



Stendhal

The Charterhouse of Parma

A new translation by Margaret Mauldon

OXFORD WORLD'S CLASSICS



THE CHARTERHOUSE OF PARMA

STENDHAL (Henri Beyle) was born on 23 January 1783 in Grenoble, where his father was a lawyer and his maternal grandfather a doctor. He lost his mother at the age of seven. After distinguishing himself in mathematics at the École Centrale in Grenoble, he moved to Paris in 1799 intending to study for admission to the École Polytechnique, but preferred to make his debut in the world of art and literature. He was employed at the Ministry of War, and took part in the Napoleonic campaigns in Italy, Germany, Austria, and Russia from 1800 to 1814. At the fall of the Empire he settled in Milan, where he began to write on painting and music. Returning to Paris in 1821, he lived as a dandy in high society, publishing a treatise on love in 1822, his first novel *Armance* in 1827, followed by *Le Rouge et le Noir* in 1830.

The last phase of his career was spent as a diplomat in Italy, with postings as Consul in Trieste and then Civitavecchia. He was awarded the Légion d'honneur in 1835. *La Chartreuse de Parme*, a novel of military and romantic adventure set in Italy, appeared in 1839. Stendhal died of a stroke in 1842 during a period of leave in Paris. His remaining fictional and autobiographical works were published posthumously. His literary achievement went largely unrecognized during his lifetime, and it was left to later generations to appreciate his penetrating psychological and social insights and his ironical humour.

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*The Charterhouse
of Parma*



Translated by

MARGARET MAULDON

With an Introduction and Notes by

ROGER PEARSON

Oxford New York

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

Oxford University Press, Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP

Oxford New York

Athens Auckland Bangkok Bogota Bombay
Buenos Aires Calcutta Cape Town Dar es Salaam
Delhi Florence Hong Kong Istanbul Karachi
Kuala Lumpur Madras Madrid Melbourne
Mexico City Nairobi Paris Singapore
Taipei Tokyo Toronto Warsaw

and associated companies in
Berlin Ibadan

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Translation © Margaret Mauldon 1997

Introduction, Select Bibliography, Chronology, and Notes © Roger Pearson 1997

This translation first published as a *World's Classics* paperback 1997

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Data available

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Stendhal, 1783-1842.

[*Chartreuse de Parme*. English]

The charterhouse of Parma | Stendhal; translated by Margaret Mauldon; with an introduction and notes by Roger Pearson.

(*World's classics*)

Includes bibliographical references.

I. Mauldon, Margaret. II. Title. III. Series.
PQ2435.C4E5 1997 843'.7—dc20 96-32010

ISBN 0-19-283183-6

3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Printed in Great Britain by

Caledonian International Book Manufacturing Ltd
Glasgow

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INTRODUCTION

A novel which will always be numbered among the dozen finest novels we possess.

(Henry James)

Stendhal's reputation as a major novelist is principally founded on his two masterpieces, *The Red and the Black* (1830) and *The Charterhouse of Parma* (1839). His first novel, *Armance*, had appeared in 1827, when he was 44, but this witty and moving tale of doomed love lacks both the scope and depth of the later narratives. *Lucien Leuwen*, on the other hand, written between 1834 and 1835, runs to over 700 pages and provides a shrewd exposé of political life in contemporary France; but it was abandoned, not only because its author, a diplomat and servant of his country, could not risk publishing such an indictment of his masters, but also because he had lost his way with the plot. And finally there was *Lamiel*, the story of a young orphan girl who becomes a criminal's moll; but this, too, remained unfinished as death interrupted the novelist's restless revisions of his original draft.

Stendhal's two great novels are superficially very different. *The Red and the Black* offers its readers a chronicle of French life in 1830: from the twin perspectives of its avuncular, worldly wise narrator and its young, ambitious, and intelligent protagonist Julien Sorel, it presents an unflinchingly topical and damning portrait of post-Napoleonic France, of its drab conformism, its ubiquitous cant and hypocrisy, and the Establishment's desperate desire to turn the clock back and guard against all further eruption of revolutionary zeal. At the end its peasant hero, rather than compromise himself or his new-found values of sincerity and voluntary submission to the power of love, mounts the scaffold, Christ-like, as though he might thereby redeem the novel's readers from their prejudice and glum fear of the unpredictable and the unforeseen.

By contrast *The Charterhouse of Parma* offers its readers an after-dinner yarn about a duchess and her nephew: from the twin perspectives of a French Napoleonic soldier revisiting Padua after many years and of the Italian family on whom he was once billeted, it presents a swashbuckling tale of passion and derring-do, of battlefields and narrow escapes, of prisons and courage and blind devotion. In a world of artful dodgers and dodgy artists, the nineteenth-century protagonists—a handsome young aristocrat, his incomparable aunt, her amiable suitor the prime minister, and a beautiful young heroine, the prison governor's daughter—play out the eternal drama of a lovers' triangle against a semi-anachronistic backdrop of pantomime princes and Renaissance skulduggery.

Yet both novels are dedicated to the Happy Few, and each has a similar tale to tell. We learn how a young man with superior powers of energy and imagination sets out to explore beyond the boundaries of his childhood domain; how he is drawn to the ephemeral glamour of Napoleonic conquest and its seeming re-enactment—here, today—of the mighty, erstwhile deeds of epic and romance; how then, having chosen the alternative power structure of the Catholic Church as the means of securing a position in the world, he discovers the spiritual fulfilment that comes from a love that is allegedly profane and yet has all the sacred value of an incontrovertible faith; and how at the last he is broken by the consequences of his unwavering determination to be true to himself. Whether, like Julien Sorel, he is condemned for trying to kill the person who (seemingly) misrepresented him as a heartless, mercenary schemer, or whether, like Fabrice del Dongo, he suffers catastrophically for his desire to remain father to the offspring of an authentic passion, the outcome remains the same. With a less acute sensitivity and a less urgent thirst to live life to the full, with a little more caution and a little more readiness to fudge the issues, each might have deferred the moment of his mortality. Irony is a great protector. But in so being or doing, the Stendhalian hero's authentic nature would long since have been forfeit. It is better to have loved and lost...

And which of the two novels is the more persuasive in the telling of this tale? Readers of Stendhal have long debated—

with themselves as much as with others—whether they are ‘Red and Blackers’ (in French, *rougistes*) or ‘Carthusians’. The *rougistes* admire Stendhal for the boldness of his political commentary and the innovative quality of his realism, while by the same tokens suspecting the later novel of political cynicism and a dubious nostalgia for romance and a mythical golden age of aristocratic rule. Some, like the eminent late-nineteenth-century critic Émile Faguet, find that whereas Julien Sorel is ‘the typical man of his age’ (that is, an instructive example of the new social forces unleashed by the 1789 Revolution and the exploits of Napoleon), Fabrice del Dongo is simply boring: ‘the chief defect of *The Charterhouse of Parma* lies in the extreme insignificance of the central protagonist and the small degree of interest he provokes’; ‘he is without meaning, one ought even to say without character’.¹ Although Faguet’s contemporary Émile Zola allowed that *The Charterhouse of Parma* was the first French novel to portray another nationality convincingly, he too thought it much less successful than *The Red and the Black*: from being a perceptive ‘psychologist’, Stendhal had become a mere ‘story-teller’, the author of a ‘novel of adventure’ rather than a ‘work of analysis’.²

‘Carthusians’, on the other hand, admire Stendhal precisely for this narrative verve, for his controlled, unsentimental lyricism and his apparently instinctive ability to convey in words the atmosphere and ethos of northern Italy. For them no chronicle, however topical, could be more revealing about the nature of political power than this account of the court at Parma, where the historical blurring of the Renaissance with the early nineteenth century serves only to underline the timelessness of the truths on display. By these tokens they regret what they perceive to be a narrowness of focus in the earlier novel, just as they wish for a less ironic, less cynical, less concerted account of Julien’s passions and his pursuit of happiness. Thus the earliest and most famous ‘Carthusian’ of all, the contemporary novelist Honoré de Balzac (1799–

¹ See Roger Pearson (ed.), *Stendhal: ‘The Red and the Black’ and ‘The Charterhouse of Parma’* (London and New York, Longman, 1994), 50, 52.

² *Ibid.* 13–14.

1850), praised the book for its political insights, comparing it to Machiavelli's *The Prince* and claiming that the accuracy of these insights could only truly be appreciated by the 1,500 or so 'top people' in Europe. More recently the American critic Harry Levin has commented to similar effect that *The Charterhouse of Parma* 'is perhaps the most civilised book ever written. It was written by a diplomat escaping from his post whereas [*The Red and the Black*] was written by a dilettante excluded from office.'³

Levin's hyperbole is not unusual among 'Carthusians'. In 1874 Henry James (who found *The Red and the Black* well-nigh 'absolutely unreadable') had no hesitation in proclaiming *The Charterhouse of Parma* 'a novel which will always be numbered among the dozen finest novels we possess'. Despite the fact that 'everyone [in the book] is grossly immoral, and the heroine is a kind of monster', James nevertheless perceived in it 'the restlessness of a superior mind' which made his 'total feeling for [Stendhal] a kindly one': 'We recommend his books to persons of "sensibility" whose moral convictions have somewhat solidified.'⁴ Three decades later the novelist and writer André Gide (1869-1951) followed James's lead and ranked *The Charterhouse of Parma* as the greatest French novel and (with Laclos's *Dangerous Liaisons*) one of only two French novels he would include in any list of the world's 'top ten'.

While such rankings may seem facile, it remains a fact that Stendhal's last published novel has retained the power to command almost religious admiration. The term 'miracle' recurs with extraordinary frequency in the extensive secondary literature devoted to this novel, and there has been a recurrent tendency among its critics to throw up their hands in both awe and surrender as they profess failure to explain how such a masterpiece of narrative art came into being. Stendhal once remarked that Italians seem to speak exclusively in exclamations, and so it is perhaps appropriate that

³ Harry Levin, *The Gates of Horn* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1963), 131.

⁴ Henri Beyle, in *The Nation* (17 Sept. 1874), reproduced in his *Literary Reviews and Essays*, ed. Albert Mordell (New York: Grove Press, 1957), 151-7.

his own 'Italian' novel should have provoked—and should continue to provoke—such hyperbolic claims to the novel's status as a World's Classic. In the most recent French monograph on *The Charterhouse of Parma* the Stendhal scholar Philippe Berthier ends with a reference to *Bella* (1926), the novel by Jean Giraudoux (1882–1944) in which the tragic waste of human life occasioned by the trench warfare of the First World War is pointed up by the observation that few 20-year-olds have yet had the time or opportunity to read Stendhal's great novel. Just as an assault is about to be launched, one soldier asks another to summarize its plot for him during their last remaining minute. For Berthier, after Giraudoux, 'it is as if, among all the masterpieces of world literature, there existed, between its motionless pages, some incomparable air of which every human being needs absolutely to have taken at least one breath before they die'.

Be it miracle or mere masterpiece, *The Charterhouse of Parma* was the product of Stendhal's lifelong passion for Italy. Born Henri Beyle in Grenoble in 1783 and briefly resident in Paris from 1799, Stendhal did not discover Italy until he crossed the Alps with Napoleon's armies early the following summer. What followed was a revelation—the moment at which his autobiography, *The Life of Henry Brulard*, stops because 'the subject exceeds the saying of it', and the moment which informs the joyous description of Napoleon's earlier entry into Milan in 1796 that fills the first pages of the novel. As Lombardy is roused from the stultifying slumber of Austrian occupation, so the young, motherless Beyle found himself liberated from the oppressive constraints of provincial Grenoble, unloving paternal discipline, and the anguish of adolescence. Italy meant love, music, painting, and sublime landscape—a motherland of the soul.

His service under Napoleon, at first as a cavalry officer and later as a rapidly promoted administrator, took him elsewhere—back to Paris, then to Brunswick and Vienna, and in 1812 eventually to Moscow (as the envoy of the Empress Josephine)—but in 1811 he spent two months visiting Milan and other Italian cities. During this period of leave he had a

passionate affair with Angela Pietragrua (known as Gina, and whom he had met on his first visit to Milan) and worked on a history of Italian painting, which he would eventually finish in 1815 and publish two years later. Following the fall of Napoleon he took up residence in Milan in August 1814; and this, his favourite Italian city—not least for its opera-house, La Scala—remained his home until 1821 when, being suspected of subversive activity, he thought it wiser to move back to France. He lived in Paris for the next nine years, and *The Red and the Black* is very much the product of this period. Following the July Revolution in 1830, which ushered in the so-called 'Bourgeois Monarchy' of Louis-Philippe, his repeated applications for a diplomatic posting at last met with success, and he left for Trieste in November. Refused accreditation there because of his suspect activities in Milan a decade earlier, he was finally appointed consul in Civitavecchia. This (with nearby Rome) was to be his home until he returned to Paris in 1836 for a period of leave which he contrived to extend for three years. Two years later, after serious bouts of illness, he left Italy for the last time. Though he died and was buried in Paris, the epitaph which he had repeatedly imagined for himself since his late thirties (and which his headstone now bears) ran as follows: 'Arrigo Beyle, Milanese. Visse. Scrisse. Amò.' Where Caesar came, saw, and conquered, Henri Beyle, self-styled citizen of Milan, saw, wrote, and loved.

During his many visits to libraries and bookstalls in Rome in the early 1830s Stendhal kept coming across manuscript chronicles recounting the generally unsavoury and blood-curdling exploits of the great Italian families of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. He began to collect them—either buying the original or having it transcribed—and by 1836, when he returned to Paris on leave, he had a large number which he intended to translate and adapt as short stories for publication in Parisian reviews. Subsequently, in August 1838, having already published several such stories, he turned to a manuscript entitled *Origine delle grandezze della famiglia Farnese*. This anonymous and maliciously frank early-seventeenth-century narrative records the unlikely career of Ales-

sandro Farnese (1468–1549), who became Pope Paul III in 1534. Aided and abetted by his beautiful aunt Vandozza Farnese, herself the former mistress of Rodrigo Borgia (who was Pope Alexander VI from 1492 until his death in 1503), he led an exciting life of reckless debauch before a reformation of character, be it real or apparent, cleared the path to his election as Pope. Whether he was abducting a young woman from her carriage in the middle of the countryside after killing one of her attendants, or being imprisoned in the Castel Sant' Angelo in Rome and then escaping by means of a very long rope, or becoming a cardinal and having four children by his high-born mistress Cleria, the younger Alessandro Farnese does not appear to have paid much attention even to the more salient aspects of Christian morality. Already on 17 March 1834 Stendhal had noted on the manuscript his admiration for this 'true and artless tale', and the biography of Paul III had clearly so captured his imagination that he continued to ponder and research it in the intervening years, until on 16 August 1838 he resolved (in his own mixture of English and Italian) to 'make of this sketch a romanzetto'.

On 4 November 1838, at no. 8 in the Rue Caumartin in Paris, Stendhal shut his door and gave orders that he was not to be disturbed, even by his closest friends. From then until 26 December he dictated *The Charterhouse of Parma* in its entirety, whereupon six 'enormous notebooks' were dispatched to his cousin Romain Colomb, whom he had charged with finding a publisher. As he later told Balzac, he would compose '20 or 30 pages' at a time, and then take a break for 'a little love-making when I can, or a spot of orgy'. Each morning, he claimed, he would have forgotten what he had dictated the previous day, but on reading the last three or four pages he would then launch forth once more upon his narrative. His intention was to achieve an effect of artless improvisation, to be 'more *natural* and worthier to find favour in 1880' when readers would no longer (he hoped) want their novels written in the grand manner, with flowery periods and only too predictable characters and plots. The novel was published by Ambroise Dupont at the beginning of April 1839, Stendhal having sold the first five years' copyright for

2,500 francs (the very approximate equivalent of £7,500 today).

Initial reaction to the novel was muted, and Balzac's extraordinarily generous and detailed eulogy in the *Revue parisienne* on 25 September 1840 does him all the more credit. He had already bumped into Stendhal in the street (appropriately, on the Boulevard des Italiens!) and complimented him on the work: in his review he praises his imagination, likening it to an Aladdin's lamp from which, magically, has issued this vivid, complex tableau of the court at Parma: 'Never before have the hearts of princes, ministers, courtiers, and women been depicted like this.' Stendhal's tableau has the dimensions of a fresco but the precision of the Dutch masters. Confessing to the sin of envy at Stendhal's brilliant description of events at Waterloo, he concluded: 'This great work could not have been conceived or carried out by anyone but a man of fifty in all the vigour of his years and in the maturity of all his talents. One sees perfection in everything'—which nevertheless did not prevent Balzac from castigating Stendhal for his bad grammar and suggesting how the book might have been improved (by omitting the pages before Waterloo, removing the figure of Blanès, and stopping the novel before the return to Parma of Mosca and Gina...). So flattered was Stendhal that he did at once undertake a revision of the novel's opening pages, claiming to have compressed the first fifty-four pages into a mere four or five. Subsequently he thought better of such 'improvements'.

It has often been said that Stendhal was incapable of inventing a plot and needed to take a pre-existing story-line if he was ever to overcome his wayward incapacity to see a work through to completion. *Armance* was 'inspired' by an unpublished novel about sexual impotence by the Duchesse de Duras; *Lucien Leuwen* was prompted by his reading of a novel sent to him for vetting by his friend Mme Jules Gauthier; and *The Red and the Black* famously retells the true story of Antoine Berthet, the private tutor who tried to murder his former employer's wife and was sentenced to death. But many novelists have done this: plots are seldom invented *ex nihilo*. For Stendhal, at least in the case of his two major

novels, it mattered that what he was recounting had—at least in its bare, factual essentials—actually happened. And it mattered because his French bourgeois reader of the 1830s and 1840s would refuse, in his pomposity and blindness, to recognize that human beings (like Julien Sorel) may shoot their ex-mistresses and yet be *excusable*, or that a sense of outraged personal honour (like Gina's) may be sufficient to authorize an assassination. Clearly it helps to have a ready-made plot if one is going to dictate a 500-page novel in some fifty-three days flat. But more importantly Stendhal wanted to alter his reader's perception of reality by replacing the 'fictions' of cant and hypocrisy by which his hidebound contemporaries habitually judged the human condition. His strategy was to present the truth as if it were fiction, the better to display the fictionality of conventional truths.

'The truth, the truth in all its harshness', reads the epigraph at the beginning of *The Red and the Black*, and despite its apparent status as a novel of adventure no less stirring than the contemporary serial-novels of Alexandre Dumas, this ambition informs the writing of *The Charterhouse of Parma* with equal urgency. In choosing the story of Antoine Berthet as the backbone of *The Red and the Black*, Stendhal had sought to show how France's ruling caste was suppressing, not future revolution, but the creative energy which humanity needs in order to achieve greatness, whether in art or in life. That such energy now manifested itself particularly in proletarian crimes of passion (as faithfully recorded every weekday in the *Gazette des Tribunaux*) was a reflection not on the immorality of the poor but on the etiolated, passionless sterility of the upper classes. Napoleon's glorious conquests had been replaced by the salon suppressions of Restoration society.

In the 1830s Stendhal's 'Italian chronicles' served the same purpose as the *Gazette des Tribunaux*. Here were detailed, if tendentious, accounts of real events during the Italian Renaissance, a time when violence and extreme immorality were accompanied by the greatest flowering of creative art the world had ever known. Perhaps only a society which lives its passions to the full can produce a Michelangelo or a Raphael;

but what they called living life to the full, Stendhal's French readers would simply call criminality—or, at best, a quaint and desperate want of caution. This repressive mind-set, opposed to the natural, the spontaneous, and the innovative, is what Stendhal saw as militating against all human joy and fulfilment and what he set out to subvert. With his own equivalent of reckless bravery he defied both the aesthetic norms and the 'political correctness' of his day to devote a verbal opera to the glorious potential of life's essentials: love, fidelity, and death. As the canon's nephew warns the narrator in the Foreword: 'Take care! this story is anything but moral, and now that you in France pride yourselves on your evangelical purity, it may earn you the reputation of an assassin.'

The brilliant opening pages of the novel introduce us to this new world, to 'marvels of courage and genius' which recall earlier epochs of superlative human achievement. And this tone of epic and romance is maintained throughout. Setting and character are invariably hyperbolic: the position of the del Dongo castle at Grianta is 'possibly unique in the whole world' (p. 13); the environs of Lake Como provide 'noble and lovely sights that the most famous setting in the world, the Bay of Naples, equals but cannot surpass' (p. 28). Of Gina we read that 'in prosperity no one was Gina's equal for high spirits and graciousness, just as, in adversity, no one was her equal for courage and calm serenity' (p. 11). Fabrice is one of the handsomest men in Italy, Giletti one of the ugliest; Mosca, at least in Gina's eyes, is 'the cleverest man and the greatest politician that Italy has produced in centuries' (p. 290). The main characters in *The Charterhouse of Parma* seem to have all the advantages: beauty, wealth, intelligence, courage, and good fortune are theirs in fullest measure, such that they appear to inhabit a fairy-tale world, a world of make-believe. Life is so packed with incident that the narrator finds himself overwhelmed; only the absolutely germane can be included, and the stuff of other novels (like Gina's two marriages, perhaps, or Fabrice and Clélia's three years of 'divine happiness') is passed over in a sentence or two.

The euphoria which follows the liberation of Italy is matched by a narrative euphoria, as Lieutenant Robert

charms Gina and the Marquise with his tales and the narrator seeks to entertain us also. His is a story which has been told many times over after-dinner coffee and zabaglione. Here is a story well worth telling, it seems, and one to which there have been several contributors over the years: the deceased canon himself, who kept written records, his nephew, the nephew's wife who knew the Duchess well, those who witnessed Fabrice's great escape from the Farnese Tower, indeed, even Fabrice himself (in Chapter 22). Everything has been thoroughly gone into: the story has been hallowed by time, and the narrator's role, far from being that of an inventive fabulist, is rather to be a humble link in the chain of a great tradition. Indeed, his very reluctance to narrate certain parts for fear of offending his reader precisely suggests some pre-existing, immutable story. Just as Caesar and Alexander have found a worthy successor in Napoleon, so it seems that the epic and romance of Tasso and Ariosto have found a no less worthy sequel. And duly the novel ends on the most fairy-tale of formulations: 'The Parma prisons were empty, the Count immensely rich, and Ernest V was adored by his subjects who compared his government to that of the Grand Dukes of Tuscany.'

But the Happy Few will realize that this is no Happy Ending: *The Charterhouse of Parma* presents no world of make-believe, but what Victor Brombert has called 'a fairyland for adults only'.⁵ If the prisons are empty, perhaps all the criminals have been hanged; the Count cares nothing for money and survives only to mourn his beloved Gina; and in Stendhal's view the Grand Dukes of Tuscany created an atmosphere of torpid security from which passion and gaiety were absent. The Happy Few, it may be suggested, are those who will have thrilled to all the excitement but without at the same time abdicating their powers of reason. Yes, this narrator has an absorbing story to tell, but just how reliable is it? Whose version are we getting, the French soldier's or the Italian canon's or the nephew's or the nephew's wife? For each would have a particular slant on the action, be it the bias

⁵ *Stendhal: Fiction and the Themes of Freedom* (Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1968), 153.

of gender or of nationality or of profession. (Compare Gina's comment to Fabrice: 'you will never appeal to men, you have too much passion in you for those with prosaic souls' (p. 34)). Just who makes all these sweeping comments in the novel about the French 'character', the 'Italian' character? Like Fabrice himself, the narrative voice seems to be half-French and half-Italian, half-soldier and half-priest. In some respects, therefore, the narrative takes on the characteristics of myth: having no one 'author', it has sprung from the accumulated story-telling of a community. And indeed, several commentators have noted the parallels with ancient mythology which are to be found in the novel, especially with the lovers' triangle involving Aphrodite/Venus, Eros/Cupid, and Psyche, and the quadripartite complications depicted in Racine's *Phèdre* (where Thésée loves Phèdre who loves her stepson Hippolyte who in turn loves Aricie).

But the unreliability of myth is brought to our attention in the novel at two key moments. In the case of Fabrice's legendary escape from the Farnese Tower, we have the conflicting accounts of Fabrice himself, the police (who invented a story of bribed guards to devalue Fabrice's courage and protect their own reputation), the liberal opposition (who put it about that the police have shot eight of these guards), a mediocre sonneteer (whose sonnet extolled 'this escape as one of the finest deeds of the century' and compared Fabrice to an angel arriving on earth with wings spread wide' (p. 405)), and finally Ferrante Palla (whose 'sublime sonnet' contains 'Fabrice's monologue as he was sliding down the rope and reflecting upon the various events in his life' (p. 405)). The 'real' Fabrice has become submerged beneath the various political or artistic transformations of his exploits.

The genesis of a myth is similarly traced towards the end of the novel. Following his eloquent sermons and increasingly celebrated self-abnegation, Fabrice becomes a kind of ecclesiastical pin-up. A portrait depicting him as a bishop sells out rapidly among the Parmesan populace, while the rich heiress Anetta Marini commissions a painting of Fabrice in non-ecclesiastical dress as an adornment for her bedroom wall and a focus for her star-struck crush. Fabrice's other female

admirers turn him into a Napoleonic legend: 'The ladies dreamed up a story about his having been one of the bravest captains in Napoleon's army. Soon this absurd fact was considered indisputable' (p. 487). Such is the transformational power of gossip and story-telling that he quickly becomes 'one of the bravest colonels in Napoleon's army' (p. 497).

Given these travesties, how can we believe the narrator's own version? The patina of epic and romance proves thin indeed. The walls and moats of the medieval castle at Grianta are empty relics of a vanished world, symbols rather than real instruments of power. The reality of battle at Waterloo (of which Stendhal's description later inspired Tolstoy's account of the Battle of Borodino in *War and Peace*) is such as to make Fabrice bid 'farewell to all his fine dreams of noble and chivalrous friendship, such as had existed between the heroes in [Tasso's epic poem] *Jerusalem Delivered*' (p. 54). Should we then suspect the narrator of trying to beguile us with adventure while putting our moral conscience to sleep? Except that he himself alerts us in Chapter 8 to the choice before us. Commenting on Fabrice's reflections on astrology, he observes:

in his idle moments his spirit would occupy itself in blissfully savouring sensations produced by romantic circumstances which his imagination was always ready to conjure up. He was very far indeed from employing his time in patiently observing the actual details of events, the better to fathom their causes. Reality still seemed to him to be mean and dirty; I can understand that people do not like to look at it, but in that case they should not theorize about it. Above all, they should not use various matters about which they know nothing, as grounds for their objections. (p. 160)

The great achievement of *The Charterhouse of Parma* is to provide us with persuasively 'blissful' romantic circumstances while at the same time inviting us to see the 'mean and dirty' reality beneath. Some readers, of course, have refused the invitation, particularly in the case of Fabrice. Young, handsome, brave, intelligent, well-connected, beloved of the most charming woman at court and lover of an ethereal beauty beneath whose pious exterior beats a passionate and adoring heart, what more could one look for in a hero? Yet this same

man ends up resigning an archbishopric at the age of 27 and dying in a monastery, having witnessed, perhaps even caused, the death of his mistress and his son. Just a tragic accident, or was he himself to blame? This central mystery is epitomized in the enigmatic title of the novel. That it should denote Fabrice's ultimate destination places him at the centre of the narrative (despite the assertion in the Foreword that we are being given 'the story of the Duchess Sanseverina'), yet what is the nature of the journey that leads him to that destination? Is it a quest, an education, a voyage of discovery, or a road to failure and withdrawal? Is monastic devotion to be seen as a feckless palliative or a moral advance on the immorality of court life? Is the charterhouse a bolt-hole or a summit?

Some ardent 'Carthusians', such as C. W. Thompson and Philippe Berthier, have read the end of the novel as a moment of supreme self-knowledge in which Fabrice cuts himself loose from terrestrial ties and, having discovered the nature of love in his relationship with Clélia, now seeks to abandon himself to the love of God. The laid-back aristocrat without care or scruple has been transformed into a contemplative monk. Less ardent but no less positive readers have seen him as the individual who has found fulfilment in profane love and then accepts the consequences of his own fateful actions rather than live a second-best existence within society. More sceptical readers have pointed to the narrator's final comment that '[Fabrice] was too intelligent not to feel that he had a great deal to atone for' (p. 509), and reflected on his possible shortcomings. He has led a charmed life, but as Mosca himself remarks: 'Everything is simple in his eyes because everything is seen from above' (p. 148). He can, as at Waterloo, lose some of his illusions, but he never replaces them with knowledge. Rather than develop rational foresight, he trusts to omens and signs, but these—like the chestnut tree which comes opportunely into leaf but then is damaged—he chooses to interpret as it suits him. Indeed, he views his life as having already been 'written' and tries to anticipate its coming chapters. Never does he set himself to 'patiently observing the actual details of events, the better to fathom their causes'. Never does he reflect that he killed Giletti not in

self-defence but in sudden rage at the thought that he has been facially disfigured by his assailant's knife. Perhaps handsome is as handsome does?

Seeing things from above, of course, is a commendable attribute in the Stendhalian scale of values, and many readers of the novel (most famously Marcel Proust) have pointed to the 'poetry of high places' in *The Charterhouse of Parma*. The bell-tower from which Blanès gazes at the stars or the Farnese Tower from which Fabrice contemplates the sublimity of the Alps both offer symbolic vantage-points for the 'superior being' whom Stendhal is portraying, raised above the petty concerns of the Parmesan court and wholly preoccupied with the demands of his soul. Yet there is selfishness as well as spirituality in such a stance, and Fabrice remains wholly oblivious to the suffering which his heedless actions cause both the women who love him. Down below—as the novel keeps reminding us—there is a 'dreadful reality', an 'awful reality', a 'harsh reality'. Despite all the analogies with card-games and play-acting, life is a serious business: be it Gina's jealousy and her sordid transaction with Ranuce-Ernest V, Clélia's anguished filial conscience, or Mosca's painful, resigned acceptance of second place in his mistress's heart, Fabrice is oblivious to it all.

And the death of Sandrino—which Stendhal told Balzac he had focused on exclusively as the end of his narrative throughout the period of its dictation—brings this issue to a head. Wishing to pretend that the child is ill in order then to abduct him, Fabrice ignores Clélia's objection that this is to tempt fate. But here superstition proves tragically apposite. Again Fabrice has ignored the signs because it suits him, and his claims to epic status begin to sound hollow: 'Since my destiny, which is without parallel in this world, has deprived me of the happiness that so many loving hearts enjoy, and I cannot live my life in the company of those that I adore, I want at least to have at my side a being who recalls you to my heart, who can in a sense replace you' (p. 506). His refusal to accommodate to reality may be spirited, but it fills his beloved's heart with 'intense pain' and soon brings the death of son and mother alike. Is this how mystic monks are made?

The rapid ending of the novel leaves many questions unanswered. While Stendhal told Balzac that this rapidity was the result of his publisher's demand that he shorten the book (so that it would fit into two volumes), it may be that the brevity and suddenness of conclusion represent a conscious artistic decision to end with a shock (as do the various short stories which he derived from his 'Italian chronicles'). What does the silence of the charterhouse conceal? A man serenely contemplating an after-life with Clélia, or a bewildered and still immature young lover whom fate has unexpectedly toppled from a summit of 'divine happiness' into an abyss of bereavement and remorse? And all on a 'tender whim'.

The death of a child at the end of *The Charterhouse of Parma* marks the death of innocence. The naïve pleasures of epic and romance belong to the past, just as Fabrice's 'artless capacity [...] to find happiness in whatever was filling his life' (p. 219) has vanished with experience. It is fitting that the Foreword should be dated on Stendhal's fifty-sixth birthday, because the novel is very much concerned with the passing of the years, with the fading of youth and the onset of middle age. It opens with the youthfulness of the French invaders whose oldest general is 27 (Fabrice's age at the end of the novel), and who rejuvenate Milan, just as the young Gina's return to Grianta rejuvenates her sister-in-law and as the older Gina later rejuvenates Mosca. But the subsequent narrative is punctuated by multiple references to the ageing of the characters, and particularly of Gina herself. At the end Clélia looks 30, Fabrice 40: and this adds extra poignancy to the lines of their favourite sonnet: 'No, you will never see me change, | Fair eyes that taught me how to love' (p. 478).

How, then, should we read *The Charterhouse of Parma*? As children or adults, like the passionate and reckless Italians or in the manner of the cautious, calculating French, as 'poetic' women or as 'prosaic' men? The dedication at the end, 'To The Happy Few', seems to put us on our mettle in this respect. The phrase itself probably has its source, not in Shakespeare's *Henry V* (IV. iii: 'we few, we happy few, we band of brothers'), but in Oliver Goldsmith's novel *The Vicar of Wakefield*, which Stendhal much admired. Here, in the

third paragraph of Chapter 2, the Vicar relates that he has given some thought to the question of whether a widowed clergyman should remarry: 'I published some tracts on the subject myself, which, as they never sold, I have the consolation of thinking were read only by the happy *few*.' While the Vicar himself may be thinking of Shakespeare, it is more plausible that he has in mind the biblical 'few' who are 'chosen' among the many who are called (Matthew 22: 14). Stendhal's wry implication seems to be not only that *The Charterhouse of Parma* is unlikely to be a runaway best-seller, but also that the average French reader of 1839 will be out of sympathy with the aesthetic and moral values with which the novel is imbued.

This parting challenge to our readerly intelligence is the more urgent for the fact that the question of interpretation and misinterpretation is raised at every turn in the novel. At the beginning of Chapter 2 the epigraph from Ronsard portrays the starry heavens as a divine alphabet which fallen man disdains to read. Is not astrology a nonsensical 'science'? Or do our supposed learning and sophistication simply blind us to the truth? (The fact that Blanès's predictions almost but not quite fit Fabrice's subsequent life only makes this question the more problematic.) Similarly, perhaps *The Charterhouse of Parma* is just a story, a romance: why look for messages? Or does our new (nineteenth-century) taste for novels which explain the world rationally and 'scientifically' perhaps blind us to the virtues of its 'alternative' way of telling the truth? Throughout the novel, 'disguise'—of name, costume, or behaviour—is repeatedly presented as a means of safeguarding liberty, sincerity, and authenticity, while a certain obliquity seems to be required if the truth is to be conveyed at all. Be it advice on the best means of escape or a profession of undying love, lantern-flashes and pseudo-theological jottings in the margins of St Jerome prove the surest means of communication: and if an aspirant Catholic archbishop would woo a married woman, then a haggard face and an eloquent sermon are just the ticket.

So what coded message may *The Charterhouse of Parma* itself contain, whether about politics or the individual's

pursuit of happiness? In Chapter 23 the narrator apologizes for introducing the first of these: 'Politics, in a literary work, is like a pistol shot in the middle of a concert; something loud and out of place to which we are none the less compelled to pay attention' (p. 414). This disingenuous remark recalls the 'Publisher's Note' at the beginning of *The Red and the Black*, where the novelist acknowledges in seeming acquiescence that the 'great events of July [i.e. the 1830 Revolution] super-vened and left French minds rather unreceptive to creations of the imagination'. But, as Stendhal well knew, the distinction between politics and literature which these comments imply is far from equating to some easy distinction between 'ugly reality' and 'inconsequential fiction'. For he reveals just how far political power actually depends on 'story-telling', on the politician's ability to get others to see events in terms of his or her own selective account or 'ideology'; while literature, which as a form of 'story-telling' is therefore inevitably caught up in the political process, must be judged by its readiness and ability to expose the narrative strategies upon which power is based. For 'In the courts of absolute rulers, the first clever schemer dictates what is "the truth", just as in Paris it is dictated by fashion' (p. 211).

In his two previous novels (as in *Lamuel* which followed), Stendhal clearly aimed to hold up a mirror to the sordid scheming that sometimes passes for political action. But, as he notes in a draft preface to *Lucien Leuwen*, such a mirror is liable to be smashed to the ground by the sick man who finds in it the pale and faintly green reflection of himself, particularly if his own particular political allegiances have been trampled on. Should the novelist perhaps adjust the angle of the mirror to soften the image it presents, or is that to compromise unduly with the 'enemy'? A further reason why Stendhal abandoned this novel lay in his inability to decide whether he was writing a satire of the moment or a timeless comedy about the corridors of power: the liberal outraged by the sacrifice of principle to selfish motive tended to the former, while the ironist and man of letters sought ultimately to achieve the latter.

In *The Charterhouse of Parma* the French reader of conservative bent is offered respite. He or she is no longer being

required to countenance a novelist bestowing the mantle of Jesus on a carpenter's murderous, upstart son from the Jura, or to believe (as in the case of *Lucien Leuwen*) that a king of France might exploit the new invention of the telegraph to make a killing on the Paris Stock Exchange. Now the scene is Italy. Moreover, while Stendhal's Parma is based on early-nineteenth-century Modena (governed by the repressive King Francis IV and the source of a republican uprising comparable with that led by Ferrante Palla), it owes much to sixteenth-century Rome. Like Italy, the past too is a foreign country, and, as we all know, they do things differently there. But do they? Perhaps the geographical and chronological distances are merely incidental. Perhaps the ways in which societies are ruled will always display a dialectic of good intention and foolish zeal, wise governance and evil exploitation? Again we find two Stendhals. For the outraged liberal, as Philippe Berthier has suggested, the evolution of Mosca from young Napoleonic soldier and republican to cynical statesman represents a critique of Napoleon himself and the sorry replacement of Bonapartist ideals by a *Realpolitik* no less unprincipled than that of the reactionary Austrians whose dead hand lies over the once creative plain of Lombardy. Meanwhile such ideals live on in Ferrante Palla, the republican and artist, who cares nothing for money and would sacrifice all to set his people free. But Stendhal the ironist is seldom absent. Mosca is an artist himself, a subtle story-teller who persuades his princely masters to a political analysis of contemporary events which is designed to ensure his own continuance in office and to exclude the base and reprehensible Rassi; while the only place where Palla might go to find his republican ideals realized is America—where 'the dollar is king' and grocers, not artists, are the arbiters of public opinion.

Politics, then, is the art of manipulation—for good or ill. 'Policy', as such, may be an illusion: witness the ease with which M. de Rênal and Valenod swap party affiliations at the end of *The Red and the Black*, or the lack of 'ideological' difference between Mosca's 'conservatism' and Rassi's 'liberalism'. In so far as a novel is political and itself an instrument

of manipulation, then perhaps *The Charterhouse of Parma* may be said to manipulate us into believing that the pursuit of happiness is better carried out in defiance of the society in which one lives and by heeding individual promptings and exploring the delights of nature, art, and sexual passion.

But just as it proclaims no political ideal, so too the novel is circumspect in its recommendations on a personal level. Whenever Stendhal refers in his diaries or other non-fictional writings to a person's 'character', he always glosses this term with the phrase: 'that is to say, his habitual manner of pursuing happiness.' What lessons, then, should the Happy Few derive from the 'characters' on display in *The Charterhouse of Parma*? Certainly, that happiness itself is an elusive and ephemeral goal. It may present itself unexpectedly and in the most surprising circumstances, and one would do well, therefore, to listen to the distant sounds of church bells which carry across the waters of Lake Como 'on a tone of gentle melancholy, and seem to say to man: "Life races by, so do not be so hard to please about any happiness that lies within your grasp: savour it without delay"' (p. 29). As far as this novel is concerned, happiness is clearly not the lot of the Austrians or the French: for earnest Baron Binder, the Austrian chief of police and 'a prudent, melancholy man', the business of life is 'to take everything seriously' (p. 89), while the French in their vanity care only about money and are the eternal victims of their self-interest and their irony (p. 208). Happiness? Only the Italians know where to find it. While the Italian heart 'is tormented by suspicion and by wild notions born of a vivid imagination', nevertheless, 'the joys it experiences are much more intense and of much greater duration' (p. 83).

The ability of *The Charterhouse of Parma* to command such devotion among its readers derives ultimately from its powerful simulation of this very ethos in the process of narrative itself: The hyperbolic epithets; the speed with which events unfold; the omission of pedantic detail and the disdain for the inconsequential; the cavalier manner in which the narrator interlaces his own account with the direct speech, reported thoughts, interior monologue, letters, poems, translated archives, and so on of the characters themselves, while rarely

bothering to let us know by punctuation where one form of discourse begins and another ends; the profusion of excitable emphasis (in italic, of course!); the debonair allusions to even the most obscure of contemporary artists; the comparative rarity of solemn analysis and earnest pronouncement: all these features of the novel seduce us into reading in just the way that Fabrice leads his life, heedlessly, without reserve, entirely given over to the magic of the moment. *Carpe diem*. Like Fabrice gazing into his own 'predestined' future, we know that the novel has been written and we suppose that there will be a logic to events, that there will be an ending, that all will become clear—and that we may eventually discover why the novel bears the title it does. But each paragraph, following close on the heels of the last, invites us to forget the wider context and to join the hero 'in blissfully savouring sensations' as they present themselves. Where (as we learn from the epigraph to Book 1) the landscape of northern Italy once led Ariosto to 'fill the pages', the pages of *The Charterhouse of Parma* in turn invite us to people the landscape of our mind with these extraordinary individuals whose personal qualities raise them to the peaks of the sublime.

Indeed, one might even say that the narrative process of *The Charterhouse of Parma* reproduces the 'language' of the very landscape it describes, 'the language of those bewitching places which have no equal in the whole world' (p. 29). Lake Como, we are told, is separated by a 'rugged promontory' into two branches: 'the Como branch, which is so voluptuously alluring, and the other one, so forbidding, that extends towards Lecco' (p. 28). Surrounding the lake are the hills which recall the 'descriptions in Tasso and Ariosto': 'Everything is noble and tender, everything speaks of love, nothing reminds you of the ugliness of civilization' (p. 29). But then if one lifts one's eyes: 'Beyond those hills, on whose summits stand solitary dwellings anyone would love to inhabit, your astonished eye can see the peaks of the Alps, eternally covered in snow, and their stern severity calls to mind enough of life's hardships to intensify the rapture of the present moment' (p. 29). Whether it be 'voluptuously alluring' in its narrative

ease or 'forbidding' in its honest appraisal of politics and the melancholy of middle age; whether it 'speaks of love' or ends with a 'stern severity', the novel does precisely seem to present 'enough of life's hardships to intensify the rapture of the present moment'.

And here it is the 'rapture' of reading *The Charterhouse of Parma*. If readers of the novel have consistently remembered it as a joyful, 'miraculous' book, this is not so much because it ends with the prospect of Fabrice and Clélia being reunited in heaven as because it opens on to a vista of rereading. The last page of *The Charterhouse of Parma* ceases to be tragic because the parting dedication to the Happy Few is an invitation to the living, an invitation to reflect and to go right back to the beginning and read the book again. Like Lake Como itself and like Henri Beyle's 'motherland of the soul', the characters of this novel—Fabrice, Gina, Clélia, Mosca, Ferrante Palla—have one last, incalculable advantage over ordinary mortals: they shall always be there, there to be revisited, to be resurrected, in the eternal after-life of posterity's attention. And in this readers' heaven, this charterhouse for the imagination, Stendhal will always be there to welcome us as, at dead of night, Clélia welcomes her beloved Fabrice: 'Entre ici, ami de mon cœur.' Enter here, friend of my heart.

NOTE ON THE TRANSLATION

This translation of Stendhal's great novel is based on the *Classiques Garnier* edition, edited by Antoine Adam (1973).

Unlike earlier translators of *La Chartreuse de Parme*, I have chosen to retain the French names that Stendhal gives to his Italian characters. I have done this in recognition of the importance to the text of Stendhal's French narrator and the French readers to whom he addresses himself. Their presence is no mere narrative device: the distance thus created between text and actual reader adds an ironic dimension to the experience of reading this novel. To Italianize all the names would remove a constant reminder that the narrative is filtered through the consciousness of a French narrator. I did, however, decide to use 'lire' instead of 'francs' in those cases where the financial transactions take place, as they almost all do, in Italy. I wanted to avoid distracting or confusing the reader unnecessarily. I have made no changes to the actual sums involved; for example, a reference to '100 francs' has simply become '100 lire'.

Anyone familiar with the French text of *La Chartreuse* will remember Stendhal's frequent and sometimes apparently arbitrary use of italics. I have retained his italics where they are used purely for emphasis or to denote a foreign (usually Italian) expression. In many examples, however, they indicate a word or phrase that is being quoted, either literally from within the text itself, or by implication from the 'world' of the text. In my translation these instances appear within quotation marks. In a few cases where the italics of the original seemed to me to be unjustified, I have simply ignored them.

The 'running heads' which appear in some French editions were in all probability the work of Stendhal's editor. I therefore felt I could choose some of my own, which I hope will give readers a sense of where they are in the novel.

One of the most remarkable characteristics of Stendhal's narrative technique is the ease with which he slips into and out of his characters' minds. In rendering this perpetual back-

and-forth between voiced and unvoiced speech, I have parted company with my predecessors and have not used quotes to mark unvoiced, interior monologue. I feel that such an artificial signal creates an unnecessary barrier between text and reader, and slows the rapid pace of the narrative.

I have left untranslated (in the actual text) the La Fontaine fable which figures so prominently in Chapter 24. In so doing I have followed the logic of the scene, where an Italian Prince is asked to read the fable aloud because he 'reads French perfectly'. The English prose translation of the fable appears in the endnotes. For the verse translation of the lines from Ronsard which form the epigraph to Chapter 2, I am indebted to my friend Janet Barton Morgan. My grateful thanks go to her and to my husband Jim Mauldon, without whose unfailing support and help at every level I could never have completed this translation. Finally my very special thanks go to Roger Pearson for all his generous help and perceptive advice over the past two years.

MARGARET MAULDON

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Readers wishing to consult the French text of *La Chartreuse de Parme* may rely not only on Antoine Adam's edition (1973) in the *Classiques Garnier* series, on which this new translation is based, but also on those of Michel Crouzet for Garnier-Flammarion (1964) and Béatrice Didier for Gallimard's *Folio Classique* series (1972).

Almost all Stendhal's works have been translated into English at one time or another. Those for whom *The Charterhouse of Parma* constitutes their first experience of his writing might next wish to read *The Red and the Black*, which is available in the recent translation by Catherine Slater (*World's Classics*, 1991). Of the other novels, the first and shortest is *Armance*, which may be read in C. K. Scott Moncrieff's version (first published in 1928 and reissued by the Soho Book Company in 1986) or in the translation by Gilbert and Suzanne Sale (*Merlin Press*, 1960). *Lucien Leuwen*, Stendhal's longest but unfinished novel, is available in H. L. R. Edward's translation, first published in 1951 and revised and introduced by Robin Buss (*Penguin Classics*, 1991).

Among Stendhal's other works, his famous analysis and anecdotal survey of love, *De l'amour*, may be read under the title *Love* in Gilbert and Suzanne Sale's version for *Penguin Classics* (first published in 1957); while his autobiographical work, *The Life of Henry Brulard*, is available in the same series, translated and introduced by John Sturrock (1995). Of further interest is Richard Howard's translation of two shorter narratives, *The Pink and the Green, followed by Mina de Vanghel* (Hamish Hamilton, 1988); the *Lives of Haydn, Mozart and Metastasio by Stendhal (1814)*, translated and edited by Richard N. Coe (*Calder and Boyars*, 1972); and the same translator's *Life of Rossini* (*Calder and Boyars*, 1970). Extracts from Stendhal's correspondence may be read in *To The Happy Few: Selected Letters*, translated by Norman Cameron and edited by E. Boudot-Lamotte in 1952 and reissued with an introduction by Cyril Connolly by the Soho Book Company in 1986.

The most reliable and up-to-date biography of Stendhal in English is Jonathan Keates's *Stendhal* (*Sinclair-Stevenson*, 1994; paperback edn., 1995). Also readable and reliable is Robert Alter (in collaboration with Carol Cosman): *Stendhal: A Biography* (*Allen & Unwin*, 1980). In French, Michel Crouzet's *Stendhal ou Monsieur Moi-Même* (*Flammarion*, 1990) is authoritative.

The best short monograph in English devoted solely to *The Charterhouse of Parma* is Alison Finch's *Stendhal: 'La Chartreuse de Parme'* (Edward Arnold, 1984). Of equal interest is Ann Jefferson's introduction to C. K. Scott Moncrieff's translation of the novel in the Everyman Library (1992). Recent critical works in English which contain chapters on *The Charterhouse of Parma* include Ann Jefferson, *Reading Realism in Stendhal* (Cambridge University Press, 1988) and Roger Pearson, *Stendhal's Violin: A Novelist and his Reader* (Clarendon Press, 1988). For a more detailed account of the novel's place within the context of Stendhal's views on Italy, there is A. E. Greaves, *Stendhal's Italy: Themes of Political and Religious Satire* (University of Exeter Press, 1995).

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The critical reception of the novel is traced in Roger Pearson (ed.), *Stendhal: 'The Red and the Black' and 'The Charterhouse of Parma'* (Longman, 1994), which includes a selection of nineteenth- and twentieth-century critical material in English or English translation.

A CHRONOLOGY OF STENDHAL (MARIE-HENRI BEYLE)

- 1783 23 January: born in Grenoble into well-to-do family.
- 1790 23 November: death of his mother Henriette (*née* Gagnon).
- 1799 After three successful years at the *École Centrale*, is recommended to apply to the *École Polytechnique* in Paris. Arrives on 10 November but prefers not to take the entrance examination.
- 1800 Family connections bring him a job at the Ministry of War. His visit to Milan at the end of May marks the beginning of a lifelong love affair with Italy. 23 September: appointed to a commission as sub-lieutenant in the cavalry (of Napoleon's army in Italy).
- 1801-2 Granted sick leave and resigns his commission on returning to Paris, where he devotes more time to study and to his many attempts to write a comedy.
- 1804-5 Falls in love with an actress, Mélanie Guilbert. Follows her to Marseille, where he briefly finds employment with a colonial import-and-brokerage firm.
- 1806 Returns to Paris without Mélanie. Departs to join Napoleon's army in an administrative position. Posted to Brunswick.
- 1809 Working in Vienna. Illness keeps him from the Battle of Wagram.
- 1810-11 Returns to Paris and promotion. Presented to the empress. Spends three months in Italy. Affair with Angela Pietragrua. Works on a history of Italian painting.
- 1812 Leaves Paris for Russia with dispatches. After a month in Moscow departs just before the main retreat.
- 1814 Paris occupied by the Allies. Signs declaration recognizing the Bourbon restoration. 20 July: leaves Paris to live in Milan.
- 1815 Publishes his *Vies de Haydn, de Mozart et de Métastase*. End of the affair with Angela Pietragrua.
- 1816-17 Meets Lord Byron at La Scala. Publishes his *Histoire de la peinture en Italie* and *Rome, Naples et Florence en 1817* (in

which he uses the pseudonym 'Stendhal' for the first time). Begins work on a life of Napoleon.

- 1818 4 March: beginning of his great and unrequited passion for Matilde Dembowska (*née* Viscontini).
- 1819 20 June: death of his father Chérubin, who leaves him some minor debts rather than the fortune he had expected. Passing friendship with Rossini.
- 1820-1 Working on *De l'amour*. Suspected by his left-wing friends of being a French agent, and by the authorities of involvement in left-wing plots. Departure from Milan and Matilde. Return to Paris.
- 1822 Publishes *De l'amour*. Begins regular contributions (until 1828) on the Parisian cultural scene to English periodicals, such as the *New Monthly Magazine*.
- 1825 1 May: death of Matilde Dembowska.
- 1827 Publishes his first novel, *Armance*.
- 1829 25-6 October: his 'first idea' of *Le Rouge et le Noir*.
- 1830 8 April: signs contract with Levavasieur for publication of *Le Rouge et le Noir*. 25 September: after considerable persistence finally offered the post of consul in Trieste. 6 November: departure from Paris, after making a written proposal of marriage to Giulia Rinieri (which is refused). 13 November: publication of *Le Rouge et le Noir*. Arrival in Trieste. Accreditation refused.
- 1831 11 February: appointed consul in Civitavecchia. 25 April: accredited as consul by the Holy See.
- 1833 Begins elaboration of short stories on the basis of late-Renaissance manuscripts discovered in Rome. These stories, posthumously dubbed his *Chroniques italiennes*, are published at periodic intervals in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* during the late 1830s.
- 1834 Starts work on *Lucien Leuwen* but abandons the novel some 700 pages later when, on 23 September 1835, he hears of the abolition of the freedom of the press—by his employers.
- 1835 Awarded the cross of the Legion of Honour for services to literature (would have preferred it for services to diplomacy). 23 November: begins work on his autobiography, the *Vie de Henry Brulard*, which he abandons on 17 March 1836: 'The subject exceeds the saying of it.'

- 1836 24 May: arrives in Paris on leave, which he manages to protract until 1839.
- 1838 Dictates *La Chartreuse de Parme* in its entirety between 4 November and 26 December.
- 1839 6 April: publication of *La Chartreuse de Parme*. 13 April: begins work on *Lamiel*, his last, unfinished novel. 24 June: leaves Paris to resume office as consul and is back at his desk on 10 August.
- 1840 1 January: suffers first stroke. 25 September: Honoré de Balzac publishes eulogious review of *La Chartreuse de Parme*.
- 1841 Further illness. 15 September: granted sick leave. 22 October: leaves for Paris.
- 1842 22 March: collapses in the street after dinner with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and dies in his lodgings at 2 a.m. the following morning. 24 March: buried in the cemetery of Montmartre. Desired epitaph: 'Arrigo Beyle Milanese. Visse. Scrisse. Amò.'



Italy in 1815

THE CHARTERHOUSE
OF PARMA

FOREWORD

It was during the winter of 1830 and at a distance of three hundred leagues from Paris that this story was written; it therefore contains no references to the events of 1839.

Many years before 1830, in the days when our armies were on the move throughout Europe, I happened by chance to be given a billeting order for the house of a Canon; this was in Padua, a charming Italian town; as my stay there lasted some time, the Canon and I became friends.

Towards the end of 1830 I once more passed through Padua; I hurried to the good Canon's house; I knew that he had died, but I wanted to see once more the drawing-room in which we had spent so many pleasant evenings, evenings that I had, in the interim, so often remembered with longing. I found the Canon's nephew and the nephew's wife, who received me like an old friend. One or two other persons dropped in, and the gathering did not break up until very late; the nephew had an excellent *zabaione* sent in from the Caffè Pedroti. What really kept us up was the story of the Duchess Sanseverina which someone alluded to, and which the nephew was so kind as to relate, for my benefit, in its entirety.

'In the country to which I'm going,' I told my friends, 'I shall hardly ever enjoy evenings like this one, and I mean to while away those long evening hours by composing a narrative based on your story.'

'In that case,' said the nephew, 'I'll give you my uncle's records which, in the section on Parma, mention some of the intrigues of that court at the time when the Duchess's influence there was paramount; but take care! this story is anything but moral, and now that you in France pride yourselves on your evangelical purity, it may earn you the reputation of an assassin.'

I am publishing this narrative without making any changes to the manuscript of 1830, a policy which may have two drawbacks:

The first concerns the reader: the characters, being Italian, may perhaps interest him less, since Italian hearts differ considerably from French hearts; Italians are sincere, decent folk who, unless they are intimidated, speak their minds; they are vain only when the mood seizes them, and then vanity becomes a passion, and is called *puntiglio*. Lastly, they do not consider poverty to be absurd.

The second drawback concerns the author.

I confess that I have been so bold as to leave my characters with their rough edges intact; but on the other hand—and this I proclaim loudly—I heap the sternest moral censure upon many of their actions. What would be the point of bestowing upon them the high morality and graces of the French character, which loves money above all else and never falls into sin from motives of hatred or of love? The Italians in this tale are more or less the opposite of that. Besides, it seems to me that every time one travels two hundred leagues from South to North, there is occasion both for a different setting, and a different novel. The Canon's charming niece had known the Duchess Sanseverina and had even been very fond of her, and she has begged me to change nothing in her adventures, which are reprehensible.

23 January 1839

BOOK I

Gia mi fur dolci inviti a empir le carte | I luoghi ameni.
(Ariosto, *Satire IV*)

These pleasant places were once, for me, a sweet
invitation to write.

CHAPTER 1

On 15 May 1796 General Bonaparte entered Milan at the head of that youthful army which a few days earlier had crossed the bridge at Lodi, and taught the world that, after so many centuries, Caesar and Alexander had a successor. The marvels of courage and genius that Italy witnessed in the course of a few months awakened a slumbering people; a week before the arrival of the French, the Milanese still thought of them as just a bunch of ruffians who routinely took to their heels when confronted by the troops of His Imperial and Royal Majesty: at least that is what they were told three times a week by a little news-sheet no bigger than your hand, printed on dirty paper.

In the Middle Ages the republicans of Lombardy had shown themselves to be as courageous as the French, and it was only fitting that they should see their city razed to the ground by the emperors of Germany. Since they had become 'loyal subjects', their principal pastime was to have sonnets printed on tiny pink taffeta handkerchiefs, to mark the marriage of some young girl belonging to a rich or noble family. Two or three years after this important event in her life, the young girl would choose a gallant; sometimes the name of the *cicisbeo* selected by the husband's family was given due place in the marriage contract. The difference was great between these effeminate customs and the intense emotions aroused by the unexpected arrival of the French army. Before long, a new and passionate approach to life began to emerge. On 15 May 1796 an entire people realized that everything they had respected up to then was supremely ridiculous and occasionally abhorrent. The departure of the last Austrian regiment marked the end of the old ideas: it became fashionable to risk one's life; people realized that in order to be happy after centuries of deadening, insipid sensations, it was necessary to feel a genuine passion for one's country, and to seek out heroic actions. A continuation of the jealous despotism of Charles V and Philip II* had plunged the country into darkest

night; their statues were overturned and suddenly everything became flooded with light. For the past fifty years or so, while the *Encyclopédie* and Voltaire* were dazzling France, the monks were haranguing the good people of Milan that to learn to read (or to learn anything else in this world) was a total waste of effort, and that by paying your tithe very regularly to your priest and faithfully telling him all your little sins you were more or less certain of a good place in paradise. To complete the emasculation of this people which had once been so formidable and so rational, Austria sold them, at a low price, the privilege of not furnishing recruits for the Austrian army.

In 1796 the Milanese army consisted of twenty-four scoundrels dressed in red who guarded the city, together with four magnificent regiments of Hungarian Grenadiers. Morals were lax in the extreme, but passion very rare: moreover, in addition to the nuisance of having to tell the priest everything, under penalty of ruin even in this world, the good people of Milan were further subjected to certain little royal restrictions that did not fail to irritate. For example, the Archduke, who resided in Milan* and governed in the name of his cousin the Emperor, had had the profitable idea of trading in wheat. As a result, the peasants were forbidden to sell their grain until his Highness had filled his own granaries.

In May 1796, three days after the entry of the French, a young man by the name of Gros,* a painter of miniatures who later became famous, happened to be in the Gran Caffè dei Servi, which was very fashionable at that time. He had come with the army, and was slightly mad. Hearing stories about the exploits of the Archduke—an enormously fat man—Gros picked up the advertised list of ice-creams that was printed on a sheet of nasty yellow paper. On the back of the sheet he drew the fat Archduke; a French soldier was sticking his bayonet into his belly from which, instead of blood, there flowed an unbelievable quantity of wheat. What we call a cartoon or a caricature was unknown in that country controlled by wary despots. The drawing left by Gros on the table in the Caffè dei Servi seemed like a miracle from heaven; it

was printed during the night and the next morning 20,000 copies were sold.

The same day, it was announced that a tax of 6 million was to be levied to meet the needs of the French army which, having just won six battles and conquered twenty provinces, lacked only shoes, trousers, coats, and hats.

Such was the flood of happiness and pleasure that poured over Lombardy at the arrival of those impoverished French that only the priests and a few of the nobles realized how severe was that levy of 6 million, soon to be followed by many others. Those French soldiers laughed and sang all day long; they were all under twenty-five and it was said that at twenty-seven their General was the oldest man in the army. Their youthful and carefree light-heartedness made an entertaining contrast with the furious predictions of the monks, who for the last six months had been preaching from the pulpit that the French were monsters, required on pain of death to burn everything down and to cut off everyone's head. For this purpose, each regiment marched with the guillotine leading.

In the country villages you could see French soldiers standing at cottage doors rocking the baby for the mother of the household, and almost every evening some drummer-boy playing his fiddle would start up an impromptu dance. Since quadrilles were much too skilful and complicated for the local women to be taught them by the soldiers—who in any case rarely knew them—it was the women who taught the young Frenchmen the *Montférine*, the *Sauteuse*, and other Italian dances.

The officers were lodged, as far as possible, with wealthy families; they sorely needed to recoup. For example, a lieutenant called Robert had a billeting order for the *palazzo* of the Marquise del Dongo. The entire fortune of this officer, a somewhat unscrupulous young recruit, consisted, upon his arrival at the Palazzo del Dongo, of a single coin worth six francs which he had received at Piacenza. After crossing the bridge at Lodi he had taken a magnificent pair of perfectly new nankeen breeches off a handsome Austrian officer who had been killed by a cannon-ball, and never was the acquisition of a garment more timely. His officer's epaulets were of

wool and his tunic was patched with the lining of his sleeves so that the pieces would hold together; but there was an even more unfortunate circumstance: the soles of his shoes were made of pieces of hats likewise taken off the battlefield, beyond the bridge at Lodi. These improvised soles were attached to the underside of his shoes by highly visible pieces of string, so that when the major-domo of the household presented himself at Lieutenant Robert's room to invite him to dine with the Marquise, the Lieutenant was faced with a dreadful predicament. His orderly and he spent the two hours still remaining before this fatal dinner in trying to sew the tunic up a bit and in dyeing those wretched strings on the shoes with black ink. At last the dreaded moment arrived. 'Never in my life have I felt more ill at ease,' Lieutenant Robert told me; 'those ladies were imagining that they'd be frightened of me, whereas I was trembling worse than they were. I looked down at my shoes and didn't know how to walk gracefully. The Marquise del Dongo', he added, 'was then in the full radiance of her beauty: you knew her, with her lovely, angelically soft eyes and that pretty dark blond hair that so perfectly framed her charming face. There was a painting of Herodias by Leonardo* in my room: you'd have thought it was her portrait. I was so struck, thank the Lord, by that divine beauty that it made me forget my clothes. For two years I had seen nothing but ugly, wretched things in the mountains round Genoa: I dared to express to her something of my delight.

'But I had too much sense to persevere for long with compliments. While I was composing my speeches I could see, in a dining-room that was entirely of marble, a dozen footmen and lackeys all dressed with what then seemed to me to be the height of magnificence. Just think, those rascals were not only wearing good shoes but they had silver buckles on them as well. Out of the corner of my eye I could see all those stupefied gazes fixed on my tunic and perhaps also on my shoes, and this pierced me to the heart. With just a word I could have struck fear into every one of those servants, but how to put them in their place without risking frightening the ladies? For the Marquise, feeling the need of a little support,

as she afterwards told me a hundred times, had had her husband's sister, Gina del Dongo (later that charming Countess Pietranera), fetched from the convent where she was then a boarder: in prosperity no one was Gina's equal for high spirits and graciousness, just as, in adversity, no one was her equal for courage and calm serenity.

'Gina, who at that time must have been about thirteen but who looked eighteen, was, as you know, lively and outspoken; and she was so afraid of bursting out laughing at my costume that she didn't dare to eat; the Marquise, on the other hand, overwhelmed me with constrained civilities; she could clearly see flashes of annoyance in my eyes. In a word, I cut a sorry figure, I had to swallow my pride, a thing which is supposed to be impossible for a Frenchman. At length I was inspired by a heaven-sent idea: I started to tell the ladies about my destitute state, and about the hardships we had suffered the last two years in the mountains around Genoa where we'd been held back by some half-witted old generals. There, I said, they gave us *assignats** which were worthless in that area, and three ounces of bread a day. I hadn't been speaking for more than two minutes when the kind Marquise had tears in her eyes and Gina had grown serious.

"'What, sir!" she said to me, "Three ounces of bread!"

"'Yes, signorina; but to make up for that, half the time there was no issue of rations and, as the peasants in whose homes we lodged were even worse off than ourselves, we used to give them a little of our bread."

'When dinner was over I escorted the Marquise to the drawing-room door, then quickly retraced my steps and gave the servant who had waited on me at table that solitary coin on which I had built so many castles in the air.

'A week later,' continued Robert, 'when it had been clearly established that the French weren't going to guillotine anybody, the Marquis del Dongo returned from his castle at Grianta, on Lake Como, where he'd courageously taken refuge at the approach of the French army, abandoning his very lovely young wife and his sister to the hazards of war. The hatred that the Marquis felt for us was as great as his fear, in other words unbounded; it was entertaining to watch his

large and sanctimonious pale face while he was greeting me with polite salutations. The day after his return to Milan I received a length of cloth and 200 lire from the levy of 6 million; I had myself properly decked out, and became the escort to those ladies, for the balls were beginning.'

Lieutenant Robert's story was similar to that of all the French; instead of making fun of the poverty of those fine soldiers, people were sorry for them, and became fond of them.

This period of unexpected happiness and elation lasted but two short years; the delirium was so great and so universal that it would be impossible for me to convey any idea of it, other than by making the following factual and profound observation: these people had been living in boredom for a hundred years.

In the past, the love of sensual pleasure natural to southern climes had reigned in the courts of the Visconti and the Sforza, those famous Dukes of Milan. But since the year 1635, when the Spaniards seized control of the Milanese—and seized control as taciturn, suspicious, and arrogant masters, ever fearful of rebellion—joy had taken flight. The Milanese, copying the ways of their masters, were more intent on avenging the slightest insult with their daggers than on savouring the present moment.

