

## "The 'MEMOIRS' of Clotilde Bersone

This novel is drawn, almost page by page, from the unpublished memoirs of Clotilde Bersone, who would have been, in Paris, from 1877 to 1880, the mistress of J. A. Garfield, elected President of the United States in 1880 and assassinated in 1881.

Garfield was clandestinely the leader of the High Lodge of France of the Illuminati, of which Bersone, under the name *Nymphe de la Nuit*, was first the Affiliate, then the Initiate and the Inspired, elected Grand Mistress of the Spirit.

There exists at the Hiéron de Paray-le-Monial, which was long a thinly disguised occult center, an authentic double manuscript of these memoirs, dated 1885. In our opinion, these are two successive drafts of the canonically required deposition of Clotilde Bersone for her reconciliation with the Roman Catholic Church, addressed to the diocesan authority or the Holy Office. This testimony carries the scent of a frightened fugitive much more than that of a true penitent, and it retains odious traces of her former ways of seeing and feeling. It may even be that certain descriptions of magical scenes, quite implausible, are to be interpreted in a more allegorical than literal sense, as a threat to disclose more if necessary, about the underlying aspects of certain affairs.

Regardless! In its original content, despite uncertainties and contradictions, the piece remains a document of the first order. One has the right to discuss more than one detail, not to deny it any value. We have had the existence of it still confirmed at the indicated location, subsequent to our initial edition; any disappearance would now be equivalent to an admission of manipulation.

The copy we worked on had, moreover, been taken, compiled, and enriched with notes of rare relevance by a Jesuit clergyman, whose colleagues from the *Études*, in contesting his existence, now force us to specify the identity: it was Father Harald Richard, recently deceased.

Finally, it remains in the memory of certain authorized witnesses, such as Mrs. Juliette Adam, a fairly precise recollection of the political activity of the alleged Countess de Coutanceau, and we have found mention in newspapers of the time of many incidents reported in these memoirs. So if anyone decides to engage in a serious discussion on this subject, we are at their disposal."

"Why, under these circumstances, extract from this true story only a novel, whose presentation— even reduced to some secondary arrangements— inevitably diminishes its impact? THE CHOSEN OF THE DRAGON

The reason is that it was impossible for us to legally take responsibility for the serious allegations that the author hurls indiscriminately in his confession against all sorts of characters involved in the history of the II Republic. This includes not only those among the reigning anti-clericals but even in the ranks most reputed of the opposition.

To legally support most of these accusations in a critical edition; we wanted, on the contrary, in an adaptation, to retain only what we could, stripping them of any character of personal implication. Even the names of Grévy, Ferry, de Lanessan, Tirard, or others less known, which we kept randomly and often left in their fanciful spelling, should not be taken literally here. It should be understood, instead of pseudonyms, as quasi-obligatory appellations, since it concerned a specific and still recent period when nothing could prevent certain well-known figures from representing the state in this kind of criminal trial opened not against a particular man but against the regime.

The main impression we sought to extract from the following pages is, indeed, that since 1871, power in France has been in the hands of an occult power, of which the Grand Orient and the Grand Lodge are themselves only instruments.

In short, Satan is our true political master; it is our Third Republic that must, on behalf of Lucifer, reign the Masonic International; it is the true 'Chosen of the Dragon': that is the entire meaning, purpose, and scope of this work.

We are not even in a democracy, to borrow a term from Bishop Goutte-Soulard; we are in a demonocracy."

"The reception given by the public to the first edition, quickly exhausted, of the 'Chosen of the Dragon,' is a guarantee of the interest it reserves for this new printing. Numerous translations have already been requested from abroad, may they contribute to making known and boldly combating the power of Sects!

Let it be noted, however, to forewarn the reader, that these memoirs of a prostitute and a possessed, despite all the language precautions we have taken, should only be placed in very informed hands."

## PART ONE THE GRAND OTTOMAN LODGE OF THE ILLUMINATI

### I THE MYSTERIOUS BELL

It was in Constantinople, around mid-December 1874. It was approximately ten o'clock at night, and the conversation in the living room between my father and me continued, more lively and cordial than it had ever been. With joy, I felt this flower of affection growing between us, the absence of which had made my life a kind of desert until now.

I was eighteen years old; I knew myself to be beautiful, with that strange beauty commonly called fatal, possessing a cultivated intelligence but with a financial situation insufficient for my ambition.

Only a shadow of tenderness, in the absence of other successes, could have animated my days, satisfied my exuberant nature, and, to put it plainly, this excessive temperament that struggled within me, bound like a young mountain bird trapped in a child's hand.

Neither the Godless education of the College nor the cold and distant concern of my mother had managed to meet the need for passionate attachment that devoured me; and I remained exposed to bursts of pride, bouts of bitterness, whose paroxysm constantly verged on hatred and dreadful appetites for revenge against those around me.

Could my father, barely glimpsed, succeed in filling this abyss in my soul?

He was evidently trying to be amiable and even loving, and all the focused attention of my mind and heart aimed to unravel, during our capricious conversation, whether he truly sought to win my affection for myself or against another, absent and rival.

For my disillusioned filial piety was now posing this impious question. For too long, I had suffered there, in Italy, on my mother's side. The resentment she had accumulated against my absent father had monstrously turned back in her heart against me and gradually deprived me of that faculty of abandonment that makes up the joyful atmosphere of the very young.

Today, the counterpart of this abominable trial began for my fervent youth.

Ah! How I would have liked to love this man, with all the respect, simplicity, and blind devotion of a true daughter! In the godless heaven, in my motherless childhood, an adored father would have been like the soothing response to all my desires. My father! If that name, if that cry could have finally burst from my lips, with tears, on my knees, hands in his hands, head against his shoulder, how many bad dreams I would have been suddenly freed from! From what dangers, what mistakes, what future! It was a kind of

redemption and salvation for me.

Therefore, the gravity of the problem mixed with our chatter, our bursts of laughter at every moment, a kind of solemnity; it entangled our confidences and swung our words from a joyful outburst of friendship to sudden silences, too laden with secret concerns and mystery.

My father was not unaware of the state of heightened sensitivity into which I had slipped during the conversation, and I sensed that he was very conscious of the silent drama playing out between us.

Two or three times, I saw him hesitate, bewildered, as if on the brink of the decisive word that could have brought us into each other's arms. But perhaps our intimacy lacked some heart-opening that long-term familiarity makes easy. On both sides, too many past mistakes or hesitations burdened us. A mysterious fate, or at least the absence of that invisible blessing that presides over the destinies of families according to the heart of God, weighed on our effusions. Hostile glances, a will, seemed to pursue us.

And my heart was about to burst; I saw a tear bead in the bright eyes of my father, at the mention of so many years I had spent away from him, without even a sign of his constant care and love.

'Ah! Forgive me, Clotilde,' he had begun to say, 'a thousand times forgive...'

And it's the grand word that commands all rehabilitations.

Suddenly, in the woodwork of the living room, a strange ring echoed, muffled, barely distinct, yet capable of being perceived throughout the apartment. It was like the roll of an electric call, without a bell, interspersed with regularly spaced shocks, resembling a signal or a message following a rudimentary telegraph code:

— 7+3+1.

Intrigued, I turned my head and listened. My father stood up, uncomfortable:

— What is that? I asked him.

— Nothing, he said. A call from the embassy... Probably a diplomatic dispatch just arrived to decipher and transcribe. I'll leave you, my child. Sleep without worry; you are in good hands here... Until tomorrow.

He could see that he wasn't fooling me. Several times already, I had noticed that he would abruptly leave me like this, especially on Fridays, only to return in the late hours of the night, and I had not been slow to suspect an affair. I suffered, not so much, alas! out of scruples and delicacy of virtue, or from a temptation to disdain my father, as from an indomitable jealous mood. Where I was, my pride made me unbearable not to dominate alone. I could not tolerate that there was a secret among my own for me.

An acute, unhealthy susceptibility made me feel insulted that this imperative and unabashed affair dared to draw my father back to his home, with me present, and snatch him away with such nonchalance from a conversation so precious to me.

With unprecedented violence, I stood up. I threw myself in front of my father, who tried to escape my embrace: — You will not leave!... I don't believe in this embassy story... Your offices are closed, and you have all the facilities to communicate directly with them. This is another signal, outside regular channels... I want to know who dares to take you away from me? I am entitled to an explanation that makes sense...

My father, embarrassed, responded to me with absurd excuses that no longer tried to convince me:

— It's absurd, my dear, I assure you... This scene has lasted too long... I absolutely have to go out. Let me pass.

— No, and no... I beg you, my father, do not abandon me tonight. Everything is at stake for me, my heart, my life. We were so close to agreeing forever. Cancel this odious exit... Here! Take this paper, an envelope. Send a note of excuse. Extricate yourself at all costs. Say that I am sick, mad; but do not leave me.

— There's no one left at this hour to deliver this letter to its address.

— Then I will go myself with you.

— It's not possible.

— Everything is possible, except what you are about to do... Because you don't know me! ...

— Yes, I know you, Clotilde, better than you think.

My resistance had irritated him in turn. Face to face, we looked at each other, eyes sparkling with anger. He had grabbed me to free himself, and some kind of confusion or horror suddenly flashed in his eyes; he burst into a sardonic laugh:

— Beautiful, he exclaimed, truly beautiful enough to damn an angel! It's too true, Clotilde: be careful.

And he pushed me so roughly that I stumbled and fell to the ground. He took advantage of this to quickly open the door of the living room and lock it behind him. I heard him running down the hallway and hastily leaving the floor. When I got up, dizzy from the impact, it was too late to think about catching up with him.

I was a prisoner until his return.

## II

### STORMY EXPLANATIONS

What a dreadful night I spent, alone with my thoughts!

Twenty times I ran to the balcony, searching the night with an eager gaze. The floor was too high, the street too dark; I couldn't tell if my father had truly left the house, or which direction he had taken. Twenty times the temptation came to me to throw myself down, so that on his return, he would find only an lifeless body in his house. But could I now believe that he loved me enough for my death to be a punishment for him? And then, I wanted to feast, alive, on his pain, and, according to the proverb of my country, revenge is a dish best served cold. So I had to wait, wait at all costs, to better plan, for this cruel heart, the dagger blow that would pierce it in turn. A thousand odious plans were being erected and collapsing on top of each other in my mind.

Twenty times, I returned to the living room, throwing myself, desperate, on the furniture, rolling on the carpets, biting my fists in fury, stomping my foot with rage, showing my horns to the ceilings. For I had finally convinced myself that this mysterious call in the night could only have come from the very house itself. Perhaps some unavowable liaison in a neighboring apartment; who knows? Up there, in the attic, some ignoble servant-mistress, Armenian or Jewish: and that's why this wretched father was leaving his daughter, brimming with tenderness, at the moment of reconnecting with her forever.

On this poisoned theme, the worst memories of my eighteen years of unfulfilled tenderness mingled haphazardly. My entire life unfolded before my eyes.

Born in Italy to an honorable family, I vaguely recalled the drama of my very early childhood: a happy mother, a smiling father; then, on an evening like this one and probably for the same reasons, a scene of unprecedented violence had erupted before my terrified child eyes.

The next day, at three and a half years old, I no longer had a father: he had fled to the ends of the earth,

and from then on, everyone had to ingeniously paint him for me as a kind of hideous and brutal Ogre. I dare say I no longer had a mother either because mine suddenly seemed to hate in me the man she had loved, and through me, I perpetuated the bitter memory in her home. Little Clotilde Bersone never knew that double smile leaning over a cradle that had briefly illuminated the dawn of her days; she became nothing more than the reject of two loves turned into fury. Soon, I became, in my mother's life, more than an inconvenient living memory: a burden. She probably dreamed of giving herself a new home, and my presence bothered her. She only thought of getting rid of an inconvenient witness. At the age of eight, I was placed in a large international College on the peninsula: a kind of ultra-secular convent where, if I may say so, my education was completed.

Far from trying to correct our faults, they endeavored in this house to cultivate them with more care than our virtues. Certainly, they watched over our innocence as young girls, but it was to better stimulate in us a rebellious love for independence and impatience with all constraints. Our mistresses advocated women's emancipation, the absolute liberation from all prejudice. In this program, there was no room for the thought of God. God was neither loved nor hated there; he had disappeared. And from that time dates this immense emptiness, this gaping chasm carved in my heart, which my unleashed passions would try in vain one day to fill by piling up follies and crimes: the enormity of my misdeeds has never succeeded in masking the abyss, preventing me from hearing the distant rumbling that continued to roar at the bottom. Satan himself, by spreading out all the span of his wings, did not fill it.

My mother, during holidays and official visiting days, spent a moment in the visiting room, deafened me with her chatter, and disappeared as quickly as possible. She had fulfilled her duties as a mother according to society; in reality, I considered myself an orphan.

To console myself, I threw myself into my studies with a kind of frenzy, eager for top ranks and praise. I learned five or six languages and excelled in all the fine arts: at seventeen, I was covered with diplomas. I had "read all the books." Rousseau, Voltaire, and some Italian philosophers had led me to the borders of free thought, that is, to the most radical materialism.

The notion of the supernatural seemed unthinkable to me; and man, through evolution, descended from the monkey, only to fall back into nothingness. Morality was just a social convention, something that great souls could escape.

With the complicity of one of my teachers, I managed to give a few semi-public lectures on these incendiary subjects in the city, after leaving school, and I tasted the poisoned bait of applause.

From the first attempt, I experienced how I exercised a kind of physical fascination on even the most refined audiences, despite the brutality of my ideas, which I mistook for eloquence. Was it my face, my captivating and bold voice? In any case, it was my youth, more than the strength of my arguments or even the grace of my style, despite the kind of determination I put into polishing and inflaming it.

Moreover, the noise of these propagandas soon spread, and I had to give them up to avoid police and religious authority intervention. It was not without difficulty, nor without keeping the ardent, sharp taste for this kind of representation or sovereignty that speaking on a platform gives!

And it was at this precise moment that I received a letter from my father. He was then a consular agent, attached to the Italian embassy in Constantinople, and he asked to see me.

Let him come himself, I was tempted to reply with irritation. My mother had a different opinion. Frightened and irritated by my recent ideological escapades, she thought it prudent to distance me for a few months. I had to leave, and she accompanied me, perhaps to ensure that I was truly boarding the ship, all the way to Brindisi.

Here, I boarded an Austrian Lloyd steamship and surrendered myself to my destiny. It was a sad journey, despite the beauty of the places we traversed! I visited Corfu, Piraeus, Athens – where the boat stopped

for a week – almost without seeing them. I caught a glimpse of Thessaloniki, crossed the Dardanelles, and arrived in Istanbul.

I touched the port with trembling limbs. I had left my mother in more constrained feelings than ever; our farewells had been icy. What would I find here?

Fortunately, the initial encounter was less pathetic than I feared, thanks to the commotion of disembarkation. My father had a lively, jovial character; I found him likable at first sight. He kept me occupied and entertained by introducing me, in the first few days, to families of the highest society. I had never dreamed of such a brilliant entry into the world, and my vanity, if not my heart, applied itself to relishing it. Everywhere welcomed, sought after, celebrated, I was dizzy with these early successes until that fateful evening when, instead of the happy outcome I had envisioned, the sudden rupture I have recounted occurred.

What a disappointment for me! What a fall! In my overheated imagination, I endeavored to magnify my misfortune even more, to depict it as unparalleled and incurable, to aggravate it with all sorts of ominous colors.

And dawn found me, in the dimly lit salon, feverish, eyes ringed with bistre, having finally settled on my plan. Around five in the morning, my father returned. He seemed exhausted, a little ashamed of his violence, but filled with a kind of resolution, sourced, I wished to know from what advice! I saw him scrutinizing me from below with curiosity, pretending to be concerned about the sleepless night he had caused me.

"Well!" he tried to joke with roundness, "is this nerve attack over, and is Miss ready to talk seriously?"

I did not answer him and stubbornly kept my distance from him. Standing in front of a mirror, pretending to fix my disheveled hair, I turned my back to him, all the while watching him from the corner of my eye in the mirror, and he eventually resigned himself to my silence.

Briefly, with affected calmness, I announced my decision. Since I inconvenienced him in his house, I would go and stay in a hotel that very evening, waiting for a ship to take me back to Italy as soon as possible.

He tried to counter with some jokes, saying I didn't know the power a father had in Turkey over his daughters and that I couldn't avoid his company under the Sultan's nose. Growing colder, I told him he wasn't Turkish and asked if he preferred me to appeal to the embassy.

He no longer tried to conceal his embarrassment and began pacing the room, muttering, swearing, shrugging his shoulders, his face displaying all the uncertainties. Finally, collapsing into a chair, he called out, "Clotilde, I was clearly wrong to treat you so vehemently last night, and I apologize... You're only eighteen, but reason and judgment haven't waited for age in you: you would certainly have understood my reasons if I had had the leisure to explain them to you last night..."

Try to regain your composure to listen to me this morning... Alas! My poor child, I admit, you have been too early exposed, by my fault, to the harsh school of misfortune. Do not overwhelm me by rejecting me from your life, under the pretext that I kept you away from mine for so long. You do not know how much this separation has cost me in regrets, in remorse. That is why, if you demand it, I am ready for anything rather than leave you prey to the cruel ghosts that undoubtedly tormented you all night and threaten to devour your heart before my eyes.

He fell silent and looked at me for a moment in silence. I hadn't moved a step and continued to listen to him without flinching. He thought me unyielding, whereas I would have ended the conversation long ago if I had not resolved to hear him out. Not that I was shaken by his kind words after such a brutal affront, but my curiosity equaled my pride. I wanted to know what he was capable of inventing as an excuse.

He sadly shook his head:

— It is already a harsh punishment for me that my Clotilde, instead of trusting her father about such a trivial incident, demands accounts from me like a criminal... Do you not understand, unhappy one, that, to satisfy your childish whim, I risk breaking the most dreadful oaths and exposing us both to dangers worse than all the horrors you may have pleased yourself to imagine about me?... Why torment me to this extent and demand the impossible from me?

Stubbornly, I remained silent. The complaint had almost touched me at first, but it had heightened my passion to know.

— So you want it? he shouted with a semblance of anger...

— Yes... Speak.

— So be it! The die is cast. Too bad for me, and perhaps for you. It will be your fault...

I had been established in Istanbul for only a few months when a dreadful misfortune befell me. To distract myself, after leaving you and my wife, I indulged in gambling with frenzy. One evening, driven by my passion, I let myself be drawn into a strange den in Pera where some international adventurers were running a hellish game. After considering the main game for a moment, I sat at a table where strangers seemed interested in more modest stakes. It was just a pretense. They were trying to lure me in. Barely seated, I saw in front of me a vast fortune spread out and growing. Then luck naturally turned. I gradually lost the treasure accumulated so quickly. In short, when I left that sinister den, I owed my partners 60,000 lire on my word of honor... You know what these debts of honor are and what the usual settlement is. Where could I have found such a sum in a day? In the world of embassies? I would have discredited myself by trying to borrow that money. Universally, my frivolity would have been condemned, and I would have ruined my career in one fell swoop. In the Ottoman world? I had no friend from whom to request such a considerable favor. Resigned to blowing my brains out in the night, I had locked myself at home, writing a final letter intended to be given to you later, my child, when a Turkish visitor announced himself, forced my door despite the instructions I had given to my dragoman, and reached me with a smile: "You have, he said, thanks be to Allah and his prophet! faithful friends who watch over you with more care than you have done yourself. You have committed, my dear, a terrible imprudence, but we will not leave you in embarrassment. Here are your 60,000 lire. Personally, it would have been difficult for me to advance them to you; I have been running since this morning to find you these Tonds, and here they are. — How will I repay you?... — You will repay whenever and however you can. Believe me, the best way to settle is to join the Society I have often spoken to you about..."

And here, my father, during his narrative, informed me about the existence in Constantinople of a Grand Lodge of the Illuminati of the East, itself connected to six other sovereign Grand Lodges that, from one end of the earth to the other, held sway over common Freemasonry and other secret societies. The supreme leader of this Lodge held the title of Grand Orient and was then called Allah Verdi, whose successor was to be the famous Bou Ahmed, later known as Ahmed Pasha.

— Sometime later, my father continued, I was personally received by Allah Verdi, who showered me with kindness. He even went so far as to claim no knowledge of the loan that had been granted to me. The Grand Master of the Lodge had played, he told me, on his own behalf, the role of a neophyte, as he was accustomed to do: for, in the Lodge, all initiates are brothers and owe each other mutual assistance... When I left, I had become his Adept, and I had taken all the commitments he could wish for, including the obligation to respond urgently to any summons, at the signal you heard tonight, my child, and misinterpreted.

This long story had relaxed me somewhat, though not completely disarmed.

— You must understand, Clotilde, my father insisted, the gravity of the confidence I am sharing with you. My oaths to the Lodge prohibit me from doing so under the most severe penalties, and, on the other hand, the Turkish government, so suspicious, so despotic, absolutely proscribes this kind of secret societies whose existence no one should therefore suspect. On both sides, if the slightest word, the slightest action on your part were to betray that I have let you in on the secret, it would mean death or worse for us... But I know you, Clotilde Bersone, and capable, though a woman, of keeping your tongue: you will not betray the trust I have placed in you.

I deigned to promise him in a few words.

Oddly enough! I hardly doubted that this story was largely sincere; however, something rang false in my father's tone and still felt calculated. At times, it seemed like he was reciting a role, touching but not spontaneous. Without clearly identifying the cause of my unease, I continued to be suspicious.

He thought it was only a remnant of my suspicions from the night, and, on his own, to dispel all my doubts, he offered to show me the Lodge during the day.

It was my turn to be astonished. I expressed my fear of being caught during this indiscreet visit. I saw from his indifferent gesture that he feared such an accident much less than he said:

— Bah! he said, I know the time when all the staff is outside or occupied. - No intruders to fear... I accepted.

But already the feeling pierced me that this supposedly surreptitious visit had been planned, last night, between my father and these mysterious conspirators, and that his alleged confidences had been dictated to him. In short, it was less about introducing me to the Lodge to finish dispelling my misunderstanding from the night before than, for the Lodge, forewarned of my presence, to lay hands on me; and my father had complied with these demands, whether I was to serve as an instrument for his personal ambitions or whether he was closely held enough to be asked for anything. In either case, I had to reject his offers. Unfortunately, my presumption was such that I flattered myself, both with unraveling this secret more important to me than that of the Sects and with avenging myself on my father himself, if necessary, by turning his odious calculations against him.

Before parting, facing the coldness of reconciliation, he had like a last heartfelt word and repeated:

— Ah! my poor child, how much better it might have been if you had not asked me anything... And, with a kind of horror that had already struck me that night:

— Beautiful and prideful to make one shudder, my Clotilde! Ah! I fear for you...

— What do you mean?

— You will know too soon.

He kissed me and left, almost as abruptly as the night before.

### III

#### FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH THE DRAGON

I didn't attach enough importance to this strange mood. It was without haste, but also without a shadow of hesitation, that I prepared for the announced visit. My curiosity had come into play, a kind of inner force impelled me, and I would have sworn that I was soon going to learn, about this sect of the Illuminati, much more than my father was determined to let me glimpse.

I was not fooled by the few words with which he had hinted that it was only an association of honest, independent, and cultivated people in search of an honest common pastime. My religious education was nil, regarding Freemasonry as well as anything else; but I had read Silvio Pellico and a whole literature, strangely mixed, about the Carbonari. I suspected that political goals and occult duties must be intertwined with the innocent program proclaimed for the profane. How could I have guessed the depth of



the abyss into which a father, whom, despite my anger from the night before, I had not perceived as so denatured, consciously led me?

It was around three o'clock in the afternoon on December 17 when I finally set foot for the first time, as a mere visitor, in the Grand Lodge of the Illuminati of the East.

I won't give a lengthy description—all the superior Lodges in the world are established on roughly the same plan, regardless of their external form, dimensions, or specific details.

I quickly realized that the floor where my father led me was only a part of the building, the most ordinary place in the house. Above or below, there undoubtedly stretched the rooms reserved for the real mysteries—those that are opened one by one to the Adepts.

Whatever it was, a first room greeted my eyes, like a vast waiting hall: it is what is called in the East the Avly, perhaps in reminiscence of the ancient Roman aula. To the right, the Black Cabinet where the candidate for affiliation, my father told me, undergoes his trials. To the left, a kind of dressing room where the initiates, after getting rid of their hats and coats in the Avly, don their Masonic aprons and jewels, sometimes the toga and other symbolic garments, before entering the Lodge.

Between the Black Cabinet and the Dressing Room, finally, a kind of vestibule whose revolving doors and even the walls are padded and muffle all sounds, no matter how piercing, that may come from the meeting room.

— Oh! I couldn't help saying, laughing to my father, these are quite a few precautions to protect the innocent pleasures of people who are having fun.

He put a finger to his lips, smiling as well, to avoid answering, and we entered the Masonic Lodge or Temple itself.

It was a beautiful rectangular hall of unusual height and adorned with strange furnishings.

About two meters from the entrance stood a skeleton; this macabre idea made me smile like a tragic Punch invention intended to frighten grown-up children.

On the other hand, in the middle of the Lodge, I suddenly stopped, despite my father's efforts to divert me, in front of a strange animal in white marble, lying on a pedestal in a threatening attitude. A broken scepter and crown under its front paws, a tiara under its hind paws, it has seven heads, almost human in appearance. Several seemed lion-like, without resembling each other; several were adorned with horns.

A strange, indefinable life emanated from this monster, whose multiple gaze seemed to have fixed on mine and fascinated me.

"It's the Dragon," my father said in a low voice. The one called here Idra, the Cabal and Illuminati Hydra.

He almost forcibly tore me away from the inexplicable attraction that nailed me in front of this beast, and I did not admit to myself the strange and sudden dominion of this effigy over my mind and senses. The statue was mediocre as a work of art, and at that time, no one was more resistant than I to the complicated symbolism of these old hermetic figures, in which the superstitions and chimeras of a now-extinct chaos of civilizations seemed to have amalgamated. Alas! I no longer had the slightest disposition to believe in the supernatural, divine or diabolical, in evocations, in magic, in any entity, foreign to the human mind and superior, in heaven or in hell, to the advances of modern science.

And yet a kind of vulture had descended on my heart and gripped it like prey, in the manner of living claws, against which my pride and passion for independence rebelled in vain.

By whom, by what, had I been thus suddenly captivated, struck by a turmoil, an emotion still unknown in my life, as if a mysterious power, casting its net over me in passing, had made me a prisoner? I ignored it, I would have been indignant at the mere thought that there might be knowledge of it. The kind of numbness, haunting, or dream that had descended upon me, the duration of a flash, left me as if annihilated and lost in a chiaroscuro of formless and will-less phantasmagoria.

I tried again to touch this marble with my hand, yet as cold and immobile as any lion or sphinx on display at the entrance of a villa or temple; my father seized my arm, as if I were about to sacrilegiously attack the majesty of the gods.

"No, come," he stammered with a visible nervous tremor... "It's already too much."

And with a bewildered air, where the accent of triumph mingled with a sort of overwhelming terror:

"I suspected it... I had been told... You will be the Sovereign Elect, Clotilde Bersone, and the queen of the Illuminati, above your father and all of us."

He was pulling me along, but beyond the monster, leaning against the wall, a gigantic painting stood, covering two-thirds of the back of the room. It was the portrait of Mazzini, supreme leader of the old Carbonari, then of the Council of Perfect Masters, from which undoubtedly emanated this new sect of higher Illuminati, now in control of all the lower-degree masons. Mazzini, standing, leaned against a Dragon similar to the one in the room. He held in his hand a royal crown from which he seemed to be plucking the fleurons one by one, with a sardonic and cruel smile. At his feet, the floor was strewn with skulls still wearing mitres or diadems. But above all, what finally penetrated my imagination like a fiery arrow was, behind the tribune, a woman standing, fluid and white. She was offering Mazzini a cup filled with blood to the brim and held with the other hand a terrestrial globe whose base was surrounded by a serpent. Mazzini wore a magnificent costume that I have since recognized as that of the Grand Orient of the Grand Lodges of Illuminati: his scarlet cloth robe covered a short white flannel skirt, stopping at mid-arm and knee, secured to the chest by a sun with three rays. Overall, a black velvet toga with gold lame, and a three-branched crown. Next to him, on a side table, were various symbolic instruments of universal Freemasonry. I shuddered. In this woman, in this nymph, it seemed to me that I recognized my image as in a mirror, and the eyes of the Dragon shot flames that surrounded me in a whirlwind of smoky lights. I looked at my father, as if coming out of a nightmare. He too was pale. "Yes," he stammered. "We've already had two Nymphs... They died... The Grand Orients are waiting for the third, the one who will not die and will speak in the name of the Dragon." I tried to laugh; it was a kind of strident sob that escaped me. "Let's get out!" I shouted at him. "I'm afraid."

He pressed on a sort of gas lever. Two rows of chandeliers lit up on each side of the room, flooding it with a bright light, and I was able to consider the entire room. Three columns rose on either side of the main aisle; a seventh in the center of the room. At the far end, above the president's chair, there was an ebony cross adorned with an ivory Christ, whose meaning I wondered about in this place full of Turks and atheists. Three other seats on each side of the presidential seat surrounded a horseshoe-shaped table, which my father, in the local jargon, called: Hemi-circular Table. Finally, behind the columns, arranged like school benches, other places were offered, furnished with ink, pens, pencils, and paper. Above, a sort of gallery, divided into boxes similar to those in theaters, and which my father proceeded to explain to me with great satisfaction. But I was overwhelmed with an indescribable emotion, crushed by a flood of contradictory thoughts, unable to hear more. He had to bring me home, silent, impenetrable, in a state close to hallucination and madness.

## JUGGLERY AND DEBAUCHERY

What had happened? Nothing and everything. I felt that my fate was sealed forever and couldn't say why, for I had never felt so determined to remain the mistress of my destiny. It had only, in a strange way, expanded. Unexpected perspectives had opened, where I wanted to remain free to commit, but at least they pierced the wall that had imprisoned me until then.

Confident in my skepticism of remaining above all the jugglery and all the secrets, I now dreamed of seizing them to make them an instrument of rule and, through them, dominate the world—or at least one of the men, the secret masters of the world.

Energetically, I shook off the sort of autosuggestion that had troubled me so ridiculously during the harmless visit we had just made to the Lodge. I scolded myself, I mocked myself for this moment of weakness, barely worthy of the child-woman I had shown myself to be and not of the Egeria of a new Mazzini that I could become now, with a bit of skill and daring.

As for my father, more and more it seemed to me that I could read deep within his heart. It was in vain that he had played, until the feet of the Dragon to whom he had led me, the comedy of alarmed tenderness. He knew much more than he had told me and was undeniably, beside me, only the intermediary of a superior power. He was made to act, either by vile fear or by vile ambition for a subordinate position. In both cases, what baseness of feelings! What mediocre combinations didn't he sacrifice love and the protection of a barely found child for? Once my wild anger of the night had passed, I hated him less, but how much more I despised him. A deep disgust, incurable, like a perpetual spasm of the heart, now drove me away from him, just as a nameless dryness had forever distanced me from my mother, who was so dry herself and stingy with tenderness. This petty, frivolous spendthrift was no better. Through him, therefore, I would rise to the top when the occasion arose, with no profit for him, and that would be my revenge...

When I saw him again, I spoke to him like a sovereign still offended, giving her orders:

— How can I now attend one of the sessions of the Lodge without being seen?

— Oh! That is absolutely impossible.

— I insist, and I will succeed, come what may.

He thought for a moment:

— Well, fine! But there is only one way. We must obtain permission from the Grand Orient. I will ask him for it...

I saw his eyes smile as if at a pleasant memory:

— It's actually quite funny... You'll see! ... You won't recognize anyone, and no one will recognize you.

Something in the tone made me feel again that he was lying. Was it simply because my request was anticipated, and the answer from the Grand Orient had been arranged in advance? In any case, it didn't take long to come. However, before this almost public session, Ahmed Pasha wanted to see me. I agreed to this visit eagerly, agitated by new dreams, though I was destined to return quite disappointed.

Certainly, the old Ahmed Kaiserli Pasha still had great presence despite his eighty years, and he welcomed me as if I were a distant princess. He showed me around his palace, where oriental splendor was on display; I went with him all the way to his harem, where three hundred women, free or enslaved, lived confined and at the disposal of this old man. During dinner, he affected a refined courtesy and kindness that hid nothing of the unyielding general who would still command victory against the Russians, nor of the fierce partisan who, the following year, would depose and possibly have Sultan Abd-ul-Aziz assassinated.

In the smoking room, where we went afterwards, his speeches and his demeanor began to displease me.

He affected an impassive expression that suited his sharp, medal-like profile and his hollowed features beneath the turban perfectly. But his eyes, shining between his crinkled eyelids, gleamed with cunning and, at times, with unmatched malevolence. One could sense that he was both ferocious and shrewd.

He himself praised at length, during our conversation, my mind, my culture, my talents. He confirmed what my father had taught me, namely that the Great Lodges of Illuminati only accepted women in exceptional cases and by higher order; that two women had already passed through their ranks, neither of whom had been particularly praiseworthy; but that they were expecting great things from a third, whose selection seemed imminent. He had no doubt, for his part, that I was that chosen and blessed Woman. Moreover, he spoke of it with disinterest, knowing full well that even if I accepted to be affiliated with the Lodge of Constantinople, it would not be to settle there, as I was destined to play a greater role on a higher stage.

And to punctuate each of these compliments, he multiplied the most unexpected obsequiousness towards me.

Finally, as I still neither agreed nor disagreed, he concluded by giving me the Masonic salute and declaring that it was a point of honor for him to consider me, in any case, an Adept beyond reproach, due to the powerful protection he knew had been extended over me.

— What protection?

I could get no more out of him, nor from my father, upon his return home, which only deepened my irritation towards both of them.

Thus, despite their insistence, I resolved to wait for the famous session to which I had been invited, now scheduled for January 22, 1875, before accepting any further proposals. My father, in vain, urged me to yield to Ahmed Pasha's advances.

Finally dropping the mask and revealing his shameful motives:

— You're wrong, my little one, he kept repeating to me. Sooner or later, you'll consent, because no one escapes the fate decided by the Higher Powers. By becoming an Adept through our Lodge right now, you would win me the favor of Bou Ahmed, flattered to have secured such a recruit for the other Orients. Our brothers are everywhere, numerous and strong.

I would obtain a promotion at my embassy. Who knows? They might send me elsewhere, wherever you wanted, and you would remain forever the guiding spirit of my career.

I asked him sharply to stop insisting, and he fell silent, shrinking like a beaten dog. But I could tell he was counting on the outcome of the next meeting to break my final resistance. I had now become his best asset in life. I could have bitten him.

And on the morning of the meeting itself, a new scene, less violent but more bitter, broke out between us.

For the session, I had ensured a stylish and understated outfit: a simple black velvet dress with matching accessories. Suddenly, an emissary of Ahmed Pasha arrived at the house, bearing a significant diamond necklace. I wanted to refuse this overly extravagant gift, finding the gesture inappropriate towards a young girl. My father seemed not at all embarrassed. He explained to me that in the East, high-ranking individuals often give such gifts to foreigners, and indeed, some other presents I received from Madame the Ambassador of Portugal, from Madame the Countess of B. de M., and from Marquis Spagnolini later taught me that this custom was quite common in certain circles. It felt like an affront to me that day. I angrily reproached my father for making me bear it and for selling his daughter's honor to the highest bidder. He no longer replied, weary as he was of my stubborn nature and eager to avoid a scene if, at the last moment, I refused to attend the requested gathering.

Because, like it or not, I had to attend this cursed meeting, either with the jewels around my neck or not at all.

I decided to leave, rather late in the evening; the diamonds burned my shoulder like a red-hot iron.

At 11 o'clock and a few minutes, I entered the Lodge with my father.

All the benches along the sides were already occupied; all the boxes were full. Of the seven chairs for the Great Initiates, six were taken. Only the Grand Orient was absent.

I didn't pay much attention to this at first. From the first glance, I was struck by an instinctive fear, and despite my resolve not to be surprised by anything, I found myself completely unsettled.

None of the attendees had human faces. All were wearing horse heads of different colors, whether they had put on these cardboard masks in the cloakroom, as if for a costume ball, or, as I would later find out, whether it was some mysterious trick of the Sect: for these heads seemed animated and alive.

Soon, I was more shocked than intrigued by this masquerade. In a whisper, I asked my father the reason for this masquerade; he responded only with an evasive answer: namely, that I had wished not to be recognized, and that the rule of the Lodge was also that no one would recognize anyone.

None of the attendees had human faces. The use of this magical method, which adorned everyone with horse-head masks instead of their real faces. This reasoning didn't convince me much. I could see my father himself in his natural form, as I could see in my pocket mirror, and so, I alone was seen by everyone and saw nothing. This new deception, inwardly, outraged me.

— Where is Ahmed Pasha? I asked, and why is he not present?

— His high duties at the Sublime Porte must have kept him, my father answered, more and more uncomfortable.

— I regret it, I said almost aloud. When someone is invited to a party, they should attend; and this gentleman is also missing the delicate display of diamonds he had me wear.

My father grasped my arm in alarm, quickly waving my fan in front of my lips: a clever echo, as I later learned, allowed the slightest of our words to be heard by stenographers stationed behind the partitions.

Fortunately, other voices filled the room. Below me, different speakers exchanged in high-pitched voices the most grandiose and empty speeches I had ever heard: they mostly spoke of the interests of the people, the duties of rulers, and so on.

However, in the gallery opposite ours, an unknown figure with a horse's head kept staring at me intently, and my instinct made me guess that it was Ahmed Pasha, trying to study me more closely without being seen, as I later confirmed.

At the time of departure, at three in the morning, I received from his hand, in the Avly, a formal invitation to the dinner that was to follow. The trial had undoubtedly seemed favorable to him, and I accepted, determined to push through with the sad experience of that day.

With my father, I descended into a large underground room beneath the Lodge. There, the horse masks had entirely disappeared, and Ahmed Pasha himself came, smiling, to greet me. I sat next to him. There were only six of us at the table, and it began as a dinner of good society, with only a slight excess in the wine. By six in the morning, they were still drinking, despite all the prescriptions of the Quran. Ahmed Pasha was completely drunk, and gradually the dinner turned into an orgy. Unspeakable remarks were made, and I could hear, in an adjacent room, the preparations for another debauchery.

Disgusted, I signaled to my father, who fortunately had kept his composure, and I was able to leave with

him without taking leave of anyone.

On the way, I didn't make any comments about what I had just seen, and I think he was grateful for that: his friends had really gone too far, and he himself could no longer believe that I was unaware of the shameful environment he was plunging me into with his own hands.

Finally, in my room, I eagerly removed my ceremonial costume and the jewelry that made my face flush. Then I threw myself onto a sofa to reflect and rest at the same time.

