

# The Queen's Necklace



**Alexandre Dumas**

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## PROLOGUE.—THE PREDICTIONS.

### AN OLD NOBLEMAN AND AN OLD MAÎTRE-D'HÔTEL.

It was the beginning of April, 1784, between twelve and one o'clock. Our old acquaintance, the Marshal de Richelieu, having with his own hands colored his eyebrows with a perfumed dye, pushed away the mirror which was held to him by his valet, the successor of his faithful Raffè and shaking his head in the manner peculiar to himself, "Ah!" said he, "now I look myself;" and rising from his seat with juvenile vivacity, he commenced shaking off the powder which had fallen from his wig over his blue velvet coat, then, after taking a turn or two up and down his room, called for his maître-d'hôtel.

In five minutes this personage made his appearance, elaborately dressed.

The marshal turned towards him, and with a gravity befitting the occasion, said, "Sir, I suppose you have prepared me a good dinner?"

"Certainly, your grace."

"You have the list of my guests?"

"I remember them perfectly, your grace; I have prepared a dinner for nine."

"There are two sorts of dinners, sir," said the marshal.

"True, your grace, but——"

The marshal interrupted him with a slightly impatient movement, although still dignified.

"Do you know, sir, that whenever I have heard the word 'but,' and I have heard it many times in the course of eighty-eight years, it has been each time, I am sorry to say, the harbinger of some folly."

"Your grace——"

"In the first place, at what time do we dine?"

"Your grace, the citizens dine at two, the bar at three, the nobility at four——"

"And I, sir?"

"Your grace will dine to-day at five."

"Oh, at five!"

"Yes, your grace, like the king——"

"And why like the king?"

"Because, on the list of your guests, is the name of a king."

"Not so, sir, you mistake; all my guests to-day are simply noblemen."

"Your grace is surely jesting; the Count Haga,<sup>[A]</sup> who is among the guests——"

"Well, sir!"

"The Count Haga is a king."

"I know no king so called."

“Your grace must pardon me then,” said the maître-d’hôtel, bowing, “but, I believed, supposed——”

“Your business, sir, is neither to believe nor suppose; your business is to read, without comment, the orders I give you. When I wish a thing to be known, I tell it; when I do not tell it, I wish it unknown.”

The maître-d’hôtel bowed again, more respectfully, perhaps, than he would have done to a reigning monarch.

“Therefore, sir,” continued the old marshal, “you will, as I have none but noblemen to dinner, let us dine at my usual hour, four o’clock.”

At this order, the countenance of the maître-d’hôtel became clouded as if he had heard his sentence of death; he grew deadly pale; then, recovering himself, with the courage of despair he said, “In any event, your grace cannot dine before five o’clock.”

“Why so, sir?” cried the marshal.

“Because it is utterly impossible.”

“Sir,” said the marshal, with a haughty air, “it is now, I believe, twenty years since you entered my service?”

“Twenty-one years, a month, and two weeks.”

“Well, sir, to these twenty-one years, a month, and two weeks, you will not add a day, nor an hour. You understand me, sir,” he continued, biting his thin lips and depressing his eyebrows; “this evening you seek a new master. I do not choose that the word impossible shall be pronounced in my house; I am too old now to begin to learn its meaning.”

The maître-d’hôtel bowed a third time.

“This evening,” said he, “I shall have taken leave of your grace, but, at least, up to the last moment, my duty shall have been performed as it should be;” and he made two steps towards the door.

“What do you call as it should be?” cried the marshal. “Learn, sir, that to do it as it suits me is to do it as it should be. Now, I wish to dine at four, and it does not suit me, when I wish to dine at four, to be obliged to wait till five.”

“Your grace,” replied the maître-d’hôtel, gravely, “I have served as butler to his highness the Prince de Soubise, and as steward to his eminence the Cardinal de Rohan. With the first, his majesty, the late King of France, dined once a year; with the second, the Emperor of Austria dined once a month. I know, therefore, how a sovereign should be treated. When he visited the Prince de Soubise, Louis XV. called himself in vain the Baron de Gonesse; at the house of M. de Rohan, the Emperor Joseph was announced as the Count de Pakenstein; but he was none the less emperor. To-day, your grace also receives a guest, who vainly calls himself Count Haga—Count Haga is still King of Sweden. I shall leave your service this evening, but Count Haga will have been treated like a king.”

“But that,” said the marshal, “is the very thing that I am tiring myself to death in forbidding; Count Haga wishes to preserve his incognito as strictly as possible. Well do I see through your absurd vanity; it is not the crown that you honor, but yourself that you wish to glorify; I repeat again, that I do not wish it imagined that I have a king here.”

“What, then, does your grace take me for? It is not that I wish it known that there is a king here.”

“Then in heaven’s name do not be obstinate, but let us have dinner at four.”

“But at four o’clock, your grace, what I am expecting will not have arrived.”

“What are you expecting? a fish, like M. Vatel?”

“Does your grace wish that I should tell you?”

“On my faith, I am curious.”

“Then, your grace, I wait for a bottle of wine.”

“A bottle of wine! Explain yourself, sir, the thing begins to interest me.”

“Listen then, your grace; his majesty the King of Sweden—I beg pardon, the Count Haga I should have said—drinks nothing but tokay.”

“Well, am I so poor as to have no tokay in my cellar? If so, I must dismiss my butler.”

“Not so, your grace; on the contrary, you have about sixty bottles.”

“Well, do you think Count Haga will drink sixty bottles with his dinner?”

“No, your grace; but when Count Haga first visited France, when he was only prince royal, he dined with the late king, who had received twelve bottles of tokay from the Emperor of Austria. You are aware that the tokay of the finest vintages is reserved exclusively for the cellar of the emperor, and that kings themselves can only drink it when he pleases to send it to them.”

“I know it.”

“Then, your grace, of these twelve bottles of which the prince royal drank, only two remain. One is in the cellar of his majesty Louis XVI.  
—”

“And the other?”

“Ah, your grace!” said the maître-d’hôtel, with a triumphant smile, for he felt that, after the long battle he had been fighting, the moment of victory was at hand, “the other one was stolen.”

“By whom, then?”

“By one of my friends, the late king’s butler, who was under great obligations to me.”

“Oh! and so he gave it to you.”

“Certainly, your grace,” said the maître-d’hôtel with pride.

“And what did you do with it?”

“I placed it carefully in my master’s cellar.”

“Your master! And who was your master at that time?”

“His eminence the Cardinal de Rohan.”

“Ah, mon Dieu! at Strasbourg?”

“At Saverne.”

“And you have sent to seek this bottle for me!” cried the old marshal.

“For you, your grace,” replied the maître-d’hôtel, in a tone which plainly said, “ungrateful as you are.”

The Duke de Richelieu seized the hand of the old servant and cried, “I beg pardon; you are the king of maîtres d’hôtel.”

“And you would have dismissed me,” he replied, with an indescribable shrug of his shoulders.

“Oh, I will pay you one hundred pistoles for this bottle of wine.”

“And the expenses of its coming here will be another hundred; but you will grant that it is worth it.”

“I will grant anything you please, and, to begin, from to-day I double your salary.”

“I seek no reward, your grace; I have but done my duty.”

“And when will your courier arrive?”

“Your grace may judge if I have lost time: on what day did I have my orders for the dinner?”

“Why, three days ago, I believe.”

“It takes a courier, at his utmost speed, twenty-four hours to go, and the same to return.”

