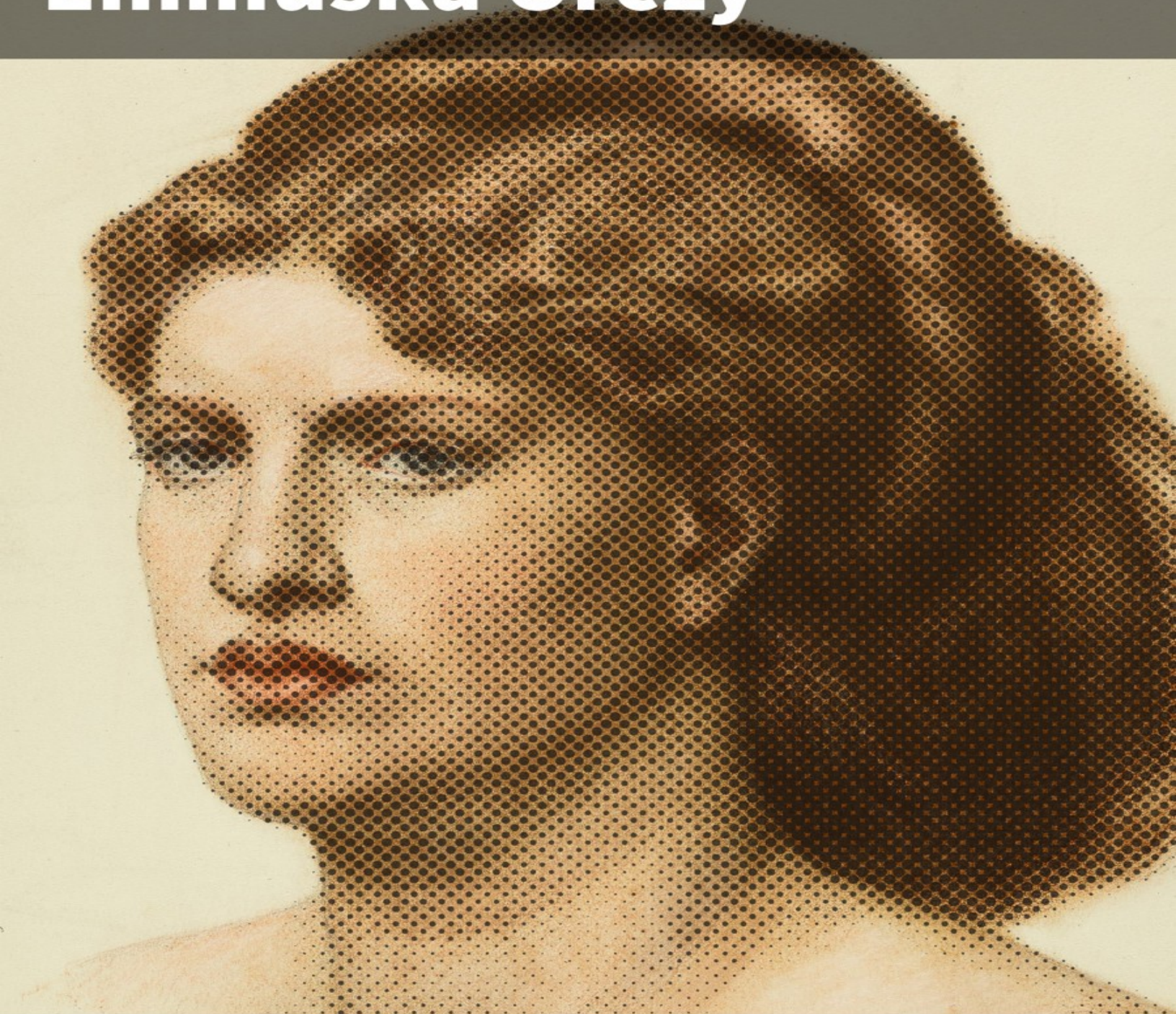


Emmuska Orczy



*Mam'zelle
Guillotine*

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Book One

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"Arms! Arms! Give us arms!"

France to-day is desperate. Her people are starving. Women and children cry for bread; famine, injustice and oppression have made slaves of the men. But the time has come at last when the cry for freedom and for justice has drowned the wails of hungry children. It is Sunday the twelfth of July. Camille Desmoulins the fiery young demagogue is here, standing on a table in the Palais Royal, a pistol in each hand, with a herd of gaunt and hollow-eyed men around him.

"Friends," he demands vehemently, "shall our children die like sheep? Shall we continue to plead for ears that will not hear and appeal to hearts that are made of stone? Shall we labour to feed the welled-filled and see our wives and daughters starve? Frenchmen! The hour has come: the hour of our deliverance. To arms, friends! to arms! Let our oppressors look to themselves. Let them come to grips with us, the oppressed, and see if brutal force can conquer justice."