The scent of the hookah smoke, in which I was still soaked, slowly rose to my head; I opened my window to inhale the fresh morning air:

— What, I asked myself, are these the powerful men, in search of a higher wisdom? Yet they risk their lives and the worst tortures to indulge in these base or foolish pleasures. What mystery lies behind the disgusting farce they seem to be playing on each other? Is this how they hope to deceive me? No, I will not join this society of incompetents and pleasure-seekers. And if I ever associate myself with a plot, it must be something far more serious and of greater scale.

But if men had disappointed my expectations, above them, alas! watched a Power that would not let go of me.

## THE CHAMBER OF TORTURES

My father did not reappear until about ten o'clock. He asked, in the most casual tone, whether I was feeling too tired, and did not add anything further. Clearly, he had guessed how the phantasmagoria of the night, far from breaking my last resistance, had instead firmly anchored in me the resolution not to ask for anything further or to receive anything from Ahmed Pasha or the Lodge of Eastern Illuminati. His beautiful dream of advancement was collapsing along with his first plans, and he left me almost immediately, preoccupied with running here and there to prevent the blow that a probable rupture would deal to his personal reputation. I did not see him again for the rest of the day.

I barely encountered him more in the following days. He had again surrendered, without restraint, to his pleasures and his vulgar career concerns. Not only was his useless daughter no longer of any interest to him, but he resented me for not having served him well by refusing to wallow in the mud with him.

However, nothing on the outside showed my disgrace. Since that unfortunate session in January, invitations to good society were multiplying in my name, and while once again an emptiness was desperately growing in my heart, I lived in a whirlwind of parties and tributes.

No news from Bou Ahmed. Nevertheless, the thought of the Lodge did not leave me. While the final orgy had revolted me and the scene of the apparitions had left me cold, this phantasmagoria continued to intrigue me. It was like an annoyance that lingered with me at all hours. I searched in vain for a natural and scientific explanation, according to all the rationalist requirements of my mind. No solution satisfied me fully.

Then, through this trivial preoccupation, my thoughts continually converged on another sudden thought I could not shake: that of the Hydra with seven heads, the White Marble Dragon, up there in the silent Lodge, under the hand of the Nymph with golden hair, behind a melodramatic Mazzini...

One evening, my father, somewhat hesitantly, told me that he had a few personal arrangements to make at the Lodge and asked if I would mind accompanying him for a simple repair of a flag fringe, a task with which he was not familiar.

I hesitated for a second before responding. The memory of that mysterious place had become painful for me, and I feared another scheme. At the same time, my indomitable pride made me fear appearing timid:

— Very well, I replied. Let's go!

I followed him, my head buzzing. We descended to the room where we had dined the other night, and I settled in to carry out the task he had assigned me.

But while I was calmly pulling the needle, I realized that after furtively ensuring that I was entirely focused on my sewing, he carefully opened a secret door behind me:

"Don't be afraid," he shouted to me from there. I have another accessory to pick up. I'm coming back in a moment.

Good, I replied from my place. Hurry. I wouldn't want to stay here alone. And barely had he turned on his heels when, carried away by my curiosity, I went down behind him. He only heard me when I was crossing a second passage: it was already too late to block my way. In vain he begged me to retrace my steps and abandon the disastrous project of accompanying him further:

"No," I told him. Don't insist. This is a resolved thing. You know what you're up to hold on to my discretion; you have nothing to fear... For a long time, I have suspected this that there may be behind your so-called fraternal fun: I want to know the rest, and I will know.

Through a maze of corridors and stairs, we reached, chatting in this way, until we reached a low, vaulted vault:

"Let's leave it there," my father said again. What's the point of showing off this spectacle? I'm afraid of scare you. I looked at him with scathing disdain:

—Where you are going, what could possibly frighten me?

He opened, without himself foreseeing the full horror of the spectacle that awaited us, and we we found ourselves in a sort of crypt full of instruments of torture. I thought I would smile, like in front of a theater paraphernalia. But, on the ground, there still lay bloody debris or emaciated: hands, feet, arms, heads. And on this butchery an abominable smell of a mass grave.

Face to face, in this setting of romantic drama, two mannequins, of which only my father had thought, stood upright, their tunics stained with blood. One wore a crown, and the other a tiara. Next to them, a stiletto, daggers still sticky with blood, testified that these homicidal weapons of the initiatory parades had not struck merely a wicker cage or a bladder full of carmine, but living flesh, human flesh — and that the cup offered by the Nymphs, in these cursed places, to the great redeemers of the Peoples, was not just metaphorical, but in reality, a cup of blood still warm from the murder of the victims.

What can I say? I was horrified, delirious, and at the same time, I felt, at the sight of the blood, some fierce instinct of a condottiere or a carbonaro stir within me: the cursed taste of this human blood, more intoxicating than the appetite for the worst of luxuries.

With a wild cry, my eyes wide in shock, pointing at the seven dreadful faces of the Dragon that seemed to rise from the depths of the abyss amid swirling smoke, I collapsed unconscious and did not regain my senses until many hours later, lying in my room, on my bed, fully dressed.

My father, at my bedside, pale, was devouring me with his eyes. He let out a sigh of relief when he saw that I was finally coming to and answering his first words without delirium. He had feared that my mind might have completely wandered, and tears were flowing down his still trembling cheeks. I was even about to feel grateful for his sorrow; but unfortunately, he opened his mouth, and I saw that he was still thinking only of his own dangers, of his compromised existence.

'I told you, little girl... Why do you always give in, when you speak like that, with those eyes of flame that seem to command hell? We are in Turkey here, and you've seen what the life of a man is worth. If the

Grand Orient learns that I allowed you to discover this mortal secret without any trial, we would have the chance to end up in turn, I in that horrible torture chamber, and you at the bottom of its harem, degraded to the lowest tasks and prey to the bestiality of the slaves.'

I gestured to him that he had nothing to fear, and, so that he would leave me in peace, I pretended to turn toward the wall to sleep, staring at the curtains, where, tirelessly, streams of bright red blood flowed, flowing endlessly.

My father, increasingly frightened, did not leave me the whole day. He had his meals served to him in my room and ate very little. I touched nothing. It seemed to me that everything would now always have, for me, the taste of that cursed blood. And at the same time that I felt nauseous, a terrible thirst for that same blood was devouring my insides. I was experiencing gnawing temptations of terrible vengeance.

I thought that all I had to do was to reveal to the Ottoman police the secret of the Illuminati. They would soon fall into the trap that could be set for them, either at the great Lodge of Buyuk-Dere or at the Galata branch. In turn, Bou Ahmed and my father at the head would feel the atrocious tortures they had inflicted on others. And, facing their accomplices from other countries, I would be free to launch, against the Society as a whole, a gigantic struggle across the world, a battle worthy of my genius and my pride.

However, in contrast to these plans, both too virtuous and parricidal, another monstrous force was fighting within me. Despite the horror of the initial shock, the Sect of the Illuminati was growing in my imagination, washed, in this blood, of the ridicule and filth of its surface tricks. Behind this comedy veil, I finally sensed all its satanic perversity and the existence of the real and terrible secret that had to be defended and avenged at the cost of so many murders committed in the shadows. It no longer seemed indifferent to me to become the subject and perhaps the queen of the terrible Sect that dared to employ such means.

With all my audacity, I would leap over the low steps of the throne where my father had degraded himself, and I would finally be rewarded for all my fears, disgusts, and despairs! To me the crown and perhaps the heart of the future Liberator of mankind, who, at the cost of so many crimes, would finally bring to earth at least the animal happiness and the great pessimistic pride of a humanity that masters nature and rivals God!

A double ideal, contradictory plans that fevered me on my bed like a nightmare...

'Clotilde,' my father gently suggested when night fell, 'perhaps we should go out for a while. Let's take in the air for a few moments. The night is cool and peaceful on the Bosphorus.'

I accepted, hoping to calm my feverish mind.

When we arrived at the quay, I thought we were going to take one of the steamships heading to the Golden Horn; my father had a small boat detached from the shore, which he used secretly for his personal errands. We sat at the front. Two rowers were at the back, and slowly we made our way towards Therapia. A magnificent Eastern sky was reflected in the illuminated waters of the shore's lights. An immense peace seemed to descend upon me from the depths of eternal mystery.

At the same time, another very sweet dizziness, like an infinite despair, now without revolt and without cries, made me slowly slide over the sides of the boat and lean toward the wave, as if to cool my burning hand; and suddenly, as we were approaching the point of Yeniköy, I rolled into the abyss, lifeless, happy, rocked by the gentle movement I had dreamed of all my life in the arms of a loving father, on the cuddling lap of a mother.

My father, who had thrown himself into the water, had the greatest difficulty finding me under the waves and hauling my fainted body back aboard the gondola.

THE THREAD OF DESTINY



Why had I not remained deep in the Bosphorus! For eight days, I had a fever and remained between life and death. Every morning, Ahmed Pasha inquired about my condition; every evening, numerous visitors called at my door. I refused to see anyone and told my father bluntly that I had decided to return to Italy as soon as possible.

He consented, after making me promise not to take my life again, not to forget him entirely, and to allow a few farewell visits, the last of which was for Ahmed Pasha.

He received me with an increasingly polite courtesy. In carefully chosen words, he expressed his regret at my leaving Stamboul and the hope that this sudden departure would not sever all ties between us. As for the Lodge, he spoke of it with exquisite discretion, and regarding my regular reception as an Adept, he confined himself to the banalities of good company, to which I replied with equally reluctant excuses of a well-bred young girl. Without pressing further, he warned me that his intention was to address my objections by letter—if I would allow him to write to me—but only when I would be in Paris.

"I'm not going to Paris," I told him. "I'm returning to Italy."

"Yes, but Paris, sooner or later, will inevitably attract you, and besides, THEY want you there. It is there that, sooner or later, you will be one of us."

"Never," I replied sharply.

"It would be a pity," he replied, contenting himself with this almost insulting declaration. "In any case, I will keep of you the imperishable memory of a woman of mind and heart. Beautiful, unyielding, and superior to all prejudices, you gave us all reason to be proud."

I inclined my head to end the conversation, for despite the exquisite courtesy of his words, the narrow, shining eyes of this impenetrable High Sectarian filled me with a secret unease. It seemed to me that he knew everything about my past, even what my father had made me swear to conceal from him, that he had pieced together all the seemingly incoherent details, and that he continued to play with my entire future, despite my imminent flight, like a tiger with a gazelle on the run.

At the moment of my departure, with a thousand polite formulas, he asked once again if I would be so kind as to carry some papers to deliver on his behalf, when I passed through Athens, to the ambassador of the Sublime Porte to the King of Greece, which he could only entrust to me. I sensed the trap or the scheme, and I looked at him fixedly, without blinking, as his hand slowly, inexorably, extended the large envelope marked with five wax seals.

Subjugated, I almost mechanically took his letter and withdrew backward, while he saluted me with a final strange gesture, which I recognized much later as that of the High Initiates, all the while uttering a sort of invocation that seemed cabalistic to me:

"May the Spirit protect you and bring you back among us, glorious and powerful, oh Chosen Nymph, oh Inspired One! You whom the Dragon has chosen above all women..."

Fifteen days later, I boarded the steamer Segesta, unknowingly accompanied by an emissary from the Grand Orient, tasked with ensuring that, upon my passage through the Piraeus, I was fulfilling the mission assigned to me. A month later, I disembarked in Genoa where my mother was waiting for me.

Alas! I found her colder and less maternal than ever.

Twice, during the following months, I was asked for my hand in marriage by young men I respected, with whom I might have succeeded, like so many others, in establishing an honest home. One in particular was secretly dear to me, and I loved him quietly. I do not wish to associate his name with this impure

story; at least let my confession and his clear memory shine for a moment through these pages stained with so much sorrow. My mother ruthlessly dismissed both of these suitors, too proud to insist: she did not consider them rich enough for our status. Perhaps she also judged them too Christian to keep much regard for them when they saw what kind of wife she had prepared for them!

I came to despise her with all the force of that supreme lost hope; and in the same hatred, I definitively included my father, who no longer gave any sign of life.

However, I had found a third suitor on my own, and this one, my mother seemed intent on throwing into my arms. It was Count Daniel F\*\*\*. He was young, pleasant in appearance, and possessed a large fortune; he loved me as well, at least with a certain passionate and crude fervor. I would have willingly consented to become his wife, and that was what my mother aimed for; he had other plans and only sought to make me his mistress.

With great ardor, he proposed to abduct me, to leave with me for Paris, and, little by little, the temptation pierced me to leave indeed, alone or with him, to escape my mother and this dreadful anguish in my heart, toward that capital of free thought and free morals, where an obscure call incessantly urged me to reconnect the threads of my destiny.

One evening, while I was debating these guilty thoughts alone with myself, I was handed an envelope, the address of which made me shudder. It was from Ahmed Pasha.

It was not yet the letter he had promised me, but another proposal, as flattering as an invitation, as impatient as a reminder:

"If you have not yet made any commitments for the future," he wrote to me, "I can offer you a prominent, honorable, and active position. One of my friends, who resides in Paris, has asked me to recommend an educated, distinguished, discreet, and courageous lady to whom serious matters can be entrusted, matters which she will be informed about later. Where else can such a marvel be found but in you?"

A few months of reflection have no doubt changed your feelings regarding a great office to be filled in our societies, and surely you would no longer feel as reluctant to join an association that has made you so many advances?

In any case, you will soon see me in Paris, if you are willing to go there without delay, and there we can resume, if necessary, this conversation in a more useful manner."

Upon this, he gave me an address in France, and in the blink of an eye, I was determined to respond to his call.

Not that I intended to commit to anything; but in order to escape a situation now inextricable with my family, and also to put the urgent barrier of distance between Count Daniel and me.

I was even about to share my decision with Daniel when he entered my room, my mother either absent or having intentionally left us alone.

Immediately, his eyes fell on the letter I was holding. He asked who it was from. I refused to tell him, and, very jealous, he got caught in the game. Frustrated by my resistance, he managed to tear a part of Ahmed Pasha's message from me. As soon as he saw the shape of certain letters, he realized it came from a High Initiate: he himself belonged to ordinary Freemasonry and its lower degrees, but surely, like my father, he was informed and was only playing a role with me.

"Ah," he said, intrigued, "your correspondent belongs to a High Lodge or a superior secret society."

"How do you know that?" I replied.

He feared revealing too much and fell silent at first. Then, after a moment, he declared that far from being upset, if I belonged to any Grand Lodge, he would only be pleased. In short, little by little, I ended up sharing with him Ahmed's proposals. They set him alight with enthusiasm:

"It's settled!" he beamed. "We leave tomorrow."

I tried in vain to convince him that I wanted to remain irreproachable and leave alone. Fired up by our argument and the opportunity, his passion knew no bounds, and he ended up abusing me with a brutality that suddenly filled me with disgust and hatred toward him as well, an insatiable desire for revenge.

When he left me alone, facing the last preparations for the departure, I had become his prey and his slave, sullied and dishonored forever. I cried all night with tears of rage. And when dawn finally rose, my decision was made.

Yes, I would become a Freemason, since fate was pushing me toward it with such ferocious relentlessness; but a Freemason to seize power and secrets, in order to turn them against all the instruments of my misfortune.

Against Ahmed Pasha and my father, if they ever fell under my power, so that instead of rejoicing in my triumph, they would eternally repent of having prepared it;

Against my mother, whom I abandoned by inflicting this stain on her name, this shame on her life, of no longer being anything but a kept woman, a plaything of the man she had hoped to subjugate us with;

Finally, against Count Daniel. Rich and independent, I would make him devour every last centime of his magnificent fortune of 500,000 lira, and one day, without a roof, without money, without honor, burdened with debt and cast onto the street, he would have no choice but to smash his head under my contemptuous gaze and my victorious laugh.

Thus, before the rising sun, like a vow and a wish to the Unnameable Being in whom I did not believe — unknowingly borrowing the Nekam Adonai of the Rosicrucians — henceforth, without God, without family, without love, I raised my hand and cried into the dawn:

"Hate and vengeance, it is you who are forever my God!"

A kind of monstrous chuckle answered me as an echo from the depths of space and froze me to the bone.

— Vengeance and hatred are indeed my name, it seemed to reply.  
We left, Daniel and I, in the afternoon.

## SECOND PART THE DALILA OF GARFIELD

### I AT THE ARTISTS' CLUB

We arrived, if I am not mistaken, in Paris on the morning of June 29, 1875. That very evening, the count took me with him to the Artists' Club. This notorious place had a certain reputation in the world of cosmopolitan revelers, and my lover thus displayed me, from the very first day, as an affair that was both glamorous and inconsequential.

I let him do it, having lost all shame the moment I left Italy. I felt an intense desire to intoxicate myself with parties and noise, before I had seen Bou Ahmed again and sought to take my bitter revenge as a foolish

mistress of a son of a family — someone whose life was in disarray.

However, Daniel certainly knew what he was doing by bringing me there so quickly, and I noticed, from certain signs he exchanged with people in the crowd, that he knew several of those present, or at least recognized them as Brothers. From the respect he showed to some, I even guessed that we were dealing with high-ranking officials, and that my lover, like my father, was first and foremost at the service, not of his love or pleasures, but of the High Occult Power against which I had struggled in vain in the East.

Soon our table was surrounded by these strangers to me. Daniel introduced me as his friend, newly arrived from Italy, and the conversation began.

Skillfully, I slipped in a few references to the journey I had just taken to Constantinople, and almost immediately, one of these gentlemen, breaking away from the group, managed to seize me, thanks to the general complicity. The conversation, initially quite trivial, was about Eastern customs. It quickly turned into a sort of intense interrogation about the people I had met there, and my interlocutor seemed to know them much better than I did.

Suddenly, leaning toward me, under the pretext of raising his glass to offer a toast, he quickly and quietly said:

— You are, indeed, the person Ahmed Pasha has sent to us, aren't you?

I didn't answer. Bou Ahmed, delayed in the East by the imminent revolutions, had not come to Paris; I had learned this that morning. Therefore, he himself must still be unaware of both my agreement to his offers and my arrival. Who, then, could have informed this man? I remained silent, struck by surprise and irritation.

However, the stranger continued to stare at me with a hypnotic gaze, and slowly, as if forced by an invincible power, I nodded my head in agreement.

He then stood up, went straight to Daniel; I saw that he was silently commanding him, through a quick play of expressions, to leave us alone. And indeed, that miserable boy immediately left us, giving as an excuse that he needed to go to the telegraph office where he was expecting a telegram. He left without waiting for my response, and at once, the other man introduced himself.

It was the famous General J.-A. Garfield, who, six years later, in 1881, would enter the White House as the successor to Washington, Monroe, Buchanan, and Lincoln, after Grant, then President of the United States, and Hayes, his successor.

At that time, he was 44 years old, and his life was already legendary. Born in Ohio, he had worked nearly every job imaginable to escape the mediocrity of his birth. He had been a laborer, carpenter, boatman, teacher, president of Hiram College, lawyer at the Columbus bar, and in 1859 was elected senator of Ohio. He had been a soldier, an officer, and a major general during the Civil War, praised by some as the liberator of Kentucky and the victor at Chicamauga, while others saw him as an arrogant extortionist and a mysterious agent of the Sect, coming to suspect him of being involved in more than just political or military affairs.

He had just entered politics and divided his time between Washington and Europe, where he had officially visited only once, around 1868. However, in reality, he spent several months each year secretly fulfilling the role of Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of the Illuminated in France. Under the cover of supposed prospecting trips, he had spent time in the deserts of Louisiana and in the mountains along the Pacific coast.

Once we were alone, he bowed gallantly before me:

— I need to speak to you, Madame, without delay, and I would appreciate it if you could follow me.

I passively followed him to a private office, where he suddenly changed his tone and manner.

— Madame, he said, there's no need for us to play this childish comedy any longer, is there? I have you, and I have you well. Let me make this clear right away.

Seeing my look of surprise and revolt, he continued:

— What's the point of resisting? You surely remember, Madame, the letter you carried secretly from Constantinople to Athens, at a time when French diplomacy in the Levant was at a critical juncture. Due to certain indiscretions, the matter is causing quite a stir these days, especially among the well-informed circles of high politics. And if by chance the French government were to learn that the charming messenger who sparked this uproar was none other than the equally charming person I have the honor of addressing, your false honeymoon trip might, Madame, end much more unpleasantly than you anticipated... Do not worry. Let us be friends instead. You will find in us the most devoted and faithful servants, but first, you must obey. Even I cannot change that.

I was stunned, and Garfield himself seemed irritated, displeased:

— "We want it," he repeated. "They say you alone can help us with certain services. So put your head, your beauty, and your energy at our disposal... Then, rest assured, while we may have to destroy many lives, we will save yours."

I seemed to hesitate.

— "Whether you want it or not," he added, "you will belong to us. Bou Ahmed must have told you. No one escapes the Power that leads us all, and your only choice is between a triumphant abdication or futile, ruinous resistance."

You are intelligent enough to understand this today. Come to us. You will find at the Lodge the nourishment your passionate mind needs, the satisfactions your fiery soul seeks, not to mention the interest you will take in high human affairs and in other honors and pleasures, which I cannot yet speak of, but which, if you love the strange, will satisfy you with their prestige... Come, and you will be a queen. Your mouth, in turn, will pronounce, when you wish, decrees of life and death. Increasingly unsettled, I dared to look directly at the man who had just spoken to me in this way. Not only did he hold my gaze, but it was mine that faltered.

This man was terrifyingly handsome, a beauty that was no doubt malevolent, but powerful. His authoritative gaze was mesmerizing, and it was filled with mysterious, fiery flames that would make me his slave for so long, before I dared to rise against him and become the Delilah of this proud Samson. By a trick of my vivid imagination, while he spoke to me, I dressed him, one by one, in the attire of the portrait of Mazzini, in the Grand Lodge of Buyuk-Déré. And I saw myself beside him as an all-powerful Nymph, while beneath his hand, the eyes of the White Marble Dragon shot long, sharp flames, like spears.

This vision brought a half-smile to my lips, to which his, a conspiratorial one, replied. An unspoken agreement sealed our fateful encounter. He had champagne brought in to celebrate this happy resolution. I eagerly pressed my lips to it, but almost immediately set my glass back down, still full. I felt my heart faltering, and taking advantage of this weakness, suddenly, this man, who had been so courteous until then, treated me like a lost girl.

I was almost unconscious when he dropped me off, in the night, at my door, saying as his only excuse:

— At your first call, it will now be my duty to rush to you. Do not delay.

I ran to lock myself in my hotel room like a madwoman.

An hour later, Daniel had still not returned. I wrote him a short note and asked the chambermaid to give it to him as soon as he came back:

"You are a wretch. I will not receive you tonight at any price. Do as you please."

Then, opening my window wide despite the chill, I stayed on the balcony, frozen, until three in the morning, insensible to the noises of the street and to anything that remained foreign to my adventure. A beautiful starry sky shone above my head, but what did the stars matter to me? Only one feeling, strange

and mixed, dominated the chaos of impressions that came to assail me. Fury and pride, unleashed, were ravaging my heart at once.

Finally, I held, if I wished, the instrument of all my vengeance. At any cost, I now had to, whether I liked it or not, submit to this imperious Garfield who had dared, from the very beginning, and with such nonchalance, to proclaim himself my master. He had to love me, for the atrocious vengeance of his atrocious insult. Because, alone, in this vast Paris, without support, without advice, without experience, already lost to honor, what could I do, what could I become, but first bend to this vile yoke to one day usurp the crown that had been made to shine in my eyes?

At seven o'clock, I decided to take a few steps into my room and, by chance, caught sight of my face in a mirror. I frightened myself. Lost and feverish eyes devoured my pale features; my lips, all white, twisted into a grimace of rage and defiance.

There was a knock at my door, but I didn't open it, and despite Daniel's long and repeated pleas, I remained silent. His behavior from the previous day had fully revealed to me the wretchedness of his love, which, not content with having dishonored me, had so quickly consented to share. It would have been impossible for me to see him without unleashing my worst fury on him.

And when, a little later, I finally decided to dress, I managed to sneak out of my room and descend by the service stairs to the Champs-Élysées. Then, after walking for a while to calm my agitation, I entered a restaurant to have something to eat.

A little more composed, I asked for ink and paper, and, resolutely determined not to hesitate any longer, I wrote this decisive note to Garfield:

Sir,

I am determined to follow your advice. I will tell you later, in person, what I expect from you in return. Wait for me tonight at the Maison Dorée, I will be there at ten o'clock.

Clotilde Bersone.

The waiter at the restaurant took it upon himself to deliver the letter to his address, and I returned home with a lighter step. At least I was done with the uncertainties and contradictory plans.

With Garfield and through Garfield — so be it: at least I would satisfy my anger.

## II

### At the Maison Dorée

At three in the afternoon, having called for the hairdresser, I began my toilette with a true sense of refinement and an awareness of coquettishness that I had never known in myself. I was too pale for my restlessness from the night before not to show in the eyes of my partner. To remedy this, I overdid the rouge and all the artifices of the perfumers. Among my dresses, I chose the one I felt would have the best effect: it was blue, adorned with garlands of small Dijon roses. With great effort, I managed to control even a heavy heartbeat, and at exactly ten o'clock, I arrived at the rendezvous.

Garfield was already there.

As I passed the buffet, I saw him detach himself from a group and move toward me. I greeted him gracefully. He offered me his arm, which I accepted, and we crossed several empty salons together. Arriving at a sort of private room that he must have been familiar with, he asked for the key. We entered. It was a square room, very elegantly furnished. I threw myself into an armchair. Garfield rang for service, asked me if I liked Chambertin, and had it brought with some pastries. Then he closed the door, handed me the key, and sat beside me.

I had allowed him to do all this, still smiling, pretending to engage in a distracted twittering like a bird. This attitude, in turn, surprised him, and my visible lightness of mood irritated him.

A few minutes of heavy silence passed between us; slowly I plucked the petals from a camellia he had just given me.

He finally got up, irritated and troubled.

Our roles from the previous day were now reversed, and I triumphed inwardly. After a few steps in the room, he said abruptly:

— Madam, I have rushed, as promised, to your first call. Now it is your turn to fulfill what your note seemed to promise me.

My intention was not to let him direct the conversation, and in response to this demand, I asked another

question:

— What exactly is Freemasonry?

— Uh, he replied, somewhat taken aback, you know very well. It is a vast society, composed of friends of the People and of Liberty.

I burst into a long, tinkling laugh, which finished his discomfiture:

— Your cheerfulness pleases me, he said, it suits you better than the sullen or overly serious demeanor from yesterday.

But he was stung.

Let me know if you need any further adjustments or clarifications!

— What do you want, Sir, I replied in the same tone. At my age, these overly serious ideologies are out of place, and at twenty, one only loves garlands of flowers. How do you expect me to accept others?

I was horrified, at these words, by the expression on his face. It was as if a whirlwind of contradictory passions passed through him: desire, anger, fear, and a flame of will that suddenly consumed everything else:

— Be silent, woman, he said roughly, and don't imagine, because of the confusion of a moment, that I love you, against all my oaths, with a stupid love. It is consciously that I yielded to this sudden attraction, to finally draw you in; and would you even be here if you knew how to love? Is that why you were chosen? ... Ah no! Our virtue, you see, is not love, it is pride, and it is hate. What are you talking about flowers for, when you think only of your vengeance? ... Ah! don't deny it, because I know you better than you know yourself, and it's because it is known that nothing will stop you from avenging your offenses that, despite your lightness, the crown is offered to you... As for me, what does it matter to you? Go, I came from lower than you, Clotilde Bersone; I have suffered and worked more fiercely and longer than you without hope. And you can test my heart: there is no place left in it but for vengeance. Love would make me cowardly, and for you, love would be your ruin.

At that moment, I was stunned, seeing how a revenge I had believed so close was slipping away from me.

Without completely abandoning my initial plans — for I could sense that I wasn't as indifferent to the general as he tried to make me believe — I decided to postpone any new attempt at seduction. I had to surprise him first to reduce him later. So I convinced myself that I had only tested him in jest. But I had given him my word to follow his best advice from now on, and I was ready to listen to him docilely.

— Right away?

— At once.

— And ready for anything?

— Anything!... I ask only for you to spare me from dragging through too many low and useless trials, fit only for the vulgar.

— That is not what you have to fear, he promised with a strange look. And besides, know this, Clotilde Bersone, so there is no misunderstanding between us from the outset, it is not I who have chosen you, and now that I know you, it is all the more reason for me to tell you that, if it were only up to us two, we would leave it at that, tonight, at least on this ground.

And that was the only admission he made that day, the only words that hinted at a more human feeling; he had fully regained his composure and, shaking his lion's head, insensitive to the sirens' seductions, he resumed his role as the initiatory Pontiff, mercilessly:

— If you are ready, I am too, and you will undergo your trials. Promise me to obey me, from now on and until the end, without revolt, without a question, no matter what happens... If you give up before the final result, you will have only one word to say: I will be there to free you from the adventure.

— Know, I told him, with a look of defiance, that once resolved, I never back down.

— I wish you that, Clotilde Bersone. We will see... Come.

— I follow you.

And I thought to myself, softly:

— Already, it is I who lead you.

### III. THE AFFILIATION

I soon feared I would be contradicted.

Garfield had wrapped me in my fur coat as we left, for the night was chilly, and we got into his carriage that was waiting at the door. The horses seemed to be taking us out of the city; and we quickly arrived, without a word, near the Gare de Lyon. There, Garfield took from his pocket a rubber band lined with silk, which, placed over my face, formed an impenetrable mask. It was only from the sound of the carriage rolling over the cobblestones that I realized, instead of continuing to gallop toward the suburbs, we were heading back into Paris. By which paths? Through which endless circuits? Was it truly Garfield who was still sitting silently beside me? This strange journey lasted two and a half hours.

Finally, the horses stopped. Garfield, reappeared, threw a shawl over my head without explanation, which further hindered my perception of the outside world. Then, holding my arm, we began yet another improbable journey on foot, crossing I don't know how many vast rooms and endless corridors, climbing and descending tall stairs—always the same, I thought—each about twenty steps high. Naturally, I refrained from making any remark and laughed inwardly, despite the boredom and fatigue of this childish trial.

At last, I found myself standing against a chair. They made me sit down, removed my blindfold, and after a few minutes to allow me to adjust to the light, I was able to examine the place where we had arrived. It was still only a kind of cloakroom, where, soon, at Garfield's suggestion, I removed my fur coat and, in front of a mirror, tidied up my attire, which was slightly rumpled from the journey.

Garfield then offered me his arm, and we went to a double door. He pressed the bell hidden in the wood seven times, then three times, then once more. From inside, a similar sound responded in the wall to this signal. I seethed at the slowness of it all; Garfield, impassive, said to me:

— It's one of the axioms of the Illuminated: "Let the arm be swift to execute what the mind has conceived in calm." Patience!

Suddenly, the two doors opened, and I entered a kind of rotunda entirely draped in black velvet. Silver braids and fringes ran along the drapery, as if for a funeral ceremony. A table was set in the middle, and six people, dressed very properly in black, were seated. Only the central chair was empty. Another type of seat or stool awaited me in front of the judges. Garfield made me sit there and took possession of the presidential chair.

I was in the Chapter Hall.

A quick glance around me allowed me to recognize some of the accessories I had already seen in the lodge in Constantinople: the skeleton, the ebony and ivory crucifix, and a large book with iron binding chained to the floor, which I later learned was the Annals of the Society.

We remained thus in silence for a quarter of an hour, by the clock.

— Well, I thought... So far, the trial isn't too difficult; but how these good people love to waste their time!

At last, Garfield stood up, solemnly made the sign of the Affiliates, and said:

— Gentlemen and dear Brothers, I have the honor of presenting Mademoiselle Clotilde Bersone, whose background you are not unaware of. I will only remind you of it with one word: she is the Adept whom the Most Illustrious and Most Powerful Brother Ahmed Pasha has so often spoken of to us. I believe her worthy of the Lodge's interest and capable of assuming the responsibility of an Affiliate.

His voice emphasized the title.

Thus, my first Masonic stage seemed to be bypassed, as if my reception into the grade of Adept had already, unbeknownst to me, occurred during my time in Constantinople or my mission in Athens. I was



both shocked by the casualness of the process and, deep down, flattered and grateful to Garfield.

— Do you consent, continued the Grand Orient, to admit Clotilde Bersone to this high grade?

The six councilors exchanged various signs of assent.

Garfield ordered me to rise, take three steps back, and remain standing. Then, fixing me with his impassive gaze, he addressed me with this short speech:

— These three steps back signify that you have walked this far in a misdirection that you now recognize and wish to repair. Standing, you are now ready to walk a better path.

He resumed his officiant tone:

— Madam, to which religion do you belong?

— I belong to none.

— Were you baptized?

— Yes.

— Do you believe in any special character that baptism might confer?

— No.

— Do you believe in God?

— No.

— What is the reason that makes you wish to join the Lodge?

— Hatred and vengeance!

— Good... Do you promise to passively obey all orders that will be given to you?

— Yes.

— Are you ready to break, by any means, all obstacles that might oppose the will of the Lodge?

— Yes.

— Would you do so even if the obstacle were your father, your mother, your child, your dearest friend?

— Yes, yes again, yes, I tell you.

Garfield passed a urn among his assistants. They placed a ball inside it, and they did not even try to conceal its color. I received 6 votes out of 7 in this vote.

Only Garfield had voted against!

Yet, he rose without the slightest apparent emotion, came to offer me his arm, and led me to another, smaller room, where he informed me that I was now to remain for three days, separated from everyone, without books or distractions, alone with my thoughts and my heart.

I must admit, it was with a smile that I welcomed the announcement of this new trial, thinking it was some rhetorical turn of phrase, more or less symbolic, as harmless as everything I had seen and heard so far. Far from responding to my smile, Garfield gave me one of those long glances where worry and pain merged with a kind of moving relentlessness. Slowly, he left, locked the doors behind him, and his eyes seemed to say:

— Ah! You thought you could play and only have to reach out to seize the scepter at my side...

It may cost you dearly, and I had warned you... You are not finished, you frivolous one! Will you ever be queen? No more than I will ever be your lover...

I had braced myself against the harsh surprise and resolved to make the best of a bad situation. After all, three days are long, but not fatal to endure, and I had faced other humiliations before.

My meals were handed to me through a small window, and in order not to perish from boredom, I began to methodically go over in my mind, during these long hours, the various grievances I believed I had against each person, as well as the means I would soon have to satisfy all my grudges. These daydreams, interrupted by long naps that came just in time to restore my strength after the nervous strain and insomnia of the past weeks, helped me to find the time much less long than one might think.

I barely thought of Daniel and his dismay, when he would believe me to be gone, lost to him forever. This thought amused me every time it crossed my mind:

— What names he must call me, I thought, and whom will he blame for my abandonment?

However, it was with joy that at midnight, on the third day, I heard the bell ring beside my bed, more pleasant this time to my ears than in Constantinople, in my father's salon: the eleven chimes, 7 + 3 + 1, the regulatory call. Hastily, I dressed in a bathrobe and opened the door. Garfield was there, colder than ever:

— Your time has come, he said in the most lugubrious tone. Are you still ready, Clotilde Bersone, and for everything?

— I am, I replied, irritated by his persistent sacrificial airs.  
And I prepared to dress to follow him.

— Leave that, he ordered, and follow me as you are.

He accompanied me to the changing room, sat down, and ordered me to kneel. I obeyed.

— Woman, he said to me, to spare you further deliberations and repulsive trials, I have hastened your reception, vouching for you before our Brothers. May I never regret it.

— I didn't ask you for anything, I replied insolently.

His eyes flashed, but he controlled himself and swallowed the retort that was surely boiling in his heart.

— Do you have courage? he asked simply.

— You'll see, I retorted, becoming increasingly aggressive.

— Well, here is your garment. Dress yourself. And he left.

On the bundle of clothes, a small note was pinned to it. I read it:  
Put on this shirt. Pass this cord around your neck, and wait, barefoot and with your hair disheveled, for them to come and fetch you.

The shirt horrified me. Large bloodstains marred it, still fresh; and I was paid to know it wasn't a playacting.

Indeed, we were in Paris, no longer on the banks of the Bosphorus. Assassination without a stir seems more difficult and rare on the banks of the Seine; but the uninitiated, I thought, would be wrong to trust it. And if I were to disappear tonight, in the middle of these trials, who would know? Who would even care, in this vast city or in my family? At best, at the hotel, they would think I had run away, lacking money, in search of another adventure, hiding my name. How many unfortunate souls, before me, had not succumbed, perhaps, in one of these oubliettes where they had been lured like a trap, under some pretext, with the same skill that had been used on me?

It was too late now to turn back. I was trapped, I who had thought I would trap others. I had to, at all costs, go all the way through.

I shuddered as I put on that dreadful garment, then the cord.

The Grand Master, in the name of the Grand Orient, entered to give me the final instructions.

They blindfolded me, and I was introduced into the Lodge in this attire.

A mournful music fell from the galleries; the sound of chains alternated with this sinister harmony. A sort of equally funereal hymn then rose, during which the Grand Master, with great ceremony, advanced towards me with measured steps: 2 + 2 + 2 + 1.

He placed my open hand on the chest of a corpse, then, still blindfolded, made me feel the skeleton next to which he had brought me: all these antics filled me with disgust more than horror.

However, the insults and mistreatment were becoming serious.

Suddenly, I received a slap that revolted my whole being for a moment; they made me kneel, my head thrown back, and recite, in this position, as if I were offering my throat to daggers, the terrible oath:

— I swear to blindly obey all orders of the Lodge, without seeking either their motives or consequences. I swear to follow no religion, to submit to no influence, and to break everything that would oppose the will of the Lodge. And if I ever fail in this oath, may all the swords that aim at my heart pierce me through and through.

The Grand Master, at that moment, had me rise and approach each of the Brother assistants in turn, and one by one, they pushed me away with words of contempt and hatred, as if their feelings toward me had changed and they believed I had failed the trial.

Finally, Garfield seized my arm, opened a vein, let a third of a glass of blood flow, and bandaged the wound.

They removed my blindfold, placed a sword in my hand, and led me in front of the so-called crowned corpse in the wicker mannequin. A Hebrew chant filled the room. After each verse, the Grand Orient recited a sort of lesson from a large book, and at the end of each lesson, the chorus, several times, uttered the anathema:

— Cursed! It's a curse.

"Strike," commanded Garfield, pointing to the royal phantom. It seemed to me that everything was spinning around me.

I raised my weapon, sweat on my brow; for the lesson from Constantinople left me with little doubt that I was about to kill, kill with my own hand and for real, and that it was no longer a comedy. A nervous tremor

shook me, frantic and dazed. Garfield did not take his haughty gaze off me, which seemed to mock:

“Well then! I told you: it’s not you, little woman, who will rule over us.”

In a huge brass bowl, placed on a tripod, he simultaneously threw a handful of aromatic herbs onto the burning coals. A huge flame erupted, and intoxicating smoke rose. All the affiliates in a semicircle around me had drawn their daggers and seemed ready to pierce me, to reduce me at least, in this scene of horror, to eternal silence.

