



(BY HONORE DE BALZAC.)

he had left certain officers in the village charged with the patrol and the rounds.

With the impetuosity of youth he was about to pass through an opening in the hedge, in order to descend the hill more rapidly; in this way he could arrive sooner than by the usual road at a little post-station at the entrance of the town in the direction of the castle; a slight noise, however, stopped him in his course. He thought he heard the sand of the path grind under the light step of a woman. He turned his head and saw nothing; but his eyes were attracted by the extraordinary brightness of the ocean. He suddenly perceived there a thing so appalling that he stood motionless in consternation. The moonlight was bright enough to disclose to him distant sails. He trembled and endeavoured to convince himself that this sight was an optical delusion produced by the fantastic combination of the waves and the moonlight. At this instant a hoarse voice pronounced the officer's name; he looked toward the opening, and



saw slowly rising there the head of the orderly who had accompanied him to the castle.

'Is that you, Captain?'
 'Yes. Well?' said the young man to him in a low voice. A sort of presentiment warned him to act with caution.

'Those villains are as restless as worms, and I am anxious. Will you allow me to tell you what I have seen?'
 'Speak!' answered Victor Marchand.
 'I have just been following a man belonging to the castle who has come this way with a lantern in his hand. A lantern is very suspicious! I don't believe that any Christian needs to light candles at this hour. They want to destroy us! so I said to myself, and I started to follow his tracks. And, Captain, I discovered three paces from here, upon a bowlder, a heap of firewood.'

A terrible cry, which suddenly rang out in the town, interrupted the soldier. A light flashed about the officer. The poor private received a ball in the head and fell. A fire of straw and dry wood was burning fiercely ten feet from the young man. The instruments and laughter in the ball-room were no longer heard. A silence as of death, interrupted by groans, had suddenly succeeded the murmurs and the dance music. A cannon-shot sounded over the surface of the sea. A cold sweat broke out upon the forehead of the young man. He was without his sword. He understood that his soldiers had perished, and that the English were about to disembark. He saw himself dishonoured if he lived; he saw himself arraigned before a court-martial; then he measured with his eye the depth of the valley and sprang a step toward it, when he was stayed by Clara's hand.

'Fly!' she cried. My brothers are following me to kill you at the foot of the cliff—there—you will find Juanito's horse. Go!

She pushed him from her. The young man gazed at her a moment. Stupefied, but obeying quickly the instinct of self-preservation which never abandons even the strongest of men, he sprang into the dark in the direction indicated, and ran across the rocks that goats alone had climbed till then. He heard Clara cry to her brothers to pursue him; he heard the steps of his assassins. Several bullets whistled by him, but he came safely to the valley, found the horse, mounted and disappeared with the rapidity of lightning.

In a few hours the young officer arrived at the quarters of General G—, whom he found breakfasting with his staff.

'I bring you my head,' cried, he as he appeared, pale and unweaned.

He seated himself, and recounted the horrible occurrence. A deathlike silence greeted his story.

'I find you unfortunate rather than culpable,' the terrible General answered finally. 'You are not to

bliame for the breach of faith of the Spanish; and, unless the Marshal decides otherwise, I acquit you.'

These words gave but small consolation to the unfortunate officer.

'When the Emperor knows,' he cried.
 'He will wish to have you shot,' said the General; 'but we shall see. Well, then, let us speak no more of this,' added he, in a severe tone, 'except to wreak a vengeance which shall excite a salutary terror in this country, where they make war like savages.'

An hour later a whole regiment, a squadron of cavalry, and a battalion of artillery were on their way. The General and Victor marched at the head of this column. The soldiers, informed of the massacre of their comrades, were possessed by an unexampled rage. The distance separating the town of Menda from the General's headquarters was traversed with wonderful swiftness. Upon the way the General found whole villages under arms. Each one of these miserable hamlets was surrounded and the inhabitants decimated.

By an inexplicable chance, the English vessels had not landed their men; but it was learned later that these ships only carried the artillery, and that they had had a quicker passage than the other transports. Consequently, the town of Menda, deprived of the defenders it expected, and which the appearance of the English sails seemed to promise, was surrounded by French troops almost without striking a blow. The inhabitants overcame with terror, offered to surrender unconditionally. Acting with a nobility not rare in the Peninsula, the assassins of the French, forseeing from the General's cruelty that Menda would perhaps be burned and the entire population put to the sword, proposed to inform the General against themselves. He accepted the offer with the condition that the inhabitants of the castle, from the meanest servant to the marquis, were to be surrendered to him. These terms were acquiesced in, and the General promised to pardon the rest of the inhabitants and prevent his soldiers from pillaging and burning the town. An enormous contribution of money was demanded, and the richest citizens gave themselves up as surety for its payment, to be made in twenty-four hours.

The General took every precaution necessary for the security of his troops, provided for the defence of the surrounding region, and refused to lodge his soldiers in the houses. After having pitched camp, he rode up to the castle and took possession. The members of the family of Legans and the servants were carefully guarded from view, bound and shut up in the hall where the ball had taken place. From the windows of this room the terrace which commanded the town could be easily seen. The staff established itself in a gallery near at hand, where the General discussed the measures to be taken to oppose the disembarking. After having despatched an aide to Marshal Ney, and ordered batteries to be placed upon the seashore, the General and his staff considered the cases of the prisoners. Two hundred Spaniards, whom the inhabitants had surrendered, were immediately shot on the terrace. After this military execution, the General gave the order to erect upon the terrace as many scaffolds as there were people in the hall of the castle, and to summon the village executioner. Victor Marchand availed himself of the time which was to elapse before dinner to see the prisoners. He returned shortly to the General.

