

# SCARAMOUCHE

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#### SCARAMOUCHE

#### BOOK I: THE ROBE

### CHAPTER I

#### THE REPUBLICAN

He was born with a gift of laughter and a sense that the world was mad. And that was all his patrimony. His very paternity was

obscure, although the village of Gavrillac had long since dispelled the cloud of mystery that hung about it. Those simple Brittany folk were not so simple as to be deceived by a pretended relationship which did not even possess the virtue of originality. When a nobleman, for no apparent reason, announces himself the godfather of an infant fetched no man knew whence, and thereafter cares for the lad's rearing and education, the most unsophisticated of country folk perfectly understand the situation. And so the good people of Gavrillac permitted themselves no illusions on the score of the real relationship between Andre-Louis Moreau - as the lad had been named - and Quintin de Kercadiou, Lord of Gavrillac, who dwelt in the big grey house that dominated from its eminence the village clustering below.

Andre-Louis had learnt his letters at the village school, lodged the while with old Rabouillet, the attorney, who in the capacity of fiscal intendant, looked after the affairs of M. de Kercadiou. Thereafter, at the age of fifteen, he had been packed off to Paris, to the Lycee of Louis Le Grand, to study the law which he was now returned to practise in conjunction with Rabouillet. All this at the charges of his godfather, M. de Kercadiou, who by placing him once more under the tutelage of Rabouillet would seem thereby quite clearly to be making provision for his future.

Andre-Louis, on his side, had made the most of his opportunities. You behold him at the age of four-and-twenty stuffed with learning enough to produce an intellectual indigestion in an ordinary mind. Out of his zestful study of Man, from Thucydides to the Encyclopaedists, from Seneca to Rousseau, he had confirmed into an unassailable conviction his earliest conscious impressions of the general insanity of his own species. Nor can I discover that anything in his eventful life ever afterwards caused him to waver in that opinion.

In body he was a slight wisp of a fellow, scarcely above middle height, with a lean, astute countenance, prominent nose and

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cheek-bones, and with lank, black hair that reached almost to his shoulders. His mouth was long, thin-lipped, and humorous. He was only just redeemed from ugliness by the splendour of a pair of ever-questing, luminous eyes, so dark as to be almost black. Of the whimsical quality of his mind and his rare gift of graceful expression, his writings - unfortunately but too scanty - and particularly his Confessions, afford us very ample evidence. Of his gift of oratory he was hardly conscious yet, although he had already achieved a certain fame for it in the Literary Chamber of Rennes - one of those clubs by now ubiquitous in the land, in which the intellectual youth of France foregathered to study and discuss the new philosophies that were permeating social life. But the fame he had acquired there was hardly enviable. He was too impish, too caustic, too much disposed - so thought his colleagues - to ridicule their sublime theories for the regeneration of mankind. himself he protested that he merely held them up to the mirror of truth, and that it was not his fault if when reflected there they looked ridiculous.

All that he achieved by this was to exasperate; and his expulsion from a society grown mistrustful of him must already have followed but for his friend, Philippe de Vilmorin, a divinity student of Rennes, who, himself, was one of the most popular members of the

Literary Chamber.

Coming to Gavrillac on a November morning, laden with news of the political storms which were then gathering over France, Philippe found in that sleepy Breton village matter to quicken his already lively indignation. A peasant of Gavrillac, named Mabey, had been shot dead that morning in the woods of Meupont, across the river, by a gamekeeper of the Marquis de La Tour d'Azyr. The unfortunate fellow had been caught in the act of taking a pheasant from a snare, and the gamekeeper had acted under explicit orders from his master. Infuriated by an act of tyranny so absolute and merciless, M. de Vilmorin proposed to lay the matter before M. de Kercadiou. Mabey was a vassal of Gavrillac, and Vilmorin hoped to move the Lord of Gavrillac to demand at least some measure of reparation for the widow and the three orphans which that brutal deed had made. But because Andre-Louis was Philippe's dearest friend - indeed, his almost brother - the young seminarist sought him out in the first instance. He found him at breakfast alone in the long, low-ceilinged, white-panelled dining-room at Rabouillet's - the only home that Andre-Louis had ever known - and after embracing him, deafened him with his denunciation of M. de La Tour d'Azyr.

"I have heard of it already," said Andre-Louis.

"You speak as if the thing had not surprised you," his friend

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reproached him.

"Nothing beastly can surprise me when done by a beast. And La Tour d'Azyr is a beast, as all the world knows. The more fool Mabey for stealing his pheasants. He should have stolen somebody else's."

"Is that all you have to say about it?"

"What more is there to say? I've a practical mind, I hope."

"What more there is to say I propose to say to your godfather, M. de Kercadiou. I shall appeal to him for justice."

"Against M. de La Tour d'Azyr?" Andre-Louis raised his eyebrows.

"Why not?"

"My dear ingenuous Philippe, dog doesn't eat dog."

"You are unjust to your godfather. He is a humane man."

"Oh, as humane as you please. But this isn't a question of humanity. It's a question of game-laws."

M. de Vilmorin tossed his long arms to Heaven in disgust. He was a tall, slender young gentleman, a year or two younger than Andre-Louis. He was very soberly dressed in black, as became a seminarist, with white bands at wrists and throat and silver buckles to his shoes. His neatly clubbed brown hair was innocent of powder.

"You talk like a lawyer," he exploded.

"Naturally. But don't waste anger on me on that account. Tell me what you want me to do."

"I want you to come to M. de Kercadiou with me, and to use your influence to obtain justice. I suppose I am asking too much."