The frenzied gaiety, the high spirits, the sensuality, and the disregard of every gloomy or even just sensible feeling reached such a point between 15 May 1796, when the French entered Milan, and April 1799, when they were driven out after the Battle of Cassano, that people could point to old merchant millionaires, old money-lenders, and old lawyers who, during that period, had forgotten to be miserable and to make money.

You could have named at most a handful of families belonging to the higher nobility who took refuge in their country castles, as though in sulky disapproval of the collective joy and the blossoming of every heart. It is also true that those rich and noble families had been singled out in an unfortunate manner in the assessment of the taxes levied for the French army.

The Marquis del Dongo, vexed by the spectacle of so much jubilation, had been one of the first to return to his magnificent castle at Grianta, beyond Como. This castle had originally been a fortress; its position is possibly unique in the whole world, for it stands on a plateau 150 feet above the majestic lake which it overlooks almost in its entirety. The del Dongo family had built it in the fifteenth century, a fact to which marble plaques bearing the family arms everywhere testified; you could still see drawbridges and deep moats, without, admittedly, any water in them; but with those walls eighty feet high and six feet thick, the castle was secure against a surprise attack; and that is why it was dear to the heart of the distrustful Marquis. Surrounded by twenty-five or thirty servants whom he believed to be loyal, apparently because he did nothing but abuse them when he spoke to them, he was less plagued by fear than in Milan.

This fear was not altogether unjustified; he kept up a very active correspondence with a spy whom the Austrians had placed at the Swiss border, some three leagues from Grianta, to arrange for the escape of prisoners captured in battle, a matter which the French generals might have taken seriously.

The Marquis had left his young wife in Milan: there she was responsible for all family affairs, and for meeting the assessment levied on the 'Casa del Dongo', to use the local expression; she was attempting to have the assessment reduced, which obliged her to see those noblemen who had accepted public office, and even some men who, though not of noble birth, were highly influential. An event of the greatest importance now occurred in this family. The Marquis had arranged the marriage of his young sister Gina with a very wealthy personage of the highest birth, but he wore powder in his hair; because of this, Gina would greet him with shrieks of laughter, and soon she did a reckless thing: she married the Count Pietranera. The Count, indeed, was a very worthy gentleman, extremely handsome in appearance, but his family had been impoverished for generations, and, as a crowning disgrace, he was an ardent partisan of the new ideas. Pietranera was a second lieutenant in the Italian Legion,* a fact which could only add to the Marquis's despair.

After these two mad, joyful years, the Directoire government in Paris* began to behave like a long-established monarch, and to display a mortal hatred of anything that was not mediocre. The incompetent generals whom it assigned to the army in Italy lost a series of battles on those same plains of Verona which two years earlier had witnessed the miracles of Arcola and Lonato. The Austrians drew closer to Milan; Lieutenant Robert, now a major, was wounded at the Battle of Cassano and came to stay for the last time with his friend the Marquis del Dongo. The farewells were sad; Robert left with Count Pietranera, who was following the French in their retreat towards Novi. The young Countess, to whom her brother refused to give the money that was rightfully hers, accompanied the army riding in a cart.

Then began that period of reaction and return to the old ideas that the Milanese call *i tredici mesi* (the thirteen months), because in fact their good fortune decreed that this return to stupidity lasted only thirteen months, until Marengo.* Everyone who was old and pious and glum reappeared at the head of affairs and once again assumed the leadership of society: soon those who had remained faithful to the right ideas let it be known throughout the countryside that Napoleon had been hanged by the Mamelukes in Egypt, which was no more than he richly deserved.

Among those who had gone away to mope on their estates and who now returned thirsting for vengeance, the Marquis del Dongo was conspicuous for his wrath; his extremism carried him inevitably to the head of the party. Those gentlemen who, except when they were frightened, were extremely decent people, but who were still trembling from fear, succeeded in imposing their ideas on the Austrian general; a good enough man, he let himself be persuaded that harshness was the very best policy, and ordered a hundred and fifty patriots arrested, men who were unquestionably, at that time, the best in all Italy.

Before long they were deported to the *Bocche di Cattaro** and cast into underground caves, where the dampness and especially the lack of food dealt promptly and appropriately with all those rogues.

The Marquis del Dongo obtained a high position and, as he united sordid avarice with a host of other fine qualities, he used to boast publicly of not sending any money at all to his sister the Countess Pietranera: she, still madly in love, refused to leave her husband, and was dying of hunger in France with him. The good Marquise was in despair: eventually she managed to abstract some small diamonds from her jewel-case, which every night her husband took from her and locked up under his bed in an iron chest; the Marquise had brought her husband a dowry of 800,000 lire, and received eighty lire a month for her personal expenses. During the thirteen months that the French spent away from Milan, this extremely timid woman found pretexts to wear mourning the entire time.

We must confess that, following the example of many serious authors,* we have begun the story of our hero a year before his birth. This essential character is none other, in fact, than Fabrice Valserra, 'Marchesino'† del Dongo, as they say in Milan. It so happened that he had taken the trouble to be born just when the French were driven out of Milan, and was, by an accident of birth, the second son of this grand nobleman the Marquis del Dongo with whose large, pasty face, perfidious smile, and unbounded hatred for the new ideas you are already familiar. The whole of the family fortune was entailed upon the elder son, Ascagne del Dongo, a worthy image of his father. He was eight years old, and Fabrice two, when quite suddenly that General Bonaparte, whom all well-born people had long since believed hanged, swooped down from Mount Saint-Bernard. He entered Milan: that moment is still unique in history: imagine an entire population mad with love. A few days later Napoleon won the Battle of Marengo. The rest needs no recounting. The delirious joy of the Milanese was at its height; but this time it was intermingled with ideas of vengeance: those good people had learnt how to hate. Soon they witnessed the arrival of those among the deportees to the *Bocche di Cattaro* who were still

† This is pronounced *markayzine*. The local custom, copied from the Germans, is to give this title to all the sons of a marquis; *contine* to all the sons of a count; *contessina* to all the daughters of a count, etc.

alive; their return was marked by a national celebration. Their white faces, their huge, startled eyes, their wasted limbs contrasted strangely with the displays of joy springing up on all sides. Their arrival was the signal of departure for the most compromised families. The Marquis del Dongo was among the first to flee to his castle at Grianta. The heads of the great families were filled with hatred and fear; but their wives and their daughters remembered the pleasures of the first French sojourn and thought longingly of Milan and those very festive balls which were organized at the Casa Tanzi, immediately after Marengo. A few days after this victory the French general responsible for keeping order in Lombardy became aware that the minds of all the noblemen's tenant farmers and all the old country women, far from still dwelling on that astonishing victory of Marengo which had changed the destiny of Italy and won back thirteen strongholds in one day, were completely obsessed with a prophecy made by St Giovita, the first patron saint of Brescia. According to this holy prophecy, the good fortunes of the French and of Napoleon would end exactly thirteen weeks after Marengo. The Marquis del Dongo and all the noble malcontents sulking on their estates have some slight excuse: they were not pretending, they really and truly believed in the prophecy. Not one among them had read more than a couple of books in his whole life; they quite openly made their preparations to return to Milan after thirteen weeks; but this period passed by, filled with fresh victories for the French cause. Once back in Paris Napoleon, with wise decrees, was saving the Revolution within his own borders, just as he had saved it from the foreigners at Marengo. Then the nobles of Lombardy, shut away in their castles, discovered that initially they had misunderstood the prophecy of the patron saint of Brescia: it was not a matter of thirteen weeks, but rather of thirteen months. The thirteen months went by, and the prosperity of France seemed to grow greater every day.

We pass rapidly over ten years of progress and happiness, from 1800 to 1810; Fabrice spent the first of these at the castle at Grianta, getting into many a scuffle with the village lads, and not learning a single thing, not even how to read. Later,

he was sent to the Jesuit school in Milan. His father the Marquis ordered that he be taught Latin, not from the works of those old authors who are forever talking about republics, but from a magnificent volume illustrated with more than a hundred engravings, a masterpiece of seventeenth-century art: it was the Latin genealogy of the Valserras, the Marquises del Dongo, published in 1650 by Fabrice del Dongo, Archbishop of Parma. Since the fortunes of the Valserras were principally military in character, the engravings depicted a great many battles, and invariably showed a hero bearing the family name mightily brandishing his sword. The young Fabrice took great pleasure in this book. His mother, who adored him, would from time to time obtain permission to go and see him in Milan; but since her husband never gave her any money for these journeys, it was her sister-in-law, the charming Countess Pietranera, who lent it to her. After the return of the French the Countess had become one of the most brilliant women at the court of Prince Eugène, Viceroy of Italy.*

When Fabrice had made his first communion, the Countess obtained from the Marquis, who was still in voluntary exile, permission to take him out occasionally from his school. He struck her as unusual, witty, and very serious: a handsome boy who did not in the least disgrace the drawing-room of a lady of fashion, but also as ignorant as you please and barely able to write. The Countess, whose warm enthusiasm informed everything she did, promised her protection to the head of the establishment if her nephew Fabrice made remarkable progress and won lots of prizes at the end of the year. In order to ensure that he had the opportunity to deserve them, she would send for him on Saturday evenings and frequently not return him to his masters until Wednesday or Thursday. Although Prince Eugène, the Viceroy, was deeply devoted to the Jesuits, they were being ousted from Italy by the law of the land, and the rector of the school, a clever man, realized the advantage to be gained from his connection with a woman who was all-powerful at the court. He was careful not to complain about the absences of Fabrice who, at the end of the year, won five first prizes. On this understanding, the brilliant Countess Pietranera together

with her husband, the general commanding one of the divisions of the Guards, and five or six of the most important personages in the Viceroy's court, attended the Jesuits' prize-giving. The rector was complimented by his superiors.

The Countess took her nephew to all those dazzling fêtes that marked the end of the too-short reign of the agreeable Prince Eugène. On her own authority she had created him an officer of the Hussars, and Fabrice, at twelve, used to wear that uniform. One day the Countess, delighted with his charming appearance, asked the Prince to appoint him page, which would have signified that the del Dongos were rallying to the party. The following day she needed all her influence to persuade the Viceroy not to remember her request, which lacked only the consent of the father of the future page, and that consent would have been most ostentatiously withheld. As a result of this rash act, which made the sullen Marquis shake with rage, the latter found an excuse to recall the young Fabrice to Grianta. The Countess felt the utmost contempt for her brother; she considered him a depressing fool who would be an evil man if he were ever in a position of power. But she doted on Fabrice and, after ten years of silence, she wrote to the Marquis to ask for her nephew back: her letter was left unanswered.

On his return to that formidable castle, built by the most bellicose of his ancestors, Fabrice knew nothing at all except how to drill and how to ride. The Count Pietranera, as infatuated with this child as was his wife, used to take Fabrice out on horseback, and with him on parade.

When Fabrice, his eyes still very red from all the tears shed on leaving his aunt's handsome drawing-rooms, arrived at the Grianta castle he was greeted only by the loving caresses of his mother and his sisters. The Marquis was shut up in his study with his elder son, the ~~Mac~~ Macchino Ascagne. There they compiled coded letters which had the honour of being sent to Vienna; both father and son appeared only at meals. The Marquis made a show of declaring that he was teaching his heir how to keep accounts, in duplicate, of what was produced by each one of his properties. In actual fact, the Marquis was too jealous of his authority to speak of such matters

to a son who would necessarily inherit all these entailed lands. He kept him busy coding fifteen- or twenty-page dispatches that he sent two or three times a week to Switzerland, whence they were forwarded to Vienna. The Marquis claimed he was keeping his legitimate rulers informed of the internal conditions in the kingdom of Italy, which he himself knew nothing about; yet his letters were very well received, for the following reason. The Marquis would send a reliable agent out on to the highway to count the number of soldiers in some French or Italian regiment that was changing its quarters and, in reporting this to the court in Vienna, he would take care to reduce the number of soldiers present by at least a fourth. These letters, which were quite absurd, had the merit of contradicting other, more veracious letters, and they gave satisfaction. Consequently, shortly before Fabrice's arrival at the castle the Marquis had received the star of a famous order: it was the fifth to adorn his chamberlain's coat. True, he had the annoyance of not daring to wear this costume outside his study, but never did he permit himself to dictate a dispatch without first putting on the gold-braided coat, decorated with all his orders. To do otherwise would, in his opinion, have shown a lack of respect.

The Marquise was amazed at the charm of her son. But she had kept up the habit of writing two or three times a year to the General Count d'A***—this was now Lieutenant Robert's name. The Marquise hated lying to those she loved; she questioned her son and was horrified at his ignorance.

If I think him poorly educated, she said to herself, I, who know nothing, then Robert, who is so learned, would consider his education a total failure; now in these times a man must have ability. Another circumstance that astonished her almost equally was that Fabrice had taken seriously all the things relating to religion that the Jesuits had taught him. Although she herself was exceedingly pious, the fanaticism of this child made her tremble; if the Marquis has wit enough to guess Fabrice can be influenced by this means, he'll rob me of my son's love. She shed many tears, and her passion for Fabrice grew stronger.

Life in this castle, with its thirty or forty servants, was extremely depressing, so Fabrice spent all his days hunting or roaming about the lake in a boat. Before long he had become very friendly with the coachmen and the stable-boys; they were all ardent supporters of the French and made fun openly of the pious valets who were the personal servants of the Marquis and his elder son. The favourite subject of jokes at the expense of these solemn personages was that they powdered their hair, in imitation of their masters.

CHAPTER 2

Now that the Vesper shades are darkening our eyes,
Enamoured of the future, I contemplate the skies,
Where God inscribes for us in simple features
The fates and destinies of all his creatures.
For He who is from Heaven's heights all-seeing
And moved by pity for a human being,
By astral signs both good and bad may show
The way that He has planned for us to go;
But man, oppressed by earth and death, indeed,
Mistrusting all such writings, will not read.

(Ronsard)

The Marquis professed a hearty abhorrence of learning: it is ideas, he used to say, that have been the ruin of Italy; he did not know quite how to reconcile this pious distrust of enlightenment with the desire to see his son Fabrice complete the education so brilliantly begun under the Jesuits. In order to run the least possible risk, he ordered the good Father Blanès, the parish priest of Grianta, to continue Fabrice's instruction in Latin. This would have necessitated the priest's knowing that language himself; but Blanès despised Latin; his knowledge of the subject was confined to reciting by heart the prayers in his missal, and giving his flock a rough explanation of their meaning. But the priest, none the less, was greatly respected and even feared in the canton; he had always declared that it was not thirteen weeks nor even thirteen months that must pass before the fulfilling of the famous prophecy of St Giovita, patron saint of Brescia. He would add, when speaking to trusted friends, that the number 'thirteen' should be interpreted in a manner which would astonish a great many people, were it possible to tell the whole story (1813).

The fact is that Father Blanès, a man of positively *primitive* integrity and virtue and, moreover, a man of intelligence, spent all his nights at the top of his bell-tower; he was mad about astrology. After using his days to calculate the

conjunctions and positions of stars, he would spend most of his nights following their movements in the sky. Because of his poverty, his only instrument was a long telescope with a barrel made out of cardboard. One can imagine the scorn felt for the study of languages by a man who spent his life ascertaining the exact date of the fall of empires and of the revolutions that change the face of the world. 'What more do I know about a horse,' he would say to Fabrice, 'when I've learned that in Latin it's called *equus*?'

The peasants feared Father Blanès as a great magician; for his part, with the help of the terror inspired by his sessions in the bell-tower, he stopped them from stealing. His fellow priests in the area were extremely jealous of his influence and loathed him; the Marquis del Dongo quite simply despised him, because he reasoned too much for someone of such low estate. Fabrice, who adored him, would sometimes spend whole evenings doing huge additions and multiplications to please him. Then he would climb up into the bell-tower: this was a great favour, never before granted to anyone by Father Blanès; but he loved the child for his simplicity. 'If you don't become a hypocrite,' he would tell Fabrice, 'you may perhaps grow up to be a man.'

Two or three times each year Fabrice, who was fearless and passionate in the pursuit of his pleasures, nearly drowned in the lake. Whenever the village lads from Grianta and Cadenabbia had an important scheme in hand, it was he who led them. These children had managed to get hold of some little keys, and when the night was very dark they would try to open the padlocks on the chains that secured the boats to a big stone, or to a tree near the shore. It should be explained that the fishermen on Lake Como go to the trouble of setting out fishing lines at a great distance from the shore. The top end of the line is tied to a small plank with a cork base; attached to this plank is a very supple hazel switch supporting a bell which rings when a hooked fish tugs at the fishing line.

The great objective of these nocturnal expeditions, with Fabrice as commander-in-chief, was to inspect the fishing lines before the fishermen heard the warning ring of the little bells. Stormy nights were preferable, and the lads would set

off on these perilous trips early in the morning, an hour before dawn. They climbed into the boat believing that they were heading straight for the most terrible danger, and in that regard what they did was admirable; following the example of their fathers, they would piously recite an *Ave Maria*. Now it frequently happened that at the moment of departure, immediately after the *Ave Maria*, Fabrice would suddenly become aware of an omen. This was the fruit he had garnered from the astrological studies of his friend Father Blanès, in whose predictions he did not believe. To his young imagination the omen was a certain portent of success or failure; and as he had a stronger will than any of his comrades, the whole band gradually became so accustomed to omens that if, at the moment of setting sail, they saw a priest standing on the shore, or a crow flying away over to the left, they quickly replaced the padlock on the boat chain and each would return to his bed. So Father Blanès had not communicated his somewhat abstruse science to Fabrice but had, without realizing it, inspired him with a limitless faith in signs that can predict the future.

The Marquis felt that some miscarriage of his secret correspondence might put him at the mercy of his sister; therefore every year, at the time of the feast of St Angela, the Countess Pietranera's name day, Fabrice was given permission to visit Milan for a week. He spent the entire year looking forward to this week, or regretting that it was over. On this important occasion, for the accomplishing of this diplomatic mission, the Marquis would give twenty lire to his son, and, as usual, nothing to his wife, who took Fabrice. But one of the cooks, six servants, and a coachman set off for Como the day before the trip, and each day in Milan the Marquise would find a coach at her command, and a dinner for twelve prepared.

Certainly the Marquis del Dongo's gloomy life-style was very far from amusing, but it had the advantage of enriching for ever those families that were so good as to embrace it. The Marquis, whose income exceeded 1,200,000 lire, spent less than a quarter of it; he was living on hopes. During the thirteen years from 1800 to 1813 he constantly and steadfastly believed that Napoleon would be overthrown before six

months had passed. So imagine his delight when, early in 1813, he learned of the disaster of Beresina!* He nearly went out of his mind when Paris was taken and Napoleon fell; he felt warranted, on that occasion, to make some highly offensive remarks about his wife and his sister. Eventually, after fourteen years of waiting, he had the inexpressible joy of seeing the Austrian troops return to Milan. Following orders from Vienna, the Austrian general received the Marquis del Dongo with a consideration bordering on respect; the Marquis was immediately offered one of the most important positions in the government, which he accepted as if in payment of a debt. His elder son was given a lieutenancy in one of the monarch's finest regiments, but the younger son stubbornly refused a cadetship he was offered. This triumph, which the Marquis enjoyed with unparalleled insolence, lasted but a few months, and was followed by a mortifying reversal. He had never had any head for business, and fourteen years spent in the country, surrounded by his valets, his lawyer, and his doctor, together with the ill humour of old age which was now upon him, had made him totally incompetent. Now it is not possible, in a country under Austrian rule, to keep an important position without the kind of talent required by that ancient monarchy's slow, complicated, but eminently reasonable administration. The Marquis del Dongo's blunders scandalized the staff and even interfered with the functioning of government. His ultra-monarchical views stirred up the common folk when it was desirable that they be lulled into quiescent indifference. One fine day he heard that his Majesty had graciously deigned to accept his resignation from his position in the administration, and at the same time was conferring upon him the position of *Second Grand Major Majordomo* of the Lombardy-Venetian kingdom. The Marquis was enraged by the horrible injustice of which he was the victim; he made a friend publish a letter in a newspaper, he who so abhorred the freedom of the press. In the end he wrote to the Emperor saying that his ministers were betraying him, and were nothing but a lot of Jacobins. This done, he returned sadly to his castle at Grianta. He had one consolation. After the fall of Napoleon certain important

personages in Milan arranged for Count Prina, former Minister to the King of Italy* and a man of the highest integrity, to be set upon savagely in the street. Count Pietranera risked his life to save that of the Minister, whose agony lasted five hours: he was beaten to death with an umbrella. A priest, confessor to the Marquis del Dongo, could have saved Prina by opening the iron gate of the San Giovanni church in front of which the unfortunate Minister was dragged, and where indeed he was even for a moment left abandoned in the gutter, in the middle of the street; but the priest contemptuously refused to open the gate, and, six months later, the Marquis had the pleasure of obtaining a fine preferment for him.

He loathed Count Pietranera, his brother-in-law, who, on an income of less than a thousand lire, dared to be quite happy, insisted on remaining faithful to what he had loved all his life, and had the insolence to champion that ideal of justice without respect of persons that the Marquis called filthy Jacobinism. The Count had refused to serve the Austrians; his refusal was turned to good account and, some months after the death of Prina, those same individuals who had hired the assassins arranged for Pietranera to be put in prison. The Countess, his wife, promptly obtained a passport and ordered post-horses so she could go to Vienna and tell the Emperor the truth. Prina's assassins took fright and one of them, a cousin of Signora Pietranera's, came to her at midnight, one hour before her departure for Vienna, bringing her the order that freed her husband. The next day the Austrian general sent for Count Pietranera and received him with the greatest possible respect, assuring him that payment of his retirement pension, on very favourable terms, would be forthcoming immediately. This worthy General Bubna,* a good-hearted, intelligent man, seemed very ashamed of Prina's murder and the Count's imprisonment.

After this little disturbance, nipped in the bud by the decisive character of the Countess, the couple lived as best they could on the retirement pension which, thanks to General Bubna's endorsement, was paid without delay.

Fortunately, it so happened that for the last five or six years the Countess had been very friendly with an extremely rich

young man, also a close friend of the Count's, who never failed to place at their disposal the handsomest carriage and pair of English horses to be seen in Milan, his box at La Scala, and his country castle. But the Count was very sensitive on the subject of his own valour, he had a generous soul, he lost his temper easily and would then feel entitled to pass some rather odd remarks. One day when he was out hunting with some young men, one of them, who had served in a different regiment from his, started making jokes about the courage of the soldiers of the Cisalpine Republic; the Count slapped him and they immediately fought a duel; the Count, who was alone without any supporters among all those young men, was killed. This so-called duel caused a great deal of talk, and those who had been present at it elected to take a trip to Switzerland.

That absurd kind of courage called resignation, the courage of a fool who lets himself be taken without uttering a sound, was something the Countess had no use for. She was furiously angry about her husband's death, and would have liked Limercati, that rich young man who was such a dear friend, also to feel an urge for travel in Switzerland, where he could have put a bullet into Count Pietranera's murderer, or challenged him to a duel.

Limercati thought this idea highly ridiculous, and the Countess realized that contempt had killed love in her heart. She increased her attentions to Limercati; her plan was to rekindle his love, then jilt him and drive him to despair. In order to make this plan intelligible in France, I should mention that in Milan, which is a very great distance from our country, love still drives people to despair. The Countess who, clad in deep mourning, easily outshone all her rivals, then made a play for the most fashionable young men-about-town, one of whom, the Count N***, who had always said that he thought Limercati's style somewhat staid and starchy for so witty a woman, fell madly in love with the Countess. She wrote to Limercati:

'Will you, for once in your life, act like a man of intelligence? Imagine that you have never known me.

'I remain, perhaps a trifle contemptuously,
your very humble servant,
Gina Pietranera.'

On reading this note Limercati left for one of his villas; ever more violently in love, he became demented, and spoke of blowing his brains out, something unheard-of in a land where people believe in hell. On the very day after arriving at his country estate, he had written to the Countess offering her his hand and his fortune of 200,000 lire a year. She returned his letter unopened via Count N***'s groom. Thereafter Limercati spent three years on his estate, returning to Milan every couple of months without once daring to remain there, and boring all his friends with his passion for the Countess and the detailed recital of the favours she had accorded him in former days. In the beginning he used to add that she was ruining herself with Count N*** and that such a liaison disgraced her.

The truth is that the Countess did not in the least love Count N*** and she told him as much when she was absolutely certain of Limercati's despair. The Count, a sophisticated man, begged her not to divulge the sad truth she had confessed to him. 'If you are so exceedingly kind', he added, 'as to continue to receive me with all the apparent marks of distinction accorded the current favourite, I may perhaps obtain a suitable position.'

After this heroic declaration the Countess would no longer accept the use of Count N***'s horses nor his box at the theatre. But she had, during the past fifteen years, become accustomed to the most elegant of existences: and she had to find a solution to a difficult or, more precisely, impossible problem: how to live in Milan on a pension of 1,500 lire. She left her *palazzo*, rented a couple of fifth-floor rooms, and dismissed all her servants, even her lady's maid, employing a poor old cleaning woman in their place. This sacrifice was in fact less heroic and less painful than it might seem to us; poverty, in Milan, is not considered ludicrous, and consequently is not viewed by the faint of heart as the worst of all possible evils. After several months of this noble poverty, during which the Countess was continually besieged by letters from Limercati and even from Count N***, who also wanted to marry her, it occurred to the Marquis del Dongo, as a rule such an odiously mercenary man, that his enemies

might very well be gloating over his sister's destitute state. What! A del Dongo reduced to living on the pension that the court at Vienna, about which he himself had such cause to complain, metes out to the widows of its generals!

He wrote to her that apartments and a reception worthy of his sister awaited her at Grianta. The Countess's mercurial soul responded with enthusiasm to the idea of this new way of life; it was twenty years since she had lived in that venerable castle rising up majestically amid those ancient chestnut trees planted in the days of the Sforzas. There, she said to herself, I shall find repose, and at my age is that not happiness? (As she was now thirty-one she believed she had reached the age of retirement.) A peaceful, happy life finally awaits me, beside that sublime lake where I was born.

I do not know if she was mistaken, but it is beyond a doubt that that passionate soul, who had just so summarily refused the offer of two vast fortunes, brought happiness with her to the castle of Grianta. Her two nieces were beside themselves with joy. 'You've given me back the happy days of my youth,' said the Marquise, taking Gina in her arms; 'the day before you came, I felt a hundred years old.' Accompanied by Fabrice, the Countess set about revisiting all those entrancing spots which are close to Grianta and have become so famous through travellers' reports: the Villa Melzi, from which there is a fine view of the castle immediately opposite, on the other side of the lake; the sacred wood of the Sfondratas, and the rugged promontory separating the two branches of the lake, the Como branch, which is so voluptuously alluring, and the other one, so forbidding, that extends towards Lecco: noble and lovely sights that the most famous setting in the world, the Bay of Naples, equals but cannot surpass. It was with the most intense delight that the Countess revived the memories of her early years and compared them with her present sensations. Lake Como, she reflected, is not surrounded, like Lake Geneva, with large parcels of enclosed land under cultivation by the best methods, a circumstance which makes you think of money and speculation. Here, on every side, I see hills of varying heights covered with clumps of trees that have grown up by chance, and that the hand of man has not yet spoilt and

forced to 'yield a profit'. Amid these superbly shaped hills which plunge down towards the lake at such extraordinary angles, I can still believe the descriptions in Tasso and Ariosto. Everything is noble and tender, everything speaks of love, nothing reminds you of the ugliness of civilization. The villages built half-way up the hillsides are hidden by tall trees, whose tops are surmounted by the charming architecture of the pretty bell-towers. If from time to time some little field fifty paces wide interrupts the clusters of chestnuts and wild cherries, your eye takes pleasure in observing that plants grow more vigorously and more happily there than elsewhere. Beyond those hills, on whose summits stand solitary dwellings anyone would love to inhabit, your astonished eye can see the peaks of the Alps, eternally covered in snow, and their stern severity calls to mind enough of life's hardships to intensify the rapture of the present moment. Your imagination is touched by the distant sound of the bell of some little village hidden under the trees; those sounds that the water softens as it carries them take on a tone of gentle melancholy, and seem to say to man: 'Life races by, so do not be so hard to please about any happiness that lies within your grasp: savour it without delay.' The language of those bewitching places which have no equal in the whole world restored to the Countess her sixteen-year-old's heart. She could not imagine how she had spent so many years without seeing the lake again. Can it be, she wondered, that happiness has taken up its abode on the threshold of old age? She bought a boat that she, Fabrice, and the Marquise refurbished with their own hands, for in that sumptuously run household there was no money for anything; since his disgrace the Marquis del Dongo's aristocratic pride had taken even more ostentatious forms. For example, in order to reclaim ten paces of ground from the lake, near the famous avenue of plane trees on the Cadenabbia side, he had a causeway constructed whose cost was estimated at 80,000 lire. At the end of the causeway a chapel had been erected; built entirely of enormous blocks of granite, it had been designed by the famous Marquis Cagnola, and inside it Marchesi, the Milan sculptor who was then all the rage, was making the Marquis a tomb with

numerous bas-reliefs depicting the glorious deeds of his ancestors.

Fabrice's older brother, the Marchesino Ascagne, wanted to join the ladies on their outings; but his aunt would splash his powdered hair with water, and every day assault his gravity with some fresh practical joke. In the end he relieved the cheerful company—who hardly dared laugh in his presence—of the sight of his large, pasty face. They thought he was spying for his father the Marquis, and it was important to humour that harsh despot, who, since his compulsory resignation, was permanently in a rage.

Ascagne swore he would revenge himself on Fabrice.

There was a storm, during which they ran into danger; although they had almost no money, they gave the two boatmen a generous sum not to say anything to the Marquis, who was already evincing considerable displeasure because they took his two daughters out with them. There was a second storm; these are fierce and unpredictable on that beautiful lake: squalls gusting forth unexpectedly from two mountain gorges that lie opposite one another, meet and fight it out on the water. The Countess decided to disembark in the midst of the fierce gale and the thunder-claps; she maintained that, perched in mid-lake on a solitary rock the size of a small room, she would be treated to an extraordinary spectacle as raging waves threatened her on every side; however, on jumping from the boat she fell into the water. Fabrice leapt in after her to save her, and the pair of them were swept quite a distance. Certainly it is not pleasant to drown, but boredom, in utter amazement, was banished from that feudal castle. The Countess had become a passionate admirer both of Father Blanès's simple soul and of his astrology. The small amount of money that remained after buying the boat she spent on acquiring a little telescope, and almost every evening she installed herself, with her nieces and Fabrice, on the platform of one of the castle's gothic towers. Fabrice was the expert of the group, and they would pass several very cheerful hours up there, well away from any spies.

It must be admitted that there were days when the Countess would say not a word to anyone; she could be seen

walking about under the tall chestnut trees, sunk in gloomy reflection; she was too intelligent not to feel bored sometimes by an existence where there was no exchange of ideas. But the next day she would be laughing again as of old; it was the complaints of her sister-in-law the Marquise that touched off these sombre moods in such a naturally restless soul.

‘Are we to spend what remains of our youth in this dreary castle?’ the Marquise would exclaim.

Before the arrival of the Countess she did not even have the courage to feel such regrets.

In this manner they passed the winter of 1814 to 1815. Despite her poverty, the Countess twice spent a few days in Milan; the occasions were two superb ballets of Vigano’s at La Scala,* and the Marquis did not forbid his wife to accompany her sister-in-law. They went to collect the money due from the tiny pension, and it was the poor widow of the Cisalpine General who lent a few coins to the exceedingly wealthy Marquise del Dongo. These expeditions were delightful; they invited old friends to dinner, and found consolation in laughing at everything, just like children. That Italian light-heartedness, full of *brio* and spontaneity, made them forget the dismal gloom that the looks of the Marquis and his elder son spread about them at Grianta. Fabrice, who was barely sixteen, represented the head of the house very well.

On the 7th of March of the year 1815 the ladies had been back two days from a charming little trip to Milan; they were walking in the fine avenue of plane trees, which had recently been extended to the very edge of the lake. A boat, approaching from the Como side, came into view, making some peculiar signals. An agent of the Marquis’s leapt onto the causeway: Napoleon had just disembarked at the Gulf of Juan.* Europe was simple-minded enough to be taken unawares by this event, but not the Marquis del Dongo; he wrote an effusive letter to his sovereign, offering him his talents and several millions, and repeating that his ministers were Jacobins hand in glove with the ringleaders in Paris.

At six in the morning on the 8th of March, the Marquis was wearing his insignia and listening to his elder son dictate the

draft of a third political dispatch, which he was solemnly transcribing in his elegant, careful handwriting on to paper watermarked with the image of his sovereign. At that very moment Fabrice was presenting himself at Countess Pietranera's door.

'I'm leaving,' he told her, 'I'm going to join the Emperor, who is also King of Italy; he was such a friend to your husband! I'm going through Switzerland. Last night in Menaggio my friend Vasi, the barometer vendor, gave me his passport; now please let me have some money, as I've only forty lire, but if necessary I'll go on foot.'

The Countess was weeping tears of joy and anguish. 'Good God! Whatever made you think of doing such a thing!' she cried, seizing hold of Fabrice's hands.

She got up and took out of the linen cupboard, where it was carefully hidden, a little purse embroidered with pearls; it was all she had in the world.

'Here, take this,' she said to Fabrice, 'But in God's name, don't get yourself killed. What would your unfortunate mother and I have left, if we lost you? As for Napoleon's succeeding, it's quite impossible, my poor boy; the gentlemen here will undoubtedly manage to have him killed. Didn't you hear, last week in Milan, about those twenty-three assassination plots which were all so well planned that it was a miracle he survived? And he was all-powerful then. And you know that our enemies are only too anxious to finish him off; France was nothing after he left.'

It was in tones of the deepest emotion that the Countess spoke to Fabrice about the future destiny of Napoleon. 'In allowing you to join him, I am sacrificing to him what I hold dearest in this world', she said. Fabrice's eyes filled with tears and he wept as he embraced the Countess, but his determination to leave never wavered for an instant. He eagerly explained to this beloved friend all the reasons that had decided him, and which we take the liberty of finding highly entertaining.

'Yesterday evening, it was seven minutes to six, and we were walking, as you know, along the avenue of plane trees by the lake's edge, below the Casa Sommariva, going in a

southerly direction. It was there that I first noticed in the distance, coming from Como, the boat that was bringing such tremendous news. While I was watching this boat without giving any thought to the Emperor—I was simply feeling envious of those who can travel—I was suddenly overcome by an intense emotion. The boat landed, the agent whispered to my father, who turned pale and took us aside to tell us the “terrible news”. I turned away towards the lake, simply in order to hide the tears of joy that flooded my eyes. Suddenly, very high up in the sky on my right I saw an eagle, the bird of Napoleon; it was flying majestically towards Switzerland, and consequently towards Paris. And I too, I instantly said to myself, I too will cross Switzerland as swiftly as an eagle, and I’ll go and offer this great man a gift that is paltry in the extreme but is nevertheless all I have to offer, the support of my feeble arm. He wanted to give us a country of our own, and he loved my uncle. Immediately, while I was still watching the eagle, for some extraordinary reason my tears stopped; and the proof that this idea comes from heaven is that at the same moment, without any hesitation, I made my decision and I saw how to carry out my plan. In the twinkling of an eye all the miserable feelings that poison my existence, as you know, especially on Sundays, vanished as if blown away by divine breath. In my mind’s eye I could see that splendid image of Italy rising up from the mire in which the Germans keep her engulfed;† she was stretching forth her bruised and battered arms, still partly hung about with chains, towards her king and liberator. And I, I said to myself, I, this as-yet unknown son of an unhappy mother, I will set off and go to die or conquer beside this man who is marked by destiny, and who tried to cleanse us of the contempt in which we are held by even the most oppressed and base among the peoples of Europe.’

‘You know,’ he added in a low voice, moving closer to the Countess and fixing upon her eyes blazing with ardour, ‘you know that little chestnut that my mother herself planted, the

† a passionate character is speaking; he is paraphrasing some lines by the famous poet Monti.*

winter I was born, about two leagues from here near the large pool in our forest: before doing anything, I decided to go and look at it. Spring is not very advanced, I thought; well, if my tree is in leaf, that will be a sign for me. I too must emerge from this state of dormancy in which I am languishing, here in this cold and gloomy castle. Don't you see these ancient, blackened walls, which are now a symbol and were in the past a means of despotism, don't you see them as a true image of the sadness of winter? For me they are what winter is for my tree.

'Can you believe it, Gina? At half-past seven yesterday evening I reached my chestnut tree; it had leaves, pretty little leaves that were already quite large! I kissed them without harming them. Reverently I dug over the earth around my beloved tree. Filled anew with exaltation, I immediately crossed over the mountain; I arrived at Menaggio; I needed a passport to enter Switzerland. The hours had flown, it was already one in the morning when I found myself at Vasi's door. I imagined I would have to knock for a long time to wake him, but he was up, with three of his friends. I had hardly started to speak when he cried: "You're going to join Napoleon!" and threw his arms round my neck. The others also embraced me fervently. "Why ever did I get married!" one of them said.'

Signora Pietranera had grown thoughtful; she felt it her duty to raise some objections. If Fabrice had had the least experience, he would easily have seen that the Countess herself did not believe in the sensible arguments she hastened to advance. But, though lacking in experience, he was very resolute; he refused even to listen to her arguments. The Countess was soon reduced to persuading him that at least he should inform his mother of his plan.

'She'll tell my sisters and, without meaning to, those women will betray me!' cried Fabrice, with a kind of heroic arrogance.

'You should speak with greater respect', said the Countess, smiling through her tears, 'of the sex that will make your fortune; for you will never appeal to men, you have too much passion in you for those with prosaic souls.'

The Marquise burst into tears on hearing of her son's strange plan; she wasn't conscious of its heroism, and did all she could to stop him leaving. When she became convinced that nothing in the world, other than the walls of a prison, could prevent his departure, she gave him what little money she owned, then recollected that she had in her possession, since the previous day, eight or ten little diamonds worth perhaps 10,000 lire, which the Marquis had given her to take to Milan for setting. Fabrice's sisters came into their mother's room while the Countess was sewing these diamonds into our hero's travel clothes; he gave the poor women back their paltry store of coins. His sisters were so enthusiastic about his project, and hugged him with such noisy exuberance, that he picked up a few diamonds that had not yet been hidden, meaning to set off right then.

'You'll give me away without realizing,' he said to his sisters. 'As I've so much money, there's no point in taking clothes with me, one can buy them anywhere.' He kissed these women who were so dear to him, and set off without delaying an instant, not even returning to his own room. In constant fear of being pursued by men on horseback, he walked so fast that he reached Lugano that same evening. Thank the Lord, he was in a Swiss town, and no longer fearful of being set upon on the lonely road, by constables in his father's pay. From Lugano Fabrice wrote him a fine letter, a childish lapse that gave the Marquis grounds for his anger. Travelling post, he crossed the Saint-Gothard Pass; his journey was rapid, and he entered France at Pontarlier. The Emperor was in Paris. There Fabrice's misfortunes began; he had set off with the firm intention of speaking to the Emperor and it had never once occurred to him that this might be a difficult thing to do. In Milan he used to see Prince Eugène ten times a day and could have spoken to him. In Paris he went every morning to the Tuileries Palace courtyard to watch Napoleon inspecting the troops, but never could he get close to the Emperor. Our hero imagined that all the French felt as deeply stirred as he did by the great danger threatening their country. At meals in the hostelry where he was staying he made no secret of his plans or of his

dedication; he encountered smoothly amiable young men, even more enthusiastic than himself, who lost no time in robbing him of all the money in his possession. Fortunately, from sheer modesty, he had said nothing about the diamonds his mother had given him. On the morning when, after a night of drinking, he discovered he had undoubtedly been robbed, he bought two fine horses, hired a former soldier, one of the horse-coper's grooms, as his servant, and, filled with contempt for the glib young Parisians, left to join the army. All he knew was that it was mustering near Maubeuge. Hardly had he reached the frontier when he decided it was ridiculous to be inside a house, keeping warm by a good fire, while soldiers were sleeping in the open. No matter what his servant, who did not lack for common sense, might say to him, he rushed recklessly off to hobnob with the soldiers in their bivouacs at the extreme edge of the border, near the highway to Belgium. As soon as he reached the first battalion by the side of the road the soldiers started scrutinizing this young bourgeois, whose appearance could not have been less military. Night was falling and there was a cold wind. Fabrice approached one of the fires and asked if he could warm himself at it, in exchange for money. Astonished at the idea of paying, the soldiers glanced at one another and kindly made room for him by the fire; his servant made him a shelter. But an hour later, when the regimental sergeant-major passed by not far from the bivouac, the soldiers went and told him about the arrival of this stranger who spoke bad French. The sergeant-major questioned Fabrice, who talked about his enthusiasm for the Emperor in a very suspect accent, so that he asked Fabrice to accompany him to the colonel, ensconced in a nearby farm. Fabrice's servant came up with the two horses. This sight seemed to strike the sergeant so forcibly that he immediately had a different idea and began to question the servant as well. The latter, who had served in the army, instantly realizing what his interlocutor had in mind, mentioned his master's influential connections, adding that surely nobody would 'pinch' his fine horses. A soldier summoned by the sergeant promptly seized Fabrice's servant by the scruff of the neck; another soldier took charge of the

horses and the sergeant, his manner stern, ordered Fabrice to follow him in silence.

After making him cover a good league on foot, in darkness that seemed all the blacker because of the bivouac fires that lit up the horizon on all sides, the sergeant handed Fabrice over to an officer in the military police who gravely asked him for his papers. Fabrice showed his passport that described him as a dealer in barometers, 'carrying his merchandise'.

'How can they be so stupid,' exclaimed the officer, 'it's a bit much!'

He questioned our hero, who spoke about the Emperor and about freedom in terms of the greatest enthusiasm; this made the officer burst into roars of laughter.

'Good Lord! You're not exactly subtle!' he cried. 'It's a bit thick, then daring to send us greenhorns like you!' And no matter how often Fabrice tried to explain that actually he wasn't a dealer in barometers, the officer sent him to the prison of B***, a little neighbouring town, where our hero arrived about three in the morning, beside himself with fury and completely exhausted.

Fabrice, at first astounded, and then enraged, and understanding absolutely nothing of what was happening to him, spent thirty-three long days in that miserable prison; he wrote letter upon letter to the local commandant; it was the jailer's wife, a beautiful Flemish woman of thirty-six, who undertook to see that these letters were delivered. But as she had no desire to get so handsome a youth executed, and as, furthermore, he paid well, she never failed to burn all the letters. Very late at night she would deign to come and listen to the prisoner's complaints; she had told her husband that the young fool had money, upon which the prudent jailer had given her a free hand. She availed herself of the permission and received several gold pieces, for the sergeant had only taken the horses, and the officer had not confiscated anything at all. One afternoon in June Fabrice could hear fierce cannonading some distance away. So they were fighting at last! His heart leapt with impatience. He could also hear a lot of noise in the town; indeed, an important operation was in fact

taking place, three divisions were passing through B***. When at about eleven that evening the jailer's wife came to share his woes, Fabrice was even more than usually charming; then, taking her hands:

'Get me out of here, I'll give you my word of honour to return to prison as soon as they stop fighting.'

'What a lot of twaddle! Have you the "wherewithal"?'

He looked uneasy, not understanding the word 'wherewithal'. The jailer's wife, seeing his expression, imagined the waters must be low, and instead of talking about gold pieces as she had planned to do, talked henceforth simply of francs.

'Listen,' she told him, 'if you can give me a hundred francs or so, I'll put a couple of coins on each of the eyes of the corporal who comes and relieves the guard during the night. He won't be able to see you leaving prison, and if his regiment is going off tomorrow, he'll agree.'

The bargain was soon struck. The jailer's wife even agreed to hide Fabrice in her room, from which he would be able to escape more easily in the morning.

Next day before dawn the jailer's wife, deeply affected, said to Fabrice:

'My pet, you're very young for this filthy job: believe me, you shouldn't do it any more.'

'What d'you mean!' exclaimed Fabrice. 'Since when is it a crime to want to defend your country?'

'That's enough of that. Never forget that I've saved your life; your case was clear, you'd have been shot; but don't tell a soul, for you'd lose my husband and me our position; above all don't repeat your awful story about a Milanese gentleman disguised as a dealer in barometers, it's too idiotic. Listen carefully, I'm going to give you the clothes belonging to a hussar who died yesterday in the prison: open your mouth as little as possible, but in any case, if a sergeant or an officer questions you so that you have to reply, say that you've been lying sick in the home of a peasant who charitably took you in when you were shaking with fever in the ditch by the roadside. If they aren't satisfied with that reply, add that you're rejoining your regiment. You may be arrested because of your accent; then you must say you were born in Piedmont, that

you're a conscript who stayed behind in France last year, etc. etc.'*

For the first time, after thirty-three days of raging, Fabrice understood what lay behind everything that had been happening to him. People took him for a spy. He argued with the jailer's wife who, that morning, was especially loving; and then while she, armed with needle and thread, took in the hussar's clothes, he told his story in plain words to the astonished woman. For a moment she believed him; he seemed so artless, and looked so handsome dressed as a hussar!

'Since you are so very eager to fight,' she told him in the end, half convinced, 'you should have joined a regiment as soon as you got to Paris. If you'd stood a sergeant a drink, you'd have been fixed up right away!' The jailer's wife added lots of good advice for the future, and eventually, just as day was breaking, sent Fabrice off, after making him swear again and again that, no matter what happened, her name would never pass his lips. As soon as Fabrice had left the little town behind, and was marching briskly along with his hussar's sword under his arm, he began to worry. Here I am, he reflected, with the uniform and the travel-warrant of a hussar who died in prison, where he'd been put, so they told me, for stealing a cow and some silver spoons and forks! In a manner of speaking I've inherited his being... and I've done so without in any way wanting it or expecting it! Beware of prisons!... The omen's clear, I shall suffer greatly from prisons!

Less than an hour had passed since Fabrice had left his benefactress when rain began to fall so heavily that the new hussar could barely walk, encumbered as he was by clumsy boots not made for his feet. Meeting a peasant riding on a sorry-looking nag, he bought it, communicating by signs; the jailer's wife had advised him to speak as little as possible, because of his accent.

That day the army, which had just won the Battle of Ligny, was marching straight for Brussels; it was the eve of the Battle of Waterloo. About midday, with the torrential rain still coming down, Fabrice heard the sound of cannon; this happiness made him forget all about the dreadful moments of despair he had experienced in that completely undeserved prison. He

rode on until far into the night, and as he was beginning to have a little common sense, he went to ask for lodging in a peasant's cottage a long way from the road. This peasant wept and claimed that everything had been taken; Fabrice gave him money, and he found some oats. My horse is no beauty, thought Fabrice, but who knows, he might catch the fancy of some sergeant-major, and he went and slept in the stable beside the horse. Next day, an hour before dawn, Fabrice was on the road and, by making much of his horse, had succeeded in persuading him to trot. At about five, he heard cannon-fire; it was the prelude to Waterloo.

CHAPTER 3

Before long, Fabrice met some vivandières, and the deep gratitude he felt for the jailer's wife from B*** prompted him to speak to them; he enquired of one where he would find the 4th Regiment of hussars, to which he belonged.

'You'd do just as well not to hurry, me little soldier,' said the canteen-keeper, touched by Fabrice's pale face and beautiful eyes. 'Your arm ain't strong enough yet for the sabre slashing that'll be going on today. Now if you had a musket, that'd be another matter, you could fire away same as the others.'

This advice was not to Fabrice's liking; but however much he urged on his horse, he could not go faster than the canteen-keeper's cart. From time to time the sound of cannon seemed to come closer and prevented them hearing one another, for Fabrice was so beside himself with enthusiasm and happiness that he had started to talk again. Every word the canteen-keeper said added to his happiness, by making him more fully aware of it. Except for his real name and his escape from prison, in the end he told everything to this woman who seemed so kind. She was greatly astonished and could not make head or tail of anything this handsome young soldier was telling her.

'Ah, now I understand,' she finally exclaimed in a triumphant tone: 'You're a young gentleman in love with the wife of a captain in the 4th Hussars. Your lady love made you a present of the uniform you've got on, and you're chasing after her. It's as true as God's in his heaven that you've never been a soldier; but like the brave boy you are, as your regiment's under fire, you want to join it and not look as though you're a coward.'

Fabrice agreed with all she said: this was the only way he could get some good advice. I know nothing whatever about how these French do things, he thought, and if I don't have someone to help me, I'll end up being thrown back into prison, and they'll steal my horse.

'Now, me dear,' said the canteen-keeper, who was becoming more friendly by the minute, 'admit you're not twenty-one; the very most you can be is seventeen.'

It was the truth, and Fabrice readily acknowledged it.

'So, you're not even a recruit; it's only on account of madame's pretty face that you're going to get yourself blown to bits. Bless me! She don't ask much! If you still have some of them gold coins she gave you, first thing you must do is buy a different horse; look at the way your nag pricks up its ears when the cannon are booming close by; that's a peasant's horse that'll get you killed the minute you reach the line. That white smoke you can see over there above the hedge, that's the troops firing, me dear! So you'd better be ready to be scared out of your wits, when you hear shot whistling past you. You'd do well to have a bite to eat while you still have time.'

Fabrice accepted her advice, and, offering the vivandière a napoleon,* asked her to take what he owed out of it.

'It's enough to make you weep!' cried the woman; 'the poor kid don't even know how to look after his money! It'd serve you right if after grabbing your money I'd set Cocotte to her quick trot; I'll be damned if your nag could catch me. What would you do, you fat-head, if you saw me take off? Now listen: when the cannon are roaring, you should never let anyone see you've got gold. Here,' she said, 'here's eighteen francs fifty, so your lunch cost one-fifty. Now we'll soon have some horses to resell. If it's small, give ten francs for it, and whatever it's like never more than twenty, even if it was the horse belonging to the four sons of Aymon.'*

Breakfast over, the vivandière, who was still rattling on, was interrupted by a woman who had come across the fields and then turned on to the road.

'Hallo there!' the woman shouted to her, 'Hallo! Margot! Your 6th Light is over on the right.'

'I'll have to leave you, me dear,' the vivandière told our hero, 'but truly I feel sorry for you; Lord bless me, I've taken ever such a liking to you! You don't know nothing about nothing, you'll be bumped off, sure as God's in his heaven. Come along with me to the 6th Light.'

'I quite see that I know nothing,' Fabrice told her, 'but I want to fight, and I'm determined to go over there towards that white smoke.'

'Just look at the way your horse pricks up its ears! The minute he gets over there, however little go he's got left, he'll take right over and start galloping, and God only knows where he'll land you. Will you do as I tell you? As soon as you reach where the soldier-boys are, pick up a musket and a cartridge-pouch, get down beside the soldiers, and do what they do, exactly the same. But my God, I'll wager you don't even know how to open a cartridge.'

Very nettled, Fabrice nevertheless confessed to his new friend that she had guessed aright.

'Poor little dear! He'll be killed right away, and that's God's truth! It won't take long. You really must come with me', continued the vivandière with an air of authority.

'But I want to fight.'

'And you shall fight; come along, the 6th Light is one of the best, and there's plenty for everyone today.'

'But will we reach your regiment soon?'

'In a quarter of an hour at most.'

If this good woman vouches for me, reflected Fabrice, I won't be taken for a spy because I'm so ignorant about everything, and I'll be able to fight. Just then the noise of cannon-fire grew much louder, the sound of each shot merging with the next. 'It's like telling your beads,' said Fabrice.

'Now you can begin to hear the troops firing,' said the vivandière, whipping her little horse which seemed greatly excited by the gunfire.

The canteen-keeper turned to the right and took a track that crossed over the fields; the mud was a foot deep and the little cart nearly got stuck there; Fabrice heaved at its wheel. His horse fell twice; soon the track, which had become less wet, was nothing but a little path over the grass. Fabrice had gone no more than five hundred paces when his nag stopped dead: a corpse lay right across the path, striking horror into both horse and rider.

Fabrice's face, naturally very pale, turned a pronounced shade of green; the canteen-keeper, after looking at the

dead body, said, as if to herself, 'It's not from our division.' Then, turning her gaze upon our hero, she burst out laughing.

'Haha! me dear!' she cried, 'Tasty, ain't it!' Fabrice remained frozen. What he was most struck by was the filthy state of the feet of the corpse, which had been stripped of its shoes and of everything except an awful pair of trousers badly stained with blood.

'Go right up,' the canteen-keeper told him. 'Get off your horse; you've got to get used to it,' she cried, 'Look! he got it in the head.'

The corpse was hideously disfigured by a bullet which had entered beside the nose and come out of the opposite temple; it had one eye open.

'Well get off your horse, dearie,' said the canteen-keeper, 'and give his hand a shake, see if he shakes it back.'

Without hesitating, although he felt sickened to death, Fabrice jumped off his horse and, taking the corpse's hand, shook it firmly; then he stood there as if paralysed; he felt he had not the strength to climb back into the saddle. What he found most horrifying was that open eye.

The vivandière will think me a coward, he thought bitterly, but he found it impossible to move; he would have collapsed. It was a dreadful moment: Fabrice was on the point of passing out completely. Seeing this, the vivandière jumped nimbly out of her little cart and silently handed him a glass of brandy which he swallowed in one gulp; he was able to get back onto his nag, and then rode off along the path without saying a word. From time to time the vivandière looked at him out of the corner of her eye.

'You can fight tomorrow, dearie,' she said to him in the end; 'today you'll stay with me. You can see, can't you, that you've got to learn about soldiering.'

'On the contrary, I want to fight right away,' cried our hero sombrely, which struck the vivandière as a good sign. The cannon-fire could be heard more frequently and seemed to be getting closer. The cannon were now beginning to sound like a basso continuo; there was no interval separating one shot from the next, and above this basso continuo which rumbled

like a far-off mountain stream, you could clearly distinguish the sound of troops firing.

At this point the path led down into a little wood; the vivandière could see three or four of our soldiers racing towards her at full speed; she jumped swiftly from her cart and ran to hide some fifteen or twenty paces from the path. She disappeared into a hole where a big tree had just been removed. Now, said Fabrice to himself, I'm going to find out if I'm a coward! He stopped beside the little cart the vivandière had abandoned, and drew his sabre. The soldiers paid no attention to him and ran past along the edge of the wood, to the left of the track.

'They're ours,' said the vivandière nonchalantly, as, gasping for breath, she returned to her little cart... 'If your horse could gallop, I'd tell you to ride ahead to the end of the wood and see if there's anyone on the plain.' Fabrice didn't wait to be told twice, but, tearing off a branch from a poplar and stripping the leaves from it, he started thrashing his horse on both flanks; the nag galloped for a moment then resumed his customary trot. The vivandière had set her horse to a gallop. 'Stop, stop!' she was shouting at Fabrice. Soon they were both out of the wood; when they reached the edge of the flat ground they could hear a terrible din, cannon and musketry thundering on every side, on the right, on the left, and behind them. And as the little wood they were leaving stood on a knoll some eight or ten feet above the plain, they could see a part of the battle fairly well; but in fact there was not a soul in the meadow at the end of the wood. At a distance of a thousand feet this meadow was bordered by a long line of very bushy willows; from time to time white smoke spiralled up above the willows towards the sky.

'If I only knew where the regiment is!' exclaimed the vivandière in perplexity. 'We mustn't just go straight across this big meadow. And by the way,' she said to Fabrice, 'if you see an enemy soldier, just stab him with the point of your sabre, don't waste time slashing him.'

Just then the vivandière caught sight of the four soldiers mentioned before; they were emerging onto the plain from the wood, to the left of the track. One of them was on horseback.

'That'll do you nicely,' she said to Fabrice. 'Hallo there!' she shouted at the one on the horse, 'come over here and have a brandy.' The soldiers approached.

'Where's the 6th Light?' she shouted.

'Down there, five minutes away, the other side of that canal beside the willows; but Colonel Macon's just been killed.'

'D'you want five francs for your horse?'

'Five francs! That's a good one, missis, an officer's horse that I'll get five napoleons for in no time at all.'

'Give me one of your napoleons,' the vivandière said to Fabrice. Then, going up to the soldier on horseback, she told him: 'dismount and look sharp about it, here's your napoleon.'

The soldier dismounted, Fabrice jumped cheerfully into the saddle, and the vivandière untied the little portmanteau on the back of the nag. 'Well give us a hand, you lot!' she said to the soldiers, 'just look at the way you're letting a lady do all the work!'

But hardly had the looted horse become conscious of the portmanteau than it started to rear, and Fabrice, who was an excellent horseman, needed all his strength to control it.

'That's a good sign!' said the vivandière, 'the gent ain't used to being tickled by a bag on his back.'

'A general's horse,' the soldier who'd sold it was exclaiming, 'a horse that's worth ten napoleons if it's worth one!'

'Here's twenty francs,' Fabrice told him, beside himself with joy at being astride a horse with some life in it.

At that moment a cannon-ball, coming from the side, landed in the row of willows, and Fabrice was treated to the curious spectacle of all the little branches flying to left and right as if sliced off by a scythe.

'Look, the guns are getting nearer,' said the soldier, taking the twenty francs. It must have been about two o'clock.

Fabrice was still enthralled by this curious spectacle when a group of generals, followed by some twenty hussars, galloped across one of the corners of the vast meadow at the edge of which he had stopped; his horse neighed, reared up several times in succession, then jerked his head violently at the restraining bridle. Right, off we go! thought Fabrice.

Given its head, the horse set off at full speed and caught up with the escort following the generals. Fabrice counted four braided hats. A quarter-of-an-hour later, from something the hussar riding next to him said, Fabrice grasped that one of those generals was Ney, the famous marshal. His happiness was at its height; but he was unable to guess which one of the four generals was Marshal Ney; he would have given anything in the world to know, but he remembered that he must not speak. The escort stopped to cross a broad ditch that the previous day's rain had filled with water; it was bordered by tall trees and formed the left boundary of the meadow at whose entrance Fabrice had bought the horse. Almost all the hussars had dismounted; the edge of the ditch was very steep and extremely slippery, and the water was a good three or four feet lower than the level of the meadow. Fabrice, distracted by his happiness, was thinking more about Marshal Ney and glory than about his horse, which, being very frisky, jumped into the canal; this made the water splash up to a considerable height. One of the generals was completely drenched by the sheet of water, and exclaimed with an oath: 'To hell with the f... brute!' Deeply wounded by this insult, Fabrice wondered: Can I demand satisfaction? In the meantime, to show he was not just a blunderer, he began trying to make his horse climb the other side of the ditch; but it was steep, and five or six feet high. He was forced to give up; so then he rode up stream, with his horse in the water up to its head, finally reaching a spot where cattle could drink; by using this gentle slope he easily reached the field on the other side of the canal. He was the first man from the escort to appear there; he began trotting proudly along the edge; down in the canal the hussars were floundering about in some perplexity over their situation, for in many places the water was five feet deep. Two or three horses took fright and tried to swim, splashing about in an appalling way. A sergeant noticed the manœuvre carried out by that greenhorn whose appearance was so unmilitary.

'Ride upstream! There's a drinking-place on the left!' he shouted, and one by one they all crossed over.

On reaching the other bank Fabrice had found the generals alone there; it seemed to him that the cannon-fire sounded louder; he could barely make out what the general he had drenched so thoroughly was shouting in his ear:

‘Where did you get this horse?’

Fabrice was so agitated that he replied in Italian:

‘L’ho comprato poco fa.’ (I’ve just bought it.)

‘What did you say?’ shouted the general.

But the din was so fierce just then that Fabrice was unable to answer him. We must confess that our hero was most unheroic at that moment. Fear, however, was only a secondary emotion; what shocked him most was that noise which was hurting his ears. The escort set off at a gallop; they were crossing a wide strip of cultivated ground, beyond the canal, and this field was strewn with corpses.

‘The redcoats! The redcoats!’ the hussars in the escort were shouting joyfully, and at first Fabrice did not understand; eventually he noticed that almost all the corpses were indeed dressed in red. One thing made him shudder with horror; he saw that many of these unfortunate redcoats were still alive; they were crying out, presumably for help, and nobody was stopping to help them. Our hero, who was very humane, went to tremendous lengths to ensure that his horse did not step on any of the redcoats. The escort came to a halt; Fabrice, not concentrating properly on his duties as a soldier, galloped on, his eyes fixed on one of those poor wounded wretches.

‘Halt, you idiot, halt!’ the sergeant shouted at him. Fabrice realized that he was about twenty paces ahead and to the right of the generals, in exactly the direction in which they were gazing with their field-glasses. As he rode back to his place behind the other hussars who had stayed a few paces to the rear, he saw that the stoutest of the generals was speaking to his neighbour, also a general, with an air of authority and almost of reproof; he was swearing. Fabrice could not contain his curiosity; and in spite of the advice not to speak given him by his friend the jailer’s wife, he thought up a little sentence in very correct, idiomatic French, and said to the hussar beside him:

‘Which is the general who’s telling his neighbour off?’

‘Good heavens, that’s the Marshal!’

'What Marshal?'

'Marshal Ney, you numskull! Hey! Where've you been serving up to now?'

Fabrice, despite his extreme touchiness, never even thought of taking offence at the insult; lost in childlike admiration, he was gazing at that famous prince of the Moskowa, the bravest of the brave.

Suddenly they all took off at a fast gallop. A few minutes later Fabrice saw, twenty paces ahead, a ploughed field whose surface seemed to be moving in an odd manner. The bottoms of the furrows were full of water, and the very wet earth that formed the crests of these furrows was flying about in little black clods that were flung three or four feet into the air. Fabrice noticed this peculiar effect as he rode past but his thoughts were once again dwelling on the glory of the Marshal. He heard a sharp cry beside him: two hussars were falling, hit by shot; and, as he looked at them, they were already twenty paces behind the escort. What filled him with horror was a horse, covered with blood, lying struggling on the ploughed earth, its hooves entangled in its own entrails; it was trying to follow the others; blood flowed over the mud.

Ah! So now at last I'm under fire! he thought. I've been under fire! he kept telling himself with satisfaction. I'm a real soldier now! The escort was galloping at full speed just then and our hero realized that it was shot that was making the earth fly about in all directions. In vain did he look in the direction the shot was coming from, he could see the white smoke of the battery a great distance away and, amid the regular, continuous booming produced by the cannonade, he thought he could make out some volleys that were much closer; he could not begin to understand what was going on.

At that moment the generals and the escort climbed down on to a little track full of water, that lay five feet lower than the field.

The Marshal halted, and again looked through his glasses. This time Fabrice could see him easily; he was very fair, with a big red face. We don't have faces like that in Italy, he thought. I, who am so pale, with my dark brown hair, I shall never look like that, he added sadly. For him these words

meant: I shall never be a hero. He looked at the hussars: with only one exception, they all had blond moustaches. If Fabrice was looking at the hussars in the escort, they were also looking at him. Their stares made him blush, and to put an end to his embarrassment he turned his head towards the enemy. He saw very wide lines of men in red; but what astonished him was that to him the men looked tiny. Their long lines, made up of regiments or divisions, looked no taller, to him, than a hedge. A line of red-coated troopers was approaching at a trot towards the sunken track that the generals and the escort were following at a walking pace, squelching along in the mud. The smoke made it impossible to make out anything that lay in the direction of their advance; occasionally, against that background of white smoke, you could see some galloping men.

Suddenly, from the direction of the enemy, Fabrice saw four men galloping up at full speed. Ah! We're being attacked, he thought; then he saw two of the men speaking to the Marshal. One of the generals in the Marshal's staff galloped off towards the enemy, followed by two hussars from the escort and the four men who had just arrived. After everyone had crossed over a little canal, Fabrice found himself alongside a sergeant who looked like a very good-natured chap. I must speak to this one, he told himself, and then perhaps they'll stop staring at me. He thought for a long time.

'Monsieur, this is the first battle I've ever been in,' he finally said to the sergeant; 'but is this a real battle?'

'Sort of. But you, who are you?'

'I'm the brother of the wife of a captain.'

'And what's the name of this captain?'

Our hero was terribly nonplussed; he hadn't foreseen this question. Fortunately, the sergeant and the escort were galloping away again. What French name shall I give? he wondered. Eventually he remembered the name of the landlord of the hostelry where he'd lodged in Paris; he moved up his horse beside that of the sergeant, and yelled at the top of his voice: 'Captain Meunier!' The other, not hearing properly because of the booming of the cannon, replied: 'Oh! Captain Teulier? Well, he's been killed.' Bravo!, thought Fabrice. Captain Teulier, I must look upset. 'Oh my God!' he ex-

claimed, and put on a woeful expression. They had left the sunken track and were crossing a little field at a fast gallop, under fire once again; the Marshal was heading towards a division of cavalry. The escort was surrounded by corpses and wounded men; but already this sight made less impression on our hero; he had something else to think about.

While the escort was halted, he caught sight of a canteen-keeper's little cart, and so powerful was his attachment to that honourable corps that he set off towards her at a gallop.

'Stay right here, you b...!' the sergeant shouted at him.

What can he do to me here? thought Fabrice, still galloping towards the vivandière. As he spurred his horse on, he hoped that perhaps it would be his good friend of that morning; the horses and the little carts seemed very similar, but the owner was entirely different, and our hero thought she looked extremely unpleasant. As he came up to her, Fabrice heard her saying: 'But he was a such handsome man!' A really dreadful sight awaited the new soldier there; they were amputating a cuirassier's leg at the thigh; he was a fine young man of five feet ten inches. Fabrice closed his eyes and drank four glasses of brandy one after another.

'You're not half going it, you little shrimp!' cried the canteen-keeper. The brandy gave him an idea: I must purchase the goodwill of my mates, the hussars of the escort.

'Give me the rest of the bottle,' he said to the vivandière.

'But d'you realize,' she answered, 'that on a day like today, what's left there's worth ten francs?'

