

## BOOK III.

### CHAPTER I.

#### THE DISAPPOINTMENT.

ALL was bustle and confusion in the Hôtel de Soissons. A crowd of workmen filled its halls; some on ladders, regilding walls and ceilings; some on their knees waxing the inlaid floors; and others occupied in removing the coverings, and dusting the satin cushions of the rich furniture of the state apartments. The first upholsterers in Paris had been summoned to the work of preparation, and the general-in-chief of the gilders stood in their midst, giving orders to his staff, and sending off detachments for special service. He held in his hand a roll of paper resembling a marshal's baton, with which he assigned their posts to his men. Some of his subalterns approached, to ask in what style the walls of the reception-rooms were to be decorated.

"I must see the Prince of Savoy about that," said he, with a flourish. And he took his way for the prince's cabinet. "Announce me to his highness," said he, as he entered the antechamber.

"His highness is at home to nobody to-day, sir," replied Conrad.

"He will be at home for me," said the decorator, complacently. "Say to the prince that I desire an interview on business of great moment, connected with the embellishment of the hôtel; and without a conference with himself we cannot proceed. I am Monsieur Louis, the master of the masters of decoration."

Conrad, quite awed by the stateliness of Monsieur Louis, went at once to announce him, and returned with a summons for him to enter the cabinet.

Eugene met him with a bright smile of welcome, and asked what he could do to assist Monsieur Louis.

"Your highness," replied monsieur, "my workmen have gilded, waxed, and dusted the apartments, and the important task of decorating them is about to commence. I am here to inquire of your highness what is to be the character of the decorations. Are they to have a significance that betokens Honor, Friendship, Art, or Love?"

Eugene could not repress a smile as he asked whether, for the expression of these various sentiments, there were different styles of decoration.

"Most assuredly," was the pompous reply. "It depends entirely upon the nature of the guest or guests to be entertained. If your highness is to receive a personage of distinction (a king, for example), your decorations must be emblematic of respect. They must consist of laurels, lilies, and banners. If a friend or one of your own noble kinsmen, the decorations have no special significance; we mingle flowers, festoons, and pictures that are not allegorical. If you invite a company of artists, poets, musicians, and the like, the principal decorations surmount the seat of the Mæcenas who entertains, and the rest of the apartment is left in simplicity."

"But you spoke of a fourth style," said Eugene, blushing.

"Indeed I did, your highness; and on that style we lavish our best efforts. If the guest is to be a bride, then our walls and ceilings must be ornamented with rich designs emblematic of love. We must have cupids, billing doves, and wreaths of roses, mingled with orange-flowers. Added to this, the decorations must begin in the vestibule, and be carried out in character, through the entire palace."

"Well," said Eugene, his large eyes glowing with delight, "let your decorations be appropriate to a bridal."

"Impossible, your highness! This style requires great originality of conception, and time to carry out the designs. It would require a hundred workmen, and then I doubt—"

"Employ more than a hundred," returned Eugene, "and it can be done in a day. Indeed it must be done, and—I ask of you as a favor not to mention to any one in what style you are decorating the Hôtel de Soissons."



"Your highness, I will answer for myself, but I cannot answer for the discretion of a hundred workmen, who, precisely because they are asked to be silent, would prefer to be communicative."

"Well—do your best, but remember that your work must be done to-day."

"It shall be done, your highness, and when you see it, you will confess that I am the first *décorateur* of the age."

So saying, Monsieur Louis made his bow and strutted off.

Eugene looked after him with a smile. "He is proud and happy," said the prince, "and yet he merely embellishes the palace wherein love's festival is to be held. But for me—oh, happiest of mortals! is the festival prepared. Laura, adored Laura, I must speak thy name to the walls, or my heart will burst with the fullness of its joy! How shall I kill the weary hours of this day of expectation? How cool the hot blood that rushes wildly through my veins, and threatens me with loss of reason from excess of bliss! I am no longer a solitary, slighted abbé; I am a hero, a giant, for *I am beloved!*"

At that moment the door was hastily opened, and Conrad made his appearance.

"Your highness," said he, "a messenger is here from her royal highness, madame, and begs for an audience."

Eugene started, and his brow clouded with anxiety. "A messenger from madame," murmured he. "What can—how should the duchess?—But—Conrad, admit him."

"Speak," cried Eugene, as soon as the messenger entered the room. "What are her royal highness's commands?"

"Her royal highness the Duchess of Orleans requests his highness Prince Eugene of Savoy to visit her immediately. And that no delay may occur, her royal highness's equipage is at the door, waiting for his excellency."