"My dear Philippe, I exist to serve you. I warn you that it is a futile quest; but give me leave to finish my breakfast, and I am at your orders."

M. de Vilmorin dropped into a winged armchair by the well-swept hearth, on which a piled-up fire of pine logs was burning cheerily. And whilst he waited now he gave his friend the latest news of the events in Rennes. Young, ardent, enthusiastic, and inspired by Utopian ideals, he passionately denounced the rebellious attitude

of the privileged.

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Andre-Louis, already fully aware of the trend of feeling in the ranks of an order in whose deliberations he took part as the representative of a nobleman, was not at all surprised by what he heard. M. de Vilmorin found it exasperating that his friend should apparently decline to share his own indignation.

"Don't you see what it means?" he cried. "The nobles, by disobeying the King, are striking at the very foundations of the throne. Don't they perceive that their very existence depends upon it; that if the throne falls over, it is they who stand nearest to it who will be crushed? Don't they see that?"

"Evidently not. They are just governing classes, and I never heard of governing classes that had eyes for anything but their own profit."

"That is our grievance. That is what we are going to change."

"You are going to abolish governing classes? An interesting experiment. I believe it was the original plan of creation, and it might have succeeded but for Cain."

"What we are going to do," said M. de Vilmorin, curbing his exasperation, "is to transfer the government to other hands."

"And you think that will make a difference?"

"I know it will."

"Ah! I take it that being now in minor orders, you already possess the confidence of the Almighty. He will have confided to you His intention of changing the pattern of mankind."

M. de Vilmorin's fine ascetic face grew overcast. "You are profane, Andre," he reproved his friend.

"I assure you that I am quite serious. To do what you imply would require nothing short of divine intervention. You must change man, not systems. Can you and our vapouring friends of the Literary Chamber of Rennes, or any other learned society of France, devise a system of government that has never yet been tried? Surely not.

And can they say of any system tried that it proved other than a failure in the end? My dear Philippe, the future is to be read with certainty only in the past. *Ab actu ad posse valet consecutio*. Man never changes. He is always greedy, always acquisitive, always vile. I am speaking of Man in the bulk."

"Do you pretend that it is impossible to ameliorate the lot of the people?" M. de Vilmorin challenged him.

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"When you say the people you mean, of course, the populace. Will you abolish it? That is the only way to ameliorate its lot, for as long as it remains populace its lot will be damnation."

"You argue, of course, for the side that employs you. That is natural, I suppose." M. de Vilmorin spoke between sorrow and indignation.

"On the contrary, I seek to argue with absolute detachment. Let us test these ideas of yours. To what form of government do you aspire? A republic, it is to be inferred from what you have said. Well, you have it already. France in reality is a republic to-day."

Philippe stared at him. "You are being paradoxical, I think. What of the King?"

"The King? All the world knows there has been no king in France since Louis XIV. There is an obese gentleman at Versailles who wears the crown, but the very news you bring shows for how little he really counts. It is the nobles and clergy who sit in the high

places, with the people of France harnessed under their feet, who are the real rulers. That is why I say that France is a republic; she is a republic built on the best pattern - the Roman pattern. Then, as now, there were great patrician families in luxury, preserving for themselves power and wealth, and what else is accounted worth possessing; and there was the populace crushed and groaning, sweating, bleeding, starving, and perishing in the Roman kennels. That was a republic; the mightiest we have seen."

Philippe strove with his impatience. "At least you will admit - you have, in fact, admitted it - that we could not be worse governed than we are?"

"That is not the point. The point is should we be better governed if we replaced the present ruling class by another? Without some guarantee of that I should be the last to lift a finger to effect a change. And what guarantees can you give? What is the class that aims at government? I will tell you. The bourgeoisie."

"What?"

"That startles you, eh? Truth is so often disconcerting. You hadn't thought of it? Well, think of it now. Look well into this Nantes manifesto. Who are the authors of it?"

"I can tell you who it was constrained the municipality of Nantes to send it to the King. Some ten thousand workmen - shipwrights, weavers, labourers, and artisans of every kind."

"Stimulated to it, driven to it, by their employers, the wealthy

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traders and shipowners of that city," Andre-Louis replied. "I have a habit of observing things at close quarters, which is why our colleagues of the Literary Chamber dislike me so cordially in debate. Where I delve they but skim. Behind those labourers and artisans of Nantes, counselling them, urging on these poor, stupid, ignorant toilers to shed their blood in pursuit of the will o' the wisp of freedom, are the sail-makers, the spinners, the ship-owners and the slave-traders. The slave-traders! The men who live and grow rich by a traffic in human flesh and blood in the colonies, are conducting at home a campaign in the sacred name of liberty! Don't you see that the whole movement is a movement of hucksters and traders and peddling vassals swollen by wealth into envy of the power that lies in birth alone? The money-changers in Paris who hold the bonds in the national debt, seeing the parlous financial condition of the State, tremble at the thought that it may lie in the power of a single man to cancel the debt by bankruptcy. To secure themselves they are burrowing underground to overthrow a state and build upon its ruins a new one in which they shall be the masters. And to accomplish this they inflame the people. Already in Dauphiny we have seen blood run like water - the blood of the populace, always the blood of the populace. Now in Brittany we may see the like. And if in the end the new ideas prevail? if the seigneurial rule is overthrown, what then? You will have exchanged an aristocracy for a plutocracy. Is that worth while? Do you think that under money-changers and slave-traders and men who have waxed rich in other ways by the ignoble arts of buying and selling, the lot of the people will be any better than under their priests and nobles? Has it ever occurred to you, Philippe, what it is that makes the rule of the nobles so intolerable? Acquisitiveness. Acquisitiveness is the curse of mankind. And shall you expect less acquisitiveness in men who have built themselves up by acquisitiveness? Oh, I am

ready to admit that the present government is execrable, unjust, tyrannical - what you will; but I beg you to look ahead, and to see that the government for which it is aimed at exchanging it may be infinitely worse."

