

illeforts promise; and, besides, death in a boat from the hand of a gendarme seemed too terrible. He remained motionless, but gnashing his teeth and wringing his hands with fury.

At this moment the boat came to a landing with a violent shock. One of the sailors leaped on shore, a cord creaked as it ran through a pulley, and Dant s guessed they were at the end of the voyage, and that they were mooring the boat.

His guards, taking him by the arms and coat-collar, forced him to rise, and dragged him towards the steps that lead to the gate of the fortress, while the police officer carrying a musket with fixed bayonet followed behind.

Dant s made no resistance; he was like a man in a dream; he saw soldiers drawn up on the embankment; he knew vaguely that he was ascending a flight of steps; he was conscious that he passed through a door, and that the door closed behind him; but all this indistinctly as through a mist. He did not even see the ocean, that terrible barrier against freedom, which the prisoners look upon with utter despair.

They halted for a minute, during which he strove to collect his thoughts. He looked around; he was in a court surrounded by high walls; he heard the measured tread of sentinels, and as they passed before the light he saw the barrels of their muskets shine.

They waited upwards of ten minutes. Certain Dant s could not escape, the gendarmes released him. They seemed awaiting orders. The orders came.

Where is the prisoner? said a voice.

Here, replied the gendarmes.

Let him follow me; I will take him to his cell.

Go! said the gendarmes, thrusting Dant s forward.

The prisoner followed his guide, who led him into a room almost under ground, whose bare and reeking walls seemed as though impregnated with tears; a lamp placed on a stool illumined the apartment faintly, and showed Dant s the features of his conductor, an under-jailer, ill-clothed, and of sullen appearance.

0113m

Here is your chamber for tonight, said he. It is late, and the governor is asleep. Tomorrow, perhaps, he may change you. In the meantime there is bread, water, and fresh straw; and that is all a prisoner can wish for. Goodnight. And before Dant s could open his mouth"before he had noticed where the jailer placed his bread or the water"before he had glanced towards the corner where the straw was, the jailer disappeared, taking with him the lamp and closing the door, leaving stamped upon the prisoners mind the dim reflection of the dripping walls of his dungeon.

Dant s was alone in darkness and in silence"cold as the shadows that he felt breathe on his burning forehead. With the first dawn of day the jailer returned, with orders to leave Dant s where he was. He found the prisoner in the same position, as if fixed there, his eyes swollen with weeping. He had passed the night standing, and without sleep. The jailer advanced; Dant s appeared not to perceive him. He touched him on the shoulder. Edmond started.

Have you not slept? said the jailer.

I do not know, replied Dant s. The jailer stared.

Are you hungry? continued he.

I do not know.

Do you wish for anything?

I wish to see the governor.

The jailer shrugged his shoulders and left the chamber.

Dant s followed him with his eyes, and stretched forth his hands towards the open door; but the door closed. All his emotion then burst forth; he cast himself on the ground, weeping bitterly, and asking himself what crime he had committed that he was thus punished.

The day passed thus; he scarcely tasted food, but walked round and round the cell like a wild beast in its cage. One thought in particular

tormented him: namely, that during his journey hither he had sat so still, whereas he might, a dozen times, have plunged into the sea, and, thanks to his powers of swimming, for which he was famous, have gained the shore, concealed himself until the arrival of a Genoese or Spanish vessel, escaped to Spain or Italy, where MercÃ©dÃ©s and his father could have joined him. He had no fears as to how he should live"good seamen are welcome everywhere. He spoke Italian like a Tuscan, and Spanish like a Castilian; he would have been free, and happy with MercÃ©dÃ©s and his father, whereas he was now confined in the ChÃ¢teau d'If, that impregnable fortress, ignorant of the future destiny of his father and MercÃ©dÃ©s; and all this because he had trusted to Villefort's promise. The thought was maddening, and DantÃ©s threw himself furiously down on his straw. The next morning at the same hour, the jailer came again. Well, said the jailer, are you more reasonable today? DantÃ©s made no reply.

Come, cheer up; is there anything that I can do for you?

I wish to see the governor.

I have already told you it was impossible.

Why so?

Because it is against prison rules, and prisoners must not even ask for it.

What is allowed, then?

Better fare, if you pay for it, books, and leave to walk about.

I do not want books, I am satisfied with my food, and do not care to walk about; but I wish to see the governor.

If you worry me by repeating the same thing, I will not bring you any more to eat.

Well, then, said Edmond, if you do not, I shall die of hunger"that is all.

The jailer saw by his tone he would be happy to die; and as every prisoner is worth ten sous a day to his jailer, he replied in a more subdued tone.

What you ask is impossible; but if you are very well behaved you will be allowed to walk about, and some day you will meet the governor, and if he chooses to reply, that is his affair.

But, asked DantÃ©s, how long shall I have to wait?

Ah, a month"six months"a year.

It is too long a time. I wish to see him at once.

Ah, said the jailer, do not always brood over what is impossible, or you will be mad in a fortnight.

You think so?

Yes; we have an instance here; it was by always offering a million of francs to the governor for his liberty that an abbÃ© became mad, who was in this chamber before you.

0119m

How long has he left it?

Two years.

Was he liberated, then?

No; he was put in a dungeon.

Listen! said DantÃ©s. I am not an abbÃ©, I am not mad; perhaps I shall be, but at present, unfortunately, I am not. I will make you another offer.

