

**THE DUKE'S DAUGHTER
AND
THE FUGITIVES**

VOL. III

**BY
MRS OLIPHANT**

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“Lady, you come hither to be married to this count?”

“I do.”

—*Much Ado about Nothing*.

THE FUGITIVES.

CHAPTER VI.

NEXT morning Latour was more cheerful than usual. The men who had come to inspect the woods were not indeed picturesque figures, nor of a very elevated class, but still they made the village street lively, which was delightful to Janey, and cheered Helen in spite of herself. Everything looks a little more cheerful, more comfortable, in the morning. The sun shone down the village street, catching here and there upon a little window in a thatched roof, upon the weather-cock on the tower of the *château*, and on the church spire—and shedding a ruddy glow, touched with frost, over all the country. The woods looked as if they had been crimsoned permanently by the red tint in the sunshine, so harmonious were their hues. The road was flecked by yellow bars looking like rays of gold; everything was mellow and warm in colour, notwithstanding the chill of coming winter in the air. Little groups of men took their way in a broken stream towards the woods. Some of them burly French farmers, of the better sort, with close-cropped heads, and overcoats of picturesque green-blue, that favoured tint which is “the fashion”; some in blouses, not so ambitious; with one or two wood merchants from the neighbouring towns, prim and well-shaven, in the frock-coat of respectability. There had been a great deal of drinking and bargaining in all the *cabarets* about, the evening before. The villagers had given their advice, especially those among them who were the least creditable members of society, the poachers of the *commune*, who knew every tree. Some of them, the idlest, the least satisfactory of all, to whom the loss of a day’s work was rather a pleasure than a misfortune, accompanied the intending purchasers to the woods.

“Keep up by the pond, monsieur,” said one of these fellows, attaching himself to Mr Goulburn. “There is some oak that might build ships of war——”

“The best trees are on the Côte du Midi,” said another. “If monsieur will confide himself to me——”

“I don’t mean to confide myself to any one, my good fellow,” Mr Goulburn said. He walked along a little in advance of the two, with an air alert and vigorous, restored by the new possibility of traffic.

Janey ran by her father’s side, clinging to his finger, and chattering all the way. “What are they saying, papa? They speak so funny. Why don’t they speak English? Couldn’t they speak English if they liked?”

Mr Goulburn was a man who liked to be popular. He was of the class which servants declare to be “not the least proud.” “My little girl thinks you could speak English if you liked,” he said, turning to Antoine, the most noted poacher in the district.

“Ah! je voudrais bien! I should then have the pleasure of talking to these demoiselles,” the man said, taking off his hat.

“I don’t like him,” said little Janey. “He has a big cut on his head; he has eyes like the ogre in ‘Jack the Giant-killer.’ What does he want with you, papa? He will take you into a cave, and he will eat you up. I like the other one best.”

The other was Baptiste, who was the son of the landlady at the Lion d’Or. It was he who advised the Côte du Midi. He knew all the coverts as well as the partridges did, or the old wolf that lurked in the darkest shades of the forest. And his woodland likings had

brought him woe; but he was bent upon defending *l'Anglais*, who was his private property for the moment, his mother's lodger, from the clutches of Antoine.

When they came as far as the *château*, Janey consented to give up her father's finger, and to withdraw from the procession of the wood merchants. The *château* was not one of those deserted grey houses they had passed on their way from Montdard, but a fine medieval building, surrounded by a moat, and modernised under Louis Quatorze. It occupied three sides of a square, and at the end nearest the village was distinguished by a noble tower, covered with a pointed roof, from the windows of which the lights always shone at night, like a sort of lighthouse to the village. Helen stopped to look at it with a little quickening of natural interest. There was nothing about it of the luxury of the English home. It stood close to the road, no privacy of exquisite lawns or wealthy foliage withdrawing it from the humblest of its neighbours, a poor little plot of shrubs occupying the centre of the square within the gravelled drive. The long row of large white windows, very close to each other, which ran round two sides of the square, were undraped and unornamented, not a curtain, not a piece of furniture, showing from the outside. The great door underneath them stood open, and showed only a narrow corridor, and a bare stone staircase, mounting between two white walls. Helen stood and looked at it wistfully. She scarcely seemed to remember her own past life—it was a life which had no sort of connection with the cottages of Latour, the women in their white caps, the strange existence of the Lion d'Or; but here there was a kind of link of connection. If there were girls in the *château*, theirs might be a French version of her old life. They would be in the neighbourhood, in the village, something like what she had been. If they but knew!