Philippe sat thoughtful a moment. Then he returned to the attack.

"You do not speak of the abuses, the horrible, intolerable abuses of power under which we labour at present."

"Where there is power there will always be the abuse of it."

"Not if the tenure of power is dependent upon its equitable administration."

"The tenure of power is power. We cannot dictate to those who hold it."

"The people can - the people in its might."

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"Again I ask you, when you say the people do you mean the populace? You do. What power can the populace wield? It can run wild. It can burn and slay for a time. But enduring power it cannot wield, because power demands qualities which the populace does not possess, or it would not be populace. The inevitable, tragic corollary of civilization is populace. For the rest, abuses can be corrected by equity; and equity, if it is not found in the enlightened, is not to be found at all. M. Necker is to set about correcting abuses, and limiting privileges. That is decided. To that end the States General are to assemble."

"And a promising beginning we have made in Brittany, as Heaven hears me!" cried Philippe.

"Pooh! That is nothing. Naturally the nobles will not yield without a struggle. It is a futile and ridiculous struggle - but then... it is human nature, I suppose, to be futile and ridiculous."

M. de Vilmorin became witheringly sarcastic. "Probably you will also qualify the shooting of Mabey as futile and ridiculous. I should even be prepared to hear you argue in defence of the Marquis de La Tour d' Azyr that his gamekeeper was merciful in shooting Mabey, since the alternative would have been a life-sentence to the galleys."

Andre-Louis drank the remainder of his chocolate; set down his cup, and pushed back his chair, his breakfast done.

"I confess that I have not your big charity, my dear Philippe. I am touched by Mabey's fate. But, having conquered the shock of this news to my emotions, I do not forget that, after all, Mabey was thieving when he met his death."

M. de Vilmorin heaved himself up in his indignation.

"That is the point of view to be expected in one who is the assistant fiscal intendant of a nobleman, and the delegate of a nobleman to the States of Brittany."

"Philippe, is that just? You are angry with me!" he cried, in real solicitude.

"I am hurt," Vilmorin admitted. "I am deeply hurt by your attitude. And I am not alone in resenting your reactionary tendencies. Do you know that the Literary Chamber is seriously considering your expulsion?"

Andre-Louis shrugged. "That neither surprises nor troubles me."

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M. de Vilmorin swept on, passionately: "Sometimes I think that you have no heart. With you it is always the law, never equity. It occurs to me, Andre, that I was mistaken in coming to you. You are

not likely to be of assistance to me in my interview with M. de Kercadiou." He took up his hat, clearly with the intention of departing.

Andre-Louis sprang up and caught him by the arm.

"I vow," said he, "that this is the last time ever I shall consent to talk law or politics with you, Philippe. I love you too well to quarrel with you over other men's affairs."

"But I make them my own," Philippe insisted vehemently.

"Of course you do, and I love you for it. It is right that you should. You are to be a priest; and everybody's business is a priest's business. Whereas I am a lawyer - the fiscal intendant of a nobleman, as you say - and a lawyer's business is the business of his client. That is the difference between us. Nevertheless, you are not going to shake me off."

"But I tell you frankly, now that I come to think of it, that I should prefer you did not see M. de Kercadiou with me. Your duty to your client cannot be a help to me."

His wrath had passed; but his determination remained firm, based upon the reason he gave.

"Very well," said Andre-Louis. "It shall be as you please. But nothing shall prevent me at least from walking with you as far as the chateau, and waiting for you while you make your appeal to M. de Kercadiou."

And so they left the house good friends, for the sweetness of M. de Vilmorin's nature did not admit of rancour, and together they took their way up the steep main street of Gavrillac.

## CHAPTER II

### THE ARISTOCRAT

The sleepy village of Gavrillac, a half-league removed from the main road to Rennes, and therefore undisturbed by the world's traffic, lay in a curve of the River Meu, at the foot, and straggling halfway up the slope, of the shallow hill that was crowned by the squat manor.

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By the time Gavrillac had paid tribute to its seigneur - partly in money and partly in service - tithes to the Church, and imposts to the King, it was hard put to it to keep body and soul together with what remained. Yet, hard as conditions were in Gavrillac, they were not so hard as in many other parts of France, not half so hard, for instance, as with the wretched feudatories of the great Lord of La Tour d'Azyr, whose vast possessions were at one point separated from this little village by the waters of the Meu.

The Chateau de Gavrillac owed such seigneurial airs as might be claimed for it to its dominant position above the village rather than to any feature of its own. Built of granite, like all the rest of Gavrillac, though mellowed by some three centuries of existence, it was a squat, flat-fronted edifice of two stories, each lighted by four windows with external wooden shutters, and flanked at either end by two square towers or pavilions under extinguisher roofs. Standing well back in a garden, denuded now, but very pleasant in summer, and immediately fronted by a fine sweep of balustraded terrace, it looked, what indeed it was, and always had been, the residence of unpretentious folk who found more interest in husbandry than in adventure.

