

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE CALUMNY.

THE union of Hortense with Bonaparte's brother had not been followed by such good results for her as Josephine had anticipated. She had made a most unfortunate selection, for Louis Bonaparte was, of all the first consul's brothers, the one who concerned himself the least about politics, and was the least likely to engage in any intrigue. Besides, this alliance had materially diminished the affection which Louis had always previously manifested for Josephine. He blamed her, in the depths of his noble and upright heart, for having been so egotistic as to sacrifice the happiness of her daughter to her own personal welfare; he blamed her, too, for having forced him into a marriage which love had not concluded, and, although he never sided with her enemies, Josephine had, at least, lost a friend in him.

The wedded life of this young couple was something unusually strange. They had openly confessed the repulsion they felt for each other, and reciprocally made no secret of the fact that they had been driven into this union against their own wishes. In this singular interchange of confidence, they went so far as to commiserate each other, and to condole with one another as friends, over the wretchedness they endured in their married bondage.

They said frankly to each other that they could never

love; that they detested one another: but they so keenly felt a mutual compassion, that out of that very compassion—that very hatred itself—love might possibly spring into being.

Louis could already sit for hours together beside his wife, busied with the effort to divert her with amusing remarks, and to drive away the clouds that obscured her brow; already, too, Hortense had come to regard it as her holiest and sweetest duty to endeavor to compensate her husband, by her kindly deportment toward him, and the delicate and attentive respect that distinguished her bearing, for the unhappiness he felt beside her; already had both, in fine, begun to console each other with the reflection that the child which Hortense now bore beneath her heart would, one day, be to them a compensation for their ill-starred marriage and their lost freedom.

“When I present you with a son,” said Hortense, smiling, “and when he calls you by the sweet name of ‘father,’ you will forgive me for being his mother.”

“And when you press that son to your heart—when you feel that you love him with boundless affection,” said Louis, “you will pardon me for being your husband, and you will cease to hate me, at least, for I will be the father of your darling child.”

Had sufficient time been allotted to these young, pure, and innocent hearts, to comprehend one another, they would have overcome their unhappiness, and love would have sprung up at last from hatred. But the world was pitiless to them; it had no compassion for their youth

and their sufferings; with cruel hands it dashed away this tender blossoming of nascent affection, which was beginning to expand in their hearts. Josephine had wedded Hortense to her brother-in-law in order to secure in him an ally in the family, and to keep her daughter by her side; and now that daughter was made the target of insidious attacks and malicious calumnies—now another plan was adopted in order to remove Hortense from the scene. The conspirators had not succeeded in their designs by means of a matrimonial alliance, so they would now try the effect of calumny.

They went about whispering from ear to ear that Bonaparte had married his step-daughter to his brother, simply because he was attached to her himself, and had been jealous of Duroc.

These slanders were carried so far as to hint that the child whose birth Hortense expected was more nearly related to Bonaparte than merely through the fact that his step-daughter was his brother's wife.

This was an infernal but skilfully-planned calumny; for those who devised it well knew how Bonaparte detested the merest suspicion of such immorality, how strict he was in his own principles, and how repulsive it therefore would be to him to find himself made the object of such infamous slanders.

The conspirators calculated that, in order to terminate these evil rumors, the first consul would send his brother and Hortense away to a distance, and that the fated Josephine, being thus isolated, could also be the more readily

removed. Thus Bonaparte, being separated from his guardian angel, would no longer hear her whispering:

“Bonaparte, do not ascend the throne! Be content with the glory of the greatest of mankind! Place no diadem upon thy brows; do not make thyself a king!”

In Paris, as I have said, these shameful calumnies were but very lightly whispered, but abroad they were only the more loudly heard. Bonaparte's enemies got hold of the scandalous story, and made a weapon of it with which to assail him as a hero.

One morning Bonaparte was reading an English newspaper which had always been hostile to him, and which, as he well knew, was the organ of Count d'Artois, then residing at Hartwell. As he continued to read, a dark shadow stole over his face, and he crumpled the paper in his clinched fist with a sudden and vehement motion. Then as suddenly again his countenance cleared, and a proud smile flitted across it. He had his master of ceremonies summoned to his presence, and bade him issue the necessary invitations for a court ball to be given, on the evening of the next day, at St. Cloud. He then went to Josephine to inform her in person of the projected *fête*, and to say that he wished her to tell Hortense, who had been ailing for some time, that he particularly desired her to be present.