“But I hope,” she said to herself with a sigh, realising vividly the imagination that had presented itself to her, as if the fancied daughters of this house were certainly existing, “I hope that nothing will ever happen to *them*!” As the thought passed through her mind, the very creatures of her fancy appeared at the open door, two girls, she thought about her own age, though they were both older than Helen, dressed in the gloomy mourning of France, without an edge of white anywhere. They came out with a little clamour of talk, their voices louder than Helen was used to, though finely modulated and sweetly toned. Their French gave her that sense of giddiness, as if her head was turning round, which a new language imperfectly understood is apt to give. She went on, thinking it rude to stand and stare after they appeared; but the attraction was strong, and she turned when they had gone a few steps farther, to go back again, almost meeting the two girls as they came out of the gate. Their pleasant voices seemed to make a difference in the air. When they perceived her their lively talk broke off suddenly. Helen felt sure they were asking each other in undertones, “Who is that? Where has she come from? Do you think she looks nice?” though all in their French. She scarcely liked to look at them, but her heart beat; for they seemed to make a pause and consult each other. She wondered would they speak to her? It went to her heart when, after that consultation, they went on, though with a momentary hesitation. “They do not like the looks of us, Janey,” she said.

“Where are they doing to?” said Janey. “What are they thinking about? I wonder if there are any little children in that big funny castle. Little children are everywhere,” said the little girl mournfully, “but you can’t play with them. Helen, don’t you want to do home?”

“I don’t know; perhaps it would not be home now—not like what it used to be. But you are too little,” said Helen, with a sigh; “if I were to tell you, you wouldn’t understand.”

“I understand more better than you,” said Janey, promptly, “for papa tells me everything. I know,” she said, clapping her hands, “I am not to be called the old name any more. I am little Janey Harford. Papa told me so. It is because of naughty, wicked men. Is it not funny, Helen? And you are Helen Harford too. I sing it to myself, over and over, not to forget. Nursey wouldn’t know who we were, if she were to hear. We are all different people now. Dolly, that I put in my little bed is me, and I’m little Janey Harford.” The child made a little chant of it as she frisked along the road. “I’m little Janey Harford, I am little Janey Haar-ford!” It was a piece of delightful fun to Janey. What child can resist the pleasure of being not me, but somebody else? The spirit of an adventurer was in the little girl. She did not cling to the superstitions of propriety and an honest life as Helen did. The mystification charmed her. “It will not be you and me, but it will be two other girls,” Janey said. Perhaps the profound gravity of this new step was lessened to Helen also by its effect upon her little sister. “It is I who am silly,” poor Helen said to herself. She reminded herself how common it was for people to travel *incognito*. “That means out of their right name. The Queen does it!” Helen said suddenly to herself, with a sense of relief and consolation unspeakable. She knew that august lady could do no wrong.

They went back slowly through the village, following at a long interval the young ladies from the *château*, in whom Helen felt so great an interest, and who stopped to speak to M. le Curé, and turned round, plainly indicating to him the two figures in the distance. M. le Curé looked very closely at Helen and Janey when

he passed them a little afterwards. He was an active, spare, tall man, in his long black *soutane* and his three-cornered hat of fluffy beaver on his head. He let his eyes rest with a lingering look of pleasure and interest upon the child. Most likely he took Helen, who looked older than her eighteen years, for a young mother with her child, and the Curé knew how to win the hearts of parents. Now that all the intending purchasers had passed, there were very few people about. The cottages did not stand open, as at Fareham; here and there a woman washing her vegetables outside the door, or chopping her wood into small pieces, would break the monotony, but there was no lively coming and going of gossips and neighbours. At one of the two larger houses an old man had come out, and was standing at the door. He had a handkerchief tied round his head, and a long coat, half a dressing-gown, folded across his long legs, and was looking out with the keenest malignant eyes, as if in search of some one. The Curé passed this personage with a stiff nod, but the other only grinned in reply. He grinned also at the young strangers as they came along, and at a lady who suddenly appeared from the door of the other house, dressed in the simple morning dress, fitting the figure behind, but falling straight and loose in front, which is common in France. There was a little conversation between these two, in the high-pitched voices which made every word audible.

“Madame goes out early,” said the old man. “M. le Précepteur perhaps has gone to the forest to lay in wood for the winter?”

“No; Monsieur le Précepteur has his public duties to think of. Persons in the public service have not time to consider their own advantage,” said the lady.

