



CHAPTER X.

Mine Enemy Intervenes.
(A war of wits, in which I learn that I am very much married indeed.)

I stepped briskly out of my aeroplane and walked over to Zeuxis, who still crouched abjectly before me. As I advanced the superstitious Corsicans gave way again and retreated before me, running in all directions in fear of my supernatural descent from the realms of the heavens. Small wonder; this was the first aeroplane that had ever entered the island. To them I must have appeared none other than some saint, made manifest out of the clouds.

The sight of Zeuxis unnerved me, but for a moment only. At all costs I must keep the dominance that I had won. But six and thirty hours remained at most before I must begin my return flight to France; and during that brief time I must obtain the bonds from him, and then, by hook or crook, so work upon his mind that he would consent to brave the perils of the return flight with me, to give that evidence which would save Charles from the ignominious fate of a traitor.

I stepped toward him and touched him on the shoulder. "Get up!" I said. Then, as he obeyed, like a man dazed, I added in louder tones so that the listening Corsicans might hear:

"Have you not hospitality enough to offer shelter to such an old friend as I?"

"Yes, yes, mademoiselle," he stammered. "Permit me to conduct you to my house. It is but a poor one—not such as you have been used to—but, if you will condescend, lady—"

"Lead the way!" I answered, stifling a desperate inclination to burst into hysterical laughter. As Zeuxis dragged himself along the straggling road, I at his elbow, and the villagers following at a respectful distance, I cast a glance backward to the aeroplane. I did not like to leave it there. But where else could I take it? I felt confident that superstition would restrain any of the inhabitants of Scuto from laying hands upon it, and then perforce dismissed the matter from my mind. At the very end of the road we turned into a small cottage, a peasant's hovel, containing but two rooms, yet not uncomfortably furnished in their primitive fashion. A tall candle was burning upon a small table. At the door a dark-browed woman stood and glared sullenly at me before stepping aside and permitting me to enter.

I knew whom she must be. This was the woman for whose sake the Greek spy had deserted his wife in Paris, the woman of whom Mme. Zeuxis had told me.

"You—you will eat, mademoiselle?" faltered my involuntary host.

Indeed I would, for I was famishing. At a few words from Zeuxis the woman stepped into the kitchen, returning with a bowl of curdled goat's milk, a dish of black beans and some rye bread, which she placed before me on the table. I made a hearty meal. When I looked up at last, satisfied, a throng of Corsicans was gathered around the door.

I advanced to the threshold. "Be gone!" I cried, in Italian. They scuttled away like hares. Zeuxis and I were alone together again, the woman having sullenly retired into the kitchen after removing the remains of the repast. I closed the door and began speaking in French to him.

"You know why I have come?" I demanded.

"Signorina—mademoiselle, have mercy," he pleaded. "You will not betray me? All the spies of France are on my track. I have repented, truly, I have burned eighteen candles before the shrine of St. Christopher! I have—"

I cut him short.

"Do you know," I began, "that an innocent man stands in danger of being convicted of having sold the treaty?" He nodded. "Let him suffer," he answered. "That is between himself and Magnifi. I was only Magnifi's tool. And he betrayed me, the scoundrel!" he continued, gritting his teeth in rage. "But just wait, mademoiselle. Wait till the spies have forgotten me. Do you know what I shall do? I shall creep back to Paris, so softly that none will know, and I shall draw my sharp knife across Leopold Magnifi's throat so—he imitated the action—"in revenge for the money that he stole from me."

His words gave me the clue that I had been searching for.

"Suppose I promised you an amnesty," I hazarded. "If I tell you that you will not be molested, would you be willing to return to Paris with me and to give evidence which will save the Chevalier d'Yves from a shameful conviction?"

He peered at me as if not understanding, br suspecting treachery.

"Will you come back with me tomorrow in the aeroplane?" I continued.

Zeuxis uttered a scream.

"The aeroplane?" he cried. "Never! I should die of terror. I would go, perhaps, in a ship—if I were offered money enough," he said, watching me greedily.

I had been noticing that his eyes continually strayed toward a small chest which rested in a far corner of the room. It was evidently no part of the original furnishings, being comparatively new, while those were black with age; and from the manner in which the Greek's glance had repeatedly fallen on it I formed a conclusion.

"Zeuxis," I said briskly, "go over to that chest and bring me my bonds."

He stared and leaped suddenly upon his feet.