With burning hearts and quivering lips they listened to him for a while, some in silence, others muttering incoherent words. But soon they took up the echo of the impassioned call: "To arms!" and in a few moments what had been a tentative murmur became a delirious shout: "To arms! To arms!" Throughout the long afternoon, until dusk and nightfall, and thereafter the call to arms like the roar of ocean waves breaking on a rocky shore resounded from one end of Paris to the other. And all night long men in threadbare suits and wooden shoes roamed about the

streets, gesticulating, forming groups, talking, arguing, shouting. Shouting always their rallying cry: "To arms!"

By dawn the next day the herd of gaunt, hollowed-eyed men has become a raging multitude. The call for arms has become a vociferous demand: "Give us arms!" Right to-day must be at grips with might. The oppressed shall rise against the oppressor. But the oppressed must have arms wherewith to smite the tyrant, the extortioner, the relentless task-master of the poor. And so they march, these hungry, wan-faced men, at first in their hundreds but soon in their thousands. They march to the Town Hall demanding arms.

"Arms! Arms! Give us arms!"

It is Monday morning but all the shops are shut: neither cobblers, nor weavers, barbers nor venders of miscellaneous goods have taken down their shutters. Labourers and scavengers are idle, for every worker to-day has become a fighter. Alone the bakers and the vinters ply their trade, for fighting men must eat and drink. And the smiths are set to work to forge pikes as fast as they can, and the women up in their attics to sew cockades. Red and blue which are the municipal colours are tacked on to the constitutional white, thus making of the Tricolour the badge of France in revolt.

The rest of Paris continues to roam the streets demanding arms: first at the Hôtel de Ville, the Town Hall where provost and aldermen are forced to admit they have no arms: not in any quantity, only a few antiquated firelocks, which are immediately seized upon. Then they go, those hungry thousands, to the Arsenal, where they only find rubbish and bits of rusty iron which they hurl into the

streets, often wounding others who had remained, expectant, outside. Next to the King's warehouse where there are plenty of gewgaws, tapestries, pictures, a gilded sword or two and suits of antiquated armour, also the cannon, silver mounted and coated with grime, which a grateful King of Siam once sent as a present to Louis XIV, but nothing useful, nothing serviceable.

No matter! A Siamese cannon is better than none. It is trundled along the streets of Paris to the Debtors' prison, to the Chatelet, to the House of Correction where prisoners are liberated and made to swell the throng.

News of all this tumult soon wakens the complacent and the luxurious from their slumbers. They tumble out of bed wanting to know what "those brigands" were up to. The "brigands" it seems were in possession of the barriers, had seized the carts which conveyed food into the city for the rich. They were marching through Paris, yelling, and roaring, wearing strange cockades. The tocsin was pealing from every church steeple. Every smith in the town was forging pikes; fifty thousand it was asserted had been forged in twenty-four hours, and still the "brigands" demanded more.

So what were the complacent and the luxurious to do but make haste to depart from this Paris with its strange cockades and its unseemly tumult? There were some quick packings-up and calls for coaches, tumbrils, anything whereon to pile up furniture, silver and provisions and hurry to the nearest barrier. But already Paris in revolt had posted its scrubby hordes at all the gates, with orders to stop every vehicle from going through and to drag every person who attempted to leave the city, willy-nilly to the Town Hall.

And the complacent and the luxurious, driven back into Paris which they wished to quit, desire to know what the commandant of the city, M. le baron Pierre Victor de Besenval is doing about it. They demand to know what is being done for their safety. Well! M. de Besenval has sent courier after courier to Versailles asking for orders, or at least for guidance. But all that he gets in reply to his most urgent messages are a few vague words from His Majesty saying that he has called a Council of his Ministers who will decide what is to be done, and in the meanwhile let M. le baron do his duty as beseems an officer loyal to his King.

Besenval in his turn calls a Council of his Officers. His troops are deserting in their hundreds, taking their arms with them. Two of his Colonels declare that their men will not fight. Later in the afternoon three thousand six hundred Gardes Françaises ordered to march against the insurgents go over to them in a body with their guns and their gunners, their arms and accoutrements. Gardes Françaises no longer, they are re-named Gardes Nationales, and enrolled in the fastgrowing Paris Militia, which is like to number forty—eight thousand soon, and by to-morrow nearer one hundred thousand.

If only it had arms, the Paris Militia would be unconquerable.

