**chapter 45**

**Exit Julien**

'I will not play that poor abbe Chas Bernard the unkind trick of sending for him,' he said to Fouque; 'he would not be able to eat his dinner for three days afterwards. But try to find me a Jansenist, a friend of M. Pirard and beyond the reach of intrigue.'

Fouque had been awaiting this development with impatience. Julien acquitted himself in a decent fashion of everything that is due to public opinion in the provinces. Thanks to M. l'abbe de Frilair, and in spite of his unfortunate choice of a confessor, Julien, in his cell, was under the protection of the Congregation; with a little more of the spirit of action, he might have made his escape. But, as the bad air of the cell produced its effect, his mental powers dwindled. This made him all the happier on the return of Madame de Renal.

'My first duty is towards you,' she said to him as she embraced him; 'I have fled from Verrieres … '

Julien had no petty vanity in his relations with her, he told her of all his weak moments. She was kind and charming to him.

That evening, immediately upon leaving the prison, she summoned to her aunt's house the priest who had attached himself to Julien as to a prey; as he wished only to acquire a reputation among the young women belonging to the best society of Besancon, Madame de Renal easily persuaded him to go and offer a novena at the abbey of BrayleHaut.

No words could express the intensity and recklessness of Julien's love.

By spending money freely, and by using and abusing the reputation of her aunt, well known for her piety and riches, Madame de Renal obtained permission to see him twice daily.

On hearing this, Mathilde's jealousy rose to the pitch of insanity. M. de Frilair had assured her that in spite of his position he dared not flout all the conventions so far as to permit her to see her friend more than once daily. Mathilde had Madame de Renal followed, so as to be kept informed of her most trivial actions. M. de Frilair exhausted every resource of a most cunning mind, in trying to prove to her that Julien was unworthy of her.

In the midst of all these torments, she loved him all the more, and, almost every day, created a horrible scene in his cell.

Julien wished at all costs to behave like an honourable man until the end towards this poor girl whom he had so seriously compromised; but,at every moment, the unbridled passion that he felt for Madame de Renal overcame him. When, through some flaw in his argument, he failed to convince Mathilde of the innocence of her rival's visits: 'At this stage, the end of the play must be very near,' he said to himself; 'that is some excuse for me if I cannot act better.'

Mademoiselle de La Mole learned of the death of M. de Croisenois. M. de Thaler, that man of boundless wealth, had taken the liberty of saying unpleasant things about Mathilde's disappearance; M. de Croisenois called on him with a request that he would withdraw them: M. de Thaler showed him certain anonymous letters addressed to himself, and full of details so skilfully put together that it was impossible for the poor Marquis not to discern the true facts.

M. de Thaler indulged in pleasantries that were distinctly broad. Mad with rage and misery, M. de Croisenois insisted upon reparations so drastic that the millionaire preferred a duel. Folly proved triumphant;and one of the men in Paris most worthy of a woman's love met his death in his twenty-fourth year.

This death made a strange and morbid impression on Julien'sweakened spirits. 'Poor Croisenois,' he said to Mathilde, 'did really behave quite reasonably and honourably towards us; he had every right to hate me after your imprudent behaviour in your mother's drawing-room, and to seek a quarrel with me; for the hatred that follows on contempt is generally furious.'

The death of M. de Croisenois altered all Julien's ideas with regard to Mathilde's future; he devoted several days to proving to her that she ought to accept the hand of M. de Luz. 'He is a shy man, not too much of a Jesuit,' he told her, 'and a man who no doubt intends to climb. With a more sober and persistent ambition than poor Croisenois, and with no dukedom in his family, he will make no difficulty about marrying Julien Sorel's widow.'

'And a widow who scorns grand passions,' replied Mathilde coldly;'for she has lived long enough to see, after six months, her lover prefer another woman, and a woman who was the origin of all their troubles.'