Eugene answered not a word. With an imperious wave of the hand, which was justly interpreted into a command to clear the passage, he strode on and on through the corridors of the Hôtel de Soissons, crushing with his foot Monsieur Louis's choicest garlands, that lay on the floor ready to wreath the walls and mirrors of the rooms of state.

Monsieur Louis was shocked at such desecration; but still more shocked was he to observe what a change had come over the face of the prince since their interview scarce half an hour ago. Reckless of the ruined garlands that followed his track, pale and silent, he went on and on, down the marble staircase, and through the vestibule, until he flung himself into the coach, and cried:

"On, for your life! urge your horses to their topmost speed!"

The coachman obeyed, and went thundering down the streets, little heeding whether the equipage that bore the royal arms trod down half a dozen boors on its way or not.

It drew up with a sudden jerk before the Palais Royal; and the messenger, who had followed on horseback, asked if his highness would follow him. He had madame's orders to introduce her visitor without further ceremony, by a private staircase, leading to her own apartments.

Doubtless the duchess had heard the carriage as it stopped, for, when Eugene entered the anteroom, she was standing in the door of her cabinet, visibly impatient for his arrival. She beckoned him to approach, and closed the door with her own hand.

She gave him no time for ceremonious greeting. "God be thanked, you are here!" exclaimed she. "Put down the portière, that no one may hear what I have to say." Eugene obeyed mechanically, and loosening its heavy tassels, the crimson satin curtain fell heavily to the floor.

"And now," cried the duchess, indignantly, "now, Prince Eugene of Savoy, I command you to tell me the truth, and the whole truth! What have you done with her? How could you be so unknighly as to take advantage of her innocent and affectionate nature, to wrong one of the purest and most perfect of God's creatures! My heart is like to break with its weight of sorrow and disgrace; and, had it not been for Laura's sake, I would have laid my complaint before his majesty. But I must not expose her to the world's contumely, and therefore I endure your presence here. Tell me at once what have you done with my darling?"

Eugene could scarcely reply to this passionate appeal. His



senses reeled—his heart seemed to freeze within him. He thought he comprehended ; and yet—

"Who ? Who is gone ? Oh, duchess, be merciful ; what mean these words of mystery ?"

The duchess eyed him scornfully. "Base seducer, dare you question me ? Do you strive to delude me into believing that you do not know of whom I speak ? I demand of you at once the person of the Marchioness de Bonaletta !"

"Laura !" cried Eugene, in a tone of deepest despair. "Laura gone ! And you say that I enticed her away !"

"Tell me the truth, tell me the truth," cried madame.

"The truth !" groaned Eugene, while the duchess started from her seat, and grasped both his hands in hers.

"Have mercy," stammered he, trembling as if an ague had suddenly seized him. "Is she no longer—here ?"

"She is no longer here," echoed the duchess, staring in astonishment at the writhing features of the unhappy prince.

"You know not where she is ?" gasped he, faintly.

"No," cried she, "no ! You look as though you were yourself astounded, Prince Eugene ; but you will no longer deny your guilt when I tell you that my poor innocent child has told me all."

"What—all ?" asked Eugene.

"She told me that you were lovers. And now, prevaricate no longer ; it is useless and renders you still more infamous."

"What more did she say ?" asked Eugene, unconscious that his tone was as imperative as that of an emperor.

"Nothing more. She merely told me that in two days I should learn all. Alas ! I have learned it to my cost, and to her ruin !"

"And you accuse *me* of enticing her ! Great God ! if my heart were not breaking with anguish, it would break that such baseness could be attributed to me. Would that I could answer you, duchess, but God in heaven knows that I was ignorant of her departure, until I learned it from yourself !"

"Was ever a man so bold in falsehood !" cried the duchess, losing all command of her temper. "I have in your own handwriting the proof of your wickedness. Now mark me ! This morning, the second woman in waiting of the marchion-

ess came frightened to my apartments to tell me that her mistress, her woman Louise, and George, had disappeared from the pavilion, no one could surmise when. I was so overcome with terror that I hurried to the pavilion, and alas ! found that it was indeed so. Neither her own bed, nor that of the servant who accompanied her, had been occupied. I looked everywhere for some clew to the mystery, when, on the floor near her morning-dress, which hung on a chair, I found this scrap of paper, which, as it is signed with your initials, you will not deny, I presume."

With eyes that flashed fire, she almost dashed the paper in his face. Eugene took it, and, having given it one glance, he turned pale as death, and it fluttered from his palsied hands to the floor.

"Heavens, what can ail him !" cried the duchess, sympathizing, in spite of herself, with his sudden sorrow. He was ghastly as a spectre, and his whole frame shook like the leaf of an aspen.