And now it is Tuesday, the fourteenth of July, a date destined to remain for all time the most momentous in the annals of France, a date on which century-old institutions shall totter and fall, not only in France, but in the course of time, throughout the civilized world, and archaic systems

shall perish that have taken root and gathered power since might became right in the days of cave-dwelling man.

Still no definite orders from Versailles. The Council of Ministers continues to deliberate. Hoary-headed Senators decide to sit in unbroken session, while Commandant Besenval in Paris does his duty as a soldier loyal to his King. But what can Besenval do, even though he be a soldier and loyal to his King? He may be loyal but the men are not. Their Colonels declare that the troops will not fight. Who then can stem that army of National Volunteers, now grown to a hundred and fifty thousand, as they march with their rallying cry "To arms!" and roll like a flood to the Hôtel des Invalides?

"There are arms there. Why had we not thought of that before?"

On they roll, scale the containing wall and demand entrance. The Invalides, old soldiers, veterans of the Seven Years' War stand by; the gates are opened, the Garde Nationale march in, but the veterans still stand by without firing a shot. Their Commandant tries to parley with the insurgents, but they push past him and his bodyguards; they swarm all over the building rummaging through every room and every closet from attic to cellar. And in the cellar the arms are found. Thousands of firelocks soon find their way on the shoulders of the National Guard. What indeed can Commandant Besenval do, even though he be a soldier and loyal to his King?

Chapter 2. PARIS IN REVOLT

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And now to the Bastille, to that monument of arrogance and power, with its drawbridges, its bastions and eight grim towers, which has reared its massive pile of masonry above the "swinish multitude" for over four hundred years. Tyranny frowning down on Impotence. Power holding the weak in bondage. Here it stands on this fourteenth day of July, bloated with pride and, conscious of its impregnability, it seems to mock that chaotic horde which invades its purlieus, swarms round its ditches and its walls, and with a roaring like that of a tempestuous sea, raises the defiant cry: "Surrender!"

A tumult such as Dante in his visions of hell never dreamed of, rises from one hundred and fifty thousand throats. Floods of humanity come pouring into the Place from the outlying suburbs. Paris in revolt has arms now: One hundred thousand muskets, fifty thousand pikes: one hundred and fifty thousand hungry, frenzied men. No longer do these call out with the fury of despair: "Arms! Give us arms!" Rather do they shout : "We'll not yield while stone remains on stone of that cursed fortress."

And the walls of the Bastille are nine feet thick.

Can they be as much as shaken, even by a hurricane of grapeshot and the roaring of a Siamese cannon? Commandant de Launay laughs the very suggestion to scorn. He has less than a hundred and twenty men to defend what is impregnable. Eighty or so veterans, old soldiers who fought in the Seven Years' War, and not more

than thirty young Swiss. He has cannons concealed up on the battlements, and piles of missiles and ammunition. Very few victuals, it is true, but that is no matter. As soon as he opens fire on that undisciplined mob, it will scatter as autumn leaves scatter in the wind. And "No Surrender!" has already been his answer to a deputation which came to him from the Town Hall in the early morning, suggesting parley with the men of the National Guard, the disciplined leaders of this riotous mob.

"No surrender!" he reiterates with emphasis; "rather will I hurl myself down from these battlements into the ditch three feet below, or blow up the fortress sky-high and half Paris along with it."

And to show that he will be as good as his word, he takes up a taper and stands for a time within arm's length of the powder magazine. Only for a time, for poor old de Launay never did do what he said he would. All he did just then was to survey the tumultuous crowd below. They have begun the attack. Paris in revolt opens fire on the "accursed stronghold" with volley after volley of musket-fire from every corner of the Place and from every surrounding window. De Launay thrusts the taper away, and turns to his small garrison of veterans and young Swiss. Will they fire on the mob if he gives the order? He has plied them with drink, but feels doubtful of their temper. Anyway, the volley of musket-fire cannot damage walls that are nine feet thick. "We'll wait and see what happens," thinks Commandant de Launay, but he does not rekindle the taper.

Just then a couple of stalwarts down below start an attack on the outer drawbridge. De Launay knows them

both for old soldiers, one is a smith, the other a wheelright, both of them resolute and strong as Hercules. They climb on the roof of the guard-room and with heavy axes strike against the chains of the drawbridge, heedless of the rain of grapeshot around them. They strike and strike again, with such force and such persistence that the chain must presently break, seeing which de Launay turns to his veterans and orders fire. The cannon gives one roar from the battlements, and does mighty damage down below. Paris in revolt has shed its first blood and reaches the acme of its frenzy.

The chains of the outer drawbridge yield and break and down comes the bridge with a terrific clatter. This first tangible sign of victory is greeted with a delirious shout, and an umber of insurgents headed by men of the National Guard swarm over the drawbridge and into the outer court. Here they are met by Thuriot, second in command, with a small bodyguard. He tries to parley with them. No use of course. Paris now is no longer in revolt. It is in revolution.

