

Fontenay, the Swordsman.
(Continued from Page 1.)

Knowing her Sovereign's heart, Marguerite forefelt that it was to speak of her absent darling, and she was not mistaken.

"Do you remember?" inquired Josephine, pointing to the mead extending from their feet and the corpse where they had come by surprise upon Paul measuring sword blades with the terrible fencing-master.

Marguerite did remember, but she was so agitated to utter all she felt.

"You have only seen him once since I betrothed you," observed the Empress, "it was when he had just escaped the death braved to save Napoleon from an assassin's poniard. God hath protected him. You will see him again and in captain's uniform."

The girl sighed, and Josephine interpreted the sigh as meaning that he was slow in coming.

"You will see him sooner than you think. I hear that he has quitted Spain, and if nothing has delayed him on the road, he may now be in Paris."

"Oh, madame, he would come straight to la Malmaison!" exclaimed Marguerite.

"He is coming. I am expecting him."

"To-day, do you mean?"

"In an instant. Look! there he is!"

Mlle de Gavre raised her eyes and saw Paul advancing, hat in hand. His gold epaulets and his silver cross shone in the sunlight. His countenance was darker than when fresh from under the West Indian sun. His figure was more developed and he seemed to have increased in height. But he still had his winning and expressive features, gentle black eyes and kind smile. He was beaming with joy and not at all agitated. He kissed the Empress' hand, and was going to treat his betrothed to the same salute when the imperial lady said mirthfully:

"No, no! I am looking the other way! a husband returning from the wars need not stand on ceremony! not that you are quite her husband yet, my dear Paul, but before a month you will be, and I hope Napoleon will sign the marriage-contract. He knows that I made the match and he will approve of your union."

The young couple stood hand in hand after the kiss, pale with joy and dumb with rapture.

"You need not relate your adventures in Spain to me," resumed the Sovereign, "for I know them, my dear Paul, and that you have nobly borne yourself. Our poor Marshal Lannes gave testimony to that before dying so heroically at Essling. Since then, General Suchet has recited the deed of daring which won you the cross. But it was not he who narrated your non-success in saving Marguerite's property."

"I wrote about that to George de Prégny," muttered Fontenay.

"And M. de Prégny showed me your letter. I informed the Emperor of the vexatious adventure, and he authorized me to provide the marriage-portion for the daughter of one of his bravest generals fallen on the field of honor. Our dear Marguerite will not have the fortune stolen from her by that man, but I have assured her fortune—and yours. You can enter with your acquired rank into the Emperor's household unless—"

Josephine did not complete the sentence but Fontenay divined the thought suddenly striking her. She had thought of the impending divorce and foresaw that, if this misfortune alighted on her, this son of her girlhood's friend would have to choose between Napoleon's brilliant staff, and the melancholy court of the repudiated Empress.

"While awaiting his return," she resumed, forcing a smile, "I attach you to my personal staff. One of my three grooms-in-waiting is absent, and you shall replace him. As my dear reader may provisionally retain her function by me, you can see her daily."

Marguerite was dying of desire to fling herself at her benefactress' feet to thank her, but Josephine rose. The audience was over. It had been prepared to give her the pleasure of witnessing the meeting of the lovers, whom she meant to unite. On arrival in Paris, Fontenay had found a note inviting him to be at three o'clock before the temple of Cupid in Malmaison Park, in full dress, and not to see anybody in the interim.

Fontenay had guessed all with the clear head of his race and took care not to misstate this imperial appointment or the caution, for he had not called even upon de Prégny. Tournesol had helped him don his handsome uniform, ornamented by the knight's cross of the Legion of Honor.

"You need not go upon duty until to-morrow," concluded Josephine. "You are free to-day. Tell M. de Prégny that Mlle de Gavre will soon bestyle Madame Paul Fontenay."

Deeply moved, the captain took leave, crossed the park, stepped into the post-chaise, waiting on the road, and was whirled to his friend's house.

CHAPTER XXXV.

FONTENAY'S ST. HELENA.

Orestes and Pylades were united, after more than once fearing they would never meet again.