“There still remain twenty-four hours,” said the marshal; “how have they been employed?”

“Alas, your grace, they were lost. The idea only came to me the day after I received the list of your guests. Now calculate the time necessary for the negotiation, and you will perceive that in asking you to wait till five I am only doing what I am absolutely obliged to do.”

“The bottle is not yet arrived, then?”

“No, your grace.”

“Ah, sir, if your colleague at Saverne be as devoted to the Prince de Rohan as you are to me, and should refuse the bottle, as you would do in his place——”

“I? your grace——”

“Yes; you would not, I suppose, have given away such a bottle, had it belonged to me?”

“I beg your pardon, humbly, your grace; but had a friend, having a king to provide for, asked me for your best bottle of wine, he should have had it immediately.”

“Oh!” said the marshal, with a grimace.

“It is only by helping others that we can expect help in our own need, your grace.”

“Well, then, I suppose we may calculate that it will be given, but there is still another risk—if the bottle should be broken?”

“Oh! your grace, who would break a bottle of wine of that value?”

“Well, I trust not; what time, then, do you expect your courier?”

“At four o’clock precisely.”

“Then why not dine at four?” replied the marshal.

“Your grace, the wine must rest for an hour; and had it not been for an invention of my own, it would have required three days to recover itself.”

Beaten at all points, the marshal gave way.

“Besides,” continued the old servant, “be sure, your grace, that your guests will not arrive before half-past four.”

“And why not?”

“Consider, your grace: to begin with M. de Launay; he comes from the Bastille, and with the ice at present covering the streets of Paris——”

“No; but he will leave after the prisoners’ dinner, at twelve o’clock.”

“Pardon me, your grace, but the dinner hour at the Bastille has been changed since your grace was there; it is now one.”

“Sir, you are learned on all points; pray go on.”

“Madame Dubarry comes from the Luciennes, one continued descent, and in this frost.”

“That would not prevent her being punctual, since she is no longer a duke’s favorite; she plays the queen only among barons; but let me tell you, sir, that I desire to have dinner early on account of M. de la Pérouse, who sets off to-night, and would not wish to be late.”

“But, your grace, M. de la Pérouse is with the king, discussing geography and cosmography; he will not get away too early.”

“It is possible.”

“It is certain, your grace, and it will be the same with M. de Favras, who is with the Count de Provence, talking, no doubt, of the new play by the Canon de Beaumarchais.”

“You mean the ‘Marriage of Figaro’?”

“Yes, your grace.”

“Why, you are quite literary also, it seems.”

“In my leisure moments I read, your grace.”

“We have, however, M. de Condorcet, who, being a geometrician, should at least be punctual.”

“Yes; but he will be deep in some calculation, from which, when he rouses himself, it will probably be at least half an hour too late. As for the Count Cagliostro, as he is a stranger, and not well acquainted with the customs of Versailles, he will, in all probability, make us wait for him.”

“Well,” said the marshal, “you have disposed of all my guests, except M. de Taverney, in a manner worthy of Homer, or of my poor Raffè.”

The maître-d’hôtel bowed. “I have not,” said he, “named M. de Taverney, because, being an old friend, he will probably be punctual.”

“Good; and where do we dine?”



“In the great dining-room, your grace.”

“But we shall freeze there.”

“It has been warmed for three days, your grace; and I believe you will find it perfectly comfortable.”

“Very well; but there is a clock striking! Why, it is half-past four!” cried the marshal.

“Yes, your grace; and there is the courier entering the courtyard with my bottle of tokay.”

“May I continue for another twenty years to be served in this manner!” said the marshal, turning again to his looking-glass, while the maître-d’hôtel ran down-stairs.

“Twenty years!” said a laughing voice, interrupting the marshal in his survey of himself; “twenty years, my dear duke! I wish them you; but then I shall be sixty—I shall be very old.”

“You, countess!” cried the marshal, “you are my first arrival, and, mon Dieu! you look as young and charming as ever.”

“Duke, I am frozen.”

“Come into the boudoir, then.”

“Oh! tête-à-tête, marshal?”

“Not so,” replied a somewhat broken voice.

“Ah! Taverney!” said the marshal; and then whispering to the countess, “Plague take him for disturbing us!”

Madame Dubarry laughed, and they all entered the adjoining room.

[A] The name of Count Haga was well known as one assumed by the King of Sweden when traveling in France.

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## II.—M. DE LA PEROUSE.

At the same moment, the noise of carriages in the street warned the marshal that his guests were arriving; and soon after, thanks to the punctuality of his maître-d’hôtel, nine persons were seated round the oval table in the dining-room. Nine lackeys, silent as shadows, quick without bustle, and attentive without importunity, glided over the carpet, and passed among the guests, without ever touching their chairs, which were surrounded with furs, which were wrapped round the legs of the sitters. These furs, with the heat from the stoves, and the odors from the wine and the dinner, diffused a degree of comfort, which manifested itself in the gaiety of the guests, who had just finished their soup.

No sound was heard from without, and none within, save that made by the guests themselves; for the plates were changed, and the dishes moved round, with the most perfect quiet. Nor from the maître d’hôtel could a whisper be heard; he seemed to give his orders with his eyes.

The guests, therefore, began to feel as though they were alone. It seemed to them that servants so silent must also be deaf.

M. de Richelieu was the first who broke the silence, by saying to the guest on his right hand, "But, count, you drink nothing."

This was addressed to a man about thirty-eight years of age, short, fair-haired, and with high shoulders; his eye a clear blue, now bright, but oftener with a pensive expression, and with nobility stamped unmistakably on his open and manly forehead.

"I only drink water, marshal," he replied.

"Excepting with Louis XV.," returned the marshal; "I had the honor of dining at his table with you, and you deigned that day to drink wine."

"Ah! you recall a pleasing remembrance, marshal; that was in 1771. It was tokay, from the imperial cellar."

"It was like that with which my maître-d'hôtel will now have the honor to fill your glass," replied Richelieu, bowing.

Count Haga raised his glass, and looked through it. The wine sparkled in the light like liquid rubies. "It is true," said he; "marshal, I thank you."

These words were uttered in a manner so noble, that the guests, as if by a common impulse, rose, and cried,—

"Long live the king!"

"Yes," said Count Haga, "long live his majesty the King of France. What say you, M. de la Pérouse?"

"My lord," replied the captain, with that tone, at once flattering and respectful, common to those accustomed to address crowned heads, "I have just left the king, and his majesty has shown me so much kindness, that no one will more willingly cry 'Long live the king' than I. Only, as in another hour I must leave you to join the two ships which his majesty has put at my disposal, once out of this house, I shall take the liberty of saying, 'Long life to another king, whom I should be proud to serve, had I not already so good a master.'"

"This health that you propose," said Madame Dubarry, who sat on the marshal's left hand, "we are all ready to drink, but the oldest of us should take the lead."

"Is it you, that that concerns, or me, Taverney?" said the marshal, laughing.

"I do not believe," said another on the opposite side, "that M. de Richelieu is the senior of our party."

"Then it is you, Taverney," said the duke.

"No, I am eight years younger than you! I was born in 1704," returned he.

"How rude," said the marshal, "to expose my eighty-eight years."

"Impossible, duke! that you are eighty-eight," said M. de Condorcet.

"It is, however, but too true; it is a calculation easy to make, and therefore unworthy of an algebraist like you, marquis. I am of the last century—the great century, as we call it. My date is 1696."

