

# HORTENSE.

## CHAPTER I. PARENTAGE AND BIRTH.

*Josephine's voyage to France.*

**I**N the year 1776 a very beautiful young lady, by the name of Josephine Rose Tascher, was crossing the Atlantic Ocean from the island of Martinique to France. She was but fifteen years of age; and, having been left an orphan in infancy, had been tenderly reared by an uncle and aunt, who were wealthy, being proprietors of one of the finest plantations upon the island. Josephine was accompanied upon the voyage by her uncle. She was the betrothed of a young French nobleman by the name of Viscount Alexander de Beauharnais, who had recently visited Martinique, and who owned several large estates adjoining the property which Josephine would probably inherit.

It was with great reluctance that Josephine yielded to the importunities of her friends and

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accepted the proffered hand of the viscount. Her affections had long been fixed upon a playmate of her childhood by the name of William, and her love was passionately returned. William was then absent in France, pursuing his education. De Beauharnais was what would usually be called a very splendid man. He was of high rank, young, rich, intelligent, and fascinating in his manners. The marriage of Josephine with the viscount would unite the properties. Her friends, in their desire to accomplish the union, cruelly deceived Josephine. They intercepted the letters of William, and withheld her letters to him, and represented to her that William, amidst the gayeties of Paris, had proved a false lover, and had entirely forgotten her. De Beauharnais, attracted by the grace and beauty of Josephine, had ardently offered her his hand. Under these circumstances the inexperienced maiden had consented to the union, and was now crossing the Atlantic with her uncle for the consummation of the nuptials in France.

Upon her arrival she was conducted to Fontainebleau, where De Beauharnais hastened to meet her. Proud of her attractions, he took great pleasure in introducing her to his high-

born friends, and lavished upon her every attention. Josephine was grateful, but sad, for her heart still yearned for William. Soon William, hearing of her arrival, and not knowing of her engagement, anxiously repaired to Fontainebleau. The interview was agonizing. William still loved her with the utmost devotion. They both found that they had been the victims of a conspiracy, though one of which De Beauharnais had no knowledge.

Josephine, young, inexperienced, far from home, and surrounded by the wealthy and powerful friends of her betrothed, had gone too far in the arrangements for the marriage to recede. Her anguish, however, was so great that she was thrown into a violent fever. She had no friend to whom she could confide her emotions. But in most affecting tones she entreated that her marriage might be delayed for a few months until she should regain her health. Her friends consented, and she took refuge for a time in the Convent of Panthemont, under the tender care of the sisters.

It is not probable that De Beauharnais was at all aware of the real state of Josephine's feelings. He was proud of her, and loved her as truly as a fashionable man of the world could

Marriage.

Birth of Eugene.

love. It is also to be remembered that at that time in France it was not customary for young ladies to have much influence in the choice of their husbands. It was supposed that their parents could much more judiciously arrange these matters than the young ladies themselves.

Josephine was sixteen years of age at the time of her marriage. Her attractions were so remarkable that she immediately became a great favorite at the French court, to which the rank of her husband introduced her. Marie Antoinette was then the youthful bride of Louis XVI. She was charmed with Josephine, and lavished upon her the most flattering attentions. Two children were born of this marriage, both of whom attained world-wide renown. The first was a son, Eugene. He was born in September, 1781. His career was very elevated, and he occupied with distinguished honor all the lofty positions to which he was raised. He became duke of Leuchtenberg, prince of Eichstedt, viceroy of Italy. He married the Princess Augusta, daughter of the King of Bavaria.

"Prince Eugene, under a simple exterior, concealed a noble character and great talents. Honor, integrity, humanity, and love of order

Birth of Hortense.

and justice were the principal traits of his character. Wise in the council, undaunted in the field, and moderate in the exercise of power, he never appeared greater than in the midst of reverses, as the events of 1813 and 1814 prove. He was inaccessible to the spirit of party, benevolent and beneficent, and more devoted to the good of others than his own."\*

The second child was a daughter, Hortense, the subject of this brief memoir. She was born on the 10th of January, 1783. In the opening scenes of that most sublime of earthly tragedies, the French Revolution, M. de Beauharnais espoused the popular cause, though of noble blood, and though his elder brother, the Marquis de Beauharnais, earnestly advocated the cause of the king and the court.