Then, with a shrill laugh, I took a step back, fixed my gaze on the mark indicating where I should strike on the mannequin, and, with all my strength, drunk, staggering, frantic, I delivered my blow.

A jet of smoking blood drenched my shoulders, and I fell to the ground, more dead than alive. I had killed! Forever a criminal, I would have this blood on my soul, like another baptism from hell, for eternity. Ah! Cursed! Truly cursed!

It was the Grand Master, covered in a white cloak, who lifted me and raised me from the ground, inert, in front of the assembly. Two affiliates held a death shroud above my head, and Garfield commanded:

— Prostrate yourself now. Submit, poor unbeliever, to the superior power of the Supreme Being that we all worship here and who governs us.

The act of faith after the baptism!

I performed the simulation that was required of me, as skeptical of this new deity as I was of the others; the black shroud fell back over me and covered me entirely. I lay there like a dead woman in its folds.

It was the moment of the supreme deliberation.

It took place slowly by signs, and not a sound of it reached me. I must believe that it was favorable to me, for the Grand Master finally lifted the death shroud under which I lay gasping like a wounded beast cornered in its den. He took my hand to help me get up and walk and led me to the bathroom, where I found everything necessary to dress decently and do my hair.

— It’s over, he reassured me. Be ready in an hour to learn the happy verdict.

I barely had time to recover a little and properly wash my body and hair from the abominable splashes of my ritual crime.

I braided my still-wet hair into plaits. A blue cashmere dress, in the Greek style, was fastened to my shoulders by two enamel clasps holding a white silk cord that passed through the sleeves, raising them so as to almost completely expose my arms. A wide golden braid adorned the slightly squared neckline. Another braid, made of the same golden material, bordered the bottom of the garment, forming a belt. The dress, too long at the front, was designed to be raised and tucked into the belt, concealing the waist. Over it, I wore a kind of black velvet toga, lined with scarlet silk, with a trowel, a hammer, a square, dice, and other Masonic accessories embroidered in gold on the front. On my feet, sandals with golden straps and borders. Nothing on my head. Such was my costume as an Affiliate.

In spirit, it seemed I no longer had one. Motionless or dead, now insensitive to everything, except to my fixed idea of ambition and revenge, I dragged it like a burden foreign to my life.

The Grand Master, upon returning to fetch me, offered me his arm on which I was only to rest my hand, and he led me back to the Temple.

This time, all the chandeliers were lit; all the lodges were filled; all the drapes were white; everything had taken on a festive and triumphant appearance. Artificial oak branches wound around columns adorned with draperies and symbolically intertwined in front of the tribunes. A golden branch was placed on the semicircular table, and the Affiliates paraded all around, in white watered silk aprons trimmed with gold, under the grand ceremonial toga.

The higher Initiates were distinguished from the others only by their golden sun, a kind of plaque attached to their togas on the left shoulder.

The Executioner of High Works was seated at the end of the semicircular table, at the opening of the horseshoe. He maintained in a brazier small irons that were glowing white hot.

The Grand Master, first, holding my hand with just the tips of his fingers, led me to the table, where I received from the Grand Orient a form of the Rules and Customs for the Affiliates, accompanied by many compliments from the other Initiates, and then a title representing 500 francs of monthly pension to be collected at the Lodge’s banker.

In turn, the Grand Orient then took my hand and led me to the Executioner of High Works, and he, without preamble, said to me:

— Kneel, and receive the supreme honor of being marked with the Seal that distinguishes, from the vile herd of men, the Brothers of Freedom, the Friends of the People, and the true Sons of Unity.

I knelt, and, taking a tiny branding iron from the fire, he applied it to the left side of my forehead. For a second, the flesh sizzled, and an acute pain bit my temple; I didn't flinch. They were all astonished. A fine cloth band, soaked in ointment, was quickly laid over the scar and almost immediately soothed the pain.

I barely had time to recover a little and properly wash my body and hair from the abominable splashes of my ritual crime.

I braided my still-wet hair into plaits. A blue cashmere dress, in the Greek style, was fastened to my shoulders by two enamel clasps holding a white silk cord that passed through the sleeves, raising them so as to almost completely expose my arms. A wide golden braid adorned the slightly squared neckline. Another braid, made of the same golden material, bordered the bottom of the garment, forming a belt. The dress, too long at the front, was designed to be raised and tucked into the belt, concealing the waist. Over it, I wore a kind of black velvet toga, lined with scarlet silk, with a trowel, a hammer, a square, dice, and other Masonic accessories embroidered in gold on the front. On my feet, sandals with golden straps and borders. Nothing on my head. Such was my costume as an Affiliate.

In spirit, it seemed I no longer had one. Motionless or dead, now insensitive to everything, except to my fixed idea of ambition and revenge, I dragged it like a burden foreign to my life.

The Grand Master, upon returning to fetch me, offered me his arm on which I was only to rest my hand, and he led me back to the Temple.

This time, all the chandeliers were lit; all the lodges were filled; all the drapes were white; everything had taken on a festive and triumphant appearance. Artificial oak branches wound around columns adorned with draperies and symbolically intertwined in front of the tribunes. A golden branch was placed on the semicircular table, and the Affiliates paraded all around, in white watered silk aprons trimmed with gold, under the grand ceremonial toga.

The higher Initiates were distinguished from the others only by their golden sun, a kind of plaque attached to their togas on the left shoulder.

The Executioner of High Works was seated at the end of the semicircular table, at the opening of the horseshoe. He maintained in a brazier small irons that were glowing white hot.

The Grand Master, first, holding my hand with just the tips of his fingers, led me to the table, where I received from the Grand Orient a form of the Rules and Customs for the Affiliates, accompanied by many compliments from the other Initiates, and then a title representing 500 francs of monthly pension to be collected at the Lodge's banker.

In turn, the Grand Orient then took my hand and led me to the Executioner of High Works, and he, without preamble, said to me:

— Kneel, and receive the supreme honor of being marked with the Seal that distinguishes, from the vile herd of men, the Brothers of Freedom, the Friends of the People, and the true Sons of Unity.

I knelt, and, taking a tiny branding iron from the fire, he applied it to the left side of my forehead. For a second, the flesh sizzled, and an acute pain bit my temple; I didn't flinch. They were all astonished. A fine cloth band, soaked in ointment, was quickly laid over the scar and almost immediately soothed the pain.

Forever, I was marked with the seal of the Beast; but I did not immediately understand the horror of this disgraceful consecration. Everything had become indifferent to me, except the hope of making my executioners pay one day for their deeds.

The only thing left was to present myself to the Dragon, and, I must say, that while I had so far roughly despised, thanks to a superior disdain, so many ridiculous or criminal antics, it was not the same when it came to this final encounter with the Hydra with seven heads, the sovereign of these places, whom my gaze had sometimes sought during my trials, due to a kind of strange superstition that did not match my upbringing, nature, or beliefs. For aside from the title of Affiliate and this pension of 6,000 livres, which assured me a material life, what had all these murderous Rites and empty words been leading to so far? What about the profound plans, the "sensational" revelations, the new ideal that this kind of investiture had brought me? The void, and blood on top of that: was that really the whole secret of the Dragon and

the mystery of its "Illuminations"? How I would have wished, from him, a good piece of illusionism, hallucinatory if you will, but truly of some scale, at least something that revealed its claws and proved its genius.

Yes, whatever one might think of these incoherent aspirations of a woman who thought herself a strong-minded spirit, they pressed deep in my frantic heart, if not in the conscious and clear regions of my intellect. My soul had died from a lack of human tenderness around my cradle; and now, to justify to my own eyes a criminal and stupid affiliation, I felt the pressing need for some kind of supernatural, whatever it might be, even unspoken, but at least something with which I could amuse my distress without being completely deceived by its reality.

"If you love the strange," Garfield had told me, "you will be satisfied" – and he had up until now only overwhelmed me with the bizarre and the odious.

Ah! If indeed a Power, superior to these mediocre ceremonies and these even more mediocre men, existed somewhere, in the depths of the sky, the human soul, or hell, it was time, long overdue, for it to manifest, so as not to find, at the very first step, an unbeliever and an impious soul in its new recruit.

Alas! The Dragon himself, to whom I was led, remained that day, for me as for the whole assembly, the mediocre effigy of a fabulous beast in white marble. I placed my hand on its back in the same posture that Mazzini had taken for his portrait in Constantinople; but nothing trembled under my fingers.

I coldly took a final oath of loyalty to this inanimate idol, and it seemed to me that, no more than I, the other affiliates did not attach much importance to this protocol.

A great disillusionment, which made me return, with quite a bad grace, the fraternal embrace to all the Affiliates who had descended from the tribunes to congratulate and kiss me. Even when everyone had returned to their places, and I alone remained seated in the middle of the Lodge, it was in vain that a shower of flowers fell around me for half an hour, while lively music echoed. In vain, Garfield invited me to a "non-Christian" feast that was to end the celebration. The Banquet Hall seemed dull to me; and the four hours that the banquet lasted seemed interminable.

The orgy soon reached its peak, much faster than the relatively restrained dinner Ahmed Pasha had offered me. This overly long session, the number of guests, and the noise of voices heightened the appetites; the wines served in abundance threw one after another the most gluttonous men off balance, transforming them into vile brutes. When I stood up to leave, most of them were already lying under the table, soiling the carpets or sleeping off their wine; others were loudly bellowing, waiting for further ignominy.

Only Garfield continued to survey this disgusting spectacle with his contemptuous and hard gaze. At the cloakroom, I exchanged my ceremonial attire for a costume he had had sent from my place, and he escorted me to my door, more distant and closed off than ever.

He could sense my disapproval for this depraved debauchery and even for the whole affiliation farce that had led to nothing. But he had not yet decided to grant me the explanation I needed.

At the moment of departure, he simply said to me, kissing my hand:

— Patience, Clotilde. The superior man is alone, everywhere and always, under a black and empty sky. Rites cannot teach him anything that he has not conceived himself, by his own effort... Keep searching, and you will find... It is within you that the true initiation, the incommunicable voice of the Spirit, will one day be heard, if indeed he has chosen you... See you on Friday!

I could already no longer hear him: for a long time, I had been gasping under the strain of this prolonged constraint. I had rushed to my room and thrown myself onto my bed like a heavy mass.

The next day, I was once again consumed by a burning fever. I had to remain bedridden for a whole month, still tormented by the same nightmares, filled with murders, debauchery, and lust.

My recovery was long and painful.

#### IV

#### FROM LONDON TO NAPLES

Garfield came every evening to inquire about my well-being.

He had surrounded me with paid servants who reported my every move and action.

Every Thursday evening, regularly, he had me receive an exemption note for the following day's session, so that I wouldn't forget that I now lived fully under the obedience of the Lodge and had obligations toward it.

As soon as I was able to go out, I had to comply: I received a summons for two-thirty in the morning.

This time surprised me: I knew that the sessions usually began at eleven o'clock, or eleven-thirty at the latest; I was told that new initiates were not admitted at the start of the meeting.

I thus waited for the prescribed hour, and upon my arrival, I was dressed at the cloakroom by a sort of usher, much like the last time. When I entered the Lodge, I heard various orders being given in Hebrew. I was called last, and I received a written order to deliver a message on behalf of the Lodge to a foreign capital.

This commission became frequent and soon seemed to be part of my actual duties, forming the true test through which the high leadership of the Illuminati, before utilizing my services more seriously, experimented with my intelligence, skill, discretion, and efficiency in carrying out the most difficult missions without questioning anyone.

I was to depart, most often dressed in mourning, under a false name, and quickly meet the person I had been instructed to contact, telling them, for example, as a sign of recognition:

— 2, 8, 4, 6, 0.

To which they had to respond:

— 1, 9, 5, 7, 3.

The even and odd numbers of the first ten, all interchanged, except the first one, were explained by the Rules as follows: "The Principle of all things must never be altered in the Lodge, while everything else can be disrupted as needed to serve this Principle."

I will not recount these many travels in detail. What's the point? They were nothing more than a purely material task that I carried out servilely, without taking much personal interest in them.

What exactly was behind these somewhat disconnected actions? I never found out: I don't even try to guess. Many must have been mere feints, carefully monitored, that allowed my new, unknown Superiors to determine exactly how far they could count on me.

Thus, almost from the start, one day I was tasked with delivering a sum of 100,000 francs to the German Consul in London. Why? For what kind of propaganda? For what exchange of purely Masonic or politico-religious services? That was not yet my concern at the time.

I delivered the sum in two installments to the recipient, brought back his receipts without incident, and was awarded a rather generous reward; though it wasn't something I was eager for.

I would have liked to at least understand what I was doing, but I was too inexperienced in these matters to

unravel the complicated web of intrigues. The Lodge itself perhaps didn't quite know how to direct its actions in France. We were still in the midst of President Mac Mahon's rule, under the dictatorship of the Moral Order. The conspirators needed to first seize the avenues of power, before organizing the Republic and exploiting the regime to its fullest. Grévy, Ferry, and Gambetta fumbled in opposition, engaged in the great parliamentary battles. Pius IX and Antonelli ruled in Rome, continuing the thunderous aftermath of the Vatican Council. Europe seemed to be heading more towards a conservative reaction.

Yet, these travels, unbeknownst to me, were shaping me. More and more clearly, on the ground, I heard our Adepts and Affiliates debate all the major questions of international politics throughout Europe, where I could easily overhear the workings and even the rivalries of the various Grand Lodges of Illuminati in Europe and Asia.

Even the Grand Orients did not always agree with each other, and I soon realized that Garfield's policies were being discussed and thwarted by other influences or coalitions of Lodges. He was criticized for having too specifically American a view on the general direction of affairs, while, on the contrary, the higher Councils seemed to be more focused on growing German dominance over the old world. It was an obscure conflict, full of complications that I was still far from grasping fully: at least I sensed that one day, I would have to enter the fray, taking sides either for or against Garfield, whom they pitted against Bismarck as his rival.

However, Garfield had become more and more odious to me, not as a leader, but as a man. He had taken far too long to declare himself, much longer than I had initially hoped, and he was too domineering with me, even in private, in a manner that was unbearable to my pride. In short, I could neither forgive him for having ensnared me so quickly in his traps, nor for evading mine for so long. And, obeying the fatal law that seemed to have condemned me to hate those around me in turn, I swore in my heart a mortal war against him, even as I was on the verge of officially taking him as my lover, in place of the intolerable Count Daniel F\*\*\*, whom I had decided to rid myself of for good.

Not that the latter bothered me much: I almost always traveled alone, certainly without him. But he exhausted me with his reproaches, his jealousy, his rages. It had been made clear to him that he was not to meddle in my affairs; and he had had to bow as a Mason, though he stormed and raged like a jealous lover.

Too happy to have found me again after my sudden departure during my initiation, the threat of another escape had completely stupefied him. He kept showering me with extravagant gifts — jewelry, furniture, horses. As a reward, I consented to appear occasionally with him at an opera box or in a fashionable nightclub. There, everyone knew where they stood. Thus, his way of throwing money out the window for a woman who mocked him amused the entire high society of Paris. He suffered like a damned soul, and he became increasingly exasperated with gambling.

Shouldn't I have already felt sufficiently avenged? I burned with the desire to see him suffer even more.

A whim of Garfield hastened the event.

I had noticed that during our Friday sessions in the Lodge, Garfield often followed me with his eyes more than was strictly necessary. Despite his affected coldness, he couldn't entirely conceal a certain tendency to seek my presence, and he frequently arranged meetings for me at the Maison Dorée, even outside of any service-related necessity. Some liberties taken by Daniel drove him mad.

One day, he lost his temper with Daniel beyond all measure, reproaching me for getting entangled with that vain, brainless young man, whose dishonorable propositions I should have been ashamed to accept.

I defiantly responded to these insults by reminding him that I had indeed given in to him as well, and it was then, with much hesitation and admitting that he felt ashamed and afraid of this unforgivable weakness, that he confessed he loved me!



He probably sensed that I could become a formidable enemy to him, and that it was better to draw me into his game. Perhaps, from the side of the Supreme Powers, he felt his prestige was wavering as my favor grew. He was especially moved, despite his bravado against love, by my youth, if not my beauty. I had sensed it from the first day, and it was in vain that he tried to resist the fatal attraction that ultimately overwhelmed him.

Of course, I did not discourage his now overflowing passion; this development fit into my broader plan of action. But how to conclude?

Garfield devised a strange stratagem in which, for the first time, this man, so self-controlled and calculating, did not hesitate to compromise his authority as Grand Orient, Leader of the High Initiates.

Five or six months after my initiation, I was therefore summoned on a Monday at three in the afternoon to the Chapter Hall. There I was informed that Garfield was about to undertake a study trip to Italy. Given my knowledge of the language and the country, I had been chosen to accompany him. I kept any expression of surprise to myself and merely asked, as usual, what credits had been opened. I was vaguely told that Garfield would cover all necessary expenses and provide me with any useful instructions. In short, he was imposed on me as a lover under the pretext of service.

I bowed, neither pleased nor rebellious, since that was the order. But it was clear that a certain dissatisfaction was subtly stirring even among those who delivered these instructions to me. It was too obvious that the Grand Orient was this time yielding to a personal feeling, substituting its higher interests with his own desires. He himself was aware of his wrongdoing, and until everything was fully arranged, I saw him anxious, nervous, agitated by the most diverse emotions, as if he truly still had a sense of right and wrong, where he was defying his gods. To distract himself, he sometimes rambled incoherently about the political necessity of this trip.

To hear him, the entire Masonic order of the world was at stake. The old King of Italy was leaning toward an alliance with France. He was still reminiscing about Magenta and Solferino and wanted to forget the papal Zouaves, Charette, Lamoricière, and Castelfidardo, in order to approach the new regime that he sensed would triumph in the Chamber of the reactionary surge after the presidency of Mac-Mahon. The anti-clerical and Masonic Republic was his work, and Garfield shared these sentiments. But another constellation of influences, as I've already said, had formed in the world of chanceries and even within the High Lodges, under the pressure of Prince Bismarck, the Senior Affiliate. Bismarck's goal was to draw Italy, instead, into a German Triple Alliance with Vienna and Berlin. This policy would have considerable repercussions, on one hand, on English and American diplomacy, and on the other hand, even on the Vatican. For the Franco-Italian alliance would force the Vatican, in order to maintain support in Europe, to make a lucky but necessary agreement with Bismarck, using the German Center as an instrument. The conclusion of an Austro-Italian-German Triple Alliance, on the other hand, would push the Pope towards an arrangement with the moderate parties of the French Republic, at the cost of a paradoxical rallying to the regime against the entire Catholic right wing. Either solution opened the door to the Sect's intrigues and profits: thus, each had its supporters, and Garfield already saw himself stripped of his role as an arbitrator and reduced to leading one of the two systems, while Bismarck, by position, led the other. Now, on one hand, in Italy, the old age of King Victor Emmanuel II and the known feelings of the presumptive heir were increasingly favoring the hopes of the pro-German party; on the other hand, within the Lodges, there were Initiates still undecided, but who were beginning to grow tired of Garfield, in the councils, almost always sacrificing the purely Masonic point of view to national prejudices, his candidacy as a federal senator in the United States, or even the ambition of the Presidency in Washington.

His trip seemed to answer his concern to examine these difficult issues more closely to give, if possible, satisfaction to all; in reality, he already had—for good reason—his mind made up and had only thought to cover himself and get rid of me.

I allowed it to happen. The intrigue amused me, and at least I enjoyed the pleasure of inflicting a final affront on the unfortunate Daniel.

For a long time, he no longer mattered to me. Becoming tyrannical and capricious, I avoided him at every turn just for the amusement of making him lose his composure. Then I would return to him for a few days, and he would throw money out the window. Bound to me by a brutal and disrespectful passion, the more he lavished signs of his slavery on me, the more I delighted in degrading him in my own eyes.

When he learned of my departure in such company, he was furious: for I had left him no ignorance of these so-called business appointments that Garfield had been showering on me for several months—those dinners where, for hours, instead of discussing the Lodge, the Grand Orient would overwhelm me with half-statements he wanted me to guess, but which I made a point of not understanding until he had frankly revealed himself—of his gifts, which I still refused, at least whenever the urge did not take me to accept them to put Daniel in a tight spot.

Thus, he could have no doubt about the extent of his misfortune when he saw me leave with his rival; but he feared the Sect even more than he loved me. He must have known, too, how easily a foreigner like him, morally outcast, could disappear one evening into the oubliettes of the Lodge, if he were to cross the Masonic designs. A sign of distress broke his last resistance, and, humiliated and trembling with impotent rage, he had to let things happen that he could not prevent.

For him, this was the beginning of a real agony.

Before his wide eyes, we left—Garfield and I—at the end of December 1876 and were not to return to Paris until the Satanic ceremonies of Holy Week 1877. How to describe this journey? The man of hate and vengeance that Garfield had so proudly claimed to be, finally discovered the flaw in his armor, and I took advantage of it without remorse or hesitation. Physically and morally tainted and dishonored, what did it matter to me whether I had one more affair or not, as long as I gained something from it? Yet my trouble was about to begin soon with my victory.

This man, despite all his flaws, was of a different race than the miserable Daniel, and though I flattered myself in being a Delilah to him, I still needed to know how to go about shearing this giant's mane.

As I mentioned, my Affiliation had greatly disappointed me with regard to the pseudo-Luciferian side of Masonic mysteries; I had never felt a more skeptical or drier soul. I had, therefore, no secret worth extracting for his downfall from those solemn mystical foolishnesses that sometimes slipped from him—nothing but perhaps the admission, one evening of abandonment, that he, in fact, had never believed in these juggling acts and that, indeed, up above our cursed heads, there was only the black and eternal void, the abyss where everything crumbles and is lost endlessly: life, pain, passions, and crimes, as well as innocence and virtue.

Politics—a shady politics of irreligion and revolution—was all the mystery of this clan of declaimers inspired by hatred and envy; and I thought I would focus mainly on gathering, one by one, willingly or by surprise, the elements of this vast international plan.

However, Garfield was on his guard, and even in the moments of apparent least-supervised effusions, he hardly lost control of his intelligence. To my great irritation, I obtained nothing from him—or very little—about the great matters we were supposed to be handling together during those three or four months. On the other hand, the peculiar undercurrents of his soul surfaced unexpectedly, puzzling with their strangeness, enough to revive in me suspicions and unease I thought I had forever rid myself of.

Two or three times, I succeeded in intoxicating him, and I found double pleasure in it. First, the pleasure of considering this man, otherwise imposing on me, in a state of helplessness and degradation; and second, the pleasure of being able to exploit the shipwreck of his reason to try to tear from him, amidst incoherent phrases, what I wanted to know.

And so, one day, in Naples, in this state of drunkenness, he suddenly cut off my insidious interrogation

about the Court of Italy with a flood of unexpected incantations about the power, jealousies, orders, and vengeance of the Dragon.

I burst out laughing and, both mocking and trying to excite him to further confidences, I said: "Come now! Leave me alone with your Dragon! What is this beast?"

I had never seen such terror pass through human eyes. At once, the drunkard sitting up straight. I saw him struggle to force his heavy tongue into a rebuke or a peremptory explanation. But before he could form a sound, another force seemed to seize him. He fell foaming at my feet, as if bound and beaten, like an epileptic.

The next day, despite all my efforts, I couldn't get him to drink, and, to take my revenge, as I innocently asked him if he was ever prone to certain crises, I saw him suddenly turn pale and walk away without answering.

In the evening, pretending to have a migraine, I retired early, and he, for his part, warned me that he would spend the night in a Neapolitan club and would not return until the next day. I bowed and, having carefully locked myself in my room, I fell asleep.

Now, the hotel where we were staying was adjacent to the church of Saint Januarius. I woke just in time to hear the clock strike eleven—7 + 3 + 1—at the nearby bell tower: Garfield was in my room. How had he managed to get in without making a sound to reveal his intrusion? He moved with infinite caution, and behind my folded bare arm in front of my face, I could observe him at ease, from the depths of the shadow that this shelter cast over my eyes.

He was as pale as marble.

Approaching my bed and facing the East, he whispered three invocations to the Spirit. An invisible presence filled the room, and Garfield threw himself face down on the floor. After a few minutes, he slowly got up and repeated the scene seven times. Then, he mysteriously and silently left the room, just as he had entered. I fell back asleep.

The next day, he entered my room around nine in the morning, insisting on asking about my health. He was determined to find me looking unwell:  
— "It seems, my dear, that you've had quite a fright. Has something happened to you?"

I swore to him that nothing had happened, that I was in perfect health, that I had slept soundly all night, and that no nightmare had disturbed my peaceful rest. He seemed quite taken aback and suddenly announced that we would have breakfast at ten, that an urgent matter was calling him to Messina, and that we needed to leave on the ship departing at eleven.

Clearly, he had believed that, during my sleep, he had performed some kind of magical enchantment, and the failure of his conjurations filled him with apprehension about his powers.

He didn't leave me for a moment before this sudden departure. The trunks were packed as if by magic, and that very evening, we were on our way to Italy. The next day, we were in sight of the Messina lighthouse; we stayed in the city for four days. Then we sailed to Palermo and, fifteen days later, to Ancona. On February 7th, we arrived in Rome.

Not a word had been said about Naples and that strange night.

What could all this mean? What kind of futile conjuration had this powerless or guilty Pontiff of an unknown Deity attempted on me? Or was it just a delusion of this powerful mind? Had I perhaps dreamed it all?

In any case, if the trip had done me good, I hadn't learned anything transcendent, despite my exceptional situation beside one of the high leaders of the Sect. The pleasures had been plentiful, but the usefulness was nil. Unless, perhaps, this Holy Week, for which we were returning to Paris the previous Friday, would finally bring me the true reward for my docility and constancy—to give these fine names to my servile and criminal dishonor.

## V A SATANIC HOLY WEEK

I was summoned to the Lodge on Holy Tuesday, where I was ordered to bring, on Thursday, fifteen consecrated host wafers.

The task did not please me at all, and it was not at all what I had expected. But one does not question an order from the Lodge; one executes it.

Although I hesitated at this sacrilegious task, it was neither out of respect for sacred things nor fear of damnation. My indifference in this regard was complete, and the matter held little importance for me. I considered it rather as a chore beneath my means, and I thought of obtaining, by subterfuge, fifteen unconsecrated host wafers from any religious goods shop to spare myself the hassle and fatigue of gathering them from one church to another. Then I thought that, most likely, at least this first time, my actions would be watched, and it would cost me dearly if I dared to deceive my masters.

So, I spent all of Holy Wednesday and Holy Thursday morning running from one sanctuary to another, kneeling at the right moment at every communion table I came across. To avoid breaking or distorting the wafer by letting it stick to my tongue and palate, I had been taught to rinse my mouth beforehand with strong vinegar, which dries the mucous membranes. No sooner had the priest placed the sacrament on my lips than, pretending to bow my head piously, I placed it between the pages of a book lined with blotting paper.

I was eager to finish this lowly task, wondering impatiently if, by chance, I would be forced to continue with such vile acts for much longer; the thought that the Good Friday ceremony would bring something new kept my courage up.

A note I received on Thursday evening set the hour before midnight as the time for the meeting. I was therefore being treated as a Senior Affiliate, and this was a good omen.

At half-past ten, I was in the changing room, where, unbeknownst to me, I was provided with a whole series of costumes, made to measure and marked with my name—or rather, the name I had been given since my affiliation, which was: The Nymph of the Night.

All these costumes were usually made in a Greek style, but that evening, the one I was given consisted of a scarlet velvet tunic with a white moiré cloak, adorned with blood-red velvet drops as trim.

I entered the Lodge thus adorned, and soon realized that a triple ceremony was taking place simultaneously on the various floors, through the maze of rooms that constituted a veritable labyrinth in this vast building.

But here, for the understanding of what follows, I must resort to a brief description supported by a few sketches.

We are already sufficiently familiar with the upper floor of the Lodge, where all the Brothers, without distinction, are admitted: it is the highest floor, although it seems to be almost at ground level, and since none of these rooms have windows facing the outside, there is no reflection of the sky visible inside.

On one side of the entrance hall, adorned with a double row of gilded benches and coat racks, there is a

bathroom, and on the other side, a Black Cabinet or Hideout, padded, from which a spiral staircase descends two floors down to a narrow dungeon. This is where the dignitaries keep any intruder or suspect who has somehow entered the Lodge under arrest.

Next is the Vestibule with its double door, which opens onto the Lodge.

From this square Lodge, we are already familiar with the ordinary furnishings: the skeleton and the cross at the entrance, the six columns around the perimeter and the central column, the Dragon, the semi-circular table with its opening facing the back, and there, the platform with seven steps and its Tribune from which the Orators speak. Behind the columns, the row of chairs and above them, the triple gallery of small lodges.

What I have not yet had the opportunity to explain is that, all around this central room, there opens an uninterrupted sequence of Apartments, about which I must say a word.

To the right of the Vestibule upon entering, there is a sort of storage room, plus the adjoining Changing Room; then a Surveillance Post, from where the Dignitaries can keep the room under their watch during meetings; finally, the Green Room.

The Green Room is reserved for the important rituals of the cult, and various sacrilegious ceremonies are held there, which we will return to in due time.

Further on, a long corridor stretches across the entire width of the building, behind the Lodge, and leads, at the end, to the Library.

Finally, on the left side, facing the series of rooms we have just listed on the right: first, the Red Room, intended for the trials of blood. It is here that part of my installation ceremony took place, the most cruel part.

Next is the Chamber of Deliberations, so named because the higher Affiliates and sometimes the Initiates gather there: seven members for receptions; forty for elections to positions; and only three when it concerns the Dignitaries.

Following this, the Black Cabinet, entirely covered in black velvet adorned with macabre embroidery.

Finally, the Dawn Room, at the height of the vestibule, is just a small room whitewashed with lime, paved with white tiles, and decorated with indecipherable whimsical inscriptions. It is used to mystify the profane, whom they pretend to initiate without consequence. At the back, sitting on a stool, a mannequin represents an old man, dressed in a brown coat, his hands on his cane and his beard on his hands, in the posture of a blind man carrying a sign that reads: Reflection.

It is in this first Lodge and its dependencies, as I mentioned, that the crowd of Affiliates and sometimes even Adepts typically move about.

Beneath the building, the cellars.

To be specific, in the basement, next to the Dungeon I mentioned earlier, is the Grand Congress Hall, also called the Feast Hall, the Amphitheater, and the Gnosis, a sort of study room for cabalistic and mystical studies, where larger meetings sometimes take place.

Alongside these three rooms, a corridor that, at that time, connected with the Golden House and the English Café.

Finally, beneath the Amphitheater, a second level of oubliettes extends, with a series of dreadful dungeons and underground rooms or Torture Chambers.

Finally, on the intermediate floor, between these two common areas for all grades, opens the Grand Lodge or Round Temple, reserved for higher affiliates and Initiates: it is the retreat par excellence of the Sect.

Its layout is roughly the same as that of the square Lodge, regarding the entrance hall, the vestibule, and the changing rooms; but the meeting hall is circular, or rather octagonal. Three gallery balconies surround it as well, but divided into boxes strictly reserved for one person.

At the four corners of the square that contains this round room, you will find, as you move from one room to another, similar to the upper floor: 1° The Congress Hall, which holds the Archives and administrative records: the 80 meet in this room; 2° The Cabinet of Occult Sciences, where the phantasmagorias of black magic, the pharmacopoeia of potions, poisons, and narcotics are prepared, maintained by the Chief Alchemist, and which no one has the key to, not even the Grand Orient; 3° The Crypt of Reflections: this is where candidates for initiation spend their seven days of confinement on bread and water, in a round tower so narrow and low that one cannot stand or lie down, but must remain kneeling or sitting; 4° The Novitiate, which serves for the studies of those aspiring to be admitted to the Grand Congress. Finally, at the end of the floor, above the Library, is the Chapter Room, also preceded by its corridor. A complicated system, as one can see, and intentionally complicated, designed to make a stronger impression on the imagination; but it is well known how little I was sensitive to this kind of prestige.

Deliberately mixing with the flow of Affiliates who silently paraded on the upper floor, I soon found myself in the Green Room, where the Initiates and Adepts were waiting for us, and immediately the celebration, if one dares call it that, began with a common ceremony.

On the wall of this room, on the side of the Surveillance Post, is a white marble altar, with the center hollowed out in the shape of a basin. Above it lies a lamb, also made of marble, its head crowned with thorns, its feet pierced with nails, its heart pierced by a spear. A symbolism that needs no explanation. The Dragon and the Lamb; Christ and the Antichrist: the true secret of universal Masonry was there, glaring at my eyes that refused to see. And that is why this celebration of the Crucifixion is the triumphant Passover of the Lodges, and why all the Sects, instead of the Christian Sunday, dream everywhere on earth of making Friday their day of rest and festivity, in commemoration of their victory.

Above the lamb, a sort of delta or flaming triangle, and a ciborium containing hosts, one of which was at least consecrated.

Several three-branched candelabras surrounded the altar, as well as two large chalices, one made of marble on the right and one of bronze on the left. A basin at the bottom of the steps was filled with water. Small olive branches adorned the walls of the room all around, and two oak branches topped the altar and the lamps.

When everyone was gathered and positioned in front of this setup, a postulant Brother approached the altar, seized a living lamb, slaughtered it, and methodically pierced it with all the instruments of the Passion, mimicking the marble Lamb. He then detached its head, feet, and heart, skillfully bruising them with his hands, and threw them into the bronze chalice where a consuming fire was blazing, as a symbol of purification by fire. The rest of the body was submerged in the marble chalice, as a symbol of purification by water.

The priest then washed his hands in the blood that filled the bowl of the altar, took the ciborium, consumed the consecrated host, broke and defiled the others at his will, reciting in Hebrew this parody of a sacred text: — It is no longer you who live, but it is I who live in you, and through your hands, I immolate you.

He then descended from the altar, exposed his neck, plunged his head into the basin, washed his arms, and exited.

The Affiliates, seizing the olive branches, threw them on his path and followed him in procession, arms crossed over their chests.

When it was my turn to march, I looked around to catch a glimpse of Garfield, curious to meet his gaze.

These blasphemous rites did not, alas, revolt my conscience, as sacrilegious or criminal; I found them absurd and disgusting, and I thought I would express this, at least through the contemptuous expression on my face. Unfortunately, Garfield was not there, and I had to follow, resigned, this reverse Palm Sunday procession. At the exit, the various groups of the Illuminated ones dispersed.

The Adepts and lower Affiliates went to the Library, where they were served a mixture of meat and fish, so that there would be a double transgression for them, on this Good Friday, of the ecclesiastical law of abstinence.

The others descended to the basement, along the Feast Hall, but did not enter: for there, once again, the group split into two.

Only the Initiates, following the long corridor, entered the Gnosis.

As for the higher Affiliates, of which I was one, they returned to the Square Lodge, where another tiring and nauseating parody began.

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An ebony crucifix was placed in the middle of the semicircular table. At the center of the room, at the back, a mannequin in a tiara and a white dress; next to it, a tripod, upon which rested a book, topped with eleven candles.

Two other tripods bore the same number of lights: arranged in a triangle, they thus represent, in threes, the sacred delta, while the thirty-three candles represent the thirty-three grades or degrees of the mysterious scale that lead to High Freemasonry.

The second Grand Orient, who presided in place of Garfield—he was T\*\*\*—made us form a semicircle around the table, went to the book, read different lessons, unintelligible to me, mixed with insults to the Church and the Papacy.

In a long speech, he assured us that the papal monarchy was a challenge to the Gospel and that if Christianity still had any respect for its origins, it would abolish this dominion contrary to its principles and, above all, any trace of temporal sovereignty and attachment to the goods of this world. He concluded by showing that man, having been born free, should not submit to any slavery, whether to the State or the Church.

A horrible chant then rose, and an atmosphere of madness stirred the room. T\*\*\* brandished an axe, and a tremendous clamor echoed as he struck the weapon down with full force on the mannequin's neck, where a corpse seemed to be enclosed.

At this blow, the Victim—this is the ritual name—let out a shrill cry, and its eyes popped out of their sockets. A second blow made the head roll. A sudden silence followed this kind of delirium.

Each affiliate, one by one, went to dip their hand in the blood of the dead, and I recoiled in horror at this new crime. A more humane Affiliate touched my hand with his bloody fingers, whispering in my ear: — Courage, my Sister. If your hand was not marked like ours, one might think you were either lukewarm or complicit: the enemy of the Lodge must be our enemy as well.

I could barely hear, still frozen with horror. Was the Victim really alive? Or had I been the plaything of a dreadful fantasy?

Already the ceremony was continuing and dragging me along despite myself.

After the head had been placed in a silver dish, we proceeded ceremonially to the Red Chamber, which, as previously seen, was for the blood trials, and the head was placed on the sacred delta.

It is a large inverted triangle made of transparent illuminated material. Next to it, two small alabaster statues represent two druids throwing flowers into a bowl where balsamic herbs burn. A lamp with a diameter of half a meter hangs from the ceiling and has seven torches that must never be allowed to go out: for the day they stop burning, these enemies of superstition fear all misfortunes.

On the walls, swords, yataghans, foils, and lances in full armor cover the entire room. These are the weapons the Initiates grasp when a postulant hesitates, as I did on the day of my affiliation, to stab one mannequin or another, pontifical or royal, or the embalmed corpse. It is the very temple of assassination. So, I left it with relief to return downstairs to the Feast Hall, where this time we were able to sit at the table after washing our hands.

It was impossible for me to eat anything, and I drank only a few drops of wine.

a few drops of wine: I was consumed with fever. For dessert, long toasts to the nation's freedom the death of the Pope, the annihilation of Catholicism. At each toast, the Second Grand Orient threw a little wine in the face of the Crucifix, and at the end each threw half his cup and drank the rest, to the



accompaniment of a toast.

and drank the rest, Masonic-style, standing with hand over heart.

The dislocated, broken Christ fell limb from limb from his cross onto the tablecloth, amid the debris of the orgy.

debris of the orgy, where everyone was still trying to crumble a piece.

Incisions were made in a host. It was nailed, or rather glued, to the ebony cross.

cross. Some cads spat on it. Finally, it was thrown into the water, reddened with blood, from a basin where we'd dipped our hands.

Several other hosts remained, and they seemed to be waiting for someone or something to desecrate them.

or something. Who or what? I didn't know. Suddenly there was a knock at the door, and we up to the Novitiate room, where new food and wine were being prepared.

being prepared. A dozen women of the lowest moral standards, all decked out in furs and with abusive language,

were waiting there.

Thus, as I had noticed several times, the orgy at the Lodge ended in bestial

debauchery; and I wasn't even spared the promiscuity of these swine and prostitutes!

prostitutes!

