bouillon!"

## CHAPTER VII.

### HELP IN TIME OF NEED.

OLYMPIA, who, with three or four wrinkled old fops, and as many withered dames, had just taken her seat at a card-table, kissed her hand, and received her brother-in-law, with a profusion of smiles such as never before had greeted his entrance into the *salons* of the Hôtel Soissons.

He seemed to be totally unconscious of her blandishments, as, with a slight inclination to the company, he came very close to the hostess, and, regardless of etiquette, whispered something in her ear.

His communication must have been of a nature to excite mirth, for she threw back her head, and, laughing rather more boisterously than was her wont, rose quickly from her seat.

"Of course, my dear duke," said she, so as to be heard by all who were around; "of course you shall have the drops for my sister. I regret to hear that she needs them. Come with me to my cabinet, and you shall receive them from my hand. I will even taste them in your presence, that they may not be suspected of containing poison. Follow me, if my kind friends will excuse us for a few moments."

With a graceful bend of her head, the countess crossed the room, and disappeared with her brother-in-law. From the window to which he had retired, Eugene had seen and heard what was passing, and in the stern expression of the Duke de Bouillon's face he had read something of more significance than a whispered request for headache-drops. No sooner had his mother left the room than he followed her, and as she was

about to enter her cabinet, he laid his hand upon her shoulder:

"Pardon, dear mother," said he, in fond and deprecating tones. "I merely wish to say, that during your interview with my uncle, I will remain in the little room adjoining. You may want me, perchance, to execute some commission—it may be to bear an apology to our guests."

"It will be better for Prince Eugene to take part in our conference," said the duke, with his usual moroseness. He is the only son you have in Paris, and, as the representative of the family, it is proper for him to hear what I am about to communicate."

"I consent," replied Olympia, calmly. "I have no secrets from my son, and your highness may speak without reserve what you have come hither at this unusual hour to say."

With these words she entered her cabinet, the others following silently behind. The duke closed the door and looked around, to see that there were no other occupants of the room. He peered curiously at the heavy folds of the satin curtains which concealed the windows, and, having satisfied himself that no listeners lurked behind, he spoke.

"You are quite sure that we cannot be overheard?" said he, addressing the countess.

"Perfectly sure," replied she. "Of these walls it may be said, that, unlike walls of ordinary construction, they have no ears. Speak without apprehension. But above all things let us be seated."

"No, madame, let us remain as we are, and hearken to my words. You know that La Voisin was arrested last night."

"I know it. Monsieur Louvois brought me the news this morning, and it was corroborated by the rabble that attacked us not long after his departure from the palace. It is said that La Voisin is a toxicologist, and that she has been in the habit of selling poison to her patrons. Was this what you came to say?"

"With this I intended to open my communication, madame. That La Voisin has trafficked in poisons is proved, and she will assuredly mount the scaffold for her crimes. But



the next point is to inquire to whom her *poudre de succession* has been sold."

"Has the question been put to La Voisin?" asked the countess, carelessly. "They have only to inquire of her; doubtless she will reveal the names of her friends."

The duke came nearer, and looked sternly in her face. "The question has been asked, and it has been answered, madame."

The countess shuddered, but recovered herself instantaneously. Momentary as it was, however, Eugene had seen the motion, and now his large dark eyes were fixed upon his uncle with a look of steady defiance.

"The confessions of La Voisin can be of no significance to the Countess de Soissons," said he, haughtily. "She cannot have made any declaration that would compromise a noble lady!"

"Nevertheless she has compromised one of the noblest names in France," returned the duke. "She was forced to reveal the names of her confederates."

"Yes! they have been as cruel as they were to poor Brinvilliers; they have taken her to the *chambre ardente*!" cried the countess, in a trembling voice.

"Yes, madame, she was taken to the *chambre ardente*, stretched upon the rack, and then she confessed."

"Confessed what?" gasped Olympia.

"She confessed to have sold her *poudre de succession*; to have foretold the future, and to have prepared love-philters."

"I do not know that there is treason in drawing horoscopes and brewing love-philters," returned the countess, with a forced laugh.