Quintin de Kercadiou, Lord of Gavrillac - Seigneur de Gavrillac was all the vague title that he bore, as his forefathers had borne before

him, derived no man knew whence or how - confirmed the impression that his house conveyed. Rude as the granite itself, he had never sought the experience of courts, had not even taken service in the armies of his King. He left it to his younger brother, Etienne, to represent the family in those exalted spheres. His own interests from earliest years had been centred in his woods and pastures. He hunted, and he cultivated his acres, and superficially he appeared to be little better than any of his rustic metayers. He kept no state, or at least no state commensurate with his position or with the tastes of his niece Aline de Kercadiou. Aline, having spent some two years in the court atmosphere of Versailles under the aegis of her uncle Etienne, had ideas very different from those of her uncle Quintin of what was befitting seigneurial dignity. But though this only child of a third Kercadiou had exercised, ever since she was left an orphan at the early age of four, a tyrannical rule over the Lord of Gavrilac, who had been father and mother to her, she had never yet succeeded in beating down his stubbornness on that score. She did not yet despair - persistence being a dominant note in her character - although she had been assiduously and fruitlessly at work since her return from the great world of Versailles some three months ago.

She was walking on the terrace when Andre-Louis and M. de Vilmorin arrived. Her slight body was wrapped against the chill air in a white pelisse; her head was encased in a close-fitting bonnet, edged with white fur. It was caught tight in a knot of pale-blue ribbon

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on the right of her chin; on the left a long ringlet of corn-coloured hair had been permitted to escape. The keen air had whipped so much of her cheeks as was presented to it, and seemed to have added sparkle to eyes that were of darkest blue.

Andre-Louis and M. de Vilmorin had been known to her from childhood. The three had been playmates once, and Andre-Louis - in view of his spiritual relationship with her uncle - she called her cousin. The cousinly relations had persisted between these two long after Philippe de Vilmorin had outgrown the earlier intimacy, and had become to her Monsieur de Vilmorin.

She waved her hand to them in greeting as they advanced, and stood - an entrancing picture, and fully conscious of it - to await them at the end of the terrace nearest the short avenue by which they approached.

"If you come to see monsieur my uncle, you come inopportunely, messieurs," she told them, a certain feverishness in her air. "He is closely - oh, so very closely - engaged."

"We will wait, mademoiselle," said M. de Vilmorin, bowing gallantly over the hand she extended to him. "Indeed, who would haste to the uncle that may tarry a moment with the niece?"

"M. l'abbe," she teased him, "when you are in orders I shall take you for my confessor. You have so ready and sympathetic an understanding."

"But no curiosity," said Andre-Louis. "You haven't thought of that."

"I wonder what you mean, Cousin Andre."

"Well you may," laughed Philippe. "For no one ever knows." And then, his glance straying across the terrace settled upon a carriage that was drawn up before the door of the chateau. It was a vehicle such as was often to be seen in the streets of a great city, but rarely in the country. It was a beautifully sprung two-horse



cabriolet of walnut, with a varnish upon it like a sheet of glass and little pastoral scenes exquisitely painted on the panels of the door. It was built to carry two persons, with a box in front for the coachman, and a stand behind for the footman. This stand was empty, but the footman paced before the door, and as he emerged now from behind the vehicle into the range of M. de Vilmorin's vision, he displayed the resplendent blue-and-gold livery of the Marquis de La Tour d'Azyr.

"Why!" he exclaimed. "Is it M. de La Tour d'Azyr who is with your uncle?"

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"It is, monsieur," said she, a world of mystery in voice and eyes, of which M. de Vilmorin observed nothing.

"Ah, pardon!" he bowed low, hat in hand. "Serviteur, mademoiselle," and he turned to depart towards the house.

"Shall I come with you, Philippe?" Andre-Louis called after him.

"It would be ungallant to assume that you would prefer it," said M. de Vilmorin, with a glance at mademoiselle. "Nor do I think it would serve. If you will wait... "

M. de Vilmorin strode off. Mademoiselle, after a moment's blank pause, laughed ripplingly. "Now where is he going in such a hurry?" "To see M. de La Tour d'Azyr as well as your uncle, I should say." "But he cannot. They cannot see him. Did I not say that they are very closely engaged? You don't ask me why, Andre" There was an arch mysteriousness about her, a latent something that may have been elation or amusement, or perhaps both. Andre-Louis could not determine it.

"Since obviously you are all eagerness to tell, why should I ask?" quoth he.

"If you are caustic I shall not tell you even if you ask. Oh, yes, I will. It will teach you to treat me with the respect that is my due."

"I hope I shall never fail in that."

"Less than ever when you learn that I am very closely concerned in the visit of M. de La Tour d'Azyr. I am the object of this visit." And she looked at him with sparkling eyes and lips parted in laughter.

"The rest, you would seem to imply, is obvious. But I am a dolt, if you please; for it is not obvious to me."

"Why, stupid, he comes to ask my hand in marriage."

"Good God!" said Andre-Louis, and stared at her, chapfallen.

She drew back from him a little with a frown and an upward tilt of her chin. "It surprises you?"

"It disgusts me," said he, bluntly. "In fact, I don't believe it. You are amusing yourself with me."

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For a moment she put aside her visible annoyance to remove his doubts. "I am quite serious, monsieur. There came a formal letter to my uncle this morning from M. de La Tour d'Azyr, announcing the visit and its object. I will not say that it did not surprise us a little..

"Oh, I see," cried Andre-Louis, in relief. "I understand. For a moment I had almost feared..." He broke off, looked at her, and shrugged.