What is that?

I do not offer you a million, because I have it not; but I will give you a hundred crowns if, the first time you go to Marseilles, you will seek out a young girl named MercÃ©dÃ©s, at the Catalans, and give her two lines from me.

0120m

If I took them, and were detected, I should lose my place, which is worth two thousand francs a year; so that I should be a great fool to run such a risk for three hundred.

Well, said DantÃ©s, mark this; if you refuse at least to tell

MercÃ©dÃ©s I am here, I will some day hide myself behind the door, and

when you enter I will dash out your brains with this stool. Threats! cried the jailer, retreating and putting himself on the defensive; you are certainly going mad. The abbé began like you, and in three days you will be like him, mad enough to tie up; but, fortunately, there are dungeons here.

Dantès whirled the stool round his head.

All right, all right, said the jailer; all right, since you will have it so. I will send word to the governor.

Very well, returned Dantès, dropping the stool and sitting on it as if he were in reality mad. The jailer went out, and returned in an instant with a corporal and four soldiers.

By the governors orders, said he, conduct the prisoner to the tier beneath.

To the dungeon, then, said the corporal.

Yes; we must put the madman with the madmen. The soldiers seized Dantès, who followed passively.

He descended fifteen steps, and the door of a dungeon was opened, and he was thrust in. The door closed, and Dantès advanced with outstretched hands until he touched the wall; he then sat down in the corner until his eyes became accustomed to the darkness. The jailer was right; Dantès wanted but little of being utterly mad.

Chapter 9. The Evening of the Betrothal

Villefort had, as we have said, hastened back to Madame de Saint-Méran in the Place du Grand Cours, and on entering the house found that the guests whom he had left at table were taking coffee in the salon. Renée was, with all the rest of the company, anxiously awaiting him, and his entrance was followed by a general exclamation. Well, Decapitator, Guardian of the State, Royalist, Brutus, what is the matter? said one. Speak out.

Are we threatened with a fresh Reign of Terror? asked another.

Has the Corsican ogre broken loose? cried a third.

Marquise, said Villefort, approaching his future mother-in-law, I request your pardon for thus leaving you. Will the marquis honor me by a few moments private conversation?

Ah, it is really a serious matter, then? asked the marquis, remarking the cloud on Villeforts brow.

So serious that I must take leave of you for a few days; so, added he, turning to Renée, judge for yourself if it be not important.

You are going to leave us? cried Renée, unable to hide her emotion at this unexpected announcement.

Alas, returned Villefort, I must!

Where, then, are you going? asked the marquise.

That, madame, is an official secret; but if you have any commissions for Paris, a friend of mine is going there tonight, and will with pleasure undertake them. The guests looked at each other.

You wish to speak to me alone? said the marquis.

Yes, let us go to the library, please. The marquis took his arm, and they left the salon.

Well, asked he, as soon as they were by themselves, tell me what it is?

An affair of the greatest importance, that demands my immediate presence in Paris. Now, excuse the indiscretion, marquis, but have you any landed property?

All my fortune is in the funds; seven or eight hundred thousand francs.

Then sell out"sell out, marquis, or you will lose it all.

0123m

But how can I sell out here?

You have a broker, have you not?

Yes.

Then give me a letter to him, and tell him to sell out without an instants delay, perhaps even now I shall arrive too late.

The deuce you say! replied the marquis, let us lose no time, then!

And, sitting down, he wrote a letter to his broker, ordering him to sell out at the market price.

Now, then, said Villefort, placing the letter in his pocketbook, I must have another!

To whom?

To the king.

To the king?

Yes.

I dare not write to his majesty.

I do not ask you to write to his majesty, but ask M. de Salvieux to do so. I want a letter that will enable me to reach the king's presence without all the formalities of demanding an audience; that would occasion a loss of precious time.

But address yourself to the keeper of the seals; he has the right of entry at the Tuileries, and can procure you audience at any hour of the day or night.

Doubtless; but there is no occasion to divide the honors of my discovery with him. The keeper would leave me in the background, and take all the glory to himself. I tell you, marquis, my fortune is made if I only reach the Tuileries the first, for the king will not forget the service I do him.

In that case go and get ready. I will call Salvieux and make him write the letter.

Be as quick as possible, I must be on the road in a quarter of an hour.

Tell your coachman to stop at the door.

You will present my excuses to the marquise and Mademoiselle Ren e, whom I leave on such a day with great regret.

You will find them both here, and can make your farewells in person.

A thousand thanks"and now for the letter.

The marquis rang, a servant entered.

Say to the Comte de Salvieux that I would like to see him.

Now, then, go, said the marquis.

I shall be gone only a few moments.

Villefort hastily quitted the apartment, but reflecting that the sight of the deputy procureur running through the streets would be enough to throw the whole city into confusion, he resumed his ordinary pace. At his door he perceived a figure in the shadow that seemed to wait for him. It was Merc d s, who, hearing no news of her lover, had come unobserved to inquire after him.

As Villefort drew near, she advanced and stood before him. Dant s had spoken of Merc d s, and Villefort instantly recognized her. Her beauty and high bearing surprised him, and when she inquired what had become of her lover, it seemed to him that she was the judge, and he the accused.