"It is treason to brew love-philters, when they are designed to take effect upon the King of France," replied the duke. "It is also treason to steal a lock of his hair wherewith to prepare the philter."

"Did she say this?" screamed the countess, with the ferocity of a tigress at bay.

"She did. The lock of hair was obtained by Marshal Luxemburg, who bribed the valet of his majesty; the philter was prepared for the Countess de Soissons."

"Her tortures must then have unsettled her reason," cried Olympia. "To end her agony, the poor delirious wretch has confessed any thing that her executioners may have suggested."

"You are mistaken. When she had fully recovered her senses, she repeated her declaration word for word. She signaled three persons as her trustiest confidants. Two of the three were her accomplices; the third is merely accused of having made use of La Voisin to raise the devil. The two who are accused of murder are Monsieur de Luxemburg and Madame de Soissons."

"The third?" said Olympia, hoarsely.

"My own wife," returned the duke, mournfully. "Not having been accused of crime, she has not been sent to the Bastille; his majesty has graciously permitted her to be imprisoned in her own hotel."

"Not sent to the Bastille!" echoed the countess, with a shudder. "Has—any one been—sent there?"

"Yes. Two hours ago Monsieur de Luxemburg was arrested, and he is now there in a criminal's cell."

The countess uttered a cry of anguish, and tottered to a seat, for her trembling limbs refused to support her. She put her hand to her head, and looked wildly around.

"And I?—am I to be arrested?"

"Yes, madame. The *lettre de cachet* has been sent by Louvois to the king, and—"

"And the king!" said Olympia, almost inaudibly.

"His majesty has signed it."

The countess pressed her hands upon her heart, and then, suddenly springing to her feet, she burst into a loud, frenzied laugh. "He has signed! He has signed!—And you—you—" muttered she, with a scowl at the duke, "did you offer to act as bailiff for the king?"

As though he would have confronted a world to shield her from harm, Eugene threw his arm around his mother's waist, and stood between the two.

"If such be your errand, Duke de Bouillon, you must first be the assassin of her son. No blow shall reach her, until it shall have pierced the heart of her only protector!"



"Not so grandiloquent, my little abbé," replied De Bouillon, superciliously. "Methinks, were I so disposed, I might snap the feeble thread of your existence, without any extraordinary display of valor, but I have no desire to deprive the countess of so valiant a knight. I come, not to arrest, but to deliver her. I come to save herself from the headsman, her family from the foul blot of her public execution."

"Avenging God!" murmured the miserable woman.

"You must fly, Olympia," continued the duke, compassionating her fearful condition, "you must fly, and without delay."

"Fly!" exclaimed Eugene, furiously. "Because a degraded wretch like that La Voisin, in her delirium of agony, has spoken the name of the Countess de Soissons, she shall become a fugitive from justice? No, mother, no! Remain to confound your calumniators, and, with the good sword of Right, and Truth, pierce the vile falsehood to its heart's core!"

The duke shook his head. "Let not ill-advised heroism tempt you to defy your legions of accusers. Be you innocent or guilty, you are prejudged, and will be condemned. Believe me, the danger is urgent, and it were sheer imbecility to confront it."

"You say the king has signed?" replied she, with a vacant stare. Then clasping her hands, she burst into a flood of tears, repeating o'er and o'er the piteous words, "Oh no! No! No! It cannot be! It cannot be!"

"Nevertheless, he has done it; done it at the instigation of Louvois and De Montespan. But mark me well, and you too, abbé—listen to what I am about to say. The king himself it was who sent me hither to warn you; it is he who urges you to flight. That you may have time to escape, the *lettre de cachet* is not to go into effect until to-morrow morning. But the morrow is close at hand: hark!—the clock strikes eleven, and you have but one hour. If after midnight you are found within the gates of Paris, your doom is certain. The spies of Louvois are close at hand; they watch before your palace-gates, and await the twelfth stroke of the iron tongue that speaks from the towers of Notre Dame, to force their way into

the very room wherein we stand. If they pass the threshold of the palace you are irretrievably lost!"

