

FONTENAY, THE SWORDSMAN.

CHAPTER III.—Continued.

"It is agreed. The puzzle is: will you get my letters? The couriers are often done to death on the highways, even those coming from the Emperor's headquarters. However, I will profit by all occasions to give you news—on condition that you do the like."

"News of me and a lady you are interested in; I formally pledge myself, and I am ready to serve you here if the case arises."

"Thank you, George! We are now friends for life. I shall see you to-morrow, after the Empress' reception of me, shall I not?"

"We will have dinner together in Paris and on the day after to-morrow I will help you into your post-chaise, since you are going to travel like a senator of our empire. For the present, let us go indoors, if you believe I can talk sensibly. Your cheek is no longer bleeding; but you are not presentable. I will take you to the surgeon on duty and it will not show a scar in three or four days."

"I should not be vexed if there remained a pretty scar."

"Heaven forbid, my friend! The Emperor would inquire in what action you were wounded, and you would be mightily embarrassed to reply. I should not advise you to tell him the truth. On the other hand," added the state council auditor, "I recommend your getting it dressed as soon as possible on our arrival at the chateau."

While chatting, the young gentlemen had made good their way. The road was not the same as the Empress and her escort had followed, but they reached the skirt of the wood and they saw them afar, entering the residence; its windows were already lighted up, as night had completely fallen.

Rueil church bell sounded the *Angelus*—the bell to which Bonaparte, when only first consul, liked to listen in the evening, and which he remembered at St. Helena. Those sweet and saddening notes had announced his future greatness. What did they foretell to Paul Fontenay on the eve of his departure for a war from which he was not sure of returning? The brave man's death in the front of the foe—or glory and conjugal happiness?

Our American was not inclined to brood study and yet he paused the better to hearken to the sounds, and his friend, who read his mind, allowed him to muse at this moment when his destiny was to be decided.

Fontenay thought of the adorable girl whom he loved, and perhaps would never behold again. He prayed to heaven for her, since he might not survive that war which would devour so many heroes, and for his death, if he might fall, to be honorable.

Suddenly the music came to him of "*Pastant pour la Lyrie!*" played by the life-guards' band in salute to the Empress returning into the palace.

Fontenay raised his head and his eyes flashed. He believed this call to the crusades was the response of heaven; that he might set out for Spain without fear or regret with it watching over him.

The die was cast. He must conquer or fall.

CHAPTER IV. A HOSTILE HOST.

"Tournesol!"

"Yes, lieutenant?"

"Is the flask empty?"

"No, lieutenant; there's enough for a drink or two."

"Pass it over. I want to warm myself."

Tournesol, the cavalry orderly, spurred his charged and held out to his officer the water canteen unhooked from his saddle-bow.

"Only to think that those noodles in Paris fancy that Spain is a hot country," grumbled the lieutenant, after having drunk.

"An odd sort of hot country! where all the mountains are covered with snow in November—I never had an idea of that though there are grapevines, and comrades told me this morning that the cellar is full of wine in that tavern where our day's ride finishes—the one before us! From the distance, it does not look inviting, and it is my opinion that we shall not be better accommodated than at Lerma, where we slept last night."

These sentences were exchanged between Paul Fontenay and a trooper of the Thirtieth Cuirassiers, who served him as orderly, on a road bordered by poplars striped of leaves by the winter, a couple of hundred paces from the pretty town of Aranda de Duero, eighteen leagues from Burgos and twenty-five from Madrid.

Overwhelmed with the Empress' boons, our American gallant found two excellent horses at Bayonne, and an order for five hundred napoleons on the army paymaster, who paid him two hundred on account for his immediate necessities. Paul carried these in his belt, and he had recruited to serve him during the campaign, a tall Gascon, as dry as a match. He was Jean Tournesol, recently discharged from the military hospital, into which a kick from a horse had sent him.