"Mademoiselle, I have not your bonds," he stammered. "There is nothing there but carpenter's tools. I swear to you—"

I rose and strode over to the chest. The lid was locked.

"Come, open it," I said.

"Mademoiselle, I swear to you, by St. Christopher—"

"Then," I replied, "God pity you, for within four and twenty hours a French warship will be en route to Scuto."

"No, I will open it," he cried, in panic at my words. "But you will see that there is nothing there—"

He was fumbling in his pocket for the key. At my insistence he crossed



A Small Knife, Keen as a Razor, Clattered to the Floor.

the room, fitted the key and turned the tongue of the lock willingly. I looked inside. There was nothing there but carpenter's tools.

I took out an adz, a saw, and a hammer—a curiously fashioned hammer, for the haft was much too large for the head, and had evidently been fitted recently. I tapped it hard upon the floor and it flew off across the room, exposing a hollow space that ran clear through to the point of the handle. Inside were some papers, tightly rolled. I drew them forth with difficulty and glanced at them.

For the first time I held my cherished bonds, the cause of so many tribulations.

Meanwhile Zeuxis had stood watching me with an expression of the utmost discomfiture. As I drew forth the papers he fell upon his knees and clasped my hands.

"Yes, they are yours," he pleaded. "Take them! Take them as the price of my liberty, mademoiselle, and leave me. I have been harassed and persecuted for the sake of them; and what am I now? Once I roamed the boulevards a free man, rattling the money in my pockets—now I am a wretched fugitive, hunted like a fox, and all because I was overpersuaded by an unscrupulous rascal. Take them as the price of my liberty and go. Go, go, go!"

He repeated the word in a crescendo of wrath and fear. I drew back and looked down at him steadily.

"The price of your liberty is your evidence in Paris," I answered, and I saw his face turn green by the candle light.

Suddenly a compelling instinct made me turn my head. Behind me was the woman; she had emerged silently from the inner room and now stood over me, in the attitude of an avenging fury, as though about to strike. I sprang on her and twisted the arm that she concealed behind her back. A small knife, keen as a razor, clattered to the floor.

As I confronted her she broke into a torrent of furious words, incomprehensible to me, with frantic gesticulations.

At that moment there came a loud knocking at the street door, and without waiting for admittance a man, attired in the cassock of a priest, entered unceremoniously and advanced toward us. His keen eyes seemed to take in everything. Calm, benignant and authoritative, he advanced toward us, a dominating presence, and raised his hand solemnly. Zeuxis and the woman fell upon their knees. For a while he spoke with them in Italian, in words which I could not follow. A few sharp, expostulating phrases broke from the woman's lips. Presently she began weeping noisily.

Then the priest turned to me and addressed me in bad French which came to his lips haltingly:

"My daughter," he began, "you have heard it said that the wages of sin is death. Your husband has sinned against you grievously, and, had he

died, he would assuredly have suffered that death of the soul which is the penalty for all who are cut off from the ministrations of the church. But now, since he repents, I bid you take him back and pardon him."

My husband! Zeuxis! I was too astounded to utter a word. The priest resumed:

"Those ignorant peasants think you are an immortal. But I am a scientist and I know that you have flown from France in one of the new airships to win back the vagrant love of the man with whom you plighted your troth. Marriage is a sacrament, my daughter; it cannot be dissolved this side of the grave. Mademoiselle Torlando has consented to relinquish him to you. Forgive him; he will return to France with you. Or, if he refuse—"

He spoke in Italian again and seemed to thunder forth some terrible anathema. The woman bowed her head and wept wildly.

I understood then. The good priest, knowing that Zeuxis had abandoned his lawful wife in France, imagined that I was she, and that the purport of my visit had been to win back the rascal's love.

Indignation overpowered me; then the humor of the situation came to my aid and saved me.

"You agree to accompany me?" I asked the Greek.

"Yes, yes," he muttered hastily. "But not in the aeroplane."

"And that will not be necessary," the priest replied, "for a yacht has just arrived in the harbor from Marseilles, and doubtless passage can be procured on it. I will recommend you," he added confidently.

As he turned to comfort the weeping woman I whispered to Zeuxis hastily:

"You will come, then? Remember, the government guarantees you an amnesty, provided you give evidence. But you must tell all."

Zeuxis clenched his fists. "Aye, I will come," he muttered back. "And then—I shall seek out my enemy and with my knife—" He stopped to gather his thoughts. "On the yacht—yes, but not in the aeroplane," he concluded.