The insurgents hustle and bustle Thuriot and his bodyguard out of the way. They surge all over the outer court, up to the ditch and the inner drawbridge. De Launay up on the battlements can only guess what is happening down there. His veterans and young Swiss stand by. Shall they fire, or wait till fired on? Indecision is clearly written on their faces. De Launay picks up a taper again, takes up his position once more within arm's length of the powder magazine. Will he, after all, be as good as his word and along with the impregnable stronghold blow half Paris up sky-high? He might have done it. He said he would rather

than surrender, but he doesn't do it. Why not? Who shall say? Was it destiny that stayed his arm? destiny which no doubt aeons ago had decreed the downfall of this monument of autocratic sovereignty on his fourteenth day of July, 1789.

All that de Launay does is to order the veterans to fire once more, and the cannons scatter death and mutilation among the aggressors, whilst all kinds of missiles, pavingstones, old iron, granite blocks are hurled down into the ditch, till it too is littered with dead and dying. The wounded in the Place are carried to safety into adjoining streets, but so much blood has let a veritable Bedlam loose. A cartload of straw is trundled over the outer drawbridge into the court. Fire! Conflagration! Paris in revolution had not thought before of this way of subduing that "cursed fortress", but now fire! Fire everywhere! The Bastille has not surrendered yet.

Soon the guard-room is set ablaze, and the veterans' mess-room. The fire spreads to one of the inner courts. De Launay still hovers on the battlements, still declares that he will blow up half Paris rather than surrender his fortress. But he doesn't do it, and a hundred feet below the conflagration is threatening his last entrenchments. The flames lick upwards ready to do the work which old de Launay had sworn that he would do.

Inside the dungeons of the Bastille the prisoners, lifewearied and indifferent, dream that a series of earthquakes are shaking Paris, But what do they care? If these walls nine feet thick should totter and fall and bury them under their ruins, it would only mean for them the

happy release of death. For hours has this hellish din been going on. In the inner courtyard the big clock continues to tick on; the seconds, the minutes, the hours go by: five hours, perhaps six, and still the Bastille stands.

Up on the battlements the garrison is getting weary. The veterans have been prone on the ground for over four hours making the cannons roar, but now they are tired. They struggle to their feet and stand sullen, with reversed muskets, whilst an old bearded sergeant picks up a a tattered white flag and waves it in the commandant's face. The Swiss down below do better than that. They open a porthole in the inner drawbridge, and one man thrusts out a hand, grasping a paper. It is seized upon by one of the National Guard. "Terms of Surrender," the Swiss cry as with one voice. The insurgents press forward shouting: "What are they?"

"Immunity for all," is the reply. "Will you accept?"

"On the word of an officer we will." It is an officer of the National Guard who says this. Two days ago he was officer in the Gardes Françaises. His word must be believed.

And so the last drawbridge is lowered and Paris in delirious joy rushes into the citadel crying: "Victory! The Bastille is ours!"



Chapter 3. ONE OF THE DERELICTS

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It is best not to remember what followed. The word of an officer, once of the Gardes Françaises, was not kept. Old veterans and young Swiss fell victims to the fury of frenzied conquerors. Paris in revolution, drunk with its triumph, plunged through the labyrinthine fortress, wreaking vengeance for its dead.

The prisoners were dragged out of their dungeons where some had spent a quarter of a century and more in a living death. They were let loose in a world they knew nothing of, a world that had forgotten them. That miserable old de Launay and his escort of officers were dragged to the Town Hall. But they never got there; hustled by a yelling, hooting throng, the officers fell by the wayside and were trampled to death in the gutters. Seeing which de Launay cried pitiably: "O friends, kill me fast." He had his wish, the poor old weakling, and all of him that reached the Town Hall was his head carried aloft on a pike.

To the credit of the Gardes Nationales, once the Royal Regiment of Gardes Françaises, be it said that they marched back to their barracks in perfect order and discipline; it was this same Garde Nationale who plied hoses on the conflagration inside the fortress and averted an explosion which would have wrecked more than a third of the city.

But no one took any notice of the liberated prisoners. A dozen or so of them were let loose in this World-Bedlam, left to roam about the streets, trying all in vain to gather up threads of life long since turned to dust. The fall of the

mighty fortress put to light many of its grim secrets, some horrible, others infinitely pathetic, some carved in the stone of a dank dungeon, others scribbled on scraps of mouldy paper.

"If for my consolation" [was the purport of one of these] "Monseigneur would grant me for the sake of God and the Blessed Trinity, that I could have news of my dear wife: were it only her name on a card to show that she is alive. It were the greatest consolation I could receive, and I would for ever bless the greatness of Monseigneur."