"Why do you stop? You had almost feared that Versailles had been wasted upon me. That I should permit the court-ship of me to be

conducted like that of any village wench. It was stupid of you. I am being sought in proper form, at my uncle's hands."

"Is his consent, then, all that matters, according to Versailles?"

"What else?"

"There is your own."

She laughed. "I am a dutiful niece... when it suits me."

"And will it suit you to be dutiful if your uncle accepts this monstrous proposal?"

"Monstrous!" She bridled. "And why monstrous, if you please?"

"For a score of reasons," he answered irritably.

"Give me one," she challenged him.

"He is twice your age."

"Hardly so much," said she.

"He is forty-five, at least."

"But he looks no more than thirty. He is very handsome - so much you will admit; nor will you deny that he is very wealthy and very powerful; the greatest nobleman in Brittany. He will make me a great lady."

"God made you that, Aline."

"Come, that's better. Sometimes you can almost be polite." And she moved along the terrace, Andre-Louis pacing beside her.

"I can be more than that to show reason why you should not let this beast befoul the beautiful thing that God has made."

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She frowned, and her lips tightened. "You are speaking of my future husband," she reproved him.

His lips tightened too; his pale face grew paler.

"And is it so? It is settled, then? Your uncle is to agree? You are to be sold thus, lovelessly, into bondage to a man you do not know. I had dreamed of better things for you, Aline."

"Better than to be Marquise de La Tour d'Azyr?"

He made a gesture of exasperation. "Are men and women nothing more than names? Do the souls of them count for nothing? Is there no joy in life, no happiness, that wealth and pleasure and empty, high-sounding titles are to be its only aims? I had set you high - so high, Aline - a thing scarce earthly. There is joy in your heart, intelligence in your mind; and, as I thought, the vision that pierces husks and shams to claim the core of reality for its own. Yet you will surrender all for a parcel of make-believe. You will sell your soul and your body to be Marquise de La Tour d'Azyr."

"You are indelicate," said she, and though she frowned her eyes laughed. "And you go headlong to conclusions. My uncle will not consent to more than to allow my consent to be sought. We understand each other, my uncle and I. I am not to be bartered like a turnip."

He stood still to face her, his eyes glowing, a flush creeping into his pale cheeks.

"You have been torturing me to amuse yourself!" he cried. "Ah, well, I forgive you out of my relief."

"Again you go too fast, Cousin Andre I have permitted my uncle to consent that M. le Marquis shall make his court to me. I like the look of the gentleman. I am flattered by his preference when I consider his eminence. It is an eminence that I may find it desirable to share. M. le Marquis does not look as if he were a dullard. It should be interesting to be wooed by him. It may be more interesting still to marry him, and I think, when all is considered, that I shall probably - very probably - decide to do so."

He looked at her, looked at the sweet, challenging loveliness of that childlike face so tightly framed in the oval of white fur, and all the life seemed to go out of his own countenance.

"God help you, Aline!" he groaned.

She stamped her foot. He was really very exasperating, and something presumptuous too, she thought.

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"You are insolent, monsieur."

"It is never insolent to pray, Aline. And I did no more than pray, as I shall continue to do. You'll need my prayers, I think."

"You are insufferable!" She was growing angry, as he saw by the deepening frown, the heightened colour.

"That is because I suffer. Oh, Aline, little cousin, think well of what you do; think well of the realities you will be bartering for these shams - the realities that you will never know, because these cursed shams will block your way to them. When M. de La Tour d'Azyr comes to make his court, study him well; consult your fine instincts; leave your own noble nature free to judge this animal by its intuitions. Consider that..."

"I consider, monsieur, that you presume upon the kindness I have always shown you. You abuse the position of toleration in which you stand. Who are you? What are you, that you should have the insolence to take this tone with me?"

He bowed, instantly his cold, detached self again, and resumed the mockery that was his natural habit.

"My congratulations, mademoiselle, upon the readiness with which you begin to adapt yourself to the great role you are to play."

"Do you adapt yourself also, monsieur," she retorted angrily, and turned her shoulder to him.

"To be as the dust beneath the haughty feet of Madame la Marquise. I hope I shall know my place in future."

The phrase arrested her. She turned to him again, and he perceived that her eyes were shining now suspiciously. In an instant the mockery in him was quenched in contrition.

"Lord, what a beast I am, Aline!" he cried, as he advanced.

"Forgive me if you can."

Almost had she turned to sue forgiveness from him. But his contrition removed the need.

"I'll try," said she, "provided that you undertake not to offend again."

"But I shall," said he. "I am like that. I will fight to save you, from yourself if need be, whether you forgive me or not."

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They were standing so, confronting each other a little breathlessly, a little defiantly, when the others issued from the porch.

First came the Marquis of La Tour d'Azyr, Count of Solz, Knight of the Orders of the Holy Ghost and Saint Louis, and Brigadier in the armies of the King. He was a tall, graceful man, upright and soldierly of carriage, with his head disdainfully set upon his shoulders. He was magnificently dressed in a full-skirted coat of mulberry velvet that was laced with gold. His waistcoat, of velvet too, was of a golden apricot colour; his breeches and stockings were of black silk, and his lacquered, red-heeled shoes were buckled in diamonds. His powdered hair was tied behind in a broad ribbon of watered silk; he carried a little three-cornered hat under his arm, and a gold-hilted slender dress-sword hung at his side.

