VICTOR HUGO

BUG-JARGAL

ENGLISH

Bug-Jargal

VICTOR HUGO

Bug-Jargal, V. Hugo
Jazzybee Verlag Jürgen Beck
86450 Altenmünster, Loschberg 9
Deutschland

ISBN: 9783849651435

English translation by Sir Gilbert Campbell (1838 – 1899)

Cover Design: based on an artwork by Ablakok - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=41579854

www.jazzybee-verlag.de
admin@jazzybee-verlag.de

CONTENTS:

PROLOGUE.

When it came to the turn of Captain Leopold d’Auverney, he gazed around him with surprise, and hurriedly assured his comrades that he did not remember any incident in his life that was worthy of repetition.

“But, Captain d’Auverney,” objected Lieutenant Henri, “you have—at least report says so—travelled much, and seen a good deal of the world; have you not been to the Antilles, to Africa, and to Italy? and above all, you have been in Spain——But see, here is your lame dog come back again!”

D’Auverney started, let fall the cigar that he was smoking, and turned quickly to the tent door, at which an enormous dog appeared, limping towards him.

In another instant the dog was licking his feet, wagging his tail, whining, and gamboling as well as he was able; and by every means testifying his delight at finding his master. And at last, as if he felt that he had done all that could be required of a dog, he curled himself up peaceably before his master’s seat.

Captain d’Auverney was much moved, but he strove to conceal his feelings, and mechanically caressed the dog with one hand, whilst with the other he played with the chin-strap of his shako, murmuring from time to time, “So here you are once again, Rask, here you are.” Then, as if suddenly recollecting himself, he exclaimed aloud, “But who has brought him back?”

“By your leave, captain——”

For the last few seconds Sergeant Thaddeus had been standing at the door of the tent, the curtain of which he was holding back with his left hand, whilst his right was thrust into the bosom of his great-coat. Tears were in his eyes as he contemplated the meeting of the dog and his

master, and at last, unable to keep silence any longer, he risked the words—

“By your leave, captain——”

D’Auverney raised his eyes.

“Why, it is you, Thaddeus; and how the deuce have you been able—eh? Poor dog, poor Rask, I thought that you were in the English camp. Where did you find him, sergeant?”

“Thanks be to heaven, captain, you see me as happy as your little nephew used to be when you let him off his Latin lesson.”

“But tell me, where did you find him?”

“I did not find him, captain; I went to look for him.”

Captain d’Auverney rose, and offered his hand to the sergeant, but the latter still kept his in the bosom of his coat.

“Well, you see, it was—at least, captain, since poor Rask was lost, I noticed that you were like a man beside himself; so when I saw that he did not come to me in the evening, according to his custom, for his share of my ration bread—which made old Thaddeus weep like a child, I, who before that had only wept twice in my life, the first time when—yes, the day when——” and the sergeant cast a sad look upon his captain. “Well, the second was when that scamp Balthazar, the corporal of the 7th half brigade, persuaded me to peel a bunch of onions.”

“It seems to me, Thaddeus,” cried Henri, with a laugh, “that you avoid telling us what was the first occasion upon which you shed tears.”

“It was doubtless, old comrade,” said the captain kindly, as he patted Rask’s head, “when you answered the roll-call as Tour d’Auvergne, the first grenadier of France.”

“No, no, captain; if Sergeant Thaddeus wept, it was when he gave the order to fire on Bug-Jargal, otherwise called Pierrot.”

A cloud gathered on the countenance of D’Auverney, then he again endeavoured to clasp the sergeant’s hand; but in spite of the honour that was attempted to be conferred on him, the old man still kept his hand hidden under his coat.