'I come,' he said to him, in a broken voice, 'to ask certain favours of you.'

'You' answered the General, in a tone of bitter irony.

'Alas!' replied Victor, 'I ask sad favours. The marquis, seeing the scaffolds erected, has hoped that you would change this form of punishment for his family, and begs you to have the nobles beheaded.'

'Granted!' said the General.

'They ask, in addition, that they be allowed the comforts of religion, and that they be unbound. They promise not to attempt to escape.'

'I consent,' said the General, 'but you will be answerable for them.'

'The marquis also offers to you his entire fortune if you will pardon his youngest son.'

'Indeed!' answered the General. 'His property already belongs to King Joseph.' He stopped. A sudden thought came to him, and he added: 'I will grant more than their desire. I understand the importance of his last request. Ah, well, let him buy the eternity of his name; but let Spain forever remember his treason and his punishment. I leave life and fortune to that one of his sons who will fulfill the office of executioner. Go, and speak no more of it.'

Dinner was served. The officers, seated at table, were satisfying an appetite which fatigue had increased. One of their number, Victor Marchand, was absent from the feast. After having hesitated for a time he entered the hall in which was the proud family of Legans. He cast sad glances upon the sight presented to him by that hall, where the evening before he had seen whirling in the dance the two daughters and the three sons of the house; he shivered at the thought that in a short time their heads must be severed by the executioner's sword.

Bound to their gilded chairs the father and mother, the three young men and the two girls remained in a state of complete immobility. Eight servants were standing, their hands tied behind their backs. These fifteen persons were looking at one another gravely, and their eyes scarcely betrayed the feelings which animated them. Complete resignation and regret at having failed in their enterprise were to be read upon certain faces. Motionless soldiers guarded the spectators, the anguish of these cruel enemies. An expression of curiosity lit up their faces when Victor Marchand appeared. He gave the order to release the condemned, and went himself to loosen the cords which bound Clara to her chair. She smiled sadly. The officer could not resist the temptation, and touched lightly the young girl's arms, admiring her black hair, her lithe form. She was a true Spaniard; she had the Spanish colour, Spanish eyes, long, curling lashes, and a pupil blacker than a crow's wing.

'Have you succeeded?' she asked, with one of those gloomy smiles in which there was yet something girlish. Victor could not repress a groan. He looked at Clara's



HE bell of the little town of Menda had just rung midnight. At that moment a young French officer, leaning upon the parapet of a long terrace which bounded the gardens of the castle of Menda, seemed buried in meditation more profound than befits the carelessness of a military life; but it must be said that never were the hour, the prospect and the night more suited to reverie. The beautiful Spanish sky extended its azure dome above his head. The quivering light of the stars and the soft moonlight illuminated an exquisite valley which lay unrolled at his feet. As he leaned against an orange-tree in blossom the town could see, a hundred feet below him, the town of Menda; it seemed to be sheltered from the northern winds at the foot of the cliff upon which the castle was built. Turning his head he saw the sea, whose gleaming waters framed the landscape in a broad band of silver. The castle was illumined; the festive confusion of a ball, the harmony of the orchestra, the laughter of the officers and their partners came to him, mingled with the distant murmur of the waves. The coolness of the night infused a sort of energy into his body, wearied with the heat of the day. To crown all, the gardens were planted with such sweet flowers and trees of such fragrance that the young man was, as it were, plunged in a bath of perfumes.

The castle of Menda belonged to a grandee of Spain, who occupied it with his family. Throughout the whole evening the elder of his daughters had regarded the officer with an interest marked by such sadness that the feeling of compassion, expressed by the Spanish girl, might well be the cause of the thoughtfulness of the Frenchman. Clara was beautiful, and, although she had three brothers and a sister, the property of the Marquis of Legans appeared large enough to persuade Victor Marchand that she would have a considerable dowry. But how dared he dream that the daughter of the nobleman proudest of his birth in Spain could be given in marriage to the son of a Parisian tradesman. Moreover, the French were hated. The marquis had been suspected by General G—, governor of the province, of stirring up a movement in favour of Ferdinand VII., and the battalion commanded by Victor Marchand had been stationed in the little town of Menda to restrain the neighbouring regions, which looked up to the Marquis of Legans as their lord. A recent despatch from Marshal Ney had aroused a fear that the English might shortly land upon the coast, and named the marquis as a man who had had correspondence with the cabinet at London. Consequently, in spite of the kind welcome which the Spaniard had given Victor Marchand and his soldiers, the young officer held himself continually on his guard.

As he approached the terrace, from which he had just examined the state of the town and the districts intrusted to his care, he asked himself how he should interpret the friendship which the marquis had constantly displayed toward him, and how the tranquillity of the country could be reconciled with the anxiety of his general; but for a moment these thoughts had been driven from his mind by a feeling of prudence and natural curiosity. He had just noticed in the town a large number of lights. Though it was St. James' Day he had commanded that same morning that all fires should be put out at an hour named in his orders. The castle alone had been excepted from this measure. He saw, indeed, the bayonets of his soldiers gleaming here and there at the usual posts; but the silence was ominous, and nothing indicated that the Spaniards were indulging in the celebration of a holiday.

After having tried to explain to himself the disobedience of which the inhabitants were guilty, he found in their actions a mystery the more incomprehensible, since

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