Fontenay emptied his budget of news, as the familiar expression goes, and it came George's turn to do the same by retelling Parisian gossip. All had greatly changed since Paul's departure. The

season in society had been dull. No one was at the Tuileries, no one at St. Cloud, and the Empress came alone to Malmaison. And the Austrian campaign, victoriously terminated by Wagram, had opened with the murderous and indecisive battle of Essling. Napoleon remained six weeks on Labou Island before renewing the crossing of the Danube, successfully at last and during that long spell, the most ominous rumors had reigned in Paris. Malevolent news-mongers ran about proclaiming that the Emperor was a prisoner there with his army, and that the second war with Austria would end with disaster. To confirm the alarmists, letters from Vienna stated now that Napoleon was attacked by a mortal malady or an assassin. Whispers ran that however great a man he, his life hangs on a thread, and that the destiny of France was at the mercy of a dagger-stroke or a fit of fever.

The Empress could notice in her familiar symptoms of disquiet and disheartenment.

Fontenay did not foresee matters so blackly. He believed Napoleon invincible, and the future was rose-tinted since his interview with Josephine. The chatter of idle Parisians fell short of him. He inwardly considered that the auditor rated it too valuable, and he hardly listened.

He grew more attentive when his friend spoke of the likelihood of their patroness' disaster. George feared she deceived herself regarding the Emperor's intentions. In principle, the divorce was decided upon, and Napoleon's delay in returning sprang from his ambassador to Vienna, Tallyrand, arranging in concord with Prime Minister Metternich of the Austrian monarchy, the alliance of Napoleon with an arch-duchess. All would soon be concluded, and poor Josephine would have to yield her place to a foreigner. She was letting herself be lulled by sweet speech. The awakening would be dreadful, asserted George, who asked Paul what he would do on the day when he must choose between the powerful Emperor and the dethroned Empress.

Without hesitation the American replied:

"Neither my wife nor I will ever turn from one who has assured our happiness—one who was my mother's friend, and born where I drew breath."

"Then you will throw up your military prospects?"

"Without a pang. I have paid my debt to your Emperor and France. I have the right to retire into private happiness."

"That would be a pity, for you might be a general at an age when many vegetate in the inferior ranks in spite of fine records of service; yet I approve. Indeed, after such a year in Spain, you ought to be sick of fighting."

"No, indeed! and I will astonish you by confessing that I long yet for the life of perils. Once having tasted it, it is hard to shake it off."

"Your wife will convert you to wiser ideas," returned the other, laughing.

"I can understand your fondness for warfare. In the new world you are born strugglers with man or nature, and if you had not entered the army, you would have developed into a duelist—in token of which, remember your affair with that commandant; it was without common sense, and it is lucky it turned out so well. What I cannot understand is your sorrowing for a land where the people fight with knives and kill prisoners in cold blood."

"Suppose I tell you that while I hate the Spaniards, I consider them heroic—"

"Because they valiantly defended Saragossa? I do not dispute that, but their abominable cruelties spoil their heroism—cruelty is in their blood—perhaps coming from the Moors they torture soldiers captured alive and their own countrymen suspected of being friendly to the French, not even sparing women."

"I do not know of any fact in support of the reproach you cast on them."

"Well, I know of one at any rate which I found in the *Journal de l'Empire*, and likely to interest you as it took place in Teruel, where you went through such terrible adventures. Listen to my reading the paragraph, which is not a long one."

The auditor took up from the table the time—no larger than a pocket handkerchief—and read aloud, with emphasis on several passages:

"Our troops forming the garrison of Teruel, a pretty town of Aragon, have just made a painful discovery which bears witness again to Spanish barbarism and fanaticism. In demolishing a house in the way of the defenses, our sappers found the entrance of a subterranean passage ending near the cloisters of San Pedro's church; in a cell, of which the door was fastened on the outside, lay the remains, partly gnawed away by rats, of a young and richly attired Spanish woman. Some towns-people identified her as the widow of a colonel killed at Saragossa in the Spanish service. From the inquest held upon the strange find, the certainty is acquired that the unhappy creature was inclosed here by her parents to die of hunger because she had befriended a French officer at the time of the riots."