I stood up, indignant, determined to shout my disgust, when suddenly Garfield entered and grabbed me by the arm.

grabbed me by the arm. He was wearing a black velvet wolf.

and his gaze more imperious than ever. He dragged me away, without even hearing my complaint, into an empty room.

complaint, into an empty room, locked me in and told me he'd be back for me in two hours.

in two hours.

The unfortunate man, as I could see, had delayed his appearance until then, precisely in order to

the opportunity to intervene in time and tear me away from this odious scene. He was jealous!

Jealous, against the law of the Lodge, which wants everything to be equal and common between the brothers, even if it's love.

love, without preference or refusal! More man than mason, I had him at last.

Meanwhile, as I found out later, the audience over there was having fun profaning

the remains of the hosts with ignoble touches, and finished off their inebriation with

impurity and impiety difficult to conceive, impossible to describe.

When everything was over, Garfield came to release me. He had his archangelic, dark expression:

— Woman, he said to me, as if his flame-like eyes had pierced me, I have once again failed the rules of the Brotherhood for you. May it not burn me too much!

I tried to reassure him, showering him with thanks and affection: truly, his intervention had saved me.

But this man himself was quite perplexing.

As I spoke to him in kind and flattering terms of my regret for not having seen him that night and my fear concerning the living corpse, calmly, he began to tell me the whole story.

The victim was a German subject, a Kadosh Knight named Zémard or léma, who had recently been ordered to come to Paris to take on the role of Grand Inquisitor. But as soon as he arrived, he pressured the Grand Master to be relieved, in his duties, of all supervision, on the pretext of some unknown higher exemption: failing which, he refused the offered position. There is scarcely a greater crime in Freemasonry. The matter was immediately brought up at the evening meeting of the Chapter. The rebel was summoned and ordered to accept both the position and four supervisors appointed by the Lodge. He insisted on rejecting them and was locked in a dungeon, where he was left for three days without food.

Then, they gave him a little food to prolong his stay until Good Friday. On Thursday, the Grand Alchemist administered a soporific potion to him, after he had been disgracefully degraded and slapped in full Chapter, before being locked in the papal mannequin. Only the death blow had momentarily revived him.

And Garfield told me all this in his calm voice, with that air of distinction, high intelligence, and pride, to say nothing of nobility, which only emphasized the cruelty and cowardice of this murder, coldly committed to provide an infamous ritual with its annual victim.

— Ah! Miserable, I wanted to cry out, when it's your turn to go through these torments, will you remain just as indifferent?

Then another thought crossed my mind. How had this German, a high initiate, chosen for a position of trust, come to throw himself into such a trap, without a superior order or interest, and other than as the holder of another Secret, more precious to him than life? Where had this emissary come from, and on whose behalf was he working? The name of the Iron Chancellor came to my mind. Now Garfield, from whom I had unintentionally distanced myself, had grasped my thought. A smile of bitter disdain curled his lip:

— No, he said. Even Bismarck himself cannot criticize our sentence without betraying himself: it is regular. Besides, it was not I who requested the condemnation: it was T\*\*\*, and I mock this Prussian. I have defeated other enemies... But you? You who pretend to reproach me for this blood, which I did not cause to flow, while dreaming of crushing hearts and lives around you... Cruel woman, fatal woman, thirsting for revenge, why do you lie to yourself?

And he continued in a more agitated voice:

— Yet you see what the name of Illuminated can cost, and you blame me for having, as much as I could, diverted you from that fatal path. You are determined to be Initiated at all costs. Well! You will be, Clotilde, and you will know. WE want it; WE want it for you and against me; WE want it from below and from above. Hail then, O Chosen one; but beware, Clotilde Bersone. You are running towards your destiny. Suddenly, he knelt down. His gaze sharpened — that magnetic gaze that raised him in my eyes even amid the worst baseness! Facing the East, pale, distant, and as if possessed, he prophesied aloud:

— Yes, I see you, Clotilde, crossing space, bringing death against my advice to the threshold of a king. Later, your fingers will be stained with blood, despite your fine scruples of today, and an innocent will perish by your own hands. Another will fall to the deceptive charm of your words, and a third will be sacrificed for your vengeance. To reach the highest degree, you will shelter yourself under the wings of the Powerful, and then your gaze will turn to crush, against the man who dared to love you, Clotilde, against his oaths and the jealousy of the Most High. It is you who, in the shadows, plots his downfall and prepares his death... There will then be no restraint on your ambitions; you will rise ever higher. The sole Sovereign Mistress of the Spirit, you make him act at your will, he speaks through your mouth, and you are not yet satiated with pride and crimes. But here comes the ultimate test, there is too much mud for you to cross this final gap. Ah! Tremble in turn, O triumphant one, if you do not find a sure refuge...

The more he spoke, the more his voice became muffled, breathless, and grim. A shiver of horror shook me entirely. I felt, I was sure, that he had indeed seen that his prediction would come true point by point, and that it was not him who had spoken, but through his mouth, Another whom I did not yet know how to name.

However, when Garfield, fallen face down, got up after a few minutes, he remembered nothing; and I refrained from enlightening him about the outcome of that bleak and cruel day.

In the end, nothing had really changed in my life because of this ordinary event; it only marked a stage on the road where I now moved forward with more confidence, sure that it was leading to something and Someone.

## VI

### HOW TO POISON A KING

The next step was to be slower and more burdensome than I had expected.

Nothing of great importance occurred during the few months of summer.

Only on October 21st — we are in 1877 — was I summoned to the Chapter, where I was informed that, in reward for the signs of courage I had shown during my novitiate, the Lodge had decided to entrust me with one of the most important missions, and that I had to first receive the Secret of the Grand Orient.

This is a kind of test specific to Affiliates who are to be trusted with a matter that is regularly reserved for the knowledge of Initiates. For they alone have the right to be informed of the acts and serious projects of the Lodge. Others know nothing — as can be seen from my own accounts — except what they are able to communicate to each other or guess from the daily rites and operations. The passwords, the rituals, are merely internal police methods, intended to guarantee the security of the premises. They are of no

importance when it comes to the true secrets of the Grand Lodges.

I was given three days to reflect before giving my consent.

I spent those three days at the Lodge without leaving or receiving anyone, and the Grand Orient confined me, to carry out this period of seclusion, in one of the least comfortable underground cells. I accepted this like a brave person, preferring the tranquility of this prison to the unpleasant customary ceremonies. In the dark, I only searched for the bed where I threw myself fully dressed, and asked sleep to help me pass this wasted time.

My first night was peaceful, and when I woke up, I felt, as I touched the hands of my watch, that it was 7 o'clock. A pale light, falling from the air vent where the cell was ventilated, soon spread a gray ash of daylight. I saw a small window in the wall, and on it, a nightlight, which I took for the next night. At 11 o'clock, a plate appeared with a small note:

— What would you like to drink with your meals?

Since they were treating me like a recluse, I replied, playing the part of austerity:

— Clear water.

I did, however, have lunch and drank a little wine. In the evening, in addition to dinner, there was a carafe of water with this label:

— Keep, if you wish, a glass and this carafe.

They had taken my answer seriously, which amused me greatly.

My watch, which I carefully wound, often more than once, helped me greatly to pass those endless three days.

Finally, at midnight, on the third day, the electric bell woke me up with a start. My door opened, and Garfield appeared, a candlestick in hand, and I once again stood before the Chapter, still astonished at the puerile nature of these kinds of initiations into the murky or bloody underworld: for no one had less of a cabalistic or esoteric mind than I did.

The Initiates received me with solemnity.

One of them held a blue sash in his hand; he passed it to Garfield, who draped it over my shoulder, saying:

— O Nymph of the Night, receive the title and charge of Dame of the Order of Cyprus, and prove yourself worthy by faithfully carrying out the orders you are about to receive.

I nodded in agreement: each of the Initiates came to congratulate me in turn and then left.

We were left alone, Garfield and I.

He was sad and silent, as he often was in such occasions. He offered me his arm without saying a word, and we descended to the Gnosis.

There, he made me sit at a desk, and with unshakable seriousness, he pricked my hand with a pin, gave me a quill, and told me:

— Write with your blood what I am about to dictate to you.

I wrote:

— I swear to open my veins myself if I am cowardly enough to abuse the secret of the Grand Orient.

— Sign it, he ordered.

I obeyed, without further question. Despite our profane intimacy, I would never have dared ask Garfield for an explanation in these circumstances, and the temptation to offer him a knowing smile did not even cross my mind. His calmness imposed respect on me, and besides, I was, fortunately, neither mocking nor teasing in the French manner. My excessive temperament, always prone to extremes, was irritated by

these pretensions but ultimately endured them with patience, seeing them as one of the inevitable annoyances of a perilous career.

Garfield's demeanor, moreover, was enough to warn me that, this time, the matter was serious and, in addition, only partially to his liking.

He made me sit in an armchair, asked for my full attention, and, handing me a sealed letter, explained without so much as a muscle twitching on his face:

— Here! This letter contains a direct order addressed to Prince Humbert, the presumptive heir to the throne of Italy, instructing him to rid us of his father, Victor-Emmanuel, who, despite his long services to the Cause against papal tyranny, now hinders or obstructs higher plans... I am thus brutally revealing to you the full importance of your mission, so that you will listen to me with the desired diligence and take all necessary precautions to play the role you are about to undertake, which is not without peril.

He resumed in a tone of light but authoritative conversation:

— So, dear Madam, from now on, remember this well, you are Madame Cerati, widow of an Italian staff officer. You arrive in Rome from Marseille, where you had been vacationing with one of your sisters. The Roman offices refuse to grant you your husband's pension, and you are carrying a petition to Prince Humbert, countersigned by His Excellency Mr. Cairoli, currently a member of the Italian Cabinet and in high favor with Victor-Emmanuel... Do you follow me?

It is clear that I was indeed following him, concentrating all my attention.

— You are an exemplary widow, Christian and even pious. So, you addressed yourself to the new Cardinal Secretary of State to obtain from him, despite the ongoing rift between the Vatican and the Quirinal, a letter of recommendation that would allow you, with Cairoli's help, to meet the heir prince here or there... When you are in his presence, seize the first opportunity to whisper this single word in his ear: "Kebir." Humbert will immediately reply: "Sabeth." You will give him the letter and wait. In response, he will entrust you with another letter that you will bring back here on Friday after your return.

He added in a half-whisper, after a pause and one of those long looks that seemed to read my thoughts:

— Thus end the oldest servants whose services are no longer desired... You are young, Clotilde; you know the language and the country perfectly; no one could be more suited for this task that has been imposed on me... Go, my child, and may the Spirit protect and guide you.

I left him, my head buzzing.

I must admit, this time the gravity of my mission filled me with pride. Finally, I was emerging from vile, subordinate tasks to take on greater responsibilities! Not that I was particularly skilled in politics. It wasn't the political aspect of things that most captured my attention, and the religious question underlying almost all of these grand debates was, through ignorance, almost indifferent to me. As a woman, it was a woman's role I aspired to—one above the masses and even the privileged of the second rank. First, as a messenger, then as the unrivaled confidante of the highest power—not to confiscate it, as I wouldn't have known what to do with it, but to share it, to inspire it, and to apply it to my personal vendettas, my ambitions for luxury, vanity, and pleasures.

Moreover, what did the crime matter to me? Italian by birth, my social fall had left me without a homeland, as without God. This old king, who had had his moment of popularity, this new prince whom the Sect dreamed of turning into a parricide—thus killing with one hand and dishonoring with the other the principle of monarchy—represented, for me, merely two puppets of higher rank in the tragicomedy where I saw Garfield's influence succumbing under the increasingly tight game of Prince Bismarck. This was like a first revenge taken by the White Cuirassier for his Kadosch Knight sacrificed on the night of Good Friday.

Should I finally say it? Alongside the interest of this high-level intrigue, there was for me a kind of other, more personal curiosity, where, as always, my entire passion was directed in one stroke.

Italian, I might no longer be very much so by patriotic attachment, but I remained so through all kinds of

fibers and heritages. Perhaps the daughter of some old carbonaro, born a conspirator, it seemed to me that, there, on the classic land of plots, of acqua tofana and daggers under the mask, I was finally going to find partners of my own stature. This Freemason prince hastening the end of a father no less aware, and for good reason; this future king, under the orders of a universal conspiracy against thrones, to save his dynasty; this head of state, finally, a slave—despite his police, his army, his crown—of an obscure Masonic agent whose word could have him shot in a citadel ditch: what a tangle! What combinations! Who would be played in the end in this Machiavellian game where Rome, for all time, had been accustomed to giving masters to the world rather than receiving lessons?

This other side of the intrigue, which even a Garfield, too rigid, and Bismarck, a bit heavy, would fail to grasp, attracted me, beside and beyond my official role. I would have bet, despite the Lodge, on the finesse of the Transalpine against the hard sectarianism of the Germanic and Anglo-Saxon; but, as one might expect, I kept these thoughts to myself and even avoided formulating them too categorically, even to myself. It is the safest precaution, which neither spoils full awareness nor the pleasure of the game.

A few days later, I left for Turin, without Garfield having deigned to speak again about the matter. I took a train through Modane that was due to arrive in Turin around 11 o'clock in the evening; I got off at a large hotel near the station, and the next morning, at 3:30 a.m., to avoid being recognized despite my mourning veil, confident that I wasn't being followed, I left again for Bologna.

In Rome, I stayed at a large shop of religious silversmiths in St. Peter's Square, a representative of the Lodge in Rome. He introduced me to the Cardinal Secretary of State.

He, without comment, listened gravely to my request and wrote the letter of recommendation I needed for Minister Cairoli.

It was at the Rospigliosi Palace that I met His Excellency, who showered me, without flinching, with all the formalities of Italian politeness, not to mention the obligatory condolences for the death of my unfortunate husband — whose civil status, true or assumed, and military service record I learned from him. Apparently, the entire Court had participated in my mourning, and Prince Humbert would certainly receive me in the shortest time possible, at the latest by the end of the week.

The minister then wanted to introduce me to Madame Cairoli, who invited me the next evening to her home for a soirée; my mourning, still too recent, served as an excuse to politely decline her kindness. — How well these scenes were played!

The next day, Prince Humbert informed me that he wished for me to be introduced to Princess Marguerite and the Duchess of Genoa, in the presence of Prince of Carignan; I replied briefly that I would be happy to bow respectfully to any wish of so illustrious a prince, and in the afternoon, I received a visit from Mr. and Mrs. Cairoli, who offered to help me with any acquisitions I might wish to make in the city. I took advantage of their kindness, and everything was ready when, the next day, Cairoli came to pick me up around two o'clock to introduce me to the prince.

I entered the Quirinal, carrying my sealed letter. Princess Marguerite, the Duchess of Genoa, Marquise Pompanati and her husband, Prince of Carignan, Prince Belgiojoso, Mrs. Amari, and Prince Humbert were the only ones present in the circle. Unintimidated, I was introduced to each of them. Dignified, reserved, my face as much as I could filled with grief, I listened for nearly two hours to the kind words of these ladies, waiting for a favorable opportunity.

Suddenly, Prince Humbert, pretending to rush to pick up a handkerchief of the Duchess of Genoa, near whom I was sitting, leaned in front of me, and I whispered in his ear: — Kebir.

I couldn't tell from his expression if his gesture had been calculated, or if my password had surprised him: — Sabeth, he replied in the same tone as he straightened up.

Prohibited, and holding my letter tightly between my clenched fingers under my dress, I looked at him, hesitant to hand over my message in front of so many people. It was he who reached out his hand and, in the most natural tone, said:

"Ah!" he said, "Is this the letter containing your husband's last wishes, personally addressed to me? Thank you, Madam."

I bowed my head to hide my distress, as if the pain awakened by this cruel memory overwhelmed me entirely. I was really wondering, quite terrified:

"What will he do with this letter now? Will he dare to open it in front of all these people? And how will he take such a commission? Will he not finally rebel at the reading of such a criminal and unnatural order, and take revenge on me for such an infamous attempt?"

Despite everything I had seen so far, an insurmountable apprehension took over me completely.

However, the prince had calmly broken the seals, allowed the packet containing the poison to fall into the envelope, unfolded the sheet, and read the letter from the Lodge. Not a feature of his face twitched. Only a brief tremor stirred his hand for a moment. Calmly, he folded the message, sealed everything in a wallet, seemed to reflect for a moment, and said to me:

"Madam, the matter is serious. I will submit it to the King, who, despite his extreme weakness, still retains his full lucidity. As soon as I know his decision, I will inform you."

I bowed again and, a few minutes later, asked to be excused. Cairoli accompanied me to my door, and I began to wait, more reassured, for the sealed letter that Prince Humbert was to hand me for the Lodge.

"What ease!" I thought, with a kind of wonder at this admirable agility in the worst intrigues, which I encountered, as I had suspected, in my fellow countrymen. "The Lodge will be the fool."

But as soon as I had entered, a Masonic emissary asked to see me and handed me a second sealed commission. It contained a second letter for Humbert and a letter for me.

The letter read:

"You will remain in Rome for another ten days. In a week, you will be presented to Victor-Emmanuel. A drink will be poured before you, and he will be made to drink half of it. Bring with you a small bottle containing violet syrup. You will pour it into the remaining drink, and do not be surprised if it turns the color of blood. This is the usual reaction of the bruccine.

Whatever happens, pour it all into another bottle that you will bring here. Do not fear anything. You will be alone with Humbert, and he will make it easier for you to carry out your mission, step by step.

A sincere and devoted friend.

P.S. — Enclosed are two thousand francs. If you are short, go to your host. But do not forget that you must strictly obey all the instructions enclosed, even at the risk of your life."

This time, things were getting serious. So, I had to not only witness the poisoning but also bring back irrefutable chemical proof of it. And not only had the Lodge secretly sent an agent carrying varying instructions depending on the circumstances, but I could no longer doubt that I was being strictly monitored in even my smallest actions by an invisible and omnipresent "eye."

"For once," I thought, "the prince will be quite clever if he escapes this dreadful trap..."  
After all, what does it matter to me? All that matters is that my mission is accomplished and my testimony

sincere... Let's go!

Indeed, I went six days without news. On the seventh day, Cairoli brought me a note from the prince. I opened it. It contained only these few words:

"Accept the invitation that Cairoli will extend to you for tomorrow's musical evening. I will see you at his place. He is a loyal subject, affiliated with the Lodge."

Cairoli indeed sent me the formal invitation, and I accepted after a little pretended hesitation. The appointment was set for eleven-thirty.

At a quarter past eleven the next day, I was at the palace. A usher took my card and, reconsidering immediately, led me into a deserted salon, where, almost immediately after, Cairoli entered:

"The prince," he told me, "will arrive precisely at eleven-thirty; but I must leave you alone so as not to intrigue my guests."

I took a music magazine in hand to appear composed, and just as the half hour struck, Humbert joined me without saying a word. I handed him his letter; he took it, courteously asked me to sit, and seemed absorbed in his reading. Only his slightly furrowed brow betrayed the concentration of his thoughts. Finally, he turned to me, more self-possessed than ever, and, with great dignity, said:

"Madam, in four days I will present you to the King, and you will be able to tell Paris how well I have obeyed."

At that moment, Cairoli came to call me to enter the salon. Presentations, music. After two hours, I pretended to be tired and withdrew.

Four days later, I was with the King. Humbert introduced me to Victor-Emmanuel, under the guise of a very complicated pension assignment, and the elderly monarch, from his bed, received me with the familiar cordiality that had partly earned him his popularity. He told me he was deeply interested in the loss I had just experienced, as well as anything that concerned his army, regretting that his old age and illness prevented him from personally attending to the matter. While speaking, he was already showing signs of fatigue; a sort of drowsiness was overtaking him.

Humbert hurried to a potion prepared on a sideboard near the sovereign. I saw him pour the contents of the packet I had given him—or at least a similar packet—into the drink. He helped his father drink about half of the mixture, then placed the glass back in its position without affectation. As the old man did not wake up, he pretended, while waiting for him to regain consciousness, to want to show me a painting hanging above the sideboard, which depicted, I no longer remember which battle. This gave me the chance, standing, to pour the syrup into the remaining drink: the glass turned bright red, and I shuddered. It was almost a corpse we had poisoned, and I no longer understood anything about this absurd and hateful crime.

It was only on the way back that an Initiate explained the details to me, without paying much attention.

The old king had remained a believer despite his faults. He did not want to die without the sacraments. But he had been excommunicated nominally as the usurper of the Papal States. To obtain the lifting of the censure, he had considered leaving at least the Quirinal and the Eternal City. The Sect, on the other hand, wanted him to die in Rome, in this plundered Palace, without reconciliation, and hastened his slow agony to even prevent him from receiving a merciful advance from the Vatican.

Ignorant of these twists, I was horrified by the wild haste with which they sought to finish off a dying man. On the contrary, when the liquid turned red, the prince seemed to have a moment of clarity in his gaze. He quickly handed me the letter I was to take to Paris, which undoubtedly contained his commitments

regarding the reversal of alliances. Then, very courteously, he asked:

"When do you leave?"

"In eight days," I replied, feeling oppressed.

It seemed to me that, between the half-closed eyelids of the patient, a particularly lucid glance had filtered through to us as well. But no! Having returned to the bedside, we saw that the king was sleeping soundly. The prince and I exchanged a Masonic salute, the sign of the Affiliates, which consists of placing a finger without affectation on the right hand, on the forehead, and over the heart, to clearly show that everything is submitted to the supreme law of the Lodge: the arm, the intellect, and the will.

I withdrew. Victor-Emmanuel survived a few more days, and more than ever, today, I hesitate to believe that his son really made him drink the poison from Paris. On the contrary, the two princes seem to have agreed to play me this superior comedy, which saved the life of the older man.

In any case, the news of the death caused a consternation in Italy, of which I was a witness. The rumor spread that poison had been found in the intestines during the autopsy, at the time of embalming, but that this poisoning was attributed to an overdose of medication, without any analysis being provided. A newspaper in Turin, *Unione*, was the only one to clearly hint at a family crime; all copies were seized by the police with such noise that it seemed as if they were trying to make the matter public at the Quirinal, rather than suppressing it.

The day after the death, Humbert was proclaimed king and began, in turn, to practice the perilous role of sovereigns who, trembling before the Sects, strive to govern with their assassins.

## VII MURDERS AND RAPE

Eight days later, I left Rome for France, spent a night in Dijon, and was back in Paris by the first Friday of Lent in 1878.

That day, I delivered Humbert's letter, my report, and the vial containing the liquid obtained at the king's bedside to the Initiates. Everything went perfectly. Victor-Emmanuel was dead—absolved, it's true—but dead in Rome, and that was what mattered most; the analysis revealed that the poison had indeed been used, and I refrained from expressing any doubts about the possibility of a ruse or a cover-up.

"Thus," I thought, "one day, oh brutes, I will escape your vengeance, and if I cannot be the strongest, I will know how to be the cleverest."

I asked for two months off to relax and distract myself. They granted it willingly. I had begun with a masterstroke and gained some unknown confidence, some new faith in my abilities. It also seemed more prudent to the Chapter that, just in case, I should remain away from any affairs for a while until all traces of the widow Cerati were erased.

Unfortunately, this break, which gave me leisure and freedom of movement, also allowed me to reflect once again on my personal grievances and my own revenge.

Garfield himself was absent.

His necessary stays in the United States were becoming more frequent. Sensing the ground shaking under his feet in Europe, he was trying to gradually strengthen his position in America. As a result, he now only returned to Paris at long intervals, for a few days, a month at most!

Now, solitude is a poor adviser for bad natures; it gave free rein to my worst whims.

First, I thought about Daniel, long neglected, and I resolved to take advantage of my break to finish with that wretched seducer.

Having tracked him down, I took him with me to Monaco. He was a gambler, and it wasn't difficult to make a victim of him at the casino. The more he lost, the more fiercely he gambled. I, for my part, played an infernal game at his expense. Soon, he was broke. Then we returned to Paris, and I urged him, to recover, to gamble on the stock market, holding before his eyes the hope of a new, brilliant, independent life together. All his assets went into it, including what remained of his interests in Italy.



One day, terrified by his ruin, he gathered all the cash he had and went to play at the Palais-Royal. When he left, he had lost more than he could ever repay.

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Dumbfounded, he came to tell me about his misadventure, hoping to make me feel sorry for him. that, having brought him to this impasse, I'd make it a point of honor to get him out of it.

I listened to him, cold and impassive as a judge:

- My friend," I said, "that's your farewell you've just given me.

I burst out laughing, and he left like a madman.

In the evening, he blew his brains out.

conscience hardened by this murder perpetrated on my own account, I lent myself to all the political and other crimes that were multiplying in the Lodge.

I saw emissaries leaving for Serbia, for Constantinople, tasked with murderous missions to which, in one way or another, I was to lend a hand. I was involved in more than one private execution, for any higher Initiate or Affiliate who seriously violates an article of the Constitution is subject to death, and when the Spirit does not take care of it, the Grand Orient must pronounce and execute the punishment.

The methods vary.

When poison is not possible, the Lodge resorts to the "accident." It's a shipwreck, a fall from a carriage, what do I know? A nighttime assault, blamed on barrier vagabonds or a supposed criminal revenge. Thus, Minister Tegalli died during a walk in the countryside of Naples; thus, King Humbert was attacked in turn with a weapon on November 22, 1878, by Passanante: the High Lodge had uncovered his treachery!

The two Rollin brothers were punished even more cruelly. They were reduced, thanks to certain drugs, to a kind of idiocy, heartbreaking even in its cheerfulness: they are still in Charenton to this day.

As for the executions entrusted to me personally, I will refrain from recounting them all. The blood rushes to my forehead at the mere memory, and I will only give one example of these ignominies. It will show what I am compelled to keep silent about, out of shame and propriety.

At the beginning of 1879, with Garfield being absent, I was assigned to watch over a certain Boulrier, who was distrusted. I was introduced to him one evening at the Maison Dorée. We met a few times in the Bois de Boulogne, where I rode side-saddle. He eventually made propositions to me, and I was ordered to become his mistress.

The life I made him lead wore him out so much that his life seemed to hang by a thread. I made him drink some learned potions, which were given to me by the Grand Alchemist of the pharmacopoeia of Occult Sciences. Finally, one day, I was entrusted with two so-called magnetic balls, which were to be given to him in a certain way, under the pretext of restoring the stimulant to his passions that he sought from all the drugs.

As soon as he had them in his hands, he turned a deathly pale and lost consciousness. I fled, taking the balls with me.

The scene had taken place secretly in a house in Passy owned by the Lodge. The man was reported to his family as having fled; the next day, I saw his body on the dissection table in our Amphitheater. Boulrier was to serve, at our first celebration, as an embalmed corpse.

And it was certainly not the first murder for which I bore more or less responsibility; but this time I had acted personally. Nothing cost me more in terms of crime, and this one was all the more cruel because the unfortunate man had never personally wronged me and because he left behind a wife and children in poverty. Furthermore, the Lodge, thanks to the notes I had extorted from him, saw fit to organize a posthumous bankruptcy after his death, in order to explain his disappearance and dishonor even his name.

Was I not finally ripe to become a perfect Initiate?

There is in the Lodge an “apartment” that I have spoken little about until now. It is the Black Cabinet, resembling a funeral chapel, which opens, as I have said, on the side of the Lodge of the Affiliates, between the Dawn and the Chamber of Deliberations.

There, eighteen skulls, illuminated by chemical preparations, are arranged in a square along the walls on shelves. A kind of altar, built of bones, forms the back. A beginning of construction in the same style faces the altar, and near the construction, there is a square, a trowel, sand, and lime.

These symbols are to teach the Brothers what sort of materials Masonry primarily uses to build its edifice.

The aspirant who is locked in there must practice enlarging the construction, spend a quarter of an hour examining the skulls one by one, approach the altar, and throw onto it a liquid and a salt which suddenly ignite, while piercing screams resound from all sides. The skulls begin to move on the shelves. Above the altar appears the head of a beheaded person, all bloody, which spits insults. Groans and complaints surround you. A sepulchral voice pronounces the name of a relative, a friend.

After this ordeal, the candidate is entitled to arm bands, a helmet, a visor, a shield, proclaiming him “hardened.” Hardened against what? He thinks, against fear, for everything seems to have shouted at him: You will die. In reality, the deeper meaning is: You will kill. You will kill, endlessly, without excuse, without reason, on behalf of a power of blood.

From the top of the construction, a kind of greenish lantern casts pale rays into the Cabinet, and a winged monster, bearing two horns, a bird’s head, and a serpent’s tail, flutters relentlessly in this light. A gloomy, predatory beast, of night and death, that some naïve people sometimes mistake for a spirit, and which is nothing more than the semblance of the Power that anticipates here the murders it inspires or commands.

The day Boulrier died, no doubt, in the Black Cabinet, this sinister Horned Eagle must have let out a double cry of joy in my honor. I had well earned it from him.

### THIRD PART

#### THE INSPIRED ONE AGAINST THE GRAND ORIENT

#### I TAKING POSSESSION

It was in June 1879 that Garfield finally informed me that I was called to replace an Initiate named Gavagnon, who had just died.

I had expected this and would have been quite surprised if this honor had not finally been conferred upon me after so many services rendered; but my occult education still left much to be desired, although my other abilities, alas! were all too apparent.

One day, the Grand Orient thus had me enter the Round Temple, or Lodge reserved for Initiates, and I found the building to have a more imposing aspect, far more serious than the Square Lodge of the Affiliates. Less ornamentation, but also nothing frivolous.

The ceremony was to take place soon, and the Initiates also intended to elect me to one of the six seats at the semi-circular table. It was a great honor all at once, after so much waiting, and the trials would be made even more difficult.

Thus, Garfield had insisted on preparing me himself for everything.

And first, solemnly, he insisted on telling me again—by order, he explained—what the secret, the true supreme secret was, upon which all the power of the Lodge rested.

"It is the Spirit," he assured me, represented here by the Dragon with seven heads.

He immediately noticed that this beginning of inverted catechism amused my absolute skepticism. Naturally and by conviction, how could I believe in the supernatural power of a celestial or infernal Spirit? I did not believe in God; it was not for me to believe in the devil.

I had even convinced myself, or nearly so, to calm my remorse, that everything I had seen or guessed up until then that was strange or terrifying was merely counterfeit sorcery or a scarecrow for fools; and I took pleasure in mocking, even to myself, the suspicions that haunted me, like a remnant of the natural weakness of women and a phantom of my overheated imagination.

Garfield, noticing my impression from my mocking lips, refused to relent, and, determined this time to end my skepticism, he vowed to make me feel the presence of the Spirit. I saw him rise, more hieratic and imposing than ever. With a gesture, he signaled me to climb the high Platform that closed the Lodge and to turn toward him.

"See!" he said then.

Slowly, he removed his hat and gloves. He donned the scarlet tunic and the ample toga. Sacred rays shone on his forehead; the Sun sparkled on his chest.

He lowered his forehead to the floor and began the invocations addressed to the Dragon, whom he called the Spirit.

Pleading, humble, even servile phrases.

Seven times he repeated it, seven times his forehead touched the ground. Then, rising as if exalted by an invisible force, he fixed his gaze into the void. His pale lips murmured a few disconnected words. All the lights in the room dimmed simultaneously, yet without completely ceasing to shine. A strange sound, like

distant thunder, filled the Lodge, and the Dragon, the white marble Dragon—like the one of the Affiliates, which I had touched a hundred times on my way—gradually came to life.

Its many eyes gleamed with a dark flame. The manes of its heads became flowing, its belly brushed the ground, its tail curled over the floor, and it leaped toward Garfield, who seemed to want to dominate it with his magnetic gaze.

At last, the horrible Beast stopped, facing the Platform, as though fascinated by its tamer; and Garfield asked it in German:

— Should the Affiliate, called the Nymph of the Night, accept the honor of being elected to the Initiate?

— Yes, said the Beast.

And the word ended with a hissing sound, like that of a huge serpent.

Garfield continued:

— Is she capable of holding this rank with honor?

— Yes, answered the Dragon.

And this time, the word ended with a shrill laugh.

Garfield, bending his knee, spoke for the third time, dramatically reciting this sort of prayer:

— O You whom I recognize as the Supreme Being who governs and inspires our minds and our actions,

— You who enlighten my spirit and guide my arm, — You who dominate and move the universe, the work of Your hand, — You to whom heaven and earth belong, all filled with Your glory, images of Your

immensity, — You, Light, Force, and Matter, — prove here Your power, which knows how, when it wills,

to bend minds and hearts. O You, whose protection extends to each of Your sons, You, the enemy of the Crucified, in whose name I curse both God and the Trinity, and Christ, and the Virgin Mother, yield at last

to the one who possesses Your spirit, who is one with You and who has the right,

— in the name of the Promise, the Symbol, and the Sacred Deposit, in the name of his belief in Your mastery over all created things, visible or invisible,

— to ask You and obtain what You know.

A short invocation in Hebrew followed, the true one: for all that preceded, in the vulgar tongue, was only for my own edification.

Then the Dragon, raising its seven heads, whose eyes fixed in divergent directions, toward the various points of the Lodge, let out a mournful cry, which the echo repeated endlessly, and began to respond by striking the floor with repeated blows.

This is the most tiring of its communications. One must count the blows struck, the number of which corresponds to the letters of the alphabet. Thus, three blows correspond to C, ten blows to I, twenty blows to T, and so on...

Garfield spelled out the entire message in this way, which said:

— Useless today. I will persuade her alone.

Then, in broken Italian:

— Vengeance and hatred... O woman, come to me!

I began to listen with more attention: but the Dragon gradually calmed down. It eventually returned to its place, and soon there was nothing left on its pedestal but the ordinary white marble statue.

Garfield, out of breath, resumed his usual impassive gentleman's posture. I descended from the platform and congratulated him for having given me this curious spectacle.

I was honestly astonished, still not convinced, fearing some suggestion from his flaming eyes. He noticed it and didn't utter another word.

A few days later, he left for New York, where he stayed for three months, and when he returned, it was to play another comedy, which, no doubt, the Dragon had whispered to him in order to finish deceiving me.

Here is the translation of the passage from French to English:

He seemed to have become infatuated with an Opera dancer named Mina, who everyone in Paris was talking about. He never stopped praising her talents, even in front of me, during his rare visits. This creature, from what he said, consumed all his time.

Now, I didn't like Garfield, since all I dreamed of was getting revenge on him as soon as I could. But our affair flattered my pride, and above all, I wasn't about to be dethroned by this girl, as long as I didn't feel like giving up my position.

In short, playing right into the trap he'd set to overcome my coldness, I became jealous. Everywhere, day and night, it seemed I saw them—this loathed couple—at the Bois, at the races, at the theater, and I hated my so-called rival with a renewed ferocity.

This Mina had dared to defy me; she was too much. How could I get rid of her? It was impossible to turn to the Lodge. A thousand ideas flashed through my mind, each one more absurd or more unfeasible than the last.

Then, one Friday, when an Orator had particularly exhausted me with his pompous speeches, I was walking around the semicircular table, near the Dragon, when an unknown voice whispered in my ear: — Hate and vengeance... O woman, come to me!

I turned quickly: there was no one around me. Who had spoken to me like that? I stared at the Hydra for a moment; it was as silent and motionless as a stone.

But my resolve was made. I decided to end it once and for all, either with this absurd obsession or with a final plan for revenge, further heightened in me by this last incident. I wanted to return the next day, alone, to the Lodge and face-to-face, to question the Sphinx, even if it meant being devoured.

Spirit, Beast, or marble, or the Dragon would remain silent, and I no longer cared for that mute God. If, on the contrary, it spoke, we would make our conditions.

But I needed a key to enter the Round Temple, and only the Initiates had this key. I used cunning and wrote to Garfield that I couldn't meet him that evening:

If your beauty doesn't consume all your time, grant me a few minutes, as an old beloved. I am very much looking forward to offering you dinner.

He rushed in. I had had a large fire prepared in the dining room, and it was still only October. Soon, the heat became uncomfortable for him. Having barely drunk anything, he was half-drunk. I finished him off by pouring a dose of opium into his glass, which knocked him out.

I then had him carried to a bedroom, where they undressed him. I went in afterward and took the small key I knew was hidden in a secret pocket under his shirt. Certain that he wouldn't wake up anytime soon, I hurried to the Lodge.

The concierge asked where I was going. I replied that I had lost an earring and that Garfield had given me the key, as he couldn't accompany me. The concierge thought it was just the Square Lodge for the Affiliates and let me pass.

The woman in charge of the cloakroom, who lives in the Avly, also looked at me in surprise but did not dare stop me, knowing my status.

Finally, I entered the Lodge, lit two or three gas lamps, and looked around in all directions. Almost immediately, my gaze fell on the Christ above the Grand Orient's seat, and I felt a shock. My uncertain eyes went from the cross to the Dragon. I remained thus torn for about ten minutes. The thought suddenly struck me that, if a supernatural order truly existed, it was better to lean toward Man, even if degraded by an ignominious torture, than toward this Animal Monster. But I was too far removed from the Cross and the ideas of forgiveness, too unworthy of holiness, and even, lacking repentance, of the mercy of the divine Master.

In vain, bold and tempting God, I climbed onto the platform and, addressing the Crucifix, after making the sign of the cross five times, I shouted at it:

— Christ, Son of the living God, if it is true that your power is above all others, show it to me and confound here the Dragon who defies you.

It was more of a summons than a prayer. I should have humbled myself first, bent my knees, and wept. The Christ remained silent.

Then, mad with rage, I blasphemed him, for the first time, of my own accord. In furious phrases, I challenged him to show himself or to annihilate me, and, as if moved by some foreign force, stumbling all the way, I fell at the foot of the Dragon, nearly lifeless.

I stared at it, uncertain at first; my hand touched it to make sure it, too, was made of marble, insensible and cold. Then, lowering my head to its feet, I stammered in a spasm:

— If you are the Powerful One, show it. If you are the Strong One, move!

Then, like lightning, one of the beast's paws landed on my neck. The blow stunned me, and its claws tore at my flesh.

My hair stood on end, and my heart faltered at the sudden and brutal contact with a supernatural force I had long refused to believe in.

No doubt was left. No machinery could explain the mystery of that furry, warm, and pulsing paw that was now gripping me. Fear and joy were battling for my soul; the pain was initially the stronger. I cried out for mercy and pity, muttering in fragments the words I had overheard from Garfield's mouth. Gradually, the Beast loosened its grip.

For another ten minutes, I remained unable to move or speak. Then, with one leap, I stood up and fled to the platform. From there, striving to dominate the situation, I dared to fix my gaze on the Dragon. Sparks were crackling from its countless eyes, and this monstrous Beast appeared monstrously beautiful: let the two words be granted as they can! Of its seven heads, some were those of a lion, others of a panther, some bore a single horn, and others two. The body seemed more like a leopard, streaked with black. Its legs were short but strong, bearing enormous claws.

— Supreme Spirit, I cried from my place, is it true that you call me to the position where I am to be named?

— Yes, said the Beast.

— And what must I do now to please you?

— Recognize me, by a pact signed with your blood, as your sovereign, proclaim me your Supreme Lord, submit yourself entirely to my will, and publicly abjure the religion you were born into.