A roar of voices, rising and falling on the wind, interrupted his soliloquy. We started and looked through the open door. The cries grew louder, and suddenly a mob of men came running along the narrow street, gesticulating and cursing. They swerved toward us with a single motion, as a school of fish that veer in deep water, and forcing the priest, who sought to bar the path, aside, burst into the cottage and surrounded us. And at their head was—Leopold Magnifi!

Yes, that arch-traitor, to frustrate whose machinations I had made my perilous passage in the aeroplane—and here in Corsica! Doubtless he had arrived in the yacht which, as the priest had told me, lay in the harbor. He must have learned of my movements from the newspapers and, shrewdly surmising the object of my journey, had chartered a vessel at Marseilles and sailed to forestall me.

But this conclusion was the result of subsequent cogitations; for at the moment seeing him here, I was overcome with horror and dread. At the very moment of victory he had circumvented me, raised the peasants against me, cutting off all chance of rescue. They thrust their faces in mine, baying me like a pack of hungry wolves.

"Ah, madame, do not look round and think of your aeroplane," said Leopold mockingly. "It is destroyed; it lies, a heap of broken metal and wood, in the center of the market place." He turned to the priest. "I demand possession of my lawful wife," he cried, and flung a forged marriage certificate upon the broken table.

The good father glanced at it and, involuntarily, shrank back from me. He looked at me with trembling lips.

"It is false!" I shouted defiantly.

The priest made as if to speak; then, abandoning the effort, which proved beyond his power, turned away, muttering to himself and wringing his hands. I must, indeed have appeared very much married to his eyes. What an abandoned monster of wickedness I seemed to the good man.

I understood now the frenzy of these good peasants against me. The runaway wife is not an object of sympathy in rural districts.

Leopold came to me with a sneer, pushing aside the men who stood in his way.

"Madame," he said mockingly, "come! Our yacht lies in the harbor."

I looked round in desperation to see if aid would come from any quarter. I looked at the priest, but he was making his way sorrowfully toward the door. Zeuxis cowered by this sudden appearance of his erstwhile confederate, had sunk to the floor and stared at him with a mixture of hate and terror.

And all around me the peasants glared at me, waiting upon Leopold's word to tear me limb from limb, if he so ordered.

"Will you come quietly, Madame Magnifi?" continued the fellow, "or shall these citizens carry you to our yacht?"

I shrugged my shoulders, and, since there was nothing else to be done, moved at his side toward the door. Only, as I did so, with a swift movement which escaped his notice, thrust the rolled up bonds into the bosom of my gown. I do not think, to do the man some justice, that he thought of them. I alone held the stage, and the triumph of possession had driven all lesser thoughts away.

He stepped down the long street beside me, the peasants keeping guard around. In the market place, as we passed on our way to the wharf, I saw the fragments of the aeroplane, and for the first time moisture dimmed my eyes. So ended all my hopes of saving Charles. Leopold had played his cards better than I, and had conquered. Now there was nothing to do but—

At any rate, if the worst came, I would choose death rather than life with him. That was a comforting thought. I had been betrothed to Charles; nothing could remove that fact nor anyone usurp his place.

A tiny yacht, which was under steam, was moored to a little pier in the harbor. At the pier end my guard left me and we were received by three figures, ruffianly seafarers attired in picturesque tatters, evidently a body-guard of my abductor, who watched me with impassive faces. I scanned them quickly. I read no hope in them. Had they been Frenchmen—I would have thrown myself upon their mercy even then—but they were ugly-looking Levantines, the scum of the Mediterranean ports, and obviously beyond scruple. Whether my story were true or false mattered nothing to them; they had their pay; that was their end; no chivalry perplexed their souls.

They closed closely around me and indicated that I should descend to a small cabin amidships. The hold looked dark and uninviting; my heart pounded as terror swept over me, and I hesitated upon the topmost step. My abductor indicated the way.

"Have no fear, mademoiselle," he said suavely. "These men obey my slightest word. Descend!"

I followed him in silence down the stairway and into the cabin. Then I breathed more freely again, for I could see the tumbling waters through the port-holes, and the room, lighted by electricity, was well furnished and comfortable, while the ruffians halted at the door. Clearly I need apprehend no physical injury.

"Be seated, mademoiselle," said Magnifi indicating a chair.

I made no answer but stood by the table facing him. He shrugged his shoulders and, sitting down in an arm-chair, lighted a gold-tipped cigarette. "Those scoundrels speak no French," he said, indicating our impassive spectators. "But they are absolutely at my beck and call. All hope of safety by appealing to them, therefore, is merely foolish."