"Impossible!" cried De Launay.

“Oh, if your father were here, he would not say impossible, he, who, when governor of the Bastille, had me for a lodger in 1714.”

“The senior in age, here, however,” said M. de Favras, “is the wine Count Haga is now drinking.”

“You are right, M. de Favras; this wine is a hundred and twenty years old; to the wine, then, belongs the honor——”

“One moment, gentlemen,” said Cagliostro, raising his eyes, beaming with intelligence and vivacity; “I claim the precedence.”

“You claim precedence over the tokay!” exclaimed all the guests in chorus.

“Assuredly,” returned Cagliostro, calmly; “since it was I who bottled it.”

“You?”

“Yes, I; on the day of the victory won by Montecucully over the Turks in 1664.”

A burst of laughter followed these words, which Cagliostro had pronounced with perfect gravity.

“By this calculation, you would be something like one hundred and thirty years old,” said Madame Dubarry; “for you must have been at least ten years old when you bottled the wine.”

“I was more than ten when I performed that operation, madame, as on the following day I had the honor of being deputed by his majesty the Emperor of Austria to congratulate Montecucully, who by the victory of St. Gothard had avenged the day at Especk, in Sclavonia, in which the infidels treated the imperialists so roughly, who were my friends and companions in arms in 1536.”

“Oh,” said Count Haga, as coldly as Cagliostro himself, “you must have been at least ten years old, when you were at that memorable battle.”

“A terrible defeat, count,” returned Cagliostro.

“Less terrible than Cressy, however,” said Condorcet, smiling.

“True, sir, for at the battle of Cressy, it was not only an army, but all France, that was beaten; but then this defeat was scarcely a fair victory to the English; for King Edward had cannon, a circumstance of which Philip de Valois was ignorant, or rather, which he would not believe, although I warned him that I had with my own eyes seen four pieces of artillery which Edward had bought from the Venetians.”

“Ah,” said Madame Dubarry; “you knew Philip de Valois?”

“Madame, I had the honor to be one of the five lords who escorted him off the field of battle; I came to France with the poor old King of Bohemia, who was blind, and who threw away his life when he heard that the battle was lost.”

“Ah, sir,” said M. de la Pérouse, “how much I regret, that instead of the battle of Cressy, it was not that of Actium at which you assisted.”

“Why so, sir?”

“Oh, because you might have given me some nautical details, which, in spite of Plutarch’s fine narration, have ever been obscure to me.”

“Which, sir? I should be happy to be of service to you.”

“Oh, you were there, then, also?”

“No, sir; I was then in Egypt. I had been employed by Queen Cleopatra to restore the library at Alexandria—an office for which I was better qualified than any one else, from having personally known the best authors of antiquity.”

“And you have seen Queen Cleopatra?” said Madame Dubarry.

“As I now see you, madame.”

“Was she as pretty as they say?”

“Madame, you know beauty is only comparative; a charming queen in Egypt, in Paris she would only have been a pretty grisette.”

“Say no harm of grisettes, count.”

“God forbid!”

“Then Cleopatra was——”

“Little, slender, lively, and intelligent; with large almond-shaped eyes, a Grecian nose, teeth like pearls, and a hand like your own, countess—a fit hand to hold a scepter. See, here is a diamond which she gave me, and which she had had from her brother Ptolemy; she wore it on her thumb.”

“On her thumb?” cried Madame Dubarry.

“Yes; it was an Egyptian fashion; and I, you see, can hardly put it on my little finger;” and taking off the ring, he handed it to Madame Dubarry.

It was a magnificent diamond, of such fine water, and so beautifully cut, as to be worth thirty thousand or forty thousand francs.

The diamond was passed round the table, and returned to Cagliostro, who, putting it quietly on his finger again, said, “Ah, I see well you are all incredulous; this fatal incredulity I have had to contend against all my life. Philip de Valois would not listen to me, when I told him to leave open a retreat to Edward; Cleopatra would not believe me when I warned her that Antony would be beaten: the Trojans would not credit me, when I said to them, with reference to the wooden horse, ‘Cassandra is inspired; listen to Cassandra.’”

“Oh! it is charming,” said Madame Dubarry, shaking with laughter; “I have never met a man at once so serious and so diverting.”

“I assure you,” replied Cagliostro, “that Jonathan was much more so. He was really a charming companion; until he was killed by Saul, he nearly drove me crazy with laughing.”

“Do you know,” said the Duke de Richelieu, “if you go on in this way you will drive poor Taverney crazy; he is so afraid of death, that he is staring at you with all his eyes, hoping you to be an immortal.”

“Immortal I cannot say, but one thing I can affirm——”

“What?” cried Taverney, who was the most eager listener.

“That I have seen all the people and events of which I have been speaking to you.”

“You have known Montecucully?”

“As well as I know you, M. de Favras; and, indeed, much better, for this is but the second or third time I have had the honor of seeing you, while I lived nearly a year under the same tent with him of whom you speak.”

“You knew Philip de Valois?”

“As I have already had the honor of telling you, M. de Condorcet; but when he returned to Paris, I left France and returned to Bohemia.”

“And Cleopatra.”

“Yes, countess; Cleopatra, I can tell you, had eyes as black as yours, and shoulders almost as beautiful.”

“But what do you know of my shoulders?”

“They are like what Cassandra’s once were; and there is still a further resemblance,—she had like you, or rather, you have like her, a little black spot on your left side, just above the sixth rib.”

“Oh, count, now you really are a sorcerer.”

“No, no,” cried the marshal, laughing; “it was I who told him.”

“And pray how do you know?”

The marshal bit his lips, and replied, “Oh, it is a family secret.”

“Well, really, marshal,” said the countess, “one should put on a double coat of rouge before visiting you;” and turning again to Cagliostro, “then, sir, you have the art of renewing your youth? For although you say you are three or four thousand years old, you scarcely look forty.”

“Yes, madame, I do possess that secret.”

“Oh, then, sir, impart it to me.”

“To you, madame? It is useless; your youth is already renewed; your age is only what it appears to be, and you do not look thirty.”

“Ah! you flatter.”

“No, madame, I speak only the truth, but it is easily explained: you have already tried my receipt.”

“How so?”

“You have taken my elixir.”

“I?”

“You, countess. Oh! you cannot have forgotten it. Do you not remember a certain house in the Rue St. Claude, and coming there on some business respecting M. de Sartines? You remember rendering a service to one of my friends, called Joseph Balsamo, and that this Joseph Balsamo gave you a bottle of elixir, recommending you to take three drops every morning? Do you not remember having done this regularly until the last year, when the bottle became exhausted? If you do not remember all this, countess, it is more than forgetfulness—it is ingratitude.”

“Oh! M. Cagliostro, you are telling me things——”

“Which were only known to yourself, I am aware; but what would be the use of being a sorcerer if one did not know one’s neighbor’s secrets?”

“Then Joseph Balsamo has, like you, the secret of this famous elixir?”

“No, madame, but he was one of my best friends, and I gave him three or four bottles.”

“And has he any left?”

“Oh! I know nothing of that; for the last two or three years, poor Balsamo has disappeared. The last time I saw him was in America, on the banks of the Ohio: he was setting off on an expedition to the Rocky Mountains, and since then I have heard that he is dead.”

“Come, come, count,” cried the marshal; “let us have the secret, by all means.”

“Are you speaking seriously, sir?” said Count Haga.