"Well, said George, laying down the newspaper, "will you maintain that these people are not savages? What is the matter with you?" he proceeded, for no answer came. "Does the story impress you?"

I should have thought your stay in Spain has surfeited you with horrors."

"Not with those in which I am concerned—in spite of my wish," faltered the captain, deeply agitated.

"What do you mean? is the story true?"

"The only truth is the young lady's dreadful death."

"Do you know her then?"

"I spoke of her to you when I returned in April last. That is the widow I saw in Saragossa praying upon her husband's coffin."

"I remember; but I was not aware you had met her again in Teruel. What was she doing there?"

"She saved my life by warning me that the Spaniards were going to rise and massacre us."

"And that is why her tender parents doomed her to death?"

"No; that is not how things came about. Her father was stern with her; he proposed immuring her in a nunnery at Tortosa, not killing her—but he was himself killed and as he alone knew where she was temporarily incarcerated—"

"She remained there to die of hunger? I pity her."

"Pity me, too, for I shall never console myself for not having saved her. I went with our men to hunt for her, but we found no trace. I believed she had succeeded in getting out of the town, and I was almost instantly recalled to Saragossa by General Suchet."

"I can see that you were much interested in her!"

"Not as you seem to hint," retorted Fontenay testily.

"Yes, yes, I know that you loved, and love Mlle de Gavre, but—"

"The dead woman is her cousin—"

"Oh! how is that?"

"She is Count de Montalvan's only child."

"The thief! the regicide! Now I pity her less. Why, when you were just now relating the siege of Teruel, you said not a word of this episode?"

"Because I was not thinking any more about it. I believed Donna Inez saved, and did not worry as to what had become of her. I also said nothing to you about an infamous duenna who caused all this woe by betraying the Tio. Rumor came to Saragossa that the guerrilleros had shot her for it."

"For once they acted properly. I suppose you have no intention of mentioning this Donna Inez to the future Madame Fontenay."

"No; and I enjoin you not to name her."

"I should have taken care. However perfect girls are, they do not like others of their sex praised for beauty by their intended. Besides, where's the good? her fortune is squandered, and the scoundrel who despoiled her has been punished. I do not see that anybody but Fouché would take any interest in the story of that bandit's end."

"I am not going to tell him."

"I see—you bear him a grudge. Well, I can assure you that he has reversed his opinion about you, for he sings your praise in town and at the court."

"I am exceedingly obliged to you," said Fontenay disdainfully. "At changing opinions, Fouché is a practiced hand. Was he not Robespierre's friend and accomplice?"

"Before he was Napoleon's minister," observed Prégny. "He would also be minister of King Louis XVIII, if ever royalty is restored to France on behalf of the Bourbons. But I do not want to talk to you of the transformations of this chameleon. I merely wish to inform you of his disposition toward you. You had better have him for friend than foe. I do not know whether I ought not to add that in this veering round of the weather-cock I see an evil portent for our beloved mistress' future. He endeavored to ruin you because she protected you. If he lays down his arms, it is because he fears her no more. He must know from a certain source that the divorce is settled upon."

"It will never be eradicated from my mind that this man betrays the Emperor, and willingly allowed the assassin Montalvan to escape. At Teruel, I heard this Montalvan boast that he had allies in the very circle of Napoleon's friends."

"No doubt he lied, although Fouché's behavior was as strange that time as in the affair of the infernal machine. He was hand and glove with people who knew the culprits and yet he did not denounce them. He was surrounded by Chouan leaders who served him as spies, and not to be suspected of complicity with them, he had one shot from time to time. But you have nothing more to fear from this personage. We have talked quite enough about him. Let us go out for a stroll on the Feuillant's terrace, for it is the hour when it is fashionable to show oneself. We may meet friends whom you can acquaint with your marriage; it should be the news of the day, to-morrow."

"Why do you counsel me to make such haste?"

"In virtue of the principle that you should strike the iron while hot. I know that your fiancée will not revolve—or the Empress; but the Emperor might change his opinion, though scarcely would he dare to oppose a marriage proclaimed by a flourish of trumpets, or what amounts to the same thing, by all the idlers of Paris."

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