When he galloped up to the escort:

'Ah! You're bringing us back some booze!' exclaimed the sergeant. 'So that's why you deserted? Give it here.'

The bottle went the rounds; the last man to get it threw it into the air after drinking. 'Thanks, mate!' he called to Fabrice. They were all gazing at him in a friendly fashion. Those looks removed an enormous weight from Fabrice's heart: it was one of those overly sensitive hearts that cannot do without the goodwill of those around it. At long last his companions were no longer staring at him with suspicion; a bond existed between him and them! Fabrice took a deep breath, then in a relaxed voice said to the sergeant:

'And if Captain Teulier's been killed, where will I be able to see my sister?' He thought himself a little Machiavelli, in so easily saying Teulier instead of Meunier.

'That's something you'll find out this evening,' the sergeant replied.

The escort set off again in the direction of some infantry divisions. Fabrice felt quite drunk; he had had too much brandy and was rolling about a bit in the saddle; most opportunely he recollected something his mother's coachman used to say: 'When you've had a few, you should look straight between your horse's ears and do just what your neighbour does.' The Marshal halted for a long time beside a number of cavalry units that he was ordering to begin a charge; but for an hour or two our hero was hardly aware of what was going on near him. He felt extremely tired, and when his horse galloped he would hit the saddle like a lump of lead.

Suddenly the sergeant shouted to his men:

'Can't you see the Emperor, you b...s!' Instantly, the escort cried: 'Long live the Emperor!' at the tops of their voices. As may be imagined, our hero stared as hard as he could, but all he could see was some generals galloping along; they too had an escort behind them. The long, drooping horse-tails that the dragoons of the retinue wore in their helmets prevented him from distinguishing the faces. So, I wasn't able to see the Emperor on the battlefield, on account of those damned glasses of brandy! This thought woke him up completely.

They climbed down again into a road that was full of water; the horses wanted to drink.

'Then that was the Emperor who passed by over there?' he asked his neighbour.

'Why yes, certainly, the one without braid on his coat. Why didn't you see him?' his comrade answered kindly. Fabrice was sorely tempted to gallop after the Emperor's escort and join it. What a joy it would be actually to go into battle in that hero's retinue! That was why he had come to France. I've a perfect right to do that, he thought, for after all, the only reason why I'm in this escort is that my horse got the urge to gallop off after these generals.

What decided Fabrice to stay was the warm-hearted way that his new friends the hussars were looking at him; he was beginning to feel he was the close friend of all these soldiers he had been riding with for the last few hours. He imagined that there existed, between himself and them, that noble friendship of the heroes of Tasso and Ariosto.* If he joined the Emperor's escort, there would be fresh acquaintances to make; perhaps they would even look askance at him because those other troopers were dragoons, whereas he was wearing the uniform of a hussar, as did everyone in Marshal Ney's escort. The way they were looking at him now made our hero feel he was in paradise; he would have done anything in the world for his comrades; his heart and his soul were filled with bliss. Everything seemed to him to be quite different now he was among friends, he was dying to ask them questions. But I'm still a bit drunk, he thought, I must remember the jailer's wife. As they left the sunken road he noticed that the escort was no longer with Marshal Ney; the general they were following was tall and spare, with a bony face and a terrifying gaze.

That general was none other than Count d'A***, the Lieutenant Robert of May 1796. What joy it would have given him to see Fabrice del Dongo!

For some time now Fabrice had no longer been noticing how the shot made the earth fly about in black blobs; as the hussars came up to the rear of a regiment of cuirassiers, he could clearly hear the bullets hitting the breastplates and he saw several men fall.

The sun, which was already very low, was on the point of setting when the escort, emerging from a sunken road, climbed a little slope three or four feet high and entered a ploughed field. Fabrice heard a peculiar little sound very close by: he turned his head, four men had fallen, together with their mounts; the general himself had been thrown from his horse, but was getting to his feet, covered in blood. Fabrice looked at the hussars who had been struck down: three were still jerking about convulsively and the fourth was screaming: 'Pull me out!' The sergeant and two or three men had dismounted to help the general who, leaning on his

aide-de-camp, was attempting to take a few steps; he was trying to get away from his horse which lay on its back, thrashing about on the ground and lashing out furiously with its hooves.

The sergeant went up to Fabrice. At that moment our hero heard someone behind him, very close to his ear, say: 'It's the only one that can still gallop.' He felt himself being grasped by his feet, which were raised, while his body was supported under the arms; he was lifted over his horse's hindquarters then allowed to slide on to the ground, where he landed in a sitting position.

The aide-de-camp took Fabrice's horse by the bridle; the general, with the sergeant's help, got into the saddle and galloped off; he was rapidly followed by the six men who remained. Fabrice stood up in a fury and began running after them, shouting 'Ladri! Ladri!' (Thieves! Thieves!) It was comic to chase after thieves in the middle of a battlefield.

The escort and the general, Count d'A***, soon vanished behind a row of willows. Fabrice, mad with rage, also reached that row of willows; he found himself faced with an extremely deep canal, which he crossed. Reaching the other side he started swearing again, on seeing once more, though at a very great distance, the general and the escort disappearing into the trees. 'Thieves! Thieves!' he was now shouting in French. In despair, not so much over the loss of his horse as over the betrayal, he collapsed at the edge of the ditch, exhausted and dreadfully hungry. If his lovely horse had been stolen from him by the enemy he would not have given it a second thought; but to be betrayed and robbed by that sergeant he liked so much and those hussars he thought of as his brothers! That was what broke his heart. He could not get over such perfidy and, leaning his back against a willow, began to weep bitter tears. One by one he was bidding farewell to all his fine dreams of noble and chivalrous friendship, such as had existed between the heroes in *Jerusalem Delivered*. To see death approach was nothing, if you were in the company of heroic and loving souls, noble friends who would grasp you by the hand as you breathed your last! But to maintain your enthusiasm when surrounded by base rogues!!! Fabrice was

exaggerating, as indignant men will. After giving vent to his feelings for a quarter of an hour, he noticed that the shot was beginning to land right by the row of trees in whose shade he was sitting brooding. He stood up and tried to get his bearings. As he gazed at those fields, bordered by a wide canal and the row of bushy willows, he thought he recognized where he was. He noticed a body of infantry crossing the ditch and entering the meadows a quarter of a league ahead. I was falling asleep, he thought; I mustn't be taken prisoner; and he started walking very fast. He felt reassured as he drew nearer, he recognized the uniform; the regiments he was afraid might cut him off were French. He headed over to the right to reach them.

After the moral pain of having been so shamefully betrayed and robbed, another pain was every instant making itself more intensely felt: he was dying of hunger. It was therefore with great joy that, after having walked or rather run for ten minutes, he saw that the infantry corps, which was also moving very fast, had halted as if to take up a position. A few minutes later he found himself in the midst of the nearest soldiers.

'Comrades, could you sell me a bit of bread?'

'Hey, here's another one who thinks we're bakers!'

This callous remark and the derisive laughter which followed it crushed Fabrice completely. So war was no longer that noble impulse shared by all those who loved glory that, after reading Napoleon's proclamations, he had imagined it to be! He sat down, or more precisely let himself drop on to the grass, turning extremely white. The soldier who had spoken to him, and who had stopped some ten paces away to clean the lock of his musket with his handkerchief, came over and threw him a piece of bread; then, seeing that he was not picking it up, the man put a bit of the bread into his mouth. Fabrice opened his eyes and ate the bread without having the strength to speak. Eventually, when he looked round for the soldier to pay him, he found himself alone; the soldiers nearest to him were a hundred paces away, and were marching on. He rose automatically and followed them. He entered a wood; he was on the point of collapsing from exhaustion, and began looking about him for a suitable spot,

but what was his delight on recognizing first the horse, then the cart, and finally the canteen-keeper of that morning! She ran up to him, alarmed by his appearance.

'Keep going, dearie,' she said; 'are you wounded then? an' where's your lovely horse?' While talking to him like this she was leading him towards her cart, which she made him climb into, holding him under the arms. Hardly had he got into the cart than our hero, utterly exhausted, fell into a deep sleep.†

† Para v. P. y. E. 15 x. 38.*

CHAPTER 4

Nothing could awaken him, neither the musket-shots so close by the little cart, nor the trotting of the horse that the canteen-keeper was whipping with all her might. After believing all day that it was victorious, the regiment had been attacked out of the blue by hordes of Prussian cavalry and was beating a retreat, or rather fleeing in the direction of France.

The colonel, a very dapper, handsome young man who had just succeeded Macon, was killed by a sabre-cut; the major who replaced him as commander, old and white-haired, ordered the regiment to halt. 'Dammit all!' he said to the soldiers. 'Under the Republic we didn't make a run for it till the enemy gave us no choice... Defend every inch of ground to the death,' he shouted with an oath; 'it's our own French soil the Prussians are now trying to invade!'

The little cart stopped and Fabrice suddenly awoke. The sun had long since set; he was astonished to see that it was almost night. The soldiers were running hither and thither in a chaotic manner that greatly surprised our hero: he thought they looked rather sheepish.

'What's going on?' he asked the canteen-keeper.

'Oh, nothing. It's just that we're done for, me dear; the Prussian cavalry's attacking with their sabres, that's all. At first that numskull of a general thought it was our cavalry. Come on, get a move on, help me fix Cocotte's harness, the trace is broken.'

Some shots were fired ten paces away: our hero, now in fine fettle, thought: But really, during the whole day, I've not done any fighting, I've just escorted a general. 'I've got to fight,' he said to the canteen-keeper.

'Don't worry, you'll fight, and more'n you'll want to! We're done for!'

'Aubry, me lad,' she shouted to a corporal passing by, 'give an eye now and again on where me little cart's got to.'

'You're going to fight?' said Fabrice to Aubry.

'No, I'm going to put on me slippers and go dancing!'

'I'm coming with you.'

'I'll vouch for the little hussar,' shouted the canteen-keeper, 'the young gent's got guts.' Corporal Aubry strode on in silence. Eight or ten soldiers ran up and joined him, and he led them behind a big oak surrounded by brambles. Once there he positioned them on the edge of the wood, still without saying a word, in a widely extended line; each man was at least ten paces from his neighbour.

'Now then, you men,' said the corporal, and this was the first time he had said anything, 'don't shoot before I tell you, remember you've only got three cartridges.'

What's going on? wondered Fabrice. Eventually, when he was alone with the corporal, he said to him:

'I haven't got a musket.'

'Quiet! Go over there, fifty paces away from the wood, and you'll find one of those poor soldiers from our regiment who've just been sabred; take his musket and cartridge-pouch. Be sure not to take 'em from one of the wounded, take the musket and cartridge-pouch of someone who's good and dead, and hurry, so you don't get shot by our men.' Fabrice ran off, returning very quickly with a musket and cartridge-pouch.

'Load your musket and get behind that tree, and whatever you do don't shoot before I order you to... God almighty!' cried the corporal, breaking off his instructions, 'he doesn't even know how to load his gun!...' He went on talking as he helped Fabrice. 'If an enemy trooper gallops at you brandishing his sabre, move round your tree and only shoot at point-blank range, when your man's three paces away; your bayonet should be nearly touching his uniform.'

'Get rid of your big sabre,' cried the corporal, 'd'you want it to trip you up, for Christ's sake! The soldiers they're giving us now!' Saying this, he himself took hold of the sabre and angrily threw it some way off.

'Now, you, wipe your gun-flint with your handkerchief. But have you ever shot anything?'

'I'm a hunter.'

'God be praised!' the corporal went on, sighing deeply. 'Now don't even think of firing before I give the order', and off he went.

Fabrice was overjoyed. At last I'm really going to fight, he thought, and kill one of the enemy! This morning we were being shot at and all I did was risk being killed; that's a fool's game. He was looking all round him with intense curiosity. After a minute he heard seven or eight shots very close by. But, receiving no order to fire, he remained quietly behind his tree. Night had almost fallen; he felt just as if he were on a bear hunt—*l'espère*, as it was called—in the Tramezzina mountains above Grianta. He remembered a hunter's trick: he took a cartridge from his pouch and removed the bullet; if I see him, he thought, I mustn't miss him, and he slipped this second bullet into the barrel of his musket. He heard two shots fired just beside his tree; at the same time he saw a rider dressed in blue gallop across from right to left in front of him. He isn't three paces away, he thought, but at this distance I'm certain to get him, and he carefully followed the rider, aiming his musket, and finally pressed the trigger; the rider fell, together with his horse. Our hero imagined he was out hunting, and ran in great delight towards the quarry he had just shot down. He was already touching the man, who seemed to him to be dying, when with incredible swiftness two Prussian troopers rode down on him with their sabres at the ready. Fabrice raced towards the wood as fast as he could; he threw away his musket, so he could run faster. The Prussians were no more than three paces from him when he reached a new plantation of very straight little oak trees no thicker than your arm, growing at the edge of the wood. These little oaks stopped the troopers for an instant, but they passed through and began pursuing Fabrice again across a clearing. Once more they were almost upon him when he slipped in among seven or eight big trees. At that moment his face was nearly scorched by the flames of five or six musket shots coming from in front. He bent his head; when he raised it again, he found himself face to face with the corporal.

'Did you get yours?' Corporal Aubry asked him.

'Yes, but I lost my musket.'

'It's not muskets we're short of; you're a good little bugger...; even though you seem so green, you've certainly earned your pay today, but these men missed that pair who

were chasing you and were coming straight at 'em; I didn't see 'em myself. Now we've got to get out of here at the double; the regiment must be an eighth of a league away, and what's more there's a little bit of meadow where they could catch us on the hop.'

While he was talking, the corporal was marching along at a fast pace at the head of his ten men. Two hundred paces further on, at the entrance to the little meadow he had mentioned, they met a wounded general being carried by his aide-de-camp and a servant.

'Let me have four men,' he said to the corporal in a faint voice, 'I have to be carried to the field hospital, my leg's broken.'

'Go to hell,' replied the corporal, 'you and all your generals. You've betrayed the Emperor today.'

'What!' exclaimed the general furiously, 'you are disobeying my orders! Do you realize I'm General Count B***, Commander of your division, etc., etc.' He held forth. The aide-de-camp seized hold of some men. The corporal bayoneted him in the arm, then raced off with his men at a faster pace. 'Let's hope they've all got broken arms and legs same as you,' the corporal kept repeating with an oath. 'What a bunch of puffed-up ponces! All of 'em in the pocket of the Bourbons,* all traitors to the Emperor!' Fabrice was shocked to hear this terrible accusation.

About ten o'clock that night the little troop met the regiment at the entrance to a large village which had several very narrow streets, but Fabrice noticed that Corporal Aubry avoided speaking to any of the officers. 'You can't move!' exclaimed the corporal. All these streets were crowded with infantry and cavalry and especially with artillery caissons and wagons. The corporal tried the entrance to three of the streets; after twenty paces they were obliged to halt; they were all cursing and losing their tempers.

'Some traitor's in command here too!' cried the corporal; 'if the enemy's got wit enough to surround the village we'll all be caught like rats in a trap. Follow me, you men.' Fabrice looked: there were now only six soldiers with the corporal. Passing through a big open door, they found themselves in a

vast farmyard; from the farmyard they entered a stable with a little door on to a garden. For a while they wandered around, looking for the way. Finally, however, by going through a hedge, they reached a huge field of buckwheat. In less than half-an-hour, guided by shouting and confused noises, they were back on the main road beyond the village. The ditches of this road were filled with abandoned muskets; Fabrice selected one, but the road, although very wide, was so crowded with fugitives and carts that in a space of half-an-hour the corporal and Fabrice had barely gone five hundred paces; people said the road led to Charleroi. As eleven was striking on the village clock:

‘Let’s cut across country again,’ cried the corporal. The little troop was now composed of only three soldiers, the corporal, and Fabrice. When they were a quarter of a league distant from the main road:

‘I can’t go on,’ said one of the soldiers.

‘Same here,’ said another.

‘Wonderful! We’re all in the same boat,’ said the corporal; ‘but do as I tell you, and you’ll be alright.’ Noticing five or six trees alongside a little ditch in the middle of a vast cornfield, he said to his men: ‘Over to the trees!’ When they reached the trees: ‘Lie down here; don’t make a sound. But before we go to sleep, who’s got some bread?’

‘Me,’ said one of the soldiers.

‘Give it here,’ the corporal said in a magisterial tone; he divided the bread into five pieces and took the smallest. ‘A quarter of an hour before daybreak,’ he said as he ate, ‘the enemy cavalry’ll be right on us. We mustn’t let ourselves be sabred. Your number’s up if you’re on your own, in this flat, open country, with cavalry after you, but five, on the other hand, can save themselves; stay with me, all together, shoot only at point-blank range, and I promise to get you to Charleroi tomorrow evening.’ The corporal woke them up an hour before dawn; he made them reload their muskets; the noise on the main road was still going on, and had lasted all night: it was like the sound of a distant mountain stream.

‘They’re like a lot of sheep running for their lives,’ Fabrice remarked guilelessly to the corporal.

'You shut your mouth, you greenhorn!' said the corporal indignantly; and the three soldiers who, with Fabrice, made up his entire army glared angrily at our hero, as if he had blasphemed. He had insulted the nation.

Well that's a bit much! thought Fabrice; I'd noticed the Viceroy in Milan was like that too; they're not running away, oh no! You can't tell these Frenchmen the truth if it upsets their vanity. But I don't give a damn about the nasty looks they're giving me, and I must make them see that. They were still marching along about five hundred paces from the flood of refugees that filled the main road. A league further on the corporal and his band crossed a track which led back to the main road, and where a great many soldiers were lying. Fabrice bought quite a good horse which cost him forty francs, and from the sabres strewn on all sides he carefully chose a big straight one. Since I'm told to stab with it, this kind's best, he thought. Thus equipped, he set his horse to a gallop and soon caught up with the corporal, who had forged ahead. He steadied himself on his stirrups, grasped the scabbard of his straight sabre in his left hand, and said to the four Frenchmen:

'Those people fleeing down the main road look like a flock of sheep... They're going along like frightened sheep...' In vain did Fabrice stress the word *sheep*, his companions no longer remembered being annoyed by the word an hour earlier. This demonstrates one of the differences between the Italian and the French characters: the Frenchman is undoubtedly the happier of the two, for he glides lightly over life's incidents and harbours no resentment.

We will not disguise the fact that Fabrice felt very pleased with himself after speaking of *sheep*. The men were chatting as they marched along. After another couple of leagues the corporal, who was still amazed at not seeing the enemy cavalry, said to Fabrice:

'You're our cavalry, gallop over to the farm on that little knoll, and ask the farmer if he's willing to sell us our breakfast, be sure to say there's only five of us. If he hesitates give him five of your francs in advance, but don't worry, we'll take back the money after we've eaten.'

Looking at the corporal, Fabrice saw in him an imperturbable gravity, and a genuine air of moral superiority; he obeyed. Everything happened the way their commander-in-chief had predicted, except that Fabrice insisted that they not take back by force the five francs he had given the farmer.

'It's my money,' he told his companions, 'I'm not paying for you, I'm paying for the oats he gave my horse.'

Fabrice pronounced French so badly, that his comrades imagined they could discern a note of superiority in what he said; they were profoundly shocked, and from that moment they began to prepare themselves mentally for a duel at the end of the day. They found him utterly different from themselves, which shocked them: Fabrice, on the other hand, was beginning to feel very friendly towards them.

They had been marching along in silence for two hours when the corporal, gazing at the highway, said in great delight: 'Here's the regiment!' They soon reached the road, but alas! there were less than two hundred men surrounding the eagle. Fabrice soon picked out the vivandière; she was on foot, her eyes were red, and from time to time she wept. In vain did Fabrice look about for the little cart and Cocotte.

'Plundered, ruined, robbed,' exclaimed the vivandière in answer to our hero's glances. He, without a word, dismounted from his horse, took it by the bridle, and said to the vivandière: 'Get on.' He didn't have to tell her twice.

'Shorten the stirrups for me,' she said.

Once she was comfortably settled on the horse, she began telling Fabrice about all the night's disasters. After an endless recital, listened to with avid attention by our hero who, in truth, could not make head or tail of it but who felt a warm attachment for the vivandière, the latter added:

'And to think it was Frenchmen who robbed me, beat me, did me in...'

'What! It wasn't the enemy?' asked Fabrice with an innocent air which lent great charm to his pale, serious, handsome face.

'Me poor dear, ain't you silly!' said the vivandière, smiling through her tears; 'but you're ever so nice, just the same.'

'And for all that, he brought down his Prussian very well,' said Corporal Aubry who, in that milling throng, chanced to

be walking on the other side of the canteen-keeper's horse. 'But he's proud,' continued the corporal... Fabrice gave a start. 'And what's your name?' continued the corporal, 'for after all, if I make a report, I want to mention your name.'

'My name's Vasi,' replied Fabrice, with an odd expression on his face; 'I mean Boulot' he added quickly, correcting himself.

Boulot was the name of the owner of the travel warrant that the jailer's wife in B*** had given him; he had studied it carefully two days ago while marching along, for he was beginning to reflect a little and was no longer so amazed by everything. As well as the travel warrant belonging to Boulot the hussar, Fabrice had also carefully preserved the Italian passport according to which he could lay claim to the noble name of Vasi, dealer in barometers. When the corporal had reproached him for being proud, he had almost replied: 'I proud! I, Fabrice Valserra, Marchesino del Dongo, who am prepared to bear the name of a Vasi, a dealer in barometers!'

While he was reflecting and telling himself: I'd really better remember that my name's Boulot, or else beware the prison with which fate's been threatening me, the corporal and the canteen-keeper had been exchanging a few words about him.

'Please don't think me inquisitive,' the canteen-keeper said to him, changing to the more polite form of address, 'it's for your own good that I'm questioning you. But who are you, really?'

At first Fabrice did not reply; he was thinking that he would never find more devoted friends from whom to ask advice, and he sorely needed some advice. We're about to enter a fortified town, the governor'll want to know who I am, and beware prison if my answers show that I don't know a soul in the 4th Hussars, the regiment whose uniform I'm wearing! Fabrice, being an Austrian subject, was well aware of all the importance that should be accorded to a passport. The members of his family, although noble and devout, and belonging to the party in power, had been inconvenienced time and again over their passports; so he was not in the least shocked by the canteen-keeper's question. But while, before replying, he was selecting the clearest French expressions, the canteen-

keeper, burning with curiosity, added, to encourage him to speak: 'Corporal Aubry and I are goin' to give you some good advice to guide you.'

'I'm sure you will,' replied Fabrice; 'my name's Vasi and I'm from Genoa; my sister, who's famous for her beauty, is married to a captain. As I'm only seventeen, she sent for me to come and join her, so I could see France and get a bit of polish; not finding her in Paris, and knowing she was with this army, I came here and hunted everywhere for her without being able to find her. The soldiers were surprised by my accent and had me arrested. I had money then, so I gave some to the military policeman, who gave me a travel warrant and a uniform and said: "Get out of here, and swear you'll never tell anyone my name."'

'What was he called?' asked the canteen-keeper.

'I gave my word,' said Fabrice.

'He's right,' resumed the corporal, 'the policeman's a scoundrel, but our friend shouldn't tell his name. And what's this captain called, who's the husband of your sister? If we know his name we can look for him.'

'Teulier, captain in the 4th Hussars,' replied our hero.

'So,' went on the corporal quite shrewdly, 'because of your foreign accent, the soldiers took you for a spy?'

'That's what's so abominable!' exclaimed Fabrice, his eyes sparkling. 'I who love the Emperor and the French so much! That's the insult I find most offensive.'

'It's not an insult, that's where you're mistaken; the soldiers' error was perfectly natural,' replied Corporal Aubry gravely.

He then explained to him most pedantically that in the army you have to belong to a corps and wear a uniform, failing which it is perfectly natural to be taken for a spy. 'The enemy dumps lots of 'em on us; everyone's a traitor in this war.' The scales fell from Fabrice's eyes; for the first time he understood that he had been at fault in all that had happened to him during the last two months.

'But the lad must tell us everything,' said the canteen-keeper, her curiosity more and more aroused. Fabrice obeyed. When he had finished:

'So in fact,' said the canteen-keeper very seriously to the corporal, 'this child's not in the military at all; now we've been beaten and betrayed it's going to be an ugly war. Why ever get your bones broken *gratis pro Deo*?'

'And he don't even', the corporal said, 'know how to load his musket, neither to the count of twelve, nor independently. It was me as loaded the shot that brought down the Prussian.'

'What's more, he shows his money to all and sundry,' added the canteen-keeper; 'he'll be robbed of the lot the minute he's no longer with us.'

'The first non-commissioned cavalry officer he meets will confiscate it and stand himself a few drinks with it, and maybe recruit him for the enemy, because everyone's a traitor. The first man he speaks to will order him to follow him, and he will: he'd do better to join our regiment.'

'No thank you, if you please, corporal!' Fabrice exclaimed sharply; 'it's better on a horse, and anyway I don't know how to load a musket, and you've seen I can handle a horse.'

Fabrice was very proud of that little speech. We will not relate the long debate about his destiny which took place between the corporal and the canteen-keeper. Fabrice noticed that as they argued these people repeated all the details of his story three or four times: the suspicions of the soldiers, the military policeman who sold him a travel warrant and a uniform, the way he had found himself, the previous day, in the escort to Marshal Ney, the glimpse of the Emperor galloping past, the horse that was 'knocked off', etc., etc.

The canteen-keeper, with a woman's curiosity, returned endlessly to the way he had been dispossessed of the fine horse she had made him buy.

'You felt yourself seized by the feet, and they lifted you gently over your horse's tail, and sat you on the ground!' Why repeat so often, wondered Fabrice, something we all three know perfectly well? He hadn't yet grasped that in France that is how simple folk pursue ideas.

'How much money have you?' the canteen-keeper suddenly asked him. Fabrice replied without hesitating; he had no doubts of this woman's nobility of soul: that is the beautiful thing about France.

'All told I've about thirty gold napoleons and eight or ten five-franc pieces.'

'In that case you're free as a bird!' exclaimed the canteen-keeper. 'Get right away from this retreating army; turn off to the side, take the first half-decent track on the right that you come across; drive your horse hard, and head away from the army all the time. First chance you get, buy some civilian clothes. When you're eight or ten leagues away, and there ain't no more soldiers about, travel post, go and rest up for a week in some nice town, and eat lots of steaks. Never tell a soul you've been in the army; the police would pick you up as a deserter; and although you're ever so nice, dearie, you're not sharp enough yet to know how to answer the police. The minute you're dressed like a civilian, tear up your travel warrant into tiny little pieces and go back to your real name; say you're called Vasi. And where should he say he's from?' she asked the corporal.

'From Cambrai on the Escaut: it's a good little town, ever so small—are you listening?—and it's got a cathedral and Fénelon.'*

'That's it,' said the canteen-keeper; 'never say you were in the battle, don't breathe a word about B***, nor about the policeman who sold you the travel warrant. When you want to return to Paris, go first to Versailles, and go casually through the gate on that side, on foot, as if you're out for a stroll. Sew your napoleons into your trousers; and whatever you do, when you've got to pay for something, never show more than the exact money that's wanted. What really upsets me is that you'll be swindled, they'll pinch everything you've got; and what'll you do without money? You who don't know how to look after yourself? etc.'

The kind canteen-keeper talked endlessly on; the corporal, unable to get a word in edgewise, showed his agreement with her advice by nodding. Suddenly, all those people crowding along the road at first began walking much faster, then, in the twinkling of an eye, crossed the little ditch bordering the road on the left, and took to their heels at top speed. 'The Cossacks! The Cossacks!' they were shouting on all sides.

'Take back your horse!' cried the canteen-keeper.

'God forbid!' said Fabrice. 'Go on, gallop away, you can have it. D'you want money to buy another little cart? Half of what I have is yours.'

'Take back your horse, I tell you!' cried the canteen-keeper angrily; and she prepared to dismount. Fabrice drew his sabre: 'Hold on tight!' he shouted at her, and landed two or three smacks with the flat of his sabre on the horse, which galloped off after the fugitives.

Our hero looked at the road; just a moment ago three or four thousand individuals had crowded there, jammed together like peasants following a procession. After the word 'cossacks' he could no longer see a single person; the fugitives had abandoned shakos, muskets, sabres, etc. Astonished, Fabrice went into a field that rose twenty or thirty feet above the road on the right; he looked both ways along the highway and over the plain, and could see no trace of cossacks. What funny people these French are! he said to himself. Since I'm supposed to go to the right, he thought, I might as well set off now; it's possible these people have a reason for running away that I don't know about. He picked up a musket, checked that it was loaded, stirred the powder in the priming, cleaned the flint, then chose a well-filled cartridge-pouch and again looked all around; he was absolutely alone in the middle of that plain which not long since had been so thronged with people. In the very far distance he could see the fugitives disappearing behind the trees; they were still running. How very, very odd! he thought; and then, remembering the corporal's tactic of the day before, he went and sat in the middle of a cornfield. He didn't go too far, because he wanted to see his good friends the canteen-keeper and Corporal Aubry again.

In the cornfield he discovered that he now had only eighteen napoleons, instead of thirty, as he had thought; but he still had the little diamonds he had put into the lining of his hussar's boots, that morning in B***, in the jailer's wife's bedroom. He hid his napoleons as well as he could, while thinking hard about this sudden disappearance. Is it a bad omen for me? he was wondering. His main worry was not having asked Corporal Aubry the following question: 'Was I

really in a battle?' He thought the answer was yes, and would have been in seventh heaven if he had been certain of it.

Still, he reflected, I was there under the name of a prisoner, I had the travel warrant of a prisoner in my pocket, and, what's much worse, his clothes on my back! This will have a fatal influence on the future: whatever would Father Blanès have said? All this is dreadfully ominous: my destiny will lead me to prison. Fabrice would have given anything in the world to know whether the hussar Boulot was actually guilty: as he searched his memory, he thought he recalled the jailer's wife in B*** telling him that the hussar had been arrested not only over some silver forks and spoons, but also for having stolen a peasant's cow and beaten the peasant almost to death: Fabrice had no doubt that he would one day be put in prison for a crime that would have some connection with that of the hussar Boulot. He thought of his friend Father Blanès; what would he not have given to be able to consult him! Then he remembered that he had never written to his aunt since leaving Paris. Poor Gina! he thought, and tears came into his eyes, when suddenly he heard a tiny sound very close to him; it was a soldier who was holding three horses by their snaffles, having removed their bridles; he was letting them feed off the corn; they seemed to be starving. Fabrice rose up like a partridge, frightening the soldier. Observing this, our hero surrendered to the temptation of playing the role of hussar for a little while.

'One of those horses is mine, damn you!' he cried. 'But I'm willing to give you five francs for taking the trouble to bring it to me here.'

'Who the hell d'you think you are?' said the soldier. Fabrice took aim at him from six paces away.

'Let go the horse or I'll fire at you!'

The soldier had his musket slung over his shoulder, and reached back to get it.

'The slightest movement and you're dead!' cried Fabrice, running towards him.

'All right, give me five francs and take one of the horses', said the soldier in confusion, after glancing regretfully at the highway where there was not a soul to be seen. Fabrice,

holding his musket high up in his left hand, with his right hand threw him three five-franc coins.

'Dismount, or you're dead... Put a bridle on the black and go a bit farther off with the two others... If you move I'll fire.'

The soldier sullenly obeyed. Fabrice went up to the horse and slipped the bridle over his left arm, without taking his eyes from the soldier who was slowly moving away; when he saw the man had gone some fifty paces, he jumped nimbly on to the horse. He had barely settled himself there, and was trying to find the right stirrup with his foot, when he heard a shot whistle past, very close by: the soldier was shooting at him. Furiously angry, Fabrice began galloping towards the soldier, who ran off as fast as his legs could carry him, and soon Fabrice saw him galloping away on one of his two horses. Good, he's out of range, he said to himself. The horse he had just bought was magnificent, but seemed to be dying of hunger. Fabrice returned to the main road, which was still completely deserted; he crossed it and set his horse to a trot, heading for a little rise in the terrain on the left, from which he hoped he might see the canteen-keeper; but when he reached the top of the hillock he could see nothing but a few solitary soldiers, more than a league away. It is written that I'll never see her again, he said to himself with a sigh, brave, good woman that she is! Noticing a farm in the distance, to the right of the road, he made for it. Without dismounting, he paid in advance for some oats to be fed to his poor horse, who was so famished he was biting the feeding trough. An hour later Fabrice was trotting along the highway, still hoping vaguely that he would once more run into the canteen-keeper, or at least Corporal Aubry. He rode on, keeping a lookout on all sides, and came to a marshy river crossed by a rather narrow wooden bridge. Before the bridge, on the right, stood an isolated house bearing the sign of the White Horse. I'll have dinner there, thought Fabrice. A cavalry officer with his arm in a sling was at the entrance to the bridge; he was on horseback and looked very dejected; ten paces away stood three troopers, filling their pipes.

These people, thought Fabrice, look to me as if they want to buy my horse off me for even less than it cost me. The

wounded officer and the three men on foot were watching him approach and seemed to be waiting for him. What I ought to do is not cross this bridge, but keep to the right bank of the river, that'd be how the canteen-keeper would advise me to get out of this fix... Yes, thought our hero, but if I run away I'll be ever so ashamed tomorrow: in any case my horse has good legs, the officer's is probably tired; if he tries to unseat me I'll gallop off. While cogitating in this manner Fabrice was 'collecting' his horse and advancing as slowly as he possibly could.

'Advance, hussar,' the officer called to him in an authoritative voice.

Fabrice rode forward several paces and halted.

'Do you mean to take my horse?' he asked.

'No, certainly not; advance.'

Fabrice looked at the officer; he had a white moustache, and bore an air of the utmost probity; the scarf supporting his left arm was covered in blood, and his right hand was also wrapped in a bloody cloth. It'll be the men on foot who jump at my horse's bridle, thought Fabrice; but, when he looked closely, he saw that they too were wounded.

'I charge you in the name of honour,' said the officer, who was wearing the epaulettes of a colonel, 'to stay here on sentry duty and tell every dragoon, chasseur, and hussar you see that Colonel Le Baron is in this inn, and that I order them to join me.' The old colonel seemed broken-hearted; his very first words had won over our hero, who sensibly replied:

'I'm very young, sir, for people to do what I tell them; I'd need an order in your handwriting.'

'He's right,' said the colonel, staring hard at him; 'you make out the order, La Rose, since you have a right hand.'

Without saying a word, La Rose took from his pocket a little parchment notebook, wrote a few lines and, tearing out a page, handed it to Fabrice; the colonel repeated his instructions to the latter, adding that after two hours on duty he would of course be relieved by one of the three wounded troopers who were with him. This said, the colonel went into the inn with his men. So struck had Fabrice been by the bleak and silent misery of these three characters that he remained

quite motionless at the end of his wooden bridge, watching them as they walked away. They could be genies who've been bewitched, he thought. Eventually he opened the folded paper and read the order, which ran as follows:

'Colonel Le Baron of the 6th Dragoons, Commander of the second Brigade of the first Division of cavalry of the 14th Corps, orders all troopers, dragoons, chasseurs, and hussars not to cross the bridge and to join him in the White Horse Inn, beside the bridge, which is his headquarters.

'At headquarters, beside the bridge of the Sainte, the 19th of June, 1815.

'On behalf of Colonel Le Baron, whose right arm is wounded, and by his order, La Rose, Sergeant.'

Fabrice had been on sentry duty at the bridge for barely half-an-hour when he saw six chasseurs on horseback and three on foot approaching; he relayed the colonel's order. 'We'll come back,' said four of the riders, crossing the bridge at a fast trot. Fabrice then spoke to the other two. The discussion became heated, and while it was going on the three pedestrians crossed the bridge. Finally one of the two remaining chasseurs on horseback asked to see the order again, and rode off with it, saying:

'I'm going to take it to my mates, who'll come back without fail; wait for them.' And away he galloped; his companion followed him. All this happened in the twinkling of an eye.

Fabrice, enraged, called one of the wounded soldiers who had been looking through a window in the White Horse. This soldier, who Fabrice saw was wearing a sergeant's stripes, came down and shouted to him as he approached:

'Sabre in hand! You're on guard.' Fabrice obeyed, and then said to him:

'They took away the order.'

'They're angry over that affair yesterday,' replied the other gloomily. 'I'm going to give you one of my pistols; if they try to force the sentry again, shoot in the air, I'll come, or the colonel himself will come out.'

Fabrice had clearly seen the start of surprise the sergeant gave, on hearing how someone had made off with the order; he realized that this had been a personal affront to him, and

he promised himself that he would never again let himself be tricked.

Armed with the sergeant's horse pistol, Fabrice had gone proudly back on sentry duty when he saw seven hussars riding towards him; placing himself so as to bar access to the bridge, he informed them of the colonel's order; they seemed very annoyed at this, and the boldest among them attempted to get past. Heeding the wise advice of his friend the vivandière, who yesterday morning had told him to use his sabre to stab rather than slash, Fabrice held his big sabre pointed downwards, looking as if he meant to stab anyone who tried to force the sentry.

'Oh, the greenhorn wants to kill us, does he!' cried the hussars, 'as if we didn't have enough killing yesterday!' They all drew their sabres simultaneously and fell upon Fabrice; he thought he was done for but, remembering the sergeant's start of surprise, he was determined not to be insulted again. While retreating over his bridge, he tried to catch them with the point of his sabre. His expression as he handled that huge, straight, heavy cavalry sabre, which was much too cumbersome for him, was so comical that the hussars soon realized whom they were dealing with; after that, instead of wounding him, they tried to slash his uniform. In this manner Fabrice received three or four little sabre cuts on his arms. As for him, ever mindful of the canteen-keeper's advice, he kept lunging out vigorously with his sabre point. Unluckily one of these thrusts cut a hussar in the hand; furious at having been wounded by such a soldier, he responded with a deep thrust that caught Fabrice in the upper thigh. What added to the effectiveness of the thrust was our hero's horse, which, far from avoiding the fight, seemed to be enjoying it and was charging at the assailants. They, seeing Fabrice's blood streaming down his right arm, feared they might have gone too far and, pushing him over to the left parapet of the bridge, took off at a gallop. As soon as Fabrice had the opportunity, he shot his pistol in the air to warn the colonel.

Four hussars on horseback and two on foot, from the same regiment as the others, were riding towards the bridge at a distance of some two hundred paces when the pistol shot rang

out; they had been watching what was happening on the bridge very closely and, supposing that Fabrice had shot at their comrades, the four horsemen galloped down on him brandishing their sabres; it was a real cavalry charge. Colonel Le Baron, alerted by the shot, opened the inn door and rushed on to the bridge at the precise moment when the galloping hussars reached it, and he himself ordered them to halt.

'There's no colonel here any longer,' shouted one of them, pressing his horse on. The incensed colonel cut short his reprimand and, with his wounded right hand, seized the reins of that horse on the off side.

'Halt! You scoundrel,' he said to the hussar; 'I know you, you belong to Captain Henriet's company.'

'Well! Let the captain himself give me the order! Captain Henriet was killed yesterday,' he added with a sneer; 'and you go f... yourself!'

While saying this he tried to force his way past, shoving the old colonel who fell on to the planking of the bridge. Fabrice, just a couple of steps further down the bridge but facing the inn, urged his horse forward, and while the breast of the attacker's horse was pushing the colonel—still holding the reins on the off side—to the ground, an indignant Fabrice aimed a deep sabre thrust at the hussar. Fortunately the hussar's horse, feeling itself pulled down by the bridle the colonel was holding, moved sideways, so that the long blade of Fabrice's heavy cavalry sabre slid all the way down the hussar's waistcoat, its entire length passing beneath his eyes. Enraged, the hussar turned round and with all his might aimed a blow which cut Fabrice's sleeve and thrust deeply into his arm; our hero fell.

One of the hussars on foot, seeing the bridge's two defenders on the ground, seized his chance and, intending to make off with Fabrice's horse, jumped into its saddle and set it galloping over the bridge.

The sergeant, as he rushed out of the inn, had seen his colonel fall and imagined he was seriously wounded. He raced after Fabrice's horse and plunged his sabre into the back of the thief, who fell. The hussars, seeing that on the

bridge, now, there was only the sergeant still standing, galloped past and rapidly disappeared. The soldier on foot took to the fields.

The sergeant went up to the wounded men. Fabrice had already got to his feet; he was not in much pain, but was losing a lot of blood. The colonel stood up more slowly; he was very dizzy from his fall, but had received no wound.

‘The only thing wrong with me’, he told the sergeant, ‘is my old wound in the hand.’

The hussar that the sergeant had wounded lay dying.

‘Confound it all!’ the colonel exclaimed, then said to the sergeant and the two other troopers who were hurrying over: ‘but look after this little lad whom I should not have exposed to danger like that. I intend to remain on the bridge myself to try to stop these madmen. Take the boy into the inn and dress his arm; use one of my shirts.’

CHAPTER 5

This whole adventure had lasted less than a minute; Fabrice's wounds were not serious; they bandaged his arm with strips of the colonel's shirt. They wanted to fix up a bed for him on the first floor of the inn:

'But while I'm up here on the first floor being cosseted,' said Fabrice to the sergeant, 'my horse'll get lonely all by himself in the stable and he'll go off with another master.'

'Not bad for a greenhorn!' remarked the sergeant; and they settled Fabrice on some nice fresh straw in the very feeding trough to which his horse was tethered.

Then, as Fabrice felt very weak, the sergeant brought him a bowl of hot wine and chatted to him a little. Our hero was in seventh heaven over one or two compliments that were slipped into this conversation.

Fabrice did not awaken until the next day at dawn; the horses were whinnying incessantly and making a terrible din; the stable was filling with smoke. At first he couldn't make anything of all the noise; he didn't even know where he was; eventually, half-choking from the smoke, he realized that the building was on fire; he was out of the stable and on to his horse in a flash. Looking up, he saw heavy smoke pouring out of the two windows above the stable; the roof was covered with swirling black smoke. A hundred or so fugitives had arrived at the White Horse Inn during the night; they were all shouting and cursing. The five or six whom Fabrice managed to see properly looked completely drunk; one of them tried to stop him and kept shouting: 'Where're you takin' my horse?'

When he was a quarter of a league away Fabrice glanced round: there was nobody following him, and the building was ablaze. He recognized the bridge and remembered his wound; the bandages on his arm felt tight and his arm was very hot. And what about the old colonel, what can have become of him? He gave up his shirt to dress my arm. That morning our hero was as cool-headed as anyone could

wish: the quantity of blood he had lost had quite purged him of the romantic side of his character.

Over to the right! said Fabrice to himself, and I'd better hurry. He began calmly following the river which, after passing under the bridge, ran along on the right-hand side of the road. He recalled the advice given him by the kind canteen-keeper. How friendly she was, he thought, how open-hearted!

After riding for an hour, he began to feel very weak. Lord, am I going to faint? he wondered. If I faint, they'll pinch my horse, and maybe my clothes, and along with my clothes all my money. He no longer had the strength to control his horse, and was endeavouring to keep his balance, when a peasant digging in a field beside the highway noticed his pallor and brought him a glass of beer and some bread.

'Seein' you're so pale, I reckoned you must be one of the wounded from the big battle!' the peasant told him. Never was help more timely. While Fabrice was chewing the piece of black bread, his eyes began to hurt when he looked straight ahead. When he felt a little better, he thanked the man. 'And where am I?' he enquired. The peasant told him that three-quarters of a league down the road was the small market-town of Zonders, where he would be very well cared for. Not really knowing what he was doing, and at every step concentrating on not falling off his horse, Fabrice reached this town. He saw a big carriage entrance standing open and rode through: it was the Étrille Inn. The good mistress of the house, an enormous woman, hurried up to him, calling for help in a voice that trembled with compassion. Two young girls helped Fabrice to dismount; hardly was he off his horse when he passed out completely. A surgeon was sent for and he was bled. That day and those that followed, Fabrice was not really aware of what was being done to him, he slept almost the entire time.

The stab wound in his thigh was in danger of becoming quite badly abscessed. Once he was fully conscious again, he urged that his horse be attended to, saying repeatedly that he would pay well, which offended the good innkeeper and her daughters. He had been admirably well looked after for a fortnight, and was beginning to feel more like his old self,

when one evening he noticed that his hostesses seemed very perturbed. Soon a German officer came into his room; they answered the officer's questions in a language that Fabrice did not understand but he could easily tell that they were speaking about him; he pretended to be asleep. Some time later, when he thought the officer might have left, he called his landlady and her daughters:

'Didn't that officer come to put me on a list of prisoners?' With tears in her eyes, the landlady acknowledged that this was the case.

'Well, there's money in my jacket!' he exclaimed, sitting up in bed; 'buy me some civilian clothes, and I'll ride away this very evening. You've saved my life once already by taking me in when I was about to die by the side of the road; save it a second time by making it possible for me to return to my mother.'

At that, the landlady's daughters began to weep; they were frightened for Fabrice; and, as they barely understood French, they came right up to his bed to question him. While they talked with their mother in Flemish, they constantly turned tearful glances towards our hero; he sensed that his flight could seriously compromise them, but that they were very willing to take the risk. Claspings his hands, he thanked them effusively. A local Jew provided a complete set of clothing, but when, about ten that evening, he brought it over, the young ladies realized, by comparing it with Fabrice's jacket, that it would have to be taken in very considerably. They set to work immediately; there was no time to be lost. Fabrice showed them some napoleons hidden in his clothes and asked his hostesses to sew them into the new garments. The Jew had supplied a fine new pair of boots as well as the clothes. Fabrice did not hesitate to ask those good girls to cut the hussar boots in a place he indicated, and they concealed his little diamonds in their lining.

An odd effect of his loss of blood and consequent weakness was that Fabrice had almost completely forgotten French; he talked to his hostesses in Italian, but they spoke a Flemish dialect, so that they communicated almost entirely by signs. When the young girls—whose motives were perfectly disin-

terested— saw the diamonds, their enthusiasm for him knew no bounds: they thought he was a prince in disguise. Aniken, the younger and more naïve of the two, gave him a kiss there and then. Fabrice, for his part, thought them charming; and towards midnight, when the surgeon had allowed him a little wine on account of the journey he was about to undertake, he almost wanted not to leave. Where could I be better off than here? he thought. Nevertheless, at about two in the morning he put on his clothes. Just as he was leaving his room the good hostess told him that his horse had been taken away by the officer who had inspected the house a few hours earlier.

‘Oh, the bastard!’ exclaimed Fabrice, with an oath, ‘to do that to a wounded man!’ Our young Italian was not philosopher enough to remember the price he himself had paid for that horse.

Aniken told him through her tears that they had hired a horse for him; she did not want him to leave; the farewells were tender. Two tall young men, relatives of the good hostess, lifted Fabrice into the saddle; they supported him on his horse as they rode along, while a third, riding a few hundred paces ahead of the little convoy, kept a lookout for any suspicious patrols on the route. After a two-hour ride they stopped at the home of a cousin of the innkeeper at Étrille. No matter what Fabrice said, his young escorts firmly refused to leave him, claiming that they knew the tracks through the woods better than anyone else.

‘But tomorrow morning, when they discover I’ve gone, and you’re nowhere to be seen, your absence will compromise you,’ said Fabrice.

They set off again. As luck would have it, when daybreak came the plain was blanketed by a thick fog. Towards eight in the morning they reached the outskirts of a small town. One of the young men went ahead to see if the post-horses had been stolen. The post-master had had time to spirit them away and muster some wretched-looking nags with which he had filled his stables. They went and found two horses hidden in the marshes, and three hours later Fabrice stepped into a little gig that, although very ramshackle, was drawn by a pair of good post-horses. He was feeling stronger. The

parting from the innkeeper's young relatives was touching in the extreme; in spite of all Fabrice's friendly persuasion, they refused to accept any money.

'In your condition, Monsieur, you need it more than we do,' those fine young men kept repeating. Eventually they left, carrying letters in which Fabrice, somewhat restored by the excitement of the journey, tried to tell his hostesses everything that he felt for them. Fabrice wrote with tears in his eyes, and there were certainly feelings of love in the letter addressed to little Aniken.

The rest of the journey passed without incident. By the time he reached Amiens the stab wound in his thigh was hurting him badly; the country doctor had not thought to excise the wound, and an abscess had formed there even though Fabrice had been bled. During the fortnight he spent at the Amiens inn, which was run by an obsequious and grasping family, the allies invaded France, and Fabrice became a changed man, so profoundly did he reflect on everything that had just happened to him. In one respect alone did he remain a child: was what he had seen a battle, and, secondly, was that battle Waterloo? For the first time in his life he took pleasure in reading: he was always hopeful that he would find in the newspapers, or in the accounts of the battle, some description by which he would recognize the terrain he had ridden over in Marshal Ney's escort, and later with that other general. During his stay in Amiens he wrote almost every day to his good friends of the *Étrille*. As soon as he was better he went to Paris; there he found, in the hostelry where he had stayed before, some twenty letters from his mother and his aunt begging him to return home without delay. There was something enigmatic about a recent letter from Countess Pietranera which worried him greatly; this letter put an end to all his romantic dreams. His nature was such that it took but a single word for him easily to foresee the worst possible disasters; then his imagination would set to work to paint those disasters in the most horrible detail.

'Whatever you do, don't sign your letters when you send us your news,' the Countess told him. 'On your return you mustn't come straight to Lake Como; stay in Lugano, on

Swiss soil.' He was to travel to that small town under the name of Cavi: there, at the principal inn, he would find the Countess's manservant, who would tell him what to do. His aunt finished with these words: 'Do everything you can to keep your reckless adventure a secret, and be particularly careful not to keep any printed or written papers on your person; in Switzerland you'll be surrounded by the friends of Santa Margherita.'†

'If I have enough money,' wrote the Countess, 'I'll send someone to Geneva, to the Hôtel des Balances, to give you details that I can't put in a letter but that nevertheless you ought to know before you get here. But, in God's name, not a day more in Paris; you'll be recognized there by our spies.' Fabrice's imagination set to work fancying the most peculiar things, and he was unable to take pleasure in anything other than trying to guess what his aunt might have to tell him that was so strange. He was arrested twice during his journey across France, but managed to extricate himself; his Italian passport was to blame for these misadventures, and that odd description of 'dealer in barometers', which did not in the least fit his youthful face and his arm in a sling.

Finally, in Geneva, Fabrice met a man in the Countess's employ, who told him, on the Countess's instructions, that he, Fabrice, had been denounced to the Milan police as having gone to Napoleon, bearing proposals drawn up by a huge conspiracy organized in the former kingdom of Italy. If such had not been the purpose of his journey, asked his accuser, why had he travelled under an assumed name? His mother would try to prove what was in fact the case, namely:

1. That he had never been out of Switzerland;
2. That he had left the castle unexpectedly, following a quarrel with his elder brother.

This account filled Fabrice with pride. I'm supposed to have been a kind of ambassador to Napoleon! he thought; I'm supposed to have had the honour of speaking to that great man; would to God it were true! He recalled that an ancestor,

† Signor Pellico* has made this name known throughout Europe; it is that of the street in Milan where the police headquarters and prison are located.

seven generations back, the grandson of the one who came to Milan in Sforza's retinue, had had the honour of having his head cut off by the duke's enemies, who caught him going to Switzerland to make overtures to its estimable cantons, and to recruit soldiers there. In his mind's eye he could see the engraving of this event, contained in the family genealogy. While questioning the servant, Fabrice discovered that this man was enraged by a detail which eventually he let slip, despite express orders to the contrary repeatedly given him by the Countess. It had been Ascagne, his elder brother, who had denounced him to the Milan police. On hearing this cruel news our hero almost took leave of his senses. To reach Italy from Geneva you pass through Lausanne; he wanted to set off that very moment, on foot, and walk the ten or twelve leagues, although the stage-coach from Geneva to Lausanne would be departing in two hours' time. Before leaving Geneva, he got into a quarrel in one of those depressing cafés they have there, with a young man who was, he said, looking at him in a funny way. That was perfectly true; the stolid, sensible Genevese youth, who was solely interested in money, thought he was mad; on entering the café Fabrice had glared furiously round, and had then upset his cup of coffee down his trousers as it was being served. Fabrice's first impulse in this quarrel was pure sixteenth-century: instead of challenging the young Genevese to a duel, he drew his dagger and flung himself upon the man, meaning to stab him. In that moment of passion Fabrice forgot everything he had been taught about the rules of honour, and reverted to instinct, or, more precisely, to recollections of his early childhood.

The trusted messenger he found at Lugano gave him further details which added to his fury. As Fabrice was well liked in Grianta, nobody would have mentioned his name, and had it not been for his brother's charming deed, everyone would have pretended to believe he was in Milan, and never would the attention of that city's police have been drawn to his absence.

'No doubt the customs officers will have your description,' his aunt's envoy told him, 'and if we keep to the main road, you'll be arrested at the Lombardo-Venetian border.'

Fabrice and his men knew every tiniest footpath in the mountains that separate Lugano from Lake Como: they disguised themselves as hunters, in other words, smugglers, and as there were three of them and they looked rather determined, the customs men they encountered did no more than greet them. Fabrice arranged matters so as not to reach the castle until about midnight; at that hour his father and all the footmen who wore powder in their hair had long been asleep. He had no trouble climbing down into the deep moat, and then entered the castle through a little cellar window; his mother and his aunt were waiting for him there; presently his sisters hurried in. Their rapturous delight and their tears continued for many hours, and hardly had they begun talking at all rationally when the first glimmers of dawn warned these creatures, who imagined themselves unfortunate, that time was racing by.

‘I trust your brother won’t suspect that you’ve got here,’ said the Countess to Fabrice. ‘After that charming escapade of his I wouldn’t speak to him, which—very flatteringly for me—was quite a blow to his vanity; at supper this evening I deigned to address him; I had to find some way of concealing my frantic joy, which could have made him suspicious. Then, when I saw how proud he was of this apparent reconciliation, I took advantage of his delight to make him drink far too much, and I’m certain it won’t have entered his head to do some more spying and lie in wait for you.’

‘We must hide our hussar in your apartments,’ said the Marquise. ‘He can’t leave right away; as yet we’re not thinking clearly enough, and we’ve got to find the best way of throwing those terrible police in Milan off the scent.’

They followed this course of action, but the next day the Marquis and his elder son noticed that the Marquise was constantly in her sister-in-law’s apartments. We shall not dwell on the transports of affection and joy which those happy creatures were still experiencing the following day. To a far greater degree than happens with us, the Italian heart is tormented by suspicion and by wild notions born of a vivid imagination, but on the other hand the joys it experiences are much more intense and of much greater duration. That day,

the Countess and the Marquise were quite out of their minds; Fabrice had to keep telling his stories over and over again; eventually they decided to go and hide their collective happiness in Milan, so difficult did it seem to keep it concealed any longer from the spies of the Marquis and his son Ascagne.

They took the usual family boat to go to Como, for to have done otherwise would have aroused endless suspicion; on arrival at the port of Como, however, the Marquise remembered that she had left some extremely important papers behind in Grianta and promptly sent the boatmen back there, so that they were unable to observe how the two ladies spent their time in Como. Immediately upon disembarking they hired, at random, one of those carriages plying for hire near the tall medieval tower that rises above the Milan Gate. They set off without delay, so that the coachman would have no opportunity to speak to anybody. A quarter of a league outside the town they saw a young huntsman of their acquaintance, who out of courtesy, since the ladies were without an escort, readily agreed to attend them as far as the gates of Milan, where he planned to go hunting. Everything was going well, and the ladies were enjoying the liveliest conversation with the young traveller, when at a point where the road makes a detour round the delightful hill and wood of San Giovanni, three constables in plain clothes leapt out at the horses' bridles. 'Ah, my husband has betrayed us!' cried the Marquise, collapsing in a faint. A sergeant who had been standing a few paces behind tottered up to the carriage and said, in a voice that suggested he had just emerged from a tavern:

'I regret to have to say that it is my duty to arrest you, General Fabio Conti.'

Fabrice imagined that the sergeant, in addressing him as 'general', was making a joke in poor taste. I'll make you pay for this, he thought; he was watching the three plain-clothes constables, waiting for the right moment to jump from the carriage and escape across the fields.

The Countess smiled—just in case, I imagine, a smile might help—and said to the sergeant:

'But, my good sergeant, is it this child of sixteen that you take for General Conti?'

'Aren't you the General's daughter?' asked the sergeant.

'This is my father,' said the Countess, pointing to Fabrice. The policemen exploded with laughter.

'Be quiet and show me your passports,' went on the sergeant, nettled by the universal mirth.

'These ladies never take them to go to Milan,' said the coachman, his manner cool and matter-of-fact; 'they've come from their castle at Grianta. This lady is the Countess Pietranera, and that one, the Marquise del Dongo.'

Thoroughly disconcerted, the sergeant walked over to the front of the horses, where he consulted his men. The discussion had been going on for a good five minutes when the Countess Pietranera begged the officers to allow the carriage to move forward a few paces into the shade; the heat was stifling, although it was only eleven in the morning. Fabrice, who was keeping a careful lookout on all sides for a means of escape, noticed a young girl of fourteen or fifteen, weeping timidly under cover of her handkerchief, emerge on to the dust-covered main road from a little path across the fields. She was walking between two uniformed constables, and, three steps behind her and also with a constable on either side, came a tall, lean man who walked with an air of affected dignity, like a government official marching in a procession.

'So where did you find them?' asked the sergeant, now thoroughly drunk.

'Making a getaway across country, and not a sign of a passport.'

The sergeant appeared to lose his head completely; he had before him five prisoners instead of the two he needed. He moved a little distance away, leaving only one man to guard the prisoner who seemed so very conscious of his own importance, and another to hold the horses.

'Stay here,' said the Countess to Fabrice who had already jumped down from the carriage; 'everything's going to be all right.'

They could hear one of the constables shouting:

'So what! They've no passports, so they're still fair game.' The sergeant did not seem quite so certain; the name of the Countess Pietranera made him uneasy; he had known the

general, but had not heard about his death. The general's not a man to take it lying down if I arrest his wife without good cause, he was thinking.

During this deliberation, which lasted for some time, the Countess had begun talking to the young girl who was standing in the dusty road beside the carriage; she had been struck by her beauty.

'The sun will do you harm, Signorina; I'm sure this good man will allow you to get into the carriage', she added, speaking to the constable holding the horses' heads.

Fabrice was pacing round the carriage and went up to help the young girl climb in. She had already sprung on to the step, with Fabrice supporting her by the arm, when the self-important gentleman standing a few paces behind the carriage shouted, his voice resonant with conscious dignity:

'Stay on the road, never get into a carriage that isn't yours.'

Fabrice had not heard this order; the young girl, instead of climbing into the carriage, tried to step down; and, as Fabrice was still supporting her, she fell into his arms. He smiled and she blushed deeply; they continued to look at one another for a moment after the girl had freed herself from his arms.

She'd be a charming companion in prison, reflected Fabrice: what deep thoughts must lie beneath that brow of hers! She would know how to love.

The sergeant came forward with an air of authority:

'Which of these ladies is named Clélia Conti?'

'I am,' said the young girl.

'And I,' cried the older man, 'I am General Fabio Conti, Chamberlain to his Serene Highness the Prince of Parma; I consider it highly improper that a man of my standing should be hunted down like a thief.'

'Yesterday, while embarking at the port of Como, didn't you send the police inspector about his business when he asked for your passport? Well, today he's stopping you going about your business.'

'I'd already set off in my boat, I was in a hurry, as the weather looked stormy; someone not in uniform shouted to me from the quay to return to port, I told him my name and continued on my way.'

'And this morning you fled from Como?'

'A man like myself does not take his passport to go from Milan to see the lake. This morning in Como I was told that I would be arrested at the town gate, so I left on foot with my daughter; I hoped to find some vehicle on the road to take me to Milan, where my first visit will certainly be to lodge a complaint with the general in command of the province.'

The sergeant seemed enormously relieved.

'Well, General, I'm placing you under arrest, and I'll escort you to Milan. And you, who are you?' he asked Fabrice.

'My son,' replied the Countess; 'Ascagne, son of General Pietranera.'

'Without a passport, my lady?' enquired the sergeant, greatly mollified.

'At his age he's never had one; he never travels alone, he's always with me.'

During this conversation General Conti was evincing evermore outraged dignity towards the constables.

'Be quiet,' one of them told him; 'you're under arrest, and that's that!'

'Count yourself lucky,' said the sergeant, 'if we let you hire a horse from some peasant; otherwise, in spite of the dust and heat, and your position as Chamberlain of Parma, you'll just have to walk beside the horses.'

The General began to swear.

'Will you be quiet!' continued the constable. 'Where's your general's uniform? Anybody can say they're a general, can't they?'

The General grew angrier than ever. Meanwhile, things in the barouche were going a lot better.

The Countess was ordering the constables about as if they were her own servants. She had just given one of them some money to fetch wine and, above all, cold water from a little cottage they could see about two hundred paces away. She had found time to calm Fabrice, who was determined to escape into the wood that covered the hill; 'I've a good pair of pistols', he kept saying. She persuaded the exasperated General to allow his daughter to get into the carriage. At this point the General, who enjoyed talking about himself and his

family, informed the ladies that his daughter was only twelve, having been born in 1803, on the 27th of October; but everyone thought she was fourteen or fifteen, she was so sensible.

The Countess gave the Marquise a look that said: what a vulgar man. Thanks to the Countess, after an hour's discussion everything was settled. A constable who discovered he had some business in the nearby village let General Conti hire his horse, after the Countess had told him he would be given ten lire. The sergeant set off alone with the General; the other constables stayed behind under a tree, in the company of four enormous bottles of wine, kinds of miniature demijohns, that the constable who had been sent to the little cottage had brought back with the help of a peasant. Clélia Conti was given permission by the worthy Chamberlain to accept a seat in the ladies' carriage for her return to Milan, and it never entered anyone's head to arrest the son of the gallant General Count Pietranera. After the first few moments of polite exchanges and remarks about the little incident that had just taken place, Clélia Conti noticed the hint of fervour in the way the Countess—such a beautiful woman—spoke to Fabrice; clearly, she wasn't his mother. Clélia's attention was particularly caught by repeated allusions to something he had just done, something heroic, daring, supremely dangerous; in spite of all her intelligence, the young girl could not guess what it was.

She gazed in wonder at the young hero whose eyes still seemed to blaze with the ardour of battle. Fabrice, for his part, was somewhat disconcerted by the remarkable beauty of this young girl of twelve, and his glances made her blush.

When they were still a league away from Milan, Fabrice said he was going to visit his uncle, and took his leave of the ladies.

'If ever I get out of this fix,' he said to Clélia, 'I shall go and look at the beautiful paintings in Parma, and will you then be so kind as to remember this name: Fabrice del Dongo?'

'Wonderful!' said the Countess. 'Aren't you good at keeping incognito! Signorina, be so kind as to remember that this bad lot is my son and his name is Pietranera, not del Dongo.'

Very late that evening Fabrice entered Milan through the Renza gate, which leads to a fashionable public walk. The dispatch of two servants into Switzerland had exhausted the very small savings of the Marquise and her sister; fortunately, Fabrice still had some napoleons and one of the diamonds, which they decided to sell.

These ladies were very popular in the city and knew everyone; the most prominent members of the pro-Austrian, pro-Church party called on Baron Binder, the chief of police, and spoke in favour of Fabrice. They simply could not understand, these gentlemen said, how anyone could take seriously the folly of a sixteen-year-old who had quarrelled with his elder brother and run away from home.

'It's my job to take everything seriously,' Baron Binder replied gently; he was a prudent, melancholy man, and was then in the process of establishing Milan's renowned police-force, having undertaken to prevent another revolution like the one in 1746 that expelled the Austrians from Genoa. The police of Milan, who later became so famous thanks to the adventures of Sigg. Pellico and d'Andryane,* were not precisely cruel; they carried out harsh laws in a reasonable but merciless manner. The design of the Emperor Francis II* was to strike terror into those unbridled Italian imaginations.

'Give me the *documented* day-by-day account,' said Baron Binder to Fabrice's advocates, 'of what the young Marchesino del Dongo did; let's take it from the moment of his departure from Grianta on March the eighth until his return there yesterday evening, when he was hidden in a room in his mother's apartments, and I'll be happy to treat him as the most likeable and the most mischievous of the youths of this city. If you cannot provide me with the young man's movements for each of the days following his departure from Grianta, however noble of birth he may be and however much I may respect the friends of his family, is it not my duty to have him arrested? Ought I not to keep him in prison until he's given me proof that he did not take messages to Napoleon from any malcontents that may exist among the subjects of his Imperial and Royal Majesty here in Lombardy? And I would also point out, gentlemen, that if the young del Dongo

manages to justify himself on this point, he will still be guilty of having travelled abroad without an officially issued passport, and furthermore under a false name, and of knowingly using a passport issued to a simple workman, that is, to an individual so very far below the class to which he belongs.'

This cruelly reasonable statement was accompanied by all the marks of deference and respect that the chief of police owed to the high rank of the Marquise del Dongo and of those important personages who came to intercede on her behalf.

The Marquise was in despair on hearing Baron Binder's response.

'Fabrice will be arrested,' she exclaimed, weeping, 'and once he's in prison, God knows when he'll get out! His father will disown him!'

Countess Pietranera and her sister-in-law talked things over with two or three close friends, and no matter what they said, the Marquise was absolutely determined to send her son away by the following night.

'But you can see perfectly well,' the Countess told her, 'that Baron Binder knows your son is here; he's not a bad man.'

'No, but he wants to please the Emperor Francis.'

'But if he thought it useful to his career to put Fabrice in prison, he'd be there already; and it would show an insulting mistrust of the Baron if we arranged to get Fabrice away.'