“Very seriously, sire,—I beg pardon, I mean count;” and Cagliostro bowed in such a way as to indicate that his error was a voluntary one.

“Then,” said the marshal, “Madame Dubarry is not old enough to be made young again?”

“No, on my conscience.”

“Well, then, I will give you another subject: here is my friend, M. Taverney—what do you say to him? Does he not look like a contemporary of Pontius Pilate? But perhaps, he, on the contrary, is too old.”

Cagliostro looked at the baron. “No,” said he.

“Ah! my dear count,” exclaimed Richelieu; “if you will renew his youth, I will proclaim you a true pupil of Medea.”

“You wish it?” asked Cagliostro of the host, and looking round at the same time on all assembled.

Every one called out, “Yes.”

“And you also, M. Taverney?”

“I more than any one,” said the baron.

“Well, it is easy,” returned Cagliostro; and he drew from his pocket a small bottle, and poured into a glass some of the liquid it contained. Then, mixing these drops with half a glass of iced champagne, he passed it to the baron.

All eyes followed his movements eagerly.

The baron took the glass, but as he was about to drink he hesitated.

Every one began to laugh, but Cagliostro called out, “Drink, baron, or you will lose a liquor of which each drop is worth a hundred louis d’ors.”

“The devil,” cried Richelieu; “that is even better than tokay.”

“I must then drink?” said the baron, almost trembling.

“Or pass the glass to another, sir, that some one at least may profit by it.”

“Pass it here,” said Richelieu, holding out his hand.

The baron raised the glass, and decided, doubtless, by the delicious smell and the beautiful rose color which those few drops had given to the champagne, he swallowed the magic liquor. In an instant a kind of shiver ran through him; he seemed to feel all his old and sluggish blood rushing quickly through his veins, from his heart to his feet, his wrinkled skin seemed to expand, his eyes, half covered by their lids, appeared to open without his will, and the pupils to grow and brighten, the trembling of his hands to cease, his voice to strengthen, and his limbs to recover their former youthful elasticity. In fact, it seemed as if the liquid in its descent had regenerated his whole body.

A cry of surprise, wonder, and admiration rang through the room.

Taverney, who had been slowly eating with his gums, began to feel famished; he seized a plate and helped himself largely to a ragout, and then demolished a partridge, bones and all, calling out that his teeth were coming back to him. He ate, laughed, and cried for joy, for half an hour, while the others remained gazing at him in stupefied wonder; then little by little he failed again, like a lamp whose oil is burning out, and all the former signs of old age returned upon him.

“Oh!” groaned he, “once more adieu to my youth,” and he gave utterance to a deep sigh, while two tears rolled over his cheeks.

Instinctively, at this mournful spectacle of the old man first made young again, and then seeming to become yet older than before, from the contrast, the sigh was echoed all round the table.

“It is easy to explain, gentlemen,” said Cagliostro; “I gave the baron but thirty-five drops of the elixir. He became young, therefore, for only thirty-five minutes.”

“Oh more, more, count!” cried the old man eagerly.

“No, sir, for perhaps the second trial would kill you.”

Of all the guests, Madame Dubarry, who had already tested the virtue of the elixir, seemed most deeply interested while old Taverney’s youth seemed thus to renew itself; she had watched him with delight and triumph, and half fancied herself growing young again at the sight, while she could hardly refrain from endeavoring to snatch from Cagliostro the wonderful bottle; but now, seeing him resume his old age even quicker than he had lost it, “Alas!” she said sadly, “all is vanity and deception; the effects of this wonderful secret last for thirty-five minutes.”

“That is to say,” said Count Haga, “that in order to resume your youth for two years, you would have to drink a perfect river.”

Every one laughed.

“Oh!” said De Condorcet, “the calculation is simple; a mere nothing of 3,153,000 drops for one year’s youth.”

“An inundation,” said La Pérouse.

“However, sir,” continued Madame Dubarry; “according to you, I have not needed so much, as a small bottle about four times the size of that

you hold has been sufficient to arrest the march of time for ten years.”

“Just so, madame. And you alone approach this mysterious truth. The man who has already grown old needs this large quantity to produce an immediate and powerful effect; but a woman of thirty, as you were, or a man of forty, as I was, when I began to drink this elixir, still full of life and youth, needs but ten drops at each period of decay; and with these ten drops may eternally continue his life and youth at the same point.”

“What do you call the periods of decay?” asked Count Haga.

“The natural periods, count. In a state of nature, man’s strength increases until thirty-five years of age. It then remains stationary until forty; and from that time forward, it begins to diminish, but almost imperceptibly, until fifty; then the process becomes quicker and quicker to the day of his death. In our state of civilization, when the body is weakened by excess, cares, and maladies, the failure begins at thirty-five. The time, then, to take nature, is when she is stationary, so as to forestall the beginning of decay. He who, possessor as I am of the secret of this elixir, knows how to seize the happy moment, will live as I live; always young, or, at least, always young enough for what he has to do in the world.”

“Oh, M. Cagliostro,” cried the countess; “why, if you could choose your own age, did you not stop at twenty instead of at forty?”

“Because, madame,” said Cagliostro, smiling, “it suits me better to be a man of forty, still healthy and vigorous, than a raw youth of twenty.”

“Oh!” said the countess.

“Doubtless, madame,” continued Cagliostro, “at twenty one pleases women of thirty; at forty, we govern women of twenty, and men of sixty.”

“I yield, sir,” said the countess, “for you are a living proof of the truth of your own words.”

“Then I,” said Taverney, piteously, “am condemned; it is too late for me.”

“M. de Richelieu has been more skilful than you,” said La Pérouse naïvely, “and I have always heard that he had some secret.”

“It is a report that the women have spread,” laughed Count Haga.

“Is that a reason for disbelieving it, duke?” asked Madame Dubarry.

The old duke colored, a rare thing for him; but replied, “Do you wish, gentlemen, to have my receipt?”

“Oh, by all means.”

“Well, then, it is simply to take care of yourself.”

“Oh, oh!” cried all.

“But, M. Cagliostro,” continued Madame Dubarry, “I must ask more about the elixir.”

“Well, madame?”

“You said you first used it at forty years of age——”

“Yes, madame.”



“And that since that time, that is, since the siege of Troy——”

“A little before, madame.”

“That you have always remained forty years old?”

“You see me now.”

“But then, sir,” said De Condorcet, “you argue, not only the perpetuation of youth, but the preservation of life; for if since the siege of Troy you have been always forty, you have never died.”

“True, marquis, I have never died.”

“But are you, then, invulnerable, like Achilles, or still more so, for Achilles was killed by the arrow of Paris?”

“No. I am not invulnerable, and there is my great regret,” said Cagliostro.

“Then, sir, you may be killed.”

“Alas! yes.”

“How, then, have you escaped all accidents for three thousand five hundred years?”

“It is chance, marquis, but will you follow my reasoning?”

“Yes, yes,” cried all, with eagerness.

Cagliostro continued: “What is the first requisite to life?” he asked, spreading out his white and beautiful hands covered with rings, among which Cleopatra’s shone conspicuously. “Is it not health!”

“Certainly.”

“And the way to preserve health is?”

“Proper management,” said Count Haga.

“Right, count. And why should not my elixir be the best possible method of treatment? And this treatment I have adopted, and with it have preserved my youth, and with youth, health, and life.”

“But all things exhaust themselves; the finest constitution, as well as the worst.”