Considering him now in complete detachment, observing the magnificence of him, the elegance of his movements, the great air, blending in so extraordinary a manner disdain and graciousness, Andre-Louis trembled for Aline. Here was a practised, irresistible wooer, whose bonnes fortunes were become a by-word, a man who had hitherto been the despair of dowagers with marriageable daughters, and the desolation of husbands with attractive wives.

He was immediately followed by M. de Kercadiou, in completest contrast. On legs of the shortest, the Lord of Gavrilac carried a body that at forty-five was beginning to incline to corpulence and an enormous head containing an indifferent allotment of intelligence. His countenance was pink and blotchy, liberally branded by the smallpox which had almost extinguished him in youth. In dress he was careless to the point of untidiness, and to this and to the fact that he had never married - disregarding the first duty of a gentleman to provide himself with an heir - he owed the character of misogynist attributed to him by the countryside.

After M. de Kercadiou came M. de Vilmorin, very pale and self-contained, with tight lips and an overcast brow.

To meet them, there stepped from the carriage a very elegant young gentleman, the Chevalier de Chabrilane, M. de La Tour d'Azyr's cousin, who whilst awaiting his return had watched with considerable interest - his own presence unsuspected - the perambulations of Andre-Louis and mademoiselle.

Perceiving Aline, M. de La Tour d'Azyr detached himself from the others, and lengthening his stride came straight across the terrace to her.

To Andre-Louis the Marquis inclined his head with that mixture of courtliness and condescension which he used. Socially, the young lawyer stood in a curious position. By virtue of the theory of his

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birth, he ranked neither as noble nor as simple, but stood somewhere between the two classes, and whilst claimed by neither he was used familiarly by both. Coldly now he returned M. de La Tour d'Azyr's greeting, and discreetly removed himself to go and join his friend.

The Marquis took the hand that mademoiselle extended to him, and bowing over it, bore it to his lips.

"Mademoiselle," he said, looking into the blue depths of her eyes, that met his gaze smiling and untroubled, "monsieur your uncle does me the honour to permit that I pay my homage to you. Will you, mademoiselle, do me the honour to receive me when I come to-morrow? I shall have something of great importance for your ear."

"Of importance, M. le Marquis? You almost frighten me." But there was no fear on the serene little face in its furred hood. It was not for nothing that she had graduated in the Versailles school of artificialities.

"That," said he, "is very far from my design."

"But of importance to yourself, monsieur, or to me?"

"To us both, I hope," he answered her, a world of meaning in his fine, ardent eyes.

"You whet my curiosity, monsieur; and, of course, I am a dutiful niece. It follows that I shall be honoured to receive you."

"Not honoured, mademoiselle; you will confer the honour. To-morrow at this hour, then, I shall have the felicity to wait upon you."

He bowed again; and again he bore her fingers to his lips, what time she curtsied. Thereupon, with no more than this formal breaking of

the ice, they parted.

She was a little breathless now, a little dazzled by the beauty of the man, his princely air, and the confidence of power he seemed to radiate. Involuntarily almost, she contrasted him with his critic - the lean and impudent Andre-Louis in his plain brown coat and steel-buckled shoes - and she felt guilty of an unpardonable offence in having permitted even one word of that presumptuous criticism. To-morrow M. le Marquis would come to offer her a great position, a great rank. And already she had derogated from the increase of dignity accruing to her from his very intention to translate her to so great an eminence. Not again would she suffer it; not again would she be so weak and childish as to permit Andre-Louis to utter his ribald comments upon a man by comparison with whom he was no better than a lackey.

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Thus argued vanity and ambition with her better self and to her vast annoyance her better self would not admit entire conviction. Meanwhile, M. de La Tour d'Azyr was climbing into his carriage. He had spoken a word of farewell to M. de Kercadiou, and he had also had a word for M. de Vilmorin in reply to which M. de Vilmorin had bowed in assenting silence. The carriage rolled away, the powdered footman in blue-and-gold very stiff behind it, M. de La Tour d'Azyr bowing to mademoiselle, who waved to him in answer.

Then M. de Vilmorin put his arm through that of Andre Louis, and said to him, "Come, Andre."

"But you'll stay to dine, both of you!" cried the hospitable Lord of Gavrilac. "We'll drink a certain toast," he added, winking an eye that strayed towards mademoiselle, who was approaching. He had no subtleties, good soul that he was.

M. de Vilmorin deplored an appointment that prevented him doing himself the honour. He was very stiff and formal.

"And you, Andre?"

"I? Oh, I share the appointment, godfather," he lied, "and I have a superstition against toasts." He had no wish to remain. He was angry with Aline for her smiling reception of M. de La Tour d'Azyr and the sordid bargain he saw her set on making. He was suffering from the loss of an illusion.

## CHAPTER III

### THE ELOQUENCE OF M. DE VILMORIN

As they walked down the hill together, it was now M. de Vilmorin who was silent and preoccupied, Andre-Louis who was talkative. He had chosen Woman as a subject for his present discourse. He claimed - quite unjustifiably - to have discovered Woman that morning; and the things he had to say of the sex were unflattering, and occasionally almost gross. M. de Vilmorin, having ascertained the subject, did not listen. Singular though it may seem in a young French abbe of his day, M. de Vilmorin was not interested in Woman. Poor Philippe was in several ways exceptional. Opposite the Breton arme - the inn and posting-house at the entrance of the village of Gavrilac - M. de Vilmorin interrupted his companion just as he was soaring to the dizziest heights of caustic invective, and Andre-Louis, restored thereby to actualities, observed the carriage

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of M. de La Tour d'Azyr standing before the door of the hostelry.