The countess spoke not a word in reply. They scarcely knew whether she had understood the terrible import of the duke's appeal. She had remained motionless, almost breathless; her face white as death, her large orbs distended to their utmost, gazing, not upon the tangible objects that were before them, but upon some fearful pageant that was passing within the shadowy precincts of her soul.

Her lips began to move, and she muttered incoherent words. "Ah! is it so?" said she, almost inaudibly. "The end of that bright dream! The philter! What!" cried she with sudden energy, "he warns me? He grants me—one—one hour!" And then, overpowered by the reality of her supreme desolation, she opened her arms, and looked defiantly above, as if invoking the wrath of that Heaven which had forsaken her.

"Olympia," said the duke, touching her arm, "you have but three-quarters of an hour to quit Paris."

"Dear mother," implored Eugene, "decide quickly whether you go or remain."

She shuddered, and, with a deep sigh, suffered her arms to fall listlessly at her side.

"I must drink of this chalice of humiliation," said she, mournfully. "I must fly."

A groan of anguish broke from the depths of Eugene's suffering heart, while a strange look shot athwart the countenance of the duke. The groan was that of faith that faltered; the glance was that of doubt made certainty.

"I must make my escape," iterated Olympia in a tone more resolute. "If Louvois has effected the arrest of a woman allied to the royal family, it is because he is secure of her conviction. Rather than become his victim, I will endure the shame of flight. Time enough remains to me for justification."\*

"Justification shall come through me!" cried Eugene, raising his right hand as though taking an oath.

\* The countess's own words.—See Amadée Renée, "The Nieces of Mazarin," p. 207.



"Countess, countess," urged De Bouillon, "you have but half an hour."

"You are right," returned Olympia, summoning all her resolution to her aid. "Time is flying, and I must be diligent."

"I promised his majesty not to leave you until you were on your way, Olympia," was the duke's reply, "and I shall remain to fulfil my promise."

"And I, mother," added Eugene, "will never leave you until you are in perfect safety."

"Then let us prepare," was Olympia's rejoinder. "You, duke, be so kind as to collect my papers and money. They are in that ebony secretary at your elbow. Here are the keys. You will find a casket therein, where all that you find may be deposited for the present. I myself will gather up my jewels and such clothing as cannot be dispensed with. Eugene, my son, go at once to the stables: order my travelling-chariot, and see that eight of my swiftest horses are attached to it. In Brussels I shall find a friend in the Spanish viceroy. Send forward relays to Rheims and Namur; and let the men be clad in liveries of dark gray. Hasten, my son; before half an hour, I must be hence!"

When Eugene returned, he found his mother waiting. The duke hastily threw over her shoulders a travelling-cloak bordered with fur, and Olympia, drawing the hood closely around her face, prepared to quit the room.

"Shall I not call my sisters to bid you adieu?" asked her son.

"No," said she, calmly. "Their absence would be remarked, and nothing must arouse the suspicion of my guests. I leave to you, Monsieur de Bouillon, the task of communicating my flight to my daughters. May I request you to bear a message to the king also? Tell him that whenever he will pass his royal word that I may return without danger of incarceration, I shall be ready to appear before my accusers, and defend my calumniated reputation.\* Give me your arm,—and yours, Eugene: we are late."

Silently, and without a single expression of regret, she went

\* Her own words.—See the "Letters of Madame de Sévigné," vol. iii.

through the lofty corridors of the hôtel, until she reached the private staircase by which Eugene had passed to the street that morning. The servants had assembled to bid her adieu, and, as they tendered their good wishes, she bent her lofty head with the condescension of a queen. Before descending, she addressed a few words to the steward:

"I am forced to leave Paris for a time, Latour. My enemies refuse me the poor privilege of remaining here to refute the absurd charges preferred against me by the senseless rabble that are in their pay. During my absence, I leave you in full command of my household. You shall receive your wages until you decide to seek employment elsewhere. Farewell all!"

The chariot with eight superb horses was at the postern, and around it stood the lackeys in their liveries of sombre gray. The countess took her seat in the carriage, and, bending forward to kiss her son, said, "Bear my greetings to your sisters, Eugene."

"Will my gracious uncle accept this commission?" asked he, turning to the duke.