'But to admit that he knows where Fabrice is, is like telling us: send him away! No, I cannot live while I can say to myself: a quarter of an hour from now my son could be between four walls! Whatever may be the Baron's ambitions,' added the Marquise, 'he thinks it useful to his own position here in Milan to make very apparent his regard for a man of my husband's rank, and I see proof of this in the extraordinary candour with which he admits he knows where to lay his hands on my son. What's more, he obligingly describes the two infractions Fabrice is accused of in his unworthy brother's denunciation; he explains that they carry a prison sentence; isn't that tantamount to telling us that if we prefer exile, it's up to us to make a choice?'

'If you choose exile,' repeated the Countess, 'we won't see him again, ever.' Fabrice, who was present throughout this discussion together with a former friend of the Marquise's, now a counsellor in the lawcourt set up by Austria, was strongly of the opinion that he should cut and run. And in fact he left the *palazzo* that very evening, hidden in the carriage which was taking his mother and his aunt to La Scala. The coachman, whom they did not trust, dropped in at a tavern as was his habit, and while the footman, whose loyalty was beyond question, watched the horses, Fabrice slipped out of the carriage disguised as a peasant, and left the city. The next morning he crossed the border with equal ease, and a few hours later was settled in a property his mother owned near Navaro in Piedmont, to be precise at Romagnano, where Bayard was killed.*

It can readily be imagined how attentively the ladies listened to the performance, once they were seated in their box at La Scala. They had only gone there in order to consult several of their friends who belonged to the Liberal party and whose appearance at the Palazzo del Dongo could have been misinterpreted by the police. In the box, it was decided to make another approach to Baron Binder. There could be no question of offering money to this irreproachably honest magistrate, and in any case the ladies were exceedingly poor, having forced Fabrice to take with him all that remained from the sale of the diamond.

Nevertheless, it was very important to keep informed of the Baron's most recent decisions. The Countess's friends reminded her about a certain Canon Borda, a very personable young man, who in the past had attempted to court her in a rather objectionable way; meeting with no success, Borda denounced her friendship with Limercati to General Pietranera, who had sent him packing like the rogue he was. Now it so happened that at present this Canon played tarot every evening with Baroness Binder, and he was, naturally, a close friend of her husband. The Countess made up her mind to take the horribly painful step of going to see the Canon; and early the next morning, before he left his home, she had herself announced.

When the Canon's only servant pronounced the name of the Countess Pietranera, Borda was so moved he could barely speak; he made no attempt to correct his very informal, unkempt appearance.

'Show her in and leave us,' he said in a faint voice. The Countess entered the room; Borda fell to his knees.

'It is in this position that a miserable madman should receive your orders,' he said to the Countess, who that morning looked irresistible in the casual style of dress which served her as a kind of disguise. Her deep distress at Fabrice's exile, and the terrible effort she was making in seeing a man who had betrayed her, all combined to impart extraordinary brilliance to her gaze.

'It is in this position that I wish to receive your orders,' exclaimed the Canon, 'for it is clear that you require some service of me, or you would not have honoured with your presence the unworthy house of a miserable madman who once behaved despicably towards you, when, carried away by love and jealousy, he saw that he could not please you.'

These words were sincere and all the more admirable because the Canon now enjoyed great power; the Countess was moved to tears; humiliation and fear had chilled her soul, and in an instant pity and a little hope took their place. She passed in the twinkling of an eye from a state of desperate unhappiness to one almost of happiness.

'Kiss my hand,' she said, holding it out to the Canon; 'and get up.' (She used the familiar form of address; you should understand that in Italy this indicates unreserved and friendly feelings as well as a more tender emotion.) 'I've come to ask your help on behalf of my nephew Fabrice. Let me tell you the complete truth, without the slightest disguise, as one tells it to an old friend. At sixteen and a half, he's just done something wildly foolish; we were at our castle at Grianta, on Lake Como. At seven o'clock one evening a boat from Como brought us news that the Emperor had disembarked in the Gulf of Juan. The next morning Fabrice left for France, having obtained a passport from one of his low-born friends, a dealer in barometers by name of Vasi. As he doesn't exactly look like a dealer in barometers, he'd hardly gone ten leagues

into France when his appearance got him arrested; people were suspicious of his enthusiastic outbursts in bad French. After a while he escaped and managed to reach Geneva; we sent someone to meet him in Lugano...'

'You mean Geneva,' said the Canon with a smile.

The Countess finished the story.

'I'll do everything for you that is humanly possible,' continued the Canon fervently; 'I place myself entirely at your orders. I'll even do things that would not be wise,' he added. 'Tell me, what must I do when my unworthy parlour is deprived of this heavenly vision, whose appearance marks a red-letter day in the chronicle of my life?'

'You must go to Baron Binder and tell him that you've loved Fabrice since he was born, that through your visits to us you've known him since he was tiny, and that you beg the Baron, in the name of the friendship he bears you, to use all his spies to ascertain whether, before Fabrice's departure for Switzerland, he had the slightest contact with any of the Liberals whom the police keep under observation. Even if the Baron's spies aren't very efficient, he'll see that this is purely a case of youthful indiscretion. You know how I had engravings of Napoleon's victories hanging on the walls of my lovely apartments in the Palazzo Dugnani; it was by studying the captions of those pictures that my nephew learnt to read. From the time Fabrice was five, my poor husband would describe those battles to him; we used to put my husband's helmet on his head, and the child would drag his big sabre about. So then, one fine day, he hears that my husband's god, the Emperor, is back in France; he recklessly sets off to join him, but is unable to do so. Ask your Baron what he thinks the penalty should be for this moment of folly.'

'There's something I forgot to tell you,' exclaimed the Canon. 'You'll see I'm not wholly undeserving of the pardon you've granted me. Here,' he said, searching through his papers on the table, 'here I have the accusation of that odious *coltorto* [hypocrite]—just look, signed *Ascanio Valserra del DONGO*—which set this whole affair in motion; I obtained it yesterday evening from the police department, and then went to La Scala, in the hope of finding someone who habitually

visited your box, through whom I could get it into your hands. A copy of this document has been in Vienna for some time. This is the enemy we're up against.' The Canon and the Countess read the accusation together, and agreed that in the course of the day he would send her a copy by someone he could trust. It was with joy in her heart that the Countess returned to the Palazzo del Dongo.

'Nobody could be a more honourable gentleman than that *ex-scoundrel*,' she told the Marquise; 'this evening at La Scala, at ten forty-five by the theatre clock, we'll send everyone away from our box, we'll put out the candles and close our door, and at eleven the Canon himself will come and tell us what he's been able to do. That's what we decided would be the least compromising for him.'

This Canon was a very intelligent man; not for anything in the world would he have missed the appointment: he exhibited an absolute integrity and an unconstrained frankness that is very rarely found except in those countries where vanity does not govern every other sentiment. His denunciation of the Countess to her husband General Pietranera was the cause of life-long self-reproach, and he had found a way of expunging that self-reproach.

When the Countess had left his house that morning: So now she's in love with her nephew, he had thought bitterly, for he was not cured. With her pride, to have come to my house!... When that poor Pietranera died, she rejected my offers of service with disgust, even though they were extremely polite and very properly conveyed by Colonel Scotti, her former lover. The beautiful Pietranera, living on 1,500 lire! continued the Canon, pacing restlessly about his room. Then to go and live in that Grianta castle, with a hateful *secatore*, that Marquis del Dongo! It's all clear now! In fact, that young Fabrice is charm personified, tall, a fine physique, always a smile on his face... and, what's more to the point, a certain look full of sweet sensuality... a face like a Correggio, added the Canon bitterly.

The difference in age... not too great... Fabrice was born after the French arrived, about '98, I believe; the Countess is perhaps twenty-seven or twenty-eight, and no one could be

prettier or more adorable; in this country which is so rich in beautiful women she outshines them all; the Marinis, the Gherardis, the Rugas, the Aresis, the Pietragruas,* she surpasses them every one... They were happy, living in seclusion on that beautiful Lake Como, when the young man decided to join Napoleon... There are still people with souls in Italy! In spite of everything! My beloved homeland!... No, went on this heart inflamed by jealousy, impossible to explain otherwise this willingness to vegetate in the country, with the mortification of seeing, every day and at every meal, the horrible face of the Marquis del Dongo, as well as the disgusting pasty face of the Marchesino Ascagne, who'll turn out worse than his father!... Well, I'll serve her faithfully. At least I'll have the pleasure of seeing her other than just through my opera glasses.

Canon Borda explained the situation very clearly to the ladies. At heart, Binder could not be better disposed towards them; he was delighted that Fabrice had made good his escape before orders could arrive from Vienna; for Binder had no power to decide anything, he was awaiting orders on this matter as on all others; each day he sent off to Vienna exact copies of the information gathered, and then he waited.

During his exile in Romagnano Fabrice must:

1. Never fail to attend Mass daily, and take as confessor someone intelligent who was devoted to the monarchy; at confession he must only admit to totally irreproachable feelings;

2. He must avoid the company of any man believed to be intelligent, and where possible he must speak of rebellion with abhorrence, as something that can never be permitted;

3. He must never let himself be seen in a café, nor read any newspapers other than the official ones of Turin and Milan; in general, evince a dislike of reading, never read anything, especially not any work published after 1720, with the possible exception of the novels of Walter Scott;

4. Finally, and most important, added the Canon with a touch of malice, he must openly pay court to one of the local beauties, a well-born one of course; that will indicate that he hasn't the gloomy, discontented nature of a budding conspirator.

Before going to bed, the Countess and the Marquise wrote two endless letters to Fabrice, in which they set forth with charming solicitude the advice given by Borda.

Fabrice had not the slightest interest in conspiring; he loved Napoleon and believed that he himself, as a nobleman, was destined to be happier than other men; he thought the middle classes ridiculous. He had not opened a book since leaving school, where he had read only books authorized by the Jesuits. He established himself a little way out of Romagnano, in a magnificent *palazzo*, a masterpiece of the famous architect San-Micheli;* but it had not been inhabited for thirty years, so that rain leaked into all the rooms and not a single window would shut. He took over the steward's horses and unceremoniously rode them all day long; he never spoke, he spent his time reflecting. He thought the advice to take a mistress in a right-wing family amusing, and followed it to the letter. He chose as confessor a young, scheming priest who wanted to become a bishop (like the confessor at the Spielberg);† but he would go three leagues on foot, enveloped (as he imagined) in impenetrable mystery, to read the *Constitutionnel*,* which he thought sublime; it's as fine as Alfieri and Dante! he would often exclaim to himself. Fabrice had this in common with young Frenchmen: he was much more seriously interested in his horse and his newspaper than in his right-thinking mistress. But there was as yet no place for *imitating others* in that candid, steadfast soul, and he made no friends in the society of the big town of Romagnano; his simplicity was mistaken for pride; people did not know what to make of this character. 'He's a younger son who resents not being the first-born,' said the priest.

† See the curious *Memoirs of Sig. Andryane*, which are as entertaining as a work of fiction, and will last as long as Tacitus.

CHAPTER 6

We will in all candour admit that Canon Borda's jealousy was not entirely without foundation; on his return from France Fabrice had seemed, to the Countess's eyes, like a handsome stranger whom she had once known very well. If he had spoken of love, she would have loved him; did she not already feel an ardent and, as it were, unbounded admiration for his conduct and for his person? But Fabrice's embraces overflowed with so much innocent gratitude and artless affection that she would have been horrified at herself had she looked for another sentiment in that almost filial attachment. In essence, reflected the Countess, friends who knew me six years ago at the court of Prince Eugène may still think me pretty and even young, but for him I'm a respectable woman... and, if I'm being really frank, without any concern for my pride, an older woman. The Countess was deluding herself about the stage she had reached in life, but not in the style of ordinary women. Besides, at his age, she added, one tends to exaggerate somewhat the ravages of time; whereas a more mature man...

The Countess, who was walking round her drawing-room, stopped in front of a mirror and smiled. You should know that, for some months past, her heart had been under serious attack, and from a remarkable individual. Soon after Fabrice left for France the Countess, who without really admitting it to herself was already very much bound up in him, fell into a profound depression. All her occupations seemed to her without pleasure and, if one dare so express it, without savour; she told herself that Napoleon, eager to win over his people in Italy, would take Fabrice as aide-de-camp. He's lost to me! she exclaimed through her tears, I'll never see him again; he'll write to me, but what will I be to him ten years from now?

This was her frame of mind when she made a trip to Milan; there she hoped to hear more immediate news of Napoleon, and consequently, perhaps, some word of Fabrice. Although she did not acknowledge the fact, her restless spirit was

beginning to be very tired of the monotonous life she was leading in the country; it's delaying death, she said, it's not living. Every day to see those powdered faces, her brother, her nephew Ascagne, their footmen! What would their outings on the lake be like, without Fabrice? Her sole consolation lay in the friendship that bound her to the Marquise. But for some time now she had found this intimacy with Fabrice's mother, who was older than she was and had lost all hope in life, less agreeable.

Such was Signora Pietranera's curious situation; with Fabrice gone, she expected little of the future; her heart had need of consolation and novelty. Once in Milan, she developed a passion for the style of opera that was then all the rage; for hours on end she would shut herself away on her own at La Scala, in the box that belonged to her former lover General Scotti. The men she sought out in order to hear news of Napoleon and his army seemed to her coarse and uncouth. She would return home and improvise on the piano until three in the morning. One evening at La Scala, when she was visiting the box of a woman friend, hoping for news of France, she was introduced to Count Mosca, a minister in Parma; he was a likeable man, who spoke of France and Napoleon in a way which gave her heart fresh cause for hope and fear. The following day she returned to the box; that intelligent man was there again and she talked to him with enjoyment throughout the entire performance. She had not spent so lively an evening since Fabrice's departure. The man she found entertaining, Count Mosca della Rovere Sorezana, was at that time Minister of War, Police, and Finance under the famous Prince of Parma, Ernest IV, renowned for the severity of his measures, which the Liberals of Milan called atrocities. Mosca might have been about forty or forty-five; he had well-marked features, not a trace of self-importance, and a simple, cheerful manner that predisposed one in his favour; and he would also have been very good-looking, had not an odd whim on the part of his prince required him to wear powder in his hair as proof of political orthodoxy. Since Italians rarely worry about wounding someone's vanity, they very soon begin to converse on an intimate level, and to pass

personal remarks. The remedy for this custom is not to meet again if your feelings are hurt.

'Now why, Count, do you powder your hair?' the Countess asked him the third time she saw him. 'Powder! On a man like you, attractive, still young, who fought with us in Spain!'

'It's because in that country I didn't do any looting, and a man must live. I was mad for glory; a flattering word from the French general, Gouvion-Saint-Cyr, our commander, was all I cared about then. It turned out, when Napoleon fell, that while I was using up all my money in his service, my father, a man of imagination who could already see me as a general, was building me a *palazzo* in Parma. In 1813 I found myself with a large unfinished *palazzo* and a pension as my entire fortune.'

'A pension: 3,500 lire, like my husband?'

'Count Pietranera was general of a division. The pension that I, as a poor major, receive, has never been more than 800 lire, and what's more I've only been paid since I became Minister of Finance.'

As the only other person there was the lady of extreme liberal views to whom the box belonged, the conversation continued with equal frankness. In response to questions, Count Mosca described his life in Parma. 'In Spain, under General Saint-Cyr, I risked being shot in order to win a cross and a little glory; now I dress like a character in a play to be able to live in great style and earn a few thousand lire. Once I'd embarked on this sort of chess game I was shocked by the overbearing manners of my superiors and set my sights on acquiring a top position for myself; I've succeeded; but my happiest days are still those I can occasionally come and spend in Milan; it seems to me that here the heart of your army of Italy lives on.'

The frankness and *disinvoltura* which marked the conversation of this minister of such a widely feared prince aroused the Countess's curiosity; from his title she had expected a pedant full of his own importance, and she found a man embarrassed by the grandeur of his position. Mosca had promised to pass on to her all the news of France that he could obtain; this was an act of great imprudence in Milan, the month before Water-

loo; it was then a question, for Italy, of whether that nation would live or die; the whole of Milan was in a frenzy of hope and fear. In the midst of the general turmoil the Countess made enquiries about this man who spoke with such irreverence of a position that was so enviable, and was his only means of support.

Some strange and intriguingly bizarre things were reported to Signora Pietranera: 'Count Mosca della Rovere Sorezana', she was told, 'is on the point of becoming the Prime Minister and acknowledged favourite of Ranuce-Ernest IV, absolute ruler of Parma, and, what's more, one of the richest princes in Europe. The Count would already have reached this supreme position if he'd been willing to adopt a more solemn demeanour; it's said that the Prince often reads him a lecture on this point.

"What do my manners matter to your Highness, if I serve your Highness well?" is his forthright reply.

'The happiness of this favourite', the report continues, 'is not without alloy. He must please a sovereign who, while doubtless a man of sense and intelligence, seems, since acceding to an absolute throne, to have lost his head; for instance, he's tormented by fears worthy of a silly old woman.

'Ernest IV is only brave in war. On the field of battle he could often be seen leading a column to the attack like any gallant general; but since, after the death of his father Ernest III, he returned to his own country (where unfortunately for him he enjoys unlimited power), he's taken to ranting wildly against Liberals and liberty. Soon he began to fancy that people hated him; in the end, in a moment of ill humour, he had two Liberals hanged who were perhaps not all that guilty; he did this on the advice of a wretch called Rassi, a sort of Minister of Justice.

'Since that fatal hour the Prince's life has changed; he's tormented by the weirdest suspicions. He's not yet fifty, and fear has so diminished him, if I may express it thus, that as soon as he begins talking about Jacobins and the Paris Directoire* he looks like an old man of eighty; he relapses into the imaginary terrors of early childhood. The only hold his favourite, the Public Prosecutor (or Chief Judge) Rassi, has

on his master is through his fears; and the moment Rassi suspects that his influence is waning, he quickly discovers some fresh conspiracy as nefarious as it is imaginary. If thirty hotheads get together to read a copy of the *Constitutionnel*, Rassi declares them conspirators and imprisons them in that famous Parma fortress, the terror of the whole of Lombardy. As it is exceedingly tall—180 feet, people say—you can see it from far away, rising up in the middle of that vast plain; the physical appearance of the prison, about which horrifying things are reported, makes it, through the agency of fear, queen of the entire plateau extending from Milan to Bologna.’

‘Would you believe it?’ another traveller told the Countess, ‘at night in his room on the third floor of his palace, surrounded by eighty guards who bellow a whole sentence every quarter of an hour, Ernest IV quakes with fear. With all the doors bolted ten times over, and the nearby rooms both below and above full of soldiers, he’s afraid of Jacobins. If a board in the parquet happens to creak, he grabs his pistols, convinced there’s a Liberal hidden under his bed. Immediately all the alarms in the palace start ringing and an aide-de-camp goes to awaken Count Mosca. Once he’s at the palace the Minister of Police is very careful not to deny the conspiracy, on the contrary; alone with the Prince, and armed to the teeth, he inspects every corner of the apartments, looks under the beds, and, in a word, does a host of ridiculous things worthy of an old woman. All these precautions would have seemed very degrading to the Prince himself, back in those happy days when he was a soldier and had killed nobody, except with a gun. As he’s an extremely intelligent man, he’s ashamed of these precautions; they seem to him to be ridiculous, even while he’s actually carrying them out; the source of Count Mosca’s great favour is that he employs all his skill to ensure that the Prince never has cause to blush in his presence. It is he, Mosca, who in his capacity as Minister of Police insists on looking under the furniture and, it’s said in Parma, even inside the cases of the double-basses. It is the Prince who tries to stop Mosca and teases him about being over-punctilious. “I’m playing the odds,” answers Count Mosca; “think

of the derisive sonnets that the Jacobins would shower us with if we let you be killed. It's not simply your life we're defending, it's our own honour": but it appears that the Prince is not entirely taken in, because if anyone in the town dares to remark that last night in the palace they didn't sleep a wink, the Public Prosecutor Rassi sends the tactless joker to the fortress; once inside that lofty dwelling where, as they say in Parma, "the air is so good", it's only by a miracle that the prisoner is ever thought of again. It's because Mosca's a soldier, and on countless occasions in Spain got himself out of a tight corner by using his pistol, that the Prince prefers him to Rassi, who is much more compliant, and much baser. Those unfortunate prisoners in the fortress are kept in the most rigorous seclusion, and there are lots of stories about them. The Liberals assert that, in accordance with a little scheme of Rassi's, the jailers and the confessors have instructions to convince the prisoners that, about once a month, one of their number is put to death. On that day the prisoners are given permission to climb up on to the esplanade of the colossal tower, 180 feet high, and from there they can watch a procession, in which there's a spy playing the part of a poor devil going to his death.'

The Countess was intensely interested by these tales and many others that were similar in nature and no less authentic; next day she demanded further details from Count Mosca, whom she teased unmercifully. She thought him amusing and kept telling him that, although he did not realize it, he was a monster at heart. On returning to his inn one day, the Count said to himself: Not only is that Countess Pietranera a charming woman, but when I spend the evening in her box I manage to forget certain things about Parma whose recollection pierces me to the heart. 'That Minister, in spite of his urbane manner and his brilliant style, did not have a *French* soul; he was not capable of *forgetting* his troubles. If something in his bolster was pricking him, he had to break it and blunt it by pressing down upon it with his quivering limbs.' I ask your pardon for this sentence, which I have translated from the Italian. The morning after this discovery, the Count found that, despite the business that had brought him to

Milan, the day seemed endless; he could not stay in one place; he wore out his carriage horses. About six, he mounted a horse to ride to the Corso; he had some hope of meeting the Countess there; not seeing her, he remembered that La Scala opened at eight; he went in and saw there were less than ten people in that vast auditorium. He felt a little ashamed of being there. Is it possible, he thought, that at over forty-five I should be doing these idiotic things that would make a sub-altern blush! Luckily, no one has the faintest suspicion I'm doing them. He made his escape and tried to fill the time walking about those charming streets that surround La Scala. They are full of cafés which at that hour overflow with customers; in front of each of the cafés crowds of onlookers lounge about on chairs in the middle of the street, eating ices and commenting on the passers-by. The Count stood out among these passers-by and consequently had the pleasure of being recognized and buttonholed. Three or four importunate souls, of the kind who must be humoured, seized the opportunity for an audience with this very powerful Minister. Two of them handed Mosca petitions; the third confined himself to giving him lengthy advice on his political dealings.

You can't sleep, he thought, when you're very intelligent; when you're this powerful you can't go for a stroll. He returned to the theatre and had the idea of taking a box on the third level; from there he could look straight down, without anyone noticing, at the second-tier box where he hoped to see the Countess arrive. Two whole hours of waiting did not seem overlong to this lover; certain of not being seen, he could happily give way to his folly. Isn't being old, first and foremost, to be no longer capable of these deliciously childish acts? he reflected.

At last, the Countess appeared. In an ecstasy of delight he studied her through his opera glasses: young, brilliant, light as a bird, he thought, she looks not a day more than twenty-five. Her beauty is the least of her charms: where else would one find a soul like hers, always sincere, never concerned about *being prudent*, surrendering herself totally to the impression of the moment, wanting only to be carried away by some new

experience? I can quite understand the foolish things Count Nani did.

The Count could find excellent reasons for being foolish himself, so long as he thought only of seizing the happiness he could see there below him. He no longer found such good reasons when he began to reflect on his age and the sometimes very depressing concerns that filled his days. A capable man, whom fear has robbed of his wits, provides me with a splendid existence and a great deal of money for being his Minister; but if, tomorrow, he dismisses me, I'll just be old and poor, that is, the most despised thing in the world; now wouldn't that be an attractive partner to offer the Countess? These thoughts were too gloomy, and he brought his mind back to Signora Pietranera; he never tired of watching her, and, so as to think about her the more easily, he did not go down to her box. I've just heard that the only reason she took up with Nani was to teach a lesson to that half-wit Limercati who refused to fight a duel with her husband's murderer, or to arrange for his throat to be cut. I'd fight twenty duels for her sake! cried the Count fervently. He glanced constantly at the theatre clock which every five minutes informed the audience, in brilliantly lit figures that stood out against the black background, that the hour was at hand when it is considered acceptable to visit a friend's box. The Count was telling himself: the very longest that I, who am such a recent acquaintance, could stay in her box would be one half-hour; if I stay any longer, people will notice, and because of my age and even more because of my wretched powdered hair, I'll be about as attractive as a Cassandra. But a sudden thought decided him: If she were to leave that box to visit someone, I'd be well rewarded for the miserly way I'm hoarding up this pleasure. He got to his feet, meaning to go down to the box where he could see the Countess; he immediately felt almost a reluctance to present himself there. Ah! How wonderful, he exclaimed, laughing at himself as he paused on the staircase: I am actually feeling timid! It must be a good twenty-five years since something like this happened to me.

He had almost to take a grip on himself as he entered the box, and, being clever enough to profit from what he was

experiencing, he made not the slightest effort to appear at ease, or to try to be witty by launching into some amusing story; he had the courage to behave with timidity, and concentrated on letting his agitation be evident without appearing ridiculous. If she takes this thing the wrong way, he thought, I'm lost for ever. What! To be timid while wearing powder on my hair, hair that without the aid of the powder would look grey! But, after all, this truly is happening to me, so it can't be ridiculous unless I exaggerate or boast about it. At the castle of Grianta the Countess had spent so many tedious hours sitting opposite the powdered heads of her brother, her nephew, and sundry right-minded neighbourhood bores, that it never occurred to her to bother about her new admirer's hair.

Since the Countess was not tempted to burst out laughing at the sight of Mosca, her whole attention was for the news from France that the Count always gave her privately the instant he entered the box; he probably invented it. That evening while she was discussing the news with him she noticed his expression, which was noble and benevolent.

'I suppose,' she said to him, 'that surrounded by your slaves in Parma you won't permit yourself that amiable look, it would spoil everything and give them some hope of not being hanged.'

The complete absence of self-importance in a man who was said to be the foremost diplomat of Italy struck the Countess as remarkable; she even thought he had charm. And, as he could speak with eloquence and fire, she was not shocked at his thinking it appropriate and of no great importance if, for one evening, he chose the role of admirer.

In actual fact this was a significant step, and a very dangerous one; luckily for the Minister, whose attentions were invariably welcomed by the ladies of Parma, only a few days had passed since the Countess had left Grianta; her spirit was still paralysed by the boredom of life in the country. It was as if she had forgotten how to joke; and all things associated with an elegant, urbane style of living had acquired, in her eyes, an air of novelty which made them sacrosanct; she was not in a mood to make fun of anything, not even of a lover who was

forty-five and timid. A week later the Count's recklessness might have met with a very different reception.

It is customary, at La Scala, to keep these little visits to someone's box to no more than twenty minutes; the Count spent the entire evening in the box where he had the happiness of meeting Countess Pietranera: here is a woman, he told himself, who has revived in me all the follies of my youth! But he was very conscious of the danger. Will she forgive me this idiocy because, forty leagues from here, I'm an all-powerful potentate? I'm so bored in Parma! Nevertheless, every quarter of an hour, he promised himself he was going to leave.

'I must confess, Signora,' he said laughingly to the Countess, 'that in Parma I die of boredom, and I must be permitted to indulge in any pleasure I encounter along my way. So do allow me, just for one evening and as a matter of no consequence, to play the role of your lover. Alas! In a few days I shall be far from this box which makes me forget all my cares and even, you will say, all the conventions.'

A week after this outrageously long visit to the box in La Scala, and following a number of little incidents whose recital might seem tedious, Count Mosca was quite desperately in love, and the Countess was already thinking that his age would not be an obstacle if in other respects she found him attractive. This is how matters stood when a courier recalled Mosca to Parma. It was as if his Prince was frightened when he was by himself. The Countess returned to Grianta; now that her imagination no longer enhanced that lovely place, it seemed to her to be a desert. Could I have become attached to this man? she wondered. Mosca wrote to her and had no need for pretence; absence had deprived him of the inspiration of all his thoughts; his letters were entertaining and, thanks to a little fancy of his which was by no means ill received, in order to avoid the comments of the Marquis del Dongo who disliked having to pay postal charges on correspondence, he sent couriers to post his letters in Como, Lecco, Varese, or one of the other charming little towns near the lake. This encouraged the dispatch of a reply by the same courier; the system was successful.

Before long, the days when the courier arrived became red-letter days in the life of the Countess; these couriers brought flowers, fruits, and little gifts that had no value but amused both her and her sister-in-law. The memory of the Count merged with the idea of his great power; the Countess had become interested in everything that was said about him, for even the Liberals themselves paid tribute to his talents.

The principal reason for the Count's bad reputation was that he was considered the leader of the Ultra-conservatives at the court of Parma, and that the Liberals had at their head a schemer capable of anything, and even of being successful, the immensely rich Marquise Raversi. The Prince was very careful not to discourage whichever of the two parties was out of power; he knew perfectly well that he would always be in control, even with a ministry formed in Marquise Raversi's drawing-room. These intrigues were reported in exhaustive detail at Grianta; the absence of Mosca, whom everyone portrayed as an outstanding minister and a man of action, made it possible to forget the powdered hair, symbol of everything that was slow-witted and gloomy; it was an unimportant point, one of the requirements of court life, in which, after all, he played such a brilliant part. 'A court is absurd but amusing,' the Countess would tell the Marquise; 'it's a game which holds your interest, but whose rules you must accept. Whoever thought of objecting because the rules of piquet are absurd? And yet, once you've got used to the rules, it's gratifying to beat your opponent.'

The Countess thought often about the author of all these pleasing letters; the days when she received one were happy days for her; she would take her boat and go and read her letter in one of the lovely places on the lake at Pliniana, or Belanno, or in the woods of the Sfondrata. These letters seemed some consolation for Fabrice's absence. She had at least to give the Count credit for being deeply in love; and, before the month was out, she was thinking of him with tender affection. For his part, Count Mosca was almost sincere when he offered to resign his position and leave the Ministry, and come and spend his life with her in Milan or elsewhere. 'I have 400,000 lire,' he added, 'which would give

us an income of 15,000 lire.' To own a box at the theatre again, and horses, and so on! though: the Countess; these were agreeable dreams. She was captivated afresh by the sublime beauty of the landscape round Lake Como. She would go and dream, on the shores of the lake, of this return to a brilliant and exceptional existence which, contrary to all expectation, was again becoming a possibility. She imagined herself on the Corso, in Milan, happy and vivacious as in the days of the Viceroy; it would mean, for me, a return to my youth or at least to a full and active life!

Her passionate imagination sometimes concealed things from her, but with her it was never a case of those intentional self-deceptions that spring from cowardice. Above all else, she was honest with herself. Although I'm rather too old to lose my head, she thought, envy, which can deceive one just as love can, could poison life in Milan for me. After the death of my husband, my noble poverty was a success, as was my refusal of two great fortunes. My poor little Count Mosca doesn't possess the twentieth part of the riches that those two fools Limercati and Nani laid at my feet. My miserly widow's pension that I had to fight for, the way I dismissed my servants—what an impression that made!—the little fifth-floor room which attracted a score of carriages, it all seemed very extraordinary in those days. But however cleverly I manage things there'll be some unpleasant moments if, with no fortune other than my widow's pension, I come back to live in Milan on the comfortable little middle-class income we'd get from the 15,000 lire Mosca would have left after resigning. A powerful objection, which will give envious tongues a formidable weapon, is that the Count is married, although he's long been separated from his wife. This separation is common knowledge in Parma, but will be news in Milan, and I'll be blamed for it. So, my lovely Scala, my divine Lake Como... farewell! farewell!

Despite all these misgivings, if the Countess had had the smallest personal fortune she would have accepted Mosca's offer to resign. She thought of herself as an old woman, and the court frightened her; but—and this will seem utterly inconceivable on our side of the Alps—the Count would have

been happy to hand in his resignation. At any rate he succeeded in convincing his friend of that. In every letter, with ever-increasing urgency, he begged for a second meeting in Milan; his request was granted. 'If I swore that I'm madly in love with you,' the Countess said to him one day in Milan, 'I'd be lying; I would be only too happy if, at past thirty, I could love today as I once loved when I was twenty-two! But I've seen the passing of so many things that I used to think eternal! I feel the most tender affection for you, I trust you absolutely, and of all men it is you that I prefer.' The Countess believed she was perfectly sincere; however, towards the end, this declaration contained a small lie. Perhaps, if Fabrice had wished it, he would have prevailed over everything in her heart. But Fabrice was only a child in Count Mosca's eyes; the latter had arrived in Milan three days after the departure of the reckless youth to Novara, and Mosca had hastened to go and speak in his defence to Baron Binder. The Count believed that nothing could be done about Fabrice's exile.

Mosca had not come alone to Milan, but had brought in his carriage the Duke Sanseverina-Taxis, a nice little old man of sixty-eight with dapple-grey hair, very polite, very neat, immensely rich but not sufficiently noble. It was only the grandfather of the present Duke who had become a millionaire, while holding the office of Farmer-General of Taxes for the state of Parma. His father had got himself appointed Ambassador to the Prince of Parma at the Court of ***, by virtue of the following argument: 'Your Highness grants 30,000 lire to his envoy at the Court of ***, who cuts a very poor figure there. If your Highness deigned to name me to this position, I would accept an allowance of 6,000 lire. My expenses at the Court of *** would never fall below 100,000 lire a year and every year my steward would return 20,000 lire to the coffers of the Foreign Ministry of Parma. With that sum it would be possible to appoint whomever one chose as my ambassadorial secretary, and I would never display the slightest interest in diplomatic secrets, if indeed such exist. My purpose is to glorify my family name, which is still young, and make it illustrious by holding one of our country's high offices.'

The present Duke, son of that Ambassador, had been so inept as to reveal he was something of a Liberal, and for the past two years had been in despair. During the time of Napoleon he obstinately remained abroad and lost two or three millions in consequence; and yet, now that order had been re-established in Europe, he had failed to obtain a certain Grand Cordon and decoration which embellished the portrait of his father; the lack of this Cordon was sending him into a decline.

The intimacy which in Italy follows upon love meant that between the lovers there were no barriers created by vanity. It was thus with the most perfect simplicity that Mosca said to the woman he adored:

‘I have two or three plans of action to propose to you, all of them quite carefully worked out; I’ve been thinking of nothing else for the past three months.

‘1. I hand in my resignation, and we’ll live like a good bourgeois couple in Milan, or Florence, or Naples, wherever you like. We have an income of 15,000, not counting gifts from the Prince, which may or may not last.

‘2. You deign to move to the state in which I wield some power, you buy a property, Sacca, for example, a charming house in the heart of a forest, overlooking the River Po: you could have the signed contract of sale in your hands a week from now. The Prince grants you a place at court. But there’s an enormous objection to this plan. You’ll be well received at that court; no one will dare to raise an eyebrow in my presence; furthermore, the Princess thinks she’s unhappy and I’ve just been doing her some favours, with you in mind. But there is, let me remind you, a very great objection to such a plan: the Prince is devout in the extreme, and as you are also aware, fate has decreed that I am married. Countless small vexations would ensue from that. You are a widow, a fine title that ought perhaps to be exchanged for another, which brings me to my third suggestion.

‘We could find you a new husband who wouldn’t incommode you. But first and foremost he would have to be very old, for why should you deny me the hope of replacing him some day? Well now! Here’s the strange bargain I’ve struck with the Duke Sanseverina-Taxis who, needless to say, does

not know the name of his future Duchess. He only knows that she'll make him an ambassador and obtain for him a certain Cordon and decoration his father had, the lack of which makes him the most wretched of mortals. In other respects this Duke isn't too stupid, he has his clothes and his wigs made in Paris. He's not at all the kind of man who spends years hatching some malicious scheme, he seriously believes that honour consists in the possession of a Cordon, and he's ashamed of his wealth. He came to me a year ago and proposed founding a hospital in exchange for the Cordon; I laughed at him, but he didn't laugh at me when I proposed a marriage; my first condition, naturally, was that he would never again set foot in Parma.'

'But do you realize that this suggestion of yours is highly immoral?' said the Countess.

'No more immoral than everything else that's done at our court and at a score of others. Absolute power has this advantage: it sanctifies everything in the eyes of the people; now, in what sense can something be an absurdity if no one's conscious of it? For the next twenty years our political policy will consist of being afraid of Jacobins, and I mean afraid! Each year we'll imagine we're back on the eve of '93. I hope you'll hear the speeches I make on that subject at my receptions. They're very fine! Anything that might in some small degree lessen that fear will be supremely moral in the eyes of the nobles and the devout churchgoers. Now, in Parma, anyone who is not noble or devout is already in prison, or is packing his bags to go there; rest assured that this marriage will not seem odd in my country until the day when I'm disgraced. This arrangement doesn't swindle anyone, and that's what I see as most significant. The Prince, whose favour is the merchandise we deal in, set only one condition on his consent, which is that the future Duchess be of noble birth. All in all last year my position brought me in 107,000 lire; my income must have totalled 122,000; I set aside 20,000 in Lyon. Well, take your pick: 1, a splendid life-style with 122,000 lire to spend, which in Parma is at least as much as 400,000 in Milan; but with this marriage which gives you the name of a man who's presentable and whom you'll never see

except at the altar; or, 2, a modest bourgeois existence on 15,000 lire in Florence or Naples, because I agree with you, you've been too much admired in Milan and we'd be plagued by envy, and perhaps envy would make us ill-humoured. The grand life in Parma would have, I hope, some trace of novelty, even for you who knew the court of Prince Eugène; it would be wise to try it out before rejecting it. Do not suppose that I'm trying to influence your decision. As for me, my choice is clear: I'd rather live in an attic with you than continue my splendid existence alone.'

The possibility of this strange marriage was every day debated by the lovers. At the ball at La Scala the Countess saw the Duke Sanseverina-Taxis; she thought him very presentable. In one of their final conversations, Mosca summed up his proposal in these terms: 'You must come to a firm decision, if we are to spend the rest of our days happily, and not grow old before our time. The Prince has given his consent; on the whole Sanseverina is quite acceptable; he possesses the finest *palazzo* in Parma and unlimited wealth; he's sixty-eight years old and desperate to own the Grand Cordon; but his life's ruined by a dreadful blunder, he once bought a bust of Napoleon by Canova for 10,000 lire. The second transgression which will be the death of him, unless you take pity on him, is that he lent twenty-five napoleons to Ferrante Palla, a madman of ours, but also in a sense a genius, whom later we condemned to death, luckily *in absentia*. In the course of his life this Ferrante has composed some 200 verses which are beyond compare; I'll recite them to you, they're as beautiful as Dante. The Prince is sending Sanseverina to the Court of ***; he'll marry you the day of his departure, and the second year of his trip, which he will call an ambassadorship, he'll receive this Cordon without which he cannot live. In him you'll have a brother who won't be in any way disagreeable, he'll sign whatever I want before the marriage, and in any case you'll see him rarely or never, as you prefer. He'd like nothing better than never to show his face in Parma, where he's embarrassed by his tax-gatherer grandfather and his own alleged liberalism. Rassi, our executioner, claims that the Duke secretly subscribed to the *Constitutionnel*, using the poet

Ferrante Palla as intermediary, and for some time that slander was a serious obstacle to the Prince's consent.'

Why should the historian be blamed for faithfully recording the tiniest details of the story he has been told? Is it his fault if the characters, seduced by passions which unfortunately for him he does not share, fall into committing acts which are profoundly immoral? It is true that things of this nature are no longer done in a country where the sole passion to have outlasted all others is the passion for money, the means by which vanity is satisfied.

Three months after the events just described, the Duchess Sanseverina-Taxis was astounding the court of Parma by her easy cordiality and the patrician serenity of her mind; her house was without question the most agreeable in the city. Count Mosca had promised as much to his master. Ranuce-Ernest IV, the Prince Regnant, and his wife the Princess, to whom she was presented by two of the highest-born ladies of the country, received her with great distinction. The Duchess was curious to see this Prince who controlled the destiny of the man she loved; she endeavoured to please him and succeeded only too well. He was of good stature, though a shade heavy; his hair, his moustaches, and his enormous side-whiskers were, according to his courtiers, of a beautiful blond; in other circumstances their washed-out colour would have brought to mind the vulgar epithet 'tow-headed'. From the middle of a large face a tiny, almost feminine nose rose up just a trifle. But the Duchess observed that in order to take note of all these reasons for thinking the Prince ugly, she had to try to examine his features one by one. Overall, he looked like an intelligent man of strong character. The Prince's bearing and manner were not without majesty, but often he would try to impress his interlocutor; then he would grow flustered, shifting his weight from one leg to the other almost continuously. In addition, Ernest IV had a haughty and penetrating gaze; he made noble gestures with his arms and his speech was both measured and concise.

Mosca had forewarned the Duchess that in the large room where he held audiences, the Prince had a full-length portrait of Louis XIV, and an extremely beautiful Florentine table

made of *scagliola*.* The similarity, she thought, was striking; he was obviously aiming for the look and stately delivery of Louis XIV, and his way of leaning on the *scagliola* table made him resemble Joseph II.* He sat down immediately after his first words to the Duchess, so as to give her an opportunity of using the stool to which her rank entitled her. At this court, only the duchesses, princesses, and wives of Spanish grandees may sit down uninvited; the other women wait until the Prince or the Princess bids them do so, and, to mark the difference in rank, these august personages are always careful to let a little interval pass before inviting the ladies who are not duchesses to be seated. The Duchess thought that at times the Prince's imitation of Louis XIV was a little too marked; for example, in his way of smiling benevolently while throwing back his head.

Ernest IV was wearing a dress coat in the latest Parisian style; every month he received from that city, which he detested, a dress coat, a tail coat, and a hat. But, by a bizarre combination of garments, on the day the Duchess was received he had put on red trousers, silk stockings, and very high-cut shoes, such as one sees in portraits of Joseph II.

He received the Duchess Sanseverina graciously; the remarks he addressed to her were witty and shrewd; but she could easily tell that there was nothing excessive about this good reception. 'Do you know why?' Mosca asked her on her return from the audience; 'it's because Milan is a larger and finer city than Parma. He'll have been afraid, if he'd received you in the manner I anticipated and that he'd led me to expect, of seeming like a provincial in raptures over the charms of a beautiful lady just arrived from the capital. He's also undoubtedly still upset by a point I hesitate to mention: the Prince cannot find at his court a single woman who can vie with you in beauty. Last night, when he was retiring to bed, he talked of nothing else to his head valet Pernice, who's well disposed towards me. I predict there's going to be a minor revolution in our etiquette; my greatest enemy at this court's a fool called General Fabio Conti. Imagine an individual who's spent maybe one day out of his entire life at war, and on the basis of that imitates the bearing of Frederick the

Great. Furthermore he also wants to copy General Lafayette's noble affability;* that's because he's the head of the Liberal party here. (God only knows what kind of Liberals!)

'I know that Fabio Conti,' said the Duchess, 'I caught a glimpse of him near Como; he was having a row with the police.' She described the little adventure that the reader will perhaps recall.

'As you'll discover one day, Signora, if your mind is ever able to grasp the subtleties of our etiquette, young girls here are not presented at court until after they are married. Well now, because the Prince holds so fervently to the patriotic conviction that his city of Parma is superior to all others, I'd be willing to bet he'll find a way of having little Clélia Conti, daughter of our Lafayette, presented to him. She is indeed charming; a week ago she was generally considered to be the most beautiful woman of the Prince's realm.

'I don't know', continued the Count, 'whether the horror stories that have been circulated about the Sovereign by his enemies ever penetrated to the castle at Grianta; they make him out to be a monster, an ogre. The truth is that Ernest IV was endowed with a good measure of solid little virtues, and one can also say that had he been as invulnerable as Achilles, he'd have continued to be a model ruler. But in a moment of boredom and anger, and also perhaps to emulate Louis XIV who, fifty years after the Fronde, discovered some hero of those disturbances living in insolent tranquillity on an estate near Versailles and ordered that man to be beheaded, one fine day Ernest IV had two Liberals hanged. It seems that these imprudent individuals used to meet regularly to vilify the Prince and address impassioned prayers to heaven that the plague might be visited upon Parma and thus deliver them from the tyrant. The word "tyrant" has been proven. Rassi called that a conspiracy; he condemned them to death, and the execution of one of them, Count L***, was horrible. This happened before my time. Ever since that fateful moment,' added the Count, lowering his voice, 'the Prince is subject to fears that are *unworthy of a man*, but which are the sole source of the favour I enjoy. Were it not for the royal fears, my talents would be too blunt, too uncompromising in

style for this court, which abounds in morons. Would you believe that the Prince looks under the beds in his room before going to bed, and spends a million, which in Parma is the same as four million in Milan, to maintain a good police-force; and you see before you, Duchess, the chief of that terrible police. Through the police, that is to say, through fear, I have become Minister of War and of Finance; and since the Minister of the Interior is nominally my superior, inasmuch as the police is under his jurisdiction, I had that portfolio given to Count Zurla-Contarini, an idiot who's a glutton for work and allows himself the pleasure of writing eighty letters every day. I just received one this morning, upon which Count Zurla-Contarini had the satisfaction of writing in his own hand the number 20,715.'

The Duchess Sanseverina was presented to the melancholy Princess Clara-Paolina of Parma who, because her husband had a mistress (a rather pretty woman, Marquise Balbi), believed herself the most unhappy person in the universe, a belief which had quite possibly turned her into the most boring. The Duchess found her a very tall and very thin woman, who, though not yet thirty-six, looked fifty. Her symmetrical, aristocratic face could have been considered beautiful in spite of a slight defect—she had round, protruding, very short-sighted eyes—if the Princess had not abandoned all interest in her own appearance. She received the Duchess with such marked diffidence that several courtiers who were enemies of Mosca's dared to remark that the Princess behaved like the person being presented, and the Duchess like the Sovereign. The Duchess, surprised and almost disconcerted, could not find appropriate expressions with which to place herself at a level humbler than that which the Princess had chosen as her own. In order to help this poor Princess, who was not really unintelligent, to regain her composure, the Duchess could think of nothing better than to embark on, and continue, a long discourse on botany. The Princess was truly learned on this subject; she had some very beautiful greenhouses full of tropical plants. The Duchess, in simply seeking a way out of a difficulty, made a friend for life of Princess Clara-Paolina, who, having begun the audience in

bashful unease, felt so comfortable towards the end that, despite all the dictates of etiquette, this first interview lasted no less than one hour and a quarter. The next day the Duchess ordered some exotic plants, and let it be known she was passionately keen on botany.

The Princess spent all her time with the venerable Father Landriani, Archbishop of Parma, a man of learning and even of intelligence, and a perfect gentleman, but who presented a strange spectacle when he was seated in his crimson velvet chair (a prerogative of his office) opposite the armchair of the Princess, surrounded by her ladies-in-waiting and her two ladies 'in attendance'. The old prelate, with his long white hair, was even more diffident, if that is possible, than the Princess; they saw one another every day, and every audience began with a silence that lasted a good quarter of an hour. It had reached the point where Countess Alvizi, one of the ladies in attendance, had become a sort of favourite, because she was good at encouraging them to talk to each other and to break the silence.

To complete the series of presentations, the Duchess was received by his Most Serene Highness the heir to the throne, an individual taller than his father and more bashful than his mother. He was very good at mineralogy, and sixteen years old. He blushed deeply on seeing the Duchess enter, and was so thrown off balance that he could not find a single word to say to that beautiful woman. He was exceedingly handsome, and spent his days in the woods, hammer in hand. When the Duchess rose to her feet to end this silent audience:

'My God, Madame, how pretty you are!' exclaimed the heir to the throne, a remark which the lady being presented did not consider to be in such poor taste.

The Marquise Balbi, a young woman of twenty-five, could still, two or three years before the arrival of Duchess Sanseverina at Parma, have been described as the perfect model of 'Italian prettiness'. Now, she still had the loveliest eyes in the world and the most charming airs and affectations, but, seen from close to, her skin was covered with a multitude of tiny, fine wrinkles, which made the Marquise look like a youthful old lady. Viewed from a distance, for example in her box at

the theatre, she was still a beauty, and the people in the pit thought the Prince had excellent taste. He spent all his evenings at the home of Marquise Balbi, but often without opening his mouth, and the boredom she observed in the Prince had caused the poor woman to grow extraordinarily thin. She claimed to be a great wit, and was forever smiling maliciously; she had the finest teeth in the world, and as she had no sense, she would, regardless of the circumstances, try to suggest by a wicked smile that her words implied something quite other than what they seemed to say. Count Mosca maintained that it was these endless smiles, while she was secretly yawning, that gave her so many wrinkles. La Balbi had a hand in everything, and the state never concluded a deal for even 1,000 lire without there being a 'memento' for the Marquise (this was the polite word in Parma). Rumour had it that she had invested 6 million lire in England, but in reality her fortune, which was actually of recent origin, amounted to less than 1,500,000 lire. It was in order to protect himself from her stratagems and make her dependent on him that Count Mosca had arranged to become Minister of Finance. Fear was the Marquise's only passion, fear masquerading as sordid avarice; 'I'll die a beggar', she would sometimes say to the Prince, whom this remark enraged. The Duchess noticed that the magnificently gilded anteroom of the Palazzo Balbi was lit by a solitary candle dripping on to a table of precious marble, and that the doors of her salon were blackened by the fingers of the footmen.

'She received me,' the Duchess told her lover, 'as if she expected me to hand her a fifty-lire tip.'

The course of the Duchess's triumphs was somewhat interrupted by the manner in which she was received by the wiliest woman at the court, the famous Marquise Raversi, a consummate schemer who led the party in opposition to that of Count Mosca. She wanted him overthrown, and the more so during the past few months, for she was niece to Duke Sanseverina and feared that her inheritance could be endangered by the charms of the new Duchess. 'La Raversi is not a woman to be underrated,' said the Count to his dear friend, 'I consider her so very much capable of anything that I left my

wife simply because she insisted on taking as lover the Chevalier Bentivoglio, one of la Raversi's friends.' This lady, a tall virago with jet-black hair who was noteworthy for the diamonds she wore even in the morning and for the rouge with which she plastered her cheeks, had declared herself in advance the Duchess's enemy, and on receiving her in her home made a point of opening the attack. The Duke Sanseverina, in the letters he wrote from***, seemed so delighted with his ambassadorship and especially with his hopes of the Grand Cordon, that his family were afraid he might leave part of his fortune to his wife, whom he showered with small gifts. La Raversi, although quite ugly, had as lover Count Balbi, the best-looking man at the court: as a rule she succeeded in everything she undertook.

The Duchess maintained a very splendid establishment. The Palazzo Sanseverina had always been one of the most magnificent in the city of Parma, and the Duke, to mark his ambassadorship and his future Grand Cordon, was spending vast sums on improving it; the Duchess directed the renovations.

The Count had guessed correctly: shortly after the presentation of the Duchess, young Clélia Conti appeared at court; she had been made a canoness.* In order to offset the blow to the Count's prestige that this favour might be seen as, the Duchess gave a party on the pretext of inaugurating the *palazzo* gardens, and in her very gracious way made Clélia, whom she called her young friend from Lake Como, queen of the entire evening. As if by chance, her monogram was displayed on the principal transparencies.* Young Clélia, though rather pensive, spoke pleasantly about their little adventure near the lake, and of her deep gratitude. She was said to be very pious and very fond of solitude. 'I'd wager', said the Count, 'that she's bright enough to be ashamed of her father.' The Duchess felt drawn towards this young girl and made her her friend; she did not wish to appear jealous, and included her in all the outings she planned; her system, in a word, was to try to lessen all the animosities directed at the Count.

Everything was going well for the Duchess; this existence at court, where one must always be on the lookout for storms,

amused her; she felt as if she was beginning life afresh. The Count, to whom she was tenderly attached, was literally out of his mind with happiness. This agreeable state of affairs had made Mosca completely cold-blooded about all matters relating solely to the furtherance of his ambitions. Therefore, barely two months after the Duchess's arrival, he was appointed to the Premiership with all its rights and privileges, which are very similar to those of the Sovereign himself. The Count had untold influence over the mind of his master, as was proven by an event which made a deep impression on everyone in Parma.

At a ten-minute distance from the town in a south-easterly direction rises that famous fortress which is so renowned throughout Italy and whose gigantic tower, measuring 180 feet in height, can be seen from so far away. The tower is modelled on Hadrian's mausoleum in Rome and was built by Paul III's grandchildren, the Farneses, in the early years of the sixteenth century; it is so broad in diameter that on the platform which extends across its top it was possible to construct a *palazzo* for the governor of the fortress, as well as a second prison, called the Farnese Tower. This prison, erected in honour of Ranuce-Ernest III's eldest son, who had been the dearly loved lover of his own stepmother, is considered beautiful and unusual by the locals. The Duchess was curious to see it; on the day of her visit the heat in Parma was overpowering and up on that lofty tower she found air to breathe, which so delighted her that she spent several hours there. The rooms of the Farnese Tower were promptly placed at her disposal.

On the platform of the huge tower the Duchess encountered a poor Liberal prisoner, who had come there to enjoy the half-hour of exercise he was allowed every three days. She had not yet acquired the discretion necessary in the court of an absolute ruler, and on her return to Parma she talked about this man, who had told her his full story. Marquise Raversi's party took up the Duchess's remarks and repeated them everywhere, with high hopes that they would shock the Prince. And indeed, Ernest IV liked to reiterate that the important thing was, above all else, to strike the imagination.

'Forever is a big word,' he would say, 'and more terrible in Italy than elsewhere'; consequently, he had never in his whole life granted anyone a pardon. A week after her visit to the fortress the Duchess received a letter of commutation of sentence, signed by the Prince and the Minister but with the name left blank. The prisoner whose name she wrote in would have his property restored to him and be permitted to go and spend the remainder of his days in America. The Duchess wrote the name of the man who had spoken to her. Unfortunately this man turned out to be a bit of a rascal, a weak character; it was on his testimony that the famous Ferrante Palla had been condemned to death.

The exceptional nature of this pardon put the crowning touch to the good fortune enjoyed by the Duchess Sanseverina. Count Mosca was beside himself with happiness, this was a wonderful period in his life, and it had a decisive influence on the destiny of Fabrice. The latter was still in Romagnano, near Novara, going to confession, going hunting, never reading, and courting a noblewoman as instructed. The Duchess was still rather shocked by this last requirement. Another sign which did not bode well for the Count was that, although she was completely frank with him about any topic under the sun, and thought aloud in his presence, she never spoke to him about Fabrice without first carefully choosing her words.

'If you like,' said the Count to her one day, 'I'll write to that delightful brother of yours on Lake Como, and with a little trouble on my part and on the part of my friends in***, I'll force that Marquis del Dongo to ask for your charming Fabrice's pardon. If it's true, as I have no doubt it is, that Fabrice is a cut above those young men who parade their English horses around the streets of Milan, what a life for him, at eighteen, to be doing nothing, with the prospect of doing nothing forever! If heaven had granted him a real passion for anything at all, were it only fishing, I would respect it; but what will he do in Milan even after his pardon's granted? At a certain hour of the day he'll ride a horse that he'll have had sent from England, and at a different hour lack of employment will make him visit his mistress, whom he'll love less

well than his horse... But if you instruct me to, I'll try to arrange for your nephew to have that kind of life.'

'I'd like him to be an officer,' said the Duchess.

'Would you advise a sovereign to entrust a position, which on any given day might be quite important, to a young man who: one, is capable of enthusiasm and two, has shown enthusiasm for Napoleon, to the point of going and joining him at Waterloo? Just think where we'd all be if Napoleon had been victorious at Waterloo! It's true that we wouldn't have any Liberals to be afraid of, but blue-blooded sovereigns would only be able to reign if they married the daughters of their Marshals. So for Fabrice a military career would be like being a squirrel in a revolving cage: a lot of activity without the slightest progress. He'd have the pain of seeing himself passed over in favour of every low-born loyalist. The most important quality in a young man today, or more precisely for perhaps the next fifty years, as long as we're still afraid and religion has not been re-established, is not to be capable of enthusiasm and not to be intelligent.

'I've had an idea, but at first you'll object violently to it, and it'll give me endless trouble for goodness knows how long; it's completely mad but I'd like to do this for you. But then tell me, if you can, what I wouldn't do for the sake of one of your smiles.'

'Well?' said the Duchess.

'Well! In Parma we've had three members of your family as archbishop: Ascagne del Dongo, who was a writer, in 1600 and something, then Fabrice in 1699, and a second Ascagne in 1740. If Fabrice is prepared to enter the prelate and distinguish himself by virtues of the highest order, I'll make him bishop somewhere and then archbishop here, provided of course that I continue to be influential. The real objection is this: will I remain a minister long enough to put into effect this beautiful plan, which requires a number of years? The Prince may die, or he may have the bad taste to dismiss me. But anyway, it's the only means in my power to do something for Fabrice that would be worthy of you.'

They argued for a long time; the Duchess hated the idea.

'Prove to me again', she said to the Count, 'that any other career is out of the question for Fabrice.' The Count did so. 'You're regretting the splendid uniform,' he added, 'but I don't know what I can do about that.'

At the end of the month that the Duchess had asked for so she could think the matter over, she agreed with a sigh to the Minister's wise views. 'He can look high and mighty riding about some big city on an English thoroughbred,' repeated the Count, 'or he can take up a calling which is not incompatible with his birth; I can see no middle course. Unfortunately, a gentleman can become neither a doctor nor a lawyer, and this is the century of the lawyer.'

'Always remember, Signora,' the Count said again, 'that if you choose the fashionable Milan life-style for your nephew, you'll be ensuring for him the kind of future enjoyed by those of his contemporaries who are considered the most privileged. Once he's been pardoned, you can give him fifteen, twenty, thirty thousand lire; it's all the same to you, neither you nor I care about saving money.'

The Duchess was sensitive on matters of pride; she did not wish Fabrice to be nothing but a spendthrift; she reverted to her lover's plan.

'Please understand', the Count said to her, 'that I've no intention of making Fabrice into one of those exemplary priests of whom we see so many. No, he's first and foremost a nobleman; he can remain completely ignorant if he so pleases, that will in no way prevent his becoming bishop and archbishop if the Prince continues to consider me a useful man.'

'If it is your gracious wish to accept my proposal as a definitive plan,' the Count added, 'Parma must on no account see our protégé in a modest situation. People will be shocked by his future high estate if he is seen here as an ordinary priest; he must not appear in Parma until he's wearing the *purple stockings* and is suitably rigged out. † Everybody

† In Italy young men who have patrons or who are very learned become a 'monsignore' or prelate, which is not the same as bishop; they then wear purple stockings. To become a monsignore no vows are taken, and it is possible to abandon the purple stockings and marry.

will then guess that your nephew is to become a bishop, and no one will be shocked.

'If you take my advice, you'll send Fabrice for three years to Naples, to do his theology. When the Ecclesiastical Academy is closed for vacations he can, if he wishes, visit Paris or London, but he must never set foot in Parma.' This remark made the Duchess almost shudder.

She sent a messenger to her nephew, asking him to meet her in Piacenza. Needless to say, the messenger carried with him all necessary moneys and passports.

Fabrice arrived first at Piacenza and hurried to meet the Duchess, greeting her with rapturous embraces that made her dissolve into tears. She was happy that the Count was not present; it was the first time since the beginning of their relationship that she had had such a feeling.

Fabrice was deeply touched, and then distressed, by the plans the Duchess had made on his behalf; his hope had always been that once the Waterloo affair was satisfactorily settled, he would go into the army. One thing impressed the Duchess and further reinforced the romantic idea she had formed of her nephew: he flatly refused to lead the life of a man-about-town in one of the big Italian cities.

'Can't you see yourself on the Corso in Florence or Naples, riding an English thoroughbred?' the Duchess asked him. 'And for the evening, a carriage, a pleasant set of rooms, etc.' She dwelt on the details of this vulgar vision of happiness, seeing with delight that Fabrice scornfully rejected it. He's a hero, she thought.

'And after ten years of this agreeable life, what will I have done?' said Fabrice; 'what will I be? A *mature* young man who'll have to give way to any handsome adolescent making his *début* in society, he too riding an English thoroughbred.'

At first Fabrice refused to even consider the idea of the Church; he spoke of going to New York, of becoming a citizen and a soldier of the Republic in America.

'You're making such a mistake! There wouldn't be any war, and you'd be idling about in cafés again, only with no elegance, no music, no love affairs', replied the Duchess. 'Believe me, in America life both for you and for me would

be a sorry business.' She explained to him the worship of the almighty dollar, and the respect one must show for the ordinary workman, who decides everything with his vote. They returned to the idea of the Church.

'Before you get all worked up,' the Duchess said to him, 'be clear about what the Count is asking of you: it's not at all a matter of leading the more or less exemplary and virtuous life of a poor priest like Father Blanès. Remember what your uncles who were archbishops of Parma were like; take another look at the accounts of their lives in the supplement to the genealogy. It becomes someone of your lineage to be first and foremost an aristocrat, noble, generous, the defender of justice, destined from the start to be at the head of his order... and in his entire life guilty of only one base deed, but that a very useful one.'

'Well, there go all my illusions,' said Fabrice with a deep sigh; 'it's a bitter sacrifice! I admit, I hadn't taken into account this abhorrence of enthusiasm and intelligence that we shall be seeing in absolute rulers from now on, even when those qualities are used to their advantage.'

'Remember that a political declaration, or a passing fancy, may drive the enthusiast to join the party opposing everything he's worked for all his life!'

'Me an enthusiast!' repeated Fabrice, 'what a strange accusation! I can't even fall in love!'

'What?' cried the Duchess.

'When I have the honour of courting a beautiful woman, even one who's well-born, and pious, I'm incapable of thinking about her except when I see her.'

This confession made a strange impression on the Duchess.

'I must have a month,' went on Fabrice, 'to take my leave of Signora C*** of Novara and, which is more difficult, of the dreams of my entire life. I'll write to my mother, who'll be kind enough to come and see me at Belgirate, on the Piedmontese side of Lake Maggiore, and, on the thirty-first day from now, I'll be in Parma, incognito.'

'You must do no such thing!' exclaimed the Duchess. She did not want Count Mosca to see her talking to Fabrice.

The same characters met again at Piacenza; on this occasion the Duchess was in a state of great agitation; a political storm had erupted at court and Marquise Raversi's party was close to victory; it was possible that Count Mosca would be replaced by General Fabio Conti, the head of what was called in Parma the 'Liberal party'. Except for the name of the rival who was gaining favour with the Prince, the Duchess told Fabrice everything. Once again she talked about the prospects for his future, even in the event that the all-powerful protection of the Count were lacking.

'I'm going to spend three years at the Ecclesiastical Academy in Naples,' said Fabrice, 'but since above all else I'm to be a young nobleman, and you don't require me to lead the austere life of a virtuous seminarist, this period in Naples doesn't alarm me in the least, it'll be every bit as good a life there as in Romagnano, where the best society was beginning to think me a Jacobin. During my exile I've discovered that I don't know anything, not even Latin, not even spelling. I'd intended to re-educate myself in Novara, and I'll gladly study theology in Naples, it's a complicated subject.' The Duchess was delighted. 'If they throw us out,' she told him, 'we'll come and see you in Naples. But since for the time being you accept the plan of the purple stockings, the Count, who knows present-day Italy through and through, has asked me to pass on the following suggestion. Whether or not you believe what they teach you, *don't ever voice any objection*. Imagine that you're being taught the rules of whist; would you make any objection to the rules of whist? I told the Count that you were a believer, and that pleased him; it's useful both in this world and the next. But, as a believer, don't give way to the vulgar temptation of speaking with disgust of Voltaire, Diderot, Raynal* and all those hare-brained Frenchmen who prepared the ground for the two Chambers. Let those names pass your lips but rarely; when the occasion calls for it, however, speak of those gentlemen with dispassionate irony; they've long since been refuted and their attacks are no longer of the slightest consequence. Believe unquestioningly everything you're told at the Academy. Remember that there are those who'll keep careful note of your smallest objections;

you'll be forgiven a little love affair if it's conducted discreetly, but never a doubt; age puts an end to the love affairs and intensifies the doubts. Follow these principles at confession. You'll be given a letter of recommendation to a bishop who is assistant to the Cardinal Archbishop of Naples; to him alone you should confess your escapade in France and your presence near Waterloo on the 18th of June. Moreover, you must abridge it considerably, make it seem less of an adventure, admit it only so that you can't be accused of having kept it secret; you were so young in those days!

'The second idea the Count sends you is this: if you think of a brilliant rebuttal, a masterful rejoinder that changes the direction of the conversation, don't give way to the temptation to be brilliant, hold your peace; the discerning will see your intelligence in your eyes. It'll be time enough to be clever when you're a bishop.'

Fabrice started off in Naples with a modest carriage and four good Milanese servants provided by his aunt. After a year of study no one said he was a clever man, he was seen as a nobleman who worked diligently, was very generous, but was something of a libertine.

That year, which Fabrice found quite amusing, was terrible for the Duchess. On three or four occasions the Count came within an ace of being dismissed; the Prince, more fearful than ever because he was ill that year, believed that by getting rid of him he would rid himself of the loathing inspired by the executions carried out before the Count became a Minister. Rassi was his heart's darling who must at all costs be retained. The dangers threatening the Count made the Duchess passionately attached to him; she no longer thought about Fabrice. In order to prepare the ground for their possible retirement, it transpired that the air in Parma, in truth a trifle damp like that of the whole of Lombardy, did not at all agree with her. Eventually, after intervals of disgrace which for the Count—the Prime Minister—sometimes meant spending twenty whole days without seeing his master in private, Mosca emerged victorious; he had General Fabio Conti, the so-called Liberal, named governor of the fortress where the Liberals sentenced by Rassi were imprisoned. 'If Conti treats

his prisoners with leniency,' said Mosca to his beloved, 'he'll be disgraced as a Jacobin whose political ideas make him forget his duties as a general; if he shows himself to be stern and pitiless, and I believe it's in that direction he'll lean, he'll cease to be the leader of his own party and will alienate every family with a relative in the fortress. That poor fellow's good at putting on an unctuously respectful manner in the presence of the Prince; he'll change his uniform four times a day if need be and he can discuss a point of etiquette, but he hasn't the brains to follow the difficult path that alone can save him; and in any case I'll be there.'