The letter is dated "A la Bastille le 7 Octobre 1752" and signed Quéret-Démery. Thirty-seven years spent in a dark dugeon with no hope of reunion with that dear wife, news of whom would have been a solace to the broken heart. History has no record of one Quéret-Démery who spent close on half a century in the "cursed fortress." What he had done to merit his fate no one will ever know. He was: that is all we know and that he spent a lifetime in agonized longing and ever-shrinking hope.

One can picture him now on this evening of July 14th turned out from that prison which had become his only home, the shelter of his old age, and wandering with mind impaired and memory gone, through the streets of a city he hardly knew again. Wandering with only one fixed aim: to find the old home where he had known youth and happiness, and the love of his dear wife. Dead or Alive? Did he find her? History has no record. Quéret-Démery was just an obscure, forgotten victim of an autocratic rule, sending his humble petition which was never delivered, to "Monseigneur." Monseigneur who? Imagination is lost in

conjecture. The profligate Philippe d'Orleans or one of his like? Who can tell?

The attempt to follow the adventures or misadventures of those thirteen prisoners let loose in the midst of Paris in revolution, would be vain. There were thirteen, it seems. An unlucky number. Again history is silent as to what became to twelve of their number. Only one stands out among the thirteen in subsequent chronicles of the times: a woman. The only woman among the lot. Her name was Gabrielle Damiens. At least that is the name she went by later on, but she never spoke publicly either of her origin or of her parentage. She had forgotten; so she often said. One does forget things when one has spent sixteen years—one's best years—living a life that is so like death. She certainly forgot what she did that night after she had been turned out into the world: she must have wandered through the streets as did the others, trying to find her way to a place somewhere in the city, which had once been her home. But where she slept then, and for many nights after that she never knew, until the day when she found herself opposite a house in the Boulevard Saint-Germain: a majestic house with an elaborate coronet and coat of arms carved in stone, surmounting the monumental entrance door: and the device also carved in stone: "*N'oublie jamais.*" Seeing which Gabrielle's wanderings came to a sudden halt, and she stood quite still in the gutter opposite the house, staring up at the coronet, the coat of arms and the device. "*N'oublie jamais,*" she murmured. "Jamais!" she reiterated with a curious throaty sound which was neither a cry nor a laugh, but was both in one. "No, Monsieur le Marquis de Saint-

Lucque de Tourville," she continued to murmur to herself, "Gabrielle Damiens will see to it that you and your brood never shall forget."

There was a bench opposite the house under the trees of the boulevard and Gabrielle sat down not because she was tired but because she had a good view of the coronet and the device over the front door. Desultory crowds paraded the boulevard laughing and shouting "Victory!" Most of them had been standing for hours in queues outside the bakers' shops, but not everyone had been served with bread. There was not enough to go round, hence the reason why with the cry of "Victory!" there mingled one which sounded like an appeal, and also like a threat:

"Bread! Give us bread!"

Gabrielle watched them unseeing. She too had stood for the past few days in queues, getting what food she could. She had a little money. Where it came from she didn't know. She had a vague recollection of scrubbing floors and washing dishes, so perhaps the money came from that, or a charitable person may have had pity on her: anyway she was neither hungry nor tired, and she was willing to remain here on this bench for an indefinite length of time trying to piece together the fragments of the past from out the confused storehouse of memory.

She saw herself as a child, living almost as a pariah on the charity of relatives who never allowed her to forget her father's crime or his appalling fate. They always spoke of him as "that abominable regicide," which he certainly was not. François Damiens was just a misguided fool, a religious fanatic who saw in the profligate, dissolute monarch, the

enemy of France, and struck at him not, he asserted, with a view to murdering his King but just to frighten him and to warn him of the people's growing resentment against his life of immorality. Madness of course. His assertion was obviously true since the weapon which he used was an ordinary pocketknife and did no more than scratch the royal shoulder. But he had struck at the King and royal blood had flown from the scratch, staining the royal shirt. In punishment for this sacrilege, Damiens was hung, drawn and quartered, but to the end, in spite of abominable tortures which he bore stoically, he maintained steadfastly that he had no accomplice and had acted entirely on his own initiative.