"I did not write it," gasped he, but almost inaudibly ; for his teeth chattered so that he could scarcely articulate a sound.

"What !" exclaimed the duchess, now thoroughly convinced of his innocence, and feeling her terror increase with the conviction, "what ! you did not write these words ?"

He shook his head, but no sound came from his blanched lips. He laid his hands upon his heart as if to stifle its anguish ; then, raising them to his head, he pressed them to his temples, and so paced the room for a while. Then he came and stood before the duchess, whose compassionate eyes filled with tears as they met his look of anguish. Finally, he heaved a long sigh, and spoke.

"My name has been used to deceive her," said he. "She has never seen my writing, and thus she fell into the snare."

"But I cannot comprehend who it is that possessed such influence over her as to frighten her into silent acquiescence of the fraud. Laura is young, but she is prudent and resolute. These words had some meaning which could be referred to you, or she would not have understood them."

"Ay," returned Eugene, solemnly, "they were chosen with satanic shrewdness. They referred to our plans of to-day, and



signified that I had anticipated the time for our marriage. Ah! well I know what happened; and well I know why Laura made no resistance! At ten o'clock she extinguished all the lights in her parlor save one; and as soon as this signal had been given, four men, whose faces were concealed, entered the house. One of them was a priest, two were witnesses, and the fourth—O God! that fourth one! Who was he I know not; but I shall learn—alas! too soon. Without a word (for such had been our agreement) he took her hand, and the priest read the marriage ceremony. When the names had been signed, he raised my Laura in his arms, bore her through the postern to a carriage, and, O God! O God! tore her from me forever!"

"But how come you to know these particulars, who knew not even of her flight?"

"Duchess, it *was* to have taken place to-night, and I was to have been that bridegroom. We were overheard, and those accursed words, 'not to-morrow, but to-night,' were sent in my name. She thought to give me her dear hand, while I—"

He could not proceed. He gave one loud sob, and burst into tears. Those tears, bitter though they were, saved his reason.

The duchess, too, wept profusely. "Poor prince!" said she, "well may you mourn, for you have lost an angel of goodness and—"

"No!" interrupted Eugene, fiercely. "Say not that she is lost to me! I must find her, for she is mine,—and I must find her ravisher. Great God of heaven!" cried he, raising his clasped hands, "where shall I find the robber that has so cruelly despoiled us both?"

"Stay!" cried the duchess. "I know of a man that was her suitor, and whose suit was countenanced by her father and her brother. She told me of it herself, and, to avoid their persecutions, took refuge with me."

"His name, his name, I implore you, his name!"

"The Venetian ambassador, the Marquis de Strozzi."

"I thank your highness," replied Eugene, approaching the door.

"Whither do you go?"

"To seek the Venetian ambassador."

"And compromise Laura? You do not know that things transpired as you imagine. She may merely have been removed by her father, to part her from yourself. And suppose the marquis was no party to her flight? You would make her ridiculous—nay, more; you would sully her name, so that every gossip in Paris would fall upon your Laura's reputation, and leave not a shred of it wherewith to protect her from the world's contempt."

Eugene wiped off the great drops of sweat that beaded his pallid brow. "You are right," said he. "She must not be compromised—no, not even if I died of grief for her loss: there are other means—I will go to her father."

Elizabeth nodded her head approvingly. "Yes—that you can do. You may confide her secret to her father. Take the same carriage that brought you hither, and, to make sure of obtaining speedy admission to Louvois' presence, announce yourself as my envoy."

"I thank your highness," replied Eugene, and, inclining his head, he moved toward the door. The duchess followed him, and, taking his hand affectionately, pressed it within her own.

"I see that you love my darling as she deserves to be loved, and you would have made her happy. Forgive my injustice and my hard words. I was so wretched that I knew not the import of my accusations."

"I do not remember them," returned Eugene, sadly. "But one thing fills my heart—the thought of my Laura's loss. Farewell, dear lady. Now, to question Louvois!"



## CHAPTER II.

## THE FOES.

GREAT was the astonishment of the household of Louvois, when, hastening to do honor to the liveries of the royal house of Orleans, they saw emerging from the coach Prince Eugene of Savoy.

"Announce me to Monsieur Louvois," said he.

The message passed from vestibule to corridor, from corridor to staircase, and finally reached the antechamber of the minister's private cabinet. In a short while, the answer was forthcoming.

"His excellency begged to decline the visit of his highness the Prince of Savoy. He was particularly engaged."

"He is at home," replied the prince; "then I shall certainly alight, for I must and will see him."

