

Unpublished Passages
IN THE LIFE OF
Vidocq, The French Minister of Police

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No. III

The Seducer

PIERRE MARCEL was the cultivator of a small but profitable vineyard, on the banks of the Garonne, a few leagues from Toulouse, where the principal part of his life had been passed in the almost daily occupation of tending his vines, and rendering his little plot of ground the fairest for many a mile around. In early life his wife, whom he had passionately adored, had fallen the victim of a lingering illness, leaving him an only child, a daughter, whom he cherished both for its own and mother's sake, with unusual tenderness. The little Louise was the solace of his days, and the prattle of her infant tongue sounded to him the sweetest music nature could invent; but when her growing years gave token of equalling her mother's beauty and symmetry of form, his satisfaction was unbounded to think that he alone, without a mother's fostering hand, had reared a flower so lovely. Oft, when working in his vineyard, would he pause as his daughter tript by with fawn-like step, and gaze with true affection on his heart's dearest object, whilst in his mind he conjured up bright dreams of the future, and tried to trace her coming years.

A short distance from Marcel's house was the chateau of the Marquis de St. Brie, who was usually resident there with his daughter. The family of the Marquis consisted only of his daughter and a son, an officer in a light cavalry regiment. A friendship more strong than those usually subsisting between persons of different stations in life, had grown up betwixt Louise and Emile de St. Brie, and it had been one of the chief amusements of the latter to instruct Louise in those accomplishments she herself so much excelled in, often remarking, that her pupil was so apt that she should soon have little left to teach her.

The notice taken of his daughter by Mam'selle St. Brie, was most gratifying to the feelings of Marcel, who daily saw her gaining those accomplishments he so much coveted for her, but which he had feared he should be unable to obtain. But few pleasures are unalloyed, and however great might have been the satisfaction he felt at the notice taken of Emily, yet there was but little in the reported attentions of Henri St. Brie, who was staying at the chateau.

Henri was by nature formed for woman's admiration. He was of that manly dashing cast which so often takes the heart by storm, ere reason has time to bring its tardy succors, and show that the advantages of a handsome person and fascinating manners are totally eclipsed by the blackness of a heart formed in total contrast to the rest. He had been but a few days at the chateau before Louise was marked as the victim of his seductive arts. He foresaw that her simple and confiding disposition would render the acquirement of her affections an easy task; but with all her simplicity, she entertained such high notions of honor, as to make his success rather doubtful; but still he thought that one who had seen but the fairest side of life, could but ill combat against the wiles of one versed in all its deadliest ways.

He sought every opportunity of being in her company, and by a thousand assiduous attentions won his way, imperceptibly, in her affections. He pretended his passion was of that fervent kind which drove every object but respect from his imagination; and vowed, could he but gain her reluctant consent, to make her the future Marchioness de St. Brie. There was but one thing he stipulated; and that was, for the marriage to be performed in private, since he feared his father's anger, unless he could, by degrees, break the circumstance to him. There was so much plausibility in this, that she could not believe he spoke other than the language of truth. The cloven foot had in no one instance as yet shown itself, and she fell convinced his affections were as pure, and as fervent, as her own. She yielded her consent to a private marriage.

Henri protested she had made him the happiest of men, by her consent, but still there was one thing more, the marriage could not be performed with that secrecy which was so necessary, elsewhere than in Paris. Would she go there? To this she demurred that the absence from her father, without any reasonable excuse, would be the cause of so much anguish to him, that she would not for the world he should feel; but even this scruple was overcome by the promise of Henri, that on their return her father should be informed of all that had taken place, when the few hours of uneasiness would be more than compensated by the pleasure he would receive on hearing of her happy marriage.

Paris, with all its charms, had less attraction for Louise than her simple home on the Garonne's banks. She lived in the most studied seclusion; passing her melancholy hours in thinking of her father, and what must be his feelings concerning her long-continued absence. She felt she had made but a poor return for all the care and solicitude bestowed upon her. Henri, it was true, had been unremitting in his attentions, and his love appeared still as fervent as ever; but he always evaded the conversation when she pressed him concerning their marriage, and she found herself in a fair way to be a mother, ere she was a wife.

"Henri," said she, one day, "will you fix the day for our marriage? When you consider my situation, your delay is cruel in the extreme."

"Yes, yes, dearest, next week. By-the bye, has Madame Girau sent home the beautiful shawl I ordered for you?"

"Some time ago; but I have not looked at it; I have been thinking of something else."

"Of what, dearest?"

"Of the time when you mean to fulfill your promise."

"Just look out of the window, dearest, and tell me what you think of the horse I purchased yesterday?"

"Oh, Henri! if you love me, I beseech you name the day; I have been unhappy, very unhappy."

"Now you are beginning to tease me again."

“Nay, do not say I tease you; I ask you but to keep your faith with me.”

“Really you are more pertinacious than ever, but I cannot stop now, I have an appointment with—”

“Henri, answer me! Am I to be your wife or not?”

