

**Fontenay, the Swordsman.**  
(Continued from page 1.)

"I will tell you. He solicited me to act as a spy. I declared that I would not be a police lack, and thereupon—"

"Well, he had you followed when you left his office. One of the two spies he set on you was killed by the man who wounded you; the other has stated that at the time of your coming out of a Palais Royal gaming house he separated from his mate to study a person whom you were trying to join—that he lost sight of him under the wooden galleries, but swears he is the same who, a little later and after a change of dress, was waiting for the Emperor in the Rue Saint Nicaise to stab him."

"But he stabbed only me and a spy of Fouché's. Do they dare to accuse me of being his accomplice?"

"Not openly; but Fouché asserts that your conduct is inexplicable. He says he has the proof that this blundering assassin is the burglar of la Malmaison—the occult chief of the Spanish rising—Mlle de Gavre's next of kin. He censures you for letting him escape at Bayonne, and not having him arrested when you caught him in the gaming saloon. In short, he has omitted nothing to injure you, but I believe he mainly seeks to ruin our kind Empress. All means are good for him to attain his end—Napoleon's resolve to be divorced. If she were not interested in you he would leave you in repose, while, as it is, you must expect to be watched, dogged, slandered—"

"Am I already defamed, in the Emperor's mind?"

"No; he has not forgotten that you exposed your life to save his—and he will never forget it."

"But still he distrusts me," bitterly replied Fontenay. "One day he will learn the truth, but it will be too late, and while awaiting justice to be done me, I have no course but to go back and be killed in Spain."

He was in inexpressible agitation. George felt that he had been too clumsy in telling of the danger without preparing him, and he hastened to soothe him.

"You always exaggerate a l'Américaine," he said, "and you take the situation much too tragically. It is certainly a pity that you have the Duke d'Otranto against you; but, I repeat, you have Napoleon for you. He knows what Fouché is and does not let anybody influence him. Yvan has told you that the Emperor has asked many times after you—a proof you are not in disgrace. The Emperor could do no more unless he came to see you—and you know that etiquette opposes that step—a sovereign must not call on a subject. Besides, between ourselves," added George smiling, "you are not the rooms in which to receive a crowned head!"

"Oh, I do not ask for so much! If I were only sure of remaining on the army roll—"

"Why not? you have not undeserved it; that I know. Your behavior in Spain was much remarked. The Emperor does not think of depriving himself of the services of a promising officer for the sole reason that this officer unfortunately displeases his police chief. You will miss the Austrian campaign this year. You will have many another occasion, for I fear that this war will not be our last. Therefore, distress yourself no more and let us speak of other matters."

"What is said in Paris about the new attempt in the Rue Saint Nicaise?"

"Nothing, because it is not known. There is no wish for the public to know that a man tried to assassinate the Emperor. Those in the secret, like Berthier, Yvan and I, received the order to keep silent."

"Good! but the police must have made a quest?"

"Managed very secretly, and to no end."

"Then this Montalvan, granting he is the man—"

"He has again vanished, and it is supposed he went back into Spain."

"Incredible! Where did he hide when in Paris?"

"It is perfectly unknown. Fouché asserts that he had French accomplices who gave him harbor, which is possible enough. The Emperor has two kind of enemies: first, the Jacobins, who never forgave him for suppressing their Republic, and the Chouans, who want to put their king on the throne. Fouché starts on these bases to accuse everybody."

"But I come from America, where there are neither Jacobins or Chouans. The Empress has the same origin and knows it well?"

"So he takes care not to accuse you plainly. He only ventures insinuations which, I repeat to you, find no credence."

"I want to believe this, because you say so, but, if mud enough be thrown, some will stick."

"The chief thing is that those who love you will not believe it."

"Those?—you alone hold me dear."

"There are several others," retorted the auditor.

"Then the Empress Josephine—"

"She is indignant at the proceedings of Otranto and said so to the Emperor. Since you were wounded, not a day has passed without her sending for news of you. Yesterday I replied that you were out of danger and would soon be outdoors."