So he entered the house, and traversed the vestibule. The lackeys made no effort to stop him, for he looked dangerous; but they were certainly astounded at his boldness, who forced himself into the presence of the minister, when *he* had declined the proffered visit.

Eugene, disregarding their amazed looks, asked the way to the cabinet, and no one ventured to refuse. So he was passed from lackey to lackey, until he reached the antechamber. "Here," said the servant that had accompanied him, "here your highness will find a person to announce you."

Eugene bowed his head, and entered. The "person" was certainly within; but in lieu of announcing the prince, he stared at him in speechless astonishment.

Eugene paid no attention to him, but moved toward the door leading to the prime minister's cabinet. When the valet saw this, he flew across the room to stop the intruder, and, placing himself directly in his way, he bowed and said, "Pardon me, your highness. You must have been misinformed. His excellency regrets that he cannot receive your highness's visit to-day. He is particularly engaged."

"I have no visit to make to his excellency," replied the

prince without embarrassment. "I am the envoy of her royal highness the Duchess of Orleans. Announce me as such."

The valet soon returned, and, holding up the portière so as to admit Eugene, he said, "His excellency will receive the envoy of her royal highness the Duchess of Orleans."

Louvois was standing near a writing-table, from which he appeared at that moment to have risen. His right hand rested on a book, and he stood stiff and erect, awaiting an inclination from Eugene, to bend his head in return. But the prince advanced so proudly that Louvois involuntarily made a step toward him, and then recollecting himself, stood still and frowned visibly.

"You came under false colors to claim an audience from me, prince," said he. "As you found (indeed, you should have known) that I would not receive you in your own name, you borrowed that of her royal highness; taking advantage of the respect due madame, to force yourself into my presence. What is your business?"

"In supposing that I have used her royal highness's name to force myself upon you, you are mistaken," replied Eugene, calmly. "If you will take the trouble to look out of yonder window, you will see that I came hither in her highness's own coach."

Louvois stepped to the window, looked out, and, affecting astonishment, exclaimed, "True enough; there are the royal liveries, and you have told the truth. You really must excuse me."

"I do excuse you; for I do not consider that one bearing the name of Louvois is in a position to affront me by doubting my word."

"Lucky for you," returned Louvois, with his sinister laugh; "for there is not likely to be much harmony between the two families. And now to business. What message do you bear from madame?"

"Her royal highness informs Monsieur de Louvois that on yesterday night, the Marchioness de Bonaletta disappeared from her pavilion in the Palais Royal. As Monsieur de Louvois is well posted in all that takes place in or about Paris, her royal highness is convinced that he is no stranger to this oc-



currence, and she requires that her lady of the bedchamber be returned to her, or she be directed where to find her."

"Is that all?" asked Louvois, after a pause.

"That is all that I have to say for the Duchess of Orleans."

"You are so very emphatic that I infer you have something else to say, after all. Am I right?"

"You are."

"Well, you may speak. But first, allow me to ask how you happen to be her highness's messenger? Was it by way of sympathizing with the Marchioness de Bonaletta, that you took service with her mistress?"

"My lord prime minister," returned Eugene, proudly, "I serve myself and the requirements of my honor only."

"Ah, indeed! And does this respectable lady pay you well?"

"She bestows upon me wherewith to pay those who venture to attack her name."

"Ha! ha! Then you must have heavy payments to make, not for yourself only, but for your mother."

Eugene clinched his fist, and made a motion toward his cruel enemy, but Louvois calmly raised his hand.

"Peace, young man," said he; "the hour for reckoning has not arrived. I respect, in you, the representative of madame, and you shall depart from my house uninjured, *to-day*. Take advantage, then, of your opportunity; say all that you have to say, and spare yourself the trouble of sending me your petitions by writing."

"I have no petitions to make to you, oral or written. I came hither to claim for her royal mistress the Marchioness de Bonaletta, your daughter."

"And I repeat my question. How came *you* to be the chosen ambassador of her royal highness, on this strictly private affair between herself and me?"

"I was chosen," replied Eugene, breathing hard and growing pale, "because I love the marchioness."

Louvois laughed aloud. "You love my daughter, do you? I admire the sagacity which directs your love toward the daughter of the prime minister of France, and the richest

heiress within its boundaries. I congratulate you upon your choice."

"Yes," repeated Eugene, "I love her, although she is your daughter. And so dearly do I love her that, for her dear sake, I submit to be affronted by my mother's traducer, because that traducer is the father of my Laura. As regards your absurd insinuations respecting her wealth, they pass by me as the 'idle wind which I respect not.' And now, that I have satisfied your curiosity, be so good as to answer me. The Duchess of Orleans wishes to know where is her lady of the bedchamber: Eugene of Savoy demands his bride."