“The body of Paris, like that of Vulcan,” said the countess. “Perhaps, you knew Paris, by the bye?”

“Perfectly, madame; he was a fine young man, but really did not deserve all that has been said of him. In the first place, he had red hair.”

“Red hair, horrible!”

“Unluckily, madame, Helen was not of your opinion: but to return to our subject. You say, M. de Taverney, that all things exhaust themselves; but you also know, that everything recovers again, regenerates, or is replaced, whichever you please to call it. The famous knife of St. Hubert, which so often changed both blade and handle, is an example, for through every change it still remained the knife of St. Hubert. The wines which the monks of Heidelberg preserve so carefully in their cellars, remain still the same wine, although each year they pour into it a fresh supply; therefore, this wine always remains clear, bright, and delicious: while the wine which Opimus and I hid in the earthen jars was, when I tried it a hundred years after, only a thick dirty substance, which might

have been eaten, but certainly could not have been drunk. Well, I follow the example of the monks of Heidelberg, and preserve my body by introducing into it every year new elements, which regenerate the old. Every morning a new and fresh atom replaces in my blood, my flesh, and my bones, some particle which has perished. I stay that ruin which most men allow insensibly to invade their whole being, and I force into action all those powers which God has given to every human being, but which most people allow to lie dormant. This is the great study of my life, and as, in all things, he who does one thing constantly does that thing better than others, I am becoming more skilful than others in avoiding danger. Thus, you would not get me to enter a tottering house; I have seen too many houses not to tell at a glance the safe from the unsafe. You would not see me go out hunting with a man who managed his gun badly. From Cephalus, who killed his wife, down to the regent, who shot the prince in the eye, I have seen too many unskilful people. You could not make me accept in battle the post which many a man would take without thinking, because I should calculate in a moment the chances of danger at each point. You will tell me that one cannot foresee a stray bullet; but the man who has escaped a thousand gun-shots will hardly fall a victim to one now. Ah, you look incredulous, but am I not a living proof? I do not tell you that I am immortal, only that I know better than others how to avoid danger; for instance, I would not remain here now alone with M. de Launay, who is thinking that, if he had me in the Bastille, he would put my immortality to the test of starvation; neither would I remain with M. de Condorcet, for he is thinking that he might just empty into my glass the contents of that ring which he wears on his left hand, and which is full of poison—not with any evil intent, but just as a scientific experiment, to see if I should die.”

The two people named looked at each other, and colored.

“Confess, M. de Launay, we are not in a court of justice; besides, thoughts are not punished. Did you not think what I said? And you, M. de Condorcet, would you not have liked to let me taste the poison in your ring, in the name of your beloved mistress, science?”

“Indeed,” said M. de Launay, laughing, “I confess you are right; it was folly, but that folly did pass through my mind just before you accused me.”

“And I,” said M. de Condorcet, “will not be less candid. I did think that if you tasted the contents of my ring, I would not give much for your life.”

A cry of admiration burst from the rest of the party; these avowals confirming not the immortality, but the penetration, of Count Cagliostro.

“You see,” said Cagliostro, quietly, “that I divined these dangers; well, it is the same with other things. The experience of a long life reveals to me at a glance much of the past and of the future of those whom I meet.

My capabilities in this way extend even to animals and inanimate objects. If I get into a carriage, I can tell from the look of the horses if they are likely to run away; and from that of the coachman, if he will overturn me. If I go on board ship, I can see if the captain is ignorant or obstinate, and consequently likely to endanger me. I should then leave the coachman or captain, escape from those horses or that ship. I do not deny chance, I only lessen it, and instead of incurring a hundred chances, like the rest of the world, I prevent ninety-nine of them, and endeavor to guard against the hundredth. This is the good of having lived three thousand years."

"Then," said La Pérouse, laughing, amidst the wonder and enthusiasm created by this speech of Cagliostro's, "you should come with me when I embark to make the tour of the world; you would render me a signal service."

Cagliostro did not reply.

"M. de Richelieu," continued La Pérouse, "as the Count Cagliostro, which is very intelligible, does not wish to quit such good company, you must permit me to do so without him. Excuse me, Count Haga, and you, madame, but it is seven o'clock, and I have promised his majesty to start at a quarter past. But since Count Cagliostro will not be tempted to come with me, and see my ships, perhaps he can tell me what will happen to me between Versailles and Brest. From Brest to the Pole I ask nothing; that is my own business."

Cagliostro looked at La Pérouse with such a melancholy air, so full both of pity and kindness, that the others were struck by it. The sailor himself, however, did not remark it. He took leave of the company, put on his fur riding coat, into one of the pockets of which Madame Dubarry pushed a bottle of delicious cordial, welcome to a traveler, but which he would not have provided for himself, to recall to him, she said, his absent friends during the long nights of a journey in such bitter cold.

La Pérouse, still full of gaiety, bowed respectfully to Count Haga, and held out his hand to the old marshal.

"Adieu, dear La Pérouse," said the latter.

"No, duke, au revoir," replied La Pérouse, "one would think I was going away forever; now I have but to circumnavigate the globe—five or six years' absence; it is scarcely worth while to say 'adieu' for that."

"Five or six years," said the marshal; "you might almost as well say five or six centuries; days are years at my age, therefore I say, adieu."

"Bah! ask the sorcerer," returned La Pérouse, still laughing; "he will promise you twenty years' more life. Will you not, Count Cagliostro? Oh, count, why did I not hear sooner of those precious drops of yours? Whatever the price, I should have shipped a tun. Madame, another kiss of that beautiful hand, I shall certainly not see such another till I return; au revoir," and he left the room.

Cagliostro still preserved the same mournful silence. They heard the steps of the captain as he left the house, his gay voice in the courtyard, and his farewells to the people assembled to see him depart. Then the horses shook their heads, covered with bells, the door of the carriage shut with some noise, and the wheels were heard rolling along the street.

La Pérouse had started on that voyage from which he was destined never to return.

When they could no longer hear a sound, all looks were again turned to Cagliostro; there seemed a kind of inspired light in his eyes.

Count Haga first broke the silence, which had lasted for some minutes. "Why did you not reply to his question?" he inquired of Cagliostro.

Cagliostro started, as if the question had roused him from a reverie. "Because," said he, "I must either have told a falsehood or a sad truth."

"How so?"

"I must have said to him,—'M. de la Pérouse, the duke is right in saying to you adieu, and not au revoir.'"

"Oh," said Richelieu, turning pale, "what do you mean?"

"Reassure yourself, marshal, this sad prediction does not concern you."

"What," cried Madame Dubarry, "this poor La Pérouse, who has just kissed my hand——"

"Not only, madame, will never kiss it again, but will never again see those he has just left," said Cagliostro, looking attentively at the glass of water he was holding up.

A cry of astonishment burst from all. The interest of the conversation deepened every moment, and you might have thought, from the solemn and anxious air with which all regarded Cagliostro, that it was some ancient and infallible oracle they were consulting.

"Pray then, count," said Madame Dubarry, "tell us what will befall poor La Pérouse."

Cagliostro shook his head.

"Oh, yes, let us hear!" cried all the rest.

"Well, then, M. de la Pérouse intends, as you know, to make the tour of the globe, and continue the researches of poor Captain Cook, who was killed in the Sandwich Islands."

"Yes, yes, we know."

"Everything should foretell a happy termination to this voyage; M. de la Pérouse is a good seaman, and his route has been most skilfully traced by the king."