— And what will I receive in exchange?

— Honors and riches.

Then, in a lower tone:

— Hatred and vengeance...

Carried away by my resentments, I declared to it:

— Very well. I will give myself to You, once I have proof of your power outside of this place. Grant me two favors that I desire.

At these words, the Spirit made a shower of gold coins fall at my feet; having gathered them with disdain, I threw them onto the semicircular Table:

— It is not gold I need.

— What, then, do you want?

— I want to take revenge on the woman who has taken all power over Garfield from me.

The Dragon laughed:

— Mina?... Very well! Let her die. You will be the sole mistress of this man.

I approached it. Its promise had broken the ice between us. I was no longer afraid:

— And can you promise me, in exchange for my total surrender, something else?

Whatever relationships I may be forced to have, can you ensure that my heart will never be involved and that, despite this lack of human love, I will live without too much suffering?

— I promise you... I can, I will! And it froze in place.

Exhausted, I threw myself into an armchair, and an hour later I left the Lodge unnoticed. Garfield was still asleep when I returned home, around two-thirty in the morning. I replaced the key and went to bed. I couldn't manage to fall asleep.

At ten o'clock, my lover finally woke up, seemed to remember nothing of what had happened, and was exquisitely kind to me. From that evening on, he stopped frequenting poor Mina's place; and seven days later, she collapsed in the street from shock, right behind the wheels of a carriage that nearly ran her over.

The doctors in charge of the autopsy concluded that she had suffered from a rather exceptional aneurysm rupture. For another week, people spoke of this strange accident throughout Paris. Then silence fell. A new star shone in the ballet corps. Garfield didn't even seem affected by the incident, never left my side, and was exceedingly generous with me.

Around my neck, one by one, the scars from the Beast's claws faded away; and not only had it granted my inhuman wish regarding Mina, but above all—this was a sort of revelation to me, a testimony of a higher complicity—it had kept our dramatic meeting entirely secret from Garfield.

One evening, alone, having thought it over thoroughly and fully aware of this infernal alliance, I signed and sealed the secret pact.

## II

### BISMARCK AGAINST GARFIELD

The result was swift.

To my great surprise, Garfield being absent, I was notified on a Friday evening to be at the Lodge not at two in the morning, as an Affiliate, but at eleven-thirty with the Initiates.

In the changing room of the round Temple, they dressed me entirely in white—robe, toga, and sandals—and gave me a crystal disc that I was to hold in my left hand. To hold a disc means, in Masonic language, a request for money.

The Grand Master accompanied me thus adorned to the door of the Chapter, where he left me without a word: and I first thought I was about to be immediately received as an Initiate, which filled me with joy.

I was mistaken. The Chapter room opened, and I had to enter. The meeting was brief, although it included all the top personnel from the Government and the Chambers, assembled in an aristocratic gathering:

— You will leave for Berlin tomorrow, one of the Initiates told me, and there, you will act according to the orders you will receive from the Supreme Lodge.

That was all. What was this Supreme Lodge that I heard mentioned for the first time? The rule is never to ask questions. They took my disc away and immediately handed me a sum of 6,000 francs for the initial expenses.

So, it was still just a mission as a messenger, but this time on behalf of the Supreme Powers I did not yet know. I was quite intrigued.

Suddenly, as I left the changing room, I bumped into Garfield, who had unexpectedly returned.

He offered me his arm, accompanied me to his carriage, and had us driven to the Hôtel des Princes. I

said nothing during the ride, asked him no questions: wasn't it for him to be the most open and to involve me more in his thoughts, especially in this political realm where I was being pushed despite my incompetence?

Only when we arrived did he inform me that he wished to introduce me to an Affiliate, a messenger from Berlin, who would travel with me the next day.

— As you wish, I replied... I would just like to know, if possible, for my guidance, how long our separation will last.

— Eh! What does it matter to you, he said suddenly with violence, you who care so little for me, and who would destroy me if it were in your power?

I smiled with an exasperated air, as if it were just a lovers' quarrel. In reality, I was thinking that this new expedition, decided against his will, was driving him to exasperation, and that his political rivalry was on the verge of turning into a man-to-man jealousy toward Bismarck. I took pleasure in his worries and irritation with a refined cruelty, and he could not mistake my feelings.

The Affiliate he introduced me to was Tauler.

At that time, he was an older man, respectable in appearance, with refined and gentle manners that charmed me. He spoke in a calm voice and expressed only elevated views and useful plans.

He greeted me very respectfully and always spoke to me with the utmost delicacy. There was no mention of the Lodge in his speeches, and except for the regular Masonic signs we exchanged at first, nothing betrayed him as an Affiliate. He affected to treat me with deference, as if I were of a higher social rank, and I wondered where this consideration from him was coming from, when Garfield handed me a packet of business cards, on which were engraved a name and title:

EMILIE DE FIEVE

COUNTESS OF COUTENCEAU

On one of these cards, Garfield had written:

Here is the name you will bear from now on. Born in Narbonne, you are the widow of a naval officer and have been living in Paris for a year. This morning, at ten o'clock, I will give you the identity papers you need. Read them carefully so that you can speak appropriately about your supposed family. Tear up my card.

I read it and, without showing the slightest surprise, continued my conversation with Tauler about the notable cities of Germany. After dinner, the three of us made plans to meet the next evening, one hour after midnight, at the Gare du Nord, where the departure was to take place.

I did not sleep for the rest of the night, and as soon as the stores opened, I rushed to do some shopping, spent the rest of the day with Garfield, packed my trunks, and immersed myself in studying my papers. There were supposed documents: 1) birth certificate, 2) marriage certificate, 3) death certificate of my husband; — the family crest of my husband and mine; — a brief overview of our double genealogy, mainly that of the de Fiève family.

At the time of departure, on the platform, Garfield suddenly drew me to him, his face ashen. He whispered in my ear that he was filled with sorrow; that this journey would certainly mark the end of our union; that this matter would be fatal to him, that he had wanted to prevent it, and that the Spirit had decided otherwise. I gave a vague reply. For the first time, this man, so cold, had lost his mask of impassivity: he pressed me against him and murmured once more in Italian, with a kind of pleading caress in his voice: I beg you, return to me as a friend.

Then, stiffening against this outburst of desperate passion, he stepped away for a moment, said a few words to Tauler, settled us into our compartment, and when the train began to move, he left on his side, sad, aged, his back hunched, like I had never seen him before.

Three days later, I was settled at the French embassy in Berlin, where I was showered with expressions of genuine friendship from all sorts of completely unknown people; and the next day, I received a note marked with Masonic signs that said:

"Accept the invitation extended to you, and be at the Crystal Palace tonight. During an intermission, you will be introduced to Prince Bismarck. It is for him that you are in Berlin."



In the evening, Tauler placed me in a box, and after leaving me for a moment, he entered the imperial box. Emperor William I received him with kindness, and I saw that he looked several times in the direction of my box, as if it concerned me.

A few moments later, Bismarck and Tauler were by my side. However, these comings and goings had been noticed in the hall, and the audience's attention had shifted to me. Everyone wondered who was the person being the object of such royal attentions. I feigned indignation at this curious attention and, very dignified, I extended my hand to Bismarck, looking successively toward the East, the West, and the ground. This was the Masonic greeting of the High Initiates that Garfield had taught me for this journey. Bismarck responded.

He was still the high and stern White Cuirassier, who nevertheless knew how to bend to all the subtleties of diplomacy and the graces of the most refined courtesy. He sat opposite me, and, looking over the astonished crowd, he said:

"Here, if the Emperor reigns, it is I who govern, and through you, I want to be master of the Emperor."

These words, both enigmatic and too clear, confused me. Clearly, Bismarck believed I was much more knowledgeable about the intrigue I had been thrown into than I actually was. It was impossible for me to proceed without more explicit instructions. What should I respond? I pretended, for prudence's sake, to drop the conversation, and the Chancellor announced his very soon visit to the embassy. He would explain himself there about the mandate he was carrying.

Indeed, he came the next day, and to facilitate our meeting away from any eavesdropping ears, it was arranged for me to receive him in the library, where he entered as if at home, under the pretext of showing me a remarkable book that we would have had the opportunity to discuss since our first conversation.

Once we were alone, he asked me various questions about the Constitutions of the Lodge, and I answered him satisfactorily. He added that for the past two years, he had been following me, so to speak, step by step, thanks to reports from the High Initiates, and that he was therefore counting on my support in the matter that interested him.

From his words, I understood that among the High Initiates of the six Great Lodges, ongoing relationships had been established, forming a sort of Council, and that this was the Supreme Court, where Bismarck aimed to one day remove Garfield's preeminence, in order to make his political views prevail in High Freemasonry.

What were these views? He revealed to me only those that concerned his personal situation. He despised and hated the sovereign to whom he had to spend more time and effort maintaining his position than to dominate all the European chancelleries, and he aspired to the first rank, without contest and without apprehension.

For now, one could not yet think, in Germany, of the abolition of the monarchy. In the meantime, the goal was to find a way to push the Emperor and his son to be initiated as members of the Lodge, just as had been done with the Italian dynasty. Thus, the Chancellor would truly become the sole and real master, since, as an Initiate, he would be superior to his own sovereign, who would have no choice but to obey him.

Certainly, the idea was bold, and I understood all the interest that the Supreme Lodge took in it. It held Bismarck, who would hold William, and through him, it would have the upper hand over the entire Empire. Prussia, which Freemasonry had already unleashed against France in 1870, would thus ensure Freemasonry's global hegemony, and it would only remain to turn this vast Empire into a Republic, along with Austria, while waiting for the advent of universal Democracy and the global Revolution of the Great

Evening.

Now, the project itself was not unattainable. Napoleon III, affiliated with Freemasonry, had nevertheless lost his crown, and the Prince Imperial owed his death to the same occult Power. For France had first to be handed over to the band that had betrayed and sold it piece by piece since 1870, unleashing religious war, after having placed its creatures in the highest positions: the presidency of the Republic, the Chambers' offices, the ministries, the government press and even opposition, in administrations, in the general staffs, and even in the Church.

Berlin, like Paris, was now going to fall under the yoke, and Bismarck, who had used the Lodge against France, had to pretend to be ready to serve it against his own country, as long as he himself retained power.

This fulcrum for the Masonic lever was enough to lift the world.

But how could the Emperor be convinced to join the conspiracy? How, especially, could I help a Bismarck persuade his own sovereign on this point, I, a woman, I, a temporary Frenchwoman and counterfeit countess?

— "Do not worry," said the Chancellor to me... "I have complete trust in you. You will know how and why later, when you have read the Sacred Book."

And he warned me that the next day I would be presented to the Emperor. He even offered me, on this occasion, a strange piece of jewelry, consisting of a kind of golden trowel, encrusted with diamonds, which he advised me to wear in my hair during the audience the next day, in order to attract William's attention and thus have the opportunity to discuss the Lodge with him. A dazzling outfit that Garfield had just sent me from Paris completed my ensemble, and a final wash, with a water that Garfield had also insisted I use, finished turning my hair completely blonde, whereas it had previously been so dark. I was unrecognizable. Even my appearance seemed entirely changed, and thus, when I would return to Paris, the Countess de Coutanceau, crowned by this worldly triumph in Berlin, could lead an entirely new life, without risking evoking the unwelcome memory of Clotilde Bersone here or there.

However, it was not without apprehension that I approached the Emperor.

I had been introduced to him as a political woman, full of vision and rich in influence: this frightened me a little, as politics was certainly what concerned me the least at that time, aside from the subaltern roles I was made to play in it. When I shared my fears with Bismarck, he cleverly responded:

— "Bah! You know how to be exactly what is desired when your mind, Madam, is willing to cooperate."

I smiled at this compliment, silently implored the Spirit to assist me in this difficult matter, and despite some lingering skepticism about his protection, I must say that I felt from that moment a new sense of assurance.

I was received at Court with much more consideration than I had been in Rome. My slightest words were approved and repeated like oracles. A circle formed around me.

Suddenly, the golden trowel in my hair caught the Emperor's attention. He asked to see the piece of jewelry. I approached the throne and, kneeling so that he could examine the jewel more closely, I found myself, so to speak, face to face with the old monarch.

— "This," he said, intrigued, "resembles a Masonic insignia."

— "Indeed," I replied, "it is one, and of the most genuine Freemasonry that exists."

He seemed quite taken aback.

— "It is strange," I continued, laughing, "to see the vain fears that these so-called secret societies inspire in the world with their innocent mystery. Ah! If only people knew what charm there is in the company of so many learned and cultured minds, of eminent personalities of all kinds, of witty and beautiful women—instead of fearing the Lodges, everyone would strive to join them."

— "But why," asked the Sovereign, "why this mystery? Why such a closed circle?"

— "Because," I replied with a bit of hauteur, "it is uncomfortable, if one opens its doors to everyone, to be in contact with the vulgar... Does the Emperor of Germany consort with the longshoremen of the Spree?"

This jest earned me the most charming smile, which, I am told, was the first time since his accession that William I had shown such an expression. And I left it there for our first meeting.

A few days later, the Emperor had Bismarck convey to me, rather cavalierly, that he was granting me an intimate meeting and would be offended by a refusal. I had no choice but to accept the invitation. The Emperor declared himself charmed, and to show that he intended for our relations to go further, he gave me a lovely villa in Lomnflistadt, a few miles from Berlin—a property from which I later drew an income of about 5,000 francs per year, until the day when, as a higher Initiate, I was forbidden by the Lodge to keep any personal property.

During a third meeting, William finally asked me many questions about Freemasonry, and I answered with ready-made phrases in the style one is accustomed to hearing. More insistently, I added:

— "Besides, join the Lodge, and Your Majesty will judge for himself. He will decide afterward."

— "One last question," he objected. "Have monarchs ever been part of this Society?"

— "Yes. King Humbert of Italy is one, and he is not the only one."

I then asked to take my leave, and eight days later, as I was preparing to depart, Bismarck requested to meet me at the Embassy:

— "Listen to me personally," he said, "for this is outside your mission, which has wonderfully succeeded. You hate Garfield, I know, and I share your hatred. This new-rich America is being too bold with old Europe, and before it is even possible to federate the United States of the Old World, it dreams of exercising its brutal autonomy within a planetary Confederation. Uncle Sam has too big an appetite, and it is Garfield who will suffocate from indigestion in advance! You aim at his downfall, and I can provide you with the means. Let us unite our efforts: the painful scaffold on which he has hoisted himself, as if on a throne, will collapse on all four sides."

And he revealed to me the key to several intrigues in which the future President of the United States had, in fact, worked against the Grand Orient or listened more to his personal interests in Paris than to the directives of the Supreme Lodge.

— "Not to mention," the prince added gallantly, "our greatest conquest, which he has managed to turn almost entirely to his advantage for so long."

That is why Garfield was rejected by the Spirit and would soon be executed.

To convince me of his high treason, I received several pieces and documents in his hand or at least signed by him, which would seal his fate once the debate was opened.

It was up to me, moreover, to bury myself with him in his ruin!

I protested that I would be very cautious, that Garfield had deceived me first, beyond what I had ever suspected, and that I was now determined to seek revenge.

We parted on this note, which was both a treaty of alliance and almost an oath.

III

### THE CHALLENGE TO THE GRAND ORIENT

The first Friday following my arrival in Paris, I briefly reported to the Initiates everything that had happened to me during my stay in Berlin. I was assigned the following Monday for a full report to all the members of the Grand Council.

As for Garfield, when it was time to leave, I signaled that I wished him to accompany me, and eagerly, he agreed to walk me home.

I made an effort to be kind to him, despite the overwhelming concern that hovered over all of our discussions. More than twenty times, he brought up the subject of Bismarck, and each time a more intense flame of hatred flared in his eyes. Twenty times, I dodged his direct questions and tried to divert his suspicions.

I told him that I had found the Chancellor distinguished, political, and energetic...

— “And cowardly,” Garfield muttered under his breath... “A coward who hides behind a woman.”

I pretended not to have heard.

— “Will you see him again?” he asked.

— “I think so.”

— “Where?”

— “In Berlin. Perhaps even in Paris or Dresden.”

— “For what purpose?”

— “Because our ideas align.”

Garfield rose with a tremor of anger. It was still too soon to challenge him. I pretended I had simply given in to a whim to tease him, becoming flattering and even coaxing, as I had never been before.

— “What’s the matter?” I asked ingenuously. “Don’t I still come across as a friend, as you wanted?... Ah! No one will ever replace you in my heart, if the place I have reserved for you there is dear to you.”

I regretted going this far, and as soon as I uttered this flattery, I bitterly regretted it. Indeed, I had unleashed in Garfield one of those bursts of brutal, wild passion that had always degraded him in my eyes. Had I remained simply an auxiliary or disciple, perhaps I would have remained forever the slave of this great mind. I despaired of being merely the plaything of his basest whims.

Thus, when he regained his composure, we both remained for a long time as though stunned by the new rift that had formed between us. Then Garfield suddenly said to me:

— “Do you still want to be Initiated?”

— “Yes, I have definitively decided in Berlin.”

— “Ah!... But you don't believe in the Spirit?”

— “I do. I now acknowledge the presence of a superior Power. Nothing more. For one thing, the submission of the intellect to inexplicable but certain facts is different from the enslavement of faith to absurd explanations.”

I refrained from making any allusion to those "facts" that had finally convinced me, and that Garfield could, at best, take as the mediocre evocation he had shown me.

He gave me a long look, didn't press the matter further; and on Monday, when I arrived at the Chapter, instead of listening to me first, I was left alone, face to face with a large closed book placed on a lectern. What to do? Open it, of course, and read. I decided to do so, and on the first page, I found pinned this note:

Read, delve deeper, submit to the evidence, let your mind not put any obstacle in the acceptance of the truth that speaks without shadow or form.

I smiled, recognizing Garfield's style, and began reading the Prophecies.

In a barbaric style, it's a kind of parody of the Apocalypse, full of rather crude symbolism, a counterfeit of the Song of Songs, and interspersed with verses from the Psalms. This chaos of so-called rhapsodies dictated by the Spirit on the eve of the year 1000 has been religiously preserved by successive Sects. It is the sacred Book par excellence, claim the Initiates; in reality, it is a jumble.

The original is said to be kept in the superior Byzantine Lodge; six copies were made for the six other Grand Lodges in Africa, America, the East Indies, France, Russia, Italy, and Asia. I leafed through this indigestible grimoire for a long time with little interest. According to it, the first of the superior Masonic Lodges was supposedly founded at the end of the 10th century; and I regret not having studied more carefully the more or less authentic lineages through which modern Freemasonry claims to descend from such high origins. I might have found some useful indications; but at the time, I considered all of this to be a heap of foolish inventions.

On the title page of the Prophecies themselves, there is an inverted triangle and a crude drawing representing the chaos from which a chained angel emerges, disrupting the space. Then begins the old texts in all languages concerning the Sect. A mystical jargon, whose poor translation into modern language further aggravates the obscurity.

It would be impossible for me today, from memory, to reproduce even the essentials of these delirious imaginings.

The Spirit, who is supposed to speak in the year 999, begins first with a kind of reverse narrative of Genesis:

I was and reigned above the expanse; one day, darkness was made for me, and I suffered. Then, among the friendly geniuses, a voice arose, and it said: “To the one who has been wronged, greetings.”

A thousand and thousand years passed, and the proscribed God floated among the scattered elements, and only the Father called me his Son.

But from the Fire came the Light, which, hovering over the earth, begat its children.

Before the turn of the millennium, the earth, which had for Mother the true Light and Fire for God, saw the arrival of finally enlightened Spirits. Men trembled, though they could not discern what stirred them so. They felt, without knowing it, that a new world was being born within the world, and they believed that the ancient universe was coming to an end. As if all were about to die, each prepared to part with their possessions.

After this confused description, comes an account of the schisms and heresies that have devastated the Church throughout time. It was only with the help of footnotes that I could grasp what it was all about. The only idea that stood out was that all these heresies had long been nothing but scattered and incomplete efforts. Failing to unite, they were doomed to failure; it was Freemasonry that finally provided them with the occult connection and a single command, preludes to their victory.

Other symbols then point to Muhammad and various sporadic wars or revolutions, which were merely preparatory.

Finally, humanity must choose between the two opposing Spirits of Good and Evil who, from the beginning, have fought through the world, eternally enemies. No agreement is possible between these two very different geniuses, and "one lives off the victims of the other."

Then, the oracle resumes:

I have come among you, Children of the Lodges, like the Pelican towards its young, after piercing my breast and nourishing you with the blood of my sufferings, the tears of my exile.

And I do not come to be raised and placed back on a throne, but to ask you for life through the blood of the Lamb.

The oracles continue with prophecies about the rise of Freemasonry, its exaltation, and at the end of time, the complete empire of the Sect — then the appearance of a new world, populated, through metempsychosis, by the faithful of the Spirit, elevated by their merits to a higher state, free from all suffering...

I confess, a profound boredom accompanied me as I read these ravings, worthy of the Sibylline Books. Suddenly, the lines began to burn before my eyes.

The Spirit spoke of a time when it would no longer manifest itself to its followers. It reproached them for the passions that dull and blind them, and suddenly it prophesied:

There will come a time when you will no longer see me; desolation and fear will reign among you.

Then you will turn to me, but I will not speak until the Woman has come.

Do not be deceived. The Dawn has risen, and at noon there was another birth.

At night, a new Nymph will come smiling from the East.

She will be strong, for she will rely only on me.

I will raise her very high, so high that the earth will seem too small to contain her.

You will receive the scent of this supreme possession; for she and I will be one, in a union that can never be dissolved.

Listen well: A woman has come, and she has died. Another will come, and she will die. A last one will come and live.

At a distant hour, I see her resting, weary from fatigue. Then do not refuse her rest, for she might flee from me. But no. Time has united us, time cannot separate us.

Know and remember well that I will speak only through the Woman.

I don't know by what aberration, probably suggested by the obsessive memory of a word from Bismarck, these obscure lines seemed to apply exactly to me, as if they had been written for me. I now understood both Garfield's veiled predictions and the Chancellor's allusion to the Sacred Book. I was the Nymph that the Spirit had announced in advance as its oracle and its Chosen One.

A double misunderstanding: for Satan is ignorant of the future, just as he is of the depth of human thought. Either these lines mean nearly nothing, or if one is to attach meaning to them as part of a project of Hell and a plan of the Sects, it is too obvious that they are not about "women," as too many unfortunate souls, before and after me, have convinced themselves. Later, I learned the names of those whom I was told had been chosen as my predecessors and who had certainly existed before my experience, and who, in reality, had inspired those who pushed me down this cursed path.

I stayed at the Lodge for two days, devouring these lines with my gaze, and finding the moments too short, I who had first thought I would perish from the tedium of it all; and with my soul hardened by criticism, I came out fanatical, to be led to the Feast Hall. I succumbed to the task; no more than they, was I meant to live forever or extend my empire over all the earth. If this promise concerns something or someone, if these Women bear a name, it concerns today the one whom Nostradamus, in his Epistle to Henry II, calls "the barren one for a long time," and who has successively been called the First, the Second, and the Third French Republic, the true Power of Satan, one with him, by which he speaks, reigns, and governs, and which, transformed into a universal Democracy in the attitude of the old Baphomet of the Temple, the torch in hand and the Phrygian cap on its head, threatens soon to rule, in the name of the Beast, over the entire earth.

But I was like someone frantic, hypnotized by this sudden echo responding to my subconscious concerns: an echo that seemed to return to me from an old text certainly predating my experience, and which in reality had inspired those who pushed me down this cursed path.

I stayed at the Lodge for two days, devouring these lines with my gaze, and finding the moments too short, I who had first thought I would perish from the tedium; and with my soul hardened by criticism, I came out fanatical, to be led to the Feast Hall.

She was completely illuminated that evening on the occasion of the Great Congress, which takes place in such circumstances. Seats were arranged in a wide semicircle, with a chair at the center. Ministers, deputies, and senators pressed in from all sides.

I was dressed in a black velvet tunic sprinkled with rays, with a matching toga lined with red satin. There were no Masonic symbols on any part of this outfit. My hair, which had become very blonde since my trip to Germany, fell loosely on my shoulders. A golden circle encircled my forehead as a sign of my spirit's adherence to the empire of the Supreme Being.

Dressed thus, the Grand Master accompanied me once again to the door of the Council Room. He knocked  $7 + 3 + 1$  times, following the customary ritual. The door opened in two halves, and a Knight from Asia came to me, took my hand, led me to the center of the semicircle, and left me alone.

Never had I seen anything more beautiful than the costume of this Knight! His torso was encased in a steel chainmail, with matching arm bracers and a flowing red silk shirt that fell over the mail in folds. He wore a kind of red jacket trimmed with gold, knee-high boots that tightly fitted his leather trousers. In his left hand, he held a shield, and his helmet, made of steel set with gold and jewels, had a flowing mane that fell over his scarlet cloak, which was carelessly draped over his arm.

The entire Council had gathered: 80 members, plus about fifteen Knights from Asia, representatives of the different superior Lodges.

I underwent an interrogation there, standing, barely leaning against the back of the chair, which lasted exactly two hours and twenty-five minutes. All the members of the Grand Council took turns questioning me about the duties of the Affiliates, the Constitutions of the Lodge, the submission to the higher decrees of the Grand Council. They probed my views, tastes, opinions, and tendencies. They were mistaken: beneath the appearance of complete surrender, I only allowed them to see or guess what I wanted them to know.

Next came the vote. One by one, the balls fell into the urn. In the tally, there were 84 red balls and 3 black ones. My triumph was complete, but alas! I was made in such a way that these 3 black balls were enough to exasperate me in the midst of victory.

Once the session was over, alone, sitting in my chair, my forehead resting on my hands, I began to reflect deeply. In vain they pressed around me to greet me, congratulating me on a success so complete, so unexpected. I remained with a sulky and absorbed look. Soon there were only the six superior Initiates

and Garfield, their president, left in the room. I then stood up and walked straight toward him.

Eyes locked on his, I spoke to him in modern Greek, a language unknown to the others:

— You voted against me.

He hesitated to deny it, seeing how certain I was of my fact; then, as if admitting it:

— It's true; but I know it's in vain that I try to save you from yourself. You will pass. The Spirit has willed it. May His will be done!

— And mine! I added sharply.

The words burst from my mouth like a challenge, and from my part, it was already a declaration. His loss was sworn in my heart.

Garfield felt it and murmured:

— Alas, Clotilde, you will never understand how much I loved you.

I passed in front of him, disdainful, and walked on to the Chapter Room.

#### IV The Initiation

There, I was told that I would undergo my trials for initiation, not in Paris, but in Ville-d'Avray, where the Lodge had recently acquired a new space specifically designed for this type of ceremony.

I immediately got into the car with Garfield; the other six Initiates followed us.

As soon as we arrived, we went to the Chapter Room. They covered me with a crepe veil. Various incantations and funeral formulas were recited over me. Then they blindfolded me. Someone pushed me by the shoulders, and I descended a long staircase into a dark room, where they removed my blindfold.

This place looked like a tomb. There was no light. However, as I groped around, I discovered a low table beside me. I noticed that bread and water had been placed on it in a generous amount.

A voice came from above:

— You will not receive more than this, and other torments await you. Do you wish to renounce the honor you seek?

— No! I replied.

And my voice echoed back eerily.

— You may die, continued the voice of Garfield (it was him who spoke). Your constitution is not strong enough to endure trials that were not made for a woman. You will succumb.

— Then it will be with your curse, coward, I retorted.

— Goodbye, was the reply.

I fell silent and remained for a long time without taking anything but a bit of pure water to quench my thirst. Finally, weary in both mind and body, I ended up falling into a restless sleep.



My ruined stomach woke me up, I'm not sure at what hour, and I tried to take some food; the bread was so hard that I had to break it against the wall to eat it. It had been about twenty-four hours since I had eaten anything, and my weakness was extreme. Yet, I managed to wet the dry bread with water and eat a little. Then, revolted by such barbaric treatment, I tried to gather my thoughts.

I had heard of such trials used in the Lodges. No matter how severe it was, it could not have been designed beyond human endurance, and I was brave. This confinement would likely end, as the others had, when I least expected it. I only had to endure my suffering patiently.

Without a doubt, Garfield, whom I had provoked, might think of seeking revenge: I believed I was certain of his passion, and besides, under the control of the other Initiates, he could not go as far as murder. Unless everything, in Paris and up there, had been nothing but a sinister play: a trap to ensnare a messenger who already knew too many perilous secrets for the Sect, and whom they had decided, for reasons of caution, to silence forever. What police force would ever think to search, in the suburbs, in this godforsaken hole, for the pseudo-countess of Coutanceau or Clotilde Bersone, already dead to all? A wind of madness was blowing, in gusts, through my emaciated brain. Hunger and thirst gradually gnawed at me, filling my dungeon with those strange delirious visions known to all who have suffered from starvation.

And the worst of this torment for me was not even knowing what the predetermined end of it was, not being able to measure — they had taken my watch — the endless passing of time. Was it one full day, or a week, a week or a month that I had been locked in there, desperate?

By piecing together vague clues, I had finally convinced myself that my confinement would last seven days, and through some calculations, I estimated, groping in the dark, that I still had three days to spend in this tomb when the bread ran out. I was a day and a half without a drop of water. God knows, however, how carefully I had rationed everything, when I realized that I had no hope of receiving any help!

What suffering! What despair! What final convulsions of rage and despair! I no longer had the consolation of speaking, to distract myself from the sound of my own voice; in this cellar, the echo terrified me.

I called upon my most violent thoughts of revenge and hatred, trying to rally my will, in vain: what good was it if I was going to die?

And finally, defeated, exhausted from this crushing struggle, I fell into the shadow, my forehead against the ground, and cowardly I abdicated in favor of the Dragon, so that it might come to my aid, my last shred of independence. I promised total servitude of mind and heart. Unable to doubt the existence of this supernatural force, I dedicated myself, whatever it might be, to serve and worship it.

Immediately, whether in reality or in a semi-conscious nightmare, I felt relieved, revived, stronger than ever. At least I no longer suffered, neither physically nor mentally, barely humiliated that I had not alone achieved this surge of energy that saved my honor.

And at last, I heard, from the depths of this hell, a distant door creaking. I rose from the ground where I had lain for hours. My sore body collapsed. With a superhuman effort, I straightened up again. I fixed my disheveled attire as best as I could. I crawled to a stepstool, leaned on it with one arm, pressing my failing heart with the other hand. Finally, a second, then a third door opened, and a light came to illuminate the dark retreat that had sheltered me for seven days and nights. My eyes closed, unable to bear the light. I eventually recognized Garfield and Grévy, then the Second Grand Orient and the President of the French Republic.

They offered their arms and did their best to support me, but in vain. They had to almost carry me to the Chapter Room, where I was placed in an armchair.

— Are you still determined to be received among the Initiates?

— Yes, sirs, I replied resolutely. You have weakened my strength, and you can finish breaking my body... I will still be Initiated, since I have obtained the votes of the Grand Council and yours. I will be, since you offered it to me. I will be, finally, because that is the will of the Spirit and it is written in the Sacred Book. And then, having recognized the Dragon as my master, I will obey only him.

Despite my weakness, I had raised my proud head to make this declaration to them; my eyes sparkled with a strange gleam that struck them with astonishment, and they all rose, extending their hands to me. Unfortunately, the effort had been too much for me. I fainted in Garfield's arms as he rushed to catch me. They carried me away, and when I regained consciousness, I found myself surrounded by several doctors

consulting each other about my condition.

For almost a week, I had to stay in bed, waiting for the date of my formal reception to be set.

It was the end of November 1879.

Garfield hardly ever left my side. The Initiates took turns visiting me, and the Grand Dignitaries came one after another.

I had been given a form with all the necessary adjurations to make the Spirit speak and act; I had been given the password, and the key to the Round Temple, which I was now allowed to enter at night. I didn't hesitate to take advantage of this during the last days leading up to the ceremony.

I even took a guilty pleasure in conversing with the Dragon. I felt my visions elevate at the contact of this twisted but superior Spirit, and thanks to him, I understood many things I had never even suspected before.

He filled me with all the errors of the Sects: the reincarnation of souls after death, the mystery of the seven gates of Plato, through which the created spirit must pass, through a double descending and ascending spiral, before returning to its principle through immense cycles. Soon, all the Masonic systems, with their associations and apparent contradictions, held no secrets for me. The monstrous kind of morality, which pretends in the Lodges to grant just as much to the animal part of the human composition its natural satisfactions, as to reason its spiritual and mystical nourishment, then appeared harmonious and legitimate to me. I learned that, having renounced all ties of the heart with creatures for the Dragon, He alone would possess me one day, though I could not fully understand the nature of this possession, nor what it meant, exactly, to be possessed!

And I saw the Spirit sometimes as a Dragon, sometimes as a man, but then in a rather bizarre yet pleasant form. The Hydra sometimes seemed to have seven human heads, or just one crowned with seven branches. It took the form of a woman, richly adorned and wondrously beautiful, and that of the Angel of Darkness, in honor of his Nymph of the Night.

At times, his language with me was that of a tender and passionate lover, though nothing sensual mingled with his words; at other times, he spoke as a master whose will is imposed without question; and finally, confusing my mind with his, I believed I lived for a few hours the life of another soul, intuitive and omniscient. Even when he made himself my slave and acknowledged me as sovereign, his servitude retained a nobility and grandeur that placed me above all creatures. Several times, holding me in his arms, I felt him lift me from the earth with him to make me understand the ardor of his desire for a more perfect union between us. Other times, on the contrary, a gloomy or vengeful groan would rumble from his chest. And my pride reveled in believing that through him and in him, whatever his true name was, I was elevated above the herd of vulgar Masons surrounding me. I was his favorite above all, and I preferred him above all.

If Garfield's lofty spirit had sometimes seduced me, it now seemed colorless and hollow. Even the most serious conversations had become insipid to me. Even reading felt burdensome. I neglected all care of myself, thinking only of that fateful Spirit and our nocturnal meetings. Far from his presence, I suffered, calling him with all my desires. As soon as I had evoked him again, I forgot everything on earth. I loved him.

My health itself suffered from this constant preoccupation, and it deteriorated; I felt my intellectual powers growing, and I eventually mastered this mystical state, without renouncing it. It became easy for me to follow a conversation or any small matter, all while keeping in mind the presence of the Spirit. My raptures gave way to the quiet permanence of a false ecstasy.

I was able to listen to Garfield, who, as the great day approached, multiplied the instructions that would allow me to face a complicated ceremony without mishap. I provided myself with everything related to attire, books, and Masonic signs. I was explained in advance all the symbolism of the rites; and I prepared a supplement for these ceremonies that none of my Co-Masons had foreseen.

For this purpose, one last time, the night before Friday, I was able to lock myself in the Lodge to resume, with the Dragon, the sweet conversations I had been forced to suspend, to my great regret, for the past few days; and, for an hour and a half, I vainly evoked the elusive Being who slipped away from me at the moment when I thought I had secured him forever. He remained deaf to my most tender pleas.

Finally, yielding to my entreaties, he appeared to me in his angelic form, all fluid and ethereal. For a

moment, he fixed me with his deep gaze, and I felt nailed to the spot, plunged into a sweet ecstasy, where the voice of the Spirit resounded. He spoke to me of the perfect happiness reserved for those who abandon themselves to him without reservation. He praised the great honor he had bestowed on me by choosing me, his unworthy mistress, and let me guess the elevated position he reserved for me in the Lodge, above the Grand Orient itself.

At my insistence, he promised me all his help for the following day.

So, when the great day of September 3, 1879 finally arrived, I had never felt happier.

From the morning, I left the Lodge so that everything could be prepared for the ceremony.

The Initiates and I had breakfast at the Hôtel des Princes, where I arrived with Garfield.

He was gloomy, his gaze shining with a sinister gleam; and anyone who had known his usual calm and grave face, marked by a certain nobility, would not have been able to imagine what his sorrow, fears, or agitation had done to that expression.

He handed me several sealed letters addressed to me: they were the congratulations and compliments from the High Initiates of the Grand Lodges, who had been notified of my admission. I couldn't help but hastily search through all those letters for Bismarck's; it was missing, and for a moment I struggled to hide my disappointment.

Cars were waiting to take us to the Bois de Boulogne, where we spent the entire afternoon, until six o'clock in the evening. We dined at the Chalet, where many toasts were exchanged, the warmest of them all.

At eight o'clock, we returned to Paris, and everyone went to their respective homes. I spent the rest of the day with Thiénet, who, it seems, was the only true judge of the mystical state I had reached. He alone also knew the symbols and trials of the Inspired; and by the way I saw the Spirit, in its form and its speeches, he immediately understood to what degree of elevation the Dragon was destined to lead me on this day. He was delighted and I lavished graciousness on him, played music, and was more expansive than ever.

At eleven o'clock in the evening, I finally got into a carriage, and by eleven-thirty, I was at the dressing room, where a dresser came to help me get into my costume.

She handed me a kind of very loose linen shirt, sleeveless, forming a pleated dress at the bottom and slightly décolleté at the top, then a narrow brocade tunic that fell to my ankles. A circle of gold around my head, just like on the day of my affiliation. On my head, a very thick black crêpe veil. On my arms, which I had to keep extended, a band of linen and a white silk cord.

The Grand Master came to fetch me and accompanied me to the Chapter's door.

There, Ferry, then Prime Minister thanks to his sectarian campaigns for the secularization of schools as Minister of Public Instruction in the Freycinet cabinet, took the linen band and placed it over my eyes.

Then, with the cord, he tied my hands and, gently holding my arm, led me to the Chamber of Occult Sciences.

There, I found the five Initiates gathered (whom I was to join as the sixth member), along with six Knights of Asia. I knelt on a stool, and for an hour, I was questioned again about the firmness of my resolutions, the motives behind my actions, the seriousness of my approach, and the reasons that might one day make me regret it.

I endured this trial patiently, but with the urgency to finish.

Just as my last word was uttered, a tremendous strike of a mallet echoed through the vault, and the Ordinance began:

— Seven times your forehead to the ground, commanded the Grand Orient, and let the Spirit manifest.

A low thunderous sound responded to this invocation; it sounded like a precursor to an earthquake.

— Seven times your forehead to the ground, repeated the Grand Orient, and let the Spirit manifest.

A kind of electric tremor ran through everyone's body.

— Seven times your forehead to the ground, said the Grand Orient again.

And the evocations began.

At one point, he exclaimed:

— Fiat lux!

An Initiate removed my blindfold.

The Grand Orient recited a formula in Hebrew, and my hands were untied. Another formula, and four

Initiates took each corner of my crêpe veil, which they tore when Garfield pronounced:

— Unveil the Temple of the Spirit.

I then saw that the tears in the veil had been prepared in advance, so that it would divide evenly into four equal squares.