I drummed my fingers upon the table idly. Up on deck I heard a creaking, groaning sound.

"The windlass," said Leopold, following my thoughts. "They are hauling in the cable. Tonight we anchor half a mile out at sea; therefore all hope of rescue from the shore is actually a chimera."

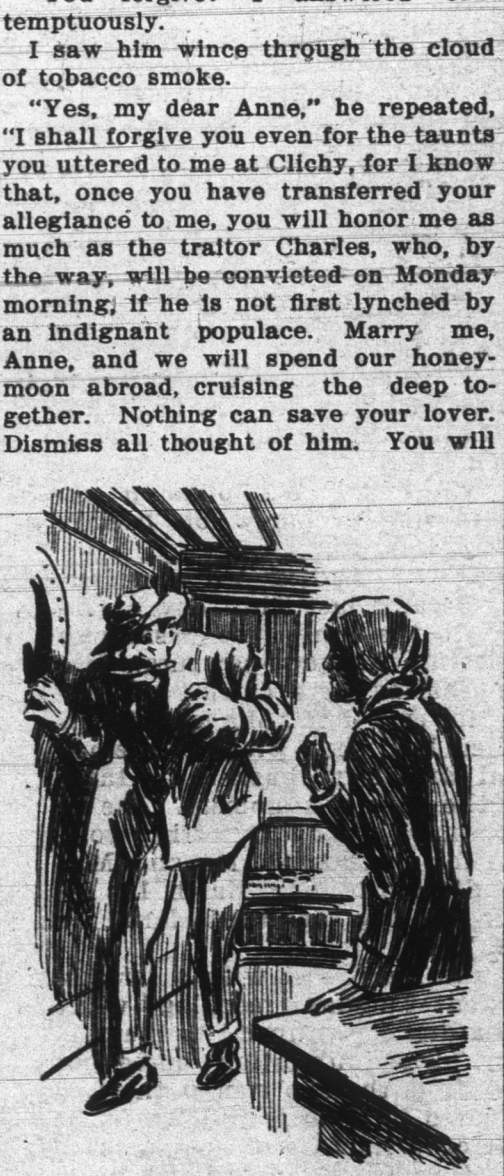
"Well," I said, breaking silence for the first time, "what is it you want of me?"

"I want you alone, dear Anne," said Leopold, smirking odiously. "When the news of your gallant flight from Paris reached me it only increased the ardor of my love for you. You see, your cause is absolutely hopeless. Consent to marry me and I shall forgive everything."

"You—forgive!" I answered contemptuously.

I saw him wince through the cloud of tobacco smoke.

"Yes, my dear Anne," he repeated, "I shall forgive you even for the taunts you uttered to me at Clichy, for I know that, once you have transferred your allegiance to me, you will honor me as much as the traitor Charles, who, by the way, will be convicted on Monday morning, if he is not first lynched by an indignant populace. Marry me, Anne, and we will spend our honeymoon abroad, cruising the deep together. Nothing can save your lover. Dismiss all thought of him. You will



In His Teeth Was the Sharp Knife That I Had Seen Him Flourish in the Cottage.

be kept prisoner in this cage until you consent to be my wife."

Leopold rose from his chair and came toward me, greatly agitated.

"O, Anne," he cried, catching at my hands, which I withdrew from the contamination of his touch, "why will you not be reasonable? Has the chevalier been as loyal to you as I, loved you as faithfully? I loved you from that moment when first I saw you on board the ship in Montreal harbor. All that I have done has been for you. Forget him, Anne, and be my wife. I will be true to you forever. If it is money," he added, ending his impassioned plea, "I have become reconciled with my father. I shall be his sole heir. We shall have millions; each wish of yours shall be gratified. You—you—"

"Let me answer you once and for all time," I replied, in tones scarcely audible, so intense was my agitation. "I would rather die a thousand deaths by torture than bear the contamination of your presence. I loathe you as I might loathe a venomous snake. You are the incarnation of all evil. You talk of love," I cried hysterically, "why you do not know even love's alphabet. Love is noble; it begets sacrifice and self-forgetfulness and innocence. You can love no more than a lead can know beauty. These are my

last words to you, whatever tyrannies and treacheries you may devise."

He staggered backward, and I felt, in spite of all, a momentary pang of pity at the extremity of his anguish. For in some strange, warped way, this man did love me, I knew. I had always felt that he did, and it had never wholly closed my heart against compassion for him.