"Why not you?" asked Olympia.

"Because my place is with you, dearest mother," was the simple reply of her devoted child, while he took his seat at her side.

"It is right," remarked the duke, "and I begin to feel considerable respect for our little abbé!"

"I shall compel respect from more than the Duke de Bouillon," thought his nephew.

"Farewell!" said Olympia, with as much self-possession as if she had been starting for a tour of pleasure. "Tell the king that I forget to pity my own impotence in compassionating his."

The carriage rolled away, first under the illuminated windows of the rooms of state, where the unconscious Princesses de Carignan were doing their best to entertain the motley assemblage, that had been so suddenly deserted by their mother; then along the dimly-lighted streets where Eugene's heart beat with painful apprehension lest the crowd should recognize the fugitive; then they entered the avenue where the



court had turned its back upon Olympia and her extravagant hopes, and at last—they reached the gates.

Meanwhile the Duke de Bouillon had returned to the *salons*, where he announced the departure of the countess to her guests; the servants had dispersed, and returned to their usual employments, all except one, who crept stealthily out, and, turning the corner, advanced a few paces into a dark and narrow alley. Two horsemen were waiting his appearance there.

"Has she gone?" asked one.

"Yes," replied the man; "and relays have been ordered to hasten her escape."

"What route did she take?"

"She goes to Brussels, by the way of Rheims, Rocroy, and Namur."

"Here are your four louis d'ors."

With these words, the two horsemen galloped away, turning their horses' heads toward the palace of the minister of war. In the porte-cochère stood Louvois himself, who, motioning them not to dismount, spoke a few low words, and then handed to each one a package of letters and a purse of gold.

"Fly with all speed," said he, in his parting injunctions. "Kill as many horses as you list—I pay for their carcasses; but see that at every station you arrive a full hour before the countess."

He then entered his carriage, and drove to the Louvre to inform the king that his royal commands had been obeyed, and that the Countess de Soissons had been suffered to escape.

As the chariot that was bearing away the disgraced Olympia drove through the barrier and entered upon the high-road, the two horsemen galloped past, and so completely did they distance the unhappy travellers, that in a few moments the echo of their horses' feet had died away into silence.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE FLIGHT.

It was a glorious night—a night of sapphire skies, radiant with stellar diamonds—one of those nights whose beauty intensifies pleasure, and whose gentle influence soothes pain; which, to the joyous heart seem to prefigure heaven; to the sorrowing are like the healing touch of the Almighty hand, which, in exceeding love, has stricken it with a passing pain.

But not a ray of hope or consolation refreshed the dreary wastes of the heart of Olympia de Soissons. She had withdrawn herself from the embrace of her son, and leaned far back into the corner of the carriage. But for the glare of her large, black eyes, as they reflected the light of the lamps on either side, she might have been asleep, so motionless she lay; but, whenever Eugene turned a timid glance upon her rigid features, he saw that she seemed ever and ever to be looking away from him, and far out upon the black and shapeless masses of the woods through which they journeyed all that night.

He had tried to divert her by conversation; but to his remarks she had made such curt and random replies, that he desisted, and left her to the bleak solitude of her own reveries.

And thus they passed the night. With fresh relays of eight spirited horses, they travelled so swiftly, that when morning dawned, the lofty towers of the Cathedral of Rheims were seen looming through the mist, and the coachman drew up before the gates.

But, although a courier had been sent in advance to order it, no relay was there. The coachman turned to Eugene for instructions.

"This is most unfortunate," replied he, "for it compels us to enter the city and change horses at the royal post-house. While arrangements are being made there, will it please my dear mother to leave her carriage and partake of some refreshment?"

The countess replied with a silent bend of the head, and



Eugene sent forward a courier, with orders to have breakfast prepared. The carriage passed the old Roman gate, and entered the city, made famous by the coronation of so many kings of France. The rattle of the wheels over the rough stone pavement made the countess start with apprehension of she knew not what, and she withdrew cautiously from sight.

"It is well that the roll of this clamorous carriage cannot awaken our foes," said she, as they stopped before the post-house.