The young man you speak of, said Villefort abruptly, is a great criminal, and I can do nothing for him, mademoiselle. Merc d s burst into tears, and, as Villefort strove to pass her, again addressed him. But, at least, tell me where he is, that I may know whether he is alive or dead, said she.

0125m

I do not know; he is no longer in my hands, replied Villefort.

And desirous of putting an end to the interview, he pushed by her, and closed the door, as if to exclude the pain he felt. But remorse is not thus banished; like Virgil's wounded hero, he carried the arrow in his wound, and, arrived at the salon, Villefort uttered a sigh that was almost a sob, and sank into a chair.

Then the first pangs of an unending torture seized upon his heart. The man he sacrificed to his ambition, that innocent victim immolated on the altar of his father's faults, appeared to him pale and threatening, leading his affianced bride by the hand, and bringing with him remorse, not such as the ancients figured, furious and terrible, but that slow and consuming agony whose pangs are intensified from hour to hour up to

the very moment of death. Then he had a moments hesitation. He had frequently called for capital punishment on criminals, and owing to his irresistible eloquence they had been condemned, and yet the slightest shadow of remorse had never clouded Villeforts brow, because they were guilty; at least, he believed so; but here was an innocent man whose happiness he had destroyed. In this case he was not the judge, but the executioner.

As he thus reflected, he felt the sensation we have described, and which had hitherto been unknown to him, arise in his bosom, and fill him with vague apprehensions. It is thus that a wounded man trembles instinctively at the approach of the finger to his wound until it be healed, but Villeforts was one of those that never close, or if they do, only close to reopen more agonizing than ever. If at this moment the sweet voice of Ren e had sounded in his ears pleading for mercy, or the fair Merc d s had entered and said, In the name of God, I conjure you to restore me my affianced husband, his cold and trembling hands would have signed his release; but no voice broke the stillness of the chamber, and the door was opened only by Villeforts valet, who came to tell him that the travelling carriage was in readiness.

Villefort rose, or rather sprang, from his chair, hastily opened one of the drawers of his desk, emptied all the gold it contained into his pocket, stood motionless an instant, his hand pressed to his head, muttered a few inarticulate sounds, and then, perceiving that his servant had placed his cloak on his shoulders, he sprang into the carriage, ordering the postilions to drive to M. de Saint-M rans. The hapless Dant s was doomed.

As the marquis had promised, Villefort found the marquise and Ren e in waiting. He started when he saw Ren e, for he fancied she was again about to plead for Dant s. Alas, her emotions were wholly personal: she was thinking only of Villeforts departure.

She loved Villefort, and he left her at the moment he was about to become her husband. Villefort knew not when he should return, and Ren e, far from pleading for Dant s, hated the man whose crime separated her from her lover.

0127m

Meanwhile what of Merc d s? She had met Fernand at the corner of the Rue de la Loge; she had returned to the Catalans, and had despairingly cast herself on her couch. Fernand, kneeling by her side, took her hand, and covered it with kisses that Merc d s did not even feel. She passed the night thus. The lamp went out for want of oil, but she paid no heed to the darkness, and dawn came, but she knew not that it was day. Grief had made her blind to all but one object—that was Edmond. Ah, you are there, said she, at length, turning towards Fernand.

I have not quitted you since yesterday, returned Fernand sorrowfully. M. Morrel had not readily given up the fight. He had learned that Dant s had been taken to prison, and he had gone to all his friends, and the influential persons of the city; but the report was already in circulation that Dant s was arrested as a Bonapartist agent; and as the most sanguine looked upon any attempt of Napoleon to remount the throne as impossible, he met with nothing but refusal, and had returned home in despair, declaring that the matter was serious and that nothing more could be done.

Caderousse was equally restless and uneasy, but instead of seeking, like M. Morrel, to aid Dant s, he had shut himself up with two bottles of black currant brandy, in the hope of drowning reflection. But he did not succeed, and became too intoxicated to fetch any more drink, and yet not so intoxicated as to forget what had happened. With his elbows on the table he sat between the two empty bottles, while spectres danced in the light of the unsnuffed candle—spectres such as Hoffmann strews over his punch-drenched pages, like black, fantastic dust. Danglars alone was content and joyous—he had got rid of an enemy and made his own situation on the _Pharaon_ secure. Danglars was one of those men born with a pen behind the ear, and an inkstand in place of a

heart. Everything with him was multiplication or subtraction. The life of a man was to him of far less value than a numeral, especially when, by taking it away, he could increase the sum total of his own desires. He went to bed at his usual hour, and slept in peace.

Villefort, after having received M. de Salvieux's letter, embraced Renée, kissed the marquise's hand, and shaken that of the marquis, started for Paris along the Aix road.

Old Dantès was dying with anxiety to know what had become of Edmond. But we know very well what had become of Edmond.

Chapter 10. The King's Closet at the Tuileries

We will leave Villefort on the road to Paris, travelling "thanks to trebled fees" with all speed, and passing through two or three apartments, enter at the Tuileries the little room with the arched window, so well known as having been the favorite closet of Napoleon and Louis XVIII., and now of Louis Philippe.

There, seated before a walnut table he had brought with him from Hartwell, and to which, from one of those fancies not uncommon to great people, he was particularly attached, the king, Louis XVIII., was carelessly listening to a man of fifty or fifty-two years of age, with gray hair, aristocratic bearing, and exceedingly gentlemanly attire, and meanwhile making a marginal note in a volume of Gryphius's rather inaccurate, but much sought-after, edition of Horace "a work which was much indebted to the sagacious observations of the philosophical monarch.