"Yes," interrupted Count Haga, "the King of France is a clever geographer; is he not, M. de Condorcet?"

"More skilful than is needful for a king," replied the marquis; "kings ought to know things only slightly, then they will let themselves be guided by those who know them thoroughly."

“Is this a lesson, marquis?” said Count Haga, smiling.

“Oh, no. Only a simple reflection, a general truth.”

“Well, he is gone,” said Madame Dubarry, anxious to bring the conversation back to La Pérouse.

“Yes, he is gone,” replied Cagliostro, “but don’t believe, in spite of his haste, that he will soon embark. I foresee much time lost at Brest.”

“That would be a pity,” said De Condorcet; “this is the time to set out: it is even now rather late—February or March would have been better.”

“Oh, do not grudge him these few months, M. de Condorcet, for, during them, he will at least live and hope.”

“He has got good officers, I suppose?” said Richelieu.

“Yes, he who commands the second ship is a distinguished officer. I see him— young, adventurous, brave, unhappily.”

“Why unhappily?”

“A year after I look for him, and see him no more,” said Cagliostro, anxiously consulting his glass. “No one here is related to M. de Langle?”

“No.”

“No one knows him?”

“No.”

“Well, death will commence with him.”

A murmur of affright escaped from all the guests.

“But he, La Pérouse?” cried several voices.

“He sails, he lands, he reembarks; I see one, two years, of successful navigation; we hear news of him, and then——”

“Then?”

“Years pass——”

“But at last?”

“The sea is vast, the heavens are clouded, here and there appear unknown lands, and figures hideous as the monsters of the Grecian Archipelago. They watch the ship, which is being carried in a fog amongst the breakers, by a tempest less fearful than themselves. Oh! La Pérouse, La Pérouse, if you could hear me, I would cry to you. You set out, like Columbus, to discover a world; beware of unknown isles!”

He ceased, and an icy shiver ran through the assembly.

“But why did you not warn him?” asked Count Haga, who, in spite of himself, had succumbed to the influence of this extraordinary man.

“Yes,” cried Madame Dubarry, “why not send after him and bring him back? The life of a man like La Pérouse is surely worth a courier, my dear marshal.”

The marshal rose to ring the bell.

Cagliostro extended his arm to stop him. “Alas!” said he, “All advice would be useless. I can foretell destiny, but I cannot change it. M. de la Pérouse would laugh if he heard my words, as the son of Priam laughed when Cassandra prophesied; and see, you begin to laugh yourself, Count Haga, and laughing is contagious: your companions are catching it. Do

not restrain yourselves, gentlemen—I am accustomed to an incredulous audience.”

“Oh, we believe,” said Madame Dubarry and the Duke de Richelieu; “and I believe,” murmured Taverney; “and I also,” said Count Haga politely.

“Yes,” replied Cagliostro, “you believe, because it concerns La Pérouse; but, if I spoke of yourself, you would not believe.”

“I confess that what would have made me believe, would have been, if you had said to him, ‘Beware of unknown isles;’ then he would, at least, have had the chance of avoiding them.”

“I assure you no, count; and, if he had believed me, it would only have been more horrible, for the unfortunate man would have seen himself approaching those isles destined to be fatal to him, without the power to flee from them. Therefore he would have died, not one, but a hundred deaths, for he would have gone through it all by anticipation. Hope, of which I should have deprived him, is what best sustains a man under all trials.”

“Yes,” said De Condorcet; “the veil which hides from us our future is the only real good which God has vouchsafed to man.”

“Nevertheless,” said Count Haga, “did a man like you say to me, shun a certain man or a certain thing, I would beware, and I would thank you for the counsel.”

Cagliostro shook his head, with a faint smile.

“I mean it, M. de Cagliostro,” continued Count Haga; “warn me, and I will thank you.”

“You wish me to tell you what I would not tell La Pérouse?”

“Yes, I wish it.”

Cagliostro opened his mouth as if to begin, and then stopped, and said, “No, count, no!”

“I beg you.”

Cagliostro still remained silent.

“Take care,” said the count, “you are making me incredulous.”

“Incredulity is better than misery.”

“M. de Cagliostro,” said the count, gravely, “you forget one thing, which is, that though there are men who had better remain ignorant of their destiny, there are others who should know it, as it concerns not themselves alone, but millions of others.”

“Then,” said Cagliostro, “command me; if your majesty commands, I will obey.”

“I command you to reveal to me my destiny, M. de Cagliostro,” said the king, with an air at once courteous and dignified.

At this moment, as Count Haga had dropped his incognito in speaking to Cagliostro, M. de Richelieu advanced towards him, and said, “Thanks, sire, for the honor you have done my house; will your majesty assume the place of honor?”

“Let us remain as we are, marshal; I wish to hear what M. de Cagliostro is about to say.”

“One does not speak the truth to kings, sire.”

“Bah! I am not in my kingdom; take your place again, duke. Proceed, M. de Cagliostro, I beg.”

Cagliostro looked again through his glass, and one might have imagined the particles agitated by this look, as they danced in, the light. “Sire,” said he, “tell me what you wish to know?”

“Tell me by what death I shall die.”

“By a gun-shot, sire.”

The eyes of Gustavus grew bright. “Ah, in a battle!” said he; “the death of a soldier! Thanks, M. de Cagliostro, a thousand times thanks; oh, I foresee battles, and Gustavus Adolphus and Charles XII. have shown me how a King of Sweden should die.”

Cagliostro drooped his head, without replying.

“Oh!” cried Count Haga, “will not my wound then be given in battle?”

“No, sire.”

“In a sedition?—yes, that is possible.”

“No, not in a sedition, sire.”

“But, where then?”

“At a ball, sire.”

The king remained silent, and Cagliostro buried his head in his hands.

Every one looked pale and frightened; then M. de Condorcet took the glass of water and examined it, as if there he could solve the problem of all that had been going on; but finding nothing to satisfy him, “Well, I also,” said he, “will beg our illustrious prophet to consult for me his magic mirror: unfortunately, I am not a powerful lord; I cannot command, and my obscure life concerns no millions of people.”

“Sir,” said Count Haga, “you command in the name of science, and your life belongs not only to a nation, but to all mankind.”

“Thanks,” said De Condorcet; “but, perhaps, your opinion on this subject is not shared by M. de Cagliostro.”

Cagliostro raised his head. “Yes, marquis,” said he, in a manner which began to be excited, “you are indeed a powerful lord in the kingdom of intelligence; look me, then, in the face, and tell me, seriously, if you also wish that I should prophesy to you.”

“Seriously, count, upon my honor.”

“Well, marquis,” said Cagliostro, in a hoarse voice, “you will die of that poison which you carry in your ring; you will die——”

“Oh, but if I throw it away?”

“Throw it away!”

“You allow that that would be easy.”

“Throw it away!”

“Oh, yes, marquis,” cried Madame Dubarry; “throw away that horrid poison! Throw it away, if it be only to falsify this prophet of evil, who threatens us all with so many misfortunes. For if you throw it away you cannot die by it, as M. de Cagliostro predicts; so there at least he will have been wrong.”

“Madame la Comtesse is right,” said Count Haga.

“Bravo, countess!” said Richelieu. “Come, marquis, throw away that poison, for now I know you carry it, I shall tremble every time we drink together; the ring might open of itself, and——”

“It is useless,” said Cagliostro quietly; “M. de Condorcet will not throw it away.”