Her rejoicings were premature ; for the master of the post-horses came leisurely forward, his face expressing a mixture of rude curiosity with careless contempt.

"You want post-horses?" asked he, with a familiar nod.

Eugene's large eyes flashed fire. "It would appear," said he, "that you do not know to whom you have the honor of speaking, or else you would remove your hat."

"Oh, yes, I know who you are," answered he, insolently. "That is the Countess de Soissons, and you are the little abbé, her son. But I keep on my hat, for it is cool this morning, and it suits me *not* to remove it."

"It suits you, then, to be a boor, a barefaced—"

"Peace, Eugene!" interrupted Olympia, in Italian; "peace, or you will cause me some detention that may imperil my life. See; in spite of the undue hour, how many men are around our carriage. They are not here by accident. Their presence only proves that Louvois' couriers have anticipated us; and if ever we hope to pass the frontiers of France, we must be discreet."

"And I may not, therefore, chastise this varlet! I must sit tamely by while he insults my mother!"

"He is but a tool, Eugene. Spare the instrument, and strike the hand that directs it against me."

"By the Eternal God, I will smite that hand!" said Eugene, while the master of the post-horses stood staring at Olympia with an expression of familiarity that would have cost him his life, had she been free to take it. But sweet as the honey of Hybla, were the words she spoke.

"Good sir, would you be so obliging as to furnish us with eight horses?" said she, almost imploringly.

"Eight horses! for that light vehicle? It looks much as if you were trying to make your escape, and were sore pressed to move on."

"I am, indeed, sorely pressed," said she, in tones of distress; "hasten, I implore of you, hasten!"

"You cannot have them before half an hour," said he, turning on his heel, and re-entering the house.

The countess now called to one of her footmen: "Go, see if we can have a room and some breakfast."

The man obeyed, but returned almost immediately, with a most embarrassed expression.

"They have no vacant room, and say that your highness need not trouble yourself to leave the carriage, in search of lodgings, were it even for five minutes."

"Then go and bring us each a cup of chocolate," replied the countess, with a sigh.

The footman renewed his petition, and this time returned, accompanied by a woman, who, in angry haste, approached the unhappy fugitives:

"You are the Countess de Soissons?" asked she, with a bold stare.

"Yes, madame, I am; and I hope you will do me the favor to serve us a cup of chocolate."

"You do—do you? Well, I have come out here to tell you that I shall do no such thing. How do I know that your breath may not poison my cup and—"

"Woman!" cried Eugene, springing up from his seat.

His mother put him firmly back. "I command you to keep silence," said she, imperiously. Then, resuming her colloquy with the woman who stood by, with arms akimbo: "I will tell you how you can oblige me without any risk to yourself."

"How, pray?"

"Sell me, not only the chocolate, but the cups that contain it. I will give you a louis d'or for each one."

The woman's eyes glistened with greed of gold. "Two louis d'ors for two cups of chocolate!" said she to herself, "that is a brave trade for me. You shall have them," added she aloud, "I will fetch them in a moment."



And off she pattered with her slipshod shoes into the house. The countess then addressed her son, who, leaning back in a corner of the carriage, sat with his head buried in his hands.

"Eugene," said she, emphatically, "if you are to accompany me any farther, it must be as a peace-loving abbé not as an irascible soldier. If you incense these people against us, your indiscreet zeal will cause me to be captured. I have no longing for death; I desire to live until my son, the mighty cardinal, has trampled under foot the least as well as the greatest of my enemies."

"Oh, mother, I have not only *your* injuries to avenge, but mine! I have the burning shame of yesterday to wipe out, although the wound of my humiliation can never be healed."

"Time—Nature's sweet balm—heals every wound, and in our days of adversity let this be our consolation. To the sharp lash of Destiny the wise man will bow in silence; but if the blow be from the hand of man, it is from the crucible of the suffering it imposes that must come the strength wherewith we retaliate; from the depths of our wounded hearts that must spring the geysers of our seething revenge. It would gratify me to have you the companion of my flight, but, if in the impotence of your wrath you seek to defend me, it will be better for us to part.—Ah, here comes the chocolate! I confess that I rejoice to scent its fragrant aroma. Let us drink, and afterward you will decide whether you subscribe to my exactions, or return to Paris."