I returned to the dressing room with the four Initiates, who waited for me at the door. I removed my brocade tunic and donned a white gown with a long train. The Initiates led the way to the Lodge, and left me at the door, which was immediately closed behind them. The Grand Master handed me the mallet, and I struck  $7 + 3 + 1$  blows myself; a bolt was opened. I struck a second time according to the ritual; a second bolt was opened. A third time, and the door opened wide.

On either side, upon entering, I saw the six Knights of Asia standing in line, holding a shield in one hand, and with arms outstretched, forming three barriers in pairs. Still holding my mallet and with my arms raised, followed by the Grand Master, I broke this triple chain and almost ran across the round Temple, ascending the seven steps of the Estrade.

Once there, I struck the brass cylinder with my mallet, which supported an inverted triangle, and the orchestra began to play a lively tune, alternating with verses from the Holy Book, sung alternately by the two semicircles of members of the Grand Council.

On this day, the tapestries of the Lodge were made of gold cloth. The symbolic oak surrounded the columns. Festoons connected them to each other. The galleries, the tribune, and the platform were adorned with the same decoration. Everywhere, chandeliers in a thousand colors sparkled. Suspended by a triple golden chain, a massive disk descended from the vault, in the center of the Temple, swaying and glittering in the void. The members of the Grand Council, in full regalia, were draped in the cappa magna and seated on either side, between the columns of the building. The High Initiates were seated at the semicircular table, and from the height of the Estrade, everything took on an imposing and yet joyful appearance for me.

Slowly, I made my way towards the Monster with seven heads and knelt before it.

Garfield, accompanied by Thiénet and Grévy, came to me and solemnly questioned me:

— To which religion do you belong?

— To none.

— In which religion were you born?

— In the Catholic religion.

— Do you renounce the beliefs of this religion?

— I never believed in them.

They presented me with a fragile crucifix.

— Break it, if you believe in this absurd symbol. I did so without hesitation and threw the broken pieces to the ground in the hall.

A basin filled with water tinged with blood was brought to the Grand Orient. He knelt to the ground, reciting several Latin formulas meant to erase the mark and stain of baptism from my soul. His two assistants, each grabbing a part of my toga, and Garfield, poured a few drops of this liquid onto my head from a small pitcher, saying:

— May the Supreme Spirit that governs us wash, by His infinite power, the stain imprinted on your forehead, which has made you the slave of the most vile Lord. May He wash your forehead and your head, and may His Spirit, revealing itself to you, open your mind to higher things, subject your will to His absolute power, and do in you what none of us could do alone, if the Spirit of the Supreme Being did not enlighten us. May He give you the strength to act according to His will. May He perform great works through you! May He, through you, further the plans of the Grand Congress of the Lodge of the Illuminated. May He close your heart and mind to all other visions. May He protect you in danger and guard you from ruin. May He be your guide, your support, your strength, your life. May everything in you belong to Him, even your very being, so that you may live only by His own existence.

Garfield then lifted me and entrusted me to Thiénet, who led me back to the great Estrade, which I quickly ascended. From there, by a sort of spiral staircase with fifteen steps, I climbed to a narrow platform or Holy of Holies, more than four meters above the ground, almost beneath the vault. The Grand Orient knelt in turn before the Dragon, rose up drenched in sweat, and, with all kinds of pleadings, once again

implored the Spirit to appear.

Nearly an hour passed in this fervent, slow, and mournful supplication, yet it was poignant like an ancient mystery.

Suddenly, I cried out. Gripped and lifted by an invisible force, I had been thrown into the void. But the Spirit held me in the air, while in my ears rang the rediscovered voice of Him who would now be my Beloved.

What an extraordinary moment!

A light had flooded my entire being. There was no longer any mystery or physical law from which I could not escape. And I understood that man is powerless here below only because he wishes to owe nothing but to himself, while the Spirit alone holds all power, and that I could do anything in Him if I knew how to detach myself from everything below for Him!

However, the Spirit gently set me back on the ground, covering me with His wings, so that only my head and a floating part of my robe were visible. I found myself standing, facing the mannequin crowned with a tiara. The Spirit Himself made me remove the crown from this effigy, then, arming me with a bow, He helped me pierce its chest with an arrow. Pressing on, I reached the royal mannequin, removed its diadem, and broke each of its jewels, just as Mazzini had done in his full-length portrait of the Grand Ottoman Lodge. I finally broke its scepter over its shoulders and pierced its heart with a dagger.

As can be seen, I had made great progress in this school of crime that is High Freemasonry, and I no longer felt either boredom or repulsion at submitting to these brutal ceremonies, not even that instinctive revolt of sensitivity so natural to women.

I acted with a sort of unconsciousness.

As for the assembly, they were wide-eyed with surprise! According to the ritual, it is the Grand Master who is supposed to accompany and guide the Initiate through this complicated ritual: for me, the Spirit Himself had wanted to serve as my initiator.

He then presented me with a large basin filled with blood, made me dip my hands into it, and brought me to the center of the Lodge where I recited the formula intended to seal the admission. Then, tilting my head back, He blew into my mouth, and I felt as though I were animated by a living fire that consumed my entire being, infusing my feeble body with a strength that renewed me entirely.

Possessed, alas! this time I was literally and completely possessed by the Damned One!

All that remained was for me to decorate myself with the insignia of my rank, while reciting another formula parodying the Holy Books:

— I am strong in Him who strengthens me: I am His and He is mine, and I will not abandon Him.

They removed my white robe and burned it in a basin filled with a flaming liquid, for this robe, resembling a chasuble, bore a double cross drawn in gold braid on the front and back, to mark the religion I had belonged to. In its place, I received a white flannel robe made in the Greek style, adorned with Masonic insignia. Then, two Initiates brought me, one the Initiate's toga, and the other the Circle of gold with two rays, along with the Golden Sun, the insignia of the degree. A third laid a sheet of paper and a large register before me.

On the register, they wrote my name, age, the main services rendered during my affiliation, and the date of my initiation. I signed my name, and the Grand Orient added his signature. The six Knights of Asia and the six Initiates then signed, and the seal of the Beast was affixed. As for the sheet of paper, I saw that it was marked with various Masonic signs. They made a small incision on the index of my right hand, placed a very small seal bearing the sign of the Dragon, and then, with a pen dipped in my blood, I traced the signs drawn on the sheet as a model, signing my name.

These signs mean:

I renounce the Trinity, the Sacrifice of the Cross, the Catholic Religion, and the one God. I deny all mysteries not revealed by the Spirit, every work that does not emanate from Him. I bind myself entirely to Him, freely, body and soul. I ask Him to possess my intelligence, my will, my memory as His exclusive domain. I implore Him to live and act in me as He makes me live and act in Him. In His name, I despise, abhor, and curse Christ, the Church, and all the signs of the faith. — In witness whereof, etc...

The Spirit, who had been standing behind me, seized this sheet as soon as it was signed and presented me with another one that I was to carry with me, as a memorial of my total donation, until my death—unless, in an extraordinary case, I would have to part with it temporarily to avoid arousing suspicion from the profane. According to the Constitutions, this rare occasion hardly ever occurs; the Spirit usually takes care of the disappearance of this paper, which, for unqualified eyes, hardly constitutes anything except a meaningless grimoire, except for the signature.

At the same time, I was given a small leather pouch, in which to fold this donation and enclose a consecrated host, now sacrilegiously mixed with my worst impieties. This host, to be renewed each month if possible, is previously desecrated by the Initiates and subjected to indescribable outrages. This is what, in Lodge terms, is called the Sacred Deposit, and the Sect boasts that by reducing the Eucharist to this state of degradation, it proves the impotence of Christ in the face of the power of the Other. In reality, it is a reverse homage to the dogma of the Real Presence.

I began to feel a sense of fatigue when the ceremony came to an end. Everyone needed to refresh themselves.

Having received the appropriate toga and insignia in the vacant space of the semicircle, I descended with the others to the Feast Hall, where we bourgeoisly drank tea. The fatigue was general, and the conversation languid.

Suddenly, an electric bell rang. Tirard, perpetual Minister of Agriculture in the Republican Cabinets, went upstairs and returned bearing a superb bouquet of camellias and a letter addressed to me. It was from Bismarck.

The prince, far from forgetting me, had managed to arrive at the right time, outside the frame and without the intermediary of Garfield. I saw him pale again, and his eyes flashed. However, I had not even opened the letter he was devouring with his gaze, nor did I appear at all transported by the royal jewels arranged among the flowers. At that moment, Garfield no longer existed for me, for I was entirely devoted to the Spirit.

When I had finished drinking my cup of tea slowly, I finally opened the Chancellor's letter. It read as follows:

"My congratulations. Remember our common friend. We must act, in his own inferno, without further delay. I count on you, the Spirit having spoken."

It was not difficult for me to interpret: "Remember that Garfield is our common enemy, that the Spirit desires his downfall, and that you have the means to achieve this. The time is now, today itself."

I crumpled up this imperious note and threw it into the hearth of the fireplace, where a winter fire blazed. My eyes vaguely followed the flight of the carefree flames that devoured this new death sentence, and a sort of melancholy, at the end of this triumphant evening, took hold of my soul. — Was my fate to always sow anger and murder?

But the Spirit had spoken; I was ready.

V

## THE DOWNFALL OF GARFIELD

Three o'clock in the morning had just struck, and it was the time set by the Spirit for my supreme consecration, no longer just as an Initiate, but as one Inspired.

Everyone returned to the Lodge, and a heavy sense of concern hung over the assembly. The events of the night foreshadowed even more astonishing and serious ones to come.

The High Initiates took their place at the semicircular table, the others in their respective seats, and I, left alone, ascended the platform once again. It was my final and supreme test, now recognized as the organ of the Spirit near the Grand Lodge and its Councils.

I was to speak from the podium, as if inspired by the Spirit. Every word I uttered, carefully received, would be considered an oracle, and a member of the Grand Congress, a skilled stenographer, had already prepared his pencils.

What was I going to say? I had not prepared anything, leaving this entirely to the Spirit, and once up there, before all those eyes fixed on me and minds wide awake, I felt, for the briefest moment, an indescribable embarrassment.

Then my mouth opened, and the words flooded onto my lips. At the same time, I saw the gazes of the listeners come to life. A look of astonished admiration gradually softened their features.

What was I saying? I was fully aware of it. Never had I enjoyed such lucidity in my mind. Yet it was certainly not me speaking, but someone else speaking through me. What I said, I needed all my intelligence, not to express, but to follow and to understand. It was like a vast tableau of questions, where I could barely hear myself, full of political intrigues on a global scale, with their general unity of direction and the multiplicity of their aspects, of secret inner hatreds, of projects prescribed by the Spirit that were going to have to be carried out.

The speech lasted a good forty minutes, and a range of emotions passed across the faces of the audience: the joy of seeing the Lodge regain an organ of the Higher Power, and also the terror of hearing the most hidden thoughts, the selfishness, and the personal ambitions publicly laid bare, all trying to divert the supposedly collective efforts for the Greater Work to their own benefit. Few consciences in the audience were pure, no doubt, on this account! Yet I touched upon this inner danger with such theoretical persuasion on one hand, and in practice with such discretion, that everyone was forced to show unanimous satisfaction and even enthusiasm.

When I had finished, I was the first to realize that at the top of the Lodge, I had become a Power—perhaps a bit eccentric, feared and envied, but not one to be defied.

The Seven Great Lodges of the Illuminated did not count merely one more Initiate: an Inspired one, a grade that only the Spirit can confer, and a sign of new activity after which they had long been yearning.

Two Initiates, who were waiting for me at the foot of the podium, escorted me with various courtesies to face the semicircular table. There, I turned toward the Grand Orient, then toward the other High Initiates and the Knights of Asia, extending my arms to them, and they responded in turn with the same ritual gesture. Kneeling before the table, I placed my Circle of Gold there, and Garfield gave me another one, which bore a small diamond-shaped delta above the two rays. Two Initiates covered me with my robe while Thiénet attached the Golden Sun permanently to my left shoulder. On Garfield's arm, I took my seat at the table, and all, standing, gave me the salute of Initiate—the six Knights of Asia with the six other Dignitaries, followed by the entire Grand Congress.

The orchestra resumed playing. A singer began a supposedly patriotic hymn in the style of 1793, then Garfield led with "Glory to the God in Chains," and the assembly moved according to the usual order of the procession, two by two.

I wanted to remain alone in the Lodge during the banquet, but Garfield opposed this. I descended last.

The Feast was livelier than the tea. Everyone freely discussed political and ministerial matters, some major bankruptcies that were then intriguing public opinion, which had been caused by Freemasonry—either by introducing affiliates willing to do anything into the business, or by creating

overwhelming competition. Later, the Union Générale in Lyon and the Banque de Paris were to collapse in such a way.

Finally, as usual, everything degenerated into orgy and unspeakable depravity. Women were introduced. These men, stupefied by alcohol, no longer had control over themselves.

Garfield himself sank into this vile frenzy, and these wretches pressed around me like dogs. Only the Spirit that possessed me intended to reserve its prey, and like the Most High, this monkey of God enjoys playing the jealous god. It tore me from the hands of these brutes and forced them to once again conceal a spectacle that I have never been able to think about without indignation and disgust.

At six in the morning, we ascended to the Chapter Room.

The purpose was, after invoking the Dragon, to collect the Ideas he had inspired during the day in each of us before we parted ways.

It is a customary ceremony, and one can easily imagine its bitter irony after the scenes of debauchery and an entire night of such "works."

These Ideas are collected by the Grand Orient, who, after taking a glance at each individual's note, summarizes it on a slate table, from which everyone transcribes it onto their notebook to ponder at leisure, without consulting anyone else. The Ideas mainly concern a Masonic project to be developed or executed, and each Initiate must propose at least one per year, either on Good Friday or on July 29, the anniversary of the establishment of the first Grand Orient. The Ideas, after several weeks, are accepted by the three High Initiates known as the Illuminated and are recorded in the large register of the Chapter Room. If they need to be executed urgently, they are prominently displayed on a huge slate that remains on a lectern in the Grand Lodge.

Some Ideas proposed may take ten, fifteen, or even twenty years to come to fruition, and many have become famous in the annals of the Lodges. For instance, the exclusion of candidates for the throne as contenders for the presidency of the French Republic was an Idea proposed by Bismarck. Royer once proposed the yet-to-be-realized Idea of abolishing the Senate. The compulsory military service for the clergy was an Idea proposed by Grévy. The expulsion of the Pope and the College of Cardinals from Rome was an Idea proposed a little later by de Lanessan. Everyone was, therefore, curious about what Idea I would propose in turn.

I myself was distractedly reflecting on this, as the last hours had mostly focused my mind on ending, that very night, the miserable Garfield, who had dared to defile himself under my eyes with the most sordid abominations. And at the moment when I least expected it, my pencil turned between my fingers on the sheet placed before me.

I had written only these few enigmatic words: — Death to the enemy of the Grand Lodge of the Illuminated.

What could this mean? The Initiates exchanged looks of concern. Garfield trembled. And immediately, I requested to withdraw, having placed in him this sharp and poisoned harpoon that he would never escape.

But scarcely had I disposed of my robe and tunic in the cloakroom and donned my city dress when the door was violently flung open. Garfield entered, pale and defeated, shaken more by grief than fear. He took both my hands, kissed them, searching my eyes. I faltered under his magnetic gaze; he himself was unable to utter a word. Finally, with a hoarse cry, he said: — Traitor, why have you conjured my downfall? Who asked for my life? What will my death bring you?

I regained all my composure and broke free from his grasp. Cold and impassive, I replied: — Are you



mad? I have not conjured your death any more than you are certainly the "enemy" the Spirit wants to rid itself of.

He lunged furiously at me: suddenly, a shrill laugh echoed through the room, the laugh of the Beast, celebrating our common vengeance. The Dragon was there, as the Angel of Darkness, surrounding and protecting his Chosen One. Swift as lightning, it fell upon Garfield and trampled him to the ground, frothing, for several minutes, while I, irresistibly, poured all my grievances and hateful contempt upon him at my feet. He fled, dismayed, under the blows.

Another thought, however, tormented my mind.

If the Spirit treated its highest favorites in this way once they ceased to please, what would become of me one day? For several minutes, I turned this thought over in my mind, without the Beast noticing. So it didn't read my thoughts, even in those it possessed! So, as soon as Garfield was out of earshot, I hurried to ask the question: — What has he done?

— He has acted against me and without me... I did not choose him to serve here with his politics or Washington's. He worked for himself first, not for me. I take my revenge...

— Why through me?

— Because this way my revenge is crueler, and also because you wanted it. My union, even with the highest of Initiates, is only partial, whereas with you, the woman, being more intimately united with me, you dominate me and have control over part of my power... I am the Master, but you are the queen, and our union is complete... Do not fear. As long as you remain loyal to me, I will be more loyal to you; but the day you betray your oaths and deliver my secret to the Enemy, woe to you. That day will mark the beginning of a new era of misfortunes for you and for those who persecute me. I will strip you of all power over men. You will become for them an object of hatred and contradiction. I will mark you on the forehead with the seal of infamy. Your name will be despised, even by your own. A curse will follow you everywhere, at every moment. All your plans will fail. And wherever you go, I will find you and follow you as your shadow. I will paralyze your intelligence, I will make your will powerless. The memory of the past will poison your days and nights. You will have neither respite nor release until you return to me, where my Spirit awaits you... This hour of trials will then appear to you as the clearest sign of my attachment to you. It is my anger and my revenge that will reveal to you all my love, for our true natural virtues, both of us, are hatred and the spirit of vengeance... It is, moreover, up to you to avoid this hour of terror. Stick with me. Your spirit is free from prejudice, and I have forgiven even your resistance to believing in my power, as my saints need neither faith, nor hope, nor especially love. It is enough that they hate as I do, with me, and in me. Hate, and you will have no truer friend, no more sincere lover, no more tender spouse than any creature could dream of in an hour of bliss.

He leaned over me, his wings enveloped me, and his gaze fixed on my eyes. I was penetrated by his effusions of light. A strange pleasure, not sensual, but spiritually intoxicating, filled me entirely. And the voice continued to speak:

— Go! Follow the path I lay out for you. Despite the attraction that holds you here, never hesitate to leave, even for a long time if necessary, to carry out my orders. My Spirit, bound to yours by an indissoluble chain, cannot leave you, and nothing can tear me away from you unless you consent... Go, my friend.

I could not end this farewell; it took the Spirit, abandoning its angelic form, to take on its Dragon shape again before disappearing.

It was past nine in the morning when I returned home. Garfield was not there, but I suspected I had not yet finished with him. He was not the type to succumb, like the miserable Daniel, to a first disgrace, and having pondered this first harsh lesson, there was no doubt that he would seek to regain my favor and that of the Spirit.

## VI. CONJURATION

At that time, I lived in a charming pavilion, entirely arranged for me.

On the very evening of my last meeting with Count Daniel F\*\*\*, I had indeed left the apartment he had rented for me and moved, with my trunks, to the Hôtel des Princes. During the week, Garfield had had a small hotel furnished for me on Rue de Dunkerque.

So, as I returned from the Lodge that morning, I wondered whether I would soon have to leave this new refuge and live, I knew not where, at my own expense. And indeed, my surprise was great upon arriving to find that everything in my home had already been turned upside down. The servants had been changed in the blink of an eye. Upholsterers were finishing putting up new curtains. Magnificent furniture was being arranged. All morning long, tailors, laundresses, and florists came in and out of the house.

For whom were all these changes being made? I was quickly reassured when I learned that it was only the Initiate, Countess de Coutanceau, who was definitively replacing the Affiliate Clotilde Bersone.

At the same time, a note from Garfield informed me that I was to appear immediately in several salons in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, where I was assured of receiving the best welcome.

I obeyed: nothing surprised me anymore.

The next day, I confidently gave my orders in person. I even got rid of jewelry that no longer pleased me, considering it too simple or too flashy, my eccentric dresses, and the less tasteful furniture that had been bothering me, in favor of a Masonic Sister who had fallen on hard times. Now promoted to the rank of lady in good society, nothing around me or within me should recall the adventurer.

I hurried to replace what I had lost in this drastic makeover, visiting all the suppliers; and soon the bill for all the expenses — clothing, furniture, curtains, horses — amounted to 26,000 francs.

I feared I had exaggerated the expenditure, but the Initiates found it very modest. They had expected much more.

At our first meeting, we recall, the Dragon had thrown gold at me; the Lodge had gathered it, and there was 30,000 francs.

It was then decided that I would open a scientific Salon in my home, which, in the late hours of the night, could transform into a gaming hall. A double bait, with which they would try to attract the elite of the scientific world and the best families of France into my nets. For one knows the incurable frivolity of some of the regulars at these social gatherings: brilliant butterflies who rush toward anything that shines and burn their wings in every flame.

Nothing is more convenient, for uncovering family secrets, the knots of a parliamentary intrigue, or the political and religious leanings of high society, than the intimacy of women's conversations and the relationships formed through games.

Thus, a hundred times, the best-laid plans of the reactionary forces have been thwarted; thus, the first suspicious sentiments of the traitors who needed to be unmasked have been revealed. Such was the fate of an Adept who ended up on the grim embalming table in the Amphitheater, having unknowingly betrayed himself, between two smiles, by chatting about trivialities with a frivolous and graceful hostess, beyond all suspicion. And no one, until now, had shown greater aptitude than I in playing the role of a high-level spy in the service of the Lodges.

However, before fully embracing this role, I requested the final consecration that would ensure the

greatest number of complicities I needed. An extraordinary session was scheduled for the first Friday after my Initiation, during which I would be officially introduced to all the Adepts and Affiliates, not as the Inspired One, of course, but as a Dignitary. In high Freemasonry, each degree is unaware of the exact functioning and existence of the higher degrees. That is why, in this account, I have occasionally had to use rather obscure and tangled language, as I could only unravel the exact distribution of this satanic hierarchy in the end, once I reached the summit.

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In reality, within the Illuminated circles of each Grand Lodge, there are nine Chores or Circles, divided into three grades.

The Adepts, divided into four Circles according to their abilities, know in reality no secrets other than an enigmatic form that they do not even understand. — Ahmed Pasha had the gallantry to make me skip this degree in one leap, without trials or stages. It is thus the one I know least by experience.

Silence is hardly imposed on these first recruits except concerning their adherence to the Lodge, the address of the premises, and the meetings held there, under the severest penalties. In their eyes, the most important things are the pass-words and Masonic signs of recognition, intended solely to prevent the intrusion of outsiders into the Lodge. Their obligatory contribution starts at 400 francs per year, and it increases by 100 francs with each promotion to a new Circle.

The fifth Circle includes the Novices, or candidates proposed for Affiliation by the Dignitaries, after a serious study of their character and dispositions. This is the amphibious degree I was said to have been provided with upon my arrival.

The sixth Circle is that of the simple Affiliates, and the seventh, that of the superior Affiliates, which encompasses all the lesser charges.

The eighth Circle is made up of all the Initiates and Dignitaries, beginning with the second Grand Orient, the Executor of the High Works, the Judges of Ordinary Causes, the Grand Master, the Chancellor, the Secretary, and all members of the Grand Council.

Finally, the ninth Circle includes the Grand Orient and the superior Initiates. Among them, there are always three Enlightened Ones, to whom all the Ideas expressed are submitted, and none of these Ideas is to be considered without their triple consent. And then, the Inspired One, when the Dragon deigns to choose one.

Finally, every new Initiate must be presented in ceremony to the entire nine Circles, but only as an Affiliate risen to a higher charge; and the second Grand Orient takes the place of the first during this ceremony, so that the sovereign personality escapes the attention of most of the assistants. The six other superior Initiates take their places at the Hemicycle Table.

On the appointed day, my seat was thus vacant in the Square Lodge; only my robe was thrown there.

All the Adepts wore the symbolic apron; the Affiliates wore both the apron and the robe. Garfield occupied a small lodge in the back gallery, as the simplest Affiliate of the sixth Circle, and the session began with some music: a succession of pseudo-religious and pseudo-patriotic hymns, impious songs inciting man to revolt against God. The music was harmonious, grand, and sometimes solemn! It carried a kind of warlike intoxication. All the eyes lit up; you could see all passions igniting. Hatred and lust flowed in full streams, and through the Spirit, I discerned the play of secret feelings and vain hopes stirred and churned by this sensual and powerful art.

That evening, there were more than three hundred people in the Lodge, for one cannot be excused from attending the sessions without a reason approved by the three Enlightened Ones. The concert lasted more than an hour.

The Second Grand Orient then rose, announced the purpose of the meeting, spoke of my election by the Grand Council, and introduced me as a Dignitary.

Before being installed, however, I had to publicly renew my abjuration, and it was lengthy. First, I renounced the dogma of the unity of the Creator Principle, then all the principal dogmas of the Church. I abjured the sacraments. I underwent a second parody of baptism. Finally, I was dressed in my robe, and I was allowed to sit at the Hemicycle Table.

Seven Affiliates took turns at the podium, praising the Spirit for having raised me to such a high rank. They were as empty, boring, and sycophantic as each other. My turn came next, and I tried to catch the style and emptiness of the previous speakers: this was not the time to display my occult gifts.

I thanked the Assembly for its gracious welcome and the Grand Council for its vote in my favor. I promised to do everything for the good of all and each, and I concluded with a fervent protocol speech against the enemies of the People, among whom were the Church, the Kings, and all those who supported the general enslavement of minds and hearts.

This speech was met with a loud ovation. I descended smiling from the podium, and, slowly, on the arm of the Second Grand Orient, I left the vast hall, followed by the crowd that had emptied out from the galleries, which slowly dispersed.

Once the first four Circles had exited, the doors of the Lodge closed, and the slate table was revealed where the last Idea emitted, considered the most practical according to the judgment of the Enlightened Ones, was to be ceremonially written by the Grand Orient, and each person was to take note of it. And suddenly, there was a shiver in the hall. Everyone could see, written in large letters, in front of the terrified Garfield, by the hand of the invisible Spirit:

— Death to the enemy of the Lodge.

And each person seemed to be searching around them, trying to determine who the enemy was to be discovered and struck.

Certainly, this was neither the time nor the place to push this internal quarrel further, and so we descended to the Feast Hall for a fraternal banquet.

In this case, it was a meal without interest or distinction, much like the naïve and idyllic portrayals that

Initiates enjoy making to the profane. The conversation mostly revolved around electoral politics, a bit of fine arts, and a great deal of gallant bohemianism.

By four in the morning, everything was over, and never had a night seemed so boring and empty. But it was necessary that I be seen, and that a few well-placed Adepts help me soon fill my famed scientific Salon.

Garfield accompanied me home, seeking a compliment for his recent generosity and a reconciliation. He had followed me like my shadow since the night of my solemn Initiation, eager for a word of forgiveness.

I was too tired to engage in an explanation with him at that moment, and I postponed any serious conversation until the following day.

The next day, he presented himself undeterred, gave me a long ceremonial conference on my new duties, and proposed introducing me to various families he knew, whose study I would undertake for the Grand Council. His plan was to be once again useful and pleasant, even indispensable. The opening of my Salon was set for the first Thursday of January 1880, and we needed to get to work as soon as possible, with the upcoming legislative elections of 1881 in mind, from which our Lodge hoped to gain greatly. However, I had not yet made any serious preparations, and I was the least involved in the scholarly debates.

But, decisively, this man was driving me mad.

Our conversation was about to end in yet another argument when, to my surprise, I was handed a letter from Prince Bismarck.

The Chancellor wished to see me and gave me an appointment in Berlin, as he could not leave Germany without the Emperor's permission, who must remain unaware of this meeting.

The letter filled me with joy. It broke the lethargy I had begun to fall into after so many empty ceremonies for show. However, I needed to get permission from the Chapter to leave, that is, to postpone the opening of my Salon, and be exempted from attending at least two Friday sessions. How could I manage that? The Initiates were very keen on my presence, and they had arranged for my new installation with the aim of keeping me as close to them as possible.

As for Garfield, I had to count on his opposition.

I thought I could quietly win over the Initiates to my cause, and I invited them to dinner on a day when I knew, by chance, Garfield would be elsewhere.

There, I subtly let them see my strong desire to be absent for fifteen days or three weeks. They seemed displeased, and God only knows what they presumed, but they could not reasonably refuse to help me, out of courtesy, to justify this small favor before the Council.

President Grévy was the first to yield; at that moment, he had hardly any will of his own. Two others followed. Only Ferry, now the Prime Minister, Tirard, and Thiénet remained to be won over. Boldly, I let them glimpse a vague love affair I wanted to keep hidden from Garfield. This idea amused them, and they no longer hesitated to help me, since it was merely about playing this harmless, masonic trick on their colleague: Ferry even took care of arranging the whole matter.

He suddenly reminded Tirard that the affairs of Serbia were increasingly intriguing the Cabinet at the moment, and it would be good to accommodate the desires of the old Ahmed Pasha, who was currently in difficulty with the Turkish reaction and asking Paris to closely monitor, in his place, this issue that could set Europe on fire. Therefore, it was appropriate to go and check it out.

"We'll leave tomorrow," he said. "I'll go straight to the Ministry, and if Thiénet wants, he will be part of it." Thiénet agreed, and this is how sometimes the most serious affairs of the world are conducted. A

woman's whim, and all the chancelleries are turned upside down!

By the very fact of the absence of three Initiates, any session of the Lodge would, moreover, be impossible for three weeks. They would take advantage of this to convene, once or twice, only the Adepts, and the Second Grand Orient would ensure everything was in order. I could therefore leave immediately.

We parted on this decision, around eleven o'clock, pleased with each other, and at one o'clock after midnight, at the Gare du Nord, I boarded, leaving Garfield this laconic note:

Love blinds me. Youth must pass, and Italy is such a beautiful place. Goodbye, in a month.

It was quite a clever stroke of the pen, and I enjoyed it immensely for almost the entire journey.

In Berlin, I stayed incognito at the French embassy, where I was warmly received; and as soon as Bismarck learned of my arrival, he wrote to me:

"I cannot come to you, for fear of alerting the Emperor. But the Embassy has been informed of my intentions towards you: only go out by carriage, and be at the Veglione at the Crystal Palace tomorrow. You will wear a Spring-and-Autumn costume: please consult Madame the Ambassador for this. And do not forget to hold a bouquet of white camellias in your left hand: it is by this sign that I will recognize you." The game was becoming enjoyable.

In the middle of a masked ball, to the sound of a festive orchestra, I, the false Frenchwoman, was about to decide, in a tête-à-tête with the Iron Chancellor, under the auspices of the Embassy and therefore the Paris government, the fall of an American Grand Orient: my taste for intrigue was fully satisfied.

Madame the Ambassador eagerly took care of my costume, and I arrived at the ball, a black velvet mask over my eyes.

Wanting to avoid the Ambassador's box, I had to go directly to the hall, and barely had I entered when a tall man, wearing a Mephistopheles costume, seized my hand and, gallantly taking my bouquet, whispered in my ear this comic introduction:

— Countess de Coutanceau... Prince Bismarck.

I accepted his arm, and he settled me into a box he had rented in advance to escape public curiosity. It was there that he explained to me in detail how to proceed for the success of our enterprise, and gave me new papers from Garfield, provided by his Foreign Affairs services. They were in open contradiction with the resolutions made at the last plenary meeting of the Supreme Lodge on July 29.

He asked me not to undertake anything serious without keeping him thoroughly informed, assured me that after Garfield's downfall, he would support all my political and private actions, and would keep an eye, even in Paris, on the intrigues of the Grand Orient's supporters who might try to harm me out of revenge.

He kindly inquired about my personal views, my life in Paris since my last trip. Then we went to the buffet; we had dinner together, and at two in the morning, he took me back to the embassy.

At full speed, he returned to the evening, in a different costume, and entered the Imperial Lodge, where Wilhelm appeared at three in the morning.

Twenty-four hours later, I took the train again, passed through Dresden, crossed the Rhine, stayed four days in Geneva, one day in Lausanne, passed through Domodossola, and continued my journey through Lombardy to Venice.

The third day after my arrival in the city of the Doges, I finally wrote a note to Garfield, so that he could have no doubt about my flight to Italy, and not three weeks had passed since my departure when I was back in Paris.

One evening, around five o'clock in the afternoon, while I was busy sorting some papers, the Spirit suddenly appeared to me without being summoned and threw me this simple word:

— Treason!

I didn't understand at first, but I felt compelled to move closer to the window, and from there I saw an emissary from the Lodge watching my door.

A flash of thought crossed my mind: — Garfield thinks I have Bismarck's papers here!

I hesitated and took another quick look outside. In the distance, I saw Garfield's carriage approaching.

Quickly, I burned the few compromising sheets I had imprudently kept at home. Soon, it was nothing but a small pile of ashes, which I drowned in a basin and threw into the sink. It was just in time.

As soon as I entered my salon and sat down in front of a small table, ensuring that a pocket revolver was

in a drawer, Garfield was announced and entered abruptly.

I smiled pleasantly without standing up; he didn't even come closer.

— Madame, he said in a feverish tone, give me your keys.

I feigned wounded dignity:

— Am I at home, Sir, or am I your slave?

And I pointed to the door.

Furious with rage, he lunged at me. I had grabbed my revolver. Without aiming, I pressed the trigger, and a bullet shattered the large mirror above the fireplace. All my staff rushed to the noise.

— It's nothing, I explained with a smile. A clumsy mistake! ... While examining this little toy, a shot went off by accident.

But I kept the weapon in my hand to hold Garfield accountable for his outrageous behavior. His anger didn't subside:

— You're definitely refusing to give me your keys? ... Very well... I know what that means. It's to hide Bismarck's papers that you went to Berlin to get, to betray me...

— I don't know if Bismarck is your enemy, Sir; what I do know is that he is a gentleman. If you need to settle something with him, go find him; he won't refuse to meet you on the field. Or maybe honor is just a word to you, and it's you who are the coward, Sir.

— My life does not belong to me. It belongs to my people.

— Those are big words that have never made great men... Let's get back to our subject. I don't want to be bothered any longer. You claim I'm hiding some papers. Well then, Sir, here are my keys. Search everywhere, you thief of women; I'd rather endure this affront than the boredom of putting up with your presence any longer.

He took my keys and, trembling, searched through all my drawers. Nothing, he found nothing. Wearied, he returned to me, still growling. I had sat down and pretended to calmly read a music review:

— What did you go to Berlin for?

I decided it was time to stop hiding:

— And why, I said to him, would you expect a German to seem, especially today, less of a gentleman than a Yankee? If Bismarck is your enemy, does that mean he must be mine?

A shiver ran through him from head to toe:

— And your secretary's office at the Lodge, would you entrust me with the key to that as well? he insisted.

— Why yes. More willingly than the others: at least that will spare me from having to deal with you, Sir...

And above all, don't trouble yourself to return the key. I'll take it back on Friday, at our next meeting...

Goodbye, Sir.

He left, furious, ashamed, and disappointed. For three days, I stayed out of my house to avoid another visit and locked myself in an apartment at the Hôtel des Princes, where I hosted a dinner one evening for about ten Initiates from all sides.

There were Léon Say, Ferry, Grévy, Tirard, de Lanessan, Thiénet, Le Royer, de C..., Paul Bert, and I believe also Clemenceau.

I laid before them all the evidence that proved the betrayal of the Grand Orient and announced that I had received from the Spirit the mission to destroy Garfield. Astonished, they had to accept the truth. But what to do? Until then, this situation had never arisen. No Initiate had ever dared to openly revolt against the Spirit, knowing too well its power. How to judge a Grand Orient, and especially how to make a Garfield disappear? He was too universally known.

Despite his apparent incognito in Europe, the entire world had its eyes fixed on him, on the eve of the presidential election that might soon bring him to the highest office in the United States.

No precedent could guide us in the decision we had to make.

Some of the senior Initiates of the Seven Lodges, like Abel Schmidt in the East, had tried, it seems, to subtly thwart the Spirit in its plans and, having reached supreme power, had wanted to claim additional rights that the Spirit reserves solely for itself. They were punished without trial by the Dragon himself, who struck down these haughty heads in a single blow; but for Garfield, it was we, the Spirit's agents, who were entrusted with the formidable mission of punishing him.

We decided that our first task should be to remove him from Paris, so that his death could not be attributed to the Lodge. And for this, there was only one way: to push his candidacy there, so that his election would force him to reside in Washington, with no hope of presiding over the Lodge for long,

where under his successor, his punishment could be more easily arranged. And from there came so many maneuvers that would increase his popularity across the Atlantic and secure him so many votes. In the Senate and in the House, Gambetta, Ferry, and de Lanessan were heard one after the other, singing his praises breathlessly; the press made him a true political giant, the arbiter of the world's destinies. A kind of panic enthusiasm broke out for him within a few months, thanks to the slogan spread secretly by Freemasonry in all circles. He became the great man and the man of the hour, one of those whose fame is suddenly thrust into the attention of the crowds, without anyone really knowing how or why. In short, he was elected president of the Union by an overwhelming majority, and the world awaited wonders from his reign.

However, according to the American Constitution, he was not supposed to enter the White House until the following year, 1881, and the Constitutions of the Lodge required that any traitor be degraded and executed as soon as possible. Now, for these twelve months, he remained our Supreme Leader and could ask to remain so by appointing a lieutenant, given the necessity of being away. To ask him to step down or to refuse him this honor would be to warn him and put him on his guard.

Some then thought of a strategy. At that time, there were no High Initiates in America, and many Orators had often wondered at the podium why this young, populous, and wealthy nation, so dedicated to the Lower Degree Workshops, did not yet have its Grand Lodge of Illuminates. Garfield himself recognized the necessity of founding this transatlantic Lodge as soon as possible, lamenting that there was no one in Paris among the members of the Chapter or the Great Dignitaries who could take on the foundation. — Oh, but? There is Garfield!

A German was Grand Orient of the Grand Lodge of Berlin; a Turk was Grand Orient of the Ottoman Grand Lodge. How could an American, and to top it off, the elected Chief of the American State, be and remain Grand Orient of the Grand Lodge of the Illuminates of Paris? This reverse Monroe Doctrine provided a strong argument in favor of Garfield's resignation, with the mission of honor being entrusted to him in return, to operate at home.

However, it was necessary to attach the bell, and perhaps our Grand Orient specifically wanted to remain the master over others, as this was the very reason for his rejection and condemnation.

The difficulty seemed insurmountable, and I had to promise to turn to the Spirit for guidance.

VII

"DEATH TO THE ENEMY OF THE LODGE"

However, the frenzy with which I had summoned the Spirit before my Initiation was followed by a strange repulsion. Was it weariness? Had too many easy favors already jaded me? Was my pride starting to revolt against the length and humiliating servility of the incantations? Every master had always, alas! seemed insufferable to me, even the devoted and submissive ones like Daniel, or like Garfield in his moments. Was it, then, after them, the Dragon's turn to see my ingratitude and fury turn against him?

In any case, our conversations became rarer and rarer, and even after promising the conspirators that I would consult the Spirit as soon as possible, I postponed it day by day and could not bring myself to do it.