You say, sir?" said the king.

That I am exceedingly disquieted, sire.

Really, have you had a vision of the seven fat kine and the seven lean kine?

No, sire, for that would only betoken for us seven years of plenty and seven years of scarcity; and with a king as full of foresight as your majesty, scarcity is not a thing to be feared.

Then of what other scourge are you afraid, my dear Blacas?

Sire, I have every reason to believe that a storm is brewing in the south.

Well, my dear duke, replied Louis XVIII., I think you are wrongly informed, and know positively that, on the contrary, it is very fine weather in that direction. Man of ability as he was, Louis XVIII. liked a pleasant jest.

Sire, continued M. de Blacas, if it only be to reassure a faithful servant, will your majesty send into Languedoc, Provence, and Dauphiné, trusty men, who will bring you back a faithful report as to the feeling in these three provinces?

Canimus surdis_, replied the king, continuing the annotations in his Horace.

Sire, replied the courtier, laughing, in order that he might seem to comprehend the quotation, your majesty may be perfectly right in relying on the good feeling of France, but I fear I am not altogether wrong in dreading some desperate attempt.

By whom?

By Bonaparte, or, at least, by his adherents.

My dear Blacas, said the king, you with your alarms prevent me from working.

And you, sire, prevent me from sleeping with your security.

Wait, my dear sir, wait a moment; for I have such a delightful note on the _Pastor quum traheret_"wait, and I will listen to you afterwards. There was a brief pause, during which Louis XVIII. wrote, in a hand as small as possible, another note on the margin of his Horace, and then looking at the duke with the air of a man who thinks he has an idea of his own, while he is only commenting upon the idea of another, said:

Go on, my dear duke, go on!"I listen.

Sire, said Blacas, who had for a moment the hope of sacrificing Villefort to his own profit, I am compelled to tell you that these are not mere rumors destitute of foundation which thus disquiet me; but a

serious-minded man, deserving all my confidence, and charged by me to watch over the south (the duke hesitated as he pronounced these words), has arrived by post to tell me that a great peril threatens the king, and so I hastened to you, sire.

Mala ducis avi domum, continued Louis XVIII., still annotating.

Does your majesty wish me to drop the subject?

By no means, my dear duke; but just stretch out your hand.

Which?

Whichever you please"there to the left.

Here, sire?

I tell you to the left, and you are looking to the right; I mean on my left"yes, there. You will find yesterdays report of the minister of police. But here is M. Dandr   himself; and M. Dandr  , announced by the chamberlain-in-waiting, entered.

Come in, said Louis XVIII., with repressed smile, come in, Baron, and tell the duke all you know"the latest news of M. de Bonaparte; do not conceal anything, however serious,"let us see, the Island of Elba is a volcano, and we may expect to have issuing thence flaming and bristling war"_bella, horrida bella_.

M. Dandr   leaned very respectfully on the back of a chair with his two hands, and said:

Has your majesty perused yesterdays report?

Yes, yes; but tell the duke himself, who cannot find anything, what the report contains"give him the particulars of what the usurper is doing in his islet.

Monsieur, said the baron to the duke, all the servants of his majesty must approve of the latest intelligence which we have from the Island of Elba. Bonaparte""

M. Dandr   looked at Louis XVIII., who, employed in writing a note, did not even raise his head. Bonaparte, continued the baron, is mortally wearied, and passes whole days in watching his miners at work at Porto-Longone.

And scratches himself for amusement, added the king.

Scratches himself? inquired the duke, what does your majesty mean?

Yes, indeed, my dear duke. Did you forget that this great man, this hero, this demigod, is attacked with a malady of the skin which worries him to death, _prurigo_?

And, moreover, my dear duke, continued the minister of police, we are almost assured that, in a very short time, the usurper will be insane.

Insane?

Raving mad; his head becomes weaker. Sometimes he weeps bitterly, sometimes laughs boisterously, at other time he passes hours on the seashore, flinging stones in the water and when the flint makes ~duck-and-drake five or six times, he appears as delighted as if he had gained another Marengo or Austerlitz. Now, you must agree that these are indubitable symptoms of insanity.

Or of wisdom, my dear baron"or of wisdom, said Louis XVIII., laughing; the greatest captains of antiquity amused themselves by casting pebbles into the ocean"see Plutarchs life of Scipio Africanus.

M. de Blacas pondered deeply between the confident monarch and the truthful minister. Villefort, who did not choose to reveal the whole secret, lest another should reap all the benefit of the disclosure, had yet communicated enough to cause him the greatest uneasiness.

Well, well, Dandr  , said Louis XVIII., Blacas is not yet convinced; let us proceed, therefore, to the usurpers conversion. The minister of police bowed.

The usurpers conversion! murmured the duke, looking at the king and Dandr  , who spoke alternately, like Virgils shepherds. The usurper converted!

Decidedly, my dear duke.

In what way converted?

To good principles. Tell him all about it, baron.

Why, this is the way of it, said the minister, with the gravest air in the world: Napoleon lately had a review, and as two or three of his old veterans expressed a desire to return to France, he gave them their dismissal, and exhorted them to ~serve the good king. These were his own words, of that I am certain.