François Damiens had left his motherless daughter in the care of a married sister Ursule and her husband Anatole Desèze, a cabinet-maker, who earned a precarious livelihood and begrudged the child every morsel she ate. Gabrielle from earliest childhood had known what hunger meant and the bitter cold of a Paris of winter, often without a fire, always without sufficient clothing. She had relaxation only in sleep and never any kind of childish amusement. The only interests she had in life was to gaze up at an old box fashioned of carved wood, which stood on a shelf in the living-room, high up against the wall, out of her reach. This box for some unknown reason, chiefly because she had never been allowed to touch it, had always fascinated her. It excited her childish curiosity to that extent that on one occasion when her uncle and aunt were out of the house, she managed to drag the table close to the wall, to hoist a chair upon the table, to climb up on the chair and to stretch

her little arms out in a vain attempt to reach the tempting box. The attempt was a complete fiasco. The chair slid away from under her on the polished table, and she fell with a clatter and a crash to the floor, bruised all over her body and her head swimming after it had struck against the edge of the table. To make matters worse, she felt so queer and giddy that she had not the strenght at once to put the table and chair back in their accustomed places. Aunt and uncle came back and at once guessed the cause of the catastrophe, with the result that in addition to bruises and an aching head Gabrielle got a sound beating and was threatened with a more severe one still if she ever dared to try and interfere with the mysterious box again. She was ten years old when this disastrous incident occurred. Cowed and fearfull she never made a second attempt to satisfy her curiosity. She drilled herself into avoiding to cast the merest glance up on the shelf. But though she was able to control her eyes, she could not control her mind, and her mind continued to dwell on the mystery of that fatal box.

It was not until she reached the age of sixteen that she lost something of her terror of another beating. She was a strapping girl by then, strong and tall for her age and unusually good-looking inspite of poor food and constant overwork. Her second attempt was entirely succesful. Uncle and aunt were out of the way, table and chair were easily moved and Gabrielle waas now tall enough to reach the shelf and lift down the box. It was locked, but after a brief struggle with the aid of an old kitchen knife the lid fell back and revealed—what? A few old papers tied up in three small bundles. One of these bundles was marked with the name

"Saint-Lucque," a name quite unknown to Gabrielle. She turned these papers—they were letters apparently—over and over, conscious of an intense feeling of disappointment. What she had expected to find she didn't know but it certainly wasn't this.

The girl however, was no fool. Soon her wits got to work. They told her that, obviously, if these old letters were of no importance to her, Aunt Ursule would not have kept them all these years out of her reach. As time was getting on and uncle and aunt might be back at any moment, she made haste to replace the box on the shelf, carefully disguising the damage done by the kitchen knife. Chair and table she put back in their accustomed places and the old letters she tucked away under the folds of her fichu. By this time she had worked herself up into a fever of conjecture, but she had sufficient control over herself to await with apparent calm the moment when she could pursue the letters in the privacy of her own room. She had never been allowed to have a candle in the evenings, because there was a street-lamp opposite the window which, as Aunt Ursule said, was quite light enough to go to bed by. Gabrielle hated that street-lamp because as there were no curtains to the window, the glare often prevented her getting to sleep, but on this never-to-be-forgotten night she blessed it. Far into the next morning sitting by the open window, did the daughter of François Damiens read and re-read those old letters by the flickering light of the street-lamp. When the lamp was extinguished she still remained sitting by the window scheming and dreaming until the pale light of dawn enabled her to read and read again. For what did those old

letters reveal? They revealed the fact that her unfortunate father who had been sent to his death as a regicide had not been alone in his design against the King. The crime—for so it was called—had been instigated and aided by a body of noble gentlemen who like himself saw in the profligate monarch the true enemy of France. But whilst Damiens bore loyally and in silence the brunt of this conspiracy, whilst he endured torture and went to his death like a hero, those noble gentlemen had remained immune and left their miserable tool to his fate.

All this Gabrielle Damiens learned during those wakeful hours of the night. A great deal of it was of course mere inference; the letters were all addressed to her father apparently by three gentlemen, two of whom with commendable prudence had refrained from appending their signature. But there was one name "Saint-Lucque" which appeared at the foot of some letters more damnatory than most. Before the rising sun had flooded the towers of Notre Dame with gold Gabrielle had committed these to memory.

Yes! Memory was reawakened now, and busy after all these years unravelling the tangled skein of the past. Sitting here on the boulevard opposite the stately mansion with the coat of arms and the device "*N'oublie Jamais*" carved in stone above its portal, Gabrielle saw herself as she was during the three years following her fateful discovery. Her first task had been to make a copy of the letters in a clean and careful hand, after which there were the days spent in establishing the identity of "Saint-Lucque" and tracing his whereabouts. M. le Marquis de Saint-Lucque turned out to be one of the greatest gentlemen in France, attached to the

Court of His Majesty King Louis XV. He lived in a palatial mansion on the Boulevard Saint-Germain and was a widower with one son. His association with François Damiens had seemingly never been found out. Presumably the whole episode was forgotten by now.