The entire renunciation of the Christian religion was then popular in France. Alexander de Beauharnais, like most of his young pleasure-loving companions, was an infidel. His conduct soon became such that the heart of poor Josephine was quite broken. Her two children, Eugene and Hortense, both inherited the affectionate and gentle traits of their mother, and were her only solace. In her anguish she un-

\* Encyclopædia Americana.

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 Separation from Beauharnais.
 

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guardedly wrote to her friends in Martinique, who had almost forced her into her connection with Beauharnais:

“Were it not for my children, I should, without a pang, renounce France forever. My duty requires me to forget William. And yet, if *we* had been united together, I should not to-day have been troubling you with my griefs.”

Viscount Beauharnais chanced to see this letter. It roused his jealousy fearfully. A sense of “honor” would allow him to lavish his attentions upon guilty favorites, while that same sense of “honor” would urge him to wreak vengeance upon his unhappy, injured wife, because, in her neglect and anguish, with no false, but only a true affection, her memory turned to the loved companion of her childhood. According to the standard of the fashionable world, Beauharnais was a very honorable man. According to the standard of Christianity, he was a sinner in the sight of God, and was to answer for this conduct at the final judgment.

He reproached his wife in the severest language of denunciation. He took from her her son Eugene. He applied to the courts for a divorce, demanding his daughter Hortense also.

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 Return to Martinique.
 

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Josephine pleaded with him in vain, for the sake of their children, not to proclaim their disagreement to the world. Grief-stricken, poor Josephine retired to a convent to await the trial. The verdict was triumphantly in her favor. But her heart was broken. She was separated from her husband, though the legal tie was not severed.

Her friends in Martinique, informed of these events, wrote, urging her to return to them. She decided to accept the invitation. Hortense was with her mother. M. de Beauharnais had sent Eugene, whom he had taken from her, to a boarding-school. Before sailing for Martinique she obtained an interview with M. de Beauharnais, and with tears entreated that she might take Eugene with her also. He was unrelenting; Josephine, with a crushed and world-weary heart, folded Hortense to her bosom, then an infant but three years of age, and returned to her tropical home, which she had sadly left but a few years before. Here, on the retired plantation, soothed by the sympathy of her friends, she strove to conceal her anguish.

There was never a more loving heart than that with which Josephine was endowed. She clung to Hortense with tenderness which has

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 Revisits France.
 

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rarely been equalled. They were always together. During the day Hortense was ever by her side, and at night she nestled in her mother's bosom. Living amidst the scenes of tropical luxuriance and beauty, endeared to her by the memories of childhood, Josephine could almost have been happy but for the thoughts of her absent Eugene. Grief for her lost child preyed ever upon her heart.

Her alienated husband, relieved from all restraint, plunged anew into those scenes of fashionable dissipation for which Paris was then renowned. But sickness, sorrows, and misfortunes came. In those dark hours he found that no earthly friend can supply the place of a virtuous and loving wife. He wrote to her, expressing bitter regret for his conduct, and imploring her to return. The wounds which Josephine had received were too deep to be easily healed. Forgiving as she was by nature, she said to her friends that the memory of the past was so painful that, were it not for Eugene, she should very much prefer not to return to France again, but to spend the remainder of her days in the seclusion of her native island. Her friends did every thing in their power to dissuade her from returning. But a mother's

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 The jewel caskets.
 

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love for her son triumphed, and with Hortense she took ship for France.

An event occurred upon this voyage which is as instructive as it is interesting. Many years afterwards, when Josephine was Empress of France, and the wealth of the world was almost literally at her feet, on one occasion some young ladies who were visiting the court requested Josephine to show them her diamonds. These jewels were almost of priceless value, and were kept in a vault, the keys of which were confided to the most trusty persons. Josephine, who seldom wore jewels, very amiably complied with their request. A large table was brought into the saloon. Her maids in waiting brought in a great number of caskets, of every size and form, containing the precious gems.