The cups were cracked, without handles, and of coarse pottery—the thrifty housewife having taken care to select the worst of her wares to barter away. The countess smilingly accepted hers, and, as Eugene was putting his impatiently away, she took it herself from the servant's hands.

"Drink," said she, "and hearken to a saying of our uncle, Cardinal Mazarin: 'When a man is troubled in spirit, he must strengthen himself in body. The world is a great campaign against contrarieties with which we must daily anticipate a skirmish. And above all, on the eve of a great battle, the soul, which is the chief, must see to it that his soldier, which is the body, is in a condition to do him service.' These were the words of a wise man, and they are worthy of being

remembered. Drink your chocolate, my son, for you well know that we are about to go into action."

He took the cup from his mother's hand, and, without another word, emptied it of its contents. The woman, meanwhile, had been watching her cups, lamenting their approaching destruction, which, spite of the tremendous price at which they had been purchased, she looked upon as a sacrifice greatly to be deplored. Seeing that the catastrophe was approaching, she stepped forward to receive her pay. In her hand she held a large pan of water, which she raised to a level with the portière of the carriage.

"Now, madame," said she, "you have had your chocolate, give me my louis d'ors."

From her jewelled purse Olympia drew out two gold-pieces, which she offered to the woman. But, instead of receiving them, she cried out in a shrill voice:

"Drop them in the water. After a few hours I may venture to touch the gold that has passed through your hands!"

The crowd, whom curiosity had drawn around the carriage, now burst out into a shout of applause.

"Right, right, Dame Margot! You are a prudent woman! Nobody knows what might come of handling her louis d'ors."

Olympia smiled. "Yes," said she, "you are a wise woman, and, as a token of my admiration for your prudence, here are three louis d'ors instead of the two I had promised."

So saying, she dropped three gold-pieces in the basin. The woman blushed, and looked ashamed. The crowd were astonished, and here and there were heard a few murmured words of sympathy. "That was very kind, was it not? After all, she may not be as bad as they say. It may all be a lie about her poisoning her children!"

Olympia heard it, and a proud smile flitted over her beautiful face. The woman still lingered at the carriage-door. "And the cups?" asked she, wistfully. "I suppose you will break them, will you not?"

"No," replied the countess, speaking so that she might be heard by the people. "No, my good woman, I will not break



them: they shall lie in the basin, so that, like the gold, they may be purified until you find them worthy of being used again!"

And again her jewelled hand was extended, and from her slender fingers the cups were carefully dropped into the basin.

"Your highness," exclaimed the woman, abashed, "I thank you a thousand times for your generosity, and I hope you will forgive my rudeness. I would not have been so forgetful of the respect I owe to a lady of your rank, if I had not been put up to it by other people. From my heart I beg your pardon, madame."

"You are sincerely forgiven," replied Olympia, gently. "I am accustomed to contumely, and when unjustly persecuted I follow the example of my Saviour—I forgive those that hate and revile me."

"Did you hear that?" whispered the multitude one to another. "And do you mark what a beautiful countenance she has? Instead of being a murderess, she may be a pious saint. Who knows?"

"No," cried the vender of chocolate, bravely diving her hand into the basin and withdrawing her louis d'ors, "no, she is no murderess, she is a benevolent, Christian lady."

"She is a benevolent Christian lady," shouted the people, and in less than five minutes the countess was as popular as a prince who has just ascended the throne.

A third time the magic purse was drawn forth, and two more louis d'ors glittered in the hand of Dame Margot!

"May I ask of you the favor to give this to those good people, that they may drink my health?" said Olympia.

"You are an angel," cried Margot, while her eyes grew moist with sympathizing tears.

"Yes, an angel!" echoed the crowd. "So beautiful! So good! So bountiful!"

They were still in the height of their enthusiasm when the half hour had expired, and the post-horses were brought out and harnessed. The postilion sounded his horn, and the coachman cracked his whip.