Well, Blacas, what think you of this? inquired the king triumphantly, and pausing for a moment from the voluminous scholiast before him.

I say, sire, that the minister of police is greatly deceived or I am; and as it is impossible it can be the minister of police as he has the guardianship of the safety and honor of your majesty, it is probable that I am in error. However, sire, if I might advise, your majesty will interrogate the person of whom I spoke to you, and I will urge your majesty to do him this honor.

Most willingly, duke; under your auspices I will receive any person you please, but you must not expect me to be too confiding. Baron, have you any report more recent than this, dated the 20th February, and this is the 3rd of March?

No, sire, but I am hourly expecting one; it may have arrived since I left my office.

Go thither, and if there be none"well, well, continued Louis XVIII., make one; that is the usual way, is it not? and the king laughed facetiously.

Oh, sire, replied the minister, we have no occasion to invent any; every day our desks are loaded with most circumstantial denunciations, coming from hosts of people who hope for some return for services which they seek to render, but cannot; they trust to fortune, and rely upon some unexpected event in some way to justify their predictions.

Well, sir, go; said Louis XVIII., and remember that I am waiting for you.

I will but go and return, sire; I shall be back in ten minutes.

And I, sire, said M. de Blacas, will go and find my messenger.

Wait, sir, wait, said Louis XVIII. Really, M. de Blacas, I must change your armorial bearings; I will give you an eagle with outstretched wings, holding in its claws a prey which tries in vain to escape, and bearing this device"_Tenax_.

0133m

Sire, I listen, said De Blacas, biting his nails with impatience.

I wish to consult you on this passage, ~_Molli fugiens anhelitu_, you know it refers to a stag flying from a wolf. Are you not a sportsman and a great wolf-hunter? Well, then, what do you think of the _molli anhelitu_?

Admirable, sire; but my messenger is like the stag you refer to, for he has posted two hundred and twenty leagues in scarcely three days. Which is undergoing great fatigue and anxiety, my dear duke, when we have a telegraph which transmits messages in three or four hours, and that without getting in the least out of breath.

Ah, sire, you recompense but badly this poor young man, who has come so far, and with so much ardor, to give your majesty useful information. If only for the sake of M. de Salvieux, who recommends him to me, I entreat your majesty to receive him graciously.

M. de Salvieux, my brothers chamberlain?

Yes, sire.

He is at Marseilles.

And writes me thence.

Does he speak to you of this conspiracy?

No; but strongly recommends M. de Villefort, and begs me to present him to your majesty.

M. de Villefort! cried the king, is the messengers name M. de Villefort?

Yes, sire.

And he comes from Marseilles?

In person.

Why did you not mention his name at once? replied the king, betraying some uneasiness.

Sire, I thought his name was unknown to your majesty.

No, no, Blacas; he is a man of strong and elevated understanding, ambitious, too, and, _pardieu!_ you know his fathers name!

His father?

Yes, Noirtier.

Noirtier the Girondin?"Noirtier the senator?

He himself.

And your majesty has employed the son of such a man?

Blacas, my friend, you have but limited comprehension. I told you Villefort was ambitious, and to attain this ambition Villefort would sacrifice everything, even his father.

Then, sire, may I present him?

This instant, duke! Where is he?

Waiting below, in my carriage.

Seek him at once.

I hasten to do so.

The duke left the royal presence with the speed of a young man; his really sincere royalism made him youthful again. Louis XVIII. remained alone, and turning his eyes on his half-opened Horace, muttered:

Justum et tenacem propositi virum.

M. de Blacas returned as speedily as he had departed, but in the antechamber he was forced to appeal to the kings authority.

Villeforts dusty garb, his costume, which was not of courtly cut, excited the susceptibility of M. de BrezÃ©, who was all astonishment at finding that this young man had the audacity to enter before the king in such attire. The duke, however, overcame all difficulties with a word"his majestys order; and, in spite of the protestations which the master of ceremonies made for the honor of his office and principles, Villefort was introduced.

The king was seated in the same place where the duke had left him. On opening the door, Villefort found himself facing him, and the young magistrates first impulse was to pause.

Come in, M. de Villefort, said the king, come in.

Villefort bowed, and advancing a few steps, waited until the king should interrogate him.

M. de Villefort, said Louis XVIII., the Duc de Blacas assures me you have some interesting information to communicate.

Sire, the duke is right, and I believe your majesty will think it equally important.

0137m

In the first place, and before everything else, sir, is the news as bad in your opinion as I am asked to believe?

Sire, I believe it to be most urgent, but I hope, by the speed I have used, that it is not irreparable.

Speak as fully as you please, sir, said the king, who began to give way to the emotion which had showed itself in Blacass face and affected Villeforts voice. Speak, sir, and pray begin at the beginning; I like order in everything.

Sire, said Villefort, I will render a faithful report to your majesty, but I must entreat your forgiveness if my anxiety leads to some obscurity in my language. A glance at the king after this discreet and subtle exordium, assured Villefort of the benignity of his august auditor, and he went on:

Sire, I have come as rapidly to Paris as possible, to inform your majesty that I have discovered, in the exercise of my duties, not a commonplace and insignificant plot, such as is every day got up in the lower ranks of the people and in the army, but an actual conspiracy"a storm which menaces no less than your majestys throne. Sire, the usurper is arming three ships, he meditates some project, which, however mad, is yet, perhaps, terrible. At this moment he will have left Elba, to go whither I know not, but assuredly to attempt a landing

either at Naples, or on the coast of Tuscany, or perhaps on the shores of France. Your majesty is well aware that the sovereign of the Island of Elba has maintained his relations with Italy and France?