Fontenay could only applaud himself

on the choice. Jean Tournesol was a well tested soldier and a "knowing" servant—one who can "see through the fog," a *de-brouillard*, as modern military slang expresses it. Furthermore, to endure him to the creole, he had not only gone on the cod-fishing cruises to Newfoundland but to the West Indies to sell the cured cargo, and he was thus able to speak with familiarity of scenes and places in the French colonies where Paul was born. Nothing put Tournesol in a quandary; he "clawed out of every squall," so to say, and though he did not speak Spanish in the least and understood it less, anyone would have thought he knew Spain thoroughly.

His flaw was to be too garrulous, but Fontenay was not sorry to converse with him a little to abridge the length of interminable rides through a deserted and desolated land.

As far as Burgos, the new second lieutenant had marched with the detachments going to join their corps. The Emperor had made a stay there, but he had gone on, and Fontenay, impatient to present himself, had determined to push on alone with his orderly.

The roads were not safe, but the passing army had left rear-guard posts in almost every village, and the enemy had fallen back upon Madrid to defend the pass in the mountains separating Old and New Castile.

Fontenay had no unpleasant meetings yet and had manfully supported abominable lodgings such as Lerma offered him on the night before this 28th of November.

He had never felt more blithe or readier for anything. He had treasured the memory of Marguerite de Gavre whom he had seen again on the eve of his departure and the hope sustained him. He was simply eager to confront the most serious dangers, see war, of which he knew solely the hardships, and distinguish himself under the great Napoleon's eyes. He was only a day's march from him, before Aranda and the foot of the Sierra, formidably entrenched, which he might attack on the morrow.

Fontenay shuddered at the idea of arriving too late. Day was declining when he reached the outermost houses in Aranda, a wretched hamlet in ruins which seemed to be abandoned by its inhabitants, for not one was to be seen in its dark and tortuous streets. None but tattered beggars roamed alongside the dilapidated dwellings. No doubt the rest were hiding in order to see nothing of the invaders.

Fontenay, who suspected as much from previous experiences, drew from his holster a *billet*, or order for lodging, issued to him at Lerma, and he set to deciphering, not without trouble, a long string of Spanish names:—

"Don Inigo de Barrameda, Marquez de Santa Cruz, y Tordesillas, y Pardilla, y Milagros—"

"There's a promise of ease," interjected Tournesol, who always would have his jest.

"Silence in the ranks!" commanded Fontenay, though laughing at the forced pun. "This nobleman with so many names lives in Vine Street or Wine Street—*calle de las Vinas*—as you please."

"Wine for me," said the orderly in an undertone, for he highly valued the wine of Aragon.

"We must find out this street."

Urging his horse up to one of the mendicants sunning himself in the last rays, he questioned him in good Spanish, though the accent might have been softened by his transatlantic origin and training. The man did not condescend to unlock his jaws, but pointed with one finger to a house as massive as a fortress, and a little less knocked to pieces than the others.

Fontenay tossed him a piece of money and rode his horse into the Vine Street, followed at the regulation distance by Jean Tournesol. They dismounted before the designated mansion, where the orderly held the horses while his master examined the front and the door; it had the appearance of a palace deserted by noble masters. The windows had no glass left, but the balconies retained their carvings, and above the portals an enormous stone escutcheon remained intact, surcharged with armorial bearings.

Fontenay rapped with the pommel of his sword. A grated wicket opened a little and a voice roughly asked: "What do you want? (*que quiere usted?*)" to which Fontenay answered by exhibiting his order for lodging.

The wicket banged shut, the bolts were drawn and the door partially opened to let a man show himself.

He was costumed like the Barber of Seville at the opera; velvet waistcoat and knee breeches, silk stockings and a handkerchief for skull cap on his head. He was going on sixty years of age, but he was as straight as the capital I, and he wore a lofty mein, notwithstanding his theatrical attire.

Without waiting for Fontenay to explain his errand, he beckoned him to follow into an immense room, furnished with a worm-eaten table and some rickety stools, after which he retired, mumbling the stereotyped speech used in Spain to imply that everything under that roof was at the visitor's disposal—"A la disposition de usted."

By prior experience Paul knew that he ought not take this polite phrase seriously

and he did not for a single instant doubt that it was equivalent in that discontented *hidalgos'* mouth to sending him among the foul fiends below.