"Will she consent to receive me?"

"On her return, certainly."

"What return?"

"She is going off to-morrow morning with the Emperor."

"She is going!" sadly exclaimed the creole.

"To Strasburg, where she will stay until peace is signed."

"Alas, this is the last blow!"

George seemed to feel a wicked pleasure in seeing his friend shake and shiver without daring to put the question on his lips.

"Does she take her household, too?" finally inquired Paul.

"All. She will hold her court at Strasburg while the Emperor marches upon Vienna. She will receive visits from her daughter, the queen of Holland, with her children; her sister-in-law, the queen of Westphalia, and her cousin, the grand duchess of Baden. This will be the counterpart of the assemblage at Erfurt last year, except that it will be the gathering of all the queens—not of kings!"

"Will this be for long?"

"That is hard to foretell. The Empress who is very unwell, will go to take the waters at Plombières. She will not return to the capital before the end of the war."

Fontenay was silent; tears stood in his eyes—guessing why, George had pity upon him.

"What you wish to know is if Mlle de Gavre will be of the travelling party?" he smilingly said. "How else could it be? The Empress cannot do without her."

"Nor I!" muttered Paul.

"I am certain you will see her again—perhaps sooner than you think."

"Yet I cannot go after her to Strasburg! You have broken my heart. Why did you not begin by saying that she was going away?"

"Because I stated that I was going to proceed in order. I reserved the great news for the end."

"Say the bad news. This drives me to despair."

"You despair too quickly. In proof of that, I hasten to add, Mlle de Gavre is more fond of you than ever."

"You told me so—you wrote me so, in Spain; you repeated it on the day of my arrival here in town, and all I ask is to believe it, but I should be more sure if I could see her."

"So you might, at the Tuileries, if you had not been wounded. She was expecting you after I heralded you, but she was cruelly disappointed."

"But has she not had any idea of calling?"

"Here, on you! Oh, you free and unfettered Americans! in the first place, you forget that the surgeon forbade any visits. This one of hers would have so excited you that you would have died."

"During the first few days, perhaps, when I wavered between life and death, but since I have regained my strength—"

"A young French lady could not come here. You are a bachelor and your united ages is not forty years."

"Oh, you prudish French, I say! But I am her betrothed!"

"All the more reason for her not to compromise herself. I do not doubt that she has a keen desire to trample on conventional rules to see you, but she is not free, as she is under the Empress' guardianship; and the Empress would never allow her to commit such imprudence."

"She could dispense with her consent," persisted the West Indian.

"Come here in secret! You cannot think of it! it would be even worse."

"I do not understand anything about your conventional rules in France. What, here we two are, betrothed. At Chamartin you delivered to me on her behalf a keepsake which I have always worn on my heart from that day, and yet for fear of giving a foundation for the evil sayings of fools, she holds back from seeing me! If these are the regulations of the society where she lives, I do not understand her submitting to them. She need not come actually alone—"

"Very well! with whom, in that case? with her lady's maid?"

As Fontenay was silent, the Frenchman pursued:

"You are never going to suggest that the Empress should leave her palace in mask and mantle to accompany her reading lady to the Rue Saint Nicaise?"

"Let me tell you that, in Martinique, she has come to my mother's house more than once."

"When she was plain Mlle de Tascher. Now she is Empress of France, and no longer at liberty to follow the impulse of her heart. But I maintain that it has not altered. She is ever the good-hearted Josephine, and thinks of nothing but making people happy. She would be miserable if she caused pain even to a stranger, and for you and for Mlle de Gavre she entertains indubitable affection. Do not again accuse her of forgetting you; trust her to insure happiness to both of you, and—who can tell! time may soon show that she busies herself on your account."

While thus discoursing to cheer Paul, not so easily consoled, the auditor of the state council had risen from his chair and walked up and down. It was splendid weather, and he stopped to look for an instant into the street through the opened window.

"Will you see her this evening?" abruptly inquired Fontenay.

"I do not believe she is receiving this evening. The departure takes place in the early morning."