“My wife! why are you not my wife as firmly as you can be such? What are the cold formalities of the world that would give you the right of being called my wife? Would they bring affection? No; they would rather bring abhorrence and disgust. As Louise Marcel, you will ever be to me the dearest object of my heart; but as my wife I could not love you, and will not do that which would make me hate you forever.”

Louise was almost motionless with surprise; it was so different from all he had ever said. These then were his true feelings.

“I thank you, sir,” she at length replied, “at least for your frankness. I will be equally so; and since I am not to be the wife, I will not submit to the dishonor of remaining another day as the mistress of Monsieur de St. Brie. We part, sir, this instant forever.”

“Stay, Louise, where are you going!” but ere he had time to stop her, she descended the stairs, and reaching the street, contrived to evade his pursuit.

“Psha!” he exclaimed, “what a fool the girl is; but she’ll soon come to her senses, so I’ll leave her to herself.”

Marcel would not at first give any credence to the report that his daughter had gone with Henri St. Brie. No, no; he was convinced some accident had happened which prevented her return. She was too amiable—too good to listen to such a villain. Bad, even, as St. Brie was, he would not rob him of such a daughter, the only hope of his declining years. Could he have the heart to dishonor one so beautiful, so fair? No, no; it was not in human nature to be so black. But months rolled on, and his dear Louise came not; every search and every endeavor to obtain tidings of her had proved fruitless; but amidst all his complaints he never uttered one word of reproach against her. He became altogether an altered man; neglectful of everything, avoiding the society of his former friends and associates, and scarcely ever going beyond the limits of his own dwelling. It was a cold and bitter morning, in the middle of an unusually severe winter, that he went, more by the force of habit than otherwise, to look after the inmates of his stable. He had his hand upon the stable door, and was entering, when he thought he heard a low moan; he turned round to look from whence it proceeded, and a few steps before him saw a woman lying on the ground, partly covered by the falling snow.

“Poor creature,” said he, “hast thou lain here during this bitter night; had’st thou been my worst enemy I could not have refused you shelter. Here, let me lift you in my arms, and carry you into the house. Eh! what do I see! Merciful heavens! it is my poor Louise. She is dying fast, and there is no help at hand. Oh! speak to me, Louise! for heaven’s sake, speak! Not a look! not a word!”

The distracted father carried her into the house, and by the aid of some warm cordials brought her to herself; it was but to hear the recital of her sufferings and her prayers for forgiveness. She had arrived at her father's house on the preceding evening, but had not dared to enter, and overcome by fatigue and cold, she had fallen where he found her. Her delicate frame was unable to withstand the shock she had sustained, and after lingering a few days, closed her eyes forever on the world, happy in the assurance of her father's true forgiveness.

Marcel had attended his daughter day and night, indulging to the last in the vain hope of her recovery; and even when life was no more, watched her cold corpse with the utmost anxiety to see if it were not death's semblance. But when the last worldly offices were performed, and he found that he was then alone in the world, for weeks he shut himself up in the chamber where she died, refusing to see or speak with anyone.

It was some months after the death of Louise that I was sitting in the Tuileries Gardens, watching the crowd of loungers passing to and fro along the principal avenue; amongst those who seemed to attract most attention was Henri St. Brie, upon whose arm was leaning a lady of most exquisite beauty whom I could not fail to recognise as his wife, to whom he had been married only a few days. He appeared to be relating something which seemed the source of much amusement to both, when suddenly the smile forsook his face, his countenance assumed an air of confusion, and he seemed striving to avoid the sight of something which flashed across him. I turned in the direction in which he had been looking, and perceiving nothing but a poor haggard and emaciated-looking man, whose dress bespoke him a native of one of the distant provinces, leaning against one of the trees. His gaze seemed fixed on St. Brie; but though there was a wildness in his look, I could not at the moment divine why St. Brie seemed so agitated by it.

In a short time the man moved away, and I had forgotten the circumstance, when my attention was attracted to another part of the gardens, by a confused noise and gathered crowd. I hastened towards the spot, and perceived St. Brie lying on the ground, covered with blood, and near him stood the man I had before remarked; he had been seized by the bystanders, one of whom had wrenched from his hand a bloody knife. He appeared the most unmoved of all around, gazing with pleasure on the dying agonies of his victim. St. Brie was raised from the ground, but it was clear that a few moments were all that remained to him of life.

"Marcel," faltered out the dying man, "you have indeed avenged your daughter's wrongs. 'Tis true I deeply wronged her, but this—"

The throes of death prevented the completion of the sentence; but ere life was quite extinct, the loud mad laugh of the man rung in his ears.

"Ah! ah! ah! I have avenged her! Look! look! he sleeps now with my poor Louise. No, no, 'tis false; for she's in heaven, and he—he has gone to join his master."

It would have been a mockery of justice to have tried Marcel for the murder, for it was clear the light of reason had forever been shut out from him. In his confinement his incoherent ravings were ever of his daughter, whom he fancied near him, but was prevented by the attendants from seeing, and were only ended by death removing him from all his worldly sufferings.

J. M. B.

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