As these caskets were opened, they were dazzled with the brilliancy, the size, and the number of these ornaments. The different sets composed probably by far the most brilliant collection in Europe. In Napoleon's conquering career, the cities which he had entered lavished their gifts upon Josephine. The most remarkable of these jewels consisted of large white diamonds. There were others in the

The jewel caskets.

shape of pears formed of pearls of the richest colors. There were opals, rubies, sapphires, and emeralds of such marvellous value that the large diamonds that encircled them were considered as mere mountings not regarded in the estimation made of the value of the jewels.

As the ladies gazed upon the splendor of this collection, they were lost in wonder and admiration. Josephine, after enjoying for a while their expressions of delight, and having allowed them to examine the beautiful gems thoroughly, said to them kindly:

“I had no other motive, in ordering my jewels to be opened before you, than to spoil your fancy for such ornaments. After having seen such splendid sets, you can never feel a wish for inferior ones; the less so when you reflect how unhappy I have been, although with so rare a collection at my command. During the first dawn of my extraordinary elevation, I delighted in these trifles, many of which were presented to me in Italy. I grew by degrees so tired of them that I no longer wear any, except when I am in some respects compelled to do so by my new rank in the world. A thousand accidents may, besides, contribute to de-

The old pair of shoes.

prive me of these brilliant, though useless objects. Do I not possess the pendants of Queen Marie Antoinette? And yet am I quite sure of retaining them? Trust to me, ladies, and do not envy a splendor which does not constitute happiness. I shall not fail to surprise you when I relate that I once felt more pleasure at receiving an old pair of shoes than at being presented with all the diamonds which are now spread before you.”

The young ladies could not help smiling at this observation, persuaded as they were that Josephine was not in earnest. But she repeated her assertions in so serious a manner that they felt the utmost curiosity to hear the story of this *wonderful pair of shoes*.

“I repeat it, ladies,” said her majesty, “it is strictly true, that the present which, of all others, has afforded me most pleasure was a pair of old shoes of the coarsest leather; and you will readily believe it when you have heard my story.

“I had set sail from Martinique, with Hortense, on board a ship in which we received such marked attentions that they are indelibly impressed on my memory. Being separated from my first husband, my pecuniary resources

The old pair of shoes.

were not very flourishing. The expense of my return to France, which the state of my affairs rendered necessary, had nearly drained me of every thing, and I found great difficulty in making the purchases which were indispensably requisite for the voyage. Hortense, who was a smart, lively child, sang negro songs, and performed negro dances with admirable accuracy. She was the delight of the sailors, and, in return for their fondness, she made them her favorite company. I no sooner fell asleep than she slipped upon deck and rehearsed her various little exercises, to the renewed delight and admiration of all on board.

“An old mate was particularly fond of her, and whenever he found a moment's leisure from his daily occupations, he devoted it to his little friend, who was also exceedingly attached to him. My daughter's shoes were soon worn out with her constant dancing and skipping. Knowing as she did that I had no other pair for her, and fearing lest I should prevent her going upon deck if I should discover the plight of those she was fast wearing away, she concealed the trifling accident from my knowledge. I saw her once returning with bleeding feet, and asked her, in the utmost alarm, if she had

The old pair of shoes.

hurt herself; ‘No, mamma.’ ‘But your feet are bleeding.’ ‘It really is nothing.’ I insisted upon ascertaining what ailed her, and found that her shoes were all in tatters, and her flesh dreadfully torn by a nail.

“We had as yet only performed half the voyage; a long time would necessarily elapse before I could procure a fresh pair of shoes; I was mortified at the bare anticipation of the distress my poor Hortense would feel at being compelled to remain confined in my wretched little cabin, and of the injury her health might experience from the want of exercise. At the moment when I was wrapped up in sorrow, and giving free vent to my tears, our friend the mate made his appearance, and inquired, with his honest bluntness, the cause of our *whimpers*. Hortense replied, in a sobbing voice, that she could no longer go upon deck because she had torn her shoes, and I had no others to give her.