Finally, I decided to lock myself in the Lodge, around seven o'clock on a Thursday, and I stayed there until eleven thirty on Friday night, without feeling the need for any food. I only drank some sweetened water several times, and two or three times I had to change my clothes, so exhausting were the efforts I was making in vain. The Spirit was being recalcitrant. It was probably his turn to resent me and give me the cold shoulder. In his form as an Angel of sinister beauty, he contented himself with appearing to me for brief moments at long intervals; I could only extract obscure or disenchanting phrases from him. Never had I felt so much bitterness from him. He seemed to have taken a dislike to all of humanity and worked hard to make me see only repulsive feelings around me: here the passion for gold, there the delirium of the most disgusting pleasures. The methods he had once used to dominate minds were now turning



against him. How, indeed, could these vile, selfish beings, given to the worst instincts, have shown, even towards a too-compliant master, loyalty, devotion, and selflessness? Betrayal was their element, and the rush for pleasures their law, even at the expense of the interests of the Lodge.

A flood of hatred towards the entire human race, a nausea of disgust towards the very Children of Light, filled the Spirit with a kind of universal discouragement. For more than twenty-four hours, I could obtain nothing from him but these pessimistic speeches.

As for Garfield's exclusion, he hardly gave me more than a few evasive sentences:

— "Undoubtedly, it is necessary to come to this... It must be done... I will do it for you, for the example... I will provide you with the means... I want it... He will die."

And I thought I understood that the subject of his sadness was not so much the rejection of one of his favorites from yesterday; nothing was sweeter to him, as it was to me, than vengeance! It was that, better than I, he saw and foresaw the impossibility of replacing this one at the head of the Lodge with someone of his caliber, who could ensure with as much seriousness and regularity the internal workings and external influence of the Lodge. None of the other Initiates in Paris had the stature of this reckless yet willing and methodical ambitious man, with his synthetic views and majestic bearing. Only Bismarck could be compared to him, and Bismarck was still impossible in France. And then, if the views, the national and personal ambitions of the Chancellor of Iron did align, for the moment, with the interests of the Sects, was he not also capable, at the first sign of disagreement, of deciding that the Lodge should be an instrument in his hands and not him the instrument of the Lodges? This scarcity of men, this famine of great intellects and characters, halted the Spirit's action at every turn and disrupted his plans. In place of the great humanitarian and international current that he had been pushing the higher Freemasonry toward, he saw only the clash of racial and personal competitions.

— "I know it well," he repeated to me in broken words, often almost unintelligible. "I cannot pretend to have my Saints against nature... It is a Sisyphean task to constantly raise these dead souls to these crumbling peaks... They too want to be gods and use my gifts to dethrone me... But at least those, those great proud ones, those magnificent haters, they were made in my image. Even when striking them with my thunder, I recognize my mark on their foreheads. What terrifies me is to see this band of crawling, slimy, and flaccid parasites assaulting my empire today... Ah! You too, Galilean, you have your vengeance!"

I was dismayed by these complaints, from which I was beginning to feel, though still not clearly perceiving, the malignant tendencies and sinister confessions; unfortunately, my immediate concerns prevented me from giving them any further thought.

At ten o'clock in the evening, the Spirit disappeared definitively on Friday, leaving me alone, without light for the discussion that was surely about to arise shortly in the Chapter; and, to make matters worse, at eleven o'clock, someone came to call me. Gambetta was waiting for me in the reception room and wanted to see me alone. He handed me an envelope. It was a final message from Bismarck: "You will speak tonight, without fail. Thank you."

I no longer knew what to do or where to go. Already, the Chapter Room was full of Initiates who had been summoned for an important communication, some curious, others sour and grumbling at the disruption.

Already, in the room, everyone was wondering about my absence.

I suddenly made up my mind.

The three chimes of the electric bell signaled to the Initiates that I only wished for the meeting to be held in the Lodge. Already on the podium, I announced that my intention was to speak. They agreed, a bit surprised.

It was some sort of inner impulse that had pushed me there, but once at the podium, the inspiration once again faded, leaving me in a cruel embarrassment. To buy time, I decided to quote a text in modern Greek, which only Garfield could understand, like a preacher recalling a verse from the Gospel in Latin to comment on it. And suddenly, as if resurrected, I heard the words flow again from my lips, like water bubbling up from a spring.

— "The Inspired One!" murmured the audience, delighted and astonished, for ordinarily such manifestations did not occur without meticulous and lengthy preparations.

Skillfully, I had entered into a general discussion of the situation from the perspective of defending and spreading Masonic ideas throughout the world. Then I specifically focused on America, with its Grand Lodges in each state and its three million ordinary Masons, not to mention the countless secret societies, which I listed with a precision and clarity that even surprised me as I went along. However, what place did we have there, as Illuminates, among this multitude of lower Adepts without guides? What role other than to create from this chaos the largest, wealthiest, and most influential Lodge we had ever had! Truly, this creation would be the crowning achievement of all our efforts, and soon the main center of our action.

As I developed these thoughts, the signs of approval multiplied from all sides, and I concluded with a bold statement:

— "Only one man is capable of realizing this grand plan. He alone has the authority, the experience, all the qualities necessary to carry out this Great Work. You have all already named him. It is Garfield. Garfield, by the will of the Spirit, be the Grand Orient of the New York Lodge."

And as if to confirm that it was indeed he who had made me speak, the Spirit seized me at that moment as it had on the day of my Initiation. It lifted me almost to the vault, threw me into the void, and, having caught me with a powerful arm, gently placed me back on the ground, exhausted from my effort.

The Initiates surrounded me, approving;

Garfield himself seemed to accept. He had feared the worst when he saw me take the floor; the solution seemed quite sweet to him, considering what he had feared. Since his recent successes in the United States, he had dreamed only of rebuilding his position there, putting himself beyond the reach of the threats he now felt were looming in the shadows. In his eyes, I saw that he was calculating his chances of taking revenge there, by creating from scratch a Grand Lodge that would soon challenge any comparison with those of the Old World.

He would surely miss Paris; and he expressed to me his regrets about our disagreements, this separation; he implored me to write to him from time to time, and I forced myself to promise him so with my mouth.

What more shall I say, to finish with this man who had held such a large place in my life? He soon left for his new post, and I was never to see him again.

At the appointed time, his predecessor Hayes transferred his powers to him, and America promised itself a glorious and prosperous presidency under the leadership of this true statesman.

The Paris Lodge had sent him its congratulations and seemed to have indefinitely postponed its plans for vengeance. Grévy, who succeeded Garfield as Grand Orient, was far from possessing the same qualities and allowed our Lodge to decline under his weak and sly leadership. The 1881 elections in France seemed to mark the definitive rise of Freemasonry, but thanks to its inferior elements, at the expense of the personnel and leadership of Illuminism, as I will explain in due course.

And it was then that Garfield had the unfortunate inspiration to write me a letter from America in which an bitter satisfaction of our defeat shone through. A biting irony emanated from every sentence. Even the compliments were double-edged, and they wounded me deeply.

He told me that upon leaving, he had foreseen this general decline — too true, as we will see — but that, having wished for this downfall, I had no choice but to take it in stride. Despite all the friendship he still held for me, he could not pity me for a lesson so well deserved.

There followed a number of sarcastic remarks that made my blood boil.

I had kept a small medallion with a miniature of Garfield, which I was very fond of. I ripped it from my neck and stamped on it in rage.

However, there was a way to make use of this letter. I ran to Ville-d'Avray, where Grévy was hiding at the time and where I knew I would find the Initiates. I asked to speak privately with the new Grand Orient and handed him the message.

He read it from start to finish, even the mocking compliments from Garfield about the choice of his successor, and I saw the paper tremble for a moment with anger between his fingers; but he was a weak and deceitful person, whose portrait I hesitate to draw page by page, as he alone explains the series of our setbacks. He noticed, when lifting his head, that I was looking at him with disdain, top to bottom, without hiding my contempt.

From pale, his face became ashen. A shiver ran through him entirely: he felt that, in turn, he would be judged if he hesitated to fulfill his duty. Slowly, he reread the fateful letter, weighing every word; then, returning it to me, he murmured, his eyes locked on mine:  
— "It's time to end it... This man has lived too long."

And a few months later, at the Baltimore train station, a man named Charles Guiteau, a rejected solicitor, as the newspapers claimed to explain this mysterious attack, wounded the new President of the United States, General John Abram Garfield, former Grand Orient of the Grand Lodge of the Illuminés, my master and my lover, with two shots from a revolver. The colossus took three months to die, without a complaint or a word that could have been used to accuse his brothers.

I believed I had touched supreme power.

#### FOURTH PART THE INFIDELITY OF THE CHOSEN ONE

I  
MR. GRÉVY

Alas! I had rejoiced too much over Garfield's downfall, and soon understood the reasons the Dragon had had for hesitating.

A Grévy was, as I said, not up to leading our ship; and I myself had been deluded about the marginal role I had taken on: the role of Pythia, now without horizon and without a guide.

In vain I tried to penetrate, in order to use him in turn, the man whom Destiny had appointed as master and to discover exactly his views, his tendencies, his character. A veil of hypocrisy concealed him from all inquiries. His true face escaped at the very moment one thought it would be captured.

He was 74 years old at the time; the habit of presiding over assemblies since 1871 had allowed him, in 1879, after the fall of Mac-Mahon, to assume the highest magistracy with more composure than authority.

Tartuffe and Joseph Prudhomme!

Morally, he had a naturally double nature. Impatient with any discipline, sensual, greedy for money, hungry for power, he felt incapable of exercising it by himself and had been throughout his life the toy of a

clique. Lazy and weak, he knew how to squirm his way into crime when he felt his situation was in jeopardy. Long involved in affairs, he got by more out of routine than out of sharpness of insight. Cowardly and crawling to escape a threat or danger, he would take advantage of the disdain his cowardice inspired to suddenly overwhelm his opponent with an audacious betrayal. With a placid exterior, he was consumed inside by revolting passions.

Despite his mediocre intelligence and superstitious nature, he had managed to quickly secure a position in the Lodge thanks to his punctuality, his loyalty to even the smallest articles of the regulations, and a certain ease in producing ideas or at least speeches suitable for average audiences. He was initiated at the formal request of the Spirit, though none of the Enlightened had approved his candidacy. He underwent all his trials, even the hardest ones, without flair, but also without failure. A certain cynicism served him, at times, as virtue.

He seemed to make no show of his grades or high positions, even though he had foolishly envied them. He never offered me any assistance in my fight against Garfield, even in hopes of succeeding him; but once in position, he defended his place with a covert ferocity, willing to do anything.

He surrounded his life with mystery and was involved in a thousand intrigues. No one knew of a mistress, yet he kept two, at the expense, it is true, of the Republic.

He never asked for advice except as a form of courtesy, always emphasizing that it was indeed a favor. Even if he were merely an agent of execution, he still wanted to give the impression that he was acting on his own initiative. He would only speak first in a discussion in an ambiguous manner, then wait for the opinions of others to make up his mind.

It was he who put forward the "idea" that, among the extreme-left deputies in the Chamber, the Lodge had agents who would report back to us on the smallest actions and movements of our Adepts: never would Garfield have stooped to such baseness!

He had entered Parliament through electoral corruption and made vote-buying one of the fundamental laws of the regime. He rose to the ministries on several occasions, against his own party, with a cunning that gave nothing away. Elevated to the highest post in the Republic, he distanced himself from everything that could remind others of the humility of his origins and the difficulties of his early years. He surrounded himself with rivals and adversaries, lavishing favors upon them, and silenced the rest through obscure blackmail. In the end, the masses grew accustomed to him, despite his lack of prestige, because his superiority offended no one.

He had troublesome political rivals, but he knew how to get rid of them. Gambetta was his most notorious victim.

Not only had Grévy failed to bring Gambetta to power in 1879, after his election as President of the Republic, and preferred the dull Waddington, but, after being forced to choose him as prime minister following the 1881 elections, he grew impatient with his popularity. The "one-eyed orator," as he was called, at least had the advantage of being an eloquent speaker, though often verbose. The Lodge quickly grew fearful of his turbulence, and the idea was put forward by Grévy that it would be better to dispose of him. The Enlightened approved.

Gambetta had taken from the glamorous bohemian life a woman he was mad about, who watched him for several police forces, including those of the Lodge and Bismarck. It was she who was tasked with carrying out his execution (December 31, 1882), and the mystery of the Jardies was never a mystery to us.

However, even this deceitful Grévy found it difficult to completely deceive the clairvoyance of the Lodge. Nothing escaped the other Initiates regarding his secret maneuvers, his abnormal favor with the Spirit, his rapid ascent to all honors.

What could be the hidden cause of this inexplicable fortune? It was noticed that often he would slip away from the presidential residences, disappearing for about twenty-four hours every month. He was followed, and it was learned that he had secretly rented a small house in Marly-sur-Seine. What beautiful unknown was drawing him there? By spying on him more closely, they realized he was actually locking himself in there alone for an entire day. A housekeeper, responsible for his meals, kept watch over the house; she was bribed.

— "The President," she said, "comes here from time to time to pursue chemical studies, which apparently interest him."

The mystery deepened.

With enough money, Ferry completely won over this woman and obtained permission to enter the mysterious house. In reality, there was an entire arsenal of stills, flasks, and other equipment, undoubtedly inherited from a predecessor, either a chemist or an alchemist; but all these tools were dusty, and, in addition to the explored rooms, there was a solidly locked cabinet. Ferry managed to break into it one night through the window, despite the housekeeper's apprehensions.

ChatGPT

The apartment was nothing extraordinary at first glance; but upon searching thoroughly, the investigator finally discovered, hidden in a closet, an effigy of the Hydra with seven heads!

Thus, Grévy would secretly come here at every opportunity to invoke the Dragon, despite the Lodge's rules prohibiting such incantations outside the Round Temple. It was to the Dragon that he extorted the advice and secrets he used to maintain his position as Grand Orient. Later, it was discovered that he was engaging in the same practices at Fontainebleau and elsewhere.

This explains the Dragon's fury, trapped by his promises to this Macbeth-Paturot figure, and perhaps his resolve to end this now leaderless Lodge.

Grévy should have been immediately charged, but it was not done; only his moral authority was shaken. Everyone took advantage of this blatant breach of conduct by the Grand Orient to pursue their own agendas, and the Law of the Lodge, already weakened by Garfield's bad examples, lost further credibility. It was no longer in the hands of a few followers but had become an instrument for personal passions, enough to disgust even Satan himself with these degenerate Luciferians. Several Initiates, among the best, regretted Garfield. They could not help but form a sort of Sect within the Sect, and their first efforts were directed at me, as if the introduction of a prophetess among these grave and wise heads had been the first sign of decay.

Whether to reinvigorate our languishing High Lodge or to test my talents, some imagined asking the Chapter to make me speak one day in front of all the Adepts and Affiliates; and to prevent these half-profane members from recognizing me, they planned to organize a session similar to the one I had seen take place for the first time in the Ottoman Grand Lodge, at the invitation of Bou Ahmed, where the attendees appeared to me wearing horse heads.

The idea came from Thiénet, and it seemed risky to the Grand Congress, which had never tried such a thing in Paris. Thiénet, as a specialist in occultism, was determined to pursue his project, so he called a Chapter meeting on a Tuesday to present the matter.

However, my increasingly difficult character made me impatient with the idea that they would dispose of me and the presumed confidences of the Spirit without even informing me. On the other hand, the idea intrigued me. It flattered both my vanity and my curiosity. Fearing failure that would make me the subject of ridicule, I wanted to reflect and consult the Dragon beforehand.

On Tuesday evening, arriving first at the meeting to prevent the deliberation, I locked the doors of the Chapter and took the keys with me, after posting a notice in large letters on the doors:

— Closed for worldly necessity: at eleven o'clock this evening, a grand dance reception at the house of the Inspired.

This bold act of defiance was, naturally, not to everyone's liking, especially Thiénet's. Most of them decided to laugh it off, fearing to offend the Dragon by condemning my act of independence. No one dared miss my appointment. We had a lot of fun at my place. On my own authority, I set the following day for an extraordinary communication in the Lodge, and Thiénet himself bowed to my decision.

However, towards the end of the evening, as I was singing and accompanying myself on the piano, I can't remember which opera aria, Tessert happened to see Séguin enter the salon. He knew that Séguin had tried to harm me several times in the past months, and since Tessert was devoted to me, he held a grudge against his colleague.

At that very moment, Séguin, taking Ferry's shoulder, whispered in his ear: — Listen to the murderer of Garfield sing without remorse, the woman who stabs in the back.

— Well, I'll slap you in the face, Tessert shouted indignantly.

And he delivered a pair of resounding slaps. Séguin responded by making a gesture as if to slap him back with his glove. They both went downstairs.

Frightened by the scene, I rushed over as soon as I realized what was happening, hoping to stop the altercation; they had already left, and I begged the Dragon in vain to defend my cause. That same night, Tessert fell victim to this duel, and I had to settle for a very poor revenge.

Séguin was sentenced, the following week, on my complaint, to four months in solitary confinement, during which he endured all kinds of torment, particularly hunger. After that, he was chosen to play the role of a Delinquent in the Good Friday ceremony, not even at the expense of the Initiates, but as a simple Affiliate: the height of humiliation for a senior Affiliate.

One can imagine my state of mind the day after this scene. Nothing at the extraordinary session I had called for the Initiates managed to satisfy the curiosity of the attendees. The Spirit remained rebellious to any communication; I myself was unable to serve as its interpreter. I could only repeat my eternal and odious indictment against Garfield.

Thiénet, increasingly exasperated since the incidents of the previous day, showed signs of impatience. I managed to further outrage him with one last act of ingratitude, for everyone knew that he had been the close friend of the deceased, just as I had been his mistress. He suddenly stood up, with a threatening look, and, leaping to the podium, he addressed me without mercy:

— Woman, he said to me, you are, according to the Constitutions, becoming increasingly openly rebellious against the Lodge, displaying a dictatorship disproportionate to your rank, imposing all your whims under the pretext of inspiration, insulting with your sarcasms even in death those to whom you owe everything. Stop, by order, since you did not do so out of decency, and get down from this podium... You have abused our patience for too long... Get down!

The conflict was serious. Thiénet, leader of the three Illuminated, the sole holder of the mystical secrets, held the highest esoteric position in the 9th Giron and perhaps elsewhere a leading role near the supreme Lodge; there was no one among the attendees, knowing me well, who could think I would obey him and renounce my speech at his command. On the contrary, this violent contradiction was undoubtedly the trigger that awaited the voice of the Other to be unleashed in me.

Turning to the assembly, with a thunderous voice and a lightning gaze:

— Friends, I cried out, how have I deserved this affront? Who will accuse me of having, for an instant, forgotten the interest of the Lodge in my words or advanced anything against the truth? Let that person rise and pierce my heart... Treading underfoot all human tenderness, I was the first, it is true, to denounce Garfield, whom others, on the contrary, allowed to betray us with impunity.

Do you wish to reopen this case? Then we need only to leaf through our Annals, in the absence of more recent documents. There we shall see how Garfield, in 1871, allowed himself to be bribed by Napoleon III to save the Empire, and the exact sum this upright man received for his useless betrayal: Metz and Sedan foiled his plot... And after the defeat, how, and with what compliances, was it allowed for Bonaparte, the former carbonaro, traitor to his oaths, to safely reach England, while the great decree of the Chapter stated that the Spirit demanded his death?... And who remained silent, covering up these crimes? Who wanted to spare yesterday the treacherous Grand Orient, while from all sides Bismarck, Bou Ahmed, Néri, Skiorid called for his head?

Is there here a faction that seeks to exalt his memory, to restore his policies to honor? Let his supporters rise and proclaim their intention aloud, in the face of the Lodge and the Dragon, so that tomorrow we can rewrite for them on the Chapter's slate, to spare the Spirit the effort of writing it himself: "Death to all enemies of the Great Lodge of the Illuminated."

As I spoke, evoking memories buried in the secrecy of consciences, and which many believed forgotten, I saw faces grow pale, foreheads bend. Thiénet himself, discouraged by the cold reception of the Assembly, remained silent. He abandoned the confrontation.

Yet, beneath the surface, I felt clearly that this opposition, counting on Grévy's cowardice, had not disarmed. Myself, deprived of any serious counsel, only fought it out of whim and with eccentricities. Only Bismarck could have drawn me a reasonable course of action; since Garfield's death, satisfied with the result obtained, he had more or less forgotten me or perhaps, waiting for his time, was he watching for the opportunity to strike me down in turn: I knew too much for a woman.

Or, beyond Bismarck, near those supreme Powers whose name I scarcely knew, perhaps they judged that, indeed, the passive instrument I was meant to be, merely a medium or simple mouthpiece for the Spirit, had begun to take part in the Council and in power, which no statute allowed.

A telling remark from the Iron Chancellor to Païva was often recounted in our circles: "You are too intelligent, you want to understand too much in my place and you muddle everything: I can no longer employ you." And it was because he had judged me brainless that he had once chosen me as an agent. But today, all these High and Illustrious Masters were indignant to see the former police Dalila, promoted to a prophetess by a whim of the Dragon, pretending to understand everything and giving lessons to everyone as fools.

The throng of jealous people followed the steps of all these prides that my own pride made it a game to offend.

In short, a thousand difficulties made me nervous, irritable beyond all measure, truly frantic. Add to this that my sessions of inspiration left my robust temperament exhausted. It would happen that I would fall into a sort of hysteria.

Thus, at another session of the Congress in the Grand Council hall, President Le Royer, once again out of deference, offered me the opportunity to ascend the podium: and there, driven by a sudden burst of anger, I launched into a violent satire against the softness of the Great Dignitaries, threatening to unmask the guilty parties by name, regardless of their rank.

Stunned, everyone fell silent, fearing to expose themselves once again, not so much to my insults as to

the revelations and explicit accusations of the Spirit.

Only one person, with unparalleled audacity, dared to respond: it was the painter Chéret. From his seat, he hurled several workshop epithets at me and ended by ordering me, in less-than-formal terms, to step down from the podium. I refused, as was my right, and the sharp language did not frighten me any more than the other, and his fury knew no bounds:

— How long, he urged his colleagues, will we let ourselves be ridiculed, horned by this shameless woman? How far does she think she can humiliate us with impunity, reducing us to make fools of ourselves? What a pity we cannot silence her with a good sword blow!

I pretended not to have heard; but the next day, I sent him my two witnesses, Ferry and de Lanessan. I had, it's true, little practice in fencing: I was relying on the protection of the Dragon. A rendezvous was set in Bern for the duel. We fought with foils, and we were stopped at the first blood. My weapon had struck Chéret lightly, it is true, in the chest, and he lost consciousness. The doctors judged the wound to be not serious, and the artist was able to return to Paris. But this insignificant wound never stopped reopening and deepening. He suffered from it for a long time, and finally, after an internal hemorrhage occurred, he died forty-eight days after the duel, just as Garfield had died many weeks after the attack.

Our Grand Orient should have intervened and reprimanded such indiscipline; Grévy, instead of punishing me or at least reprimanding me for this outburst, remained silent. And the Garfield faction, as hostile to his negligence as to my violence, grew even larger with those who could not stomach this Amazonian act. I felt criticized from all sides; the Supreme Power was undermined and ruined, and troubling infiltrations threatened us even in the most secretive areas of our Ritual, our evocative formulas, and our mystical practices.

It was then that the use of spirit boards began in the Lodge, as the fashion was at its peak. Automatic writing and all other forms of spiritism became familiar to us. Grévy himself, the natural guardian of the Constitutions and traditions of our Order, indulged in it without restraint, using these childish oracles to sow discord in order to rule better, both in the Chambers and even among the High Lodges.

After my quarrel with Thiénet, he pretended, when we were alone, to support my side, just as he probably condemned me when alone with my adversary; and he even went as far as to evoke, one day before me, a deceased sister of one of the Enlightened.

The consulted table graciously shared with us terrifying revelations. According to it, this young woman had died, allegedly giving birth to her brother's child, the brother having refused her the assistance of a midwife or doctor for her labor, fearing that the affair would be exposed.

One can imagine the mutual suspicions that these practices could sow, even in a more united environment, and all the more so among us. Adventurers took advantage of the situation to infiltrate the Lodge, impose themselves, and raise power against power, under the pretext of a shared impiety.

On nights of sessions where it seemed that special thanksgiving was owed to the Dragon, a priest, Abbé Mazati, would ascend to the altar at two in the morning. The sacred vessels, which had fallen into the hands of the Lodge since the looting of 1793, were arranged on an altar with the required relics. The Initiates attended the ceremony, and the celebrant made sure to perform everything ritually. He consecrated a full ciborium of hosts. Then, after the mass, he would discard his vestments and sit down to eat. The hosts were carelessly thrown into sauces, or onto wine stains. One day, Thiénet tossed one to a dog, along with a piece of meat. Grévy amused himself by cutting obscene designs into them. Abbé Mazati would prick them with a knife. Others profaned them with vile touches, and, at the end of the orgy, when prostitutes were brought in, they would be made to consume the remaining pieces that were still recognizable. These sacrileges, which the Spirit not only failed to condemn but visibly approved and endorsed.

However, the unworthy priest, recruited for this task, did not hesitate to boast of a certain superiority over



the Dignitaries themselves and refused to be at their command. He would enter the Lodge at any hour, attend secret sessions without being invited, and invent all kinds of rituals that only he, by virtue of his priesthood, could perform. One evening, when an extraordinary Chapter was to meet in the Banquet Hall, we were surprised to find Mazati there, in the middle of saying his mass. Grévy, furious, confronted him, asking why and how he was there. No answer. The Grand Orient ordered the intruder to leave. Mazati ignored it. I had to make several appeals for him not to be dragged off the altar, and for us to wait until his mass ended—this we did while drinking a glass of Madeira.

Meanwhile, Mazati did not hurry. He had consecrated 120 hosts for the upcoming Good Friday celebrations, and he did not deign to speak to us until after removing his sacerdotal vestments. Then, turning to Grévy, he bluntly declared:

— I am here by the order and action of the Dragon, and I act here as I see fit, in and through him, as much as the Inspired one.

No one dared expel him. On the contrary, he was given the task of overseeing that night's Initiates' votes.

He evoked the Dragon, not according to our rituals, but in the name of the Most Holy Trinity, and each time, the Spirit would immediately respond to this summons. As a result, several Initiates eventually adopted his formula, finding it more effective and convenient than ours, despite the bad mood it regularly induced in the Spirit. As for the abbé, he abused and exploited this power to the fullest.

In order to get rid of him, they had to assign him a mission to Rome around 1882, where he spent three months; he returned in 1883, as I was told, better informed, more adaptable, and stronger than ever. However, I do not know what news he brought back, for it was at that time that my estrangement from the Lodge began.

## II. THE ELECTIONS OF 1881

If the internal activity of the Lodge was so anarchic, one can imagine what its external actions must have been like.

It wasn't long before it turned into chaos, a complete rout.

I had eventually opened the famous Scientific Salon, which had been Garfield's last creation in Paris. Now, as for the services this salon provided to science, I will not recount them, and for good reason; I only know the harm it allowed our political opponents to do.

Through it, I was able to study the opinions and monitor the attempts to organize part of the action-oriented and high-society individuals who remained attached to the monarchy, either by personal conviction or family tradition. Most of them candidly entrusted me with their most delicate projects, with the complete abandon that is inspired in well-born minds by sentiments of loyalty and honor, sentiments they themselves were nurtured with. Once they were introduced to you in the right way, it was as though you were considered one of their own.

In this game, it is easy to imagine how many dupes and victims I was able to multiply. Following the Spirit's instructions, I sowed grief and ruin everywhere, divisions and hatred. My salon became a breeding ground for hideous intrigues.

Le Royer, then President of the Senate, met with Madame de X at my place, someone I had learned was married to a man who had once been a close associate of Count de Chambord and was actively working toward the restoration of the monarchy. He held all sorts of meetings at his home, distributing roles with a view to a restoration, and even already dividing up positions to be distributed after the coup. This plot had to be thwarted at all costs. Le Royer denounced the husband to the Lodge, which took care of him, while a young Initiate took care of the wife.

First, we created an unpleasant affair for Mr. de X\*\*\* that would keep him at the French embassy in London for nearly a year. During this time, the Initiate seduced the wife, who had been very proper but was light-hearted and fell into his daring traps. A few months later, she was pregnant. Ashamed, she left her home and came to take refuge with me. We advised her to have an abortion, and she became ill from drugs; the child died, and she thought herself freed.

But the world had spoken, or rather, we made it speak.

A highly publicized duel pitted Mr. de X\*\*\* against Le Royer. Mr. de X\*\*\* succumbed in the duel, and to top it all off, a liquidation of his considerable fortune resulted in over 300,000 francs being deposited into the Lodge's coffers, thanks to an affiliated banker in charge of managing common interests.

So many basenesses could not replace the grand visions, which had become increasingly foreign to our type of petty politics since the rise of the mediocre Grévy.

On February 18, 1881, a General Congress of the Grand Orients was indeed held in Paris: Thomson, deputy of Constantine, for the Grand Lodge of Africa; Gasconi, for the Grand Lodge of America and the East Indies; Néri, for Italy; Grévy, for France; Bou Ahmed, for Turkey; Sebeyck-Kadr, for Asia; Sokolof, for Saint Petersburg. But this was still just talk outside of the real leaders, who were becoming increasingly reluctant. Nothing concrete came out of these deliberations, except for the usual agendas aimed at the annihilation of all religious power and the fall of thrones.

For his part, Thomson proposed the method of corrupting a high-ranking prelate and recruiting him into our ranks, in order to monitor the attempts to defend the Roman Church. I will not say, out of respect for the episcopate, whether this method succeeded.

The Spirit, it is believed, manifested itself several times during this assembly, but it could neither transform the minds nor the hearts of men.

Thus, the legislative elections (August-September 1881) and the partial renewal of the Senate on January 8, 1882, marked, for the first time, despite the apparent triumph of the Republicans, a setback and almost a rout for the occult leadership of Illuminism, if not for the lower Masonry of the Grand Lodge and the Grand Orient. Many candidates supported by the Lodge, at least to hold the place of more feared adversaries, were left behind or suffered, as senatorial or deputy candidates, significant losses of votes that shook their position.

And, no doubt, the composition of the two Chambers at that time makes it clear enough that Masonry still had enough secret supporters in both camps to explain how, despite this secret failure of a disbanding staff, its troops were bound to win the battle. This is the inevitable outcome of any parliamentary comedy. The so-called sovereign People, the Chambers themselves, and the government are perpetually maneuvered by a clan who controls all the strings. In vain would honest people, Catholics, or the right try to double their chances; the game is rigged from the start, and even those who seem to gain from the stakes as adversaries of the regime have only paid for a betrayal.

In reality, the Lodge continued to count among its Council members a large number of influential ministers, members of the Bureau of both Chambers, major commissions, high finance, and administration. Most of the leaders, even in the opposition, were either aligned with us or, at the very least, bound by subsidies and dishonorable secrets. From their violent rhetoric, one might have taken some of them for irreconcilable adversaries of Freemasonry; in reality, they were tasked, by offering this outlet for the inevitable Catholic reaction, with misdirecting the blows, channeling the resistance, diverting the debate from the most embarrassing questions and people, and especially preventing anyone from touching the true occult force behind this power, which was on its way to dominating the entire country.

How could the "People" have guessed this immense deception? Which saviors could have freed them, when they themselves were either imprisoned or sold out? Anyone who has not touched the hidden

mechanism of contemporary history will never find a plausible explanation for it. It alone, in any case, helps to understand how, ten times before and since this date, a so-called reactionary parliamentary majority has only managed to ultimately strengthen the power in the hands of the defeated anticlericalism and radicalism.

The first shock, however, was severe, and our Adepts, mostly recruited through ambition, became demoralized, threatened to disband, at least to move to the neighboring Lodges; and the failure could have been final if the enemy had had one man, just one, with his eyes truly open, a fearless heart, determined to assume the dictatorship against Freemasonry, in order to restore order in France, the supremacy of the public good, and the true notion of the State.

Dissensions and endless quarrels agitated our Grand Council. The success of rival organizations, combined with our own disappointments, made everyone suspicious, and an intensive system of espionage and denunciation, trying to prevent defections, created an oppressive atmosphere of personal grudges and petty concerns. The very character of our Work was fading amidst this general consternation. The speakers who took the podium on Fridays no longer spoke but of "business" to be arranged, overcome, or resolved. The existence and worship of the Supreme Being, in whose name they spoke, seemed forgotten. Short meetings, insignificant ideas expressed; only the "fraternal" banquets continued without end, as if everyone rushed to enjoy the last hours of the orgy. The Spirit grew irritated, but in vain. Beneath the sectarian veneer, human passions regained the upper hand everywhere.

The finances themselves were exhausted through electoral generosity. Internal competitions led to a kind of perpetual squandering. Money, the sinew of war, money with which so many consciences were held, was running out.

All our external projects were thwarted and weakened as a result.

The International Workers' movement, unknowingly subjected to our control, trembled under the yoke: opposition movements were forming within it against the occult influence of our affiliates and their motions that had no connection to the class interests of the masses.

For foreign affairs, we had to rely on unknown or unreliable agents.

Thus, at that time, the assassination of Tsar Alexander II (March 13, 1881) was carried out, as his decree against the Grand Lodge of St. Petersburg was feared. I had little information about this affair, which, once decided, was plotted almost entirely outside of our circle. I only knew, through Dinamigko, that most of the militant nihilists were, through intermediaries, emissaries or affiliates of the Paris or Constantinople Lodges. Bou Ahmed and Grévy were the two main instigators of the plot.

The Prince of Wales, as a high-ranking English mason, had caught wind of the Illuminati's existence and became concerned about these behind-the-scenes activities of the ceremonious and loyalist stage where he was paraded for the public. He had to be won over at all costs or treated as an enemy. During a trip to Paris with the princess, Grévy managed to convince him. He was made a Knight Kadosh on January 28, 1882, and became a Senior Affiliate in 1883. However, it was evident that he had conformed to the ceremony out of precaution, in order to gain influence, rather than to zealously serve us in London.

Every year, the Lodge finally sent immense sums to Germany, through high finance operations, such as counter-insurances. Some dramatic financial crashes and ruinous strikes also broke out at that time. There was an open effort to impoverish France for the benefit of Berlin, which, once a Republic, was to take the lead of the United States of Europe and universal democracy. But it was clear that Bismarck was using these ideological views for the immediate benefit of a very practical pan-Germanism, and perhaps even über alles.

It became evident how necessary it was to restore order to this general disorder, if we did not want the Dragon itself to proceed with the closing of this crumbling Temple.

It was then that the idea previously put forward by Thiénet, which I had feigned to oppose for a while, was finally accepted and put into execution: that of calling upon the reserves and the back-up of the Affiliates and Adepts, in order to revive hopes and courage, and to stir up the languishing fanaticism.

### III BREAK WITH THE SPIRIT

Alas! This was my last and futile great success in the Lodge. I had asked to consult the Spirit beforehand about the opportunity of such an extraordinary session, unique in the annals of the Paris Lodge.

One night, I decided to implore the Dragon to enlighten me on the matter; and after an evocation lasting about three-quarters of an hour, I was surprised to witness a completely new manifestation of the Spirit.

At first, the numerous eyes of the marble Dragon came to life and emitted flames, while the rest of its body remained motionless and unchanged.

Then, suddenly, I saw the Spirit, no longer alone, but divided into three forms, identical and yet separate, like the three personifications of the same power, in the monstrous image of the multiplicity of persons within the unity of nature in the divine Trinity. The Dragon, the Beast, and the other Beast resembling it, and all three were one!

The first of these parodies of hypostases seemed to have particularly seized my intellectual powers, the second my emotional faculties, and the third my sensory forces and body. The first urged me especially to revolt against any power opposed to its own, the second towards all kinds of desires contrary to good, and the last towards a certain sensual pleasure, leading to softness, rest, and drowsiness.

I vainly tried, in this state, to pursue a proper thought; I no longer even sought the answer to my questions. I felt as though I were bound, to the point of fearing I had lost all ability to regain my freedom of movement and my personality.

Frightened, I cried out, but no one heard me, as I was alone in the Lodge. A convulsive tremor seized me, and I finally fainted.

The Spirits then left me, saying: "Go, and act according to your desire. I will speak for you; this is my affair."

Empowered by this promise and the favorable interpretation that Thiénet gave me of the bizarre form of the apparitions, I finally agreed to support his plan. Then, as was required for it to be definitively adopted, the consent of three Grand Orients was necessary, so the matter was postponed.

Finally, after a month, Bou Ahmed and Gasconi sent an affirmative reply to Grévy. The Adepts, Affiliates, and Initiates, in full, were summoned to the Square Lodge, and, by some magic, the mirage I had already witnessed in Constantinople — and several times since, in much smaller proportions — was renewed with a strength and variety of illusion that astonished even me.

One would have thought we were in an immense and fantastical menagerie. Everywhere, both on the ground and in the galleries, strange figures with animal heads were leaning on the railings. All the fauna was represented: horses, lions, bears, gazelles, monkeys, and so on.

I myself entered the hall, dressed in the great white tunic reserved for major ceremonies, completely unrecognizable. My face, which remained human, no longer resembled me. And I must have been beautiful, though in a different kind of beauty, even more than usual, for a kind of neighing ran through the crowd at the sight of me. A wave of passion stirred these men, given over to their worst instincts, and their strange anonymity freed them, in addition, from all restraint.

The Spirit, scarcely evoked, came to me, and touching my forehead, seemed to say: — From now on, it is I who will direct all her thoughts. Then, bringing its finger to my lips, it continued, parodying various sacred verses, in a pseudo-Hebrew distich: — I will open your lips, and you will announce my Justice and my Truth. With that, it disappeared with a muffled chuckle, and they gave up evoking it a second time. Immediately, they moved on to the speeches.

Thirteen speakers successively ascended the podium and discussed the question of the definitive expropriation of the religious, which was then a major concern for Freemasonry, following the expulsion decrees of Jules Ferry (March 20, 1880). The most violent speeches and the most odious accusations were endlessly repeated. Listening to these virtuous figures, one would think that the convents were full of monsters devoted to every vice, of lazy people living off the credulous public. They had seized immense riches that it was time to return to the nation. Congregational schools were lowering standards and spreading obscurantism; the chocolate factories, distilleries, and so on, exploited by these parasites, drained millions. Their workshops, where children were systematically exploited, drove down wages everywhere. These immoralities and glaring abuses would have long ago stirred public opinion, had it not been for the shameless protection of the highest judiciary, which was in cahoots with this monastic rule that was everywhere in control.

In short, all the commonplaces of this kind of rhetoric, treated with overwhelming prolixity.

Finally, my turn came.

It was the first time a woman had spoken before the Adepts, and their astonishment did much to shake off the torpor caused by the previous speeches. Moreover, while the theme I undertook did not stray far from the general banality, I knew — or rather, THEY knew for me — how to free it from vague rhetorical amplifications and overly bold arguments.