“Ah, how right madame is! how fine is devotion to one’s country!” cried the old man, with a grin which divided his long face into two halves, shrivelling up both. He laughed when his neighbour had passed, and went on laughing sardonically under his breath. Then his eyes fell upon Helen and the child. “Tiens! des Anglaises,” he said.

Even Janey knew now that *des Anglaises* had something to do with her small self. She drew up her little person with conscious dignity, averting her head as she walked past.

“Bonjour, mes demoiselles,” he said, and straightway addressed the alarmed Helen in a speech which drove all idea of amusement out of her head, comical though his grimaces were. To be addressed in so much French bewildered the girl, especially as he seemed to be asking something of her which she could not fathom. “Belle appartement, beau jardin, pension si on le veut.”

What was it he was offering her? She blushed to the roots of her hair, and faltered in her English-French, “Pardonnez-moi, s’il vous plaît. Mon père n’est pas ici. Je ne sais pas. Mon père est——”

Helen’s words failed her. She pointed with much embarrassment along the road by which her father had gone.

“Ah! monsieur est là-bas? in the woods? Bien, bien, bien! I will wait for monsieur,” said the old man.

The girls quickened their steps as they got away from him.

“What does he want, Helen?” Janey said in great alarm.

“Oh, I think he wants us to lodge there,” said the elder sister, scarcely less uncomfortable.

The little girl looked up in her face with a dismayed and frightened countenance. “Are we doing to stay here—always?” little Janey said.

The question appalled them both, but the one knew as little as the other how to answer it. They went on softly in the sudden gloom which this idea spread round them. To drop suddenly from the skies from one new place into another, might be amusing enough for a little while; but to remain—always, as Janey said! Helen’s imagination was scarcely less young than her little sister’s. To-day and always were the only alternatives. They held each other fast by the hand, and walked along the village street, feeling a sudden dreariness steal over the whole scene. It had relapsed into its usual quiet, though there were ranges of tables outside the Lion d’Or, and the rival *auberge* on the other side of the street, to accommodate the thirsty visitors when they should return from the woods. In the distance the young ladies from the *château* were disappearing round the corner. The woman who had been washing her vegetables had also disappeared, but another had come out to help her who was chopping the wood. And the old man still stood at his door, peering up and down the village. It was strange to go on disturbing the silence, interrupting the sunshine, in a place so quiet; their steps seemed to send echoes through all the tranquil place.

“Is it always so quiet?” Helen asked timidly when they reached the Lion d’Or. The mistress of the house stood at the door, shading her eyes with her hand, and looking out for the return of the

expected purchasers. She was a buxom woman, in a white cap, with long, heavy ear-rings and bright eyes.

“Does mademoiselle think it so quiet?” she said. “Wait till they begin to come back. *Ma foi!* it is a crowd, a tumult. In half an hour we shall not know where to turn to find a seat that is unoccupied. Ah! the ‘*vente des bois*’ is a great day. There is nothing like it out of Paris. But in Paris it lasts continually, that is the difference. Mademoiselle has been in Paris?”

“Only for a day.”

“Aha! that is nothing at all. Paris cannot be seen in so little time. The English go too quickly, if you will pardon me for saying so. Paris! Figure to yourself that I was there, mademoiselle, effectively there, for all of a month. I know Paris at my fingers’ ends.”

“Are the young ladies very nice,” said Helen, hesitating—(she did not know how to say nice, that accommodating word. “*Les jeunes dames, sont-elles très-agréables*”—which, even to her English ear, did not sound right—was what she said)—“at the *château*?”

“*Comment?*—ah! you would say the demoiselles who passed just now. Yes, not amiss. We do not find fault with them,” said Madame Dupré, with a slight shrug of the shoulders; “but speaking of Paris, mademoiselle. Ah! if I could but have sent my Baptiste there, what a happiness! He might have been clerk in one of the best *magasins* on the Boulevard. But boys are obstinate beyond all things, beyond the very mules. He prefers his village, and the woods, and the *chasse*. He gives me a great deal of inquietude, my boy. Should he draw a bad number it will be an evil day for the

Lion d'Or. There is always that hanging over us. When a poor woman has several sons, instead of being a help to her it is but opening the gates to evil. She who has only one may keep him safe. And what does it matter, when they are helpless children, how many sons you have, mademoiselle? Till the *tirage* is over, I shall never know a day's ease. Sometimes I think it is better to have no children at all, as old M. Goudron says."