I am, sir, said the king, much agitated; and recently we have had information that the Bonapartist clubs have had meetings in the Rue Saint-Jacques. But proceed, I beg of you. How did you obtain these details?

Sire, they are the results of an examination which I have made of a man of Marseilles, whom I have watched for some time, and arrested on the day of my departure. This person, a sailor, of turbulent character, and whom I suspected of Bonapartism, has been secretly to the Island of Elba. There he saw the grand-marshal, who charged him with an oral message to a Bonapartist in Paris, whose name I could not extract from him; but this mission was to prepare mens minds for a return (it is the man who says this, sire)"a return which will soon occur.

And where is this man?

In prison, sire.

And the matter seems serious to you?

So serious, sire, that when the circumstance surprised me in the midst of a family festival, on the very day of my betrothal, I left my bride and friends, postponing everything, that I might hasten to lay at your majestys feet the fears which impressed me, and the assurance of my devotion.

True, said Louis XVIII., was there not a marriage engagement between you and Mademoiselle de Saint-MÃ©ran?

Daughter of one of your majestys most faithful servants.

Yes, yes; but let us talk of this plot, M. de Villefort.

Sire, I fear it is more than a plot; I fear it is a conspiracy.

A conspiracy in these times, said Louis XVIII., smiling, is a thing very easy to meditate, but more difficult to conduct to an end, inasmuch as, re-established so recently on the throne of our ancestors, we have our eyes open at once upon the past, the present, and the future. For the last ten months my ministers have redoubled their vigilance, in order to watch the shore of the Mediterranean. If Bonaparte landed at Naples, the whole coalition would be on foot before he could even reach Piombino; if he land in Tuscany, he will be in an unfriendly territory; if he land in France, it must be with a handful of men, and the result of that is easily foretold, execrated as he is by the population. Take courage, sir; but at the same time rely on our royal gratitude.

Ah, here is M. DandrÃ©! cried de Blacas. At this instant the minister of police appeared at the door, pale, trembling, and as if ready to faint. Villefort was about to retire, but M. de Blacas, taking his hand, restrained him.

Chapter 11. The Corsican Ogre

At the sight of this agitation Louis XVIII. pushed from him violently the table at which he was sitting.

What ails you, baron? he exclaimed. You appear quite aghast. Has your uneasiness anything to do with what M. de Blacas has told me, and M. de Villefort has just confirmed? M. de Blacas moved suddenly towards the baron, but the fright of the courtier pleaded for the forbearance of the statesman; and besides, as matters were, it was much more to his advantage that the prefect of police should triumph over him than that he should humiliate the prefect.

Sire,"" stammered the baron.

Well, what is it? asked Louis XVIII. The minister of police, giving way to an impulse of despair, was about to throw himself at the feet of Louis XVIII., who retreated a step and frowned.

Will you speak? he said.

Oh, sire, what a dreadful misfortune! I am, indeed, to be pitied. I can never forgive myself!

Monsieur, said Louis XVIII., I command you to speak.

Well, sire, the usurper left Elba on the 26th February, and landed on

the 1st of March.

And where? In Italy? asked the king eagerly.

In France, sire,"at a small port, near Antibes, in the Gulf of Juan. The usurper landed in France, near Antibes, in the Gulf of Juan, two hundred and fifty leagues from Paris, on the 1st of March, and you only acquired this information today, the 3rd of March! Well, sir, what you tell me is impossible. You must have received a false report, or you have gone mad.

Alas, sire, it is but too true! Louis made a gesture of indescribable anger and alarm, and then drew himself up as if this sudden blow had struck him at the same moment in heart and countenance.

In France! he cried, the usurper in France! Then they did not watch over this man. Who knows? they were, perhaps, in league with him.

Oh, sire, exclaimed the Duc de Blacas, M. Dandr   is not a man to be accused of treason! Sire, we have all been blind, and the minister of police has shared the general blindness, that is all.

But"" said Villefort, and then suddenly checking himself, he was silent; then he continued, Your pardon, sire, he said, bowing, my zeal carried me away. Will your majesty deign to excuse me?

Speak, sir, speak boldly, replied Louis. You alone forewarned us of the evil; now try and aid us with the remedy.

Sire, said Villefort, the usurper is detested in the south; and it seems to me that if he ventured into the south, it would be easy to raise Languedoc and Provence against him.

Yes, assuredly, replied the minister; but he is advancing by Gap and Sisteron.

Advancing"he is advancing! said Louis XVIII. Is he then advancing on Paris? The minister of police maintained a silence which was equivalent to a complete avowal.

And Dauphin  , sir? inquired the king, of Villefort. Do you think it possible to rouse that as well as Provence?

Sire, I am sorry to tell your majesty a cruel fact; but the feeling in Dauphin   is quite the reverse of that in Provence or Languedoc. The mountaineers are Bonapartists, sire.

Then, murmured Louis, he was well informed. And how many men had he with him?

I do not know, sire, answered the minister of police.