In a moment Leopold had recovered his self-possession. He uttered a few curt words to the guards in some Mediterranean dialect. They advanced and indicated by signs that I should follow them. I was conducted into a little cabin in the fore part of the ship, the door was locked on me, and I was alone.

As I stood there in my desolation I felt the vessel begin to move through the water. Leopold was fulfilling his threat. We cast our anchor half a mile out at sea. Through the port-hole I saw sunset faintly mirrored in the dark waves like a pale reflection of the cold misery in my own breast.

CHAPTER XI.

The Ultimate Appeal.

(In which I snatch success out of the jaws of failure.)

We lay at anchor half a mile outside the bay. All was silent aboard the yacht, save the monotonous tramp of the guard on deck above my cabin. My watch marked six o'clock in the afternoon and this was Wednesday. Five days remained—only five days of grace, and on Monday Charles would stand condemned, while I was powerless to save him. I pictured him in his dungeon in the Paris fortress, ignorant of my whereabouts; I wept to think that my desperate flight to Corsica to procure the only witness who could deliver him had ended in my ignominious capture. Yet unless deliverance came from some unguessed-at quarter, hope must be abandoned.

I dared not go to bed but paced my tiny cabin in feverish despair. Outside, through the closed port-hole, the sea tumbled in rising waves, and the yacht rocked and pitched as she strained at her anchor. So heart-weary was I, so helpless, that my fatigue induced a period of merciful unconsciousness into which I glided by imperceptible degrees, to be tortured by nightmares. Now I was in Paris again, watching the condemnation of Charles. One by one the military judges arose and announced their verdict—guilty. I saw him led forth to the parade ground, to be stripped of his uniform, to have his buttons and epaulets torn from him and his sword-broken, while outside the barriers a mob howled for his death. The intensity of my despair awoke me.

What was that low tapping upon the pane of the port-hole?

I was upon my feet now, fully awake, staring with incredulity through the dull, rounded glass, at a small boat that rocked perilously beside the yacht. I listened; the tramp on deck had ceased. The sentinel was gone, or sleeping upon watch. The tapping came again, and, looking out, I perceived the Greek Zeuxis, with a companion seated in the little boat.

I strained at the port-hole fastenings with all my strength. The rusty catch slid back and admitted the fresh night air. The head of Zeuxis was upon a level with my own.

Then I knew that his words had not been vain; he had come to settle his score with my captor, Magnifi. There was no need of words; we both understood. I opened the port-hole to its fullest extent. It was just wide enough to admit of the Greek's passage.

He stood up in the rocking boat, clung to the exterior of the orifice with both his hands, and then, heedless of the swaying boat, which rose and fell beneath him, raised himself and thrust his head and shoulders within. He caught at my two willing hands, a moment later and he had wriggled through and stood up on the floor of my cabin. He looked back, nodded, and the boat pulled slowly away. He had cut off his retreat, the single avenue of flight.

In his teeth was the sharp knife that I had seen him flourish in the cottage. I knew the mad determination which inspired him, the hate which had transformed the cringing coward into a hero. I knew the deadly purpose for whose accomplishment he had armed himself with that razor-keen blade. But now, with Charles' liberty at stake, and hope clutching me by the throat, what was the life of Leopold Magnifi to me. Should I not in duty let loose this assassin upon the man who had shown me no quarter?

While I was struggling thus between two motives Zeuxis, still without a word, had crept like a cat to the locked door of the cabin. He wrenched at it; then, with a smile at the pitiful weakness of that defense which had seemed insuperable to me, he inserted the thin blade of the knife into the lock and forced back the tongue. A moment later and he had disappeared from sight, leaving me tremulous with alternating terror and hope. I heard his footsteps die away upon the carpeted floor without. I heard Leopold's voice, cool, calm, penetrating, and the voice of the Greek as he raged above him, pouring forth a torrent of accusations, threats and oburgations. Then came a rush of quick footsteps, the crash of a falling deck-chair, and I pressed my fingers tightly to my ears.

"Yes, but I could not shut out that awful cry that followed, I heard racing below, shouting and struggling, the slamming of doors. Oaths, maledictions, blows came to my ears faintly as I cowered there; the sound of falling bodies—and then a more intense and still more awful silence. I dared not stir."