"Is that old M. Goudron?" said Helen, pointing to the old man who still stood at his door and watched, with his red and yellow handkerchief tied round his head.

"He is what we call a *richard*, mademoiselle, the most rich person in the village. He has so much that he thinks it is a crime to be poor; he thinks it is your fault, not circumstances. His poor little granddaughter lives with him in that big house, and he leads her a life! Fancy, mademoiselle, the poor girl loves my Baptiste! they have always had a fancy for each other; and if the old man would give her a *dot* as he promised, and Baptiste drew a good number—
—"

"What is a good number?" said Helen, in her ignorance. She did not know what it meant. That the young man's fate should depend on the very insignificant fact whether he drew five or fifty, was incomprehensible to Helen.

Madame Dupré on her side was equally incapable of understanding how any one could be ignorant on the subject of the conscription. It did not require a very strong inducement to make her talk. And she launched forthwith into an eloquent denunciation of the evils of the system. "A low number is a good number," she said; "but figure to yourself, mademoiselle, what will happen to me

if it comes otherwise. Either my Baptiste marched away to the life of the *caserne*,—such a life, such a life, *mon Dieu!* and though he is a good son, he is idle, I do not deny it—he loves to wander; it would be his destruction,—or all that we have taken from us to buy a substitute. Often it is a thousand francs, no less. Think of that, mademoiselle, a thousand francs! and I but a poor widow with four children. When I think of it in the night my sleep goes from me. Certainly M. Goudron has reason. Children are the chief pleasures in our existence, but it is true that they are at the same time our torment—they are our cross that we must bear.”

She lifted up the corner of her apron to her eye, but seeing under its shadow the first person of the crowd coming into sight, she returned at once to her business.

“Quick, Jeanne!” she said—“the soup! they come.” And sure enough, the one figure was soon followed by others. Madame Dupré lost not another moment. She took the long rolls out of the basket and put them by every plate. She set upon the table, at equal distances, the *vin du pays*, which was given with the meal. Her long ear-rings swung in her ears with the vehemence of her movements, her cap-strings floated in the air. She sent little Auguste, the waiter, in three directions at once, and, wonderful to relate, he went. Auguste was ubiquitous; he could carry any number of plates, full or empty, and a laden tray on four fingers of his extended hand. His feet, in their low shoes, twinkled over the floor like lightning. He was never still for a moment. The two girls stood looking on at all these arrangements till Madame Dupré ran against them. “Pardon me, mes demoiselles,” she said, “you will be better up-stairs. When monsieur your father comes back he will like to find you in your own apartment. The Lion d’Or is very well regulated, but there are *mauvais sujets* that will take more wine

than is good for them. When the bustle is over, Auguste shall mount up-stairs with the young ladies' breakfast."

This speech, delivered without one pause for breath, was very puzzling to Helen, who had only understood approximately. But she understood enough to lead Janey, very reluctant, up-stairs. And here they watched the return of the buyers, which went on for the next two hours, one group and another coming in till the whole village was overflowing. The most important among them had maps of the property, to which they referred, perpetually pointing out to one another the different lots, and quarrelling about the position of their bits of timber. Mr Goulburn returned as he had gone away, with young Baptiste and Antoine discoursing to him on either side. He had the air, radiant and satisfied, of a man who had done a good morning's work. He listened to all they said to him with a smile, but he did not accept Antoine's offers of guidance in the matter of cutting up the wood he had bought, or getting the best price for it. "We will talk of that afterwards, my good friends," he said. He was willing to hear what they said to him, but he did not pledge himself to follow either. Meanwhile it was quite a gay scene from the windows of the Lion d'Or. The old man still stood at his door, exchanging a word here and there, and asking eager questions about the buyers. He had nothing to do with the old Count's wood, but to have something happening was a godsend to him. As for little Janey, the bustle in the street was delightful to her. She leaned out of the window, keeping Helen in terror. She called "Papa," making a pretty babyish grimace as she looked down upon him, watching her opportunity to drop something upon his head or his plate. However impatient of others, he was always tolerant of Janey's freaks. Her countenance was as gay as that of the happiest child in Christendom; and his was bright with satisfaction and

pleasure. It was not possible to Helen to change so easily. She gazed upon the happiness in both their faces with an envy that perhaps had a little disdain in it. How easily they threw over their burdens, while she—— And once more it became apparent to Helen that they were very likely to remain a long time at Latour.

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