“Yes, captain,” continued Thaddeus, drawing back a step or two, whilst D’Auverney fixed his eyes upon him with a strange and sorrowful expression. “Yes, I wept for him that day, and he well deserved it. He was black, it is true, but gunpowder is black also, and—and——”

The good sergeant would fain have followed out his strange comparison, for there was evidently something in the idea that pleased him; but he utterly failed to put his thoughts into words, and after having attacked his idea on every side, as a general would a fortified place, and failed, he raised the siege, and without noticing the smiles of his officers, he continued:

“Tell me, captain, do you recollect how that poor negro arrived all out of breath, at the moment that his ten comrades were waiting on the spot?—we had had to tie them though. It was I who commanded the party; and when with his own hands he untied them, and took their place, although they did all that they could to dissuade him; but he was inflexible. Ah, what a man he was; you might as well have tried to move Gibraltar! And then, captain, he drew himself up as if he were going to enter a ballroom, and this dog, who knew well enough what was coming, flew at my throat——”

“Generally, Thaddeus, at this point of your story, you pat Rask,” interrupted the captain; “see how he looks at you.”

“You are right, sir,” replied Thaddeus, with an air of embarrassment; “he does look at me, poor fellow—but the old woman Malajuda told me it was unlucky to pat a dog with the left hand, and——”

“And why not with your right, pray?” asked D’Auverney, for the first time noticing the sergeant’s pallor, and the hand reposing in his bosom.

The sergeant’s discomfort appeared to increase.

“By your leave, captain, it is because—well, you have got a lame dog, and now there is a chance of your having a one-handed sergeant.”

“A one-handed sergeant! What do you mean? Let me see your arm. One hand! Great heavens!”

D’Auverney trembled, as the sergeant slowly withdrew his hand from his bosom, and showed it enveloped in a blood-stained handkerchief.

“This is terrible,” exclaimed D’Auverney, carefully undoing the bandage. “But tell me, old comrade, how this happened.”

“As for that, the thing is simple enough. I told you how I had noticed your grief since those confounded English had taken away your dog, poor Rask, Bug’s dog. I made up my mind to-day to bring him back, even if it cost me my life, so that you might eat a good supper. After having told Mathelet, your bât man, to get out and brush your full-dress uniform, as we are to go into action to-morrow, I crept quietly out of camp, armed only with my sabre, and crouched under the hedges until I neared the English camp. I had not passed the first trench, when I saw a whole crowd of red soldiers. I crept on quietly to see what they were doing, and in the midst of them I perceived Rask tied to a tree; whilst two of the milords, stripped to here, were knocking each other about with their fists, until their bones sounded like the big drum of the regiment. They were fighting for your dog. But when Rask caught sight of me, he gave such a bound, that the rope broke, and in the twinkling of an eye the rogue was after me. I did not stop to explain, but off I ran, with all the English at my heels. A regular hail of balls whistled past my ears. Rask barked, but they could not hear him for their shouts of ‘French dog! French dog!’ just as if Rask was not of the pure St. Domingo breed. In spite of all I crushed through the thicket, and had almost got clean away, when two red coats

confronted me. My sabre accounted for one, and would have rid me of the other, had his pistol not unluckily had a bullet in it. My right arm suffered; but ‘French dog’ leapt at his throat, as if he were an old acquaintance. Down fell the Englishman, for the embrace was so tight that he was strangled in a moment—and here we both are. My only regret is that I did not get my wound in to-morrow’s battle.”

“Thaddeus, Thaddeus!” exclaimed the captain in tones of reproach; “were you mad enough to expose your life thus for a dog?”

“It was not for a dog, it was for Rask.”

D’Auverney’s face softened as Thaddeus added—“For Rask, for Bug’s dog.”

“Enough, enough, old comrade!” cried the captain, dashing his hand across his eyes; “come, lean on me, and I will lead you to the hospital.”

Thaddeus essayed to decline the honour, but in vain; and as they left the tent the dog got up and followed them.

This little drama had excited the curiosity of the spectators to the highest degree. Captain Leopold d’Auverney was one of those men who, in whatever position the chances of nature and society may place them, always inspire a mingled feeling of interest and respect. At the first glimpse there was nothing striking in him—his manner was reserved, and his look cold. The tropical sun, though it had browned his cheek, had not imparted to him that vivacity of speech and gesture which amongst the Creoles is united to an easy carelessness of demeanour, in itself full of charm.