“‘Is that all?’ said the sailor. ‘I have an old pair in my trunk; let me go for them. You, madame, will cut them up, and I shall sew them over again to the best of my power; every thing on board ship shall be turned to account; this is not the place for being too nice

Commencement of the Reign of Terror.

or particular; we have our most important wants gratified when we have the needful.'

"He did not wait for our reply, but went in quest of his old shoes, which he brought to us with an air of exultation, and offered them to Hortense, who received the gift with every demonstration of delight.

"We set to work with the greatest alacrity, and my daughter was enabled, towards the close of the day, to enjoy the pleasure of again amusing the ship's company. I repeat it, that no present was ever received by me with more sincere gratitude. I greatly reproach myself for having neglected to make inquiries after the worthy seaman, who was only known on board by the name of James. I should have felt a sincere satisfaction in rendering him some service, since it was afterwards in my power to do so."

Josephine had spent three years in Martinique. Consequently, upon her return to France, Hortense was six years of age. Soon after her arrival the Reign of Terror commenced. The guillotine was erected, and its knife was busy beheading those who were suspected of not being in full sympathy with the reformers whom revolution had brought into

Arrest of Beauharnais.

power. Though Viscount Beauharnais had earnestly espoused the popular cause; though he had been president of the National Assembly, and afterwards general of the Army of the Rhine, still he was of noble birth, and his older brother was an aristocrat, and an emigrant. He was consequently suspected, and arrested. Having conducted him to prison, a committee of the Convention called at the residence of Josephine to examine the children, hoping to extort from them some evidence against their father. Josephine, in a letter to her aunt, thus describes this singular scene:

"You would hardly believe, dear aunt, that my children have just undergone a long and minute examination. That wicked old man, the member of the committee whom I have already mentioned to you, called upon me, and, affecting to feel uneasy in regard to my husband, and to converse with me respecting him, opened a conversation with my children. I acknowledge that I at first fell into the snare. What surprised me, however, was the sudden affability of the man. But he soon betrayed himself by the malignity and even bitterness which he displayed when the children replied in such a manner as to give him no advantage



over their unhappy parents. I soon penetrated his artful intentions.

“When he found me on my guard, he threw off the mask, and admitted that he was desired to procure information from my children, which, he said, might be more relied on, as it would bear the stamp of candor. He then entered into a formal examination. At that moment I felt an indescribable emotion; and the conflicting effects of fear, anger, and indignation alternately agitated me. I was even upon the point of openly giving vent to my feelings against the hoary revolutionist, when I reflected that I might, by so doing, materially injure M. de Beauharnais, against whom that atrocious villain appeared to have vowed perpetual enmity. I accordingly checked my angry passions. He desired me to leave him alone with my children; I attempted to resist, but his ferocious glance compelled me to give way.

“He confined Hortense in the closet, and began to put questions to her brother. My daughter’s turn came next. As for this child, in whom he discovered a premature quickness and penetration far above her age, he kept questioning her for a great length of time. After having sounded them respecting our com-

mon topics of conversation, our opinions, the visits and letters we were in the habit of receiving, but more particularly the occurrences they might have witnessed, he came to the main point—I mean, to the expressions used by Alexander. My children gave very proper replies; such, in fact, as were suited to their respective dispositions. And notwithstanding the artfulness of a mischievous man whose object is to discover guilt, the frankness of my son and the quick penetration of my daughter disconcerted his low cunning, and even defeated the object he had in view.”

Viscount Beauharnais, when arrested, was conveyed to the palace of the Luxembourg, where he was imprisoned with many other captives. To spare the feelings of the children, the fact of his imprisonment was concealed from them by Josephine, and they were given to understand that their father, not being very well, had placed himself under the care of a celebrated physician, who had recommended him to take up his residence at the Luxembourg, where there was much vacant space, and consequently purer air. The imprisoned father was very anxious to see his wife and children. The authorities consented, allowing the chil-