The day after the nomination of General Fabio Conti, which ended the ministerial crisis, it emerged that Parma was to have an ultra-monarchical newspaper.

'What dissension this paper's going to cause!' said the Duchess.

'The idea of starting this newspaper's probably my masterpiece,' replied the Count with a laugh; 'little by little—and very reluctantly—I'll allow the extremists, the ultras, to take its control away from me. I've seen to it that the editors will receive handsome salaries. They'll be applying on all sides for these positions; the affair will keep us busy for a month or two, and people'll forget the danger I've just been in. Those solemn gentlemen P. and D. have already put their names forward.'

'But this paper will be nauseatingly absurd.'

'I certainly hope so', replied the Count. 'The Prince will read it every morning and will be full of admiration for my opinions, since I am its founder. As for the details, he may approve or he may be shocked; it'll use up two of the hours he devotes to work. There'll be some rows about the newspaper but by the time the serious complaints begin, eight or ten months from now, it'll be entirely in the hands of the ultra-extremists. The party that's bedevilling me will be held accountable, and I myself will raise some objections to the paper; actually, I'd rather see a hundred outrageously idiotic articles than a single person hanged. Who remembers an idiotic article two years after the appearance of the official newspaper? Whereas the sons and family of the man who's

hanged vow an implacable hatred towards me that'll last as long as I do and may perhaps shorten my life.'

The Duchess, who was always passionately involved in something, always busy, never idle, was more intelligent than anyone at the court of Parma, but she lacked the patience and the impassivity essential to success in intrigue. Nevertheless, she was now capable of following—with rapt attention—the interests of the various cliques, and she was even beginning to have some personal influence with the Prince. Clara-Paolina, the Princess Regnant, who was surrounded by honours but a prisoner of the most antiquated etiquette, considered herself the unhappiest of women. The Duchess Sanseverina paid court to her, and set about proving to her that she was not so very unhappy. It should be explained that the Prince only saw his wife at dinner; that meal lasted thirty minutes and the Prince went for weeks at a time without saying a word to Clara-Paolina. The Duchess tried to change all that; she amused the Prince, the more so because she had managed to preserve her independence intact. Even had she wished it, she would have been incapable of never wounding any of the fools in which that court abounded. It was this utter lack of skill on her part that made her detested by the rank and file of the courtiers, all of them counts or marquises with, on average, about 5,000 lire a year. She grasped this unfortunate fact straight away, and applied herself exclusively to pleasing the Sovereign and his wife; the latter's influence over the heir to the throne was absolute. The Duchess knew how to amuse the Sovereign and took advantage of the extreme attention he paid to her slightest word to poke fun at the absurdities of the courtiers who loathed her. Ever since the blunders that Rassi had made him commit—and blunders in blood cannot be redressed—the Prince was sometimes afraid, and often bored, which had predisposed him to the miseries of envy; he felt he hardly ever had any fun, and grew morose when he believed others were enjoying themselves; the sight of happiness made him furious. 'We must hide our love', said the Duchess to Mosca; and she gave the Prince to understand that she was now no more than very mildly enamoured of the Count, who was of course such a worthy man.

This discovery had given his Highness one happy day. From time to time, the Duchess would happen to mention a possible plan of hers of taking a few months' holiday each year to see Italy, which she did not know at all: she would visit Naples, Florence, Rome. Now, nothing in the world could give the Prince greater pain than an apparent desertion of this nature: it was one of his most conspicuous failings that any act which might seem to imply scorn of his capital city pierced him to the heart. He felt he had no way of making Signora Sanseverina stay, and Signora Sanseverina was far and away the most brilliant woman in Parma. People would return from the surrounding countryside in order to attend her 'Thursdays', a fact which, given Italian laziness, was quite unprecedented; these were truly gala affairs at which the Duchess almost always introduced something new and fascinating. The Prince was dying to see one of these Thursday receptions, but how to set about it? A visit to the home of a private subject! Neither his father nor he had ever done such a thing!

One particular Thursday it was rainy and cold; every minute of the evening the Prince could hear carriages rattling over the cobbles of the square outside the palace, as they drove by on their way to the Duchess's reception. He felt a surge of impatience; others were enjoying themselves and he, the sovereign, the absolute ruler, who should be enjoying himself more than anyone in the world, he was bored! He rang for his aide-de-camp; it would take time to place a dozen trusted men in the street leading from the royal palace to the Duchess's home. Finally, after an hour that seemed an eternity to the Prince, and during which he was repeatedly tempted to risk the daggers and rush out without taking any precautions, he appeared in Signora Sanseverina's outer drawing-room. If a thunderbolt had fallen in that drawing-room it could not have produced such a sensation. In an instant, as the Prince advanced, a stupefied silence spread throughout those noisy and convivial apartments; every pair of eyes, staring wide, was fixed upon the Prince. The courtiers looked disconcerted; only the Duchess did not appear to be astonished. Eventually, when those present had found their tongues again, their over-

riding concern was to resolve the following important question: had the Duchess been forewarned of this visit, or had she, like everyone else, been taken by surprise? The Prince enjoyed himself, and the reader will be able to judge how profoundly impulsive was the Duchess's character, and what immeasurable power she had acquired through her adroitly dropped hints of vague travel plans.

While she was seeing the Prince out and listening to his very gracious remarks, an extraordinary idea occurred to her that she dared convey to him with complete simplicity, as if it was the most commonplace thing in the world.

'If your Serene Highness would favour the Princess with three or four of these charming remarks he is lavishing on me, he would make me far happier than by telling me here that I am pretty. I would not on any account wish the Princess to view with displeasure the signal honour that your Highness has just bestowed on me.' The Prince stared at her and replied in a dry tone:

'I believe I am at liberty to go where I choose.'

The Duchess blushed.

'I simply intended', she instantly replied, 'to save your Highness a wasted journey, for this Thursday will be the last. I am leaving to spend a few days in Bologna or Florence.'

As she walked back through her drawing-rooms, everyone believed her to have attained the highest possible favour, and yet she had just ventured to do something that within living memory no one in Parma had ever risked. She made a sign to the Count, who left his whist table and followed her into a small room that, though brightly lit, was empty.

'What you did is very daring,' he told her; 'I would not have advised it; but when one is deeply in love,' he added with a laugh, 'happiness increases love, and if you leave tomorrow morning, tomorrow evening I'll follow you. The only thing keeping me will be this thankless job at the Ministry of Finance that I was foolish enough to take on, but in four hours of hard work one can hand over the keys to quite a number of coffers. Let us return to your guests, my dearest, and let me play the mindless minister to the full and without reserve; it will, perhaps, be our final performance in this

town. There's nothing the Prince will stop at if he fancies he's been defied; he'll call it "setting an example". When these people have left, we'll consider ways of securing your doors for tonight; the best thing might perhaps be to set off immediately for your house at Sacca, on the Po, which has the advantage of being only half-an-hour from the Austrian states.'

This moment was exquisite, both for the Duchess's love and for her self-esteem; she looked at the Count and her eyes filled with tears. That so powerful a minister, surrounded by throngs of courtiers who treated him with a veneration equal to what they showed the Prince himself, should be willing to abandon everything for her sake, and so readily!

On returning to the reception rooms she was beside herself with joy. Everyone behaved towards her with the greatest deference.

'How different the Duchess looks when she's happy,' the courtiers were remarking on all sides; 'you would hardly recognize her. So, after all, this woman who has such a Roman soul, who's so above everything, does nevertheless deign to appreciate the inordinate favour that the Sovereign's just bestowed upon her.'

Towards the end of the evening the Count approached her. 'I've something to tell you.' Those close to the Duchess moved away.

'The Prince, on returning to the palace, paid a call on his wife,' continued the Count. 'Imagine the surprise! "I've come to tell you about a really very pleasant evening", he said to her, "that I spent at Signora Sanseverina's. It was she who asked me to describe to you the way she's fixed up that smoky old *palazzo*." So then the Prince sat down and set about detailing each one of your drawing-rooms.

'He spent more than twenty-five minutes with his wife, who was weeping from happiness; despite all her intelligence she couldn't find a single word with which to maintain the light tone his Highness tried to give to this conversation.'

This Prince was not a bad man, whatever the Liberals of Italy might say. It was true he had had quite a large number of them thrown into prison, but that was out of fear, and he

would sometimes say, as if seeking comfort for certain memories: 'It's better to kill the devil than let the devil kill you.' The day following the evening described above, he was very happy indeed, he had done two fine things: he had gone to the Thursday reception, and spoken to his wife. He addressed a word to her at dinner; in brief, that 'Thursday' of the Duchess Sanseverina's resulted in a domestic revolution affecting the whole of Parma; la Raversi was filled with dismay, and the Duchess knew a double joy: she had been able to help her lover, and he was more deeply enamoured of her than ever.

'And all because of a very foolhardy idea of mine!' she said to the Count. 'Of course I'd be freer in Rome or Naples, but would I find such an absorbing game there? Indeed, my dear Count, I would not, and you make me very happy.'

CHAPTER 7

The story of the next four years is made up of little details of court life as trivial as those recounted above. Every spring the Marquise came with her daughters to spend two months at the Palazzo Sanseverina or the estate at Sacca, on the banks of the Po; they had some very happy times and they spoke of Fabrice, but not once would the Count permit him to visit Parma. The Duchess and the Minister did indeed have to intervene to remedy a few indiscretions, but on the whole Fabrice kept reasonably well to the line of conduct he had been advised to follow: a nobleman who was studying theology and did not at all rely upon his own virtues as a means of advancement. While in Naples he developed a keen interest in the study of antiquity, and took part in archeological digs; this passion had almost replaced his passion for horses. He sold his English thoroughbreds so that he could pursue some excavations at Miseno, where he found a bust of the young Tiberius which was judged to be among the most beautiful relics of antiquity. The discovery of this bust was almost the most intense pleasure he experienced in Naples. He had too fastidious a spirit to wish to imitate other young men and, for instance, play the role of lover in any serious fashion. He did not, of course, lack for mistresses, but they were of no importance to him, and, despite his age, it could be said of him that he did not know the meaning of love; he was loved all the more because of this. Nothing prevented him from behaving with the most enviable self-possession, since for him one young and pretty woman was always interchangeable with another young and pretty woman; only the more recent acquaintance always seemed the more alluring. One of the most generally admired ladies of Naples quite lost her head over him during the last year of his stay; at first he found this entertaining, but eventually it bored him exceedingly, so much so that one of the joys of leaving Naples was being freed from the attentions of the charming Duchess d'A***. This was in 1821, when, after Fabrice had passed his exam-

inations with adequate marks, his director of studies (or tutor) received a decoration and a gift, and he himself finally set off to visit that city of Parma about which he thought so often. He was now a Monsignore, with four horses to draw his carriage; at the post-town immediately before Parma he took only two horses, then stopped in the city in front of the church of Saint-Jean. This was the site of the sumptuous tomb of his great-great-uncle the Archbishop Ascagne del Dongo, the author of the Latin Genealogy. He prayed at the tomb, then went on foot to the home of the Duchess, who did not expect him until some days later. There were a great many visitors gathered in her drawing-room; presently she was left alone.

‘Well! Are you pleased with me?’ he asked her as he threw himself into her arms: ‘Thanks to you, I’ve spent four reasonably happy years in Naples, instead of being bored in Novara with the mistress authorized by the police.’

The Duchess could not get over her astonishment, she would not have recognized him had she passed him in the street; she thought him one of the handsomest men in all Italy, which indeed he was; his face in particular was charming. When she sent him to Naples he had had an impudent, daredevil air; the riding-crop he always carried then seemed an inherent part of his being; now, in the presence of strangers, he bore himself in the most dignified and restrained manner, and when they were alone she again saw in him all the ardour of his early years. He was a diamond that had lost nothing in the polishing. Barely an hour had passed since Fabrice’s arrival when Count Mosca appeared: he came a little too soon. The young man spoke to him in such suitable terms about the Cross of Parma bestowed on his tutor, and expressed his deep gratitude for other services which he did not dare refer to so openly, displaying such perfect judgement that the Count’s impression of him was immediately favourable. ‘This nephew of yours’, he murmured to the Duchess, ‘will confer distinction upon each of the high offices in which you propose to place him one day.’ Up to that point everything was going wonderfully well, but when the Count, delighted with Fabrice and until then totally engrossed in his

exploits, glanced at the Duchess, he was struck by the extraordinary look in her eyes. This young man is making a strange impression here, he said to himself. This was a bitter thought; the Count had reached *fifty*, a fact which is exceedingly unpalatable and whose implications can perhaps only be fully appreciated by a man deeply in love. He was a very good person, very worthy of being loved, except for the harshness of his ministerial policies. But, in his eyes, that cruel word *fifty* cast a pall over his entire life and would have been capable of making him cruel on his own account. During the five years since he had persuaded the Duchess to come to Parma, she had often made him jealous, especially in the early days, but never had she given him any real cause for complaint. He even believed, and he was right, that it was with the intention of more completely securing his heart that the Duchess had resorted to those apparent marks of favour accorded to some of the young bloods of the court. He was sure, for example, that she had rejected the advances of the Prince, who had on that occasion made a revealing comment.

‘But if I were to accept your Highness’s attentions,’ the Duchess laughingly asked him, ‘how could I possibly face the Count?’

‘I should be almost as disconcerted as yourself. The dear Count! My friend! But I’ve thought of a simple solution to the problem: the Count would be shut up in the fortress for the rest of his days.’

At the moment of Fabrice’s arrival the Duchess was so overcome with happiness that she never once considered the ideas that the look in her eyes might suggest to the Count. The impression was profound and the suspicions irreversible.

Fabrice was received by the Prince two hours after his arrival; the Duchess, foreseeing the good impression that this impromptu audience would make with the public, had been requesting it for the past two months; this favour placed Fabrice in an unrivalled position from the very first; the excuse had been that he was simply passing through Parma on the way to visit his mother in Piedmont. At the moment when a charming little note from the Duchess informed the Prince that Fabrice awaited his orders, his Highness was

feeling bored. I'm about to meet a fatuous little goody-goody, he said to himself, with a face that's either commonplace or crafty. The commandant of the fortress had already reported on the first visit to the tomb of the uncle who was an archbishop. The Prince saw a tall young man come in whom he would have taken for a young officer, had he not been wearing purple stockings.

This little surprise put an end to boredom: here's a fine fellow, he thought, God only knows what favours I'll be asked for on his behalf, probably everything that's in my power to grant. He's just arrived, he must be feeling nervous; I'll try my hand at Jacobin politics, and we'll see what he has to say for himself.

After the Prince's initial gracious remarks:

'Well, Monsignore,' he said to Fabrice, 'are the people of Naples happy? Do they love the king?'

'Serene Highness,' replied Fabrice without a moment's hesitation, 'I used to admire, as I passed them in the street, the superb demeanour of the soldiers of his Majesty's various regiments; people of breeding show respect towards their masters as is only fitting; but I must confess that I have never ever permitted those of the lower classes to speak to me about anything other than the work for which I pay them.'

Goodness! thought the Prince, here's a fine one! He's been well-schooled, that's his aunt's quick wit. The Prince, now on his mettle, exerted considerable skill to make Fabrice talk about this highly sensitive subject. Spurred on by danger, the young man had the good fortune to come up with some admirable replies; 'It's little short of insolence to profess love for one's king,' he said, 'what one owes one's king is blind obedience.' At the sight of so much prudence the Prince almost lost his temper; it seems this is a clever man who's come to us from Naples, and I dislike that breed; a clever man may live by the best principles, and even do so sincerely, but there's always some side of his nature by which he's kin to Voltaire and Rousseau.

The Prince felt as if he was being challenged by the exceedingly good manners and the totally unexceptionable replies of the young student; what he had expected was not happening;

quickly adopting a friendly tone, and briefly referring back to the great principles of society and of government, he quoted, making appropriate changes, a few phrases of Fénelon's which, as a child, he had been made to learn for use in public audiences.

'These ideas astonish you, young man,' he said to Fabrice (he had called him 'Monsignore' at the beginning of the audience and he fully intended to include another 'Monsignore' when he said goodbye, but in the main body of the conversation he felt it was subtler, and more conducive to the affective tone he sought, to address him in an informal, friendly manner); 'these ideas astonish you, young man, and I confess that they bear little resemblance to the *absolutist rigmarole* [his very words] that you can read every day in my official newspaper... But, Heavens above, what am I doing referring to that? You cannot know anything about the writers in that newspaper.'

'I beg your Serene Highness's pardon, not only do I read the Parma newspaper, which I consider quite well written, but what is more I am in agreement with its view that everything that has happened since the death of Louis XV in 1715 is at once a crime and a blunder. The greatest concern of man is his salvation—there cannot be two opinions on such a subject—and that joy will endure for all eternity. The words "liberty, justice, the happiness of the majority", are vile and criminal; they foster habits of discussion and distrust in the minds of men. A chamber of deputies will *distrust* what those people call "the ministry". Once this fatal habit of *distrust* has taken hold, human frailty applies it to everything, man begins to distrust the Bible, the commands of the Church, tradition, etc., etc.; from that moment he is lost. Even supposing, and this is an abominably false and criminal thing to say, that this distrust of the authority of princes *appointed by God* ensured happiness for the twenty or thirty years of life each one of us can expect, what is a half-century or even an entire century compared with an eternity of torment?' Etc.

It was evident from Fabrice's style of speaking that he was trying to present his thoughts in the way that would be most

easily understood by his hearer, it was clear that he was not just repeating something he had learned.

The Prince soon lost interest in fencing with this young man whose grave and simple manners made him uncomfortable.

'Goodbye, Monsignore,' he said to him abruptly, 'I can see that the Ecclesiastical Academy of Naples provides an excellent education, and it is only to be expected that when these fine precepts are assimilated by a mind of such distinction, the results are brilliant. Goodbye'; and he turned his back on him.

The brute doesn't like me, thought Fabrice.

And now it remains to be seen, reflected the Prince as soon as he was alone, if this handsome young man is susceptible to feeling passion for anything; if so, he would be perfect... Could anyone repeat his aunt's lessons more cleverly? I felt as if I was hearing her speak; if there was a revolution here, it would be she who would edit *Le Moniteur*,* just as that San-Felice woman once did in Naples! But San-Felice, despite being twenty-five and beautiful, did get herself just a trifle hanged!* A warning to women who are too clever. In supposing Fabrice to be the pupil of his aunt, the Prince was mistaken; clever people who are born on the throne or close to it soon lose any subtlety of perception; they banish freedom of conversation, which they think of as vulgarity, from their presence; they wish to see nothing but masks and yet claim to be connoisseurs of beautiful complexions; the amusing thing is that they imagine themselves to be very perceptive. In this case, for example, Fabrice pretty well believed everything we have heard him say; it's true he hardly thought twice in a month about all these great principles. He had keen and lively preferences, he was intelligent, but he had faith.

The love of liberty, the fashion for and the pursuit of 'the happiness of the majority' with which the nineteenth century is so infatuated, were to his eyes simply a *heresy* which will pass as others have done, but only after it has killed a great many souls, just as the plague kills a great many bodies while it ravages a country. And in spite of all that, Fabrice delighted in reading French newspapers, and even took risks to obtain them.

When Fabrice, considerably ruffled by his audience at the palace, had returned and was describing to his aunt the Prince's various attacks:

'Now you must go immediately,' she told him, 'to see our excellent Archbishop, Father Landriani; go there on foot, walk softly up the stairs and be very quiet in the antechambers; if they keep you waiting, that's all to the good, that's splendid! In a word, be *apostolic!*'

'I understand, our friend is a hypocrite.'

'Absolutely not, he's virtue personified.'

'In spite of what he did', asked Fabrice in astonishment, 'at the time of Count Palanza's dreadful death?'

'Yes, my dear, in spite of what he did: our Archbishop's father came from the lower middle class, he was a clerk in the Ministry of Finance, which explains everything. Monsignore Landriani's a man with a lively, wide-ranging, profound mind; he is sincere, and loves goodness; I am convinced that if an Emperor Decius reappeared among us he would embrace martyrdom just like that Polyucte we could have seen at the Opera last week.* So much for the handsome side of the coin; now, here's the reverse: the minute he's in the presence of the Sovereign or even just of the Prime Minister, he's dazzled by such grandeur, he becomes flustered, he blushes; he literally cannot say no. That's the reason for the things he's done which have earned him such a cruel reputation throughout Italy; but what is not generally known is that when public opinion enlightened him over the trial of Count Palanza, he undertook a self-imposed penance by fasting on bread and water for thirteen weeks, as many weeks as there are letters in the names "Davide Palanza". We have at our court an extremely clever rascal called Rassi, the Chief Judge or Public Prosecutor, who, on the occasion of Count Palanza's death, cast a spell upon Father Landriani. At the time of the thirteen-week penance Count Mosca—out of pity but also a trifle maliciously—used to invite Landriani to dinner once or even twice a week; being very anxious not to offend, the good Archbishop would eat his dinner like everyone else. He would have considered it seditious and Jacobinic to make a parade of a penance for an act approved by the Sovereign.

But it turned out that for every dinner at which his duty as a loyal subject required him to dine like everyone else, he imposed on himself a further penance of two days on bread and water.

‘Monsignore Landriani, a superior intellect and a first-class scholar, has only one weakness, he wants to be liked; so, look kindly upon him and, by your third visit, with real affection. That, together with your birth, will immediately endear you to him. Do not appear surprised if he escorts you as far as the stairs, try to appear accustomed to his manners; he’s a born groveller in the presence of aristocrats. Apart from that, behave in a simple, apostolic way, no wit or brilliance, no clever rejoinders; if you don’t frighten him off, he’ll like you; remember it’s important that of his own accord he should choose you as his Vicar-General. The Count and I will be surprised and even annoyed at this too rapid preferment; that’s essential with respect to the Sovereign.’

Fabrice hurried to the Archbishop’s palace; by a remarkable stroke of luck the good prelate’s valet, who was slightly deaf, did not hear the name ‘del Dongo’; he announced a young priest called Fabrice; the Archbishop was with a parish priest whose morals left much to be desired, whom he had summoned in order to reprimand him, a duty he found extremely painful and which he did not wish to have hanging over him any longer; he therefore kept waiting, for three-quarters of an hour, the great-nephew of the celebrated Archbishop Ascagne del Dongo.

What description could do justice to his apologies and his despair when, after accompanying the priest to the second antechamber and enquiring, on again passing by this man who was waiting there, ‘what he could do for him’, he noticed the purple stockings and heard the name Fabrice del Dongo? The incident struck our hero as so amusing that, even though this was a first visit, he was overcome with affection for the saintly prelate and dared to kiss his hand. You should have heard the Archbishop repeat in tones of despair: ‘A del Dongo kept waiting in my antechamber!’ To make amends he thought himself obliged to recount the entire episode of the parish priest, his wrongdoings, his replies, etc.

Can it actually be possible, wondered Fabrice as he made his way back to the Palazzo Sanseverina, that this is the man who pressed for the execution of that poor Count Palanza!

'So what does your Excellency think?' Count Mosca laughingly enquired, when Fabrice was back in the Duchess's drawing-room. (The Count did not want Fabrice to call him 'Excellency'.)

'I'm dumbfounded: I don't understand a thing about human nature; I'd have wagered, if I hadn't known his name, that that man can't stand to see a chicken bleed.'

'And you'd have won,' replied the Count; 'but when he's with the Prince, or even just with me, he can't say no. In truth, if I'm to produce my full effect, I have to put on the yellow Grand Cordon over my coat; he'd contradict me if I was wearing my dress coat, so I always put on a uniform to receive him. It isn't up to us to undermine the prestige of power, the French newspapers are doing quite well enough in that regard; this *ingrained deference* will barely last out our lifetime, and you, nephew, will outlive it. You will be a good man!'

Fabrice took great pleasure in the company of the Count. He was the first truly great man willing to talk to him frankly; besides, they shared a common interest, in antiquities and archeological digs. For his part, the Count was flattered by the profound attention with which the young man listened to him; but there remained a capital objection: Fabrice had a room in the Palazzo Sanseverina, he spent all his time with the Duchess, he let it be seen, in all innocence, that this intimacy made him very happy, and his eyes and complexion were heart-breakingly brilliant.

Ranuce-Ernest IV, whose attentions the ladies almost never rejected, had for some time now felt piqued because the Duchess's virtue, which was well known at the court, had not made an exception in his favour. As we have seen, Fabrice's wit and presence of mind had shocked the Prince from the start. The deep devotion which the Duchess and Fabrice felt for one another and which they recklessly displayed displeased the Prince; he listened with extreme attention to his courtiers' remarks, which were endless. For a month the

court did little else but talk of and marvel at the young man's arrival and the unprecedented audience he had obtained; this gave the Prince an idea.

There was in his guard an ordinary soldier with a remarkable head for wine; this man spent all his time in taverns, and kept his Sovereign directly in touch with what the troops were thinking. Carlone could not write, otherwise he would long since have been promoted. Now, his orders were to be at the gates of the palace every day just as the great clock was striking twelve. Shortly before midday the Prince himself went and arranged in a particular way the slatted shutters of a room next to that in which his Highness dressed. He returned to the room a few minutes after twelve had struck and found the soldier; in his pocket the Prince had a sheet of paper and pen and ink, and he dictated to Carlone the following letter:

'Your Excellency is without doubt a very clever man, and it is thanks to your profound sagacity that this state is so well governed. But, my dear Count, such great successes are never entirely free of a modicum of envy, and I am very much afraid that people may enjoy a little laugh at your expense, if your sagacity does not guess that a certain handsome young man has been fortunate enough to inspire, perhaps without intending to do so, a most unusual kind of love. This fortunate mortal is, I am told, only twenty-three, whereas you and I, my dear Count, and this complicates the matter, are more than twice that age. In the evening, at a certain distance, the Count is charming, vivacious, witty, as attractive as anyone can be; but, to speak frankly, in the morning, in private, the new arrival may perhaps seem more engaging. Now we women set great store by this bloom of youth, especially when we have passed thirty. Is there not already talk of establishing this pleasing young man at our court, in some fine position? And who indeed is the person who speaks of this most often to your Excellency?'

The Prince took the letter and gave the soldier two scudi.

'This is in addition to your pay,' he told him gloomily; 'don't breathe a word to anyone, or it'll be the dampest, deepest hole in the fortress for you.' The Prince kept in his

desk a collection of envelopes with the addresses of most of the members of his court, written by this same soldier who everyone believed could not write, and who never wrote his own police reports: the Prince chose the appropriate envelope.

Some hours later, Count Mosca received a letter in the post; the Prince had calculated the time of its delivery, and just as the postman, who had been observed going into the Ministry carrying in his hand a small letter, was emerging from it, Mosca was summoned to his Highness. Never had the favourite looked so utterly disconsolate; the better to enjoy this, the Prince cried on seeing him:

‘I need to relax by simply chatting with my friend, rather than working with my Minister. I’ve a terrible headache this evening, and what’s more I’m feeling dreadfully depressed.’

Need I dwell on the abominable temper the Prime Minister Count Mosca de la Rovere was in by the time he was permitted to take leave of his noble master? Ranuce-Ernest IV was expert at torturing a heart, and I could, without being too unjust, compare him to a tiger that takes pleasure in toying with its prey.

The Count had himself driven home at a gallop; as he went in he shouted that absolutely no one was to be admitted; he ordered that the duty-clerk was free to go (he found it abhorrent that a human being should be within reach of his voice), and he raced up to the great picture gallery where he shut himself in. There at last he could give full vent to his rage; there he spent the evening pacing about in the darkness like someone in a frenzy. He was trying to silence his heart, so as to concentrate the whole force of his attention on considering what he should do. Gripped by anguish that would have inspired pity in his cruellest enemy, he was thinking: The man I detest lives at the Duchess’s and spends all his time with her. Should I try to make one of her women talk? Nothing could be more dangerous: she is so good; she pays them well! They adore her! (And who, dear God, does not adore her?) This is the question, he went on furiously: Should I let this frantic jealousy of mine be seen, or should I never speak of it?

If I keep quiet, she won't hide anything from me. I know Gina, she's wholly a creature of impulse: her behaviour cannot be predicted even by her; if she tries to plan what she's going to do ahead of time, she grows confused; invariably, in the moment of action, she has a fresh idea that she delights in pursuing as if it were the best idea in the whole world, and which ruins everything.

If I never say a word about what I'm suffering, she won't hide anything from me and I'll see everything that goes on...

Yes, but if I speak, I'll make different things happen; I'll make her reflect; I'll forestall many of those horrible events that could occur... Perhaps he'll be sent away (the Count took a deep breath), and then I'll almost have carried the day; even if she's upset at the time, I'll calm her down... And what could be more natural than being upset?... She's loved him like a son for the last fifteen years. That's where all my hopes lie: *like a son*... But she hasn't seen him since he ran away to Waterloo; and now that he's back from Naples he seems, especially to her eyes, like a different man. *A different man!* he repeated in a fury, and that man is charming; in particular he has that unaffected and tender air and that smiling eye that promise so much happiness! The Duchess cannot see eyes like his every day at our court!... No, here we have only gloomy or sardonic glances. I myself, I who am beset by affairs of state, who only govern by virtue of my influence over a man who would love to make me look ridiculous, what kind of expression must my eyes often reveal? Ah! No matter how careful I am, it must be my eyes, above all else, that give my age away. Don't my high spirits always verge on irony? I'll even say, for here I must be honest, don't my high spirits hint at the near presence of absolute power... and cruelty? Is it not the case that I sometimes say to myself, particularly if I am annoyed: 'I can do whatever I like!' And I even add something foolish, I say I ought to be happier than other men, because I possess what the others do not: supreme power, in three cases out of four... Well then, let me be fair: the habit of thinking that way must spoil my smile... must give me a selfish, self-satisfied air... And how charming is that smile of his! It

breathes the easy happiness of early childhood, and it inspires that happiness.

Unfortunately for the Count, that evening the weather was warm and oppressive, heralding a storm; the kind of weather, in a word, which in such countries fosters desperate resolutions. How am I to recount all the lines of reasoning, all the different ways of looking at what was happening to him, that tortured this passionate man for three mortal hours? Caution finally carried the day, solely as a consequence of this idea: I'm most probably mad; I imagine I'm thinking it through clearly, but I'm not; I'm just casting about to find a less painful way of looking at things, and I'm passing right over some decisive point. Since I'm blinded by such excessive pain, I'll follow the principle that all wise people believe in, the principle of *prudence*.

Besides, once I utter the fatal word 'jealousy', my role is fixed for all eternity. On the other hand, if I say nothing today, tomorrow I can still speak, I'm still in complete control. The crisis was too acute, the Count would have gone out of his mind if it had lasted any longer. His attention happened to settle on the anonymous letter, and this brought him a few moments' relief. Who could have sent it? A search for names followed, with a separate appraisal of each one, which created a diversion. In the end, the Count recalled a flash of malice that had gleamed in the Sovereign's eye when, towards the end of the audience, he remarked: 'Yes, my good friend, let us admit that the pleasures and cares of the most successful ambition, even those of absolute power, are nothing compared with the intimate happiness we derive from relations of affection and love. I'm a man before I'm a prince, and when I have the good fortune to be in love, my mistress speaks to the man and not to the prince.' The Count connected this moment of malicious delight with the sentence in the letter which read: 'It is thanks to your profound sagacity that this state is so well governed.' Those are the Prince's words, he exclaimed, in a courtier they would be gratuitously imprudent; the letter is from his Highness.

This problem having been resolved, the brief happiness occasioned by the pleasure of guessing was soon effaced by

the cruel vision, which returned, of Fabrice's engaging charms. It was like an enormous weight falling once more on to the wretched man's heart. What does it matter who wrote the anonymous letter! he exclaimed furiously, does that in any way alter the reality it describes? This fancy of hers can change my life, he reflected, as if to excuse himself for being so distraught. If she loves him in a certain way, at the first opportunity she'll take off with him for Belgirate, for Switzerland, for anywhere in the world. She's rich, and anyway, if she had to live on just a few lire a year, what would she care? Didn't she confess to me, not a week ago, that her *palazzo*, which is so beautifully arranged, so magnificent, bores her? That youthful soul of hers must have novelty! And in how simple a form has this new felicity appeared. She'll be swept away before she's aware of the danger, before she's thought of pitying me! And yet I'm so miserable! exclaimed the Count, bursting into tears.

He had sworn not to go and see the Duchess that evening, but was unable to stop himself; never had his eyes thirsted so desperately for the sight of her. Towards midnight he appeared in her drawing-room; he found her alone with her nephew; at ten she had sent everyone away and ordered her doors closed for the night.

On seeing the tender intimacy that reigned between those two, and the innocent happiness of the Duchess, suddenly the Count became conscious of an appalling problem. It had never entered his head during his long deliberations in the picture gallery: how was he to conceal his jealousy?

Not knowing what pretext to adopt, he declared that that evening he had found the Prince excessively hostile towards him, contradicting everything he said, etc., etc. He had the pain of seeing the Duchess hardly listen to him, and pay no attention to those details which, even just two days earlier, would have elicited endless conjectures from her. The Count looked at Fabrice: never had that handsome Lombard countenance appeared so simple and so noble! Fabrice was paying more attention than the Duchess to the difficulties he was relating.

Really, he thought, that face unites extreme goodness with a certain expression of innocent and tender joy which is irresistible. It seems to say: in this world the only things that matter are love and the happiness it brings. And yet if you raise some point where intelligence is called for, his eyes light up and astonish you, and you are quite taken aback.

Everything is simple in his eyes because everything is seen from above. Good God! However can I fight an enemy like him? And after all, what is life without Gina's love? With what utter delight she's listening to the charming witticisms of that youthful mind, which to a woman must seem to be without equal in this world!

A monstrous idea gripped the Count like a spasm of cramp: shall I stab him here, in front of her, and then kill myself?

He paced about the room, his legs barely supporting him but with his hand clenched convulsively round the hilt of his dagger. Neither of them was paying attention to what he might do. He said he was going to give an order to his footman, they did not even hear him; the Duchess was laughing fondly at something Fabrice had just said to her. The Count went up to a lamp in the outer drawing-room and looked to see if the point of his dagger was well sharpened. I must be gracious, I must behave perfectly towards this young man, he was telling himself as he returned and walked up to them.

He was going mad: he fancied that as they leant forward they were kissing one another there, before his very eyes. It's impossible in my presence, he thought, I'm taking leave of my senses. I must calm myself; if I behave boorishly, the Duchess is quite capable, simply from injured vanity, of following him to Belgirate, and there, or on the journey, words may be uttered by chance that will give a name to what they feel for one another; and then, in an instant, all the consequences will follow.

Solitude will make those words decisive, and in any case, once the Duchess is far away, what will become of me? And if, after overcoming endless difficulties on the part of the Prince, I go and show my old and anxious face in Belgirate, what role will I play beside those two deliriously happy people?

Even here, what am I other than the *terzo incommodo* (this lovely Italian language is perfectly suited to love)! *Terzo*

incommodo (a third person who is in the way)! How painful for an intelligent man to feel that he's been cast in this loathsome role, and yet be unable to make himself get up and leave!

The Count was on the point of losing control, or at the very least of revealing his suffering through the agitation of his features. Finding himself near the door while pacing round the drawing-room, he took to his heels, calling out in a kind and friendly tone: 'Good night, you two!' I must avoid bloodshed, he thought.

The morning after this horrible evening, after a night spent partly in detailing Fabrice's advantages, partly in the terrible grip of the most agonizing jealousy, the Count had the idea of summoning a young valet of his; this man was courting one of the Duchess's maids, a girl named Chékina, who was a favourite of Gina's. Fortunately this young servant was very methodical, even miserly, in his ways, and was hoping for a position as concierge in one of Parma's public institutions. The Count ordered this man to make Chékina, his beloved, come at once. The man obeyed, and an hour later the Count suddenly appeared in the room where this girl and her suitor were. The Count frightened them both by the amount of gold he gave them, then, looking her straight in the eyes, he addressed these few words to the trembling Chékina:

'Does the Duchess make love with Monsignore?'

'No,' said the girl, making up her mind after a moment's silence, '...no, *not yet*, but he often kisses the Signora's hands, laughingly, it's true, but with great feeling.'

This testimony was supplemented by a hundred replies to as many furious questions of the Count's; his tormented passion made certain that the unfortunate couple earned the money he had showered upon them; in the end he believed what they were telling him, and felt less unhappy.

'If ever the Duchess suspects about this interview,' he said to Chékina, 'I'll send your intended to the fortress for twenty years, and you won't see him again until his hair's white.'

During the next few days Fabrice, in his turn, lost all his high spirits.

'I assure you,' he said to the Duchess, 'Count Mosca dislikes me.'

'Too bad for his Excellency,' she replied, with some ill humour.

That was not the true reason for the anxiety that had made Fabrice's high spirits disappear. The position fate has placed me in is untenable, he reflected. I'm very sure that she'll never speak, she'd be as appalled by the thought of saying too much as she would be by incest. But if one evening, after a rash and heedless day, she should examine her conscience, if she believes that I've been able to guess what she seems to feel for me, what role will I play in her eyes? Exactly that of *casto Giuseppe* (an Italian proverb alluding to the ridiculous role of Joseph with the wife of Potiphar the eunuch).

Ought I to reveal in a nicely worded confession that I'm not susceptible to true love? I haven't a sure enough touch to make this declaration in such a manner that it won't seem like rank impertinence. The only expedient open to me is a grand passion left behind in Naples, so I'd better return there for twenty-four hours; that would be a sensible course of action, but what a bore! The other possibility is an affair with some low-born little creature here in Parma, which she might not like, but anything is preferable to the frightful role of a man who refuses to understand what he's seeing. This last choice might, it's true, compromise my future, I'd have to reduce that danger by exercising extreme care and paying well for discretion. The cruel thing about all these reflections was that Fabrice really loved the Duchess far better than anyone else in the world. I must be a real blunderer, he thought angrily, to be so afraid of not being able to convince her of something that is so true! Lacking the skill to extricate himself from this predicament, he grew moody and depressed. Good God, what would become of me if I quarrelled with the only person in the world whom I love deeply? On the other hand, Fabrice could not bring himself to mar such perfect happiness by a tactless word. His situation was so full of charm! The close friendship of such an amiable and lovely woman was so delightful! As far as the more prosaic side of life was concerned, her protection ensured him an agreeable position at this court, where the vast intrigues, thanks to the explanations she gave him, amused him like a play! But, he thought, at any

moment I might be awakened by a thunderbolt! These happy, tender evenings, spent almost alone with such a captivating woman, if these evenings lead to something better, she'll think of me as a lover, she'll expect rapture and delirium of me, and all I'll ever have to offer her is the deepest friendship, but no love; nature has deprived me of that kind of sublime folly. How many reproaches have I had to endure in that connection! I think I can still hear the Duchess of A***, and I didn't care a rap for the Duchess! She'll believe I am lacking in love for her, whereas it is love that is lacking in me; she'll never be able to understand me. Often, after an anecdote about the court which is vital to my education, recounted by her with that grace and light-heartedness that are hers alone, I kiss her hands and sometimes her cheek. What shall I do if that hand presses mine in a certain way?

Every day Fabrice visited the most highly respected and the least amusing houses in Parma. Guided by the sagacious advice of the Duchess, he skilfully courted the Princes, both father and son, the Princess Clara-Paolina, and his Lordship the Bishop. He met with some success, but this did not console him for his mortal fear of falling out with the Duchess.

CHAPTER 8

Thus, less than a month after arriving at court, Fabrice knew all the vexations of a courtier, and the intimate friendship that had made his life happy was poisoned. One evening, tormented by these thoughts, he left the Duchess's drawing-room where he seemed too like a currently favoured lover; wandering at random in the city, he passed by the theatre, which was lit up; he went in. For a man of his cloth this was a gratuitously rash act, one that he had promised himself he would avoid in Parma, which is, after all, a small town of only 40,000. It is true that early on he had abandoned his official costume; in the evening, unless he was attending a function in the very highest society, he simply wore black like someone in mourning.

At the theatre he took a box on the third level so as not to be seen; the play was Goldoni's *La locandiera*.* He studied the architecture of the theatre, barely turning his eyes towards the stage. But the large audience kept bursting into laughter; Fabrice glanced at the young actress playing the part of the landlady, and thought her funny. He looked at her more attentively; she struck him as absolutely charming and above all perfectly natural: an unaffected young girl who laughed before the audience did at the delightful witticisms Goldoni had put into her mouth and which she seemed quite astonished to be uttering. He enquired her name and was told: 'Marietta Valserra.'

Ah! he thought, she's taken my name, how extraordinary; in spite of his resolutions he did not leave the theatre until the end of the play. He returned the following day; three days later he knew the address of Marietta Valserra.

The very evening of the day on which he had with some difficulty obtained this address, he noticed the Count looking at him with a very kindly expression. That poor jealous lover, who found it the most difficult thing in the world to behave within the constraints of prudence, had set spies to follow the young man, and he was pleased by Fabrice's escapade at the

theatre. The Count's joy was beyond description when, the morning after the day when he had managed to make himself be nice to Fabrice, he learnt that the latter, partly disguised, it is true, by a long, blue-coat, had climbed right up to the wretched rooms Marietta Valserra occupied in an old house behind the theatre. His joy was all the greater when he discovered that Fabrice had presented himself under a false name, and had had the honour to excite the jealousy of a rogue called Giletti, who in towns played the role of Third Servant, and in villages danced on the tightrope. This noble lover of Marietta's was unsparing in his abuse of Fabrice, saying he wanted to kill him.

Opera companies are formed by an *impresario* who signs on actors in various different places, as long as he is able to pay them and they are not working, and this randomly assembled company stays together for one or two seasons at most. The same is not true of theatrical companies which, although they travel from town to town and change their residence every two or three months, none the less form a family in which all the members either love or detest one another. Within these companies there are established couples, which the young blades of the towns where the players are performing often find it extremely difficult to break up. This is exactly what was happening to our hero: little Marietta was quite fond of him, but she was horribly afraid of Giletti who claimed he was her sole master, and kept a close watch on her. He went round declaring that he would kill the 'Monsignore', for he had followed Fabrice and managed to discover his name. This Giletti was beyond question the ugliest man alive and the least suited to love: inordinately tall, he was horribly thin, badly pockmarked, and slightly cross-eyed. Full of the graces of his calling, moreover, he generally made his entrance in the wings where his comrades were gathered by turning cartwheels or indulging in some other charming trick. He revelled in parts where the actor appears with his face whitened with flour and receives or delivers an infinite number of blows with a cudgel. The salary of this worthy rival of Fabrice's was thirty-two lire a month, and he thought himself very rich.

Count Mosca felt as if he were coming back from the dead when he was assured by his spies that all these details were absolutely true. His urbanity returned; in the Duchess's drawing-room he seemed more cheerful and better company than ever, and he was extremely careful not to breathe a word to her about the little adventure that was restoring him to life. He even took precautions to ensure that she would find out about what was happening as late as possible. Finally he had the courage to listen to the voice of reason, which for the past month had been vainly telling him that whenever the merit of a lover begins to wane, that lover must absent himself.

Important business required his presence in Bologna, where twice a day government messengers brought him not so much official documents from his department, as news of the loves of the little Marietta, the rage of the terrible Giletti, and the ventures undertaken by Fabrice.

An agent of the Count's asked, on several occasions, for *Arlecchino fantasma e pasticcio* to be performed. This was one of Giletti's successes (he emerges from the pie at the very moment when his rival Brighella is cutting it, and lays into him with a cudgel); this provided an excuse to give Giletti 100 lire. Giletti, who was heavily in debt, naturally did not say a word about this splendid windfall, but he became amazingly arrogant.

Fabrice's whim evolved into a feeling of hurt pride (young as he was, his troubles had already reduced him to having *whims*)! Vanity drove him to the theatre; the girl's acting was very spirited and amused him; for an hour after leaving the theatre he was in love. The Count returned to Parma on hearing that Fabrice was in real danger; Giletti, who had been a dragoon in the fine Napoleonic dragoon regiment, talked seriously of killing Fabrice and was making plans to escape afterwards to Romagna. If the reader is very young, he will be shocked by our admiration for this fine act of valour. Yet it required no small degree of heroism on the Count's part to return from Bologna; for after all, in the mornings his complexion often looked sallow, and Fabrice was so radiant, so serene! Who would have thought of blaming him for Fabrice's death, if it occurred during his absence, and for such a

stupid reason? But he was one of those rare souls who reproach themselves eternally for a generous act that they could have done and did not do; besides, he could not bear the idea of seeing the Duchess unhappy, and because of him.

On his return he found her silent and gloomy; what had happened was this: the little maid Chékina, tortured by remorse and gauging the gravity of her offence by the size of the sum she had received for committing it, had fallen sick. One evening the Duchess, who was fond of her, went up to her room. The young girl could not resist this mark of kindness; she burst into tears, tried to give back to her mistress what was left of the money she had received, and finally found the courage to tell her about the Count's questions and her replies. The Duchess hurried over to the lamp and extinguished it, then told little Chékina she forgave her, but on condition that she would never breathe a word of this strange scene to a living soul; the poor Count, she added lightly, fears ridicule; all men are like that.

The Duchess quickly returned to her apartments. Hardly had she shut herself in her bedroom when she burst into tears; she felt there was something horrible in the idea of making love with Fabrice, whom she had known since infancy, and yet what did her own behaviour imply?

This was the prime cause of the deep melancholy in which the Count found her engulfed; once he had returned, she experienced fits of impatience with him, and almost with Fabrice; she would have liked never to see either of them again; she was annoyed by what she saw as the ridiculous role Fabrice was playing in relation to little Marietta, for the Count had, like a true lover incapable of keeping a secret, told her everything. She could not become inured to this misfortune: her idol had a flaw; eventually, in a moment of true friendship, she asked advice of the Count; for Mosca this was a wonderful event, and a beautiful reward for the honourable impulse that had brought him back to Parma.

'What could be simpler!' said the Count with a laugh: 'young men want to have every woman they lay eyes on, then on the morrow forget all about them. Isn't he supposed to go to Belgirate to see the Marquise del Dongo? Well! Let

him go. While he's away I'll ask the players to take their talents elsewhere, and I'll pay their travel expenses; but we'll soon see him falling in love with the first pretty woman that chance puts in his path: that's as it should be, I wouldn't have it otherwise... If necessary, ask the Marquise to write.'

This idea, presented with an air of complete indifference, lightened the Duchess's mood, for she was frightened of Giletti. That evening the Count announced, as if by chance, that a messenger was leaving for Vienna and travelling via Milan; three days later Fabrice received a letter from his mother. He set off, feeling very annoyed because, thanks to Giletti's jealousy, he had not yet been able to take advantage of the excellent intentions that little Marietta had assured him of through the good offices of a *mammaccia*, an old woman who served her as a mother.

Fabrice found his mother and one of his sisters at Belgirate, a large Piedmontese village on the right bank of Lake Maggiore; the left bank belongs to the Milanese, and hence to Austria. This lake, which is parallel to Lake Como and, like Como, runs north-south, lies some twenty leagues further west. The mountain air, the majestic and tranquil appearance of this magnificent lake which reminded him of the one beside which he had spent his childhood, all this helped transform Fabrice's vexation, which was close to anger, into a gentle melancholy. It was with infinite tenderness that he now summoned up the memory of the Duchess; it seemed to him that while he was far away, he was beginning to feel for her the kind of love he had never felt for any woman; nothing would have been harder for him than to be separated from her for ever, and if, while he was in this mood, the Duchess had stooped to any kind of coquetry, she would have won his heart; for instance, if she had let him see he had a rival. But, far from taking any such decisive step, she reproached herself bitterly on realizing that her thoughts invariably kept company with the young traveller. She reproached herself for what she still termed a passing fancy as if it were something detestable; she increased her attentions and her kindnesses to the Count who, seduced by so much charm, paid no heed

to the cold voice of reason which prescribed a second trip to Bologna.

The Marquise del Dongo, busy with the wedding of her eldest daughter whom she was marrying to a Milanese duke, could only spare three days for her beloved son; never had she found him so tenderly affectionate. In the midst of the melancholy that increasingly possessed Fabrice's soul, a strange and even ridiculous idea had come to him, and had instantly taken root. Dare we confess that he wanted to consult Father Blanès? That excellent old man was utterly incapable of understanding the suffering of a heart torn apart by youthful passions of almost equal force, and in any case it would have taken a week to give him even a glimpse of all the different interests that Fabrice had to reconcile in Parma; but, as he thought about consulting the priest, Fabrice rediscovered the freshness of his feelings at sixteen. Can this be believed? It was not simply as a wise man, as a completely devoted friend, that Fabrice wished to talk to him; the purpose of this trip and the feelings of our hero during the fifty hours it lasted are so absurd, that in the interests of this story it would undoubtedly have been better to suppress them. I fear lest Fabrice's credulity may deprive him of the reader's sympathy; but after all that is what he was like, and why should I flatter him more than anyone else? I have not flattered Count Mosca or the Prince.

Fabrice, therefore, since we must tell all, Fabrice accompanied his mother to the port of Laveno on the left bank of Lake Maggiore, the Austrian bank, where she disembarked about eight in the evening. (The lake is considered neutral territory, and no passport is required by those who do not disembark.) But hardly had night fallen when he had himself put ashore on that very same Austrian side, in the middle of a little wood that comes down to the water's edge. He had hired a *sediola*,* a kind of fast, rustic tilbury, which enabled him to follow some five hundred paces behind his mother's carriage; he was disguised as a servant of the Casa del Dongo, and it did not occur to any of the numerous employees of the police or the customs to ask him for his passport. A quarter of a league from Como, where the Marquise and her daughter

were to spend the night, he took a path on the left which, after skirting the town of Vico, merges with a little road that had recently been made right along the edge of the lake. It was midnight, and Fabrice could assume he would not meet any police. The little road kept passing through clusters of trees whose dark foliage was silhouetted against a sky that was full of stars, but veiled in a light mist. The waters and the sky were deeply peaceful; Fabrice's soul could not resist this sublime beauty; he stopped, then sat down on a small rock which jutted out into the lake, forming a little promontory. The universal silence was unbroken except for the regular sound of the lake's tiny waves dying away on the sand. Fabrice had an Italian heart: I ask you to pardon him for that defect, which will render him less attractive, and consisted principally in this: he was only vain by fits and starts, and just the sight of that sublime beauty filled him with emotion and expunged from his anxieties what was biting and bitter. As Fabrice sat on his solitary rock, no longer needing to be on his guard against the police and protected by the deep night and the vast silence, sweet tears filled his eyes, and there he knew, and with such little effort, the happiest moments he had known in a long time.

He resolved never to lie to the Duchess, and because in that moment he loved her to the point of adoration, he swore he would never tell her that *he loved her*; never would he utter the word love in her presence, since the passion bearing that name was a stranger to his heart. Overwhelmed by the surge of generosity and virtue that gave him happiness at that moment, he resolved to tell her everything at the first opportunity: his heart had never known love. Once he had conclusively taken this courageous decision he felt as if an enormous weight had been lifted. Perhaps she'll say something to me about Marietta: well, I'll never see the little thing again, he told himself cheerfully.

The morning breeze was beginning to temper the oppressive heat of the preceding day. The faint white light of dawn was already picking out the peaks of the Alps which rise up to the north and east of Lake Como. Their massive shapes, which even in the month of June are white with snow, stand

out against the clear blue of a sky which at those great heights is always pure. A branch of the Alps thrusting southward towards the happy land of Italy separates the slopes of Lake Como from those of Lake Garda. As Fabrice's gaze followed along each branch of those sublime mountains, the dawn as it grew brighter marked out the valleys which divide them, touching with light the delicate mist that rose up from the depths of the gorges.

Fabrice had set off again a few minutes before this; passing by the hill that forms the Durini peninsula, he at last beheld the belfry of Grianta village, where he had so often watched the stars with Father Blanès. How ignorant I was in those days! I couldn't even understand, he thought, the idiotic Latin of those astrological treatises my master used to dip into, and I believe that I respected them especially because, since I only understood a few words here and there, my imagination set about giving them a meaning, and as romantic a meaning as possible.

Little by little his reverie took a different course. Could there be any truth in this science? Why should it be different from other sciences? A certain number of imbeciles and clever people agree among themselves that they know, let's say, the *Mexican* language; on the basis of this they foist themselves upon society, which respects them, and upon governments, which pay them money. They are showered with favours precisely because they have no intelligence, and the powers that be do not have to fear that they will stir up the populace and raise the emotional temperature with noble sentiments! Take, for instance, Father Bari, to whom Ernest IV has just granted a pension of 4,000 lire and the Cross of his order for having restored nineteen lost lines of a Greek dithyramb!

But, Heavens above, have I any right to think such things ridiculous? Who am I to complain, he suddenly thought, pausing, wasn't that very same Cross just given to my tutor in Naples? Fabrice was conscious of a feeling of profound unease; the fine enthusiasm for virtue which so recently had made his heart beat faster was turning into the base pleasure of enjoying the spoils of a theft. Oh well! he finally thought, his lack-lustre gaze that of a man dissatisfied with himself,

since my birth gives me the right to profit by these abuses, it would be patently foolish for me not to accept my share; but I mustn't even think of damning them in public. This reasoning was not unsound, but Fabrice had certainly come down from the heights of sublime happiness where he had been transported an hour earlier. The notion of privilege had withered that plant—always so very delicate—which we call happiness.

If we should not believe in astrology, he went on, trying to dull his unease, if that science, like three-quarters of the non-mathematical sciences, consists merely in a collection of enthusiastic half-wits and of clever hypocrites who are paid by the masters they serve, why is it that I think so often and with such emotion of that fateful happening? I did indeed escape that time from the prison in B***, but with the clothes and papers of a soldier who'd been cast into prison for a good reason.

Fabrice's reasoning could never reach beyond this point; he studied the difficulty from a hundred different angles, without ever being able to get the better of it. He was as yet too young; in his idle moments his spirit would occupy itself in blissfully savouring sensations produced by romantic circumstances which his imagination was always ready to conjure up. He was very far indeed from employing his time in patiently observing the actual details of events, the better to fathom their causes. Reality still seemed to him to be mean and dirty; I can understand that people do not like to look at it, but in that case they should not theorize about it. Above all, they should not use various matters about which they know nothing, as grounds for their objections.

That is why Fabrice, without lacking in intelligence, could not manage to see that his half-belief in omens was for him like a religion, a deep-rooted impression received in the earliest years of his life. To think of this belief was like feeling; it was a way of being happy. And he kept on trying to discover how it could be a *proven* science, a real science, of the same kind, for example, as geometry. He searched his memory eagerly for every situation where an omen he had observed had not been followed by the auspicious or inauspicious event

that it had seemed to predict. But, even while convinced that he was acting rationally and drawing nearer to the truth, his attention would dwell with delight on the memory of cases where the omen had been followed, in the main, by the fortunate or unfortunate outcome that he had believed it foretold, and his soul was filled with respect and emotion; he would have felt an overwhelming aversion for anyone who had denied the truth of omens, especially if they had done so ironically.

Fabrice was walking along without any awareness of distance, and he had reached this point in his fruitless cogitations when, on raising his head, he beheld the wall of his father's garden. This wall, which supported a handsome terrace, rose up more than forty feet above the road on the right hand side. A row of square-cut stones at the very top, near the balustrade, gave it a monumental air. It's not bad, thought Fabrice dispassionately, the architecture's good, almost Roman in style; he was drawing on his recently acquired knowledge of antiquities. Then he turned away his head in disgust, remembering his father's harshness, and especially his brother Ascagne's denunciation of him after his return from the trip to France.

That callous denunciation is the source of my present life; I may loathe and despise it, but in fact it's changed my destiny. What would have become of me, banished to Novara and barely tolerated by my father's steward, if my aunt hadn't made love with a powerful minister? If that aunt had happened to have a cold and commonplace soul instead of that tender and passionate one which loves me with a kind of ardour I find astonishing? Where would I be now if the Duchess had had a soul like that of her brother, the Marquis del Dongo?

Overwhelmed by these cruel recollections, Fabrice was now walking hesitantly; he reached the edge of the moat at a point exactly opposite the magnificent façade of the castle. Hardly did he give a glance at that huge building blackened by time. The noble language of its architecture left him unmoved; the memory of his father and brother closed his soul to any feelings of beauty, he was only aware of the need to be on his guard in the presence of hypocritical, dangerous

enemies. For a moment he gazed with unequivocal dislike at the little window of the third-floor room he had occupied before 1815. His father's character had robbed the memories of his early years of all their charm. I haven't been back in there, he thought, since the 7th of March at eight in the evening. I left that room to go and get Vasi's passport, and the next day fear of spies made me hasten my departure. When I came back after the trip to France, I hadn't the time to go up there, not even to see my engravings, thanks to my brother's denunciation of me.

Fabrice turned his head away in disgust. Father Blanès is over eighty-three, he reflected sadly, and according to my sister he hardly ever comes to the castle any more; the infirmities of old age have taken their toll. The years have chilled that resolute and noble heart. God knows how long it's been since he climbed up to his belfry! I'll hide in the store-room, under the vats or the wine-press, until he wakes; I won't disturb the good old man's rest; he'll probably even have forgotten what I look like! Six years is a long time at that age! All I'll find is the tomb of a friend! And it's really childish of me, he added, to have come here to experience the loathing that my father's castle inspires in me.

Fabrice had just reached the little square in front of the church; it was with an astonishment bordering on ecstasy that he saw, on the second floor of the ancient belfry, the tall narrow window lit up by Father Blanès's small lantern. When he climbed up to the cage made of planks that formed his observatory, the Father was in the habit of leaving the lantern there, so that its light would not prevent him from being able to read his planisphere. That chart of the sky was spread out over a large earthenware pot which had once contained one of the orange trees at the castle. In the hollow at the bottom of the pot burned the tiniest of lamps, with a minute tin pipe that drew the smoke out of the pot; the shadow of the pipe marked north on the map. All these memories of such simple things flooded Fabrice's spirit with emotion, and filled it with happiness.

Almost without thinking, he gave the little low, short whistle through his hands which in the past had signalled that he wished to be admitted. Immediately, he heard the sound of

the rope that worked the latch on the belfry door being pulled several times from the top of the observatory. Beside himself with emotion, he raced up the stairs; he found Father Blanès seated as usual in his wooden armchair; his eye was glued to the eyepiece of a mural quadrant. With his left hand the priest signed to him not to interrupt his observations; after a moment he wrote a number on a playing-card, then turned round in his chair and opened his arms to our hero who, bursting into tears, threw himself into the priest's arms. Father Blanès was his true father.

'I was expecting you', said Blanès, when their first unrestrained, affectionate exchanges were over. Was this the priest speaking as a seer, or, since Fabrice was so often in his thoughts, had some astrological sign warned him, by pure chance, of his return?

'Here's my death approaching', said Father Blanès.

'What!' cried Fabrice, very upset.

'Yes,' went on the priest in a tone which, though serious, was not sad: 'Five-and-a-half or six-and-a-half months after I've seen you, my life will have known its full measure of happiness and will die away, "Come face al mancar dell' alimento" [like the little lamp when the oil runs dry]. Before my last hour comes, I shall probably pass a month or two without speaking, after which I shall be received into the bosom of our Father; that is, if he deems me to have fulfilled my obligations in the post where he placed me as shepherd.

'You're completely exhausted, after so much emotion you are in need of sleep. Since I've been expecting you I've kept a loaf of bread and a bottle of brandy hidden in my big instrument chest. Use them to restore your strength and try to summon up the energy to listen to me for a few more minutes. I have it in my power to tell you several things before the night is finally banished by the day; I can see these things far more clearly now than I shall perhaps be able to see them tomorrow. For, my child, we are always weak, and we must always take this weakness into account. It may be that tomorrow the old man, the earthly man in me, will be occupied with preparations for my death, and tomorrow night at nine you must leave me.'

When Fabrice had silently obeyed him as was his custom:

‘So, is it true,’ went on the old man, ‘that when you attempted to go to Waterloo, all you found at first was a prison?’

‘Yes, Father,’ replied Fabrice in astonishment.

‘Well that was an exceptional blessing as, forewarned by my voice, your soul can prepare itself for another prison that will be far harsher, far more terrible! You will probably only escape from it by means of a crime, but, heaven be thanked, this crime will not be committed by you. Never fall into crime no matter how fiercely you are tempted; I think I see that it will be a matter of killing an innocent person who inadvertently usurps your rights; if you resist the fierce temptation which will appear justified by the laws of honour, your life will be very happy in the eyes of men... and reasonably happy in the eyes of the sage,’ he added after a moment’s reflection; ‘you will die like me, my son, seated on a wooden bench, far from all luxury, no longer deceived by such things, and, like me, without any significant reason for self-reproach.

‘We shall now speak no more of things that lie in the future, I could add nothing that would be truly important. In vain have I tried to see how long this imprisonment will last; will it be six months, a year, ten years? I have not been able to find out anything; apparently I have committed some sin and it is the will of heaven that I be punished with the grief of this uncertainty. I’ve only seen that after the prison, but I do not know if it is at the very moment of your leaving it, there will be what I call a crime, but mercifully I believe I am certain that it won’t be committed by you. If you are so weak as to be a party to this crime, all the rest of my calculations are nothing but one long mistake. In that event you will not die with peace in your heart, seated on a wooden bench and dressed in white.’ As he said this, Father Blanès tried to stand up; it was then that Fabrice became conscious of the ravages of time; it took the priest almost a minute to get to his feet and turn towards Fabrice. The latter, motionless and silent, made no effort to help him. Father Blanès threw himself repeatedly into his arms, embracing him with the utmost tenderness. Then he went on, with all his former cheerfulness: ‘Try to settle yourself comfortably among my instruments and get

some sleep, take my fur-lined cloaks; you'll find several very costly ones that the Duchess Sanseverina sent me four years ago. She asked me for a prediction about you, which I was most careful not to send her, although I kept her cloaks and her fine telescope. Any prediction of the future is an infraction of the rule, and brings with it the danger of changing the event, in which case the entire science falls apart like a child's toy; and in any case there were some harsh things I should have said to that duchess who's still so pretty. By the way, don't be frightened if your sleep is disturbed by the bells, which will make a terrible racket in your ears when they're rung for the seven o'clock mass; later, on the floor below, they'll be setting the great bell ringing, the one that shakes all my instruments. Today's the feast of St Giovita, martyr and soldier. As you know, our tiny village of Grianta has the same patron saint as the large city of Brescia, which, by the by, deceived my illustrious master Jacques Marini de Ravenne in a most amusing way. He told me several times that I would have quite a splendid ecclesiastical career, he believed I would become priest of the magnificent church of St Giovita, in Brescia; and I've been priest of a little village of seven hundred and fifty souls! But it's all been for the best. It's not ten years since I discovered that if I had been parish priest at Brescia, my destiny would have been to be cast into prison up in the Moravian hills, at the Spielberg. Tomorrow I'll bring you all sorts of delicacies filched from the fine dinner I'm giving for all the local priests who're coming to sing at my High Mass. I'll leave them down below, but don't try to see me, don't come down to get those good things until you hear me leave. You must not see me again *by day*, and as tomorrow the sun sets at seven twenty-seven, I shan't come to embrace you until about eight, and you must leave while the hours can still be counted by nine, that is to say, before the clock strikes ten. Be careful not to be seen at the belfry windows: the police have your description and are more or less under the orders of your brother, who's quite a tyrant. The Marquis del Dongo's health is failing,' added Blanès sadly, 'and if he saw you, perhaps he would give you something directly. But rather questionable gifts of that kind are not suitable for a man like

you, whose strength will one day lie in his conscience. The Marquis loathes his son Ascagne, and it is that son who will inherit the five or six millions he possesses. That is only just. You, on his death, will receive an income of 4,000 lire, and fifty measures of cloth for your servants' mourning.'

CHAPTER 9

Fabrice's soul was in a state of exaltation from the old man's words, from the profound attention with which he had listened, and from his extreme fatigue. He found it very difficult to fall asleep, and his sleep was disturbed by dreams, perhaps portents of future events; he was awakened at ten the next morning by the shaking of the whole belfry: a terrible noise seemed to be coming from outside. He stood up in bewilderment, imagining it was the end of the world, then he thought he was in prison; it took him some time to recognize the sound of the big bell, which was being rung in honour of the great St Giovita by forty villagers (ten would have sufficed).

Fabrice looked for a convenient place from which he might see without being seen; he noticed that from this great height he commanded a view of the gardens and even of the interior courtyard of his father's castle. He had forgotten about him. The idea of his father reaching the end of his days changed all his feelings. He could even see the sparrows hunting for a few crumbs of bread on the big balcony of the dining-room. They're the descendants of those I tamed years ago, he thought. That balcony, like all the other balconies of the *palazzo*, was filled with a large number of orange trees in earthenware pots of differing sizes: this sight touched him; the appearance of the interior courtyard decorated in this manner, with its clearly outlined shadows intensified by the brilliant sunshine, was truly magnificent.

His thoughts returned to his father's failing health. But it's really extraordinary, he reflected, my father's just thirty-five years older than me, thirty-five and twenty-three only make fifty-eight! His eyes, which were fixed on the bedroom windows of this man who was so severe and who had never loved him, filled with tears. He trembled and a sudden shiver ran through his veins as he thought he recognized his father crossing a terrace that was decorated with orange trees and on the same level as his bedroom; but it was only a manservant. Immediately below the belfry, a number of young girls

dressed in white and divided into various groups were tracing patterns with red, blue, and yellow flowers on the ground of those streets where the procession was due to pass. But there was another sight that spoke more directly to Fabrice's soul: from the belfry his eyes could look down over the two branches of the lake several leagues away, and this sublime view soon made him forget all the others; it awakened the most noble feelings in his heart. All the memories of his childhood came thronging into his mind, and this day spent imprisoned in a belfry was perhaps one of the happiest of his life.