“No,” returned De Condorcet, “I shall not throw it away; not that I wish to aid my destiny, but because this is a unique poison, prepared by Cabanis, and which chance has completely hardened, and that chance might never occur again; therefore I will not throw it away. Triumph if you will, M. de Cagliostro.”

“Destiny,” replied he, “ever finds some way to work out its own ends.”

“Then I shall die by poison,” said the marquis; “well, so be it. It is an admirable death, I think; a little poison on the tip of the tongue, and I am gone. It is scarcely dying; it is merely ceasing to live.”

“It is not necessary for you to suffer, sir,” said Cagliostro.

“Then, sir,” said M. de Favras, “we have a shipwreck, a gun-shot, and a poisoning which makes my mouth water. Will you not do me the favor also to predict some little pleasure of the same kind for me?”

“Oh, marquis!” replied Cagliostro, beginning to grow warm under this irony, “do not envy these gentlemen, you will have still better.”

“Better!” said M. de Favras, laughing; “that is pledging yourself to a great deal. It is difficult to beat the sea, fire, and poison!”

“There remains the cord, marquis,” said Cagliostro, bowing.

“The cord! what do you mean?”

“I mean that you will be hanged,” replied Cagliostro, seeming no more the master of his prophetic rage.

“Hanged! the devil!” cried Richelieu.

“Monsieur forgets that I am a nobleman,” said M. de Favras, coldly; “or if he means to speak of a suicide, I warn him that I shall respect myself sufficiently, even in my last moments, not to use a cord while I have a sword.”

“I do not speak of a suicide, sir.”

“Then you speak of a punishment?”

“Yes.”

“You are a foreigner, sir, and therefore I pardon you.”

“What?”

“Your ignorance, sir. In France we decapitate noblemen.”

“You may arrange this, if you can, with the executioner,” replied Cagliostro.



M. de Favras said no more. There was a general silence and shrinking for a few minutes.

“Do you know that I tremble at last,” said M. de Launay; “my predecessors have come off so badly, that I fear for myself if I now take my turn.”

“Then you are more reasonable than they; you are right. Do not seek to know the future; good or bad, let it rest—it is in the hands of God.”

“Oh! M. de Launay,” said Madame Dubarry, “I hope you will not be less courageous than the others have been.”

“I hope so, too, madame,” said the governor. Then, turning to Cagliostro, “Sir,” he said, “favor me, in my turn, with my horoscope, if you please.”

“It is easy,” replied Cagliostro; “a blow on the head with a hatchet, and all will be over.”

A look of dismay was once more general. Richelieu and Taverney begged Cagliostro to say no more, but female curiosity carried the day.

“To hear you talk, count,” said Madame Dubarry, “one would think the whole universe must die a violent death. Here we were, eight of us, and five are already condemned by you.”

“Oh, you understand that it is all prearranged to frighten us, and we shall only laugh at it,” said M. de Favras, trying to do so.

“Certainly we will laugh,” said Count Haga, “be it true or false.”

“Oh, I will laugh too, then,” said Madame Dubarry. “I will not dishonor the assembly by my cowardice; but, alas! I am only a woman, I cannot rank among you and be worthy of a tragical end; a woman dies in her bed. My death, a sorrowful old woman abandoned by every one, will be the worst of all. Will it not, M. de Cagliostro?”

She stopped, and seemed to wait for the prophet to reassure her. Cagliostro did not speak; so, her curiosity obtaining the mastery over her fears, she went on. “Well, M. de Cagliostro, will you not answer me?”

“What do you wish me to say, madame?”

She hesitated—then, rallying her courage, “Yes,” she cried, “I will run the risk. Tell me the fate of Jeanne de Vaubernier, Countess Dubarry.”

“On the scaffold, madame,” replied the prophet of evil.

“A jest, sir, is it not?” said she, looking at him with a supplicating air.

Cagliostro seemed not to see it. “Why do you think I jest?” said he.

“Oh, because to die on the scaffold one must have committed some crime—stolen, or committed murder, or done something dreadful; and it is not likely I shall do that. It was a jest, was it not?”

“Oh, mon Dieu, yes,” said Cagliostro; “all I have said is but a jest.”

The countess laughed, but scarcely in a natural manner. “Come, M. de Favras,” said she, “let us order our funerals.”

“Oh, that will be needless for you, madame,” said Cagliostro.

“Why so, sir?”

“Because you will go to the scaffold in a car.”

“Oh, how horrible! This dreadful man, marshal! for heaven’s sake choose more cheerful guests next time, or I will never visit you again.”

“Excuse me, madame,” said Cagliostro, “but you, like all the rest, would have me speak.”

“At least I hope you will grant me time to choose my confessor.”

“It will be superfluous, countess.”

“Why?”

“The last person who will mount the scaffold in France with a confessor will be the King of France.” And Cagliostro pronounced these words in so thrilling a voice that every one was struck with horror.

All were silent.

Cagliostro raised to his lips the glass of water in which he had read these fearful prophecies, but scarcely had he touched it, when he set it down with a movement of disgust. He turned his eyes to M. de Taverney.

“Oh,” cried he, in terror, “do not tell me anything; I do not wish to know!”

“Well, then, I will ask instead of him,” said Richelieu.

“You, marshal, be happy; you are the only one of us all who will die in his bed.”

“Coffee, gentlemen, coffee,” cried the marshal, enchanted with the prediction. Every one rose.

But before passing into the drawing-room, Count Haga, approaching Cagliostro, said,—

“Tell me what to beware of.”

“Of a muff, sir,” replied Cagliostro.

“And I?” said Condorcet.

“Of an omelet.”

“Good; I renounce eggs,” and he left the room.

“And I?” said M. de Favras; “what must I fear?”

“A letter.”

“And I?” said De Launay.

“The taking of the Bastile.”

“Oh, you quite reassure me.” And he went away laughing.

“Now for me, sir,” said the countess, trembling.

“You, beautiful countess, shun the Place Louis XV.”

“Alas,” said the countess, “one day already I lost myself there; that day I suffered much.”

She left the room, and Cagliostro was about to follow her when Richelieu stopped him.

“One moment,” said he; “there remains only Taverney and I, my dear sorcerer.”

“M. de Taverney begged me to say nothing, and you, marshal, have asked me nothing.”

“Oh, I do not wish to hear,” again cried Taverney.

“But come, to prove your power, tell us something that only Taverney and I know,” said Richelieu.

“What?” asked Cagliostro, smiling.

“Tell us what makes Taverney come to Versailles, instead of living quietly in his beautiful house at Maison-Rouge, which the king bought for him three years ago.”

“Nothing more simple, marshal,” said Cagliostro. “Ten years ago, M. de Taverney wished to give his daughter, Mademoiselle Andrée, to the King Louis XV., but he did not succeed.”

“Oh!” growled Taverney.

“Now, monsieur wishes to give his son Philippe de Taverney, to the Queen Marie Antoinette; ask him if I speak the truth.”

“On my word,” said Taverney, trembling, “this man is a sorcerer; devil take me if he is not!”

“Do not speak so cavalierly of the devil, my old comrade,” said the marshal.

“It is frightful,” murmured Taverney, and he turned to implore Cagliostro to be discreet, but he was gone.

“Come, Taverney, to the drawing-room,” said the marshal; “or they will drink their coffee without us.”

But when they arrived there, the room was empty; no one had courage to face again the author of these terrible predictions.