"Long live the noble Countess de Soissons!" cried Dame Margot, and "Long live her highness!" echoed the converts,

while the carriage thundered through the streets, and the countess threw herself back and laughed.

"Miserable rabble!" said she, "whose love and hate are bought with gold, and whom philanthropists regard as the exponents of the Divine will! '*Vox populi vox Dei*,' forsooth!" —Then, turning to Eugene, who, during the whole performance, had remained sullenly silent, she continued: "Have you decided whether to leave or accompany me? If the latter, it must be in the character of a diplomatist, whose weapons are sweet words and shining gold."

"I go on with you, mother, as your loving and obedient son," said Eugene, kissing her hand—even the one which still clasped the wonder-working purse. "I have no right to despise this tiny necromancer, for, by its beneficent power, you have been rescued from dangers which I, a man, and not a coward, was impotent to avert. I submit, dear mother, to your dictates—no longer your champion, look upon me henceforth as your subject."

The voice was very mournful in which Eugene made this profession of vassalage, and at its conclusion his eyes were veiled by tears of burning humiliation. His mother affected not to perceive his emotion, as she replied in her blandest tones:

"I thank you, my son. Your decision is a most filial and meritorious one. The two days that have just passed over your head have proved to me that, whatever may be your career, you are destined to render it illustrious either by statesmanship or prowess. Whether as an ecclesiastic, a politician, or a soldier, you will certainly attain distinction."

"Mother, as a soldier, I *may* attain distinction; as a churchman, never. For the present I accept my fate; but blessed will be the day on which I go into the world free to feel the power of my manhood, and to shape my fortunes with my own hand. Let women rise to dignity through royal favor and family influence; man's only ally should be his own strong arm. Far nobler to me is the lieutenant who wins his epaulets upon the battle-field, than the prince who is born to the command of an army."

"Have a care how you speak such high-treason at the court



of Louis XIV.," replied his mother. "It would be repeated to his majesty, and never would be forgiven."

"I hope to do many things in my life that will be repeated to his majesty of France—perchance some of which may never obtain his forgiveness," replied Eugene, quietly. "But let us speak of the present, and of you, beloved mother."

Olympia threw herself back against the soft upholstery that lined the back of the carriage. "Rather let us speak of nothing, my child. Neither of us had any rest last night: I would gladly sleep awhile."

She closed her eyes, and finally Nature asserted her long-frustrated claims. In a few moments, the humiliations, the fears, and the sufferings of the unhappy Olympia, were drowned in the drowsy waters of profound sleep.

She was not long permitted to remain in oblivion of her woes. Her repose was broken by the hoots and hisses of another vulgar crowd, that swarmed like hornets about the carriage-windows. They had arrived at another station, where, in place of finding post-horses, they were met by another mob as vituperative as the one they had encountered before.

Eugene thrust open the portière, and, leaping into the very midst of the rioters, he drew out his pistols. "The first one of you," cried he, "that proffers another injurious word, I will shoot as I would a vicious dog!"

"Hear that sickly manikin! He is trying to browbeat us!" cried some one in the crowd.

"Yes, yes, trying to browbeat us!" echoed the chorus.

"Yes—by the eternal heavens above us!" exclaimed the prince, "The first that moves a foot toward us, dies!"

His eyes flashed so boldly, and his attitude was so commanding, that the people, ever cowed by true courage, faltered and fell back.

Just then Olympia opened the door on her own side of the chariot, and, without the slightest manifestation of fear or anger, stepped to the ground, and, with one of her bewitching smiles, made her way to the very center of her foes. Her voice was soft and low, but, to a practised ear, it would have seemed like that of a lioness, who, forced to temporize, was longing to devour.

"Good people," said the leonine siren, "pardon the irascibility of this young man. He is my son, and, when he heard his mother's name aspersed, his anger got the better of his discretion. Is it not true," continued she, turning to a woman who had been most vociferous in her maledictions, "is it not true, dear friend, that a son is excusable who grows indignant when he hears his mother accused of deeds the very thought of which would fill her with horror? Perhaps you, too, have a son that loves you, and who, knowing you to be a good and pious woman, would never suffer any man to attack your good name."