'You are unjust; Madame de Renal's visits will furnish the barrister from Paris, who has been engaged to conduct my appeal, with some striking phrases; he will describe the murderer honoured by the attentions of his victim. That may create an effect, and perhaps one day you will see me the hero of some melodrama,' etc., etc.

A furious jealousy and one that was incapable of wreaking vengeance,the prolongation of a hopeless misery (for, even supposing Julien to be saved, how was she to recapture his heart?), the shame and grief of loving more than ever this faithless lover, had plunged Mademoiselle de La Mole in a grim silence from which the zealous attentions of M. de Frilair were no more capable than the rude frankness of Fouque, of making her emerge.

As for Julien, except during the moments usurped by the presence of Mathilde, he was living upon love and with hardly a thought of the future. A curious effect of this passion, in its extreme form and free from all pretence, was that Madame de Renal almost shared his indifference and mild gaiety.

'In the past,' Julien said to her, 'when I might have been so happy during our walks in the woods of Vergy, a burning ambition led my soul into imaginary tracts. Instead of my pressing to my heart this lovely arm which was so near to my lips, the thought of my future tore me away from you; I was occupied with the countless battles which I should have to fight in order to build up a colossal fortune… No, I should have died without knowing what happiness meant, had you not come to visit me in this prison.'

Two incidents occurred to disturb this tranquil existence. Julien's confessor, for all that he was a Jansenist, was not immune from an intrigue by the Jesuits, and quite unawares became their instrument.

He came one day to inform him that if he were not to fall into the mortal sin of suicide, he must take every possible step to obtain a reprieve.

Now, the clergy having considerable influence at the Ministry of Justice in Paris, an easy method offered itself: he must undergo a sensational conversion…

'Sensational!' Julien repeated. 'Ah! I have caught you at the same game,Father, play-acting like any missionary … '

'Your tender age,' the Jansenist went or gravely, 'the interesting appearance with which Providence has blessed you, the motive itself of your crime, which remains inexplicable, the heroic measures of which Mademoiselle de La Mole is unsparing on your behalf, everything, in-short, including the astonishing affection that your victim shows for you,all these have combined to make you the hero of the young women of Besancon. They have forgotten everything for you, even politics …

'Your conversion would strike an echo in their hearts, and would leave a profound impression there. You can be of the greatest service to religion, and am I to hesitate for the frivolous reason that the Jesuits would adopt the same course in similar circumstances! And so, even in this particular case which has escaped their rapacity, they would still be doing harm! Let such a thing never be said… The tears which will flow at your conversion will annul the corrosive effect of ten editions of the impious works of Voltaire.'

'And what shall I have left,' replied Julien coldly, 'if I despise myself? I have been ambitious, I have no wish to reproach myself; I acted then according to the expediency of the moment. Now, I am living from day today. But, generally speaking, I should be making myself extremely unhappy, if I gave way to any cowardly temptation … '

The other incident, which affected Julien far more keenly, arose from Madame de Renal. Some intriguing friend or other had managed to persuade this simple, timid soul that it was her duty to go to Saint-Cloud, and to throw herself at the feet of King Charles X.

She had made the sacrifice of parting from Julien, and after such an effort, the unpleasantness of making a public spectacle of herself, which at any other time would have seemed to her worse than death, was no longer anything in her eyes.

'I shall go to the King, I shall confess proudly that you are my lover: the life of a man, and of such a man as Julien, must outweigh all other considerations. I shall say that it was out of jealousy that you attempted my life. There are endless examples of poor young men who have been saved in such cases by the humanity of a jury, or by that of the King … '

'I shall cease to see you, I shall bar the door of my prison against you,' cried Julien, 'and most certainly I shall kill myself in despair, the day after, unless you swear to me that you will take no step that will make us both a public spectacle. This idea of going to Paris is not yours. Tell me the name of the intriguing woman who suggested it to you …

'Let us be happy throughout the few remaining days of this brief life.