Don Inigo de Barrameda—for it was he who had personally received him—naturally cursed the invader of his country and only submitted to the vanquishers' law under force and constraint. He left his guests to "fight out" the welcome with an old hag of repulsive uncomeliness half-servant, half-duenna, as thickly bearded as a man, and afflicted with a stumpy nose, studded with moles.

Tournesol, who had fastened the horses to rings set in the wall, came in and incontinently began to try taming this virago by speaking to her in that universal tongue of old sailors and campaigners, the *lingua Franca*. He wasted his learning. The beldame affected not to understand, and Fontenay was obliged to use pure Castilian to ask for supper to be cooked and the stables to be pointed out to his servant. She appeared very much surprised to hear one whom she took to be a "dog of a Frenchman" speak her tongue so correctly, but she only sulkily obeyed.

Tournesol was conducted by her under a shed where he could give the horses the feed he had luckily brought, for there was no hay in the rack or grain in the manger. The sullen witch shuffled back to the officer to announce that she would attend to his supper. She lighted a pitch candle in an iron socket and disappeared.

Fontenay did not pine for the society of the bearded beauty and went in search of his man. He found him grooming the steeds, which stood in great need of care and food, after nine hours' march on deeply rutted roads.

Tournesol had lost not a jot of his good temper, and he enlivened his superior with jokes upon the costume of Don Inigo, who seemed to have dressed himself as Figaro to greet the French guests. He had discovered a low room, furnished with fresh straw, where his lieutenant might sleep in case the ferocious noble should not offer a more suitable sleeping chamber.

Fontenay was in the mood to content himself with restricted hospitality, and as he was very hungry, he did honor to the *puchero* which the old woman served up to him in an earthen pot, to be eaten with a wooden spoon.

Satisfied and fatigued, he was talking about going to rest after the summary repast, on the litter which seemed all the bed he could expect, when he was greatly astonished to see the master of the house enter. He was followed by the duenna, carrying a bottle and two glasses which she set on the table.

Don Inigo seemed transfigured. His manner was almost winning, but Paul soon had the explanation of the miracle as the marquis said that, having learned from his housekeeper that his guest spoke his language, he felt bound to come and converse—further, to drink with him as became courteous enemies.

Fontenay was willing enough to learn what this typical Spaniard thought of events during the war and he warmly accepted the tardy but polite offer. He little foresaw the turn the unexpected dialogue would take.

Don Inigo de Barramedas, after taking a place at the table, facing his guest, gravely filled both glasses and tossing off his at a draught, said, in his own tongue:

"Senor Frenchman, I drink first to prove to you that this old wine made on my own estate, is not poisoned, as you might have believed."

"The thought is one that never came to me," protested Fontenay, drinking in his turn, without leaving a drop of this nectar poured out by an enemy's hands.

"I am obliged to you for not suspecting me. I hate the invaders of my country, but I wish to wage only a fair war upon them."

"I believe you, my lord marquis."

"How do you know that I am a marquis?" brusquely inquired the host.

"On my warrant is written Marquez de Santa Cruz. I am not a nobleman myself, but plain Paul Fontenay."

"But you are not a Frenchman."

"I came from the French West Indies, Martinique."

"Is not that the island where your Empress was born?"

"The same. I am her fellow countryman, and it is by reason of her patronage that I am going to join the French army as an officer attached to the Emperor Napoleon's household."

A silence ensued. Don Inigo seemed to hesitate about putting another question trembling on his lips.

"Napoleon left Aranda yesterday, I believe!" resumed Fontenay.

"He passed here two days ago and should arrive this evening at Somo Sierra—where he is waited for."

"By the Spanish?" They will make a stand this time, I suppose and the encounter will be a hot one. I shall try to be in it."

"I wish you to come out of it, but I hope your army will be destroyed."

This double wish, so bluntly expressed, made the young officer smile, and he observed with more curiosity the strange man who, while hobnobbing with a French soldier, proclaimed his desire for all the other French to be annihilated.

"You are looking at my dress," smilingly inquired Don Inigo. "I have not always worn it, but I shall not cast it off

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