Happiness uplifted his thoughts to a level which was comparatively foreign to his nature; young as he was, he pondered the events of his life as if he had already reached its final moments. I have to admit, he told himself eventually, after several hours of delightful reverie, that since my arrival in Parma I have not known any joy as tranquil and perfect as the joy I used to feel in Naples when I was galloping on the roads of Vomero or racing along the shore at Miseno. All those very complicated interests of that nasty little court have made me nasty... I take no pleasure whatsoever in hating people; in fact I think I'd find it a miserable form of pleasure, to humiliate my enemies if I had any; but I haven't any enemies... Just a minute! he thought suddenly; Giletti's my enemy... Now this is most strange, he reflected; the pleasure I'd feel on seeing that very ugly man go to hell has outlived the very faint attraction I felt for little Marietta... She doesn't bear comparison with the Duchess d'A***, whom I was obliged to make love to in Naples because I'd told her I was in love with her. Good God! How bored I used to be during the endless assignations that the beautiful Duchess granted me; I felt absolutely different in that ramshackle room which they also used for cooking, where little Marietta received me twice, for just two minutes each time.

Good Lord! Whatever do those people eat? It's pitiful! I should have made her and her *mammaccia* an allowance of three steaks payable every day... Little Marietta, he added, took my mind off the evil thoughts that being close to that court inspired in me.

Perhaps I would have done well to choose the life of a man-about-town, as the Duchess said; she seemed to incline in that direction, and she's much cleverer than I am. Thanks to her generosity, or even just with my income of 4,000 lire and that investment of 40,000 at Lyons that my mother plans to give me, I'd always have a horse and a little money to pay for excavations and for starting a collection. Since it seems I am not destined to know love, those will always be, for me, my principal sources of happiness; I'd like, before I die, to see the battlefield of Waterloo again, and try to identify the meadow where I was so comically lifted up off my horse and seated upon the ground. When I'd completed that pilgrimage I'd return often to this sublime lake; no other sight in the whole world's as beautiful, at any rate to my heart. What's the point of going so far away to find happiness, it's here, within my reach!

Ah! reflected Fabrice, recognizing a problem: the police keep me away from Como; but I'm younger than the people who control what those policemen do. Here, he added laughingly, I wouldn't find another Duchess d'A***, but I'd have one of those little girls down there who're setting out flowers along the street, and actually I'd love her just as well; even in love I'm paralysed by hypocrisy, and our great ladies aspire to effects that are too exalted. Napoleon's filled them with ideas about high principles and constancy.

Hell! he suddenly exclaimed, drawing back his head from the window, as if afraid of being recognized despite the enormous wooden shutter that protected the bells from the rain, here comes a group of constables in full dress uniform. In fact ten constables, four of them non-commissioned officers, had appeared at the top of the village's main street. The sergeant was placing them every hundred paces along the route the procession would follow. Everyone here knows me; if I'm seen, they'll whip me away in a trice from the shores of Lake Como to the Spielberg, where they'll put a chain weighing 110 pounds on each leg; and how terrible that'll be for the Duchess!

It took Fabrice a couple of minutes to remember that, first, he was more than eighty feet above them, that the place he

was in was comparatively dark, that the eyes of those who might be able to see him were dazzled by brilliant sunshine, and that in fact they were parading about staring at streets where all the houses had just been whitewashed in honour of the feast of St Giovita. Despite all this lucid reasoning, Fabrice's Italian soul would henceforth have been incapable of enjoying any pleasure, had he not interposed between himself and the constables a scrap of old cloth that he nailed over the window and in which he cut two holes for his eyes.

For the past ten minutes the bells had been making the air resound, the procession was emerging from the church, the *mortaretti* could be heard. Fabrice turned his head and recognized that little walled esplanade looking over the lake, where so often, during his childhood, he had risked life and limb in order to watch the *mortaretti* fire between his legs, so that his mother had preferred to keep him at her side on feast-day mornings.

I should explain that the *mortaretti* (or little mortars) are simply gun barrels which have been sawn off so that they are only four inches in length; that is why the peasants are so eager to collect these gun barrels with which, since 1796, the politics of Europe has so abundantly strewn the plains of Lombardy. Once their length is reduced to four inches, these tiny cannons are loaded to the limit, placed upright on the ground, and linked together by a train of gunpowder; some two or three hundred of them are arranged in three rows like a battalion, and set up in some site near the route along which the procession will pass. As the Blessed Sacrament approaches, the train of gunpowder is set alight and then, one after another, the *mortaretti* begin firing with sharp little reports, in the most erratic and ridiculous way imaginable; the women go wild with delight. Nothing is as festive as the sound of those *mortaretti* heard from a distance across the lake, and softened by the rhythmic motion of the water; that peculiar noise, which had so often filled him with joy as a child, chased away the rather too serious ideas that beset our hero; he went and fetched the priest's large astronomical telescope and recognized most of the men and women following the procession. Several charming small girls whom Fab-

rice had last seen when they were eleven or twelve years old were now splendid women, in the full bloom of their most vigorous youth; they rekindled our hero's courage, and he would readily have braved the police in order to speak to them.

When the procession had moved past and then re-entered the church through a side door that Fabrice could not see, the heat soon became intense even at the top of the belfry; the local people went back into their homes and a heavy silence descended on the village. Several boats filled up with peasants returning to Bellagio, Menaggio, and other villages round the lake; Fabrice could make out the sound each time an oar entered the water: he was utterly entranced by this very simple detail; his present joy was compounded by all the unhappiness, all the constraint he experienced in the complicated life of the court. How happy he would have been, at that moment, to go for a row on that beautiful lake which looked so tranquil and so perfectly mirrored the depths of the sky! He heard the door at the bottom of the belfry open; it was Father Blanès's old servant, bringing a large basket; it was as much as he could do to stop himself speaking to her. She's almost as fond of me as is her master, he reflected, and in any case I'm leaving this evening at nine; wouldn't she keep a secret, just for a few hours, if she had given me her word? But, thought Fabrice, my good old friend wouldn't like that! I might get him into trouble with the police! And he let Ghita leave without speaking to her. He made an excellent dinner, then settled down to sleep for a few minutes; he did not awaken until half-past eight that evening, Father Blanès was shaking his arm, and night had fallen.

Blanès was extremely tired; he had aged fifty years since the previous night. He spoke no more of serious matters; seated in his wooden armchair he said to Fabrice: 'Embrace me.' He clasped him in his arms several more times. 'Death,' he said finally, 'which will put an end to this very long life, will not bring with it anything as painful as this separation. I've a purse that I'm leaving in the care of Ghita, with orders to draw on it for her needs, but to give you what's left if ever you come and ask for it. I know her; after these instructions she's

quite capable of not buying meat even four times a year, so as to save the money for you, unless you give her very definite orders. You yourself may become destitute, and your old friend's pittance will help you. Expect nothing from your brother except vile treatment, and try to earn money through some work that is of use to society. I foresee some strange upheavals; it may be that fifty years from now the world will not tolerate idlers. Your mother and your aunt may fail you, your sisters will have to obey their husbands... Leave me! Leave me! Go!' Blanès shouted urgently; he had just heard a tiny sound in the clock indicating that ten o'clock was about to strike; he would not even allow Fabrice to embrace him one last time.

'Hurry! Hurry!' he cried. 'It'll take you at least a minute to get down the stairs, be careful not to fall, that would be a dreadful omen.' Fabrice raced down the stairs and when he came to the square began to run. Hardly had he reached the front of his father's castle when the clock struck ten; each stroke reverberated in his heart, filling him with a strange agitation. He stopped to think, or rather to indulge the turbulent feelings inspired in him by the contemplation of that majestic building, which yesterday he had surveyed so dispassionately. In the middle of his reverie he was aroused by the sound of men's footsteps; looking about, he saw he was surrounded by four constables. He had two excellent pistols that he had recharged while having his dinner; the tiny sound he made in cocking them attracted the attention of one of the men and was on the point of getting him arrested. Realizing his danger, he decided to fire first; he had the right to do this, since it was his only chance of resisting four well-armed constables. Luckily the latter, who were going round clearing out the taverns, had shown themselves not entirely insensible to the courtesies they had received in a number of these pleasant establishments; they weren't quick enough in resolving to do their duty. Fabrice took to his heels as fast as he could. The constables also ran a few paces, shouting 'Stop! Stop!' then silence fell once more. Three hundred paces further on, Fabrice stopped to catch his breath. The sound of my pistols almost got me arrested, this time the Duchess

would certainly have said to me, if ever I'd been lucky enough to see her lovely face again, that my soul delights in contemplating what will happen in ten years' time, and forgets to notice what's actually going on under my nose.

Fabrice shuddered to think of the danger he had just escaped; he quickened his pace, and soon could not stop himself from running, which was not very wise as he drew the attention of several villagers who were making their way home. He could not bring himself to stop until he had reached the mountains, more than a league from Grianta, and, even when he had stopped, he came out in a cold sweat at the thought of the Spielberg prison.

What a dreadful fright! he said to himself; at the sound of that word, he was almost tempted to feel ashamed. But isn't my aunt always telling me that what I most need to learn to do is to forgive myself? I'm always comparing myself to a model that's perfect and cannot possibly exist. Well! I'll forgive myself for being frightened, because I was, on the other hand, fully prepared to defend my freedom, and they certainly wouldn't all four still have been on their feet and capable of escorting me to prison. What I'm doing at this moment, he added, isn't very military; instead of effecting a rapid retreat, after accomplishing my mission, and perhaps alerting my enemies, I'm indulging a whim that may well be more ridiculous than all the good Father's predictions.

In fact, instead of retreating by the shortest route and heading for the shores of Lake Maggiore where his boat awaited him, he was making a huge detour in order to go and see 'his tree'. The reader will perhaps recall the love Fabrice felt for a chestnut planted by his mother twenty-three years earlier. It would be just like my brother, he thought, to have had that tree cut down; but creatures like him have no delicacy of feeling; he won't have thought of it. And anyway, it wouldn't be a bad omen, he added firmly. Two hours later he was gazing in consternation at the young tree: some malicious individuals, or a storm, had broken one of its principal branches, which hung drooping and withered; Fabrice carefully pruned it with his dagger, scrupulously trimming the cut so that no water could get into the trunk.

Then, even though time was very precious to him because dawn was approaching, he spent a good hour turning over the soil around his beloved tree. When he had completed all this foolishness he set off again rapidly in the direction of Lake Maggiore. On the whole, he did not feel down-hearted, the tree was flourishing, stronger than ever, and had almost doubled in size in five years. The branch was just an unimportant mishap, once it had been removed it no longer harmed the tree, which would grow even taller now that its branches began higher up.

Before Fabrice had covered a league, a band of brilliant white in the east was lighting up the peaks of the 'Resegon di Lek', a mountain that was famous in those parts. The road he had taken was full of country-folk, but instead of thinking along military lines, Fabrice allowed himself to be moved by the sublime or touching aspects of the forests near Lake Como. They are perhaps the finest in the world; I do not mean those which bring in the most 'new money', as the Swiss would say, but those which speak most eloquently to the soul. To heed that language in the situation in which Fabrice found himself, exposed to the attentions of the gentlemen of the Lombardo-Venetian police-force, was truly childish. I'm half-a-league from the border, he finally told himself, I'll be meeting some customs officers or constables on their morning rounds: this fine cloth coat will arouse their suspicions, and they'll ask me for my passport; now, clearly written out on that passport is a name destined for prison; and then I'll be faced with the agreeable necessity of committing a murder. If, as usually happens, the policemen are travelling in pairs, I can't simply wait to shoot until one of them tries to collar me; even if he only slows me down a second as he falls, there I'll be in the Spielberg. Fabrice, above all filled with horror at the necessity of shooting first, perhaps at a former soldier of his uncle, Count Pietranera, ran and hid in the hollow trunk of an enormous chestnut tree; he was renewing the priming of his pistols when he heard a man approaching through the wood, very tunefully singing a delightful melody by Mercadante, who was fashionable in Lombardy at that period.*

Now there's a good omen! Fabrice said to himself. The song, to which he was listening with great attention, cured him of the tiny spark of anger which had begun to creep into his thinking. Looking carefully up and down the main road, he did not see a soul; the singer, he decided, must be coming along some side-road. Almost at the same moment, he saw a manservant very neatly dressed in the English style, advancing at a walking pace on a nag and holding the reins of a thoroughbred that was perhaps a trifle too thin.

Ah! If I reasoned like Mosca, thought Fabrice, when he tells me that the danger a man's in is always the measure of his rights over his neighbour, I'd blow out that servant's brains with my pistols, and, once I was mounted on that skinny horse, I wouldn't give a damn for any constable in the world. The instant I was back in Parma I'd send some money to that man or to his widow... but that would be appalling!

CHAPTER 10

While moralizing thus, Fabrice was jumping down on to the highway that goes from Lombardy into Switzerland; at that spot it runs fully four or five feet below the level of the forest. If my man takes fright, he thought, he'll gallop away and I'll be left standing here looking like a real booby. At that moment Fabrice was ten paces from the manservant who was no longer singing; he saw in his eyes that he was afraid; perhaps he was going to turn his horses round. Without as yet having made up his mind what to do, Fabrice leapt forward and grabbed the bridle of the skinny horse.

'My friend,' he said to the manservant, 'I'm not an ordinary thief, because I'm going to start by giving you twenty lire, but I'm obliged to borrow your horse; I'll be killed if I don't make tracks damned fast. I've the four Riva brothers after me, those great huntsmen that I'm sure you know; they've just caught me in their sister's bedroom, I jumped out of the window and here I am. They're out in the forest with their dogs and their guns. I hid in that big hollow chestnut because I saw one of them crossing the road, their dogs will track me down! I'm going to get on your horse and gallop a league beyond Como; I plan to make for Milan and throw myself on the mercy of the Viceroy. I'll leave your horse at the post-house with forty lire for you, if you willingly go along with my plan. If you attempt the least resistance I'll kill you with these pistols I have here. If, when I've gone, you put the police on my tracks, my cousin, the gallant Count Alari, equerry to the Emperor, will see to it that your bones are broken.'

Fabrice was concocting this speech while delivering it in a very calm manner.

'In any case,' he said with a laugh, 'my name's no secret; I'm the Marchesino Ascagne del Dongo, my castle's quite near here, in Grianta. F... you,' he said more loudly, 'let the horse go!' The manservant, dumbfounded, didn't say a word. Fabrice moved his pistol into his left hand, grasped the bridle as the other released it, jumped on to the horse, and cantered

off. When he had gone three hundred paces he realized he had forgotten the promised twenty lire; he stopped: there was still nobody on the road except for the manservant who was galloping after him; he signalled to him with his handkerchief to come nearer, and when he was fifty paces away he threw a handful of coins on to the road, then set off again. When he had ridden for some distance he saw that the manservant was picking up the coins. Now there's a truly sensible man, Fabrice thought laughingly, not one unnecessary word. He travelled fast, stopping towards midday at an isolated house, and riding off again several hours later. At two in the morning he reached the shores of Lake Maggiore; soon he saw his boat, which was sailing about and came in response to the prearranged signal. Seeing no peasant to whom to entrust the horse, he gave the noble animal its freedom, and three hours later reached Belgirate. Once back on friendly soil he took some rest; he was filled with joy, he had managed everything perfectly. Dare I point to the true reasons for his joy? His tree was doing superbly well, and his soul had been restored by the deep emotion he had felt in the arms of Father Blanès. Does he truly believe, he wondered, in all those predictions he told me, or is it that, because my brother has painted me as a Jacobin, a man without religion or respect for the law, capable of anything, he was simply trying to ensure I would resist the temptation to kill some brute who played a dirty trick on me? Two days later Fabrice reached Parma, where he greatly amused the Duchess and the Count by giving them, as he invariably did, a scrupulously accurate account of his entire trip.

On his arrival, Fabrice found the porter and all the servants of the Palazzo Sanseverina wearing the accoutrements of deepest mourning.

'What loss have we suffered?' he enquired of the Duchess.

'That excellent man who was called my husband has just died in Baden. He's left me this *palazzo*, which we had agreed on, but as a sign of his regard he's added a legacy of 300,000 lire, which I find most embarrassing; I don't want to renounce it in favour of his niece the Marquise Raversi, who's forever playing me abominable tricks. You who know about

these things, you must find me some talented sculptor; I'll build the Duke a tomb costing 300,000 lire.' The Count embarked on some anecdotes about la Raversi.

'I've tried to win her over with favours, but to no avail', said the Duchess. 'As for the Duke's nephews, I've made them all colonels or generals. In return, not a month goes by but they send me some despicable anonymous letter, and I've been obliged to take on a secretary to read those letters.'

'And the anonymous letters are the least of their sins,' Count Mosca went on, 'they fabricate abominable accusations by the thousand. I could have had the whole gang hauled up before the bench on a score of occasions, and,' he added, turning to Fabrice, 'your Excellency may imagine whether my good judges would have convicted them.'

'Ah! Well now, that spoils all the rest for me,' replied Fabrice with a naïveté which, at that court, seemed ludicrous; 'I'd have preferred to have them convicted by magistrates acting according to their conscience.'

'You who travel in order to improve yourself, you'd be doing me a service by giving me the addresses of such magistrates, I'll write to them before I go to bed.'

'If I were a minister, this lack of honest judges would offend my pride.'

'But it seems to me,' replied the Count, 'that your Excellency, who so loves the French, and who even once gave them the aid of his invincible arm, is forgetting one of their great maxims: "It's better to kill the devil than let the devil kill you." I'd like to see how you would govern those fiery souls who spend all their days reading the *History of the French Revolution*, if you had judges who acquitted the people I send up on charges. They'd manage not to convict the most patently guilty rogues, and would see themselves as reincarnations of Brutus. But I've a bone to pick with you: doesn't your fastidious soul feel a trifle guilty about that handsome, rather skinny horse you just abandoned on the shores of Lake Maggiore?'

'I've every intention', replied Fabrice with perfect seriousness, 'of sending its master whatever's needed to reimburse him for the cost of hand-bills and suchlike, which will enable

him to get it back from the peasants who find it; I'm going to read the Milan paper very carefully, to watch for the announcement of a lost horse; I'm very familiar with all the particulars of this one.'

'He's positively *primitive!*' said the Count to the Duchess. 'And what would have become of your Excellency,' he continued with a laugh, 'if when you were galloping along as fast as you could on that borrowed horse, it had taken it into its head to stumble? You'd have been in the Spielberg, my dear little nephew, and all my influence would barely have sufficed to get the weight of your leg-shackles lightened by thirty pounds. You'd have spent ten years in that pleasure-spot; your legs might perhaps have become swollen and gangrenous, in which event they'd have carefully cut them off...'

'Ah! I beg you, don't say another word about such a terrible possibility,' cried the Duchess with tears in her eyes. 'Here he is, back with us...'

'And I'm even happier about it than you are, I do assure you,' replied the Minister, with great seriousness; 'but why ever did this cruel child not ask me for a passport in a suitable name, since he wished to go into Lombardy? At the first word of his arrest I'd have set off for Milan, and the friends I have there would have been good enough to close their eyes and assume that their police had arrested a subject of the Prince of Parma. The story of your trip is charming, it's amusing, I quite agree,' continued the Minister in a less ominous tone; 'I do really like the way you emerged from the wood on to the highway; but between ourselves, since that manservant held your life in his hands, you had the right to take his. We're going to make a brilliant future for your Excellency, at least that is what the Signora here has commanded me to do, and I don't believe my greatest enemies have ever been able to accuse me of disobeying her commands. What terrible anguish both for her and for me if during that steeple-chase you rode on the skinny horse, he had stumbled! It would almost have been better', added the Count, 'if that horse had broken your neck.'

'You're in a very tragic mood this evening, my dear,' remarked the Duchess, deeply affected.

'It's because we're surrounded by tragic events,' the Count replied with feeling; 'this isn't France, where everything ends with a song, or with a year or two of prison, and I'm really unwise to speak lightly to you of these matters. Now, my dear young nephew, supposing I find a way of making you a bishop, for I simply cannot begin with the Archbishopric of Parma, as her Grace the Duchess here present would very reasonably have me do: when you're in that bishop's palace, far from our wise counsel, what, pray tell us, will be your policy?'

'To kill the devil rather than let the devil kill me, as my friends the French so very wisely say,' replied Fabrice, his eyes glowing with ardour; 'to preserve, by every means possible, including a pistol-shot, the position you'll have secured for me. I've read the story, in the del Dongo genealogy, of that ancestor of ours who built the castle of Grianta. Towards the end of his life his good friend Galeas, Duke of Milan, sends him to inspect a fortified castle on our lake; it was feared that the Swiss were about to invade again. "It would be only polite to write a word or two to the commandant", the Duke of Milan says as he dismisses him; he writes a couple of lines and hands him the letter, then he asks for it back to seal it: "that would be more polite", says the Prince. Vespasian del Dongo sets off, but as he's sailing across the lake he remembers an old Greek story, for he was a learned man; he opens his good master's letter and finds it's an order to the commandant of the castle to have him put to death immediately upon arrival. Sforza, too absorbed in the game he was playing with our ancestor, had left a space between the last line of the note and his signature; Vespasian del Dongo inserts the order to acknowledge him as governor-general of all the castles on the lake, and removes the top of the letter. Once arrived and established in the fort, he has the commandant thrown down a well, declares war on Sforza, and after several years exchanges his fortress for these vast lands which have made the fortune of every branch of our family, and which one day will bring me in an income of 4,000 lire.'

'You talk like an academician,' exclaimed the Count with a laugh; 'that's a very fine spur-of-the-moment deed you've just

described, but it's only once in a decade that one has the fun of being able to do something as exciting as that. A person who's a bit stupid, but who consistently pays attention and behaves with prudence, very frequently has the pleasure of triumphing over men of imagination. It's because he was wildly misled by his imagination that Napoleon surrendered to the prudent John Bull, instead of trying to reach America. Sitting in his bank, John Bull had a good laugh over Napoleon's letter in which he quotes Themistocles.* In the long run the base Sancho Panzas will always get the better of the sublime Don Quixotes. If you will agree not to do anything extraordinary, I have no doubt that you will be a very respected, if not a very respectable, bishop. Nevertheless, my observation still holds; your Excellency behaved frivolously in the matter of the horse, you were within a hairsbreadth of imprisonment for life.'

Mosca's remark made Fabrice shudder, and he was overcome with profound astonishment. Was this the prison, he wondered, that I've been threatened with? Was this the crime that I must not commit? Father Blanès's predictions, which he had scoffed at when thinking of them as prophecies, now assumed, in his eyes, all the significance he accorded to genuine omens.

'Why, whatever's the matter?' the Duchess asked him in astonishment; 'the Count's put some very black thoughts into your head.'

'My eyes have been opened to a new truth, and, instead of rebelling against it, my mind accepts it. It's true, I was very close to life-imprisonment! But that manservant looked so nice in his English coat! What a pity to kill him.'

The Minister was delighted with his air of modest compli-
ance.

'In any event, he's a fine young man,' he remarked, looking at the Duchess. 'Let me tell you, my friend, you've made a conquest, one that's perhaps the most desirable of all.'

Ah! thought Fabrice, this is a joke about little Marietta. He was mistaken; the Count went on:

'Your "evangelical" simplicity has won the heart of our venerable Archbishop, Father Landriani. One of these days

we'll be appointing you as Vicar-General, and (here's the beauty of this joke) the three present Vicars-General, who are able men, hard workers, and two of whom, I believe, were Vicar-General before you were born, will be making the request, in a handsome letter addressed to their Archbishop, that you should be first in rank among them. These gentlemen will base their request primarily on your moral qualities, and further on the fact that you are the great-nephew of the celebrated Archbishop Ascagne del Dongo. As soon as I heard of the respect they felt for your moral qualities, I promptly promoted to captain the nephew of the senior Vicar-General; he'd been a lieutenant since Marshal Suchet's siege of Tarragona.'

'Go straight away, dressed just as you are, and pay a friendly visit to your Archbishop', cried the Duchess. 'Tell him about your sister's marriage; when he hears she's to be a duchess, he'll think you even more apostolic. Moreover, you know nothing at all about what the Count has just told you regarding your future appointment.'

Fabrice hurried to the Archbishop's palace; his behaviour there was simple and modest, a style that came to him too easily; for him to behave like a great nobleman, on the other hand, required an effort. While listening to Monsignore Landriani's somewhat wordy tales, he was wondering: Ought I to have shot at the manservant who was holding the skinny horse by the bridle? His reason said yes, but his heart could not become inured to the bloody image of the handsome young man falling, disfigured, off the horse.

That prison where I would have been entombed, had the horse stumbled, was that the same prison with which I'm threatened by so many omens?

This question was of the utmost importance to him, and the Archbishop was pleased with his air of profound attention.

CHAPTER 11

Upon leaving the Archbishop's palace, Fabrice hurried to see little Marietta; from far away he could hear the gruff voice of Giletti, who had had some wine brought in and was treating himself and his friends, the prompter and the candle-snuffer. *La Mammaccia*, who was like a mother to Marietta, came alone in response to his signal.

'Ever so much has happened since you left,' she exclaimed; 'two or three of our actors have been accused of celebrating our great Napoleon's feast-day with an orgy, and our poor company's been called Jacobin and ordered to get out of the state of Parma, and long live Napoleon! But they do say as how the Minister coughed up. What's certain is that Giletti's got some money, I don't know how much, but I've seen him with a fistful of crowns. Our director gave Marietta five crowns to pay for travel to Mantua and Venice, and I got one. She's still very in love with you, but she's scared of Giletti; three days ago, at our last show, he really tried to kill her, he slapped her twice, something fierce, and what's real disgusting, he tore her blue shawl. You'd be ever so kind to give her a blue shawl, and we'd say we won it in a lottery. The Carabineers' drum-major's giving a military display tomorrow, you'll see the time posted up on all the street corners. Come and see us; if he's left for the display, and we think there's a hope he'll stay away a while, I'll be at the window and I'll signal to you to come up. Try and bring us something real pretty, and Marietta'll love you madly.'

As he went down the spiral staircase of that miserable hovel, Fabrice was filled with remorse; I haven't changed, he was thinking; all those fine resolutions I made on the shores of our lake, when I was looking at life so philosophically, have flown right away. My mind had been shaken out of its normal composure, it was all a dream that vanishes in the face of harsh reality. Now would be the moment to act, Fabrice told himself as he returned to the Palazzo Sanseverina at about eleven in the evening. But it was in vain that he

searched his heart for the courage to speak with that noble sincerity which had seemed so easy during the night spent on the shores of Lake Como. I'm going to offend the person I love best in the world; if I speak, I'll sound as if I'm putting on an act; I'm not worth anything, really, except in certain moments of exaltation.

'The Count is so very good to me,' he told the Duchess, after giving her details of his visit to the Archbishop's palace; 'I appreciate his conduct all the more because I rather think he does not like me very much; I must therefore be scrupulous in my behaviour towards him. There are those excavations of his at Sanguigna which he's still crazy about, at least if one judges by his trip the day before yesterday; he rode about a dozen leagues at the gallop in order to spend a couple of hours with his workers. If they find any fragments of statues in that ancient temple whose foundations he's just discovered, he's afraid they'll be stolen; I'd like to suggest to him that I spend a day or two at Sanguigna. I have to see the Archbishop again tomorrow about five, I could leave in the evening and take advantage of the cool night hours to travel.'

At first the Duchess did not reply.

'One might suppose you're looking for excuses to keep away from me,' she finally said to him with the utmost tenderness; 'you're hardly back from Belgirate, and you've found a reason to leave again.'

Here's a perfect opportunity to say something, thought Fabrice. But at the lake I was a bit mad, I didn't realize, in my enthusiasm for sincerity, that my compliment would finish up as an impertinence; it would be like saying: I love you with the most devoted friendship, etc., etc., but my heart is insensible to love. Isn't that tantamount to saying: I can see you're in love with me, but be warned, I cannot repay you in the same coin? If she is in love with me, the Duchess may be angry at being detected, and she'll be disgusted by my impudence if all she feels for me is pure friendship... and those are affronts which are never forgiven.

While weighing these important considerations, Fabrice was quite unconsciously pacing up and down the drawing-

room, his manner solemn and very aloof, like a man who sees disaster close at hand.

The Duchess was gazing at him in admiration; no longer was he the child she had known from infancy, no longer was he the nephew who always did her bidding; he was a most impressive man, and to make him love her would be an enchantment. She rose from the divan where she was sitting and threw herself ecstatically into his arms:

‘Are you trying to avoid me?’ she asked him.

‘No,’ he replied, in the manner of some Roman emperor, ‘but I would like to behave well.’

This remark was open to various interpretations; Fabrice did not feel brave enough to go any further and risk offending this adorable woman. He was too young, too easily moved; he could think of no kind and tactful turn of phrase to convey what he wanted to say. In a natural outpouring of feeling and contrary to all reasoning, he took that charming woman in his arms and covered her with kisses. At that moment they heard the sound of the Count’s carriage entering the courtyard, and almost immediately he himself appeared in the drawing-room; he seemed greatly excited.

‘You inspire some very remarkable attachments,’ he told Fabrice, who found this remark rather disconcerting.

‘This evening, as is the case every Thursday, the Archbishop was received in audience by his Serene Highness; the Prince has just told me that the Archbishop, who appeared very agitated, began by making an extremely erudite speech which he had learnt by heart, and which at first the Prince could not understand at all. Landriani finished by declaring that it was important for the church of Parma that Monsignore Fabrice del Dongo be appointed his senior Vicar-General, and later, as soon as he reached his twenty-fourth birthday, his Coadjutor *with the right of succession*.

‘I must confess that this alarmed me,’ said the Count, ‘it’s moving a little too fast, and at first I feared the Prince would throw a tantrum. But he looked at me with a laugh and said in French: “Ce sont là de vos coups, Monsieur!” (You had a hand in this, Sir!)

“I can take my oath before God and your Highness,” I exclaimed with the greatest possible fervour, “that I knew nothing whatever about the part concerning the *right of succession*.” Then I told him the truth, what we were talking about a few hours ago in this very room; I added, very earnestly, that I would in the future consider myself most exceptionally favoured by his Highness, if he deigned to grant me a little bishopric to start with. The Prince must have believed me, because he judged it appropriate to be very gracious; he said to me, with the utmost simplicity: “This is an official matter between the Archbishop and myself, it’s nothing to do with you; the dear man treated me to a very long and rather boring statement of sorts, at the end of which he made an official proposal; I replied very coldly that the subject was very young, and, above all, very new at our court; that I would almost give the impression of honouring a bill of exchange payable by me to the Emperor, were I to confer the prospect of such a high honour on the son of one of the dignitaries of his Lombardo-Venetian kingdom. The Archbishop protested that there had been no recommendation of that kind. It was very stupid to tell that to *me*; I was surprised to hear it from a man of his shrewdness; but he is always flustered when he speaks to me, and this evening he was more discomposed than ever, which made me think that this was something he passionately desired. I told him that I knew better than he did that there had been no recommendation from an exalted quarter in favour of del Dongo, that no one at our court doubted his ability, that people did not speak too ill of his morals, but that I feared he might be capable of *enthusiasm*, and that I had vowed never to promote to a position of importance madmen of that kind with whom a Prince is never certain of anything. Then,” continued his Highness, “I had to sit through some bathos that lasted almost as long as the first speech; the Archbishop treated me to a panegyric on the enthusiasm of the house of God. Blunderer, I thought, you’ve miscalculated, you’re jeopardizing the nomination that was almost approved; you should have stopped talking and thanked me effusively. Not at all: he pursued his homily with the most absurd intrepidity; I tried to think of a reply that

would not be too unfavourable to young del Dongo: I came up with quite a good one, as you'll see: 'Monsignore,' I said to him, 'Pius VII was a great pope and a great saint; he alone of all the sovereigns dared say "no" to the tyrant before whom all Europe bowed its head! Well now! He was capable of enthusiasm, and this led him, when he was Bishop of Imola, to write his famous pastoral letter from "the Citizen Cardinal Chiaramonti", in support of the Cisalpine Republic.*

"My poor Archbishop was dumbfounded, and, to complete this effect, I said to him with the utmost seriousness: 'Farewell, Monsignore, I'll take twenty-four hours to reflect upon your proposal.' The poor man added some entreaties that were rather ill-phrased and rather ill-timed once I had uttered the word 'farewell'. Now, Count Mosca della Rovere, I command you to tell the Duchess that I do not wish to delay by twenty-four hours something that can give her pleasure; sit down there and write to the Archbishop the note of consent that will conclude this matter." I wrote the note, he signed it, then said: "Take it this very instant to the Duchess." Here is the note, Signora, which has provided me with an excuse for the happiness of seeing you again this evening.'

The Duchess read the note with intense delight. During the Count's long monologue Fabrice had had time to compose himself; he did not appear astonished by this event, but treated it in the style of a true nobleman who had always believed himself entitled as a matter of course to these extraordinary advancements, to these strokes of good fortune which would leave a commoner completely stunned; he expressed his gratitude, but in measured terms, and finished by saying to the Count:

'A good courtier should pander to the ruling passion; yesterday you were telling me you were afraid your workmen at Sanguigna might steal any fragments of ancient statues they discovered; I myself am extremely keen on excavating; if you will kindly give me your permission, I'll go and pay a visit to those workmen. Tomorrow evening, after expressing suitable appreciation at the palace and at the Archbishop's, I'll leave for Sanguigna.'

‘But can you guess’, the Duchess asked the Count, ‘the source of this sudden passion the good Archbishop feels for Fabrice?’

‘I don’t need to guess; the Vicar-General whose brother’s a Captain was telling me yesterday: “Father Landriani starts from this indisputable principle, that the titular Bishop is superior to his Coadjutor, and he’s beside himself with joy because he has a del Dongo at his orders, and because he’s rendered him a service.” Everything that draws attention to Fabrice’s noble birth adds to his secret happiness: he has a man of that quality as aide-de-camp! Secondly, he likes Monsignore Fabrice, he doesn’t feel shy with him; and lastly, for the past ten years he’s nursed a thoroughgoing dislike of the Bishop of Piacenza, who goes about boldly declaring his claim to succeed him in the see of Parma, and who furthermore is the son of a miller. It is in the interests of this future succession that the Bishop of Piacenza has entered into a very close relationship with the Marquise Raversi, and now that relationship is making the Archbishop fear for the success of his favourite plan, to have a del Dongo on his staff, and to give him orders.’

Two days later, at an early hour, Fabrice was directing the excavations at Sanguigna, across from Colorno (the Versailles of the Princes of Parma); these excavations extended across the plain, close beside the main road that leads from Parma to the bridge at Casal-Maggiore (the nearest Austrian town). The workmen were digging a long trench across the plain, eight feet deep and as narrow as possible; they were searching, along the length of the old Roman road, for the remains of a second temple which, according to local rumour, still existed in the Middle Ages. Despite the Prince’s orders, it was with covetous eyes that many of the peasants viewed these long ditches crossing their properties. No matter what they were told, they imagined that a search for treasure was in progress, and Fabrice’s presence was especially desirable to prevent any little disturbances. He was not in the least bored, he felt a passionate interest in the operations, for every now and again some medallion would be found, and he did not want to give the workmen the opportunity of arranging between them to filch it.

The day was fine; it was about six in the morning; he had borrowed an old single-bore shotgun and was shooting a few larks; one fell, wounded, on to the main road; as he went after it Fabrice saw, far in the distance, a carriage travelling from Parma in the direction of the border at Casal-Maggiore. He had just reloaded his gun when, as the very dilapidated carriage had slowed to a walking pace, he recognized little Marietta; beside her sat that great loud Giletti, and the old woman she passed off as her mother.

Giletti imagined that Fabrice had placed himself thus in the middle of the road, gun in hand, in order to insult him and possibly steal little Marietta from him. Full of bravado, he leapt down from the carriage; in his left hand he held a large, very rusty pistol, and in his right a sword still in its scabbard, which he used when the needs of the company forced the manager to entrust him with some nobleman's part.

'You brigand!' he cried. 'I'm real glad to find you here just a league from the border; I'll soon settle you; your purple stockings won't protect you here!'

Fabrice was smiling at little Marietta and paying no attention to Giletti's jealous cries, when suddenly he saw, three feet from his chest, the muzzle of the rusty pistol; he just had time to strike at the pistol, using his rifle as a stick: the pistol went off, but without hitting anyone.

'Stop, you...,' Giletti yelled at the *vetturino*;* at the same time he had the wit to leap at the end of his adversary's shotgun and keep its barrel pointed away from his body; he and Fabrice were each tugging at the gun with all their might. Giletti, who was much the stronger, was working his way hand over hand and steadily getting closer to the trigger; he was on the point of gaining hold of the gun when Fabrice, to prevent him from shooting it, fired. He had clearly seen that the muzzle was more than three inches above Giletti's shoulder; the report went off right beside the latter's ear. It stunned him, but he recovered in an instant.

'Ah, you bastard, you're trying to blow me brains out! I'll settle you.' Giletti threw away the scabbard of his nobleman's sword, and sprang at Fabrice with amazing speed. Fabrice, who was unarmed, believed his last moment had come.

He raced towards the carriage which had halted some ten paces behind Giletti; passing it on the left, he grasped hold of the springs, ran very fast right round it, and passed by it again, close to the right side-door which was standing open. Giletti, who had leapt forward on his long legs and had not thought of catching hold of the springs, continued for several paces in his original direction before being able to stop. Just as Fabrice passed beside the open door, he heard Marietta saying to him in a whisper:

‘Watch out, he’ll kill you. Here!’

At that moment Fabrice saw a large hunting-style knife fall from the door; he bent down to pick it up but, as he did so, felt his shoulder slashed by a sword thrust from Giletti. When Fabrice stood up again he found himself only inches away from Giletti who hit him violently in the face with the hilt of his sword; this blow was delivered with such force that it completely stupefied Fabrice; at that moment he was on the point of being killed. Luckily for him, Giletti was still too close to be able to lunge at him with the sword. When he had recovered his senses, Fabrice ran off at top speed; as he ran he pulled the sheath off the hunting knife, and then, spinning round, found Giletti only three paces away, in pursuit. As Giletti leapt forward Fabrice stabbed him with his knife; Giletti was able to deflect the hunting knife a little with his sword, but its point stabbed him full in the left cheek. He passed close by Fabrice who felt something pierce his thigh, it was Giletti’s knife which he had had time to open. Fabrice jumped to the right and at last the two adversaries were at an appropriate distance for combat.

Giletti was swearing like a trooper. ‘Aha! I’ll slit your throat, you wretched priest,’ he kept repeating. Fabrice was quite out of breath and unable to speak; the blow to his face from the sword-hilt pained him badly, and his nose was bleeding profusely; several times he used the hunting knife to parry Giletti’s sword, and he kept making thrusts with the knife without really knowing what he was doing; he had a vague idea he was taking part in some military display of arms. This notion was suggested by the presence of his workmen, in number some twenty-five or thirty, who had formed a

circle round the combatants, though at a very respectful distance, for the latter were constantly rushing forward and leaping at one another.

The fight appeared to be slowing down a little; the blows were no longer succeeding each other with the same rapidity, when Fabrice said to himself: judging by the pain I feel in my face, he must have disfigured me. Filled with rage by this idea, he leapt upon his enemy holding the hunting knife pointed forward. This point entered through the right side of Giletti's chest and came out towards his left shoulder; at the same time Giletti's sword penetrated its entire length into Fabrice's upper arm, but the cut was just below the skin, and the wound was not serious.

Giletti had fallen; as Fabrice advanced towards him, watching his left hand which was holding a knife, that hand opened in an involuntary gesture and let the weapon drop.

The scoundrel's dead, thought Fabrice; he looked at his face, Giletti was bleeding heavily from the mouth. Fabrice ran to the carriage.

'Have you a mirror?' he shouted to Marietta. Marietta, very pale, stared at him and made no reply. The old woman, with great self-possession, opened a green work-bag and passed Fabrice a tiny mirror with a handle, no bigger than his hand. As he looked at himself Fabrice was feeling his face: my eyes aren't damaged, he thought, and that's wonderful; he looked at his teeth, they were not broken. 'Then why is it I'm in such pain?' he asked himself in a whisper.

The old woman answered him:

'Because the upper part of your cheek was crushed between the hilt of Giletti's sword and the bone that's there. Your cheek's horribly swollen and blue: put some leeches on it right away, and it'll be fine.'

'Ah! Some leeches right away,' laughed Fabrice, regaining all his composure. He saw that the workmen were gathering round Giletti and staring at him without daring to touch him.

'Well do something to help that man,' he shouted to them, 'take his coat off...' He was about to continue, but on looking up saw five or six men on the main road about three hundred paces away, marching steadily towards the scene of the fight.

They're police, he thought, and as a man's been killed, they'll arrest me, and I'll have the honour of making a solemn entrance into the city of Parma. What a story for those courtiers who're friends of la Raversi and loathe my aunt!

Instantly, with the speed of lightning, he threw all the money he had in his pockets to the astounded workmen, and leapt into the carriage.

'Stop the police from following me,' he shouted to his workmen, 'and I'll make your fortune; tell them I'm innocent, that that man attacked me and tried to kill me. And you,' he said to the *vetturino*, 'put your horses to a gallop and you'll have four gold napoleons if you cross the Po before those people can get to me.'

'Right you are!' replied the *vetturino*, 'but don't be frightened, those men are on foot, and even if they're just trotting, my little nags can leave 'em way behind.' So saying, he set them to a gallop.

Our hero was shocked by the word 'frightened' the coachman had used: for he had in truth been extremely frightened after being hit in the face with the hilt of Giletti's sword.

'We might meet some riders coming this way,' remarked the prudent *vetturino*, thinking of his four napoleons, 'and those men who're chasing us could shout to them to arrest us.' He meant: 'reload your weapons...'

'Oh, how brave you are, my little priest!' cried Marietta, clasping Fabrice in her arms. The old woman was looking through the carriage door; after a while she withdrew her head.

'No one's following you, Signore,' she said to Fabrice with great composure; 'and there's no one on the road in front of you. You know what sticklers the Austrian police officials are; if they see you coming galloping up the embankment of the Po like this, they'll arrest you, you can be sure.'

Fabrice looked out of the window.

'Trot,' he told the coachman. 'What passport have you?' he asked the old woman.

'I've three, not one,' she replied, 'and they cost us four lire apiece; now ain't that dreadful for poor players who travel all year long! Here's the passport of Signore Giletti, dramatic artist, that'll be you; here's our two passports, Mariettina's

and mine. But Giletti had all our money in his pocket, whatever's to become of us?'

'How much did he have?' asked Fabrice.

'Forty lovely five-lira pieces,' said the old woman.

'She means six, and some small change,' laughed Marietta; 'I don't want my little priest cheated.'

'Ain't it quite natural, sir,' the old woman went on very coolly, 'that I should try to soak you for thirty-four scudi? What's thirty-four scudi to you? And we've lost our protector; who's going to find us lodgings, and haggle with the *vetturini* when we travel, and browbeat everybody? Giletti wasn't handsome, but he was very handy, and if this little creature here wasn't an idiot, and gone and fallen for you, Giletti'd not have noticed anything, and you'd have given us lots of lovely money. Believe you me, we're real poor.'

Fabrice was touched; he opened his purse and gave the woman several twenty-lira pieces.

'You can see', he said to her, 'that I've only fifteen left, so from now on it won't be any more use trying it on.'

Little Marietta flung her arms round his neck, and the old woman kissed his hand. The carriage was still moving at a slow trot. When they could see in the distance the yellow barriers striped with black that signalled Austrian territory, the old woman said to Fabrice:

'You'd do better to cross on foot with Giletti's passport in your pocket; as for us, we'll stop there for a bit, we'll say we want to tidy up. And anyway the customs will examine our things. If you take my advice you'll walk nice and easy through Casal-Maggiore; you might even go into a café for a glass of spirits; once you're through the village move fast. Inside Austrian territory the police are as sharp as the devil; they'll soon find out a man's been killed; you're travelling with a passport that's not yours; you can get two years in prison for less than that. When you leave the town turn right and make for the Po; hire a boat and take refuge in Ravenna or Ferrara; get off Austrian soil as soon as you can. For forty lire you'll be able to buy another passport from a customs official, this one will be fatal to you, remember you've killed the man.'

As he walked towards the pontoon bridge of Casal-Maggiore, Fabrice was carefully rereading Giletti's passport. Our hero was very frightened, he was vividly recollecting everything that Mosca had told him of the danger he would be running if he went back into Austrian territory; now he could see, a couple of hundred paces in front of him, the redoubtable bridge that would convey him into that country, whose capital, in his eyes, was the Spielberg. But what other choice did he have? The Duchy of Modena, which borders the State of Parma to the south, returned fugitives to Parma in accordance with the terms of a specific agreement; the frontier that extends to the mountains on the Genoa side was too far away; his misadventure would be known in Parma long before he could reach those mountains; nothing else remained except the Austrian states on the left bank of the Po. Before there would be time for a letter to reach the Austrian authorities requesting his arrest, thirty-six hours or two days would elapse. After thinking it all over, Fabrice used his cigar to burn his own passport; on Austrian soil it was safer for him to be a vagrant than to be Fabrice del Dongo, and it was possible that he would be searched.

Apart from the very natural reluctance he felt in entrusting his life to the passport of the unfortunate Giletti, this document presented some material difficulties: Fabrice's height was at the most five feet five inches, and not five feet ten inches as the passport declared; he was nearly twenty-four and looked younger, Giletti was thirty-nine. We must confess that our hero paced up and down for a good half-hour on one of the embankments beside the Po, near the pontoon bridge, before making up his mind to walk down on to that bridge. What would I advise somebody else who was in my position? he finally asked himself. Obviously, to cross; it's dangerous to stay in the State of Parma; they might send a constable in pursuit of the man who killed another man, even if it was done in self-defence. Fabrice went through his pockets, tore up all the papers, and kept absolutely nothing but his handkerchief and box of cigars; he thought it important to curtail the search he would have to undergo. He thought of a terrible objection that might be raised and for which he could only

come up with poor explanations; he was going to claim he was called Giletti, yet all his linen was marked F.D.

As can be seen, Fabrice was one of those unfortunates who are tormented by their imagination; this is a not-uncommon failing of intelligent people in Italy. A French soldier of equal or even inferior courage would have presented himself at the bridge crossing immediately, without thinking of any difficulty beforehand; but he would also have been completely cool and collected, whereas Fabrice was very far from being cool and collected when, at the end of the bridge, a little man dressed in grey told him: 'Bring your passport into the police station.'

This police station had dirty walls studded with nails from which hung the pipes and dirty hats of the employees. The big pine desk behind which the latter were entrenched was badly stained with ink and wine; two or three thick registers bound in green leather bore stains of every colour, with the cut edges of their pages blackened by grubby hands. On the top of the piled-up registers were three magnificent laurel-wreaths that had been used two days earlier on one of the Emperor's feast days.

Fabrice was struck by all these details, they pierced him to the heart; this was the price he must pay for the magnificent, sweet-smelling luxury that reigned in his pleasant rooms at the Palazzo Sanseverina. He was obliged to go into that foul office and to do so as an inferior; he was going to be interrogated.

The official who reached out a yellow hand to take his passport was small and dark; he wore a brass pin in his necktie. This is a bad-tempered fellow, thought Fabrice; the individual seemed extremely surprised by his perusal of the passport, which lasted a good five minutes.

'You've had an accident', he said to the newcomer, indicating his cheek with a glance.

'The *vetturino* tipped us out against the embankment of the Po.' Then the silence began again, while the official kept casting fierce looks at the traveller.

Here it comes, thought Fabrice, he's going to tell me he regrets being the bearer of bad news, but that I'm under

arrest. All sorts of wild ideas entered the head of our hero, who was not being very logical just then. For example, he thought of making his escape through the office door which had been left open; I'll take off my coat; I'll jump into the Po and I'll probably be able to swim across it. Anything's better than the Spielberg. The official was staring fixedly at him at the moment when he was calculating his chances of succeeding in this escapade, so that two countenances were wearing peculiar expressions. The presence of danger bestows genius on the man of reason, making him, so to speak, superior to himself; in the man of imagination it inspires entire fictions, daring ones it is true, but frequently absurd.

You should have seen the indignant air with which our hero bore the scrutiny of that police clerk sporting his brass tie-pin. If I killed him, Fabrice was thinking, I'd get twenty years in the galleys or the death-penalty for murder, that's a lot less dreadful than the Spielberg with a 120-pound chain on each leg and nothing to eat but eight ounces of bread, and that would last for twenty years; so I wouldn't get out till I was forty-four. Fabrice's logic forgot that since he had burned his passport, there was no way the official could know he was the seditious Fabrice del Dongo.

Our hero was certainly frightened, as is obvious; he would have been considerably more so had he known the thoughts that were worrying the police clerk. That man was a friend of Giletti's; his surprise on seeing Giletti's passport in the hands of another can readily be imagined; his first impulse was to have that other arrested, but then it occurred to him that Giletti might well have sold his passport to this handsome young man who had apparently committed some criminal act in Parma. If I arrest him, he thought, Giletti will be compromised; they'll easily find out that he's sold his passport; on the other hand, what will my bosses say if they should discover that I, a friend of Giletti's, stamped his passport when it was presented by somebody else? The official got to his feet, yawning, and said to Fabrice, 'Would you wait, Signore,' then, out of habit, he added: 'A problem's come up.' Fabrice said to himself: 'What's going to come up is my disappearance.'

The official did indeed walk out of the office, leaving the door open and the passport on the pine table. The danger's clear, thought Fabrice; I'll take my passport and stroll back over the bridge, I'll say to the policeman if he questions me that I forgot to have my passport stamped by the police commissioner in the last village inside Parma. Fabrice had already picked up his passport when, to his inexpressible astonishment, he heard the clerk with the brass tie-pin saying:

'My God, I can't stand this any longer, the heat's stifling; I'm off to the café for a coffee. Go into the office when you've finished your pipe, there's a passport to stamp; the man's in there.'

Fabrice, who was creeping out, found himself face to face with a handsome young man who was saying to himself in a soft, sing-song voice: 'All right, let's see about stamping that passport, I'll put my special flourish under it.'

'Where does the gentleman wish to go?'

'To Mantua, Venice, and Ferrara.'

'Ferrara, fine,' answered the clerk, whistling; he took a stamp, printed the visa in blue ink on to the passport, and quickly wrote the words 'Mantua, Venice, and Ferrara' in the space left blank by the stamp, then, after waving his hand about in the air a few times, he signed, then put more ink on to the pen and slowly, taking infinite pains, drew in some decorative lines beneath. Fabrice's eyes followed every movement of that pen; the clerk gazed at his flourish with satisfaction, and added five or six dots to it; finally he handed Fabrice the passport, saying casually, 'Have a good journey, sir.'

As Fabrice walked quickly away, trying to disguise his rapid pace, he was stopped by a hand on his left arm; instinctively he reached for the hilt of his dagger, and had he not been surrounded by houses, he might well have done something foolish. The man whose hand was on his left arm, seeing how alarmed he seemed, said to him by way of excuse:

'I called you three times, sir, but you didn't answer; have you anything to declare at customs?'

'I've nothing on me but my handkerchief; I'm going very near here to visit a relative of mine for some hunting.'

He would have been in real difficulties if he had been asked to name that relative. Because of the extreme heat and all these emotions, Fabrice was as wet as if he had fallen into the Po. I'm quite brave when faced with actors, but officials wearing brass tie-pins thoroughly shake me up; I'll write a funny sonnet about this for the Duchess.

As soon as he entered Casal-Maggiore, Fabrice turned right into a mean-looking street that led down to the Po. I'm very much in need, he thought, of the attentions of Bacchus and Ceres, and he went into a shop outside which hung a tattered grey cloth tied to a rod; on the cloth the word *Trattoria* was written. A skimpy bed-sheet, supported by two very narrow wooden hoops, and hanging down to within three feet of the ground, protected the door of the *Trattoria* from the direct rays of the sun. Inside, a very pretty, half-naked woman received our hero respectfully, which gave him the greatest pleasure; he immediately told her he was dying of hunger. While the woman was preparing the meal, a man of about thirty came in without greeting anyone; suddenly getting up from the bench where he had flung himself down in a familiar way, he said to Fabrice: '*Eccellenza, la riverisco*' (My respects, your Excellency). Fabrice was feeling very lighthearted at that moment and instead of thinking up some sinister plan, he replied with a laugh:

'And how the devil d'you know my Excellency?'

'What! Doesn't your Excellency recognize Ludovic, one of the coachmen to my lady the Duchess Sanseverina? I always used to fall ill of the fever at Sacca, that villa in the country where we used to go every year; I asked the Signora for a pension and retired. I'm a rich man now; instead of the pension of twelve scudi, which was the most I could expect, the Signora told me that so I would have the time to write sonnets, for I write poetry in my own local dialect, she was giving me twenty-four and his Excellency the Count told me that if ever I was in difficulties, I had only to come and speak to him. I had the honour of driving Monsignore for part of the way when, like a good Christian, he went on a retreat to the Charterhouse at Velleja.*'

Fabrice looked at this man and thought he recognized him. He used to be one of the most stylish coachmen of the Sanseverina household; now that he was, as he put it, rich, all he was wearing was a coarse, torn shirt and some cloth trousers that had once been dyed black and barely covered his knees; a pair of shoes and a dreadful hat completed the outfit. Moreover, he had not shaved for a fortnight. While he ate his omelette, Fabrice chatted with him as a complete equal; from what he had seen he believed Ludovic was the landlady's lover. Quickly finishing his lunch, he said in an undertone to Ludovic:

'A word in your ear.'

'Your Excellency can speak freely in front of her, she's a truly good woman', said Ludovic fondly.

'Very well, my friends,' went on Fabrice without hesitating, 'I'm in trouble and I need your help. In the first place, there's nothing political about this business; I've simply killed a man who tried to murder me because I was speaking to his mistress.'

'You poor young man!' cried the woman.

'Your Excellency can count on me!' exclaimed the coachman, his eyes flashing with the most ardent devotion. 'Where does your Excellency wish to go?'

'To Ferrara. I've a passport, but I'd rather not speak to any constables, they might know about what's happened.'

'When did you dispatch this character?'

'At six this morning.'

'Might your Excellency have some blood on his clothing?' asked the landlady.

'I was wondering about that,' went on the coachman, 'and in any case the cloth of those garments is too fine; you don't see many like that hereabouts, it could draw attention to us; I'm going to buy some clothes from the Jew. Your Excellency is about my height, but thinner.'

'I beg you, don't call me Excellency any more, it might attract attention.'

'Yes, Excellency,' replied the coachman as he left the shop.

'Just a minute!' cried Fabrice. 'What about money! Come back!'

'Don't think about money!' said the landlady. 'He's got sixty-seven scudi that are entirely at your service. For my part,' she added, lowering her voice, 'I've about forty scudi that I'm very happy to offer you; you don't always have money on you when these things happen.'

Because of the heat, Fabrice had taken off his coat upon entering the *Trattoria*:

'You've got a waistcoat there that could get us into difficulties if someone came in: that handsome English cloth would be noticed.' She gave our fugitive a cloth waistcoat, dyed black, that belonged to her husband. A tall young man came into the shop through an inside door; he was dressed with a certain elegance.

'This is my husband,' said the landlady. 'Pierre-Antoine,' she told her husband, 'this gentleman's a friend of Ludovic's; he got into a bit of trouble this morning on the other side of the river, and he wants to escape to Ferrara.'

'Oh! We'll get him there,' the husband declared very politely; 'we've Charles-Joseph's boat.'

Due to another weakness of our hero's, which we will confess as sincerely as we described his fear in the police station on the end of the bridge, there were tears in his eyes; he was deeply touched by the complete devotion that these peasants were showing him; he thought also of his aunt's characteristic generosity; he would have liked to make these people rich. Ludovic returned, carrying a parcel.

'We're going to get this fellow away,' the husband said to him, his manner very friendly.

'That's not what I'm worried about,' replied Ludovic in a tone of great alarm; 'they're beginning to talk about you, people noticed you hesitating as you turned into our *vicolo* [alley] from the main street, as if you were trying to hide.'

'Quick, go up to the bedroom,' said the husband.

This room, which was very large and handsome, had grey canvas instead of glass in its two windows; it contained four beds, each six feet wide and five feet high.

'Hurry! Hurry!' cried Ludovic; 'we've a new policeman who thinks he's a real fine fellow and tried to get off with that pretty lady downstairs; well I told him that when he's out on

the road he might easily meet a bullet; if that wretch hears mention of your Excellency, he'll want to do us a bad turn, he'll try to arrest you here so as to get Théodolinde's *Trattoria* a bad name.'

'Well now!' continued Ludovic on seeing Fabrice's shirt all stained with blood and his wounds bound with handkerchiefs, 'so the *porco* put up a fight, did he? That's a hundred times more than you need to get you arrested; I didn't buy a shirt.' Without more ado he opened the husband's wardrobe and gave one of his shirts to Fabrice, who was soon dressed as a wealthy farmer. Ludovic unhooked a net hanging on the wall, put Fabrice's clothes in the basket used for the fish, ran down the stairs, and went quickly out by a back door; Fabrice followed him.

'Théodolinde,' he shouted, as he passed alongside the *Trattoria*, 'hide the stuff that's upstairs, we're going to wait in the willows; and you, Pierre-Antoine, send us a boat as quick as you can, you'll be well paid.'

Ludovic took Fabrice across more than twenty ditches. Some very long and springy planks served as bridges over the widest of these; Ludovic withdrew the planks after they had crossed over. Once they had reached the last ditch he pulled back the plank with alacrity. 'Now we can have a breather,' he said; 'that damned policeman'll have to go more than two leagues to catch your Excellency. You've gone very pale,' he told Fabrice; 'I didn't forget to bring a drop of brandy.'

'That's very welcome; I'm beginning to feel the wound in my thigh, and besides, I was scared out of my wits in the police station on the end of the bridge.'

'I can well believe it,' said Ludovic; 'with a shirt all over blood like yours, I can't imagine how you even dared go into such a place. As for your wounds, that's something I know all about; I'm going to put you in a nice cool spot where you can sleep for an hour; the boat will come and get us there, if they can find a boat, that is; if not, when you're a bit rested we'll just go another two little leagues, and I'll take you to a mill where I myself will hire a boat. Your Excellency's much more knowledgeable than me; the Signora will be in despair when she hears about your misadventure; she'll be told that you

were very badly wounded, perhaps even that you killed the other man in a dishonourable way. The Marquise Raversi will be sure to spread every ugly rumour about that might distress the Signora. Your Excellency could write.'

'And how could I get the letter to her?'

'The lads at the mill where we're going earn twelve soldi a day; they'd reach Parma in a day and a half, so that makes four lire for the trip; two lire for the wear and tear on the shoes, if the errand was for a poor man like me that'd be six lire, but as it's to be a service for a lord, I'll give them twelve.'

After they had reached the cool, dense wood of alders and willows where they were to rest, Ludovic walked for more than another hour to fetch paper and ink. 'Lord, how comfortable I am here!' exclaimed Fabrice. 'Fortune, farewell, I shall never be an archbishop!'

When Ludovic returned he found him fast asleep and was reluctant to disturb him. The boat did not appear until toward sunset; as soon as Ludovic saw it in the distance, he woke Fabrice, who wrote two letters.

'Your Excellency's much more knowledgeable than me,' said Ludovic rather anxiously, 'and whatever your Excellency may say, I'm very much afraid that deep down you'd be offended if I were to suggest something.'

'I'm not such an idiot as you think,' replied Fabrice, 'and no matter what you may say, in my eyes you will always be a faithful servant of my aunt's, and a man who has done everything in his power to help me out of a very nasty predicament.'

Still more protestations were needed to persuade Ludovic to speak, and when he had finally made up his mind to do so, he began with a preamble that lasted a good five minutes. Fabrice grew impatient, then asked himself: Who's to blame for this? We are, because of our vanity, which this man could so clearly see when he was up there on the driver's seat. Eventually, Ludovic's devotion made him risk speaking frankly.

'What wouldn't the Marquise Raversi give to the messenger you're sending to Parma, to get her hands on those two letters! They're in your writing, and therefore provide legal

evidence against you. Your Excellency will think I'm poking my nose in where I shouldn't, you may also be embarrassed at placing before the eyes of the Signora the poor scrawl of a coachman, but, in short, your safety forces me to speak, even though you may think me impertinent. Could not your Excellency dictate these two letters to me? Then I would be the only one compromised, and even so not seriously, as I'd say if need be that you stopped me in the middle of a field with a horn inkstand in one hand and a pistol in the other, and ordered me to write.'

'Give me your hand, my dear Ludovic,' cried Fabrice, 'and to prove to you that I don't want any secrets from a friend like you, copy these two letters out just as they are.' Ludovic realized the full significance of this mark of confidence and was deeply touched by it, but after several lines, as the boat could be seen approaching swiftly along the river:

'These letters will be finished sooner', he said to Fabrice, 'if your Excellency would be so good as to dictate them to me.' Once the letters were finished, Fabrice wrote an A and a B on the last line, and on a little scrap of paper put in French: 'Croyez A et B', then crumpled up the paper. The messenger was to hide this crumpled paper in his clothes.

When the boat was within reach of his voice, Ludovic hailed the boatmen by names that were not theirs; they made no reply, and pulled over a thousand yards farther down river, looking all round to make sure they weren't being watched by some customs officer.

'I'm at your service,' Ludovic told Fabrice; 'would you like me to take the letters to Parma myself? Would you like me to go with you to Ferrara?'

'To go with me to Ferrara is a favour that I hesitated to ask of you. I'll have to disembark, and try to go into the town without showing my passport. I can tell you I'm most tremendously reluctant to travel under the name of Giletti, and you're the only person I can think of who could buy me another passport.'

'Why didn't you say something at Casal-Maggiore! I know a spy who'd have sold me an excellent passport, and not expensive, maybe forty or fifty lire.'

One of the two boatmen had been born on the right bank of the Po, and consequently needed no passport to enter Parma from outside the state; he undertook to deliver the letters. Ludovic knew how to handle an oar and was quite prepared to manage the boat with the help of the second boatman.

'On the lower reaches of the Po', he said, 'there'll be a number of armed police vessels, but I'll be able to avoid them.' They were obliged, on more than ten occasions, to hide among tiny, low-lying islands, covered with willow trees. Three times they disembarked so as to let the boats pass empty in front of the police vessels. Ludovic took advantage of these long periods of idleness to recite several of his sonnets to Fabrice. The feelings, though appropriate enough, seemed to have been blunted by the expression, and were not worth the effort of being written down; the extraordinary thing was that this ex-coachman had emotions and views which were vivid and picturesque; he became cold and banal as soon as he began to write. It's the opposite of what we see in society, thought Fabrice; nowadays people can express anything with grace, but their hearts have nothing to say. He realized that the greatest pleasure he could give this loyal servant was to correct the spelling mistakes in his sonnets.

'They make fun of me when I lend them my notebook,' said Ludovic; 'but if your Excellency was so kind as to dictate the spelling of the words to me letter by letter, the only thing envious people could then say would be: "good spelling isn't the same as genius."' It was not until two nights later that Fabrice could disembark in complete safety in an alder wood, a league short of Ponte Lago Oscuro. He remained hidden all day in a field of hemp, and Ludovic went ahead of him into Ferrara; there he rented a little room from a poor Jew, who immediately grasped that there was money to be earned if he knew how to keep quiet. That evening, as darkness was falling, Fabrice entered Ferrara riding on a small horse; he was badly in need of this assistance, as the heat on the river had affected him; the knife-wound in his thigh, and the sword-thrust Giletti had given him in the shoulder at the beginning of the fight, had become inflamed and were making him feverish.

CHAPTER 12

The Jew who owned the room had found a discreet surgeon who, in his turn grasping that there was money in the purse, told Ludovic that his 'conscience' obliged him to make a report to the police concerning the wounds of the young man whom he, Ludovic, called his brother.

'The law is clear,' he added; 'it's only too obvious that your brother didn't inflict these wounds on himself, as he claims, by falling off a ladder with an open knife in his hand.'

Ludovic coldly replied to this honest surgeon that, if he decided to follow the promptings of his conscience, he, Ludovic, before leaving Ferrara, would have the honour of falling upon him in similar fashion, with an open knife in his hand. When he reported this incident to Fabrice, the latter reproached him vehemently, but there was not a moment to lose before making tracks. Telling the Jew he was going to try giving his brother an outing in the fresh air, Ludovic went and fetched a carriage, and our friends quitted the house, never to return again. No doubt these accounts of the measures that the absence of a passport entails will seem tedious to the reader; this type of concern no longer exists in France, but in Italy, and particularly in the vicinity of the Po, everyone talks about passports. Once they had left Ferrara without let or hindrance, as if setting off on a country outing, Ludovic dismissed the carriage then re-entered the town by another gate, returning to pick up Fabrice with a *sediola* he had hired for a journey of a dozen leagues. When they were close to Bologna our friends asked to be driven across country by the road leading from Florence to Bologna; they spent the night in the meanest inn they could find, and in the morning, as Fabrice felt strong enough to walk a little, they entered Bologna as pedestrians. They had burnt Gilletti's passport; the death of the actor must be known and there was less danger in being arrested for not having passports than for having in their possession the passport of a man who had been killed.