"Demands his bride? This is too presuming! But I must be patient with the representative of madame. Know, then, ambitious manikin, that, with a father's right to save his misguided child from your artifices and from the ridicule of the world, I rescued her from ruin last night, and, to secure her honor, gave her in marriage to an *honorable* man."

Eugene was as overwhelmed with this intelligence as though he had not foreseen it from the first. His wail was so piteous that Louvois himself felt its terrible significance, and started.

"You forced—forced her to give her hand to another?" gasped he.

"Forced! I perceived no reluctance on my daughter's side, to her marriage. She spoke a willing and distinct assent to the priest's interrogatory. I ought to know, who myself was one of her witnesses."

"That merely proves that she was deceived by the lying note that you forged in my name. How, in the sight of God, can a father so betray his own child!"

"It was sent with my approbation, but written by Barbesieur, as a slight token of acknowledgment for your cowardly attack on him at the Pré aux Clercs. Your mother was right, it appears, when a few weeks ago she told me that no sympathy could exist between her race and mine; and that every attempt at love between us was sure to end in hate. Quite right she was, quite right. And now, Prince of Savoy, your mission is fulfilled. Tell the Duchess of Orleans that her lady of the bedchamber is secure, but cannot return to her service: she is under the protection of her husband."



"I will tell her," replied Eugene. "I will tell her that all honor, all humanity, all justice, forgetting, a father has cruelly betrayed his own daughter, and has cursed her life forever. Your wicked action has broken the hearts of two of God's creatures, and has consigned them to a misery that can only end with death. I say not, 'May God forgive you.' No! may God avenge my Laura's wrongs, and may he choose Eugene of Savoy as the instrument of His wrath! for every pang that rends the heart of my beloved, and for every throe that racks my own, you shall answer to me, proud minister of France: and, as there lives a God in heaven, you shall regret one day that you rejected me for your son-in-law."

Without another word or look toward Louvois, he left the room, and returned to his carriage. When he re-entered the cabinet of madame, his ghastly face, the very incarnation of woe, told its own story.

"You bring me evil tidings," said she, mournfully. "My darling is lost to us both!"

"Alas, my prophetic heart! She is married!" was his cry of despair.

"Poor Laura! poor Eugene!" sobbed the duchess, unable to restrain her tears.

"If you weep, what shall I do?" asked Eugene. "Why do you take it so much to heart?"

"Why?" exclaimed she. "Because I am no longer young, and I have lost my last hope of happiness. You, at least, have life and the world before you."

"And I," said he, languidly—"I am young, and have a lifetime wherein to suffer. The world is before me! Yes; but it is a waste, without tree or flower. With scorched eyes and blistered feet, I must tread its burning sands alone. Forgive me, dear lady, if I ask permission to go. If I stay much longer, my aching head will burst."

"You are wan as a spectre, my poor Eugene," returned the duchess, laying her hand upon his arm, and looking him compassionately in the face.

"And, in truth, I am but the corpse of the living man of yesterday," sighed he. "Let me go home, that I may bury myself and my dead hopes together."

The duchess rang for her gentleman in waiting, and requested him to accompany the prince to his carriage, and thence to the Hôtel de Soissons; but Eugene gently refused the proffered escort, and begged to be allowed to depart alone. He turned away, and as the duchess watched his receding figure, she saw him reel from side to side, like a man intoxicated.

At last he was at home. He had strength left to alight, to ascend the long marble staircase, whose balustrade was now hidden by a thicket of climbing jessamines, and to enter the antechamber leading to the apartments of state.

Monsieur Louis, with the élite of his workmen, was decorating its walls with hangings of white satin, looped with garlands suspended from the bills of cooing doves. When he beheld the prince, he came triumphantly forward.

"See, your highness, this is but the vestibule of the temple! When you will have seen its interior, you will confess that it is worthy the abode of the loveliest bride that ever graced its princely halls."

Eugene neither interrupted nor answered him. He raised his large, mournful eyes to the festooned roses, the gilded doves, the snowy, shimmering satin, and to his fading senses they seemed gradually to darken into cypress-wreaths and funereal palls. He pressed his hand upon his bursting heart, and fell insensible to the floor.

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE REPULSE.

EIGHT weeks had passed away since the disappearance of the Marchioness de Bonaletta—eight weeks of suffering and delirium for Eugene of Savoy. A nervous fever had ensued, which, if it had well-nigh proved mortal, had proved, in one sense, beneficent; for it had stricken him with unconsciousness of woe. Blissful dreams of love hovered about his couch, and lit up with feverish brilliancy his pallid countenance. At