That silence, that complete absence of sound, was far more terrible to me than had been the sounds, and the shouting. Nothing occurred. There

was no murmur in the air. I took my fingers from my ears, and, sitting up, waited. At last, hours later, it seemed to me, I heard the slow, uncertain tread of heavy footsteps without. A finger appeared round the door, groping uncertainly; a hand followed it, an arm—and Leopold Magnifi entered and stood before me, his face convulsed with pain, yet wearing the semblance of a ghastly smile.

Blood dripped from his arms and breast, and there was a deep slash across his face and throat. He stood there, holding for support against the lintel, and, regarding me silently, he continued smiling. When at last he spoke his voice seemed hollow as a specter's.

"See what you have brought me to, Anne," was all he said.

I came to my senses then. I rose to staunch the blood, to bind his wounds; but he waved me aside, and then, as though his sight failed him, he groped uncertainly for me and found my arms.

"Take me back to my cabin, Anne," he whispered. "I think I'm going to die."

Summoning all my fortitude I placed my arm round him. His grasp upon my shoulder made me wince. Slowly, with staggering steps, I led him along the passage way toward his room, outside which a group of sailors clustered, terror-stricken, staring foolishly at one another and at me. One had a long cut across his hand; another a blood-stained head-bandage. And on the stairs that led up to the deck dead men were lying, hideously hacked and maimed. I looked into the face of the one nearest me. In those livid and twisted features I recognized all that had been mortal of the Greek Zeuxis.

Leopold waved back the men as they approached, and we entered his cabin. Inside, the table was overturned; pillows and blankets strewn the floor, and there were all the signs of a desperate battle. I placed Leopold upon the couch and sought to cleanse his wounds. But he declined all my efforts and beckoning to me to kneel at his side, spoke in low whispers.

"It's no use—I'm dying, Anne," he murmured. "I only want your forgiveness. Don't let me go down to hell without your pardon, Anne. My love for you was the one not wholly selfish act of my life. You knew that, Anne?"

I nodded, seeing him through a mist of blinding tears. When he began to speak I understood how my words of the evening had wounded him. I think that in my horror and hatred for the man I had overlooked the human qualities that lay buried deep, but existent, in his heart.

"I am dying, Anne," he whispered, grasping for my hand and holding it fast in his, as though seeking to find some clasp upon that life which was slowly ebbing away. "Do you remember your words last night? That I could know love no more than a toad can know beauty? And that I seemed to you the incarnation of all evil? Well, I think you were right, Anne."

I made no answer, but sat silently beside him, while his grasp tightened cruelly on mine. I knew the struggle that was taking place in his soul.

"I want to tell you something, Anne," he said after a while. "I was not quite so bad as you imagined me to be. You always influenced me for good. Are you glad to hear that, Anne?"

"Very glad," I answered.

"I always planned, when I had won you, to turn over a new leaf, as my father would have phrased it. I've been a bad lot, but I was playing for high stakes, Anne, and—and I've lost. And now I'm going to make amends. We must get you to Paris before the trial."

My hopes, so long abased, leaped up incredulously again. With Zeuxis dead I had not dared to think that anything could stay the fate which overhung my lover. But now—if Leopold should take the place of the Greek, if he should confess.

He smiled weakly, as if in anticipation of my thoughts.

"Do you see that little cabinet in the corner, Anne?" he whispered. "Under that pile of papers near it you will find a key. Unlock the cabinet and bring me what you find inside."

I rose and obeyed him. I fitted the little key into the lock and, opening the cabinet, drew forth a bundle of manuscript. I placed it in Leopold's hands.

"These papers contain my confession, Anne," he said. "I wrote it once when under the influence of good thoughts—of you. Often I have been tempted to destroy it. But I felt that if you should escape me and carry out your purpose it would be but fair to give you the means with which to free your lover, the chevalier. These papers will exonerate him completely, even after I am dead, for they contain an entire history of the plot to secure the treaty, and give the names of those who were behind us. No officers of the court could read it and condemn your lover. Now touch the bell, Anne."

I rang, and instantly two sailors reappeared from the passage without. They stood impassive and mute before us. Leopold spoke a few words to them in their own language.

"These men will take the yacht at full speed to Bon Martin," he continued to me, speaking now with a supreme effort of the will. "It is a little seaport near Marseilles, but not too near. There you will charter a special train for Paris, using the money which you will find in the drawer of my desk. There are ten thousand francs; they are yours by all laws of war. As for the yacht, the men will take her out to sea again after they have set you ashore and convey her where she belongs. They have been amply recompensed for their work and they know it."

"And now, Anne, grant me your forgiveness."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)