In Bologna Ludovic had two or three acquaintances who were servants in great houses; it was decided that he would go and pass the time of day with them. He would tell them that while travelling from Florence with his young brother, the latter, feeling in need of sleep, had let him set off by himself an hour before dawn. He was supposed to meet him in the village where he, Ludovic, was going to rest during the hottest hours of the day. But when his brother failed to turn up Ludovic decided to retrace his steps; he had found him lying wounded; he had been struck with a stone, slashed several times with a knife, and also robbed by some men who had picked a quarrel with him. This brother was a good-looking youth, he knew how to groom and drive horses, he could read and write, and he was keen to find work in some good house. Ludovic was prepared to add, should the need arise, that after knocking Fabrice down the thieves had carried off with them the little bag containing their linen and their passports.

On reaching Bologna Fabrice felt extremely tired and as, without a passport, he dared not show himself at an inn, he went into the huge church of San Petronio. It was delightfully cool in there and he soon felt completely revived. What an ingrate I am, he suddenly thought, I've come into a church and it's to sit down, as though it were a café! He fell to his knees and gave fervent thanks to God for the protection with which he had obviously been surrounded since he had had the misfortune to kill Giletti. The danger which still made him shudder was that of being recognized in the police station at Casal-Maggiore.

How was it, he kept wondering, that that clerk, whose eyes were so full of suspicion and who actually reread my passport three times, how was it he didn't notice that I'm not five foot ten inches, I'm not thirty-eight years old, and I'm not badly pock-marked? Oh Lord, how many blessings I have to thank Thee for! And I've waited until this moment to cast my worthless being at Thy feet! My pride would have had me believe that it was due to futile human prudence that I had the good fortune to avoid the Spielberg, which was simply waiting there to swallow me up!

Fabrice spent more than an hour in this state of intense emotion, in the presence of God's immeasurable goodness. Ludovic approached without his hearing, and sat down opposite him; Fabrice had hidden his forehead in his hands, and when he raised his head his faithful servant saw tears streaming down his cheeks.

'Come back in an hour,' Fabrice told him rather curtly.

Ludovic was aware of Fabrice's piety, and forgave him for his curt tone. Fabrice recited, several times, the Seven Penitential Psalms, which he knew by heart; he lingered a long while over the versicles relating to his present situation.

Fabrice begged forgiveness of God for many things, but what is remarkable is the fact that it did not occur to him to number among his transgressions the plan of becoming an archbishop, solely because Count Mosca was Prime Minister and considered this position, and the splendid existence that went with it, appropriate for the Duchess's nephew. It is true that Fabrice had not desired it passionately, but he had thought about it, exactly as he would have thought about a position as a minister or a general. It had never entered his head that his conscience could be implicated in this project of the Duchess's. This is a remarkable aspect of the religion that he had learnt from the Jesuits in Milan. That religion *takes away the courage to think about unaccustomed matters*, and above all forbids, as the gravest of sins, *self-examination*, which is a step towards Protestantism. To discover what one is guilty of, one must question one's priest, or read the list of sins as it appears in the books entitled: *Preparation for the Sacrament of Penitence*. Fabrice knew by heart the list of sins made out in Latin that he had learnt in the Ecclesiastical College of Naples. So, when he recited this list and reached the section on murder, he had most certainly accused himself before God of killing a man, but in defence of his own life. He had passed rapidly over, without paying them the slightest attention, the various sections relating to the sin of *simony* (the procurement of high positions in the church by means of money). If anyone had proposed that he should pay 2,000 lire to become senior Vicar-General to the Archbishop of Parma, he would have rejected this suggestion with horror; but, although he was not

lacking in intelligence nor, more particularly, in logic, it had never once entered his head that the influence of Count Mosca, employed on his behalf, constituted *simony*. That is the triumph of a Jesuit education: to inculcate the habit of not paying attention to things that are as clear as daylight. A Frenchman brought up amid the self-interest and the irony of Parisians could, in good faith, have accused Fabrice of hypocrisy, at the very moment when our hero was opening his soul to God with the greatest possible sincerity and the deepest emotion.

Fabrice did not leave the church until he had prepared the confession he planned to make the very next day; he found Ludovic sitting on the steps of the vast stone peristyle which rises above the large square in front of the façade of San Petronio. Just as, after a great storm, the air is purer, Fabrice's soul was tranquil, contented, and as though refreshed.

'I'm feeling splendid, and my wounds hardly hurt me now,' he said, coming up to Ludovic; 'but first I must ask your pardon, I answered you crossly when you came and spoke to me in the church; I was preparing for confession. Well now! How are things going?'

'Never better; I've found lodgings, in truth they're hardly worthy of your Excellency, they're with the wife of a friend, she's very pretty and furthermore she's a very close friend of one of the most important officials in the police. Tomorrow I'll go and declare that our passports were stolen; that declaration will be taken at face value; but I'll pay the postal charges for the letter the police will write to Casal-Maggiore, to enquire whether there exists in that commune one Ludovic San-Micheli, who has a brother, named Fabrice, in the service of the Duchess Sanseverina, in Parma. It's all over, *siamo a cavallo*.' [An Italian proverb: we're safe and sound.]

Fabrice had suddenly grown extremely serious: he asked Ludovic to wait for him for a moment, almost ran back into the church, and was barely inside when he again threw himself on to his knees and humbly kissed the flagstones. 'It's a miracle, Lord,' he exclaimed, with tears in his eyes; 'when Thou didst see that my soul was ready to return to the fold, Thou didst save me. Dear Lord! It is possible that one day I

may be killed in some duel; at the instant of my death, remember the state my soul is in at this moment.' It was with the most intense rapture that Fabrice again recited the Seven Penitential Psalms. Before leaving, he went up to an old woman who was sitting in front of a large Madonna, and beside a triangular piece of iron that was fixed vertically on to a base of the same metal. The edges of the triangle were covered with a large number of spikes intended to hold the little candles that the piety of the faithful lights in front of the famous Madonna of Cimabue.* When Fabrice approached it there were only seven candles burning; he registered this detail in his memory, intending to reflect upon it later when he had more time.

'How much are the candles?' he asked the woman.

'Two baiocchi* apiece.'

And indeed they were no thicker than the top of a quill pen, and less than a foot in length.

'How many more candles can your triangle hold?'

'Sixty-three, as there are seven burning.'

Ah! thought Fabrice, sixty-three and seven make seventy; that's also something I should remember. He paid for the candles, set up and lit the first seven himself, then knelt down to make his offering, saying to the old woman as he stood up:

'It's for *grace received*.'

'I'm dying of hunger,' Fabrice told Ludovic as he rejoined him.

'Don't let's go to a tavern, we'll go to our lodgings; the mistress of the house will buy you what you need for lunch; she'll make a few soldi on it and be all the fonder of the new arrival because of that.'

'That'll just mean I have to die of hunger for a whole hour longer', said Fabrice, laughing as serenely as a child, and going into a tavern near San Petronio. To his extreme surprise, he saw, at a table close beside the one where he had seated himself, Pépé, his aunt's senior manservant, the very person who had once come to meet him in Geneva. Fabrice signed to him to keep quiet; then, after a quick lunch, during which his happy smile never left his lips, he stood up; Pépé followed him and, for the third time, our hero entered San

Petronio. Ludovic tactfully remained outside, walking about the square.

'My God, Monsignore, how are your wounds? My lady is terribly worried; for a whole day she believed you'd been abandoned for dead on an island in the Po; I'll send off a messenger straight away. I've been looking for you for six days, I spent three in Ferrara, going round all the inns.'

'Have you a passport for me?'

'I've three different ones; one with your Excellency's names and titles; the second simply with your name, and the third made out in a false name, Joseph Bossi; each passport is in two versions, depending on whether your Excellency will be arriving from Florence or from Modena. All you have to do is go for a walk outside the city. His Excellency the Count would be pleased if you chose to stay at the Albergo del Pellegrino, the owner's a friend of his.'

While apparently walking at random, Fabrice was making his way up the right nave of the church towards the place where his candles were burning; his gaze settled on Cimabue's Madonna, and he fell to his knees, saying to Pépé: 'I must give thanks for a moment.' Pépé did likewise. As they left the church, Pépé noticed that Fabrice gave a twenty-lira piece to the first beggar who approached him; attracted by this beggar's grateful cries, the swarms of destitutes who normally haunt the square of San Petronio crowded round our charitable hero. They all wanted a share of the coin. The women, despairing of being able to penetrate the rabble surrounding Fabrice, swooped down upon him, yelling that surely it was true that he had intended his twenty lire to be divided among all of God's poor. Pépé, brandishing his gold-knobbed cane, ordered them to leave his Excellency in peace.

'Ah, Excellency,' the women continued in yet more piercing tones, 'give us poor old women a gold piece too!' Fabrice walked faster, the women, still shouting, followed him, and a great many male beggars, rushing up from streets all round, created a kind of small-scale riot. The whole of this horribly dirty and forceful crowd was shouting: 'Excellency.' Fabrice had a very difficult time getting away from the mob; this scene

brought his imagination back to earth. I got what I deserved, he thought, I'd been rubbing shoulders with the riff-raff.

Two women followed him right up to the Saragossa gate through which he left the city; P  p   stopped them by threatening them with his cane in a determined way and throwing them some money. Fabrice climbed the charming hill of San-Michele in Bosco, walked round part of the city on the outside of the walls, turned on to a footpath, and after five hundred paces reached the Florence road, then re-entered Bologna and gravely handed to the police official a passport in which his description was given with great precision. This passport named him as Joseph Bossi, a theological student. Fabrice noticed a tiny spot of red ink that appeared as if by chance near the bottom right-hand corner of the sheet. Two hours later he had a spy on his heels, because of the title 'Excellency' with which his companion had addressed him in front of the beggars of San Petronio, although his passport did not include any of the titles which give a man the right to be called 'Excellency' by his servants.

Fabrice saw the spy, but did not give him a second thought; he was no longer worried about passports or the police, but was enjoying everything just like a child. P  p   had been ordered to stay with him, but seeing Fabrice quite satisfied with Ludovic, preferred to go himself to tell the Duchess this excellent news. Fabrice wrote two very long letters to those who were so dear to him; then he had the idea of writing a third to the venerable Archbishop Landriani. This letter made a marvellous impression, it contained a very precise account of the fight with Giletti. Deeply touched, the good Archbishop did not fail to go and read this letter to the Prince, who listened to it eagerly, being quite curious to see how this young Monsignore would set about excusing so appalling a murder. Thanks to the many friends of the Marquise Raversi, the Prince, along with the whole of the city of Parma, believed that Fabrice had enlisted the aid of twenty or thirty peasants to fall upon a wretched actor who had been so insolent as to contest his right to little Marietta. In the courts of absolute rulers, the first clever schemer dictates what is 'the truth', just as in Paris it is dictated by fashion.

'But, devil take it,' said the Prince to the Archbishop, 'one has things like that done by someone else; to do them oneself is just not proper; and in any case one doesn't kill a player like Giletti, one buys him.'

Fabrice had not the faintest suspicion of what was going on in Parma. In actual fact, it was a question of whether the death of this actor who, when he was alive, earned thirty-two lire a month, would bring down the Ultra ministry and its leader, Count Mosca.

On hearing of Giletti's death, the Prince, irritated by the independent airs the Duchess affected, had ordered the Public Prosecutor Rassi to treat the whole affair as if it concerned a Liberal. Fabrice, for his part, believed that a man of his rank was above the law; he did not take into account that in those countries where men of high birth are never punished, intrigue is all-powerful, even against them. He often spoke to Ludovic of his complete innocence, which would shortly be proclaimed; the paramount reason he gave was that he was not guilty. On that subject Ludovic said to him one day: 'I don't understand why your Excellency, who's so intelligent and learned, takes the trouble to say these things to me, his faithful servant; your Excellency takes too many precautions; those are things you should say in public or in court.' That man thinks I'm a murderer and loves me no less because of it, thought Fabrice, dumbfounded.

Three days after P p 's departure, he was quite amazed to receive an enormous letter sealed with a silk braid as in the days of Louis XIV, and addressed to *His Excellency the most Reverend Monsignore Fabrice del Dongo, senior Vicar-General of the diocese of Parma, Canon, etc.*

But am I still all those things? he wondered laughingly. Archbishop Landriani's epistle was a masterpiece of logic and clarity; it ran to no less than nineteen large sheets, and told him in great detail all that had occurred in Parma relating to the death of Giletti.

'A French army commanded by Marshal Ney and marching on the city would not have caused more of a stir,' the good Archbishop wrote to him; 'with the exception of the Duchess and myself, my dearest son, everybody believes that you

permitted yourself the indulgence of killing the actor Giletti. If you had indeed committed such a desperate act, things of that nature can be hushed up with a few thousand lire and an absence of six months; but la Raversi wants to use this affair to bring down Count Mosca. It is not the dreadful crime of murder that the public blames you for, it is solely the *ineptitude* or rather the insolence of not having deigned to resort to a *bulo* [a kind of small-time cut-throat]. I am reporting here, in plain language, what I hear said, because since this eternally regrettable misfortune occurred, I visit each day three of the most influential houses in the city, so that I may have the opportunity of vindicating you. And never, I feel, have I put to a more saintly use the small measure of eloquence with which Heaven has seen fit to bless me.'

The scales fell from Fabrice's eyes; the Duchess's numerous letters, which overflowed with expressions of the warmest affection, never deigned to tell him what was going on. The Duchess swore she would leave Parma for ever, if he did not, very soon, return there in triumph. 'The Count will do everything for you that is humanly possible,' she told Fabrice in the letter accompanying the one from the Archbishop. 'As for me, you've changed my character with this fine escapade of yours; I'm now as miserly as Tombone the banker; I've dismissed all my workers, and I've done more, I've dictated an inventory of my fortune to the Count and discovered that it's considerably less extensive than I had believed. After the death of that excellent man Count Pietranera who, by the way, you'd have done better to avenge rather than risk your life against a creature like Giletti, I was left with an income of 1,200 lire and 5,000 lire's-worth of debts; one of the things I remember is that I had two-and-a-half dozen pairs of white satin slippers from Paris and only one pair of shoes for walking in the street. I've almost decided to take the 300,000 lire that the Duke left me, all of which I was planning to use to build him a magnificent tomb. Anyway, the Marquise Raversi is your main enemy, in other words, mine; if you're finding it dull on your own in Bologna, just say the word, I'll come and join you. Here are four more bills of exchange, etc., etc.'

The Duchess did not say a word to Fabrice about how people in Parma viewed his case, she wished above all to comfort him, and, in any event, the death of a ridiculous creature like Giletti did not strike her as the kind of thing for which a del Dongo could seriously be blamed. 'How many Gilettis must our ancestors have dispatched to the next world,' she remarked to the Count, 'without it having entered anyone's head to reproach them on that score!'

Fabrice, who for the first time now had an inkling of the true state of affairs, was astonished, and settled down to study the Archbishop's letter. Unfortunately, the Archbishop supposed he knew more than he actually did. Fabrice grasped that the Marquise Raversi's triumph was based above all on the fact that it was impossible to find any eyewitnesses to that fatal combat. The manservant who had first brought the news to Parma was in the village inn at Sanguigna at the time of the fight; little Marietta and the old woman who acted as her mother had disappeared, and the Marquise had bought the *vetturino* who drove the carriage, and whose testimony now was abominable. 'Although the proceedings are shrouded in the most impenetrable mystery,' wrote the good Archbishop in his Ciceronian style, 'and directed by the Public Prosecutor Rassi, of whom Christian charity alone prevents me speaking ill, but who has made his fortune by pursuing the accused as mercilessly as a hound pursues a hare; although, as I say, Rassi, whose turpitude and venality are greater than anything your imagination could envisage, has been entrusted by an irate Prince with the direction of the case, I have been able to read the three depositions made by the *vetturino*. By a remarkable stroke of good fortune, the wretched man contradicts himself. And I will add, because I am speaking to my Vicar-General, to the person who will have the direction of this diocese after me, that I summoned the priest of the parish wherein this misguided sinner dwells. I can tell you, my very dear son, although this is under the seal of the confessional, that this priest already knows, from the *vetturino*'s wife, the number of scudi he received from the Marquise Raversi; I would not dare assert that the Marquise required him to accuse you falsely, but that is probably the case. The money

was remitted by an unworthy priest who performs for this Marquise tasks that are far from exemplary; I have, for the second time, been obliged to deny him the right to celebrate Mass. I will not try your patience with details of several other measures that you might expect I would take and which, furthermore, fall within the range of my duties. A certain Canon, a colleague of yours at the cathedral, and who moreover is upon occasion a little too conscious of the influence he exerts by virtue of his family's wealth, of which, by the will of Heaven, he is now sole heir, made so bold as to declare, when visiting the home of Count Zurla, Minister of the Interior, that he considered this little matter proven against you (he was referring to the murder of the unfortunate Giletti). I sent for him, and in the presence of my three other Vicars-General, of my Almoner, and of two other priests who happened to be in the waiting-room, I begged him to communicate to us, his brothers, the reasons for this total conviction he said he now had of the guilt of one of his colleagues in the cathedral; the wretched man could only articulate some unconvincing reasons; everyone remonstrated with him and, although I deemed it best to say very little myself, he burst into tears and freely admitted to us that he was totally mistaken, upon which I promised him secrecy in my own name and in the name of all those present at the interview, but on condition that he would employ all his zeal to rectify the false impressions that could have been created by statements he had advanced over the course of the preceding fortnight.

'I shall not, my dear son, repeat what you must have known for some time, namely, that of the thirty-four workmen employed in the excavations undertaken by Count Mosca, workmen whom la Raversi claims were paid by you to help you commit a crime, thirty-two were down in the bottom of their ditch and completely engrossed in their work when you seized the hunting knife and used it to defend your life against the man who had attacked you without warning. Two of them, who were not in the ditch, shouted to the others: "Monsignore is being murdered!" That shout alone reveals your innocence in all its dazzling purity. Well now! The Public Prosecutor Rassi asserts that these two men have

disappeared; what's more, eight of the men who were in the ditch have been found; during their first interrogation six declared having heard the shout "Monsignore is being murdered". I know, by roundabout means, that in their fifth interrogation, which took place yesterday evening, five declared that they could not clearly recall whether they had actually heard that shout or whether it had simply been repeated to them by one of their comrades. Orders have gone out to the effect that I be informed of the domiciles of these workmen, and their priests will make them understand that they will be damned if they should go so far as to modify the truth in order to earn a few scudi.'

The good Archbishop went into endless details, as will be evident from those reported above. Then he added, using the Latin language:

'This affair is nothing less than an attempt to change ministries. If you are condemned, it can only be to the galleys or to death, in which case I would intervene by declaring, from the eminence of my archiepiscopal pulpit, that I know you are innocent, that you simply defended your life against a ruffian, and lastly, that I have forbidden you to return to Parma as long as your enemies there prevail; I even intend to discredit, as he deserves, the Public Prosecutor; hatred of this man is as widespread as esteem for his character is rare. But in fact on the eve of the day when the Public Prosecutor pronounces this highly unjust judgment, the Duchess Sanseverina will leave the city and perhaps even the State of Parma: in that event no one entertains the slightest doubt that the Count will hand in his resignation. Then, in all probability, General Fabio Conti will come to the Ministry, and the Marquise Raversi will triumph. The great misfortune in your affair is that no capable man has been entrusted with the task of doing what is required to bring your innocence to light and thwart the attempts to suborn witnesses. The Count imagines himself to be filling this role, but he is too much of an aristocrat to stoop to certain details; furthermore, in his capacity as Minister of Police, he was immediately obliged to issue the most severe orders against you. And lastly, dare I say this? Our Sovereign Prince believes you to be guilty, or at any rate

makes a pretence of so believing, and reveals a certain acrimony in this matter.' (The words corresponding to 'our Sovereign Prince' and 'makes a pretence of so believing' were in Greek, and Fabrice felt infinitely grateful to the Archbishop for having dared to write them. He took a knife, cut out that line of the letter, and destroyed it on the spot.)

Fabrice broke off reading this letter a score of times; he was overcome with feelings of the warmest gratitude: he replied immediately with a letter of eight pages. Often he was obliged to raise his head so that his tears would not fall on the paper. The next day, when he was about to seal the letter, its tone struck him as too worldly. I'll write it in Latin, he thought, that will seem more suitable to the worthy Archbishop. But as he strove to compose beautiful Latin sentences that were of ample proportions and truly Ciceronian in style, he recalled that one day the Archbishop, when speaking to him about Napoleon, had affected to call him Bonaparte; all the emotion which had moved him to tears on the preceding day vanished instantly. Oh King of Italy, he exclaimed, that same allegiance that so many swore to you in your lifetime, I will keep towards you after your death! He's fond of me, I know, but it's because I'm a del Dongo and he's the son of a bourgeois. So that his fine letter in Italian would not be wasted, Fabrice made some necessary alterations to it, and sent it to Count Mosca.

That very day, Fabrice met little Marietta in the street; she turned pink with delight, and signed to him to follow without speaking to her. She made her way rapidly to a deserted portico; there, to avoid being recognized, she pulled forward the black lace that covered her head in the local fashion and, turning round with alacrity:

'How can it be possible', she asked Fabrice, 'that you're walking freely about in the street?' Fabrice told her his story.

'Good God! You've been in Ferrara! And there I was scouring the town for you! I quarrelled with the old woman, you know, because she wanted to take me to Venice and I was sure you'd never go there, as you're on Austria's blacklist. I sold my gold necklace to get to Bologna, I had a feeling I'd be lucky like this and meet you; the old woman came here two

days after me. So I won't invite you to our place, she'd bother you with more of those horrid demands for money that make me so ashamed. We've lived very comfortably since that fatal day—you know when I mean—and we haven't spent a quarter of what you gave her. I wouldn't want to go and see you in the Pellegrino, it would attract attention. Try to rent a little room in a quiet street, and at the *Ave Maria* [nightfall] I'll be here, under this same portico.' So saying, she ran off.

CHAPTER 13

Every serious idea was forgotten at the unexpected appearance of this charming person. Fabrice settled down to life in Bologna with a feeling of profound joy and complete security. This artless capacity of his to find happiness in whatever was filling his life was apparent in the letters he wrote the Duchess; so much so that it annoyed her. Fabrice was only faintly conscious of this, but he did note in compressed form on the face of his watch: 'when I write to the D. never say, "when I was a prelate, when I was a man of the cloth"; it makes her angry.' He had bought two small horses with which he was very pleased; he would harness them to a hired carriage whenever little Marietta wanted to visit one of those enchanting sites near Bologna; he drove her to the Reno Waterfall* almost every evening. On their return, he would stop and call on that agreeable man Crescentini, who had some idea he might be Marietta's father.

Heavens! If this is that coffee-house existence that I thought so ridiculous for a man with any ability, thought Fabrice, I was wrong to reject it. He forgot that he never went to a café except to read the *Constitutionnel*, and that, as he was totally unknown to the fashionable society of Bologna, the gratifications of vanity played no part in his present happiness. When he was not with little Marietta, he was to be seen at the Observatory, where he was attending a course of lectures on astronomy; the professor had taken a great liking to him, and Fabrice would lend him his horses on Sundays so that he could cut a dash with his wife on the Corso della Montagnola.

He detested making anyone unhappy, however unworthy of esteem they might be. Marietta was utterly opposed to his seeing the old woman, but one day when she was at church he went up to visit the *mammaccia*, who turned scarlet with rage on seeing him come in. Now's the time to lord it like a del Dongo, Fabrice told himself.

'How much does Marietta earn per month, when she's working?' he demanded, with the air that a self-respecting

young Parisian affects as he makes an entrance into the dress-circle at the Bouffes.*

'Fifty scudi.'

'As usual you're lying; tell me the truth, or by God you won't get a penny.'

'Well, she was earning twenty-two scudi in our company in Parma, when we were so unlucky as to meet you; I earned twelve, and we each gave Giletti, our protector, a third of what we got. Out of this Giletti used to give Marietta a present every month; that might easily have been worth two scudi.'

'You're still lying; all you ever earned was four scudi. But if you're good to Marietta, I'll take you on as if I were an impresario; every month you'll receive twelve scudi for yourself and twenty-two for her; but if I see her with red eyes, I'll declare bankruptcy.'

'Real proud of yourself, aren't you! Well, your wonderful generosity will be the ruin of us,' replied the old woman furiously; 'we're losing our *avviamento* [contacts]. When we have the dreadful misfortune to be deprived of your Excellency's protection, no troop of actors will have heard of us, and they won't have no vacancies; we won't be able to get taken on, and we'll starve to death thanks to you.'

'Go to the devil!' said Fabrice as he left.

'I won't go to the devil, you ungodly wretch, but where I will go is the police station, and I'll tell 'em that you're a Monsignore who's unfrocked himself, and that you're no more called Joseph Bossi than I am.' Fabrice had already gone down several of the stairs; he came back.

'In the first place the police know better than you do what my real name is, but if you take it into your head to denounce me, if you are so vile as to do that,' he said to her with the utmost seriousness, 'Ludovic will have something to say to you, and it won't be just six gashes with a knife your old carcass will get, but two dozen, and you'll be in hospital for six months, and without any snuff.'

The old woman turned pale and seized Fabrice's hand, which she tried to kiss.

'I gratefully accept the life you're giving us, Marietta and me. You seem so kind-hearted, that I took you for a fool; you

should think about that, 'cos others besides me might make the same mistake; my advice is to be a bit more high-hat all the time.' Then she added with supreme effrontery: 'Don't forget my good advice, and as winter's not that far off, make Marietta and me a present of two nice outfits in that fine English cloth you can get in that big draper's in San-Petronio square.'

Pretty Marietta's love gave Fabrice all the charms of the sweetest friendship, which made him think of that similar kind of happiness which he could have experienced with the Duchess.

But isn't it a funny thing, he would sometimes reflect, that I'm not susceptible to that exclusive and passionate preoccupation that people call love? In those relationships that chance threw in my path at Novara or Naples, did I ever meet a woman whose company I preferred, even during the first few days, to an outing on a fine horse I had never ridden before? This thing they call love, he went on, could it be just another lie? I do feel love, it's true, just as I've an excellent appetite at six o'clock! I wonder, could it have been this very same rather vulgar susceptibility that those liars portrayed as the love felt by Othello, and by Tancredi? Or must I conclude that I am made differently from other men? Could my soul lack one passion, and if so, why should that be? That would be an extraordinary destiny!

In Naples, especially towards the end of his time there, Fabrice had met women who, proudly conscious of their rank, their beauty, and the social standing of those suitors that they had spurned for his sake, had attempted to manage him. When he realized what they were trying to do, Fabrice had broken off the relationship in the most flagrant and expeditious manner. Now, he told himself, if ever I allow myself to be carried away by the undoubtedly very great pleasure of becoming the lover of that pretty woman they call the Duchess Sanseverina, I'll be exactly like that heedless Frenchman who one day killed the hen that laid the golden eggs. It is to the Duchess that I owe the only happiness that tender sentiments have ever accorded me; my affection for her is my life, and in any case, without her, what am I? A poor

exile reduced to existing as best I can in a run-down villa near Novara. I remember that during the heavy autumnal rains I was obliged, at night, to fix up an umbrella over the canopy of my bed, in case of accidents. I rode the steward's horses; he was prepared to put up with this out of respect for my 'blue blood' (for my noble family), but he was beginning to think my stay rather long; my father had allotted me an income of 1,200 lire and believed himself damned for supporting a Jacobin. My poor mother and my sisters went without gowns to enable me to give my mistresses a few small presents. Their generosity pierced me to the heart. In addition, people were beginning to guess how poor I was, and the younger members of the local nobility would soon have begun to pity me. Sooner or later some conceited fool would have made clear his contempt for a poor Jacobin whose hopes had come to nothing, for, in the eyes of those people, that was what I was. I would have given or been given some splendid sword-thrust that would have sent me to the Fenestrelles Fortress, or else I'd have taken refuge again in Switzerland, still with an income of 1,200 lire. I'm fortunate enough to owe the absence of all these evils to the Duchess; and what's more, it's she who feels for me the fervent affection that I ought to feel for her.

Instead of that absurd, pathetic existence that would have turned me into a miserable creature, an imbecile, I've been living for the last four years in a big city, with an excellent carriage, which has saved me from envy and from all the petty emotions of provincial life. This too-kind aunt is forever telling me off for not withdrawing sufficient money from the bank. Do I want to spoil, for ever, this admirable state of affairs? Do I want to lose the only friend I have in the world? All I need to do is to tell *a lie*, to say to a charming woman who is probably without equal in this world, and for whom I feel the deepest attachment: 'I love you', I who do not know what real love is. She'd spend her time bitterly reproaching me for the absence of those passionate raptures to which I am a stranger. Marietta who, on the other hand, cannot see into my heart, and who intèrprets a caress as a transport of the soul, believes me madly in love, and considers herself the most fortunate of women.

In fact the only person for whom I've felt something like this tender absorption that's called, I believe, 'love', is that young Aniken in the Zonders Inn, near the Belgian border.

It is with regret that we are about to record here one of Fabrice's worst actions; in the midst of this tranquil life, a wretched impulse of ruffled vanity took possession of that heart which rebelled against love, and led it a very long way. The celebrated Fausta F*** happened to be in Bologna at the same time as Fabrice; she was unquestionably one of the leading singers of our day and possibly the most capricious woman ever to exist. The first-rate Venetian poet Burati* had composed this famous satirical sonnet about her, a sonnet which was being quoted both by princes and by the lowliest guttersnipes:

'To desire and to reject, to adore and to detest in the course of one day, to be constant only in inconstancy, to despise what the world adores even as the world adores her, la Fausta has these faults and many others besides. So do not ever look upon this serpent. If, unheeding, you should look upon her, you will forget her capriciousness. If you should be so fortunate as to hear her, you will forget yourself, and love, in that moment, will make of you what Circe made of Ulysses' companions, long ago.'

For the time being this miracle of beauty was under the spell of the enormous side-whiskers and the blatant insolence of the young Count M***, sufficiently so for her not to be repelled by his appalling jealousy. Fabrice saw this Count in the streets of Bologna, and was shocked by the air of superiority with which he strode grandly along the pavement, and condescended to display his charms to the public. This young man was exceedingly wealthy, and believed he was entitled to do anything he wished; and as his *prepotenze* [arrogant ways] had earned him some threats, he rarely put in an appearance without being accompanied by eight or ten *buli* [a kind of cut-throat] dressed in his livery, whom he had summoned from his estate on the outskirts of Brescia. On one or two occasions Fabrice's gaze had encountered that of this terrible Count, when fate ordained that he should hear Fausta. He was amazed at the angelic sweetness of her voice; he had not

imagined a voice could be like that; because of it he experienced sensations of supreme happiness, which contrasted beautifully with the *placidity* of his present existence. Could this be love at last? he wondered. Intensely curious to experience this emotion, and furthermore amused at the thought of defying this Count M***, whose countenance was more terrible than that of any drum-major, our hero indulged himself in the childish pastime of walking back and forth far too often in front of the Palazzo Tanari, which Count M*** had rented for Fausta.

One day, towards evening, while Fabrice was trying to attract the attention of Fausta, he was greeted by some very pointed roars of laughter coming from the Count's *buli*, who were at the doors of the *palazzo*. He ran home, armed himself with some good pistols, and again passed in front of the *palazzo*. Fausta, hidden behind her slatted shutters, was expecting his return and gave him due credit. M***, who was jealous of the entire universe, became particularly jealous of Signor Joseph Bossi, and stormed about making ridiculous threats; whereupon our hero sent him each morning a letter containing only these words:

'Signor Joseph Bossi destroys undesirable insects, and resides at the Pellegrino, via Largo, n° 79.'

Count M***, accustomed to the respect that his enormous fortune, his blue blood and the bravery of his thirty servants everywhere guaranteed him, preferred not to understand the language of this little note.

Fabrice wrote notes of a different kind to Fausta; M*** set spies on to watching this rival, whose attentions were not, perhaps, unwelcome; first he discovered his real name, and then that he could not, for the present, show his face in Parma. A few days later Count M***, his *buli*, his magnificent horses, and Fausta left for Parma.

Put on his mettle, Fabrice followed them the next day. In vain did the good Ludovic make pitiful protests; Fabrice sent him packing and Ludovic, himself very courageous, admired him; besides, this trip brought him closer to the pretty mistress he had in Casal-Maggiore. Thanks to Ludovic, eight or ten former soldiers of Napoleon's regiments joined the house-

hold of Signor Joseph Bossi in the guise of servants. Provided, Fabrice told himself as he embarked on this madness of following Fausta, provided that I have no contact either with the Minister of Police, Count Mosca, or with the Duchess, I am putting no one but myself at risk. I'll tell my aunt later that I was going in search of love, that beautiful thing that I've never experienced. The fact is that I think about Fausta even when I can't see her... but is it the memory of her voice that I love, or her own self? Now that he was no longer contemplating an ecclesiastical career, Fabrice was sporting a moustache and side-whiskers almost as ferocious as those of Count M***, which did disguise him a little. He established his headquarters not in Parma, which would have been too reckless, but in a nearby village in the woods, on the road to Sacca, where his aunt's villa was located. On the advice of Ludovic, he presented himself in the village as the manservant of an extremely eccentric English nobleman, who spent a hundred thousand lire a year on indulging his love of hunting, and who would shortly be arriving from Lake Como where he had been detained by the trout fishing. Fortunately, the pretty little *palazzo* that Count M*** had taken for the lovely Fausta was situated on the southern edge of the city of Parma, on the very same Sacca road, and Fausta's windows overlooked the handsome walks lined with large trees that extend beneath the fortress's lofty tower. In that unfrequented neighbourhood Fabrice was not known; he did not fail to have Count M*** followed, and one day when the latter had just left after a visit to the great singer, he had the audacity to appear in the street in broad daylight; he was in fact mounted on an excellent horse and well armed. Some musicians, of the kind who roam the streets of Italian cities and are sometimes excellent, set up their double-basses under Fausta's windows; after a prelude, they sang, quite nicely, a cantata in her honour. Fausta appeared at the window, and could hardly fail to notice a very polite young man who, having halted the horse he was riding in the middle of the street, first bowed, then proceeded to stare at her in a highly unambiguous manner. In spite of the showy English outfit that Fabrice was sporting, she soon recognized the author of the passionate letters which

had precipitated her departure from Bologna. He's a real eccentric, she thought, I do believe I'm going to love him. I've a couple of thousand lire put by, I can perfectly well ditch that terrible Count M****. In fact, he lacks both wit and originality, the only reason he's in the least entertaining is because his servants are all so atrociously ugly.

Fabrice had discovered that each day, at about eleven o'clock, Fausta went down to the centre of the town to hear Mass in that very same church of San Giovanni where the tomb of his great-uncle, the Archbishop Ascanio del Dongo, was to be found; the next day he took the risk of following her there. Truth to tell, Ludovic had procured for him a handsome English wig made of the most splendid red hair. On the subject of the colour of this hair, which was the colour of the flames that were burning his heart, Fabrice wrote a sonnet which Fausta thought charming; an unseen hand had placed it carefully upon her piano. These skirmishes went on for a good week, but Fabrice found that despite attempts of all kinds on his part, he was not making any real progress; Fausta refused to see him. He was overdoing the eccentricity; she said later that she was afraid of him. The only thing that kept Fabrice there was a lingering hope that he would eventually experience what is called 'love', but often he was bored.

'Let's leave, Signore,' Ludovic kept urging him, 'you're not in love at all, you strike me as hopelessly cold-blooded and sensible. In any case you're not getting anywhere; let's take ourselves off, if only out of pride.' Annoyed, Fabrice was on the point of leaving, when he heard that Fausta was to sing at the Palazzo Sanseverina; perhaps that divine voice will finally inflame my heart with love, he thought; and he actually dared to enter, in disguise, that *palazzo* where all eyes knew him. Imagine the feelings of the Duchess when, at the very end of the concert, she noticed a man in huntsman's livery standing near the door of the large drawing-room; that figure reminded her of someone. She sought out Count Mosca, who only then told her of Fabrice's egregious, quite incredible folly. Mosca was taking it very well. This love for someone other than the Duchess pleased him greatly; the Count, a perfect gentleman in matters other than politics, based his conduct on the

principle that he could only be happy if the Duchess was happy. 'I'll save him from himself,' he told his beloved, 'imagine how delighted our enemies would be if he were arrested here in this house! I've more than a hundred of my men here, that's why I asked for the key to the great water-tower. He says he's madly in love with la Fausta, and up to now he has not been able to steal her away from Count M***, who's set up that madwoman in royal style.' The Duchess's face showed signs of acute distress; Fabrice, then, was simply a libertine who was totally incapable of tender, serious emotions. 'And not to see us! That's something I'll never be able to forgive!' she finally said. 'And here I've been writing to him in Bologna every day!'

'I greatly appreciate his prudence,' replied the Count; 'he doesn't want to compromise us by his escapade, and it'll be amusing to hear him describe it.'

Fausta was too rattle-brained to know when to keep quiet about something that interested her: the day after the concert, at which her eyes had addressed every melody to that tall young man attired in hunting dress, she mentioned this unknown admirer to Count M***. 'Where d'you see him?' asked the Count furiously. 'In the street, at church,' replied Fausta, disconcerted. She immediately tried to remedy her indiscretion or at least play down anything that might recall Fabrice: she launched into an endless description of a tall young man with red hair and blue eyes; he must be some very wealthy and very inept Englishman, or some prince. On hearing this, Count M***, who did not shine at making accurate deductions, jumped to a conclusion that was most gratifying to his vanity, namely, that this rival was none other than the Crown Prince of Parma. That poor, melancholy young man, guarded by five or six advisors, assistant advisors, tutors, etc., etc., who never permitted him to go out without consulting one another, would cast strange glances at every reasonably attractive woman he was allowed to get near. At the Duchess's concert his rank had placed him in front of the rest of the audience, in an isolated armchair, three paces away from the beautiful Fausta, and the way he gazed at her had shocked Count M*** intensely. This foolishness born of

exquisite vanity, the notion of having a prince as rival, greatly amused Fausta, who took pleasure in confirming it by artlessly supplying countless details.

'Isn't your family', she asked the Count, 'as ancient as the Farnese, the family of this young man?'

'Whatever do you mean, as ancient! There are no bastards† in my family!'

As chance would have it, Count M*** was never able to get a good look at this so-called rival, which confirmed him in the flattering belief that he had a prince as his adversary. As a matter of fact, whenever the requirements of his plan did not take Fabrice into Parma, he remained in the woods near Sacca and the banks of the Po. Count M*** was undeniably more arrogant, but also more prudent, since he believed himself in a fair way to contending with a prince for Fausta's heart: he begged her very seriously to conduct herself at all times with the greatest possible circumspection. After falling to his knees and playing the part of a jealous and passionate lover, he told her straight out that it was for him a matter of honour that she should not be the dupe of the young Prince.

'Excuse me, but I wouldn't be his dupe if I loved him; I've never had a prince kneel at my feet.'

'If you yield,' he went on with a haughty glare, 'I may not be able to take my revenge on the Prince; but I shall most certainly take my revenge', and he left, closing the doors violently behind him. If Fabrice had presented himself at that moment, he would have won his case.

'If you care about staying alive,' he told her that evening when he took his leave after the performance, 'make certain I never discover that the young Prince has been inside your house. There's nothing I can do to him, goddamn it! But don't make me remember that I can do whatever I like to you!'

'Ah, my dear Fabrice,' cried Fausta, 'if only I knew how to find you!'

† Pierre-Louis, the first sovereign in the Farnese family, who was so celebrated for his many virtues, was, as is well known, the natural son of the saintly Pope Paul III.

Wounded vanity can have a powerful effect on a rich young man who from birth has always been surrounded by flatterers. The very genuine passion that Count M*** had felt for Fausta returned with renewed intensity; he was undeterred by the dangerous prospect of competing with the only son of the Sovereign in whose lands he found himself; but neither did he have the wit to try to see this Prince, or at least to have him followed. As he had no other means of attacking him, M*** dared to think of making fun of him. I'll be banished forever from the State of Parma, he thought; well, what if I am? Had he attempted to reconnoitre the enemy's position, Count M*** would have discovered that the poor young Prince never went out without being escorted by three or four old men, the tedious custodians of etiquette, and that absolutely the only pleasure of his own choosing that he was ever permitted was mineralogy. By day as by night, the little *palazzo* where Fausta lived and where the good society of Parma came in droves, was surrounded by watchers; M*** knew, hour by hour, what she was doing and especially what other people around her were doing. One can at least say, in praise of the precautions taken by her jealous lover, that at first this capricious woman had no idea at all about this increased surveillance. The reports of all his agents informed Count M*** that an extremely young man wearing a red wig appeared very often under Fausta's windows, always in a fresh disguise. It's obviously the young Prince, thought M***, otherwise why disguise himself? And, goddamn it, I'm not the kind of man to yield to him. If the Republic of Venice hadn't usurped that land, I too would be a sovereign prince.

On the day of San Stefano the reports of the spies took on a more sombre note; they appeared to suggest that Fausta was beginning to respond to the stranger's ardour. I can leave with this woman immediately, thought M***. But goddamn it! In Bologna I ran away from del Dongo; here I'd be running away from a Prince! But what would that young man say? He might well believe that he'd succeeded in frightening me! And goddamn it, my family's every bit as good as his! M*** was furious, but his worst misfortune was the fact that he wanted to avoid the absurdity, in Fausta's eyes, of seeming jealous; he

knew she loved making fun of people. So, on the day of San Stefano, after spending an hour with her and being welcomed with an eagerness that struck him as the height of perfidy, he left her at eleven, as she was dressing to go to Mass in the Church of San Giovanni. Count M*** returned home, donned the threadbare black coat of a young student of theology, and ran to San Giovanni; he chose a position behind one of the tombs that adorn the third chapel on the right side; he could see everything that was happening in the church from beneath the arm of a cardinal who was depicted kneeling on his tomb; this statue blocked the light at the rear of the chapel and hid him well enough. Soon he saw Fausta arrive looking more beautiful than ever; she was most sumptuously dressed, and accompanied by a score of admirers from the highest ranks of society. Her eyes and lips were radiant with joyful smiles; it's clear, thought the jealous Count miserably, that she expects to meet the man she loves here; thanks to me, she may not have been able to see him for some time. Suddenly, the expression of most intense happiness in Fausta's eyes seemed to increase; my rival's here, thought M***, and his rage, born of wounded vanity, knew no bounds. What kind of a figure am I cutting here, imitating a young Prince who is also in disguise? But however hard he tried, he never succeeded in discovering this rival for whom his avid gaze was searching all round.

Every minute or two Fausta, after casting her eyes over the entire church, would finally allow her gaze, full of love and happiness, to come to rest on the dark corner where M*** was hidden. In a passionate heart, love tends to exaggerate the subtlest of hints and to draw the most ridiculous conclusions from them; so, eventually, did not poor M*** convince himself that Fausta had seen him, that despite his efforts she had become aware of his desperate jealousy, and that she meant both to reproach him for it and to console him with these loving glances?

The cardinal's tomb behind which M*** had positioned himself for observation was raised up four or five feet above the marble floor of San Giovanni. The fashionable Mass having finished about one o'clock, the majority of the faithful

departed and Fausta dismissed her circle of local gallants on the pretext of making her devotions; she was still kneeling on her chair, with her eyes, which had grown more tender and more brilliant, fixed on M***; now that there were few people in the church she no longer bothered to let her eyes roam all round it before resting them happily on the statue of the cardinal. What delicacy! thought Count M***, imagining himself to be their object. Eventually Fausta stood up and abruptly left, after making some strange gestures with her hands.

M***, in a frenzy of love and almost entirely cured of his insane jealousy, was emerging from his hiding place to fly to his mistress's *palazzo* and thank her a million times, when on passing in front of the cardinal's tomb he noticed a young man dressed entirely in black; this accursed creature had until then been kneeling right against the epitaph of the tomb, in such a way that the gaze of the jealous lover, as he searched for his rival, could pass over his head and not see him.

This young man stood up and, walking fast, was instantly surrounded by seven or eight somewhat uncouth, odd-looking individuals who seemed to belong to him. M*** rushed after him, but, without its being very obvious, he was held up in passing through the narrow wooden vestibule of the entrance by these uncouth men who were guarding his rival; when he finally followed them out into the street, he was only able to see the door being closed on a carriage of mean appearance, which contrasted very strangely with the two superb horses that were harnessed to it, and which in a moment was out of his sight.

He returned home gasping with fury; soon his spies arrived, and coolly informed him that on that particular day the mysterious lover, disguised as a priest, had been kneeling very devoutly close beside a tomb at the entrance to a dark chapel in the Church of San Giovanni. Fausta had remained in the church until it was almost deserted, and then she had rapidly exchanged certain signals with this stranger; she had made what looked like crosses with her hands. M*** hurried over to his faithless mistress's *palazzo*; for the first time she was unable to conceal her agitation; she told him, with the artless duplicity of a passionate woman, that she had gone as usual to

San Giovanni, but that she had not seen, there, the man who had been importuning her. At these words M***, quite beside himself, turned on her as if she were the vilest of women, told her everything that he himself had observed, and, as the boldness of the lies grew in proportion to the fierceness of the accusations, he drew his dagger and fell upon her. Fausta said to him with the utmost composure:

‘Very well! Everything you’re complaining of is perfectly true, but I’ve tried to hide it all from you, so as not to goad you, in your temerity, to make insane plans of revenge which could ruin us both; for, and please understand this well, to my way of thinking the man who’s importuning me with his attentions is in a position to encounter no obstacles to his will, at any rate in this country.’ After having very adroitly reminded M*** that after all he had no rights over her, Fausta finished by declaring that she would probably not go again to the Church of San Giovanni. M*** was desperately in love, a hint of coquetry may perhaps have blended with prudence in this young woman’s heart, and he felt himself disarmed. He considered leaving Parma; the young Prince, however powerful he might be, would not be able to follow him, or if he followed him would become no more than his equal. But pride once again pointed out that this departure would still look like flight, and Count M*** would not permit himself to contemplate it.

He hasn’t the faintest suspicion that my little Fabrice is here, thought the singer delightedly, and now we can have a wonderful time making a fool of him!

Fabrice had no idea of his good fortune; on the following day he found the singer’s windows carefully closed and he did not see her anywhere; it seemed to him that the joke was beginning to pall. He felt some remorse. What a position I’m putting that poor Count Mosca in, and him the Minister of Police! People will think he’s my accomplice, and my visit to Parma will have spelt ruin for his career! But if I give up a project I’ve spent so much time on, whatever will the Duchess say when I tell her about my efforts at love?

One evening when Fabrice, on the verge of abandoning his project, was admonishing himself in this fashion while prowling

ing round under the huge trees that stand between Fausta's *palazzo* and the fortress, he noticed that he was being shadowed by a spy of very short stature; in vain did he make detours through various streets in order to shake him off; this microscopic creature stuck close to his heels. Losing patience, he hurried to an unfrequented street that ran beside the Parma river, and where his servants were lying in ambush; at a sign from him they leapt on the poor little spy, who hastily begged for clemency; it was Bettina, Fausta's maid; after three days of boredom and seclusion, she had disguised herself as a man to elude the dagger of Count M***, of whom her mistress and she stood in great fear, and she had undertaken to come and tell Fabrice that Fausta loved him passionately and longed desperately to see him, but that she could no longer attend the Church of San Giovanni. About time, thought Fabrice, long live perseverance!

The little maid was very pretty, which made Fabrice forget his moralizing. She told him that the avenue and all the streets that he had walked along that evening were rigorously watched over, although no one could have known it, by spies in the employ of M***. They had rented ground-level or first-floor rooms in which, from behind closed shutters and in complete silence, they observed everything that was happening in that apparently totally deserted street, and listened to what was being said there.

'If those spies had recognized my voice,' said little Bettina, 'I'd have been cold-bloodedly stabbed on my return home, and perhaps my mistress too.'

This terror made her seem charming to Fabrice's eyes. 'Count M***', she continued, 'is furious, and Madame knows he's capable of anything. She told me to tell you she wishes she was a hundred leagues away from here, with you!'

She then went on to describe the scene on the day of the feast of San Stefano, and M***'s fury; the Count had not missed a single one of the looks and signs of love that Fausta had directed at Fabrice, with whom she was that day madly in love. The Count had drawn his dagger, had seized Fausta by the hair, and, had it not been for her presence of mind, she would have been lost.

Fabrice took that pretty Bettina up into a small apartment he had nearby. He told her that he was from Turin, the son of a very high-ranking individual who was in Parma just then, which was why he was obliged to be very circumspect. Bettina replied laughingly that he was a much grander nobleman than he wished to appear. It required a little time for our hero to grasp that the charming girl took him for no less a personage than the Crown Prince himself. Fausta was beginning to feel afraid and to be in love with Fabrice; she had taken it upon herself not to mention his name to her maid, but to speak to her only of the Prince. Fabrice finally admitted to the pretty girl that she had guessed correctly. 'But if my name becomes known,' he added, 'in spite of the great love of which I've given your mistress so much proof, I'll be forced to stop seeing her, and my father's ministers, that wretched bunch of rascals whom one day I'll send packing, won't fail to order her to leave the country which until now she has adorned with her presence.'

Towards morning Fabrice and the little lady's maid together devised a number of plans that would enable Fabrice and Fausta to meet; he sent for Ludovic and another of his servants who was very resourceful, and they settled matters with Bettina, while he wrote the most extravagant letter to Fausta; the situation embodied all the exaggerations of tragedy, and Fabrice was quite equal to the occasion. It was not until dawn that he parted from the little lady's maid, whom he left delighted with the manners of the young Prince.

It had been repeatedly stressed that now that Fausta and her lover had reached an understanding, Fabrice would no longer parade to and fro beneath the windows of the little *palazzo* unless he could be received there, and in that event a signal would be given. But Fabrice, in love with Bettina and believing himself on the verge of success with Fausta, could not remain in his village two leagues away from Parma. Towards midnight the next day he came on horseback, heavily escorted, to sing under Fausta's windows a song that was fashionable just then but whose words he changed. Isn't that the sort of thing that lovers do? he thought to himself.

Ever since Fausta had indicated her wish for a meeting, all this courting had seemed interminable to Fabrice. No, I'm not in love, he was thinking as he sang, rather badly, beneath the windows of the little *palazzo*; I find Bettina infinitely preferable to Fausta, and it's by her that I would like to be received at this moment. Rather bored, Fabrice was returning to his village when, about five hundred paces from Fausta's *palazzo*, some fifteen or twenty men flung themselves upon him, four of them seizing the bridle of his horse and two others taking hold of his arms. Ludovic and Fabrice's *bravi* were attacked, but managed to get away; they fired a few shots. All this happened in an instant: then, with lightning speed, fifty flaring torches appeared in the street as if by magic. The men were all well armed. Fabrice had jumped off his horse, in spite of the people holding him; he tried to clear a way for himself; he even wounded one of the men, who grasped his arms with vice-like hands; but he was utterly astonished to hear that man say to him in the most respectful tone:

'Your Highness will give me a good pension on account of this wound, which will be better for me than if I were to commit high treason, by drawing my sword against my Prince.'

This is a well-deserved punishment for my stupidity, thought Fabrice, I'm going to be damned for a sin that I didn't enjoy.

Hardly was the little attempt at resistance over, than several footmen wearing full livery appeared with a sedan chair which was gilded and painted in a fantastic manner; it was one of those grotesque chairs that are used by masquers during carnival. Six men, dagger in hand, begged 'his Highness' to enter, telling him that the fresh night air might harm his voice; they used the most respectful forms of address, constantly repeating the title 'Prince', almost shouting it. The procession set off. In the street Fabrice counted more than fifty men bearing lighted torches. It must have been about one in the morning, everyone had come to their windows, the affair was being conducted with a certain solemnity. I was afraid of being knifed by Count M***'s men, thought Fabrice, he's

content with making fun of me, I didn't suppose him to have such good taste. But does he really imagine he's dealing with the Prince? If he finds out I'm just Fabrice, I'd better watch out for those daggers!

Those fifty men carrying torches, and the twenty who were armed, after halting for a considerable time beneath Fausta's windows, continued their parade in front of the finest *palazzi* in the city. Major-domos positioned on either side of the sedan chair enquired of his Highness from time to time whether he had any orders for them. Fabrice did not lose his head; by the light of the torches, he could see that Ludovic and his men were following the procession as best they could. Fabrice thought: Ludovic has only eight or ten men and doesn't dare attack. From inside the sedan chair, Fabrice could clearly see that the men carrying out this bad joke were armed to the teeth. He pretended to laugh with the major-domos who were responsible for attending him. After more than two hours of triumphant parading, he saw that they were going to pass the end of the street where the Palazzo Sanseverina was situated.

As they turned into the street that leads to it he quickly opened the door in the front of the sedan chair, leapt over one of the poles, and with his dagger struck down one of the attendants who held his torch up to his face; somebody's dagger wounded him in the shoulder; a second attendant singed his beard with his lighted torch, and then at last Fabrice reached Ludovic, shouting to him: 'Kill! Kill all those with torches!' Wielding his sword, Ludovic saved him from two men who were doggedly pursuing him. Fabrice ran up to the door of the Palazzo Sanseverina; the porter, out of curiosity, had opened the little three-foot door that was cut into the larger one, and was staring in amazement at the enormous number of torches. Fabrice leapt inside and shut this miniature door behind him; he raced to the garden and escaped through a gate which gave on to a deserted street. An hour later he was outside the city; at daybreak he crossed over the border into the State of Modena and was safe. That evening he entered Bologna. This was a fine expedition, he thought; I didn't even succeed in speaking to my lady-love. He lost no

time in writing letters of apology to the Count and the Duchess, prudent letters which, while describing what he felt in his heart, would have told an enemy nothing. 'I was in love with love,' he said to the Duchess; 'I've done everything I could think of to know love, but it seems that nature has not granted me a heart that knows how to love and be melancholy; I cannot rise above common pleasure, etc., etc.'

No description could do justice to the sensation that this affair caused in Parma. Its element of mystery aroused general curiosity: countless people had seen the torches and the sedan chair. But who was this man who had been seized, and treated with every possible mark of respect? The following day not a single prominent person was missing in the city.

The ordinary folk who lived in the street in which the prisoner escaped did indeed claim to have seen a dead body, but when daylight came and the inhabitants dared emerge from their houses, they found no traces of the fight except for a lot of blood on the cobble-stones. During the day more than 20,000 sightseers came to look at the street. Italian towns are used to strange spectacles, but they always know the why and the wherefore. What shocked Parma about this event was that even after a month, when the torch-lit parade was no longer the sole topic of conversation, no one, thanks to the prudence of Count Mosca, had been able to guess the name of the rival who had tried to take Fausta from Count M***. That jealous and vindictive lover had made his escape as soon as the parade began. On the Count's orders, Fausta was imprisoned in the fortress. The Duchess was very amused by a small injustice the Count had been forced to indulge in, so as to satisfy, once and for all, the curiosity of the Prince, who might otherwise have come up with Fabrice's name.

There was in Parma a visiting scholar who had come from the north to write a history of the Middle Ages; he was looking for manuscripts in the libraries, and the Count had provided him with all necessary authorizations. But this scholar, who was still very young, seemed rather touchy; he believed, for example, that everyone in Parma wanted to make fun of him. It is true that small boys sometimes

followed him in the streets, because of his luxuriant head of light red hair which he took pride in displaying. This scholar believed that at his inn he was asked to pay inflated prices for everything, and he would not pay for the least little trifle without looking up the price in the travel book written by a Mrs Starke, which has reached its twentieth edition, because it tells the careful Englishman the price of a turkey, an apple, a glass of milk, etc., etc.*

On the very evening of the day when Fabrice took part in that compulsory parade, the scholar with the red mane made an angry scene at his inn, and produced from his pocket a brace of small pistols to take his revenge on the waiter who was demanding two soldi for an indifferent peach. He was arrested, because carrying small pistols is a great crime!

As this quick-tempered scholar was tall and thin, the Count had the idea, the next morning, of passing him off to the Prince as the reckless lover who had been the victim of a practical joke, as a consequence of trying to take Fausta away from Count M***. Carrying pocket pistols is punishable in Parma by three years in the galleys, but this penalty is never imposed. After spending a fortnight in prison, during which time the scholar saw no one but a lawyer who inspired in him a terrible fear of the atrocious sanctions directed against the bearers of concealed weapons by the cowardice of those in power, another lawyer visited the prison and told him about the parade inflicted by Count M*** on a rival whose identity was still unknown. 'The police don't want to confess to the Prince that they have been unable to discover the name of this rival. Admit that you were trying to court Fausta, that fifty ruffians abducted you while you were singing under her window, that they paraded you about in a sedan chair for an hour, during which time they addressed you with unvarying courtesy. This admission is not in any way humiliating, you only have to say one word. As soon as you have helped the police out of their difficulty by uttering this word, they will put you into a post-chaise and escort you to the border where they will bid you God speed.'

The scholar resisted for a month; two or three times the Prince was on the point of having him brought to the Ministry

of the Interior and interrogated in his presence. But in fact he had forgotten about the affair when the historian, who was bored, decided to confess everything and was escorted to the frontier. The Prince remained convinced that Count M***'s rival had a mass of thick red hair.

Three days after being publicly paraded, Fabrice was in hiding in Bologna and devising, with the faithful Ludovic, ways of discovering the whereabouts of Count M***, when he learnt that he also was concealed in a mountain village on the road to Florence. The Count only had three of his *buli* with him; the following day, as he was returning from a ride, he was seized by eight masked men who told him they were policemen from Parma. They blindfolded him and took him to an inn two leagues further into the mountains, where he was treated with every possible consideration and given a copious supper. He was served with the best Italian and Spanish wines.

'So am I a prisoner of state?' enquired the Count.

'No, absolutely not!' a masked Ludovic told him very politely. 'You've insulted a private individual, by taking it upon yourself to have him paraded about in a sedan chair; he wants to fight a duel with you tomorrow morning. If you kill him, you'll find two good horses, money, and relay horses arranged for on the road to Genoa.'

'What's this swashbuckler's name?' asked the Count, annoyed.

'He's called "Bombace". You'll have the choice of arms and some good seconds, very loyal men, but one of you two must die!'

'So this is murder!' cried Count M*** in alarm.

'God forbid! It's simply a duel to the death with the young man you paraded round the streets of Parma in the middle of the night, and who would be dishonoured if you remained alive. There isn't room for you both on this earth, so do your best to kill him; you'll have swords, pistols, sabres, every weapon we could get hold of in a few hours, for we had to be quick; the Bologna police are very diligent, as you may know, and we don't want them to prevent this duel which is vital for the honour of the young man you made fun of.'

'But if this young man is a Prince...'

'He's a private individual like yourself, and in fact much less wealthy than you are, but he wants to fight to the death, and let me warn you, he'll force you to fight.'

'I fear nothing in this world!' exclaimed M***.

'That is what your adversary most passionately desires', replied Ludovic. 'Tomorrow, early in the morning, prepare to defend your life; it will be attacked by a man who has cause to be very angry and who won't spare you; I repeat, you'll have the choice of weapons; and be sure to write your will.'

About six o'clock the following morning Count M*** was served with breakfast, then a door was opened in the room where he was being kept, and he was urged to pass through into the courtyard of a country inn; this courtyard was surrounded by fairly high hedges and walls, and its doors had all been carefully closed.

In a corner, on a table which Count M*** was invited to approach, he found several bottles of wine and brandy, two pistols, two swords, two sabres, paper and ink; a score of peasants were standing at the windows of the inn which overlooked the courtyard. The Count begged them for mercy. 'They mean to murder me!' he screamed. 'Save my life!'

'You're mistaken! Or you're trying to mislead people,' cried Fabrice who stood in the opposite corner of the courtyard, beside a table covered with weapons; he had taken off his coat, and his face was hidden by one of those iron wire masks one sees in fencing schools.

'I urge you', added Fabrice, 'to don the wire mask you see before you, and then to advance towards me with a sword or with pistols; as you were told yesterday evening, you have the choice of weapons.'

Count M*** kept raising endless difficulties, and seemed very put out at having to fight; Fabrice, for his part, feared the arrival of the police, even though they were in the mountains, a good five leagues away from Bologna; finally he started insulting his rival in the most outrageous manner and eventually had the good fortune to anger the Count, who grabbed a sword and strode towards Fabrice; the fight got under way fairly slowly.

After a few minutes, it was interrupted by a tremendous noise. Our hero was well aware that he was embarking on a course of action which, throughout his entire life, might give rise to reproaches or at least to denigrating imputations. He had sent Ludovic out into the countryside to recruit some witnesses. Ludovic gave money to some strangers who were working in a nearby wood: they rushed over, shouting, supposing it was a case of killing an enemy of the man whose money they had received. Once they were at the inn, Ludovic asked them to keep their eyes peeled and see whether one of the two young men who were fighting was behaving treacherously and taking any unfair advantage of the other.

The duel, which the peasants' cries and threats of death had briefly interrupted, took some time to start up again; Fabrice once more attacked the Count's complacency with insults. 'Count,' he shouted at him, 'when a man is insolent, he must also be brave. I realize that this requirement is a difficult one for you, you prefer to pay others to be brave.' The Count, incensed afresh, began to shout at Fabrice that he had long frequented the fencing school of the famous Battistin in Naples, and that he was going to punish his insolence; Count M***'s anger having finally been rekindled, he fought quite resolutely, although this did not prevent Fabrice's giving him a splendid sword-thrust in the chest, which kept him in bed for several months. Ludovic, while rendering first-aid to the wounded man, whispered in his ear: 'If you denounce this duel to the police, I'll have you stabbed in your bed.'

Fabrice escaped to Florence; as he had remained in hiding in Bologna, he did not receive all the Duchess's reproachful letters until he reached Florence; she could not forgive him for having come to her concert without trying to speak to her. Fabrice was delighted with the letters from Count Mosca; they exuded genuine friendship and the noblest of sentiments. He guessed that the Count had written to Bologna in order to deflect the suspicions that might fall on him with regard to the duel; the police were scrupulously fair: they established that two foreigners, of whom only one, the wounded man, was identified (Count M***), had crossed

swords in the presence of more than thirty peasants, including, towards the end of the fight, the village priest, who had made vain attempts to separate the duellists. As the name of Joseph Bossi had never been uttered, Fabrice risked returning to Bologna after less than two months, more convinced than ever that his destiny condemned him never to experience the noble, intellectual side of love. That is what he allowed himself the pleasure of explaining at enormous length to the Duchess; he was very tired of his solitary life and longed passionately to enjoy once again the charming evenings he used to spend with the Count and his aunt. He had not, since leaving them, known the delights of good company.

'I became so bored by love, which I longed to experience, and so bored by Fausta,' he wrote to the Duchess, 'that now, were she still inclined to favour me, I wouldn't go twenty leagues to put her to the test; so have no fear that, as you suggest, I'll follow her all the way to Paris where I see she's opened to tremendous acclaim. I would travel any imaginable distance to spend an evening with you and with that Count who is so good to his friends.'

BOOK II

This incessant Republican clamour would prevent us
from enjoying the best of Monarchies...

(Book II, Chapter 23)

CHAPTER 14

While Fabrice was occupied in the pursuit of love in a village near Parma, the Public Prosecutor Rassi, who did not know Fabrice was so close at hand, continued to treat his case as though he were a Liberal; he pretended to be unable to find, or rather he intimidated, the witnesses for the defence; and finally, after almost a year of very skilful work and some two months after Fabrice's last return to Bologna, a deliriously happy Marquise Raversi declared publicly in her drawing-room one Friday, that the following day the sentence that had been passed one hour earlier on the young del Dongo would be presented for the Prince's signature and approved by him. A few minutes later the Duchess heard about this statement made by her enemy.

The Count must really be very badly served by his agents! she thought; only this morning he believed that the sentence could not be passed for another week. Perhaps he wouldn't be sorry to banish my young Vicar-General from Parma; but, she added exultantly, we'll see him return, and one day he'll be our Archbishop. The Duchess rang the bell:

'Call the entire staff to the ante-room,' she instructed her manservant, 'even the cooks; go and ask the Commandant of the fortress for the necessary permit for four post-horses, and see that by half an hour from now those horses are harnessed to my landau.' All the women of the household were busy packing trunks; the Duchess quickly changed into a travelling costume, all without saying a word to the Count; the thought of making rather a fool of him delighted her.

'My friends,' she told the assembled servants, 'I've heard that my poor nephew is about to be condemned *in absentia* for having the audacity to defend his life against a madman; Giletti tried to kill him. You've all seen how mild and inoffensive Fabrice's character is. Justifiably angered by this dreadful injustice, I'm leaving for Florence; I'm arranging for each of you to have your wages for ten years; if you fall on

hard times, write to me, and as long as I have any money, there'll be something for you.'

What the Duchess thought was exactly what she said, and at the end of her speech the servants burst into tears; her eyes also were damp; she added, in a voice full of emotion:

'Pray to God for me and for Monsignore Fabrice del Dongo, senior Vicar-General of the diocese, who tomorrow morning will be condemned to penal servitude or, which would be less idiotic, to death.'

The tears of the servants increased and little by little turned into protests that verged on the seditious: the Duchess climbed into her carriage and had herself driven to the Prince's palace. Despite the unprecedented hour, she requested an audience through General Fontana, the aide-de-camp on duty, who was utterly astounded by the fact that she was not wearing full court dress. As for the Prince, he was not surprised, and even less annoyed by this request for an audience. We're going to see tears shed by those beautiful eyes, he told himself, rubbing his hands. She's coming to beg for mercy; at last this proud beauty's going to humble herself! But she really was too insufferable with her little independent airs! Those so-expressive eyes always seemed to be telling me, whenever the slightest thing shocked her: Naples or Milan would be far pleasanter places to live than your little city of Parma. It's true I don't rule over Naples or Milan, but still, this great lady's here to ask me for something which depends solely on me and which she's desperate to have; I've always thought that the arrival of that nephew would give me a hold over her.