"I don't believe you've been listening to me," said he.

"Had you been less interested in what you were saying, you might have observed it sooner and spared your breath. The fact is, you disappoint me, Andre. You seem to have forgotten what we went for. I have an appointment here with M. le Marquis. He desires to hear me further in the matter. Up there at Gavrillac I could accomplish nothing. The time was ill-chosen as it happened. But I have hopes of M. le Marquis."

"Hopes of what?"

"That he will make what reparation lies in his power. Provide for the widow and the orphans. Why else should he desire to hear me further?"

"Unusual condescension," said Andre-Louis, and quoted "Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes."

"Why?" asked Philippe.

"Let us go and discover - unless you consider that I shall be in the way."

Into a room on the right, rendered private to M. le Marquis for so long as he should elect to honour it, the young men were ushered by the host. A fire of logs was burning brightly at the room's far end, and by this sat now M. de La Tour d'Azyr and his cousin, the Chevalier de Chabrillane. Both rose as M. de Vilmorin came in. Andre-Louis following, paused to close the door.

"You oblige me by your prompt courtesy, M. de Vilmorin," said the Marquis, but in a tone so cold as to belie the politeness of his words. "A chair, I beg. Ah, Moreau?" The note was frigidly interrogative. "He accompanies you, monsieur?" he asked.

"If you please, M. le Marquis."

"Why not? Find yourself a seat, Moreau." He spoke over his shoulder as to a lackey.

"It is good of you, monsieur," said Philippe, "to have offered me this opportunity of continuing the subject that took me so fruitlessly, as it happens, to Gavrillac."

The Marquis crossed his legs, and held one of his fine hands to the blaze. He replied, without troubling to turn to the young man, who

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was slightly behind him.

"The goodness of my request we will leave out of question for the moment," said he, darkly, and M. de Chabrillane laughed. Andre-Louis thought him easily moved to mirth, and almost envied him the faculty.

"But I am grateful," Philippe insisted, "that you should condescend to hear me plead their cause.

The Marquis stared at him over his shoulder. "Whose cause?" quoth he.

"Why, the cause of the widow and orphans of this unfortunate Mabey."

The Marquis looked from Vilmorin to the Chevalier, and again the Chevalier laughed, slapping his leg this time.

"I think," said M. de La Tour d'Azyr, slowly, "that we are at cross-purposes. I asked you to come here because the Chateau de Gavrillac was hardly a suitable place in which to carry our discussion further, and because I hesitated to incommode you by suggesting that you should come all the way to Azyr. But my object is connected with certain expressions that you let fall up there. It is on the subject of those expressions, monsieur, that I would hear you further - if you will honour me."

Andre-Louis began to apprehend that there was something sinister in the air. He was a man of quick intuitions, quicker far than those of M. de Vilmorin, who evinced no more than a mild surprise.

"I am at a loss, monsieur," said he. "To what expressions does monsieur allude?"

"It seems, monsieur, that I must refresh your memory." The Marquis crossed his legs, and swung sideways on his chair, so that at last he directly faced M. de Vilmorin. "You spoke, monsieur - and however mistaken you may have been, you spoke very eloquently, too eloquently almost, it seemed to me - of the infamy of such a deed as the act of summary justice upon this thieving fellow Mabey, or whatever his name may be. Infamy was the precise word you used. You did not retract that word when I had the honour to inform you that it was by my orders that my gamekeeper Benet proceeded as he did."

"If," said M. de Vilmorin, "the deed was infamous, its infamy is not modified by the rank, however exalted, of the person responsible. Rather is it aggravated."

"Ah!" said M. le Marquis, and drew a gold snuffbox from his pocket.

"You say, 'if the deed was infamous,' monsieur. Am I to understand that you are no longer as convinced as you appeared to be of its  
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infamy?"

M. de Vilmorin's fine face wore a look of perplexity. He did not understand the drift of this.

"It occurs to me, M. le Marquis, in view of your readiness to assume responsibility, that you must believe justification for the deed which is not apparent to myself."

"That is better. That is distinctly better." The Marquis took snuff delicately, dusting the fragments from the fine lace at his throat. "You realize that with an imperfect understanding of these matters, not being yourself a landowner, you may have rushed to unjustifiable conclusions. That is indeed the case. May it be a warning to you, monsieur. When I tell you that for months past I have been annoyed by similar depredations, you will perhaps understand that it had become necessary to employ a deterrent sufficiently strong to put an end to them. Now that the risk is known, I do not think there will be any more prowling in my coverts. And there is more in it than that, M. de Vilmorin. It is not the poaching that annoys me so much as the contempt for my absolute and inviolable rights. There is, monsieur, as you cannot fail to have observed, an evil spirit of insubordination in the air, and there is one only way in which to meet it. To tolerate it, in however slight a degree, to show leniency, however leniently disposed, would entail having recourse to still harsher measures to-morrow. You understand me, I am sure, and you will also, I am sure, appreciate the condescension of what amounts to an explanation from me where I cannot admit that any explanations were due. If anything in what I have said is still obscure to you, I refer you to the game laws, which your lawyer friend there will expound for you at need."

With that the gentleman swung round again to face the fire. It appeared to convey the intimation that the interview was at an end. And yet this was not by any means the intimation that it conveyed to the watchful, puzzled, vaguely uneasy Andre-Louis. It was, thought he, a very curious, a very suspicious oration. It affected to explain, with a politeness of terms and a calculated insolence of tone; whilst in fact it could only serve to stimulate and goad a man of M. de Vilmorin's opinions. And that is precisely what it did. He rose.