Hortense had been too long accustomed to obey her step-father's requests, to venture a refusal. She rose, therefore, from her couch on which she had been in the

habit, for weeks past, of reclining, busied with her own dreams and musings, and bade her waiting women prepare her attire for the ball. Still she felt unwell, and seriously burdened by this festive attire, which harmonized so little with her feelings, and was so far from becoming to her figure, for she was only a few weeks from her confinement; but with her gentle and yielding disposition she did not venture, even in thought, to murmur at the compulsion imposed upon her by her step-father's command. She therefore repaired, at the appointed hour, to the ball at St. Cloud. Bonaparte stepped forward to meet her with a friendly smile, and, instead of thanking her for coming at all, earnestly urged her to dance.

Hortense gazed at him with amazement. She knew that hitherto Bonaparte had always sought to avoid the sight of a woman in her condition; he had frequently said that he thought there was nothing more indecent than for a female to join in the dance under such circumstances, and now it was he who asked her to do that very thing.

For this reason Hortense hesitated at first to comply, but Bonaparte grew only the more pressing and vehement in his request.

"You know how I like to see you dance, Hortense," he said, with his irresistible smile; "so do this much for me, even if you take the floor only once, and that for but a single *contredance*."

And Hortense, although most reluctant, although blushing with shame at the idea of exposing herself in

such unseemly shape to the gaze of all, obeyed and joined the dances.

This took place in the evening—how greatly surprised, then, was Hortense when next morning she found, in the paper that she usually read, a poem, extolling her performance in words of ravishing flattery, and referring to the fact that, notwithstanding her advanced state of pregnancy, she had consented to tread a measure in the *contredance*, as a peculiar trait of amiability!

Hortense, however, far from feeling flattered by this very emphatic piece of verse, took it as an affront, and hastened at once to the Tuileries, to complain to her mother, and to ask her how it was possible that, so early as the very next morning, there could be verses published in the newspapers concerning what had taken place at the ball on the preceding evening.

Bonaparte, who happened to be with Josephine when Hortense came in, and was the first to be questioned by her, gave her only an evasive and jocose reply, and withdrew. Hortense then turned to her mother, who was leaning over on the divan, her eyes reddened with weeping and her heart oppressed with grief. To her, Bonaparte had given no evasive answer, but had told the whole truth, and Josephine's heart was at that moment too full of wretchedness, too overladen with this fresh and bitter trouble, for her possibly to retain it within her own breast.

Hortense insisted upon an explanation, and her mother gave it. She told her that Bonaparte had got the poet

Esmenard to write the verses beforehand, and that it was for this reason that he had urged her to dance; that he had ordered the ball for no other purpose than to have her dance, and have the poem that complimented her and referred to her pregnancy published in the next day's paper.

Then, when Hortense, in terror, begged to be informed of the ground for all these proceedings, Josephine had the cruel courage to tell her of the slanders that had been circulated in reference to herself and Bonaparte, and to say that he had arranged the poem, the ball, and her participation in the dance, because, on the preceding day, he had read in an English journal the calumnious statement that Madame Louis Bonaparte had safely given birth to a vigorous and healthy child some weeks previously, and he wished in this manner to refute the malicious statement.

Hortense received this fresh wound with a cold smile of scorn. She had not a word of anger or indignation for this unheard-of injury, this shameless slander; she neither wept nor complained, but, as she rose to take leave of her mother, she swooned away, and it required hours of exertion to restore her to consciousness.

A few weeks later, Hortense was delivered of a dead male infant, and so passed away her last dream of happiness; for thus was destroyed the hope of a better understanding between her and her husband.

Hortense rose from her sick-bed with a firm, determined heart. In those long, lonely days that she had

passed during her confinement, she had the time and opportunity to meditate on many things, and keenly to estimate her whole present position and probable future. She had now become a mother, without having a child; yet the resolute energy of a mother remained to her. The youthful, gentle, dreamy, enthusiastic girl had now become transformed into a determined, active, energetic woman, that would no longer bow submissively to the blows of fortune, but would meet them with an open and defiant brow. Since her fate could not be changed, she accepted it, all the while resolved no longer to bend to its yoke, but to subdue it, and try to be happy by force of resolution; and, since a charming, peaceful, and harmonious fireside at home was denied her, to at least make her house a pleasant gathering-point for her friends—for men of scientific and artistic attainments, for poets and singers, for painters and sculptors, and for men of learning. Ere long, all Paris was talking about Madame Louis Bonaparte's drawing-rooms, the agreeable and elegant entertainments that were given there, and the concerts there arranged, in which the first singers of the day executed pieces that Hortense had composed, and Talma recited, with his wonderful, sonorous voice, the poems that she had written. Every one was anxious for admission to these entertainments, in which the participants not merely performed their parts, but greatly enjoyed themselves as well; where the guests indulged in no backbiting or abuse, but found more worthy and elevated subjects of conversation; where, in fine, they could admire

the works of poets and artists, and enjoy the newly-awakened intellectual spirit of the age.