What, you do not know! Have you neglected to obtain information on that point? Of course it is of no consequence, he added, with a withering smile.

Sire, it was impossible to learn; the despatch simply stated the fact of the landing and the route taken by the usurper.

And how did this despatch reach you? inquired the king. The minister bowed his head, and while a deep color overspread his cheeks, he stammered out:

By the telegraph, sire. Louis XVIII. advanced a step, and folded his arms over his chest as Napoleon would have done.

0141m

So then, he exclaimed, turning pale with anger, seven conjoined and allied armies overthrew that man. A miracle of heaven replaced me on the throne of my fathers after five-and-twenty years of exile. I have, during those five-and-twenty years, spared no pains to understand the people of France and the interests which were confided to me; and now, when I see the fruition of my wishes almost within reach, the power I hold in my hands bursts and shatters me to atoms!

Sire, it is fatality! murmured the minister, feeling that the pressure of circumstances, however light a thing to destiny, was too much for any human strength to endure.

What our enemies say of us is then true. We have learnt nothing, forgotten nothing! If I were betrayed as he was, I would console myself; but to be in the midst of persons elevated by myself to places of honor, who ought to watch over me more carefully than over themselves,"for my fortune is theirs"before me they were nothing"after

me they will be nothing, and perish miserably from incapacity"ineptitude! Oh, yes, sir, you are right"it is fatality! The minister quailed before this outburst of sarcasm. M. de Blacas wiped the moisture from his brow. Villefort smiled within himself, for he felt his increased importance.

To fall, continued King Louis, who at the first glance had sounded the abyss on which the monarchy hung suspended,"to fall, and learn of that fall by telegraph! Oh, I would rather mount the scaffold of my brother, Louis XVI., than thus descend the staircase at the Tuileries driven away by ridicule. Ridicule, sir"why, you know not its power in France, and yet you ought to know it!

Sire, sire, murmured the minister, for pitys""

Approach, M. de Villefort, resumed the king, addressing the young man, who, motionless and breathless, was listening to a conversation on which depended the destiny of a kingdom. Approach, and tell monsieur that it is possible to know beforehand all that he has not known.

Sire, it was really impossible to learn secrets which that man concealed from all the world.

Really impossible! Yes"that is a great word, sir. Unfortunately, there are great words, as there are great men; I have measured them. Really impossible for a minister who has an office, agents, spies, and fifteen hundred thousand francs for secret service money, to know what is going on at sixty leagues from the coast of France! Well, then, see, here is a gentleman who had none of these resources at his disposal"a gentleman, only a simple magistrate, who learned more than you with all your police, and who would have saved my crown, if, like you, he had the power of directing a telegraph. The look of the minister of police was turned with concentrated spite on Villefort, who bent his head in modest triumph.

I do not mean that for you, Blacas, continued Louis XVIII.; for if you have discovered nothing, at least you have had the good sense to persevere in your suspicions. Any other than yourself would have considered the disclosure of M. de Villefort insignificant, or else dictated by venal ambition. These words were an allusion to the sentiments which the minister of police had uttered with so much confidence an hour before.

Villefort understood the kings intent. Any other person would, perhaps, have been overcome by such an intoxicating draught of praise; but he feared to make for himself a mortal enemy of the police minister, although he saw that Dandr   was irrevocably lost. In fact, the minister, who, in the plenitude of his power, had been unable to unearth Napoleons secret, might in despair at his own downfall interrogate Dant  s and so lay bare the motives of Villeforts plot. Realizing this, Villefort came to the rescue of the crest-fallen minister, instead of aiding to crush him.

Sire, said Villefort, the suddenness of this event must prove to your majesty that the issue is in the hands of Providence; what your majesty is pleased to attribute to me as profound perspicacity is simply owing to chance, and I have profited by that chance, like a good and devoted servant"thats all. Do not attribute to me more than I deserve, sire, that your majesty may never have occasion to recall the first opinion you have been pleased to form of me. The minister of police thanked the young man by an eloquent look, and Villefort understood that he had succeeded in his design; that is to say, that without forfeiting the gratitude of the king, he had made a friend of one on whom, in case of necessity, he might rely.

Tis well, resumed the king. And now, gentlemen, he continued, turning towards M. de Blacas and the minister of police, I have no further occasion for you, and you may retire; what now remains to do is in the department of the minister of war.

Fortunately, sire, said M. de Blacas, we can rely on the army; your majesty knows how every report confirms their loyalty and attachment. Do not mention reports, duke, to me, for I know now what confidence to

place in them. Yet, speaking of reports, baron, what have you learned with regard to the affair in the Rue Saint-Jacques?

The affair in the Rue Saint-Jacques! exclaimed Villefort, unable to repress an exclamation. Then, suddenly pausing, he added, Your pardon, sire, but my devotion to your majesty has made me forget, not the respect I have, for that is too deeply engraved in my heart, but the rules of etiquette.

Go on, go on, sir, replied the king; you have today earned the right to make inquiries here.

Sire, interposed the minister of police, I came a moment ago to give your majesty fresh information which I had obtained on this head, when your majestys attention was attracted by the terrible event that has occurred in the gulf, and now these facts will cease to interest your majesty.

On the contrary, sir,"on the contrary, said Louis XVIII., this affair seems to me to have a decided connection with that which occupies our attention, and the death of General Quesnel will, perhaps, put us on the direct track of a great internal conspiracy. At the name of General Quesnel, Villefort trembled.