Then there came the great day when Gabrielle first called on Monsieur le Marquis. It was not easy for a girl of her class to obtain an interview with so noble a gentleman, and at once Gabrielle was confronted with a regular barrage of lackeys, all intent apparently on preventing her access to their master. "No, certainly not," was the final pronouncement of the major-domo, a very great gentleman indeed in this lordly establishment, "you cannot present yourself before Monsieur le Marquis, he will not see you." Gabrielle conscious of her personal charm tried blandishments, but these were of no avail, and undoubtedly she would have failed in her purpose had not Monsieur le Vicomte, son and heir of Monsieur le Marquis, come unexpectedly upon the scene. He was in riding kit. An exceptionally handsome young man, and apparently more impressionable than the severe major-domo. Here was a lovely girl whose glance was nothing less than a challenge, and she wanted something which was being denied her by a lot of louts. Whatever it was, thought the handsome Vicomte, she must have her wish; preliminary, he added to himself with an appraising look directed at the pretty creature, to his getting what he would want in return for his kind offices. There was an exchange of glances between the two young people and a few moments later Gabrielle was ushered into the presence of Monsieur le Marquis de Saint-

Lucque by a humbled and bewildered major-domo. Monsieur le Vicomte had given the order, and there was no disobeying him. "I'll wait for you here," he whispered in the girl's ear, indicating a door on the same landing. She lowered her eyes, put on the airs of a demure country wench, and disappeared within the forbidden precincts.

The first interview with the old aristocrat was distinctly stormy. There was a great deal of shouting at first on his part. A stick was raised. A bell was rung. But Gabrielle held her grounds: very calmly, produced the copy of a damnatory letter, and presently the shouting ceased, the stick was lowered, and the lackey dismissed who came in answer to the bell. The letter doubtless brought up vivid and most unpleasant memories of the past. Presently a bargain was struck, money passed from hand to hand—quite a good deal of money, more than Gabrielle had ever seen in all her life, and the interview ended with a promise on her part to destroy all the original letters. She was to bring them to Monsieur le Marquis the next day and burn them before his eyes. She trotted off with the money safely tucked away in the fold of her fichu. The handsome Vicomte was waiting for her, and she duly paid the tribute which he demanded of her. But she did not call on the old the old Marquis either the next day, or the day after that, or ever again, because a week later Monsieur le Marquis de Saint-Lucque had a paralytic stroke, and thereafter remained bedridden for over four years until the day when he was laid to rest among his ancestors in the family mausoleum in Artois.

In the meantime Gabrielle Damiens's relationship with Vicomte Fernand de Saint-Lucque had become very tender.

He was for the time being entirely under the charm of the fascinating blackmailer, unaware of the ugly role she had been playing against his father. He had fitted up what he called a love-nest for her in a rustic chalet in the environs of Versailles and here she lived in the greatest luxury, visited constantly by the Vicomte, who loaded her with money and jewellery to such an extent that she forgot all about her contemplated source of revenue through the medium of the compromising letters.

Everything then was going on very well with the daughter of François Damiens. Her uncle and aunt with the philosophy peculiar to *hoc genus omne* of their country were only too ready to approve of a situation which contributed largely to their well-being, for Gabrielle, ready to forget the cavalier way in which she had been treated in the past, was not only generous but lavish in her gifts to them. And all went well indeed for nearly three years until the day when Fernand de Saint-Lucque became weary of the tie which bound him to the rather common and exacting beauty and gave her a decisive if somewhat curt *congé*, together with a goodly sum of money which he considered sufficient as a solace to her wounded vanity. The blow fell so unexpectedly that at first Gabrielle felt absolutely stunned. It came at a moment when, deluded into believing that she had completely enslaved her highborn lover, she saw visions of being herself one day Vicomtesse and subsequently Marquise de Saint-Lucque de Tourville, received at Court, the queen and leader of Paris society.

She certainly did not look upon the Vicomte's partin gift as sufficient solace for her disappointment. It would not do

much more than pay her debts to dressmakers, milliners and jewellers. With the prodigality peculiar to her kind she had spent money as freely and easily as she had earned it. She had, of course, some valuable jewellery, but this she would not sell, and the future, as she presently surveyed it, looked anything but cheerful. Soon, however, her sound common sense came to the rescue. She took, as it were, stock of her resources, and in the process remembered the letters on which she had counted three years ago as the foundation of her fortunes. She turned her back without a pang on the rustic chalet, no longer a love-nest now, and returned to her uncle and aunt, in whom she now felt compelled to confide the secret of her disappointment in the present and of her hopes of the future.