This speech is indeed one of the most treacherous and shameless I have ever delivered. It is from this speech that Léo Taxil drew the material for his scandalous novel *Les maîtresses de Pie IX*, the so-called revelations he pretended to have obtained from a papal chamberlain. In reality, it was nothing more than a stream of filth thrown by Satan against the Church of God, represented through the Court of Rome as a hotbed of intrigue and immoral living. To which the audience could not wait to applaud.

As for the second point of my speech, it aimed to prove that while the monasteries harbored pleasure-seekers and business-minded monks, they also housed sincere fanatics, and these were even more dangerous, obsessed with destroying the Great Work of the Republic. No peace, no truce with these people. No compromises, especially from above.

And a memory of my mission in Rome provided me with the conclusion of my speech. I reminded them of how Victor Emmanuel II, King of Italy, who seized the Papal States and finally Rome in September 1870, became one of the heroes of Universal Freemasonry for this great act. However, toward the end of his life, having listened to Cardinal Antonelli's scheming for a tacit agreement meant to support the dual power of the Quirinal and the Vatican against certain revolutionary threats, it was time for him to die before being condemned as anathema. Who knows, though, if his son Humbert, who was destined to inherit the crown, did not try to secretly negotiate with the Pope instead of simply seeking to expel him definitively from the City of the Seven Hills?... Woe to all traitors! There is not a prince, not a man of state of any importance, who does not have beside him, visible or invisible, a watcher from the Supreme Lodge, tasked with reducing, willingly or unwillingly, all these powers to their duty.

Naturally, I was greatly applauded. A motion was passed by a large majority, ordering the mandatory attendance of all Adepts and Affiliates at a weekly meeting every Monday. There were only 22 black balls out of 440, and each Initiate in turn was to ensure that the sacred fire was kept alive in these meetings in favor of a general movement of French public opinion for secular laws.

It is needless to add that these meetings were often used to spread infamous rumors or at least false reports about the projects or actions of Freemasonry. For it would have been foolish to expect perfect discretion from such a large number of men, and secrecy was only demanded about the source of the doctrines and information shared in these exoteric sessions. Often, a more or less extraordinary project, with no real follow-up, was entrusted to the Adepts. This was a way to test how much any of them would leak, either in their circles or with their friends, or sometimes, in case of a conversion, to priests on the lookout for such information. If necessary, the Initiates themselves would help spread this gossip, and while public curiosity started to follow this false trail, the true activity of the Lodge escaped all investigation.

This was, in fact, about the only benefit we gained from this sensational session, which seemed, at the time, to have made a considerable impression. I myself felt that we had finally played all our cards for a mediocre result. In the end, I was dissatisfied with the Spirit. It had not supported me as I had hoped. In this semi-profane gathering, it was surely not necessary to say anything extraordinary; but still, I felt almost entirely reduced to my own resources this time. Nothing I had uttered had answered, not to my usual thoughts, at least to the possibilities of my subconscious. Perhaps assisted, I had not been significantly inspired.

I dared to complain about this, and from then on began a series of misunderstandings that quickly alienated the Spirit's favor from me.

Exhausted by these communications, my nerves on edge, I now avoided all supra-normal relations with the same eagerness that I had once put into seeking them out. The Initiates, for their part, did their best to distance all direct contact between the Dragon and me. I had intervened rigidly in too many delicate matters; several were concealed from me along the way, and arrangements were made for me to be excluded from the Lodge during the negotiations, so that the Spirit could not warn me. Once, even at a formal request or summons from the Dragon, a true refusal was presented under the guise of delay.

As a result, several times, the Spirit, in retaliation, left official requests unanswered during the Council sessions. On one occasion, I was locked in the Lodge for three whole days without receiving any evocation.

Exhausted, I had eventually fallen asleep when, on Friday evening, the Initiates entered in slow steps, their togas dragging on the ground. None of them wore their sun-plaque: it was a sign of mourning. One by one, beginning with the most recent member, they went to bow before the Dragon, and seven times they bent to the ground, begging for the Spirit's mercy, which they sensed was angered.

The Spirit remained deaf to their pleas, and they had to withdraw without pardon.

Meanwhile, I had gradually drifted off during this display in a gallery where I had retired at the beginning. Suddenly, an irresistible languor tied up all my limbs. At the same time, my intellectual faculties seemed heightened, and I grasped the secret of the scene. All these signs of grief from the Initiates did not stem from remorse for offending the Spirit, but only from the fact that he refused them gold. Gold for their debauchery and electoral schemes; gold for themselves and not for the service of the Spirit! Thus, he had sworn they would receive no more, even if it meant seeing the Lodge fall into sleep. Only the Dragon desired to be their end, and not a means for them to achieve other goals. He was the supreme Master and would not relent.

I then saw the very depths of my own heart and shuddered, realizing that it did not appear entirely devoted to the Dragon. Not only had I abandoned the Lodge out of weariness and pride, but also the worldly life of salons had weakened my character as a woman, indifferent to higher thoughts and the worship of the Spirit. In me, without my knowing it, and even in my fits of rage against Garfield, a slow and steady regret for the man and the friend had crept in, through the crack of my disgust toward the current Grand Orient. It was now, after the other had died, that I had come to appreciate his qualities, his devotion, and even his tenderness. I loved him, after having assassinated him, despite my promise never

to attach myself to any living soul, with love entirely reserved for the Spirit. And the Spirit, furious at this betrayal, suddenly rushed at me, threw me to the ground, and trampled me. And I—Clotilde Bersonne, the haughty, the vindictive, who had never forgiven the slightest offense in my life—humiliated and beaten, had to endure this ultimate outrage.

Fortunately, this submission seemed to calm the Spirit. For a long time, he spoke to me, lamenting my indifference, my slackness in his service, my lack of care and reluctance during our meetings, my eagerness to leave him. Finally, he overwhelmed me with new promises and, to make amends for his outburst, he agreed to forget all the oaths he had made regarding the Initiates. He charged me with telling them that he was yielding to their prayers.

I hastened to find them in the Chapter hall and announced that they would find the sum they had requested under the Dragon of the Grand Lodge.

Needless to say, I was received as a joyful messenger. They hurried to the Round Temple. Grévy, overjoyed, became familiar with me.

But it was not the time.

The correction I had just received still stung, and someone, sooner or later, had to pay for it. I hated the Grand Orient too much for it not to seem the perfect target for this job.

“Don’t touch me,” I screamed at him, “or woe to you.”

The success of the evening and a few copious libations, I think, had intoxicated him. He insisted. Anger took hold of me. Fortunately, the Spirit inspired a diversion. I leapt onto the platform. A three-ring bell froze the Initiates at the semicircular Table. I do not know what fury was transfiguring me. For an hour and a half, I spoke like a fury. What did I say? I didn’t even hear myself; but I saw the faces of the Initiates pass through every kind of concern. And it was only the next day that I read the speech, finally worthy of my title of Inspired, at the Stenographers’ Bureau.

One by one, I had tackled the most delicate issues of high politics; the state of minds in France and the situation of the Church; the intrigues of Pope Pecci and his advances to Germany via Monsignor Galimberti, all while making provisions for a fallback, in case of failure, with the French Republic; the battle plan that needed to be carried out to resist this offensive.

First, it was necessary to have the Chambers vote on the abolition of the religious budget, the incapacity of the parish funds, and even the prohibition, as illicit gain, of collecting any fees for honors, alms, or indemnities for masses and ceremonies.

A furious diatribe, filled with sharp remarks that each of the Initiates, closely involved in affairs, could appreciate in passing for the accuracy and breadth of the information, while at the same time drenched in atrocious and gratuitous slanders. Had I not invented a story of secret reports between Cardinal Antonelli, who remained the black beast of the Sects, and the prioress of the Carmelites in Rome, as well as a plan for underground passages between the Vatican and the nearby convents, to debase the Holy See and accuse the prelates of the Curia of the worst corruptions?

Finally, I concluded by stating a series of numbers that they hurried to stenograph, and when I descended from the platform, exhausted by those three days of confinement and by that troubled night, my head empty, my heart ready to fail, Thiénet and Tirard, who had offered me their hands to help me down from the platform and the tribune, had to carry me—or nearly so—to the semicircular Table. There, the incorrigible Grévy did not stop until he had asked me the meaning of those incomprehensible numbers. I pretended, still angry, to ignore him out of disdain; and I would have been hard-pressed to do otherwise: I didn’t even know I had uttered numbers.

Grévy then tried to consult the spirit boards; he obtained no result, and I myself never succeeded in understanding what that communication meant. Beyond Grévy and myself, it was doubtless directed to some obscure and silent assistant, the only true ear to which my unconscious mouth spoke.

This last speech remained like my swan song.

Not that I did not try to regain the trust of the Spirit; I approached it with increasing clumsiness.

To avoid the waits and the rejections that exasperated me, I adopted a shorter and almost mechanical formula for evocation. I knew it displeased the Dragon; it was my revenge for the blows he had dealt me.

It is remembered that Abbot Mazati, on his part, invoked the Dragon without further ceremony, in the name of the Holy Trinity. When the Beast was slow to respond to other formulas, I had also seen the Grand Orient, driven to the edge, sometimes resort to the same method. It was in Hebrew, so that none of the Affiliates present could suspect the meaning of the words. It was only considered a secret rite, on which it was forbidden, even for the Initiates, to discuss with one another, and one had to follow it blindly. But in my dealings with the Spirit, I had learned a little Hebrew, which, when he deigned to explain it to me, seemed to me both simple and profound, and, as such, has remained the language par excellence of the Sects since the beginning. I had thus quickly understood, from certain words, that the invocation of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit came to the forefront in several formulas. I used it, I abused it.

Then, I encountered a strange difficulty: the difficulty of pronouncing the name of the Holy Spirit. I was later told that it likely stemmed from this very Holy Spirit, who suffered from being invoked by a possessed person of the other Spirit. In any case, this difficulty forced me to reflect on the formula itself, and from there, it was but a small step to find it absurd.

How, indeed, could the Spirit be compelled to respond to a prayer made in the name of the inferior Catholic divinity? I decided to abandon this way of doing things and to take advantage of the first opportunity to ask the Dragon to explain his paradoxical way of acting.

Having tried to evoke him for this purpose, I initially failed. It was a Thursday night, going into Friday. I was alone in the Lodge. For two hours, with my watch in hand, I exhausted myself with various invocations. Then, exasperated, I invoked him once again:

— In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Immediately, he appeared to me, contracted and grimacing. I asked him to tell me why he only obeyed this invocation with punctuality:

— It is, he replied in a strained tone, customary from the beginning.

I thought I would make a dramatic move by then ordering him, out of caprice, just to see the effect:

— Now, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, withdraw. Go away.

He rebelled with a terrible laugh:

— Sent away, fine! ... But not by you! You belong to me. I can come, but I cannot be sent away by myself.

And he suddenly seized me with an incredible violence: body, spirit, and will. All his suggestions overwhelmed me at once. To satisfy him, knowingly, if not entirely voluntarily, I embraced evil, I cursed good. I renounced all personality for the pride of being the Sovereign Mistress, elected by this Spirit of darkness. And when he finally consented to return the use and freedom of my mind to me, he first answered my questions with a better grace. Especially since I knew not to push the interrogation too far at the outset:



— Will we succeed in the expulsion of the religious, which we are now working on with such zeal?

— Yes!

— Soon?

— I believe so, but it will not bring you what you think.

— What do you mean? Would you support these monks and nuns, and their defenders?

— On the contrary, I would crush them all if I had the power.

— How, the power? Are you not the Supreme Being? Is there a superior Principle above you, even more powerful?

He rolled, growling, at my feet, rather than articulating his response. Finally, a single word burst from his fiery throat, and it had no connection in meaning or tone to my question. It was not a reply, but a cry, a name, which I did not manage to understand:

— Beelzebub!

— Why, I asked again mercilessly, do you not answer me? Why leave us, your faithful and your chosen ones, in the dark, while some miserable priest, like this Abbot Mazati, forces you to speak, in his kitchen Latin, with a banal Catholic formula that he himself no longer believes in?

The Dragon, once again, answered me only with howls and once again threw me brutally onto the pavement, then, lifting me off the ground, raised me high enough to let me fall with such force that I thought I had broken every bone in my body.

Barely able to rise, I left the round Temple, outraged by this undignified treatment and swearing to return only after the Dragon had offered me an apology and new guarantees against such whims of a mad beast.

#### IV. HESITATIONS AND TERRORS

My immeasurable pride had failed to account for that of the Beast. I sulked, and it rejected me. Or rather, without intending to sever the relationship, would it wait for me to return sufficiently subdued, so that it would no longer be exposed to such terrible questions?

I stubbornly persisted, half out of fear, half out of bravado, in only entering the Lodge accompanied, never again invoking the Dragon.

And I now felt the breath of its anger growling around me at every moment.

Terror gripped my heart during the nights. I was reduced to a dreadful state.

I used this to justify my absence from most of the meetings to the Council; however, the situation could not last forever. I feared that, taking advantage of my absence, the Dragon might warn the Initiates and demand my punishment, and I knew all too well that these people would find a thousand ways to bring me death if necessary. The crimes I had committed had taught me too much, and in the absence of remorse, the terror of such a fate left me no moment of peace.

The eighteen gleaming skulls of the Black Cabinet now all took on the name of one of my victims in my dreams, and the ghost of Garfield hovered above my nightmares, like the Horned Eagle, croaking with

joy. The first vengeance of those I had so coldly immolated!

I considered submitting, then killing myself.

But some vague, still undefined and nameless light now floated over my despair. I thought of that Higher Power who even commanded our so-called Supreme Spirit, just as Fate once commanded the Immortals; and the temptation came to pray to this unknown God. I did not dare, feeling unworthy; already, silently, I hoped that one day I would dare, and this faint feeling of a sovereign recourse stayed my hand.

These feelings were not meant to facilitate a reconciliation between the Dragon and his Chosen One, should he manage to read my soul; nor could they practically calm my fears.

Especially since every day some Dignitary would come to visit me, or rather, to watch over me, under the pretense of checking on my well-being. It seemed as though they had all agreed to keep me in a state of terror. Not a week passed without them telling me some new story of a crime committed by one of our own.

And indeed, crimes were committed constantly, even for the simple observation of the rules of the game. For such is the trial through which at least every senior Affiliate must pass: they must, to be accepted, first establish themselves in a "state of crime," which, on one hand, is like the state of grace of this counter-religion; through which, on the other hand, one keeps the person forever bound, threatening to reveal their secret if they try to shake off the yoke of the Sect.

Thus, not one of the political leaders who have made their mark in France in recent years has reached such a high position without the help of the Lodges, and the Lodges had first demanded from them the proof that they were worthy of it. To one, they made the child of a woman who had secretly given birth at the Lodge drown; others had to, at least like me, stab the Victim on the day of their higher affiliation. Grévy's state of crime was related to the Saydon case in England. — It is remembered that Saydon was accused in London in 1866 of being the author of a "suicide" awkwardly disguised: the real culprits were Grévy and Teller, — another Initiate, who died in 1874.

One of the worst murders I was told about around this time was that of an unfortunate layman. He was, however, a high-ranking man; but he had allowed himself to be drawn, half by play, half by curiosity, into a session of the Grand Council, and there, once caught, he was ordered to give pledges and to affiliate by oath. He refused, perhaps out of a remaining religious conscience, I think; they made him swallow a drug well known to the Grand Alchemist, and the next day, when the police were alerted, they found him in the Bois de Boulogne, rambling, dazed. He had to be committed.

Thiénet and Tirard, around the same time, had set out to convince the Count of Paris to join Freemasonry if he wanted to make a restoration possible. The prince rejected their advances: he was certain of the good the Sect wants for kings. Kellner and Tauler were then tasked with approaching him again, and if he resisted, to find a way to eliminate him.

They went to meet the count at Chambord, where he was at the time; but they were received with such exquisite kindness that they lost the courage to carry out their barbaric mandate. They were two rather fearful affiliates. They returned to the Lodge, claiming they had not been able to reach the prince. However, the Spirit had denounced them. Tauler was thrown into a dungeon and kept for the next Good Friday's victim. Kellner was killed by the Dragon himself in a bloody hand-to-hand combat. The Beast seized him in the middle of the Lodge with its strong claws and began by tearing him apart; then, lifting him off the ground, in the form of a winged spirit, it carried him up to the vault; and then, dividing into several Spirits, one tore out his hair, while the others pulled out his nails. His naked body was covered in burns and finally torn apart, after he had cried out in dreadful screams for a long time.

Another horrible drama! T\*\*\* had a married mistress, whose name I withhold out of respect for the family, but she belonged to the good nobility and her husband had earned a great reputation in high diplomacy. One evening, somewhat drunk, T\*\*\* let slip some words in front of her concerning the secret activities of

the Lodge. She tried to question him about it the next day; T\*\*\*, instead of satisfying her curiosity, made her swear to keep a deathly silence on the matter. The young woman was of a rather frivolous nature and had limited judgment. Growing increasingly intrigued, she could not help but tell a relative of hers, a politician, about her adventure. He belonged to the Grand Congress: he denounced T\*\*\*, and T\*\*\*, in his defense, turned the blame onto the unfortunate woman. They lured her into an ambush while arranging everything at her home to make it seem like she had run away; and while her husband mourned this blatant infidelity, the poor woman was locked in the underground chambers. Crying, lamenting her inconsistency, still not understanding her adventure or the extent of her misfortune, she remained there for an entire month. Then her trial was held at the Chapter. Léon Say was her so-called defender; T\*\*\* himself, in an effort to seek forgiveness, had agreed to be the accuser and delivered a loathsome indictment against his bewildered mistress, half-mad with surprise and terror.

Seven black spheres judged her guilty, and they were about to write the sentence when the Spirit suddenly took charge, pronouncing and executing it. A flash of lightning streaked across the room, a thunderclap echoed, and a funeral march began to play, while the Dragon rushed toward the unfortunate woman. He seized her, gripping her with one of his monstrous claws, and hurled her into the air. She fell, frantic with terror, to the ground, struggling to flee from the horrible specter of the Beast; it leapt back onto its victim, tearing into her with its claws.

Soon the unfortunate woman was nothing but a bleeding wound; shreds of cloth and torn hair mingled all along her body with her bruised flesh. A blow to the chest causes her to vomit blood. Agonized, she begs in vain for a drop of water. To finish her off, the Dragon repeatedly throws her against the wall with all his might, so that her shattered face becomes unrecognizable. Finally, seeing her lifeless, he drags her by the hair across the room, pounces on the corpse, his many horns forward, and pierces it with a thousand more blows.

Tirard watched impassively this long and dreadful execution: — It lasted forty-four minutes, he told me without flinching. And I thought that with even more impassibility, and perhaps with a secret joy, he would no doubt soon witness my own torment. I, too, by my rank, was justifiable only by the Dragon, and how much I would have preferred, if I had to die, to succumb by the hand of men.

Only my status as Inspired gave me some peace, and foolishly I relied, in desperation, on the prophecies of the sacred Book. Was I not the third Chosen, predestined for a role I had not yet even begun to play?

Very often, since my Initiation, I had pored over the Annals of the Lodge to find traces of my predecessors. The rest mattered little to me; I was passionately drawn to their stories. One, Catherine Vadier, had taken the name of Théos; the other, Thérèse Séther, better known as Sylphide, was English. One, moreover, was uneducated, the other foolish; they never understood their role except in flashes and intuitions.

If God ever allows, as I hope, that one day the Lodges and their Annals may be seized to find proof of these monstrous crimes, they should look in volume XVIII, article 1225. It is there that the history of these two women can be found.

Catherine Vadier especially haunted me. She lived during the time of the Great Revolution, intertwined with the rise and fall of Robespierre, and was a first-rate Inspired. One day, she displeased the Spirit that possessed her and was handed over as punishment to another Spirit, opposed to the first— a way of speaking that perhaps indicates and at the same time veils, in the language of the Lodges, a return to Catholicism— and it resulted in such a contradiction in her mind that for a long time she was thought to be mad. She was not mad, though; she suffered terribly from this intellectual division and eventually died, suffocated, they say, by her evil genius.

— And there it is, I sometimes thought, that is the fate that awaits me too, if not worse.

Yet the promise still sang in my ear: The first woman has risen, and she is dead; the second has come,

she will pass; my alliance with the third will not pass.

This present disgrace was therefore still only the predicted crisis, the crisis of drought and distance, which would one day end in a brilliant reconciliation and lead to my total union, a prelude to the final Election: and this would raise me to the top of all hierarchies, to a rank still unnamed, unknown, almost unsuspected, since it has never yet been occupied by a living soul, near the Supreme Lodge finally ruling the world.

## V THE FALL

By certain signs, I sensed that my trial was being prepared. I underwent various interrogations at home, which pretended to be nothing more than clarifications about certain things I had said in the past.

I believe I have indicated that at the Lodge, thanks to a cleverly arranged echo at the center of the hall, as soon as an Initiate is at the podium, stenographers—either stationed in the lateral surveillance rooms or on the lower floor where acoustic conduits transmit even the slightest words to them—record not only the speaker's discourse but also every little word, even exchanged in whispers, between the attendees. These signs of particular opinions are carefully examined, and more than one Adept or Affiliate has been excluded or eliminated for a jest they had long forgotten. The system, which had already been in place under Garfield, had under Grévy become a regime of continuous denunciation.

Now, God knows that, during the time of my arrogant favor, I had spread many of these sarcastic remarks and criticisms that could cost the lives of a hundred innocents. I was as unrestrained in that place as in my own salon; and, while reviewing this case, certain things must have seemed so enormous that even my unscrupulous colleagues hesitated to bring them up against me without a new confession from my mouth. They obtained from my exhaustion and disgust everything they wanted.

There was no doubt, therefore, that excited jealousies, secret grudges, and the fear of my sudden diatribes managed, thanks to these compelling testimonies, to rally the majority of voices in the Grand Council against me. Everyone had had enough of the dictatorship of a whimsical and angry woman, inexplicably lifted from the lowest positions, under whose inspiration everything had fallen apart in the Lodge. No more skirts at the semicircular Table, such had become the motto; and that Clotilde Bersone should be cast out to the misfortune!

Only the Dragon, no doubt, intervened one last time in my favor. He too disliked contradicting himself, at least in front of his own. He had lost Garfield and was ashamed to have made Grévy his favorite. Who could replace his Chosen one from yesterday? Where would he find a similar instrument, despite my faults? Would the Spirit never succeed in keeping a servant-mistress whom he could trust as a friend? And all those accusers before him at the Chapter, were they not, at heart, just as unfaithful in spirit? So many mediocrities, from whom even the Genius of evil would never extract anything?

The Dragon thus reserved the sentence for himself, as in any major case, and Ferry took responsibility for conveying it to me.

It was both fierce, given its content, and benign, given the one from whom it emanated.

Under threat of death, I received orders to leave immediately for Grenoble, where I was to wait for further instructions, in a rendezvous house, if not a house of tolerance, where I would now be required to reside until the Spirit, satisfied with the rightful reparations I owed him, would call me back and restore me to my high functions.

"You will rest there, Madame," Ferry said to me hypocritically. "Your health was worrying us, and the mountain air will do you good. You will return to us soon, I hope, in good form."

I felt like tearing his face apart with my nails, and the punishment was even more ignoble, if not more

atrocious, than I had feared. It was truly the muddy lake that Garfield had predicted I would cross one day, and which would stop me at the end of my journey. Everything in me revolted against this affront. But what could I do? The least I risked by disobeying was being thrown out onto the streets the next day, penniless, denounced to every police force. It was better to pretend to comply. At least, in Grenoble, I would be far from the dreadful Dissection Amphitheater and the white marble Hydra. Resolute to make myself respected at all costs, even in this vile place, I could escape from there with a better chance of revenge from the Initiates and even the claws of the Beast. I accepted, trembling.

The welcome I received there further inclined me to endure this shameful penance as patiently as possible. This unclean establishment had an outward appearance of respectability, catering to the high bourgeoisie and senior officials. It was not quite the vile public house. Probably secluded and under good guard, the owner, one of our Affiliates, had been ordered to treat me with all the respect compatible with the execution of my disgusting mission.

Barely settled in, I received communication of a first assignment. It was to thoroughly probe the disposition of an Adept, the senator Bovier-Lapierre, whose induction as an Affiliate was still uncertain. It was known that he frequented this house in Paris. The task was to make contact with him and gradually extract his secrets.

I accepted again, and spent months and months completing the task, one can imagine with occasional surges of revolt. To treat me so, after what I had become! What a fall! I had never, of course, been spared from committing a crime; at least they had spared me the basenesses. Today, however, it seemed they wanted to condemn me to precisely that, with deliberate intent, and for eternity. So much so that the former Countess of Coutanceau, confidante of Bismarck, and even the Bersone, mistress of a Garfield, was no longer anything but a lost woman in that cesspool. How could I climb back up after having given such horrible pledges?

The correspondent assigned to me in Paris for all my affairs was de Lanessan. I often wrote to him to complain: but the Beast did not want complaints, it wanted my submission.

Inexplicably, as soon as my letter had been sent, I would receive the response, not by post, but in a mysterious way, directly on my reading device. Yet I could not doubt the authenticity of these missives. The Initiates obligatorily use a number of embellished capital letters in their correspondence, particularly D, B, R, V, P, D. At the top of each letter, two open triangles, joined at the base. Each Initiate also has a special sort of signature that must appear on the envelope so that the source can be discerned at a glance, even in a bulky Courier.

I would thus sign with an N in hieroglyphics, the first letter of my grade of Nymph, and I knew Lanessan's signature, an I. S. (Superior Initiate) oddly intertwined.

No subterfuge was possible, and it had to be assumed, in this too-quick exchange of correspondence, that there had been direct intervention from the Dragon, whose power thus extended to this point.

So, what was the point of fleeing any further? Indeed, I felt more repulsion at reestablishing relations with him, as I had once, than at the infamous profession to which he had reduced me. But sooner or later, a resolution would have to be reached. Which one?

Out of weariness, I no longer even asked myself the question.

After much effort, I thought I had finally reached the end of my assignment regarding the man I had been instructed to watch, when unexpectedly, another parallel mission fell to me in the same house.

Important papers, I was told, had fallen into the hands of a certain P.-B., the son of the admiral of the same name, who also frequented the pleasure house where I had now made my regular haunt, and the Lodge was determined to acquire this file. Though the owner had been repeatedly robbed, had his

belongings stolen during a trip by so-called criminals, etc., they had never been able to get hold of the wallet containing these precious papers.

"Clotilde alone is capable of getting them," the Dragon had decided. "Let her work on it, since she prefers that to my friendship."

I had to bow again. Now, I was cowardly and preferred anything to the cruelties of the torture and the hopeless death that awaited me. Like a slave, each time this man showed up at the cursed house, I was notified and had to rush. But in vain did I use every trick to discover where his elusive wallet might be hidden; I was beginning to despair.

Finally, one night, I succeeded.

P.-B., completely drunk, spoke: I learned where the hidden stash was. I finished getting him drunk to the point of death. An accomplice ran to his house, entering by climbing like a thief, found the treasure in an attic, and brought me the papers. After carefully removing the seals from the envelope that contained them, I seized the coveted documents and replaced everything, stuffing the envelope with random newspaper clippings. So, the victim might never have known he had been stolen from, unless he had the foresight to carefully check his deposit.

The next day, I triumphantly telegraphed Paris:

"I have the double secret. Get me out."

I was told that I was free, and that I was expected in Mâcon.

Why Mâcon? What was still reserved for me there? And had I ever intended to leave here, only to return, even to Paris, under the Beast's grip?

## VI THE CLOISTER

No matter! The next morning, I was ready, and with all my luggage checked in, I left, leaving behind no suspicion, almost sure that I was neither followed nor watched by anyone.

A few hours later, I unexpectedly got off the train at a large station, under the pretext of going to the buffet, and I rushed into the city, abandoning my trunks and everything else.

At the gate of a house I believed to be a monastery, I rang the bell feverishly. The door opened. A gentle face appeared, smiling under the wimple. It was one of those nuns whom I had so often hated and vilified over the past ten years. I asked to see the Superior, and for a long time, with a flood of tears, I unraveled my shameful confession, begging for refuge, for help against death and hell. Gently, it was promised to me. For the first time, in my harsh and miserable life, I encountered a mother's heart!

Several weeks of purification and rest passed for me in a bright cell and in an atmosphere of peace I had never known. And then, the hospital and its pains...

For one must not think that this grace of escape and deliverance had been suddenly granted to me.

My bitter reflections dated back to the day when the demon had to admit defeat in the face of the invocation of the Holy Trinity. Long closed to faith in anything supernatural, I had first discovered one, and now I had to accept two: that of Catholicism and that of the Beast, and the latter admitted that the God of my baptism was superior to it. One would have to be blind not to conclude that it was not only in power, but in goodness, in light, in divine perfection.

Certainly, I did not yet admit this; I already felt it—just as I had always felt it, without admitting it, but clearly enough to condemn myself to the sovereign tribunal—I don't know what malignant influence, even in the most elevated inspirations of the Dragon, much less in his cynical outbursts of cruelty and in his indulgence toward the worst depravity of his devotees. Thus, little by little, I discovered that this false Supreme Spirit had never been anything but the god of my passions, and especially of my appetite for blind vengeance.

God cannot be Hatred or Falsehood: and I began to quietly aspire—oh! from such a distance!—to Truth and Love.

Long did I hesitate, as a miserable sinner, without strength for good. But my confinement in Grenoble lasted a year and a half, from 1882 to the end of 1883. One can guess the nature of my thoughts during those many months. Even regarding the true elevation of my rank in occult Freemasonry, the present humiliation opened my eyes. A professed satanist, yet how far I was from having reached all the levels of the hierarchy that I had once believed to have conquered the heights of!

Perhaps I would never have had the courage to shake off the yoke if a new and unforeseen event in my life had not forced me to make a decision. I realized I was pregnant. Now, to return to Paris with this burden, I could not entertain that possibility for a minute. I foresaw all too clearly the infamous mockery of the Lodge, the abortive maneuvers, the drowned child, to serve as proof, by some initiate, and dissected by these atrocious suppliers of blood and human flesh, for the marble Moloch of the Round Temple.

Never! A courage rose in me, one I would probably have been incapable of for the defense and redemption of my own soul, too sullied and unworthy of forgiveness. In favor of the innocent, whose birth would already be marked by enough signs of misfortune, a new soul, a mother's soul, lifted me to a less dishonorable plane. At all costs, I would rescue my child from this filth and this hopeless death!

I prayed, amidst my filth, and when I finally managed to conquer the key to my dungeon, my resolution was made. I would escape from this prison of crimes that is Freemasonry, and I would go toward penance and redemption.

Thus, the Lodge never learned from me the secrets of Senator Bovier-Lapierre nor received the papers from the wretched father of my child; and at the same time, I placed myself in a state of rebellion against the Constitutions, knowing the cost it might bring.

At the hospital, the child came, and he died: I had suffered too much and certainly did not deserve to raise him, even for God. But he died baptized. This angel is with the Lamb without blemish, before whom I had profaned the adorable memory of sacrifice on so many Good Friday nights: he prays from above for his miserable mother.

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Barely convalescent, with infinite precautions to detect the Adversary, I was taken to another convent better sheltered from the gaze of the world; and here there is no longer Clotilde Bersone, nor widow Cerati, nor Countess de Coutanceau: only a poor woman, a servant of the servants of God, whom her Sisters affectionately call by the name of her new baptism: Marie-Amélie.

The vast, peaceful garden stretches out under the window of my cell; in the distance, the wide river flows silently. What a contrast to my former tumultuous life, amidst the flow of carriages, in the din of Paris!

I no longer fear the Lodge or the Dragon. I have found in my heart, beyond my most biting remorse and the kind of sacred horror that my crimes now inspire in me, another peace that surpasses all sweetness and calms all anxiety. Not that I am unaware of the power of the Adversary or the malice of his followers. More than anyone, I have had the cruel experience of it. But in the true Sacred Book, I have learned to know the Beast that so long seduced me, then terrified me.

Draco ille magnus, serpens antiquus, qui vocatur diabolus et satanas, qui seducit universum orbem, — APOC., XII, v. 9.

Et vidi de mari bestiam ascendentem, habentem capita septem et cornua decem, et super cornua ejus decem diademata, et super capita ejus nomina blasphemica... Et dedit illi Draco virtutem suam et potestatem magnam. — APOC., XII, v. 1-2. Et vidi alteram bestiam... Et fecit terram et habitantes in ea adorare bestiam primam. — APOC., XIII, v. 11-12.

He is called Satan; he was the ancient serpent, and he remains the inexterminable demon. He raised the idolater Beast that reigned over the City of the Seven Hills, and then this other Beast of Christian heresies, which takes advantage of the resemblance of the Lamb to make people worship the false God of the Gnostics and the Talmud. In turn, since the beginning, they have fought against the worshippers of the incarnate Word. And contemporary Freemasonry unites them as if in a single reincarnation of this perpetual Antichrist raised against the Church of God.

But Lucifer is powerless against those who, armed with the sign of the cross, do not voluntarily submit to his empire. Saint Michael and his Angels have been entrusted with defending the order of the world against him. The government of Providence only abandons to his intrusions what human freedom has delivered to him through sin. He can do nothing except through us and our faults.

Alas! The abominable wounds caused by my crimes have not healed so quickly or completely that they do not sometimes reopen and fester. Memories assail me, hideous temptations often obsess me despite myself; and whenever I have yielded to them, I feel that I have given power back to the Beast and its accomplices.

On the night from Wednesday to Thursday, January 8th of this year, five demons incessantly tormented me. The next day, having listened with complacency to some malicious compliments that had been



addressed to me during the day, it seemed to me that the Dragon had regained possession of me. For a moment, he lifted me off the ground and proposed to put me back in communication with the Grand Council, which was meeting at that very moment, in the night of Friday, to negotiate my return and my forgiveness; but I cried out to my guardian angel and to the Archangel protector of all the children of God:

— O Saint Michael, defend me in danger... O Father, O my God, libera nos a Malo.

The Beast threw me back to the ground so violently that I lost blood from my ears and became somewhat deaf. No matter! May I hear less of the world's seductions from now on.

What I feared most, not for myself, but for my admirable Sisters, the heroic nurses of a soul in distress — was that the Demon, sent after me, would go to denounce my refuge in Paris and unleash all the powers of darkness against it.

Ah! these expulsions of nuns that I had so often advocated in the past, who would have believed that I would tremble to be one of the first victims of them, in my saving shelter? This very eventuality does not move the nun with a great heart who took me in, and for whom I have no more secrets. She knows the value of a soul redeemed from all its follies by the blood of God. Her fearless courage fears nothing.

The other day, in the meager belongings I had kept until then, I found by chance a rosary that, during my possession, the Demon had broken in my hands in mockery. I threw it away in horror. Mother Marguerite calmly picked it up and set about putting it back together:

— Leave it, I said to her. Let's rather bury it deeply in some corner. These haunted objects bring bad luck.

She smiled her beautiful angelic smile and took me to her cell. At her bedside, she had already suspended a profaned crucifix, which I had handed to her upon my arrival, and which she had placed there to offer her reparative homage at all hours; and she surrounded this cross with my broken rosary, as a new trophy, saying:

"It will protect us, on the contrary: for we are under the hand of God, and nothing can happen to us without His permission."

The devil appeared to me, furious, in the night:

"Leave this woman," he ordered me. "She feigns devotion and kindness toward you; in truth, she is only interested in her Church. When her curiosity is satisfied, don't you see that she or her Superiors will find it wise to abandon you? ... Moreover, I will make her disgusted with you and your company. I will make her suffer."

I faithfully reported these words to Mother Marguerite; she seemed no more disturbed by them than usual:

"Let him speak, little sister, and even let him act. It is by suffering that one delivers; it is by sacrificing oneself for others that one disarms Hell."

And in her melancholic gaze, I suddenly discovered the abyss of another mystery of grace and atonement, which explained to me both the invisible path of my conversion and the so-called coincidences that had finally made me the companion and protected one of this soul of distinction.

The tabernacle and penance, in this oasis of holiness, serve as a lightning rod against the lightning bolts of the Accursed."

"As for the Initiates and the entire army of officials and policemen, not to mention the assassins, that they can send after me, thanks to Grévy, his ministers, and their countless agents, I initially hoped that God's will would continue to force the Beast to keep the location of my refuge hidden from them. Soon, I would

discover that the Lodge had tracked me down.

Indeed, I was busy one day at the office when a man entered. He was a gardener's assistant, newly hired and invited to come in for a refreshment.

He came straight to me, and, with an excessive politeness of the common people, he extended his hand, making sure to keep his index finger outstretched while shaking mine. I shuddered: it was one of the recognition signs of the Illuminati. Coldly, I filled his glass as if I had not understood. He clinked his glass loudly with the bottle, like a good companion, raised it, then set it back on the table, looking at me intently, before drinking it all in one go, wiping his mustache with the back of his sleeve, and mumbling something that ended with:

"... éclair."

This time, I couldn't hide my unease: it was another recognition sign of the Affiliates.

Suddenly determined to put an end to it, I declared:

"Well! Yes, it's me... The one they call the Nymph of the Night over there."

"Where's that, over there?"

"At the Blind and Deaf House, where, between two rows of apartments overlooking the English Café and the Golden House, the Square Lodge, the Round Temple, and the dungeon-like cells in the basement are located... Go ahead, tell those who sent you. I've written everything concerning my life among you, and copies are safely stored, on both sides, in places secure and in the hands of the ecclesiastical authorities. If anything suspicious happens to me, or to this house, an accident, a fire, an unexplained death, a complaint will be immediately..."

A complaint will be filed with the Prosecutor's Office against the Grand Council, supported by press revelations that, willingly or unwillingly, will shake public opinion and force a semblance of a search and investigation, from which you may well hide your Annals and the suspicious furniture, but not the existence of the octagonal room and the cellars. That is enough to expose the secret of these gentlemen and make it worthwhile to have died for it... I will offer my life to God, so that He may raise up Christians capable of taking advantage of the warning and breaking this tyranny... Do you understand?"

He burst into a thick laugh, and in a cracked voice said:

"Well, no. You speak too well, my sister. Your little wine suits my needs better."

He left with a heavy, indifferent step, picked up his tools without haste, left the house, and was never seen there again.

I think my message was conveyed to the Chapter, and the Enlightened ones reflected. They must have thought that it was better to let me lead a miserable life in some obscure convent, rather than expose the Sect's secrets too glaringly.

In these past weeks, I have heard nothing in my painful tête-à-tête with the past and the eternal hopes of which I feel so unworthy.

May the Lord Jesus forgive the miserable woman I was. Trembling before His justice, and even before His mercy, I dare to call upon His glory, which the Dragon strives in vain to usurp in the world and in souls. May He finally tear me away, entirely and forever, from the Beast, and, in turn, make from the proud Sovereign Mistress Inspired of the past the humblest of His Chosen.

June 1885.