"Are there in the world no laws but game laws?" he demanded, angrily.

"Have you never by any chance heard of the laws of humanity?"  
The Marquis sighed wearily. "What have I to do with the laws of humanity?" he wondered.

M. de Vilmorin looked at him a moment in speechless amazement.  
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"Nothing, M. le Marquis. That is - alas! - too obvious. I hope you will remember it in the hour when you may wish to appeal to those laws which you now deride."

M. de La Tour d'Azyr threw back his head sharply, his high-bred face imperious.

"Now what precisely shall that mean? It is not the first time to-day that you have made use of dark sayings that I could almost believe to veil the presumption of a threat."

"Not a threat, M. le Marquis - a warning. A warning that such deeds as these against God's creatures... Oh, you may sneer, monsieur, but they are God's creatures, even as you or I - neither more nor less, deeply though the reflection may wound your pride, In His eyes..."

"Of your charity, spare me a sermon, M. l'abbe!"

"You mock, monsieur. You laugh. Will you laugh, I wonder, when God presents His reckoning to you for the blood and plunder with which your hands are full?"

"Monsieur!" The word, sharp as the crack of a whip, was from M. de Chabrilane, who bounded to his feet. But instantly the Marquis repressed him.

"Sit down, Chevalier. You are interrupting M. l'abbe, and I should like to hear him further. He interests me profoundly."

In the background Andre-Louis, too, had risen, brought to his feet by alarm, by the evil that he saw written on the handsome face of M. de La Tour d'Azyr. He approached, and touched his friend upon the arm.

"Better be going, Philippe," said he.

But M. de Vilmorin, caught in the relentless grip of passions long repressed, was being hurried by them recklessly along.

"Oh, monsieur," said he, "consider what you are and what you will be. Consider how you and your kind live by abuses, and consider the harvest that abuses must ultimately bring."

"Revolutionist!" said M. le Marquis, contemptuously. "You have the effrontery to stand before my face and offer me this stinking cant of your modern so-called intellectuals!"

"Is it cant, monsieur? Do you think - do you believe in your soul - that it is cant? Is it cant that the feudal grip is on all things that live, crushing them like grapes in the press, to its

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own profit? Does it not exercise its rights upon the waters of the river, the fire that bakes the poor man's bread of grass and barley, on the wind that turns the mill? The peasant cannot take a step upon the road, cross a crazy bridge over a river, buy an ell of cloth in the village market, without meeting feudal rapacity, without being taxed in feudal dues. Is not that enough, M. le Marquis? Must you also demand his wretched life in payment for the least infringement of your sacred privileges, careless of what widows or orphans you dedicate to woe? Will naught content you but that your shadow must lie like a curse upon the land? And do you think in your pride that France, this Job among the nations, will suffer it forever?"

He paused as if for a reply. But none came. The Marquis considered



him, strangely silent, a half smile of disdain at the corners of his lips, an ominous hardness in his eyes.

Again Andre-Louis tugged at his friend's sleeve.

"Philippe."

Philippe shook him off, and plunged on, fanatically.

"Do you see nothing of the gathering clouds that herald the coming of the storm? You imagine, perhaps, that these States General summoned by M. Necker, and promised for next year, are to do nothing but devise fresh means of extortion to liquidate the bankruptcy of the State? You delude yourselves, as you shall find. The Third Estate, which you despise, will prove itself the preponderating force, and it will find a way to make an end of this canker of privilege that is devouring the vitals of this unfortunate country."

M. le Marquis shifted in his chair, and spoke at last.

"You have, monsieur," said he, "a very dangerous gift of eloquence.

And it is of yourself rather than of your subject. For after all, what do you offer me? A rechauffe of the dishes served to out-at-elbow enthusiasts in the provincial literary chambers, compounded of the effusions of your Voltaires and Jean-Jacques and such dirty-fingered scribblers. You have not among all your philosophers one with the wit to understand that we are an order consecrated by antiquity, that for our rights and privileges we have behind us the authority of centuries."

"Humanity, monsieur," Philippe replied, "is more ancient than nobility. Human rights are contemporary with man."

The Marquis laughed and shrugged.

"That is the answer I might have expected. It has the right note

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of cant that distinguishes the philosophers." And then M. de Chabrilane spoke.

"You go a long way round," he criticized his cousin, on a note of impatience.

"But I am getting there," he was answered. "I desired to make quite certain first."

"Faith, you should have no doubt by now."

"I have none." The Marquis rose, and turned again to M. de Vilmorin, who had understood nothing of that brief exchange. "M. l'abbe," said he once more, "you have a very dangerous gift of eloquence. I can conceive of men being swayed by it. Had you been born a gentleman, you would not so easily have acquired these false views that you express."

M. de Vilmorin stared blankly, uncomprehending.

"Had I been born a gentleman, do you say?" quoth he, in a slow, bewildered voice. "But I was born a gentleman. My race is as old, my blood as good as yours, monsieur."

¿From M. le Marquis there was a slight play of eyebrows, a vague, indulgent smile. His dark, liquid eyes looked squarely into the face of M. de Vilmorin.

"You have been deceived in that, I fear."

"Deceived?"

"Your sentiments betray the indiscretion of which madame your mother must have been guilty."

The brutally affronting words were sped beyond recall, and the lips that had uttered them, coldly, as if they had been the merest commonplace, remained calm and faintly sneering.

A dead silence followed. Andre-Louis' wits were numbed. He stood

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