Everything points to the conclusion, sire, said the minister of police, that death was not the result of suicide, as we first believed, but of assassination. General Quesnel, it appears, had just left a Bonapartist club when he disappeared. An unknown person had been with him that morning, and made an appointment with him in the Rue Saint-Jacques; unfortunately, the generals valet, who was dressing his hair at the moment when the stranger entered, heard the street mentioned, but did not catch the number. As the police minister related this to the king, Villefort, who looked as if his very life hung on the speakers lips, turned alternately red and pale. The king looked towards him.

Do you not think with me, M. de Villefort, that General Quesnel, whom they believed attached to the usurper, but who was really entirely devoted to me, has perished the victim of a Bonapartist ambush?

It is probable, sire, replied Villefort. But is this all that is known?

They are on the track of the man who appointed the meeting with him.

On his track? said Villefort.

Yes, the servant has given his description. He is a man of from fifty to fifty-two years of age, dark, with black eyes covered with shaggy eyebrows, and a thick moustache. He was dressed in a blue frock-coat, buttoned up to the chin, and wore at his button-hole the rosette of an officer of the Legion of Honor. Yesterday a person exactly corresponding with this description was followed, but he was lost sight of at the corner of the Rue de la Jussienne and the Rue Coq-Héron. Villefort leaned on the back of an armchair, for as the minister of police went on speaking he felt his legs bend under him; but when he learned that the unknown had escaped the vigilance of the agent who followed him, he breathed again.

Continue to seek for this man, sir, said the king to the minister of police; for if, as I am all but convinced, General Quesnel, who would have been so useful to us at this moment, has been murdered, his assassins, Bonapartists or not, shall be cruelly punished. It required all Villeforts coolness not to betray the terror with which this declaration of the king inspired him.

How strange, continued the king, with some asperity; the police think that they have disposed of the whole matter when they say, ~A murder has been committed, and especially so when they can add, ~And we are on the track of the guilty persons.

Sire, your majesty will, I trust, be amply satisfied on this point at least.

We shall see. I will no longer detain you, M. de Villefort, for you must be fatigued after so long a journey; go and rest. Of course you stopped at your fathers? A feeling of faintness came over Villefort.

0145m

No, sire, he replied, I alighted at the Hotel de Madrid, in the Rue de Tournon.

But you have seen him?

Sire, I went straight to the Duc de Blacas.

But you will see him, then?

I think not, sire.

Ah, I forgot, said Louis, smiling in a manner which proved that all these questions were not made without a motive; I forgot you and M. Noirtier are not on the best terms possible, and that is another sacrifice made to the royal cause, and for which you should be recompensed.

Sire, the kindness your majesty deigns to evince towards me is a recompense which so far surpasses my utmost ambition that I have nothing more to ask for.

Never mind, sir, we will not forget you; make your mind easy. In the meanwhile (the king here detached the cross of the Legion of Honor which he usually wore over his blue coat, near the cross of St. Louis, above the order of Notre-Dame-du-Mont-Carmel and St. Lazare, and gave it to Villefort)"in the meanwhile take this cross.

Sire, said Villefort, your majesty mistakes; this is an officers cross.

Ma foi! said Louis XVIII., take it, such as it is, for I have not the time to procure you another. Blacas, let it be your care to see that the brevet is made out and sent to M. de Villefort. Villeforts eyes were filled with tears of joy and pride; he took the cross and kissed it.

And now, he said, may I inquire what are the orders with which your majesty deigns to honor me?

Take what rest you require, and remember that if you are not able to serve me here in Paris, you may be of the greatest service to me at Marseilles.

Sire, replied Villefort, bowing, in an hour I shall have quitted Paris.

Go, sir, said the king; and should I forget you (kings memories are short), do not be afraid to bring yourself to my recollection. Baron, send for the minister of war. Blacas, remain.

Ah, sir, said the minister of police to Villefort, as they left the Tuileries, you entered by lucks door"your fortune is made.

Will it be long first? muttered Villefort, saluting the minister, whose career was ended, and looking about him for a hackney-coach. One passed at the moment, which he hailed; he gave his address to the driver, and springing in, threw himself on the seat, and gave loose to dreams of ambition.

Ten minutes afterwards Villefort reached his hotel, ordered horses to be ready in two hours, and asked to have his breakfast brought to him. He was about to begin his repast when the sound of the bell rang sharp and loud. The valet opened the door, and Villefort heard someone speak his name.

0147m

Who could know that I was here already? said the young man. The valet entered.

Well, said Villefort, what is it?"Who rang?"Who asked for me?

A stranger who will not send in his name.

A stranger who will not send in his name! What can he want with me?

He wishes to speak to you.

To me?

Yes.

Did he mention my name?

Yes.

What sort of person is he?

Why, sir, a man of about fifty.

Short or tall?

About your own height, sir.

Dark or fair?

Dark, "very dark; with black eyes, black hair, black eyebrows.

And how dressed? asked Villefort quickly.

In a blue frock-coat, buttoned up close, decorated with the Legion of Honor.

It is he! said Villefort, turning pale.

0148m

Eh, _pardieu!_ said the individual whose description we have twice given, entering the door, what a great deal of ceremony! Is it the