Let us conceal our existence; my crime is only too plain. Mademoiselle de La Mole has unbounded influence in Paris, you may be sure that she is doing all that is humanly possible. Here in the provinces, I have all the wealthy and respectable people against me. Your action would embitter still further these wealthy and above all moderate men, for whom life is such an easy matter … Let us not give food for laughter to the Maslons,the Valenods, and a thousand people better worth than they.'

The bad air of the cell became insupportable to Julien. Fortunately on the day on which he was told that he must die, a bright sun was gladdening the earth, and he himself was in a courageous mood. To walk in the open air was a delicious sensation to him, as is treading solid earth to A mariner who has long been at sea. 'There, all is well,' he said to himself, 'I am not lacking in courage.'

Never had that head been so poetic as at the moment when it was about to fall. The most precious moments that he had known in the past in the woods of Vergy came crowding into his mind with an extreme vividness.

Everything passed simply, decorously, and without affectation on his part.

Two days earlier, he had said to Fouque: 'For my emotions I cannot answer; this damp and hideous cell gives me moments of fever in which I am not myself; but fear, no; no one shall see me blench.'

He had made arrangements in advance that on the morning of the last day, Fouque should carry off Mathilde and Madame de Renal.

'Take them in the same carriage,' he had told him. 'Arrange that the post-horses shall gallop all the time. They will fall into one another's arms, or else will show a deadly hatred for one another. In either case, the poor women will have some slight distraction from their terrible grief.'

Julien had made Madame de Renal swear that she would live to look after Mathilde's child.

'Who knows? Perhaps we continue to have sensation after our death,' he said one day to Fouque. 'I should dearly like to repose, since repose is the word, in that little cave in the high mountain that overlooks Verrieres. Many a time, as I have told you, retiring by night to that cave, and casting my gaze afar over the richest provinces of France, I have felt my heart ablaze with ambition: it was my passion then … Anyhow, that cave is precious to me, and no one can deny that it is situated in a spot that a philosopher's heart might envy… Very well! These worthy members of the Congregation of Besancon make money out of everything; if you know how to set about it, they will sell you my mortal remains … '

Fouque was successful in this grim transaction. He was spending the night alone in his room, by the body of his friend, when to his great surprise, he saw Mathilde appear. A few hours earlier, he had left her ten leagues from Besancon. There was a wild look in her eyes.

'I wish to see him,' she said to him.

Fouque had not the courage to speak or to rise. He pointed with his finger to a great blue cloak on the floor; in it was wrapped all that remained of Julien.

She fell upon her knees. The memory of Boniface de La Mole and of Marguerite de Navarre gave her, no doubt, a super-human courage. Her trembling hands unfolded the cloak. Fouque turned away his eyes.

He heard Mathilde walking rapidly about the room. She lighted a number of candles. When Fouque had summoned up the strength to look at her, she had placed Julien's head upon a little marble table, in front of her, and was kissing his brow …

Mathilde followed her lover to the tomb which he had chosen for himself. A great number of priests escorted the coffin and, unknown to all, alone in her draped carriage, she carried upon her knees the head of the man whom she had so dearly loved.

Coming thus near to the summit of one of the high mountains of the Jura, in the middle of the night, in that little cave magnificently illuminated with countless candles, a score of priests celebrated the Office of the Dead. All the inhabitants of the little mountain villages, through which the procession passed, had followed it, drawn by the singularity of this strange ceremony.

Mathilde appeared in their midst in a flowing garb of mourning, and,at the end of the service, had several thousands of five franc pieces scattered among them.

Left alone with Fouque, she insisted upon burying her lover's head with her own hands. Fouque almost went mad with grief.

By Mathilde's orders, this savage grot was adorned with marbles sculptured at great cost, in Italy.

Madame de Renal was faithful to her promise. She did not seek in any way to take her own life; but, three days after Julien, died while embracing her children.