She made a fresh attempt to see the old Marquis. Then only did she learn of his sickness and the hopeless state of mind and body in which he now was. But this did not daunt Gabrielle Damiens. Her scheme of blackmail could no longer be successfully directed against the father, but there was the son, the once enamoured Vicomte, her adoring slave, now nothing but an arrogant aristocrat, treating the humble little bourgeoisie as if she were dirt and dismissing her out of his life with nothing but a miserable pittance. Well! He should pay for it, pay so heavily that not only his fortune but also his life would be wrecked in the process. Moreover, she, the daughter of that same François Damiens, who had been dubbed the regicide and died a horrible death, would see her ambition fulfilled and herself paid court to and the hem of her garment kissed by obsequious courtiers, when she was Madame la Marquise de Saint-Lucque de Tourville.

She started on her campaign without delay. A humble request for an interview with M. le Vicomte was at first curtly refused, but when it was renewed with certain veiled threats it was conceded. Armed with the copies of the damnatory letters Gabrielle demanded money first and then marriage. Yes! no less a thing than marriage to the heir of one of the greatest names in France, failing which the letters would be sent to the Comte de Meaurevaisre, Chief of the Secret Police of His Majesty the King. Well! When Fernand de Saint-Lucque had dismissed her, Gabrielle, with a curt word of farewell, he had dealt her a blow which had completely knocked her over. But it was her turn now to retaliate. He tried to carry off the affair in his usual high-handed manner. He began with sarcasm, went with bravado, and ended with threats. Gabrielle stood as she had done three years ago before the old Marquis. Already she felt conscious of victory, because she had seen the look almost like a death-mask which had come over Fernand de Saint-Lucque's face when he took in the contents of this the first of the fateful letters. When she held it out to him he had waved her hand aside with disdain. She placed it on the table, and waited until natural curiosity impelled him to pick it up. He did it with a contemptuous shrug, held it as if it were filth.

But the look so like a death-mask soon spread over his face. He did his best to disguise it, but Gabrielle had seen it and felt convinced that victory was already in sight. She left, not taking any money away with her, not exacting any promise at the moment save that her victim—he was her victim already—would see her once more. He had

commanded her to bring the letters: "Not the copies remember! The originals!" which the Vicomte declared with all his old arrogance did not exist save in the imagination of a cinderwench.

For days and weeks after that first interview did Gabrielle Damines keep the Vicomte de Saint-Lucque on tenterhooks without going near him. The old Marquis was still alive, slowly sinking, with one foot in the grave, and Gabrielle hugged herself with thoughts of the heir of that great name writhing under the threat of disgrace to the head of the house, disgrace followed by confiscation of all his goods, exile from court and country, his name for ever branded with the stigma of regicide: disgrace which would redound on his heir and on all his family, and might even be the stepping stone to an ignominious death.

When Gabrielle felt that Fernand had suffered long enough she sent him a harsh command for another interview. Devoured with anxiety, he was only too ready to accede. She came this time in a mood as arrogant as his own, exacting written promise of marriage: the date of the wedding to be fixed here and now. She did not bring the original letters with her. They would, she said curtly, be handed over to him when she, Gabrielle Damines, was incontestably Vicomtesse de Saint-Lucque de Tourville.

Fernand at his wits' end did not know what to do. He tried pretence: a softened manner as if he was prepared to yield. Quite gently and persuasively he explained to her that whatever his ultimate decision might be—and he gave her to understand that it certainly would be favourable—he was compelled at the moment to ask for a few days delay. He

had been, he said, paying court to a lady, at His Majesty's express wish, had in fact become officially engaged, and all he needed was a little time for the final breaking off of his obligations. In the meanwhile he was ready, he said, to give her a written promise of marriage duly signed, the wedding to take place within the next three months.

As usual Gabrielle's common sense warned her of a possible trap. The Vicomte had made a very sudden volte-face and had become extraordinarily suave and engaging. He even went to length of assuring her that he never ceased to love her, and that it was only at the King's command that he had become engaged to the lady in question. The breaking off of that engagement, he declared in conclusion, would cause him no heartache. A little doubtful, inclined to mistrust this plausible dissembler, Gabrielle remained impervious to his blandishments, even when she suddenly found herself in his arms, under the once potent spell of his kisses. No longer potent now. She smiled back into his glowing eyes, accepted the written promise of marriage and endured his kisses while keeping her wits about her. When she finally freed herself from his arms she merely assured him that the compromising letters would be returned to him when she had become his lawful wife.

She trotted home that afternoon happy and triumphant with the written promise of marriage duly signed "Fernand de Saint-Lucque de Tourville" safely tucked away in the folds of her fichu. Aunt Ursule and Uncle Desèze congratulated her on her triumph, and the three of them sat up half the night making plans for a golden future. Aunt and uncle