D’Auverney spoke little, listened less, but showed himself ready to act at any moment. Always the first in the saddle, and the last to return to camp, he seemed to seek a refuge from his thoughts in bodily fatigue. These thoughts, which had marked his brow with many a premature wrinkle, were not of the kind that you can get rid of by confiding them to

a friend; nor could they be discussed in idle conversation. Leopold d’Auverney, whose body the hardships of war could not subdue, seemed to experience a sense of insurmountable fatigue in what is termed the conflict of the feelings. He avoided argument as much as he sought warfare. If at any time he allowed himself to be drawn into a discussion, he would utter a few words full of common sense and reason, and then at the moment of triumph over his antagonist he would stop short, and muttering “What good is it?” would saunter off to the commanding officer to glean what information he could regarding the enemy’s movements.

His comrades forgave his cold, reserved, and silent habits, because upon every occasion they had found him kind, gentle, and benevolent. He had saved many a life at the risk of his own, and they well knew that though his mouth was rarely opened, yet his purse was never closed when a comrade had need of his assistance.

He was young; many would have guessed him at thirty years of age, but they would have been wrong, for he was some years under it. Although he had for a long period fought in the ranks of the Republican army, yet all were in ignorance of his former life. The only one to whom he seemed ever to open his heart was Sergeant Thaddeus, who had joined the regiment with him, and would at times speak vaguely of sad events in his early life. It was known that D’Auverney had undergone great misfortunes in America, that he had been married in St. Domingo, and that his wife and all his family had perished in those terrible massacres which had marked the Republican invasion of that magnificent colony. At the time of which we write, misfortunes of this kind were so general, that any one could sympathize with, and feel pity for, such sufferers.

D’Auverney, therefore, was pitied less for his misfortunes than for the manner in which they had been brought about.

Beneath his icy mask of indifference the traces of the incurably wounded spirit could be at times perceived.

When he went into action his calmness returned, and in the fight he behaved as if he sought for the rank of general; whilst after victory he was as gentle and unassuming as if the position of a private soldier would have satisfied his ambition. His comrades, seeing him thus despise honour and promotion, could not understand what it was that lighted up his countenance with a ray of hope when the action commenced, and they did not for a moment divine that the prize D'Auverney was striving to gain was simply—Death.

The Representatives of the People, in one of their missions to the army, had appointed him a Chief of Brigade on the field of battle; but he had declined the honour upon learning that it would remove him from his old comrade Sergeant Thaddeus.

Some days afterwards, having returned from a dangerous expedition safe and sound, contrary to the general expectation and his own hopes, he was heard to regret the rank that he had refused.

"For," said he, "since the enemy's guns always spare me, perhaps the guillotine, which ever strikes down those it has raised, would in time have claimed me."

Such was the character of the man upon whom the conversation turned as soon as he had left the tent.

"I would wager," cried Lieutenant Henri, wiping a splash of mud off his boot which the dog had left as he passed him, "I would wager that the captain would not exchange the broken paw of his dog for the ten baskets of Madeira that we caught a glimpse of in the general's waggon."

"Bah!" cried Paschal, the aide-de-camp, "that would be a bad bargain: the baskets are empty by now, and thirty empty bottles would be a poor price for a dog's paw—why, you might make a good bell-handle out of it."

They all laughed at the grave manner in which Paschal pronounced these words, with the exception of a young officer of Hussars named Alfred, who remarked—

“I do not see any subject for chaff in this matter, gentlemen. This sergeant and dog, who are always at D’Auverney’s heels ever since I have known him, seem to me more the objects of sympathy than raillery, and interest me greatly.”

Paschal, annoyed that his wit had missed fire, interrupted him. “It certainly is a most sentimental scene—a lost dog found, and a broken arm——”

“Captain Paschal,” said Henri, throwing an empty bottle outside the tent, “you are wrong; this Bug, otherwise called Pierrot, excites my curiosity greatly.”

At this moment D’Auverney returned, and sat down without uttering a word. His manner was still sad, but his face was more calm; he seemed not to have heard what was said. Rask, who had followed him, lay down at his feet, but kept a watchful eye on his master’s comrades.

“Pass your glass, Captain d’Auverney, and taste this.”