Hortense had firmly made up her mind that, since she had resigned herself to accept the burden of existence, she would strive to render it as agreeable as possible, and not to see any of its hateful and repulsive features, but to turn away from them with a noble and disdainful pride. She had never even referred to the frightful calumnies which her mother had privately made known to her, nor had she deemed any defence or proof of her innocence at all necessary. She felt that there were certain accusations against which to even undertake defence is to admit their possibility, and which, therefore, could only be combated by silence. The slanders that had been flung at her lay in a plane so far beneath her, that they could not rise high enough to reach her, but fell powerless at her feet, whence she did not deem it even worth her while to thrust them.

But Bonaparte continued to feel outraged and wounded by this vile story, and it annoyed him deeply to learn that these rumors were still spread abroad, and that his foes still bestirred themselves to keep him ever on the alert, and, if possible, to dim the lustre of his gloriously-won laurels by the shadow of an infamous crime.

"There are still rumors abroad of a *liaison* between me and Hortense," said he one day to Bourrienne. "They have even invented the most repulsive stories concerning her first infant. At the time, I thought that these calumnies were circulated among the public because the latter

so earnestly desired that I might have a child to inherit my name. But it is still spoken of, is it not?"

"Yes, general, it is still spoken of; and I confess that I did not believe this calumny would be so long continued."

"This is really abominable!" exclaimed Bonaparte, his eyes flashing with anger. "You, Bourrienne, you best know what truth there is in it. You have heard and seen all; not the smallest circumstance could escape you. You were her confidant in her love-affair with Duroc. I expect you to clear me of this infamous reproach if you should some day write my history. Posterity shall not associate my name with such infamy. I shall depend on you, Bourrienne, and you will at least admit that you have never believed in this abominable calumny?"

"No, never, general."

"I shall rely on you, Bourrienne, not only on my own account, but for the sake of poor Hortense. She is, without this, unhappy enough, as is my brother also. I am concerned about this, because I love them both, and because this very circumstance gives color to the reports which idle chatterboxes have circulated regarding my relations to her. Therefore, bear this in mind when you write of me hereafter."

"I shall do so, general; I shall tell the truth, but, unfortunately, I can not compel the world to believe the truth."

Bourrienne has, at all events, kept his word, and

spoken the truth. With deep indignation he spurns the calumny with which it has been attempted to sully the memory of Bonaparte and Hortense, even down to our time; and, in his anger, he even forgets the elegant and considerate language of the courteous diplomat, which is elsewhere always characteristic of his writings.

“He lies in his throat,” says Bourrienne, “who asserts that Bonaparte entertained other feelings for Hortense than those a step-father should entertain for his step-daughter! Hortense entertained for the first consul a feeling of reverential fear. She always spoke to him tremblingly. She never ventured to approach him with a petition. She was in the habit of coming to me, and I then submitted her wishes; and only when Bonaparte received them unfavorably did I mention the name of the petitioner. ‘The silly thing!’ said the first consul; ‘why does she not speak to me herself? Is she afraid of me?’ Napoleon always entertained a fatherly affection for her; since his marriage, he loved her as a father would have loved his child. I, who for years was a witness of her actions in the most private relations of life, I declare that I have never seen or heard the slightest circumstance that would tend to convict her of a criminal intimacy. One must consider this calumny as belonging to the category of those which malice so willingly circulates about those persons whose career has been brilliant, and which credulity and envy so willingly believe. I declare candidly that, if I entertained the slightest doubt with regard to this horrible calumny, I would say so. But Bona-

parte is no more! Impartial history must not and shall not give countenance to this reproach; she should not make of a father and friend a libertine! Malicious and hostile authors have asserted, without, however, adducing any proof, that a criminal intimacy existed between Bonaparte and Hortense. A falsehood, an unworthy falsehood! And this report has been generally current, not only in France, but throughout all Europe. Alas! can it, then, be true that calumny exercises so mighty a charm that, when it has once taken possession of a man, he can never be freed from it again?”

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## CHAPTER V.

### KING OR EMPEROR.

JOSEPHINE's entreaties had been fruitless, or Bonaparte had, at least, only yielded to them in their literal sense. She had said: “I entreat you, do not make yourself a king!” Bonaparte did not make himself king, he made himself emperor. He did not take up the crown that had fallen from the head of the Bourbons; he created a new one for himself—a crown which the French people and Senate had, however, offered him. The revolution still stood a threatening spectre behind the French people; its return was feared, and, since the discovery of the conspiracy of Georges, Moreau, and Pichegru, the people anxiously asked themselves what was to become