"Yes," replied the woman, entirely propitiated, "yes, madame, I have a son who certainly would defend my good name against any man that attacked it."

"Then you will make allowances for mine, and speak a kind word for him to your friends here, for we mothers understand one another, do we not? And any one of us is ready to shelter the good son of some other woman? Are we not?"

"That we are," returned the woman, enthusiastically. "I will protect your son, never fear." And, with her arms upraised, she dashed through the crowd, and addressed those who were nearest to Eugene, and who, partially over their panic, were just about to remember that they were many against their one opponent.

"Let him alone!" cried she. "He is her son! You see that we have been deceived by those who told us that she had poisoned her children. How should this one love her, if she were so wicked?"

"Dear friends," cried Olympia, so as to be heard by all around, "you have been shamefully imposed upon, if you were told that I poisoned my dear children. I have given birth to seven, who are all alive to testify that their poor mother is innocent."

"All seven alive! Seven children, and not one dead!" exclaimed the "dear friend" whom Olympia had specially addressed. "Just think of that! Why, of course she is innocent."

And here and there the shrill voices of the women were



heard repeating the words, "She is innocent, of course she is innocent!"

"You perceive, then," continued the countess, pursuing her advantage, "that I have powerful enemies, since they precede me on my journey with slanderous falsehoods, and try to turn the honest hearts of the villagers of France against me and my son. I see that they have been here, and have bribed you to insult me."

"That is true," cried a chorus of rough voices. "We were paid to insult you and to refuse you post-horses."

"Well, then," returned Olympia, with one of her most enchanting smiles, "I, too, will give you money, but it shall not be to bribe you to resent my injuries. It will be to dispose of as your kind hearts deem best."

She threw out a handful of silver, for which some began to stoop and scramble, while others, emboldened by the sight of such a largesse, crowded around, stretching out their hands for a "souvenir."

"Whoever, at the expiration of fifteen minutes, furnishes me eight fresh horses, shall receive eight louis d'ors as a token of my gratitude," said the sagacious Olympia.

No sooner were the words spoken, than every man there flew to earn the token. In less than a minute the ground was cleared, and naught was to be seen but a few women and children, still bent upon searching for the silver.

The countess returned to her carriage, where she found Eugene, looking embarrassed and ashamed. He immediately apologized for his involuntary disregard of her injunctions.

"Dear mother, forgive me; in this last dilemma I have conducted myself like a madman, while you have shown that you possess true heroism. I see how very much wiser you are than I; and I solemnly promise to attempt no more violence, where personal violence is not offered to us. But to say that I could exchange my weapons for yours, I cannot. I never shall learn to dissimulate and flatter."

His mother slightly raised her shoulders. "You will learn it in time, when you will have learned to despise your fellows as I do.—But see! Heaven be praised, here come the horses."

In a few moments, eight brown hands were outstretched to receive the gold, and, amid the huzzas of the multitude, the Countess de Soissons pursued her journey.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE PARTING.

EUGENE looked gloomily out of the carriage-window, and heard a succession of deep sighs.

"Shall I tell you why you are so sad?" said Olympia to her son.

"I am sad because I feel my miserable impotence," replied he, moodily. "I am sad because I must at last acknowledge that Mazarin was right when he said that gold was the only divinity devoutly worshipped on earth."

"Speak not slightly of gold," cried Olympia, laughing; "it has probably saved my life to-day. Unluckily we are far from the end of our journey, and I may not have enough of this precious gold wherewith to purchase forbearance as we go."

"We are not far from the frontier, and once in Flanders, you are safe."

"Not so. There are no bounds to the realms of this yellow divinity. Its worshippers are everywhere, and Louvois will seek them in France and out of it. But I think I have a device whereby we may outwit our mighty oppressor, and avoid further contumely."

"What is it, mother?"

"I will take another and a less public road. You shall go with me as far as the boundaries. We can pass the night at Rocroy, and part on the morrow: you to retrace your steps, I to continue my flight in a plain carriage, with two horses and no attendants."

"I have promised to submit, and will obey you implicitly," returned Eugene, respectfully. "Since you command me to go, we will part at Rocroy."