"Then you cannot ask what is to become of me. I shall not even know if the Emperor has placed me anywhere."

"I dare say you will be notified before his departure."

"Heaven grant it, for I would rather die than linger in all this uncertainty. But what are you hanging out of the window about? do you perceive a despatch-bearer with an order for me?"

"No, I am looking at your orderly, who stands sentry before your door. I set him there, with the order to allow nobody to intrude."

"Oh, make yourself easy! nobody will come. I am as deep in oblivion as though I had been killed at Somo Sierra, like the brave Pole who saved my life. He is better off than I! he is no longer in pain."

"My dear Paul," said the other gayly, "you have too had an opinion of men—and women. Those whom you doubt have no cause for self-reproach, and you will repent having misjudged them. You will acknowledge your wrong-doing before five minutes are over."

Upon this prediction, George closed the window.

"Understanding nothing of this enigmatical speech, the American wondered why he had been deprived of fresh air by the shutting of the sashes. But he had other cares than this to learn about, and he fell back into his meditation far from thoughtful. He was roused from it by the squeaking of the door on its uncoiled hinges, and he turned his head to see who entered, but solely under the impression that it was Tournesol whom George had beckoned to come upstairs. It was not Tournesol. It was a woman in hood and cloak, and she was followed by a taller one, also in hooded cloak.

He rose, stupor-stricken, in an attitude so respectful that it was a proclamation of the visitress' frank.

"The Empress!" he murmured, pale with emotion.

CHAPTER XXV.  
INSEPARABLE!

The captain dared not utter the name of Marguerite, although he had at the same time recognized her.

Josephine was a trifle thinner since he saw her at la Malmaison, but she was still entrancing; her young companion was, however, fairer and more winsome than ever.

Fontenay quickly forgot his friend's arguments so exhaustively demonstrating that a sovereign cannot enter the humble lodgings of a wounded officer, but not before perceiving that the language had been used to make him more highly value the imperial visit.

"I see," said Josephine, looking at the two gentlemen, "that M. de Prégny. He promised me not to warn you, my dear Paul, and he has kept his promise, for I mark how my visit surprises you."

"It overwhelms me with gladness and gratitude," muttered the West Indian, so agitated that he could hardly speak.

"You will see that I have not come alone," continued the Empress, taking Mlle de Gavre by the hand.

She put this trembling hand in the captain's, and this one trembled no less.

Had Napoleon been there, he would doubtless have scolded Josephine, but he would have been moved; all the more, perchance, from his seeing the time draw near when the necessity was imposed on him of parting from the companion of his glorious youth—the sweet and affectionate woman who had been his good angel.

"My not coming sooner," she said, "is due to Yvan's prohibition, but I was determined not to go away without seeing you; and as you had not obtained permission to go out, I decided to do what is forbidden you. There is some merit in it, for it was not easy, particularly this day. If you only knew the difficulty I have had in leaving the palace incognito! However, I have succeeded, but I have very little time to give you. If I am belated here, my absence will be remarked—perhaps it has been remarked by this, for I am persuaded that the odious Fouché set spies upon me. But I shall tell Napoleon at Strasburg all that is burdening my heart, and prove that this man is his evil genius."

Prégny was the only one who lent an attentive ear to Josephine's words. Hand in hand, Paul and Marguerite were no longer listening. Josephine perceived this and laughingly said:

"I forgot you were in love with each other and would be eager to learn what I had done for you. Well, your marriage is arranged. I spoke of it to the Emperor, who does not oppose it. He even promised to sign the contract, after the peace. His sole condition is that Paul shall not leave the army."

"Then he does not think of breaking my career?" blunderingly uttered Fontenay.

"What are you talking about? Who could have made you believe that he was dissatisfied with your services? He does not take you with him to-morrow because you are not yet fit to mount a horse. His staff is complete; the campaign will be short, and you cannot take part in it, but he does not intend you remaining idle. He has left orders concerning you at the war ministry's, and as soon as you are completely recovered from your wound,

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