“Oh, thank you,” replied the captain, evidently imagining that he was answering a question, “the wound is not dangerous—there is no bone broken.”

The respect which all felt for D’Auverney prevented a burst of laughter at this reply.

“Since your mind is at rest regarding Thaddeus’ wound,” said Henri, “and, as you may remember, we entered into an agreement to pass away the hours of bivouac by relating to each other our adventures, will you carry out your promise by telling us the history of your lame dog, and of Bug—otherwise called Pierrot, that regular Gibraltar of a man?”

To this request, which was put in a semi-jocular tone, D’Auverney at last yielded.

“I will do what you ask, gentlemen,” said he; “but you must only expect a very simple tale, in which I play an extremely second rate part. If the affection that exists

between Thaddeus, Rask, and myself leads you to expect anything very wonderful, I fear that you will be greatly disappointed. However, I will begin.”

For a moment D’Auverney relapsed into thought, as though he wished to recall past events which had long since been replaced in his memory by the acts of his later years; but at last, in a low voice and with frequent pauses, he began his tale.

CHAPTER I.

“I was born in France, but at an early age I was sent to St. Domingo, to the care of an uncle to whose daughter it had been arranged between our parents that I was to be married. My uncle was one of the wealthiest colonists, and possessed a magnificent house and extensive plantations in the Plains of Acul, near Fort Galifet.

“The position of the estate, which no doubt you wonder at my describing so minutely, was one of the causes of all our disasters, and the eventual total ruin of our whole family.

“Eight hundred negro slaves cultivated the enormous domains of my uncle. Sad as the position of a slave is, my uncle’s hardness of heart added much to the unhappiness of those who had the misfortune to be his property.

“My uncle was one of the happily small number of planters from whom despotic power had taken away the gentler feelings of humanity. He was accustomed to see his most trifling command unhesitatingly obeyed, and the slightest delay on the part of his slaves in carrying it out was punished with the harshest severity; whilst the intercession either of my cousin or of myself too often merely led to an increase of the punishment, and we were only too often obliged to rest satisfied by secretly assuaging the injuries which we were powerless to prevent.

“Amongst the multitude of his slaves, one only had found favour in my uncle’s sight; this was a half-caste Spanish dwarf, who had been given him by Lord Effingham, the Governor of Jamaica.

“My uncle, who had for many years resided in Brazil, and had adopted the luxurious habits of the Portuguese, loved to surround himself with an establishment that was in

keeping with his wealth. In order that nothing should be wanting, he had made the slave presented to him by Lord Effingham his fool, in imitation of the feudal lords who had jesters attached to their households. I must say that the slave amply fulfilled all the required conditions. Habibrah, for that was the half-caste's name, was one of those strangely-formed, or, rather, deformed beings, who would be looked upon as monsters if their very hideousness did not cause a laugh. This ill-featured dwarf was short and fat, and moved with wondrous activity upon a pair of slender limbs, which, when he sat down, bent under him like the legs of a spider. His enormous head, covered with a mass of red curly wool, was stuck between his shoulders, whilst his ears were so large that Habibrah's comrades were in the habit of saying that he used them to wipe his eyes when he wept. On his face there was always a grin, which was continually changing its character, and which caused his ugliness to be of an ever-varying description. My uncle was fond of him, because of his extreme hideousness and his inextinguishable gaiety. Habibrah was his only favourite, and led a life of ease, whilst the other slaves were overwhelmed with work. The sole duties of the jester were to carry a large fan, made of the feathers of the bird of paradise, to keep away the sandflies and the mosquitoes from his master. At meal-times he sat upon a reed mat at his master's feet, who fed him with tit-bits from his own plate. Habibrah appeared to appreciate all these acts of kindness, and at the slightest sign from my uncle he would run to him with the agility of a monkey and the docility of a dog.

"I had imbibed a prejudice against my uncle's favourite slave. There was something crawling in his servility, and though outdoor slavery does not dishonour, domestic service too often debases. I felt a sentiment of pity for those slaves who toiled in the scorching sun, with scarcely a vestige of clothing to hide their chains; but I despised this