The wax lights burned in the candelabra, the fire burned on the hearth, but all for nothing.

“Ma foi, old friend, it seems we must take our coffee tête-à-tête. Why, where the devil has he gone?” Richelieu looked all around him, but Taverney had vanished like the rest. “Never mind,” said the marshal, chuckling as Voltaire might have done, and rubbing his withered though still white hands; “I shall be the only one to die in my bed. Well, Count Cagliostro, at least I believe. In my bed! that was it; I shall die in my bed, and I trust not for a long time. Hola! my valet-de-chambre and my drops.”

The valet entered with the bottle, and the marshal went with him into the bedroom.

END OF THE PROLOGUE.

## CHAPTER I.

### TWO UNKNOWN LADIES.

The winter of 1784, that monster which devoured half France, we could not see, although he growled at the doors, while at the house of M. de Richelieu, shut in as we were in that warm and comfortable dining-room.

A little frost on the windows seems but the luxury of nature added to that of man. Winter has its diamonds, its powder, and its silvery embroidery for the rich man wrapped in his furs, and packed in his carriage, or snug among the wadding and velvet of a well-warmed room. Hoar-frost is a beauty, ice a change of decoration by the greatest of artists, which the rich admire through their windows. He who is warm can admire the withered trees, and find a somber charm in the sight of the snow-covered plain. He who, after a day without suffering, when millions of his fellow-creatures are enduring dreadful privations, throws himself on his bed of down, between his fine and well-aired sheets, may find out that all is for the best in this best of all possible worlds.

But he who is hungry sees none of these beauties of nature; he who is cold hates the sky without a sun, and consequently without a smile for such unfortunates. Now, at the time at which we write, that is, about the middle of the month of April, three hundred thousand miserable beings, dying from cold and hunger, groaned in Paris alone—in that Paris where, in spite of the boast that scarcely another city contained so many rich people, nothing had been prepared to prevent the poor from perishing of cold and wretchedness.

For the last four months, the same leaden sky had driven the poor from the villages into the town, as it sent the wolves from the woods into the villages.

No more bread. No more wood.

No more bread for those who felt this cold—no more wood to cook it. All the provisions which had been collected, Paris had devoured in a month. The Provost, short-sighted and incapable, did not know how to procure for Paris, which was under his care, the wood which might have been collected in the neighborhood. When it froze, he said the frost prevented the horses from bringing it; if it thawed, he pleaded want of horses and conveyances. Louis XVI., ever good and humane, always ready to attend to the physical wants of his people, although he overlooked their social ones, began by contributing a sum of 200,000 francs for horses and carts, and insisting on their immediate use. Still the demand continued greater than the supply. At first no one was

allowed to carry away from the public timber-yard more than a cart-load of wood; then they were limited to half this quantity. Soon the long strings of people might be seen waiting outside the doors, as they were afterwards seen at the bakers' shops. The king gave away the whole of his private income in charity. He procured 3,000,000 francs by a grant and applied it to the relief of the sufferers, declaring that every other need must give way before that of cold and famine. The queen, on her part, gave 500 louis from her purse. The convents, the hospitals, and the public buildings were thrown open as places of asylum for the poor, who came in crowds for the sake of the fires that were kept there. They kept hoping for a thaw, but heaven seemed inflexible. Every evening the same copper-colored sky disappointed their hopes; and the stars shone bright and clear as funeral torches through the long, cold nights, which hardened again and again the snow which fell during the day. All day long, thousands of workmen, with spades and shovels, cleared away the snow from before the houses; so that on each side of the streets, already too narrow for the traffic, rose a high, thick wall, blocking up the way. Soon these masses of snow and ice became so large that the shops were obscured by them, and they were obliged to allow it to remain where it fell. Paris could do no more. She gave in, and allowed the winter to do its worst. December, January, February, and March passed thus, although now and then a few days' thaw changed the streets, whose sewers were blocked up, into running streams. Horses were drowned, and carriages destroyed, in the streets, some of which could only be traversed in boats. Paris, faithful to its character, sang through this destruction by the thaw as it had done through that by famine. Processions were made to the markets to see the fisherwomen serving their customers with immense leathern boots on, inside which their trousers were pushed, and with their petticoats tucked round their waists, all laughing, gesticulating, and splashing each other as they stood in the water. These thaws, however, were but transitory; the frost returned, harder and more obstinate than ever, and recourse was had to sledges, pushed along by skaters, or drawn by roughshod horses along the causeways, which were like polished mirrors. The Seine, frozen many feet deep, was become the rendezvous for all idlers, who assembled there to skate or slide, until, warmed by exercise, they ran to the nearest fire, lest the perspiration should freeze upon them. All trembled for the time when, the water communications being stopped, and the roads impassable, provisions could no longer be sent in, and began to fear that Paris would perish from want. The king, in this extremity, called a council. They decided to implore all bishops, abbés, and monks to leave Paris and retire to their dioceses or convents; and all those magistrates and officials who, preferring the opera to their duties, had crowded to Paris, to return to their homes; for all these people used large quantities of wood in their hotels, and consumed no small amount of food. There

were still the country gentlemen, who were also to be entreated to leave. But M. Lenoir, lieutenant of police, observed to the king that, as none of these people were criminals, and could not therefore be compelled to leave Paris in a day, they would probably be so long thinking about it, that the thaw would come before their departure, which would then be more hurtful than useful. All this care and pity of the king and queen, however, excited the ingenious gratitude of the people, who raised monuments to them, as ephemeral as the feelings which prompted them. Obelisks and pillars of snow and ice, engraved with their names, were to be seen all over Paris. At the end of March the thaw began, but by fits and starts, constant returns of frost prolonging the miseries of the people. Indeed, in the beginning of April it appeared to set in harder than ever, and the half-thawed streets, frozen again, became so slippery and dangerous, that nothing was seen but broken limbs and accidents of all kinds. The snow prevented the carriages from being heard, and the police had enough to do, from the reckless driving of the aristocracy, to preserve from the wheels those who were spared by cold and hunger.

It was about a week after the dinner given by M. de Richelieu that four elegant sledges entered Paris, gliding over the frozen snow which covered the Cours la Reine and the extremity of the boulevards. From thence they found it more difficult to proceed, for the sun and the traffic had begun to change the snow and ice into a wet mass of dirt.

In the foremost sledge were two men in brown riding coats with double capes. They were drawn by a black horse, and turned from time to time, as if to watch the sledge that followed them, and which contained two ladies so enveloped in furs that it was impossible to see their faces. It might even have been difficult to distinguish their sex, had it not been for the height of their coiffure, crowning which was a small hat with a plume of feathers. From the colossal edifice of this coiffure, all mingled with ribbons and jewels, escaped occasionally a cloud of white powder, as when a gust of wind shakes the snow from the trees.

These two ladies, seated side by side, were conversing so earnestly as scarcely to see the numerous spectators who watched their progress along the boulevards. One of them taller and more majestic than the other, and holding up before her face a finely-embroidered cambric handkerchief, carried her head erect and stately, in spite of the wind which swept across their sledge.

It had just struck five by the clock of the church St. Croix d'Antin and night was beginning to descend upon Paris, and with the night the bitter cold. They had just reached the Porte St. Denis, when the lady of whom we have spoken made a sign to the men in front, who thereupon quickened the pace of their horse, and soon disappeared among the evening mists, which were fast thickening around the colossal structure of the Bastille.