While the Prince was smiling over his thoughts and indulging in all these agreeable expectations, he was pacing up and down his large study, at whose door General Fontana was standing stiffly to attention like a soldier shouldering arms. Seeing the Prince's sparkling eyes and recollecting the travel costume of the Duchess, he believed he was witnessing the dissolution of the monarchy. His amazement knew no bounds when he heard the Prince say: 'Ask the Duchess to wait for a few minutes.' The aide-de-camp about-turned like a soldier on parade; the Prince smiled once more: General Fontana, he thought, isn't accustomed to seeing that proud Duchess wait:

the astonished expression with which he's going to tell her about 'the few minutes' wait' will prepare the way for the affecting tears this room is going to see shed. For the Prince, those few moments were exquisite; he walked up and down with a firm and steady pace, he *was reigning*. I must be careful not to say anything that is not perfectly appropriate; whatever may be my personal feelings towards the Duchess, I mustn't forget that she's one of the greatest ladies of my court. How did Louis XIV address his daughters the Princesses when he had occasion to be displeased with them? And his gaze rested on the portrait of the great king.

The amusing thing about this was that it did not occur to the Prince to wonder whether he would grant a pardon to Fabrice and what exactly it might consist of. Eventually, after twenty minutes, the faithful Fontana again appeared at the door, but without saying anything. 'The Duchess Sanseverina may come in', declared the Prince theatrically. Now the tears will start to flow, he thought, and, as if in preparation for such a spectacle, pulled out his handkerchief.

Never had the Duchess seemed so elegant and so lovely; she looked less than twenty-five. As he watched her tiny, light, rapid steps barely skimming the carpets, the poor aide-de-camp very nearly lost his head.

'There are a great many things for which I must beg your Serene Highness to pardon me,' said the Duchess in her soft, vivacious little voice; 'I've taken the liberty of appearing before you in a costume which is hardly appropriate, but your Highness has graciously allowed me to grow so accustomed to your kindnesses that I dare to hope you will grant me this further indulgence.'

The Duchess was speaking rather slowly, so as to give herself time to enjoy the Prince's expression which, because of his complete astonishment and the traces of self-importance still apparent in the way he was holding his head and arms, was delicious. The Prince looked as if a thunderbolt had struck him; from time to time he would splutter almost inaudibly in a shrill, agitated voice: '*What's this! What's this!*' After completing her salutation the Duchess, as though out of respect, left him plenty of time to reply; then she went on:

'I dare to hope that your Serene Highness will deign to pardon the incongruity of my costume'; but, as she spoke, her mocking eyes shone with such brilliance that the Prince could not bear it; he gazed at the ceiling, which, in him, was a sign of the most extreme embarrassment.

'*What's this! What's this!*' he said again; then he had the good fortune to think of a remark. 'Pray be seated, Duchess', and he himself, in quite a gracious manner, brought forward a chair. The Duchess was not insensible to this mark of politeness; she moderated the insolence of her gaze.

'*What's this! What's this!*' the Prince repeated again, shifting about in his armchair in which, it seemed, he could not find a settled position.

'I'm going to take advantage of the fresh night air to travel', continued the Duchess, 'and, as my absence may be of some duration, I did not wish to leave your Serene Highness's domains without thanking you for all the kindnesses that you have so graciously shown me over the past five years.' At these words the Prince finally understood; he turned pale; he suffered more than other men at finding he was mistaken in his expectations; then he assumed a majestic air quite worthy of the portrait of Louis XIV that hung before him. Well done! thought the Duchess; now there's a man for you!

'And what is the reason for this sudden departure?' the Prince enquired in quite a steady voice.

'It has been my intention for some time,' replied the Duchess, 'and a trifling insult to Monsignore del Dongo who tomorrow will be condemned to death or to penal servitude has prompted me to hasten my departure.'

'And to which city do you plan to go?'

'Naples, I think.' Rising from her seat, she added: 'There only remains for me to take leave of your Serene Highness and to thank you very humbly for your *former* kindnesses.' She in her turn spoke in so decided a tone that the Prince clearly saw that in a couple of seconds it would all be over; once her departure was public knowledge, he knew that any compromise would be impossible; she was not a woman to go back on decisions she had made. He hurried after her.

'But you well know, Duchess,' he said, taking her hand, 'that I have always felt affection for you, affection which had you so desired would bear a different name. A murder has been committed, no one can deny that fact; I entrusted the investigation to my best judges...'

At these words, the Duchess pulled herself up to her full height; any semblance of respect and even courtesy vanished in a flash; the outraged woman was clearly apparent, an outraged woman addressing a creature whom she knows to be duplicitous. It was with an expression of the most intense anger and even contempt that she said to the Prince, emphasizing every word:

'I am leaving your Serene Highness's domains for ever, so that I may never again hear any mention of the Prosecutor Rassi and the other vile murderers who have condemned my nephew and so many others to death; if your Serene Highness wishes to avoid embittering the last moments I am spending with a Prince who is courteous and witty when he is not deceived, I humbly beg you not to remind me of those vile judges who sell themselves for a thousand scudi, or for a decoration.'

The admirable and above all sincere tone of voice in which these words were uttered startled the Prince; for a second he feared that his dignity might be compromised by an even more direct accusation, but overall his feeling soon turned into a pleasurable one; he admired the Duchess; at that moment her entire person had attained a sublime degree of beauty. Good God! how beautiful she is, thought the Prince; one must forgive a few things to an exceptional woman, a woman who most probably has no equal in the whole of Italy... Well! If I play my cards right it might not be out of the question to make her my mistress one day; what a world of difference between a creature like her and that marionette of a Marquise Balbi, and what's more Balbi steals at least 300,000 lire every year from my poor subjects... But did I hear her aright? he suddenly wondered, she said: 'condemned my nephew and so many others'; whereupon anger reasserted itself, and it was with a dignity worthy of his supreme position that the Prince, after a silence,

enquired: 'And what must be done to prevent your departure, madame?'

'Something you are not capable of doing,' replied the Duchess in a tone of the bitterest irony and the most undisguised contempt.

Although beside himself with rage, the Prince had the strength to control his immediate reaction, thanks to habits of mind formed by his life as absolute ruler. I must have this woman, he thought; I owe it to myself, and then I'll make her die from contempt... If she walks out of this room, I'll never see her again. But, crazed with rage and hatred as he was at that moment, how could he think of something to say that would both satisfy what he owed to himself and persuade the Duchess not to desert his court forthwith? It's impossible, he thought, to repeat or to make fun of a gesture, and he went and stood between the Duchess and the door of his study. Almost immediately he heard a scratching sound at that door.

'Who is the half-wit,' he bellowed, swearing at the top of his voice, 'who is the half-wit who dares to pester me with his idiotic presence?' Poor General Fontana showed his pale, utterly bewildered countenance, and it was with the air of someone at death's door that he said in a quavering voice: 'His Excellency Count Mosca requests the honour of being admitted.'

'Let him come in!' shouted the Prince; and, as Mosca was making his bow:

'Well now!' he told him, 'here's the Duchess Sanseverina saying she's leaving Parma this minute to go and live in Naples, and what's more she's behaving towards me with impertinence.'

'What!' said Mosca, turning pale.

'Goodness! You didn't know about this plan to leave?'

'Not one word; I left madame at six, cheerful and contented.'

This reply made an unbelievable impression upon the Prince. First he stared at Mosca; the Count's increasing pallor told him that he was speaking the truth and was not party to the Duchess's impulsive decision. In that case, he thought, I'm losing her for ever; both pleasure and revenge will disappear

together. In Naples she'll think up epigrams with her nephew Fabrice about the great anger of the little Prince of Parma. He looked at the Duchess; her heart was divided between feelings of the most powerful contempt and anger; her eyes were fixed at that moment on Count Mosca, and the delicate lines of her beautiful mouth expressed the bitterest contempt. The whole of her face was saying: you base courtier! So, thought the Prince, after studying her expression, I have lost that means of getting her back to this country. It's still the case, even now, that if she leaves this room she's lost to me, God knows what she'll say in Naples about my judges... And with that wit and divine persuasiveness that Heaven has given her, she'll make everyone believe her. Thanks to her I'll have the reputation of a ridiculous tyrant who gets up in the night to look under his bed... So then, by a skilful manœuvre, as if he were pacing about to calm his agitation, the Prince placed himself again before the door of the study; the Count was to his right, some three paces away, pale, discomposed, and trembling so much that he was forced to seek support from the back of the arm-chair the Duchess had occupied at the beginning of the audience, and which the Prince had pushed away with an angry gesture. The Count was in love. If the Duchess leaves I'll follow her, he was thinking; but will she want me to follow her? That's the question.

On the Prince's left stood the Duchess, her arms tightly crossed over her breast, gazing at him with a wonderfully impertinent expression; a deep and absolute pallor had succeeded the brilliant colour which a short time before had enhanced that superb head.

The Prince, in contrast to the other two characters, looked red-faced and uneasy; his left hand was toying convulsively with the cross hanging from the Grand Cordon of his order that he wore beneath his coat; his right hand was stroking his chin.

'What's to be done?' he said to the Count, hardly aware of what he was doing himself, and carried along by the habit of consulting Mosca on everything.

'In truth, Serene Highness, I have no idea,' answered the Count, in the voice of a man at death's door. He could barely

enunciate the words of his reply. The tone of his voice gave the Prince the first consolation that this audience had afforded his wounded pride, and this modest pleasure suggested something to say that satisfied his vanity.

'All right,' he said, 'I'm the most reasonable of the three of us; I'm willing to disregard entirely my position in the world. I'm going to speak *as a friend*,' and he went on, with a fine condescending smile that was a good imitation of Louis XIV at his best: '*as a friend speaking to friends*', adding: 'Duchess, what must be done to make you renounce this over-hasty decision?'

'In truth, I have no idea,' replied the Duchess with a deep sigh, 'in truth, I have no idea, I loathe Parma so.' This reply was in no way intended as repartee, it was clear that what she said was completely sincere.

The Count turned sharply towards her; his courtier's soul was scandalized; then he looked beseechingly at the Prince. The Prince, in the most dignified and self-possessed manner, let a moment pass, then addressed the Count:

'I see,' he said, 'that your charming friend is quite beside herself; it's perfectly simple, she *adores* her nephew.' And, turning towards the Duchess he added, with a look that was extremely gallant and at the same time recalled the style in which one quotes from a play: '*What must I do to bring a smile to those fair lips?*'

The Duchess had had time to consider; in a slow, decisive tone, and as if she were dictating her *ultimatum*, she replied:

'Your Highness might write me a gracious letter of the kind your Highness is so very good at; you might tell me that, not being convinced of the guilt of Fabrice del Dongo, the Archbishop's senior Vicar-General, you will not sign the sentence when it is presented to you, and that these unjust proceedings will have no consequences in the future.'

'Whatever do you mean, "unjust"!' cried the Prince, angered afresh, his face turning scarlet to the whites of his eyes.

'That is not all!' replied the Duchess with a truly Roman dignity. '*This very evening*, and,' she added, looking at the clock, 'it's already quarter past eleven, this very evening your

Serene Highness will send word to the Marquise Raversi that you advise her to go to the country, to recover from the fatigue she must be feeling as a result of a certain case she was discussing in her drawing-room early this evening.' The Prince was pacing up and down his study like a man in a fury.

'Did you ever see such a woman?...' he exclaimed, 'she's not showing me proper respect.'

The Duchess replied with perfect grace:

'Never has it been my intention to show your Serene Highness anything but proper respect; your Highness was so extremely condescending as to say that you were speaking "as a friend to friends". In any case I have no desire whatever to remain in Parma', she went on, looking at the Count with the most profound contempt. This look settled the matter for the Prince, who until now had been undecided, although his words had seemed to suggest a commitment; he attached no importance whatsoever to words.

A few more remarks were exchanged, but eventually Count Mosca was commanded to write the gracious note requested by the Duchess. He omitted the sentence: 'these unjust proceedings will have no consequences in the future.' It's enough, thought the Count, that the Prince promises not to sign the sentence that will be presented to him. As he signed, the Prince thanked him with a glance.

The Count made a very grave mistake, the Prince was tired and would have signed anything; he felt he had managed a difficult encounter well, and in his eyes the entire situation was dominated by this idea: 'If the Duchess leaves, I'll find my court boring before the week is out.' The Count noticed that his master corrected the date and put in that of the morrow. He looked at the clock; it was nearly midnight. The Minister saw this corrected date as nothing other than the Prince's pedantic desire to demonstrate his punctiliousness and good administration. As for the exile of the Marquise Raversi, he made no difficulty about it; the Prince took particular pleasure in exiling people.

'General Fontana!' he shouted, partly opening the door.

The General's countenance, as he appeared, expressed such extreme astonishment and curiosity that an amused

glance passed between the Duchess and the Count, and that glance restored peace.

'General Fontana,' said the Prince, 'you will take my carriage which is standing beneath the colonnade, you will go to the Marquise Raversi's and have yourself announced; if she's in bed, you will add that you come on my behalf, and, once you are in her room, you will repeat precisely the following words, and no others, to her: "Marquise Raversi, his Serene Highness commands your Ladyship to leave tomorrow, before eight in the morning, for your castle at Velleja; his Highness will inform you when you may return to Parma."'

The Prince tried to catch the Duchess's eye, but she, instead of thanking him as he expected, made him an exceedingly respectful curtsey and quickly left.

'What a woman!' exclaimed the Prince, turning towards Count Mosca.

The latter, delighted by the exile of the Marquise Raversi which would simplify all his work as Minister, spent a good half-hour playing the perfect courtier; he wanted to soothe the Prince's pride, and did not take his leave until he saw him totally convinced that Louis XIV's anecdotal biography contained no finer page than that which he had just provided for his own future historians.

On returning home the Duchess shut her door, and ordered that no one be admitted, not even the Count. She wished to be alone with herself, and begin to form some notion of how to interpret the scene which had just occurred. She had acted without premeditation and for the pleasure of the moment; but no matter what the course of action she had been drawn into, she would have pursued it resolutely. On regaining her equanimity she would not have blamed herself, still less would she have repented: such was the character thanks to which she still remained, at thirty-six, the loveliest woman of the court.

At that moment she was musing about what pleasures Parma might have to offer, as she would have done on returning from a long journey, so convinced had she been, between nine and eleven, that she was leaving that country for ever.

That poor Count cut a ridiculous figure on hearing, in the Prince's presence, about my departure... In point of fact he's a lovable man, with a quite exceptional heart! He'd have left his ministries to follow me... But then, for five whole years he hasn't been able to reproach me with even one single flirtation. How many women married at the altar could say as much to their lord and master? I must admit that he's not conceited, he's not pedantic; he doesn't in the least make one long to deceive him; when he's with me he always seems ashamed of his power... How comic he looked in front of his lord and master; if he were here I'd give him a kiss... But nothing in the world would induce me to take on the amusement of a minister who'd lost his portfolio, that's a malady death alone can cure and... which kills. What a misfortune it would be to become a minister while you're young! I must write and tell him, it's something he must be formally told before he quarrels with his Prince... But I'm forgetting my good servants.

The Duchess rang. Her women were still busy packing the trunks; the carriage had been driven under the portico and was being loaded; all the servants who were not busy working were standing round the carriage with tears in their eyes. Chékina, the only servant who could enter the Duchess's apartments on great occasions, gave her all these details.

'Tell them to come up,' said the Duchess; a moment later she walked through into the ante-room.

'I've been promised', she told them, 'that the sentence passed on my nephew will not be signed by the "Sovereign" [that's the expression they use in Italy]; I'm deferring my departure; we'll see if my enemies are influential enough to have this decision changed.'

After a brief silence the servants began shouting: 'Three cheers for her ladyship!' and clapping violently. The Duchess, who had already passed into the adjoining room, reappeared like an actress taking a curtain call, made an extremely graceful little curtsey to her servants and said: 'I thank you, my friends.' If she had said a word, they would all, at that moment, have marched to the palace and stormed it. She

made a sign to a postilion, a former smuggler who was devoted to her, and he followed her.

'You're to dress as a well-to-do peasant, leave Parma by whatever means you think best, hire a *sediola*, and get to Bologna as quickly as possible. Enter Bologna on foot, by the Florence gate, and deliver to Fabrice, whom you'll find at the Pellegrino, a package that Chékina will give you. Fabrice is in hiding and is known there as Signor Joseph Bossi; don't go and betray him inadvertently, don't look as though you know him; my enemies may set spies to follow you. Fabrice will send you back here after a few hours or a few days; it's above all on your return journey that you must be extra careful not to betray him.'

'Ah! The Marquise Raversi's men!' exclaimed the postilion, 'we're ready for them, and if the Signora so desired they'd soon be got rid of.'

'One day, perhaps! But on peril of your life, don't dare to do anything without my orders.'

It was the copy of the Prince's note that the Duchess wanted to send to Fabrice; she couldn't resist the pleasure of amusing him, and added a word about the scene which had led up to the note; this word became a letter of ten pages. She sent again for the postilion.

'You can't leave before four,' she told him, 'when the gates open.'

'I was planning to leave by way of the large drain, I'll have water up to my chin but I can get through...'

'No,' said the Duchess, 'I don't want to expose one of my most faithful servants to the fever. Do you know anyone at the Archbishop's?'

'The second coachman's a friend of mine.'

'Here's a letter for that saintly prelate: go into the palace very quietly, and have someone take you to the valet; I don't want the Archbishop awakened. If he's already in his room, spend the night in the palace, and, as he usually rises before dawn, at four o'clock tomorrow morning ask to be admitted as coming on my behalf; ask the Archbishop to bless you, hand him this packet, and collect any letters he may give you for Bologna.'

The Duchess was sending the Archbishop the actual original of the Prince's note; as this note concerned his senior Vicar-General, she begged him to deposit it in the archives of the archbishopric, where she hoped that the Vicars-General and Canons who were her nephew's colleagues would be anxious to read it; all this on condition that the strictest secrecy be maintained.

The Duchess wrote to Monsignor Landriani with a familiarity that would surely delight that worthy bourgeois; the signature alone was three lines long; the extremely friendly letter was followed by these words: 'Angelina-Cornelia-Isota Valserra del Dongo, Duchess Sanseverina.'

I don't believe I've written so much, thought the Duchess with a laugh, since my contract of marriage with the poor Duke, but it's the only way to manage people of that sort, and a caricature has beauty in the eyes of a bourgeois. She could not let the evening end without yielding to the temptation to write a teasing letter to the poor Count; she informed him officially, for his 'guidance', she said, 'in his relations with crowned heads', that she did not consider herself capable of amusing a minister who had fallen from favour. 'The Prince frightens you; when you can no longer see him, will it be my job to frighten you?' She had this letter delivered on the spot.

For his part, the following morning at seven the Prince sent for Count Zurla, Minister of the Interior. 'Once again,' he told him, 'issue the strictest orders to all the magistrates for the arrest of Signor Fabrice del Dongo. We've been informed that he may dare to reappear in our domains. Since this fugitive is in Bologna, where he seems to be snapping his fingers at the proceedings of our courts, put constables who know him personally, 1. in the villages on the road between Bologna and Parma, 2. near the Duchess Sanseverina's villa at Sacca and her house in Castelnuovo, and 3. round Count Mosca's villa. I dare to expect of your great wisdom, Count, that you will be capable of concealing these orders of your Sovereign's from Count Mosca. I would have you know that I want Signor Fabrice del Dongo arrested.'

As soon as this minister had left, a secret door introduced Rassi, the Public Prosecutor, into the Prince's presence; he

came in bent double, and bowing at every step. The face of that rascal was a sight worth seeing; it lived up to all the infamy of his role and, while the rapid, convulsive movements of his eyes betrayed his awareness of his own worth, the arrogant, affected self-assurance of his mouth revealed that he knew how to fight back against contempt.

Since this character will exert considerable influence over Fabrice's destiny, it is appropriate to say something about him. He was tall, with very fine, shrewd eyes, but a face ravaged by smallpox; as for his intelligence, he had it in good measure, and of an extremely subtle kind; he was reputed to command a perfect knowledge of the law, but it was in his resourcefulness that he excelled the most. Regardless of how a case might be presented, he would easily find, in just a few moments, perfectly legal means of securing a conviction or an acquittal; he was, above all, master of the prosecutor's craft.

This man, whom great monarchs might have envied the Prince of Parma, was known to have only one passion: that of conversing intimately with important people and amusing them with his clowning. Little did he care whether the powerful personage was laughing at what he was saying or at his, Rassi's, own person, or whether he made revolting jokes about Signora Rassi; as long as he laughed, and treated Rassi with familiarity, Rassi was satisfied. Sometimes the Prince, unable to think up other ways of persecuting the dignity of this great judge, would kick him; if the kicks hurt, Rassi would begin to cry. But the propensity for buffoonery was so strong in him, that he would invariably prefer the drawing-room of a minister who jeered at him, over his own drawing-room where he reigned tyrannically over all of Parma's gentlemen of the robe. Above all, Rassi had created a unique position for himself, in that it was impossible for the most insolent nobleman to humiliate him; his way of taking revenge for the insults he suffered all day long was to repeat them to the Prince, to whom he had gained the right to tell everything; it is true that the response was frequently a well-aimed and painful slap, but this did not in any way offend him. The presence of this Chief Justice distracted the Prince in his moments of ill humour, when he would amuse himself by

vilifying him. It will be apparent that Rassi was just about the perfect creature for a court: without honour and without humour.

'Secrecy must be maintained above all else', exclaimed the Prince, not greeting Rassi and addressing him in a very ill-mannered way, although he was as a rule so polite to everybody. 'What is the date on your sentence?'

'Yesterday morning, Serene Highness.'

'How many judges signed it?'

'All five.'

'And the sentence?'

'Twenty years in the fortress, as your Serene Highness had instructed me.'

'The death penalty would have seemed too shocking,' said the Prince, as though to himself, 'it's a pity! What an effect on that woman! But he's a del Dongo, and that name's revered in Parma, because of the three archbishops who practically succeeded one another...'

'You said twenty years in the fortress?'

'Yes, Serene Highness,' replied the Prosecutor, who was still on his feet, bent nearly double, 'with, as a preliminary, a public apology in front of the portrait of your Serene Highness; in addition, fasting on bread and water every Friday and on the eve of every important feast day, "as the subject is notoriously ungodly"'. This with an eye to the future, to ruin his prospects.'

'Write,' said the Prince, "'His Serene Highness, having kindly deigned to listen to the very humble supplications of the Marquise del Dongo, mother of the convicted man, and of the Duchess Sanseverina, his aunt, who pointed out that at the period of his crime their son and nephew was very young and furthermore led astray by his desperate passion for the wife of the unfortunate Giletti, has graciously decided, despite the horror inspired by a murder of this nature, to commute the sentence to which Fabrice del Dongo has been condemned, to twelve years in the fortress.'"

'Give it to me to sign.'

The Prince signed and wrote yesterday's date; then, handing the sentence to Rassi, he said to him: 'Write just above my

signature: "The Duchess Sanseverina having immediately cast herself at the feet of his Highness, the Prince has granted permission for the convicted man to enjoy an hour's exercise every Thursday on the platform of the square tower commonly called the Farnese Tower."

'Sign it,' said the Prince, 'and above all keep your mouth shut, no matter what you may hear said in the city. Tell the Counsellor De Capitani, who voted for two years in the fortress and even gave a speech supporting that ridiculous opinion, that I suggest he reread the laws and regulations. Once again, not a word: goodbye.' Rassi very slowly gave three deep bows, which the Prince did not look at.

This scene occurred at seven in the morning. A few hours later the news of the Marquise Raversi's exile was spreading throughout the city and the coffee-houses; people were all talking at once about this great event. The Marquise's exile banished for a time from Parma that implacable enemy of small courts and small towns: boredom. General Fabio Conti, who had believed he was about to become a minister, pretended to have an attack of gout, and spent several days without leaving the fortress. The middle classes and, after them, the common folk, concluded from what was going on that the Prince had clearly decided to bestow the Archbishopric of Parma on Monsignore del Dongo. The more astute coffee-house politicians even went so far as to assert that the present Archbishop, Father Landriani, had been urged to feign an illness and proffer his resignation; he would, they were quite certain, be granted a large pension from the taxes levied on tobacco; this rumour reached the Archbishop and greatly alarmed him, and for some days his zeal for our hero was, for the most part, paralysed. Two months later this fine item of news appeared in the Paris newspapers, with the trifling alteration that it was Count Mosca, nephew to the Duchess Sanseverina, who was to be made Archbishop.

In her castle at Velleja the Marquise Raversi was beside herself with rage; she was not one of those silly little females who feel sufficiently avenged by starting outrageous rumours about their enemies. On the very day following her disgrace the Chevalier Riscara and three other men friends, following

instructions from the Marquise, appeared before the Prince and requested permission to go and see her in her castle. His Highness received these gentlemen with perfect courtesy, and their arrival at Velleja was a great consolation for the Marquise. Before the end of the second week she had thirty people in her castle, everyone who would have obtained a place in a Liberal ministry. Each evening the Marquise held a regular council meeting with the better-informed among her friends. One day, when she had received numerous letters from Parma and Bologna, she retired early; her favourite chambermaid brought up first her current lover, the Count Baldi, a wonderfully handsome young man of great insignificance; and, later, his predecessor, the Chevalier Riscara; the latter, a little man of murky complexion and morals, had started out as a tutor in geometry at the College for Nobles in Parma, and was now a Counsellor of State and a Chevalier of several orders.

'I've the excellent habit', the Marquise told these two men, 'of never destroying a single document, which turns out to be lucky for me; here are nine letters that la Sanseverina wrote to me on different occasions. You are both to leave for Genoa, and look for an ex-convict, a former notary called Burati, like the great Venetian poet, or Durati. You, Count Baldi, sit down at my desk and write what I dictate to you.

"I've had an idea, hence this note. I'm going to my cottage near Castelnuovo; if you felt like coming and spending a day with me, I'd be very happy; there's no great danger, it seems to me, after what has just happened; the clouds are lifting. Nevertheless, stop before entering Castelnuovo; you'll find one of my men on the road, they all adore you. Of course you must keep the name of Bossi for this little trip. I've been told you've a beard like the very finest Capuchin friar, and you've only been seen in Parma with the decently shaved face of a Vicar-General."

'Do you understand, Riscara?'

'Yes indeed: but the trip to Genoa's an unnecessary luxury; I know a man in Parma who isn't in prison yet, it's true, but who cannot fail to fetch up there. He'll counterfeit la Sanseverina's writing quite admirably.'

At these words Count Baldi opened his beautiful eyes very wide; he had finally understood.

'If you know this worthy personage in Parma, whom you hope to see promoted,' the Marquise told Riscara, 'obviously he also knows you; his mistress, his confessor, his friend could be creatures of la Sanseverina's; I prefer to postpone this little joke for a few days, and not take any risks. Set off in a couple of hours like good little lambs, don't see a soul in Genoa and come back very quickly.' Laughing, the Chevalier Riscara ran comically out of the room, saying through his nose like Punchinello: 'We must pack our bags.' He wanted to leave Baldi alone with the lady. Five days later Riscara returned a very sore Count Baldi to the Marquise: to save a distance of six leagues, he had been made to ride over a mountain on a mule; he swore that he would never again undertake a 'long journey'. Baldi gave the Marquise three copies of the letter she had dictated to him, and five or six others in the same writing, composed by Riscara, which might perhaps come in useful later on. One of the letters contained some excellent jokes about the Prince's night-time fears, and about the lamentable thinness of his mistress, the Marquise Balbi, who left, it was said, indentations as though from a pair of tongs on the cushions of armchairs after sitting in them for a moment. You would have sworn that all these letters had been written by the Duchess.

'Now I'm absolutely certain', said the Marquise, 'that her heart's darling, that Fabrice, is in Bologna or nearby..'

'I'm too ill,' cried Count Baldi, interrupting her, 'I beg you to kindly spare me this second trip, or at least I'd like a few days' rest to restore my health.'

'Let me plead your case,' said Riscara; he stood up and spoke to the Marquise in a low voice.

'Very well! I agree,' she replied with a smile.

'Don't worry, you won't be going,' the Marquise told Baldi rather contemptuously.

'Thank you,' he said in a tone of heartfelt gratitude. Sure enough, Riscara stepped into the post-chaise by himself. He had barely spent two days in Bologna when he saw Fabrice in a barouche with little Marietta. 'Lord!' he thought, 'it seems

our future Archbishop isn't too concerned about what people think; the Duchess must be told about this, she'll be so delighted.' To find out where Fabrice was staying, Riscara had only to follow him; the next morning the latter received one of the Genoa letters in the mail; he thought it rather short, but otherwise suspected nothing. He was beside himself with joy at the prospect of seeing the Duchess and the Count again, and in spite of anything Ludovic could say, he hired a post-horse and galloped off. Although he was unaware of it, he was closely followed by the Chevalier Riscara, who, on reaching the stage before Castelnovo, six leagues from Parma, had the pleasure of seeing a large crowd in the square in front of the local prison, where our hero had just been brought, after being recognized, while changing horses at the stage, by two constables whom Count Zurla had chosen and dispatched there.

Chevalier Riscara's little eyes sparkled with pleasure; with exemplary patience he verified everything that had just taken place in the tiny village, before dispatching a messenger to Marquise Raversi. Then, wandering through the streets as if on his way to look at the very remarkable church, and, after that, searching for a painting by Parmigianino* that he had been told was to be found in the village, he finally came upon the *podestà*,* who lost no time in paying his respects to a counsellor of state. Riscara appeared astonished that he had not promptly sent the conspirator he had been so fortunate as to arrest to the fortress in Parma.

'There might be a danger,' added Riscara coldly, 'that his numerous friends who the day before yesterday were on the lookout for him, to ensure his safe passage through his Serene Highness's domains, could encounter the constables; there must have been at least twelve or fifteen of those rebels, on horseback.'

'Intelligenti pauca!'^{*} exclaimed the *podestà*, with a crafty look.

CHAPTER 15

Two hours later the unfortunate Fabrice, wearing handcuffs and secured by a long chain to the actual *sediola* they had compelled him to get into, was on his way to the Parma fortress, escorted by eight constables. The latter had orders to take with them all the constables stationed in the villages the procession would pass through; the *podestà* himself was accompanying this important prisoner. At seven that evening the *sediola*, surrounded by all the urchins in Parma and thirty constables, came down the splendid avenue, passing in front of the little *palazzo* occupied by Fausta a few months earlier, and finally stopped at the outer gate of the fortress just as General Fabio Conti and his daughter were about to come out. The Governor's carriage halted before reaching the drawbridge to allow the *sediola* to which Fabrice was chained to enter; the General immediately shouted that the gates of the fortress be shut, and hurried into the gatehouse to find out what was happening; he was more than a little surprised when he recognized the prisoner, who had become extremely stiff from being chained to the *sediola* for such a long journey; four constables had picked him up and were carrying him into the committal office. So now I have in my power, thought the vainglorious Governor, this famous Fabrice del Dongo whom, one might have said, the nobility of Parma, for the past year, had sworn to make their exclusive concern!

The General had met him a score of times at court, at the Duchess's, and elsewhere, but he was very careful not to suggest that he knew him; he was afraid of compromising himself.

'Make out a very detailed report', he shouted at the prison clerk, 'of the remittal of this prisoner to me by the worthy *podestà* of Castelnuovo.'

Barbone, the clerk, a fearsome-looking figure with his enormous beard and his martial bearing, adopted a more self-important air than usual; he might have been a German gaoler. Convinced that it was above all the Duchess Sanseverina who

had prevented his master, the Governor, from becoming Minister of War, he behaved towards the prisoner with even greater than customary insolence, addressing him as 'voi', a style reserved, in Italy, for speaking to servants.

'I am a Prelate of the Holy Roman Church,' Fabrice told him firmly, 'and Vicar-General of this diocese; my birth alone entitles me to be treated with respect.'

'I know nothing about that!' replied the clerk impertinently; 'prove your claims by producing the documents that establish your right to those highly respectable titles.' Fabrice had no documents and made no reply. General Fabio Conti was standing next to his clerk and watching him write without raising his eyes to look at the prisoner, so that he would not have to say that he really was Fabrice del Dongo.

All of a sudden Clélia Conti, who was waiting in the carriage, heard a tremendous uproar in the guardroom. The clerk Barbone, who was writing an insolent and very long description of the prisoner's person, ordered him to open his garments, so that the number and condition of the scratches he had received during the fight with Giletti could be examined and noted.

'I cannot,' said Fabrice, with a bitter smile; 'I find I am unable to comply with the gentleman's orders, the handcuffs prevent me.'

'What!' cried the General with an innocent air, 'the prisoner's handcuffed! Inside the fortress! That's against the regulations, a special order's required for that; remove the handcuffs.'

Fabrice looked at him. He's a real Jesuit! he thought; for the last hour he's seen me wearing these handcuffs, which are horribly uncomfortable, and he's pretending to be surprised!

The constables removed the handcuffs; having just heard that Fabrice was nephew to the Duchess Sanseverina, they hastened to treat him with a soft-spoken politeness that contrasted with the coarseness of the clerk; the latter, apparently annoyed, said to Fabrice, who had remained motionless:

'Come on! Get a move on there! Let's see those scratches you got from poor Giletti at the time of the murder.' With one bound Fabrice flung himself on the clerk, and gave him such

a blow that Barbone fell off his chair and against the General's legs. The constables grabbed Fabrice, who was motionless, by the arms; the General himself and two constables who were nearby hurried to pick up the clerk, whose face was bleeding profusely. Two constables further away rushed to shut the office door, imagining that the prisoner was trying to escape. The sergeant commanding them thought that the young del Dongo could not seriously be planning to escape, since after all he was inside the fortress; nevertheless he followed his official instincts and went up to the window to prevent any disturbance. Opposite this open window and just a couple of paces away the General's carriage stood waiting; Clélia had huddled into a corner, so as not to have to watch the painful scene taking place in the office; on hearing all the commotion, she looked out.

'What's happening?' she asked the sergeant.

'It's young Fabrice del Dongo, Signorina, he's just given that insolent Barbone a fine old clout.'

'What! It's Fabrice del Dongo they're putting in prison?'

'It most certainly is', replied the sergeant; 'it's because the poor young man's so high-born that they're making such a to-do about it; I thought you knew, Signorina.' Clélia remained at the carriage window; when the constables standing round the table moved a little, she could see the prisoner. Whoever could have told me, she thought, when I met him on the Lake Como road, that when I next saw him he'd be in this unhappy situation?... He handed me into his mother's carriage... He was already with the Duchess then! Had their love-affair already started at that time?

The reader should know that the Liberal party controlled by the Marquise Raversi and General Conti affected to entertain no doubts that an intimate relationship existed between Fabrice and the Duchess. Count Mosca, whom they detested, was the butt of endless jokes on account of his credulity.

So, thought Clélia, here he is a prisoner, and a prisoner of his enemies! For after all, even if one believes Count Mosca's an angel, he's going to be delighted by this arrest.

A loud roar of laughter came from the guardroom.

'Jacopo,' she asked the sergeant in an agitated voice, 'whatever is happening?'

'The General asked the prisoner sternly why he'd struck Barbone; Monsignore Fabrice coolly replied: "he called me 'murderer'; let him produce the titles and documents that authorize him to address me in that manner"; that's why they're laughing.'

A gaoler who could write replaced Barbone; Clélia watched the latter come out, using his handkerchief to wipe the blood that was flowing freely down his dreadful face; he was swearing like a heathen: 'that f... Fabrice,' he shouted very loudly, 'he won't die by anyone's hand but mine... I'll do the hangman's job for him, etc., etc.' He had stopped between the office window and the General's carriage to watch Fabrice, and his oaths increased.

'Move along there,' the sergeant told him; 'you don't swear like that in front of the Signorina.'

Barbone raised his head to look inside the carriage and his eyes met Clélia's; she gave a terrified scream; never had she seen, at such close range, such a horrifying expression. He'll kill Fabrice, she thought; I must warn Don Cesare. This was her uncle, one of the most reputable priests in the city; General Conti, his brother, had obtained for him the position of steward and principal chaplain of the prison.

The General got back into the carriage.

'Would you like to go home,' he asked his daughter, 'or wait for me, perhaps for quite a long time, in the palace courtyard? I must go and report all this to the Sovereign.'

Fabrice was coming out of the office escorted by three constables who were taking him to his assigned cell; Clélia was looking out of the carriage door, and the prisoner was very close to her. At that moment she was answering her father's question with the words: 'I'll go with you.' Fabrice, hearing these words uttered just beside him, raised his eyes and met the young girl's gaze. What most struck him was the expression of melancholy on her face. How much more beautiful she has become, he thought, since our meeting near Como! Such a profoundly thoughtful look!... People are right to compare her with the Duchess; what an angelic face!

Not for nothing had the clerk Barbone, his face covered in blood, stationed himself beside the carriage; he gestured to the three constables escorting Fabrice to stop, and, walking round behind the carriage, reached the door beside which the General was sitting:

‘Since the prisoner committed an act of violence within the fortress,’ he said to him, ‘by virtue of article 157 of the regulations aren’t there grounds for keeping him handcuffed for three days?’

‘Go to the devil!’ cried the General, whom this arrest placed in an awkward situation. His concern was to avoid forcing either the Duchess or Count Mosca to take an extreme position; and in any case, how would the Count react to this development? Essentially, the murder of a Giletti was a trifling matter, and it was simply because of intrigue that it had acquired any importance.

Standing among his guards during this brief exchange, Fabrice looked superb; his demeanour could not have been prouder or more noble; his fine, delicate features, and the disdainful smile hovering on his lips, made a delightful contrast with the coarse appearance of the constables surrounding him. But all that only concerned, so to speak, the outward part of his appearance; he was entranced by Clélia’s sublime beauty, and his eyes revealed all his astonishment. She was lost in thought, and it had not occurred to her to withdraw her head from the carriage window; he greeted her with the most respectful little smile, and said to her after a moment:

‘I believe, Signorina, that I had the honour once before, near a lake, of meeting you in the company of police.’

Clélia blushed and was so disconcerted that she could find nothing to say in reply. How noble he looks, among those vulgar creatures! she was thinking at the moment when Fabrice addressed her. The intense pity and what we might almost call the tenderness which engulfed her robbed her of the presence of mind needed to say something; she became aware of her silence and blushed even more deeply. Just then the bolts of the fortress’s enormous gates were being vigorously drawn back, for had not his Excellency’s carriage been waiting for at least a minute? The noise, beneath that archway,

was so extremely loud that, even had Clélia thought of a reply, Fabrice would not have been able to hear her words.

Borne along by the horses which had begun galloping once they were over the drawbridge, Clélia was thinking: What a fool he must have thought me! Then suddenly she added: Not just a fool; he must have supposed me to be mean-spirited, he must have imagined that I didn't reply to his greeting because he's a prisoner and I'm the Governor's daughter.

This young girl's pure soul was filled with despair at such an idea. What makes my behaviour altogether abhorrent, she added, is that in the past, when we first met, also, as he said, 'in the company of police', it was I who was the prisoner, and he helped me and saved me from a dreadful predicament... Yes, there's no doubt about it, my behaviour could not have been worse, it was both rude and ungrateful. Alas! Poor young man! Now that he's in trouble everyone will behave ungratefully towards him. Indeed, didn't he say to me then: 'Will you remember my name, in Parma?' How he must despise me at this moment! A courteous word would have been so easy! Yes, I have to admit, my behaviour towards him was atrocious. In the past, had it not been for the generous offer of his mother's carriage, I'd have had to walk in the dust behind the constables, or, which would have been much worse, ride pillion behind one of those men; then it was my father who was arrested and I defenceless! Yes, my behaviour could not have been worse. And how intensely a being like him must have felt it! What a contrast between his noble countenance and my behaviour! What nobility! What serenity! How like a hero he seemed, surrounded by his base enemies! Now I understand the passion of the Duchess; since that is his demeanour in a misfortune which may have appalling consequences, what must he be like when his heart is full of joy!

The carriage of the Governor of the fortress remained for more than an hour-and-a-half in the palace courtyard, yet even so, when the Governor emerged after waiting on the Prince, Clélia did not feel that he had been in the palace for too long.

‘What is his Highness’s will?’

‘His voice said “Prison!” but his look said “Death!”’

‘Death! Good God!’ cried Clélia.

‘Now then, be quiet!’ responded the General crossly. ‘What a fool I am to answer a child!’

During this time Fabrice was climbing the 380 steps that led to the Farnese Tower, the new prison built, at a prodigious height, upon the platform of the large tower. Not once did he think, at any rate clearly, about the tremendous change in his destiny that had just taken place. What eyes! he was thinking, how very many things they were expressing! What intense pity! She seemed to be saying: ‘Life is such a web of misfortunes! Don’t be too distressed by what is happening to you! Are we not put into this world to suffer?’ How those lovely eyes remained fixed on me, even when the horses were advancing so noisily under the archway!

Fabrice completely forgot to be unhappy.

Clélia accompanied her father on various social calls; during the early part of the evening no one had yet heard the news of the arrest of the ‘great culprit’, which was what the courtiers, two hours later, were calling that unfortunate and reckless young man.

People noticed, that evening, that Clélia’s face was more than usually animated; now animation, the impression of being involved in what was going on round her, was precisely what that beautiful young girl lacked. When her beauty was compared with that of the Duchess, it was above all Clélia’s air of not being touched by anything, her manner of seeming as it were above everything, that tipped the scales in favour of her rival. In England, in France, countries where vanity holds sway, the opinion would probably have been precisely the reverse. Clélia Conti, though still somewhat too slender, could be compared to the beautiful women painted by Guido Reni;* we will not conceal the fact that, according to Greek notions of beauty, her features might have been considered rather marked; those lips, for example, which were full of the most affecting grace, were a trifle large.

What was admirable and remarkable about this face from which radiated the innocent grace and divine imprint of the

most noble of souls, was the fact that although Clélia's beauty was of the rarest and most unusual kind, she did not in any way remind one of the heads on Greek statues. The Duchess, by contrast, possessed in rather too high a degree the *recognized* type of ideal beauty, and her truly Lombard head recalled the voluptuous smile and tender melancholy of Leonardo's lovely portraits of Herodias. Just as the Duchess sparkled and scintillated with wit and malice, becoming passionately involved, if one may so describe it, in every subject which the flow of the conversation set before her mind's eye, so Clélia appeared calm and slow to react, either from disdain of what she saw around her, or from a yearning for some absent dream. It had long been believed that she would, eventually, embrace the religious life. She was twenty, yet she seemed to dislike going to balls, and if she did attend them with her father, this was out of obedience and in order not to hinder the furthering of his ambitions.

So, it's going to be impossible for me, the vulgar-minded General would all-too frequently say to himself, although heaven has granted me for a daughter the most beautiful woman in our Sovereign's domains, and the most virtuous, it's going to be impossible to derive any benefit from this for the advancement of my fortune! I live in too isolated a way, she's all I have in the world, and I sorely need a family to support me in society, a family who'll open some drawing-rooms doors to me, where my merit and especially my suitability for a ministerial appointment are accepted without question as the basis of any political discussion. And yet my beautiful, virtuous, pious daughter shows displeasure the minute a young man who's well placed at court tries to persuade her to accept his attentions. If this suitor is dismissed her character becomes less melancholy, and I see her grow almost light-hearted, until another wooer enters the lists. The handsomest man at the court, Count Baldi, presented himself and failed to please; the richest man in his Highness's realm, Marquis Crescenzi, came next; she claims he would make her miserable.

There's no doubt, the General would reflect at other times, that my daughter's eyes are finer than the Duchess's, especially

because they're capable, on rare occasions, of a deeper expression; but when does one ever see that superb expression in her eyes? Never in a drawing-room where she might use it to advantage, but when she's out riding alone with me, when, for instance, she's deeply moved by the misfortunes of some hideous-looking yokel. 'Try to keep some traces of that divine expression', I sometimes tell her, 'for the drawing-rooms we'll be visiting this evening.' Not at all: if she deigns to accompany me on my visits, her pure and noble countenance wears that rather aloof and unencouraging look of passive obedience. The General spared no effort, as can be seen, to find a suitable son-in-law, but what he said was true.

Courtiers, with nothing within their own souls to hold their attention, notice everything; they had observed that it was particularly on those days when Clélia could not bring herself to abandon her cherished dreams and pretend to take an interest in something, that the Duchess chose to stop beside her and try to engage her in conversation. Clélia's ash-blond hair was very gently set off by cheeks which were delicate in colour, though as a rule rather too pale. The shape alone of her forehead could have told an attentive observer that that aristocratic air, that bearing which was so very superior to any commonplace charms, sprang from a deep-seated indifference to everything that is vulgar. It bespoke the absence, not the impossibility, of an interest in anything. Since her father had become Governor of the fortress, Clélia, in her lofty apartments, had been happy, or at any rate free of vexations. The fearful number of steps that must be climbed in order to reach that Governor's *palazzo* on the platform of the large tower discouraged tedious social calls, and Clélia, for that practical reason, enjoyed a convent-like freedom; it was almost exactly the ideal of happiness which she had at one time considered seeking in the religious life. She was filled with a kind of horror at the very idea of placing her beloved solitude and her most private thoughts at the disposal of a young man, whom the name of husband would entitle to intrude into all of her spiritual life. If she did not attain happiness by means of solitude, at least she had been able to avoid those sensations which were too painful.

On the day when Fabrice was taken to the fortress, the Duchess met Clélia at a reception given by Count Zurla, Minister of the Interior; everyone clustered round the two women; Clélia's beauty, that evening, put the Duchess's in the shade. The expression in the young girl's eyes was so extraordinary, so intense, as to be almost indiscreet; there was pity in it, and also indignation and anger. The Duchess's high spirits and brilliant ideas seemed to plunge Clélia into moments of distress which bordered on horror. How this poor woman will cry and moan, she thought, when she learns that her lover, that young man who has such a great heart and such a noble face, has just been put in prison! And that look on the Sovereign's face condemning him to death! Oh absolute power, when will you no longer oppress Italy! O vile and venal souls! And I a gaoler's daughter! And I lived up to that noble reputation by not deigning to answer Fabrice! He who was once my benefactor! What can he be thinking of me now, alone in his room with his little lamp for sole company? Sickened by this idea, Clélia gazed in horror at the magnificent illumination of the Minister of the Interior's drawing-rooms.

'Never,' the courtiers were saying as they formed a circle round the two queens of the evening and attempted to join in their conversation, 'never have they conversed in so animated and at the same time so intimate a manner. Could it be that the Duchess, who's always alert to any way of countering the hostility the Prime Minister excites, could it be that she's thought of some splendid marriage for Clélia?' This conjecture was based on a circumstance which the court had never before been privileged to observe: the young girl's eyes held more fire, and, if one can so express it, more passion than those of the beautiful Duchess. For her part, the latter was astonished and, be it said to her credit, delighted by these new graces she was discovering in the young recluse; for the past hour she had been watching her with a pleasure that is rarely experienced at the sight of a rival. But what is happening here? wondered the Duchess; Clélia has never looked so lovely, nor, one could say too, so touching; can her heart have spoken?... But if that's the case, then most certainly it's an

unhappy love, there's a dark pain lying beneath this unwonted vivacity... But a love that's unhappy remains silent! Might she be trying to win back a fickle lover by her success in society? And the Duchess looked attentively at the young men standing nearby. Nowhere did she see an unusual expression, it was all more or less self-satisfied complacency. But there's something miraculous here, thought the Duchess, annoyed at being unable to guess. Where's Count Mosca, that shrewd creature? No, I'm not mistaken, Clélia's watching me attentively, and as if she finds me interesting in a completely new way. Can this be the effect of something that vile courtier her father has ordered her to do? I had imagined that young and noble soul incapable of lowering herself to pecuniary concerns. Could General Fabio Conti have some important favour to ask of the Count?

At about ten o'clock a friend of the Duchess's approached and whispered a few words to her; she turned extremely pale; Clélia took her hand and ventured to press it.

'I thank you and I understand you now... You're a good soul!' said the Duchess, trying to control herself; she was barely capable of uttering these few words. She smiled repeatedly at the lady of the house, who rose to accompany her to the door of the outer drawing-room; such honours were reserved for princesses of the blood, and seemed to the Duchess to form a cruel contrast with her present position. So she smiled a lot at Countess Zurla, but despite inordinate efforts on her part, was unable to address one single word to her.

Clélia's eyes filled with tears as she watched the Duchess pass through those reception rooms crowded with all that was most brilliant at that time in society. What will happen to that poor woman, she wondered, when she finds herself alone in her carriage? It would be an indiscretion on my part to offer to accompany her, I dare not... Yet what a consolation it would be to the poor prisoner, sitting alone with his little lamp in some horrible cell, if he knew he was loved as deeply as that! How dreadful the isolation he's been thrust into! And here we are, in these glittering rooms! How appalling! Might there be some way of getting a message to him? Good God! That would mean betraying my father; his position is so delicate,

caught between the two parties! What will become of him if he's exposed to the fierce hatred of the Duchess, who controls the will of the Prime Minister, the person who decides what will happen in three cases out of four? On the other hand, the Prince invariably takes a close interest in what's going on in the fortress, he's very touchy on that point; fear has made him cruel... In any case, Fabrice (Clélia no longer said Signor del Dongo) is far more to be pitied!... For him it's something very different from the danger of losing a lucrative position!... And the Duchess!... What a terrible passion love is!... And yet all those liars in society speak of it as a source of happiness! People are sorry for old women because they can no longer feel or inspire love! Never shall I forget what I've just seen; what an abrupt change! How those beautiful, radiant eyes of the Duchess's grew dull and dead after the fatal message that the Marquis of N*** gave her!... Fabrice must surely be very worthy of being loved!

In the midst of these very serious reflections with which Clélia's mind was totally preoccupied, she found the flattering remarks which invariably surrounded her even more than usually distasteful. In order to escape them, she went up to an open window which was half concealed by a taffeta curtain; she hoped that no one would dare follow her into this kind of retreat. This window looked out over a little grove of orange trees that were growing in open ground; it was true that every winter a roof had to be erected over them. In delight, Clélia breathed the perfume of these blossoms, and this pleasure seemed to restore a little tranquillity to her soul... I thought he had a very noble air, she reflected, but to inspire a passion like that in such a distinguished woman!... She had the honour of refusing the attentions of the Prince, and had she deigned to desire it, she could have been queen of his domains... Father says that the Sovereign's passion was great enough for him to marry her, were he ever free... And this love for Fabrice has lasted so long! For it's at least five years since we met them near Lake Como!... Yes, it's five years, she added after a moment's thought. Even then I was struck by it, even though my childlike eyes missed so much! How those two ladies seemed to admire Fabrice!...

Clélia was delighted to observe that none of the young men who had been speaking to her so eagerly dared approach the balcony. One of them, the Marquis Crescenzi, had taken a few steps in that direction, but had then stopped beside a gaming-table. If only, she thought, beneath my little window in our *palazzo* at the fortress, the only one where there's some shade, I could see some pretty orange trees like these, my thoughts would be less sad! But all I have to look at are the enormous blocks of stone of the Farnese Tower... Oh! she cried, giving a start, perhaps that's where they've put him! How I long to be able to speak to Don Cesare! He won't be as strict as the General... My father certainly won't tell me anything on the way back to the fortress, but I'll find out everything from Don Cesare... I have some money; I could buy some orange trees which, set under the window of my aviary, would stop me seeing that thick wall of the Farnese Tower. How much more hateful I'm going to find it now that I know one of the people whom it keeps hidden from the light of day!... Yes, it's certainly the third time I've seen him; once at court, at the ball in honour of the Princess's birthday; today, surrounded by three constables, while that horrible Barbone was asking for him to be handcuffed; and lastly near Lake Como... It's at least five years since then; what a young rascal he seemed at that time! What looks he kept giving the constables, and how strangely his mother and his aunt kept glancing at him! That day there was certainly some secret, some special awareness they shared; I once thought that he too was afraid of the constables... Clélia shuddered; How ignorant I was! At that time the Duchess must already have begun to feel an interest in him!... After the first few minutes how he made us laugh, when the ladies, in spite of their obvious anxiety, had become more used to the presence of a stranger!... And this evening I actually didn't answer him when he spoke to me! Oh ignorance and timidity! How often you look just the same as the very blackest of qualities! And that's what I'm like at over twenty!... I was right to think of taking the veil; the cloistered life's all I'm really good for! The perfect daughter for a gaoler! That's what he'll have thought. He despises me, and as soon as he can write to the Duchess,

he'll mention my unkindness, and the Duchess will think me a very two-faced young thing; for after all, this evening she may well have believed me filled with compassion for her in her misfortune.

Clélia noticed that someone was approaching, apparently with the intention of joining her on the iron balcony outside the window; this annoyed her, although she reproached herself for such feelings; the musings she was being roused from were not without sweetness. 'Here's some busybody who's going to get a nice welcome!' she thought. She was turning towards him with a haughty look, when she caught sight of the timid face of the Archbishop, who was drawing nearer the balcony by a series of almost imperceptible little movements. 'That saintly man doesn't know how to behave,' thought Clélia; 'why come and disturb a poor girl like me? My tranquillity's the only thing I own.' She was greeting him with respect, but also with coolness, when the prelate said to her:

'Have you heard the horrible news, Signorina?'

The expression in the young girl's eyes was already entirely different; however, following instructions her father had given her hundreds of times, she replied with an air of ignorance that her eyes openly contradicted:

'I have heard nothing, Monsignore.'

'My senior Vicar-General, poor Fabrice del Dongo, who's as guilty as I myself am of the death of that rascal Giletti, was seized in Bologna where he was living under the assumed name of Joseph Bossi; he's been imprisoned in your fortress; he arrived there *chained* to the actual carriage he was travelling in. A gaoler of sorts called Barbone, who was pardoned, some time ago, after murdering one of his own brothers, tried to attack Fabrice physically, but my young friend isn't someone who'll take an insult. He knocked down his vile adversary, whereupon they flung him into a dungeon twenty feet underground, after handcuffing him.'

'No, not handcuffed.'

'Ah! You do know something!' cried the Archbishop, and the old man's features lost their expression of deep discouragement; 'but, firstly, someone could come on to

this balcony and interrupt us; would you be so charitable as to hand personally to Don Cesare this pastoral ring of mine?’

The young girl had taken the ring, but did not know where to put it so that there would be no risk of losing it.

‘Put it on your thumb,’ said the Archbishop, and he placed it there himself. ‘May I rely on your passing on this ring?’

‘Yes, Monsignore.’

‘Will you promise me to keep secret what I am about to say, even in the event that you do not consider it appropriate to accede to my request?’

‘Certainly, Monsignore’, replied the young girl, trembling all over at the sombre, serious air that the old man had suddenly assumed...

‘Our esteemed Archbishop’, she added, ‘can give me no orders that are not worthy of himself and of me.’

‘Tell Don Cesare that I commend my adoptive son to him; I know that the constables who arrested him didn’t allow him time to pick up his breviary. I beg Don Cesare to give him his own, and if your uncle will send someone tomorrow to my palace, I undertake to replace the book he gives Fabrice. I also beg Don Cesare to pass on to Signor del Dongo the ring which is on that pretty hand.’ The Archbishop was interrupted by General Fabio Conti, who came to collect his daughter and escort her to his carriage; a brief exchange took place which was not without adroitness on the part of the prelate. Without in any way referring to the new prisoner, he managed to direct the conversation in such a manner as to make it appropriate for him to enunciate certain moral and political maxims; for example: ‘There are moments of crisis in the life of a court which seal the fate of the most exalted personages for many years to come; it would be egregiously imprudent to convert into *personal hatred* the political antipathy that is often the simple consequence of opposite positions.’ The Archbishop, allowing himself to be a trifle overcome by the intense grief he was experiencing at this very unexpected arrest, went so far as to say that while one naturally would not give up a position one already enjoyed, it would be gratuitously imprudent to draw upon oneself fierce

animosities for the future, by acquiescing in certain acts that are never forgotten.

When the General was in his carriage with his daughter:

'Those could be termed threats,' he said to her... 'threats, to a man like me!' No other words passed between the father and daughter for twenty minutes.

On accepting the Archbishop's pastoral ring, Clélia had certainly intended that when she was in the carriage she would tell her father about the small favour that the prelate had asked of her. But after hearing the angry tone in which her father uttered the word 'threats', she felt certain that he would intercept the token; she covered the ring with her left hand, gripping it fervently. During the entire time it took to drive from the Ministry of the Interior to the fortress, she was wondering whether it would be very wrong of her not to speak to her father. She was very pious and over-scrupulous, and her heart, so tranquil as a rule, was beating with unaccustomed violence; but in the end the sentry's challenge had resounded from the rampart above the gates as the carriage approached them, before Clélia had been able to think of how to express her request so that her father would not refuse it, so greatly did she fear that refusal! As they climbed the 360 steps that led to the Governor's *palazzo*, Clélia could think of nothing.

She lost no time in speaking to her uncle, who scolded her and refused to be a party to anything.

CHAPTER 16

'Well!' exclaimed the General on catching sight of his brother Don Cesare, 'now the Duchess will be spending 100,000 scudi to make a fool of me and help the prisoner escape!'

But for the present we must leave Fabrice in his prison at the very top of Parma's fortress; he is well guarded, and when we return to him there we may perhaps find him a trifle changed. We are going to occupy ourselves mainly with the court, where some very complicated intrigues, and especially the passions of an unhappy woman, will decide his fate. As he climbed the 390 steps of his prison in the Farnese Tower, under the gaze of the Governor, Fabrice, who had so dreaded this moment, discovered that he had no time to dwell on his misfortune.

On returning home after Count Zurla's reception, the Duchess dismissed her servants with a gesture; then, collapsing fully dressed on to her bed, she cried aloud: 'Fabrice is in the hands of his enemies, and perhaps, because of me, they'll poison him!' How can one describe the despair that followed this outline of the situation, in a woman so far from rational, so much a slave to the feelings of the present moment, and who was—although without admitting it to herself—desperately in love with the young prisoner? There were inarticulate cries, and outbursts of rage, and convulsive gestures, but never a tear. She dismissed her women so as to conceal her tears, believing she would begin sobbing her heart out as soon as she was alone; but tears, that instant solace for great sorrows, completely failed her. Anger, indignation, a sense of her own inferiority *vis-à-vis* the Prince, had too powerful a hold over this haughty soul.

How could I be more humiliated! she kept exclaiming; I've been outrageously insulted, and, what's far worse, Fabrice's life has been endangered! How could I not seek revenge! Enough, my Prince! Yes, you may kill me, you have it in your power to do so, but afterwards I'll see that you die too. Alas, poor Fabrice! How would that help you? How different things

are from that day when I wanted to leave Parma! And yet, that day I imagined I was unhappy... how blind I was! I was going to break with everything that made up my pleasant way of life: alas! without realizing it, I was on the verge of an event that would decide my fate for ever. Had the Count not given way to his courtier's habits of servile obsequiousness, had he not suppressed the words 'unjust proceedings' in that fatal note which the Prince's vanity had granted me, we'd have been saved. I was lucky, I must admit, rather than clever, to engage his pride on the subject of his precious city of Parma. I threatened to leave then, I was free then! God! Now I couldn't be more a slave! Now I'm bound to this foul cess-pool, and Fabrice is chained up in the fortress, in that fortress which for so many illustrious people has been the antechamber of death! And no longer can I subdue that tiger with the threat of leaving his lair!

He's too clever not to realize that I'll never leave that infamous tower where my heart is imprisoned. This man's wounded vanity may suggest the most extraordinary ideas to him now, ideas whose bizarre cruelty will simply further excite that astounding vanity of his. If he resumes his former vapid wooing, if he says to me: 'Accept the addresses of your slave or Fabrice dies': well! There's the old story of Judith...* Yes, but although for me it would simply be suicide, for Fabrice it would be murder; the Prince's half-witted successor, our Crown Prince, and that vile executioner Rassi would have Fabrice hanged as my accomplice.

The Duchess moaned aloud; her stricken heart was tormented by this dilemma, to which she could see no solution. Her troubled mind could not visualize any other outcome. Ten minutes passed in a frenzy of agitation; then for a minute or two, with all life drained from her, an exhausted sleep replaced this horrible state. She awoke with a start after a few moments and found she was sitting on her bed; it seemed to her that there, right before her, the Prince was going to have Fabrice's head cut off. Wild-eyed, the Duchess stared about her. When she had finally convinced herself that she could see neither the Prince nor Fabrice, she fell back once more, almost fainting, on to her bed. Her physical weakness was

such that she did not think she had the strength to change her position. My God! If only I could die! she said to herself... But what a coward I am! I, abandon Fabrice in his misfortune! I'm losing my wits... Come, I must face things as they are; I must calmly consider the appalling position I've almost deliberately placed myself in. What a disastrous blunder! To come and live in the court of an absolute ruler! A tyrant who knows all his victims! For him, every one of their glances seems a challenge to his power. Alas! That's what neither the Count nor I understood when I left Milan; I pictured the delights of an agreeable court; something slightly inferior, it's true, but something in the style of the best years under Prince Eugène!

From a distance we can have no notion of the kind of authority wielded by a despot who knows all his subjects by sight. The outward form of despotism is the same as that of other kinds of government; there are, for example, judges, but they are like Rassi; such a monster that he wouldn't consider it at all extraordinary to hang his father were the Prince to order him to do so... he would call it his duty... Bribe Rassi! What an unhappy creature I am! I have no means of doing so. What can I offer him? Perhaps 100,000 lire. And they say that after the most recent attempt to assassinate him—which he was saved from by the wrath Heaven harbours against this wretched country—the Prince sent him a casket containing 10,000 golden zecchini. And in any case what amount of money could buy him? That despicable creature, who has never seen anything but contempt in men's eyes, now has the pleasure of seeing fear, and even respect; he may become Minister of Police, and why not? Then three-quarters of the population of this place will lick his boots, and tremble in his presence, just as abjectly as he himself trembles in the presence of the Sovereign.

Since I cannot flee this odious place, I must find some means, here, of helping Fabrice: if I were to live alone, in solitude and despair, what could I then do for Fabrice? Come, *wretched woman, pull yourself together*; do your duty; go about in society, pretend never to give Fabrice a thought... Pretend to forget you, my sweet angel!

At this point the Duchess burst into tears; now at last she was able to weep. After an hour spent in indulging human weakness, she was somewhat comforted to see that her ideas were beginning to grow clearer. With a magic carpet, she thought, I could get Fabrice out of the fortress, and escape with him into some blessed place where we couldn't be pursued, for example, Paris. At first we'd live there on the 1,200 lire that his father's steward forwards to me with such comic punctiliousness. I could certainly scrape together 100,000 lire from the ruins of my fortune! For a few inexpressibly delightful moments the Duchess pictured, in her imagination, all the details of the life she would lead 300 leagues away from Parma. In France, she thought, he could join the army under an assumed name... Established in a regiment of those gallant Frenchmen, young Valserra would soon make himself a reputation, he would at last be happy.

These golden visions brought on fresh tears, but this time the tears were sweet. Somewhere, then, happiness did still exist! This state lasted for a long time; the poor woman dreaded returning to a contemplation of the hideous reality. As dawn was beginning to outline in white the treetops of her garden, she at last made a fierce effort to control herself. In a few hours, she told herself, I'll be on the field of battle; I'll have to take action, and if something upsets me, if the Prince dares to say something to me about Fabrice, I'm not confident I'll be able to keep my head. So here and now I must *come to some decisions*.

If I'm declared guilty of crimes against the State, Rassi will have everything in this *palazzo* seized; on the first of this month the Count and I burned, as is our custom, all the papers the police might be able to use against us, and he's Minister of Police, that's the funny thing. I've three fairly valuable diamonds; tomorrow I'll send Fulgence, the boatman I had at Grianta, to Geneva to put them in safe keeping. If Fabrice ever escapes (God almighty! Hear my prayer! and she crossed herself), the Marquis del Dongo's incalculable cowardice will make him think it a sin to put food in the mouth of a man who's fleeing from a legitimate Sovereign, at least he'll have my diamonds, he'll have something to eat.

I'll have to break off with the Count... To be alone with him, after what's happened, is impossible. Poor man! He's not a bad man, on the contrary; he's just weak. He's a prosaic soul, not on our level. Poor Fabrice! If only you could be here with me for a moment, so we could talk over our dangerous predicament!

The Count's painstaking prudence would hinder all my plans, and in any case I mustn't involve him in my downfall... For why would the vanity of that tyrant not have me put behind bars? I'll have been guilty of conspiracy... what could be easier to prove? If the fortress was where he sent me and I could buy the means of speaking to Fabrice, if only for a moment, how bravely we would face death together! But enough of these mad ideas; his Rassi would advise him to finish me off with poison; the sight of me riding through the streets on a tumbril might touch the hearts of his precious Parmesans... What are you about? Still fantasizing! Alas! A poor woman whose actual fate is so sad must be forgiven this folly! The truth of all this is that the Prince won't have me put to death, but nothing would be easier than to throw me into prison and keep me there; he'll have all kinds of incriminating documents hidden in some corner of my *palazzo*, as they did for poor L***. Then three judges—who won't be real rogues, because there'll be what's called 'documentary evidence'—and a dozen false witnesses will suffice. So I can be condemned to death for conspiracy; and the Prince, in his infinite mercy, bearing in mind the fact that I once had the honour of being received at his court, will commute my sentence to ten years in the fortress. But I, to prove myself true to that tempestuous character which has made the Marquise Raversi and my other enemies say so many idiotic things, I'll bravely poison myself. At least that's what the public will be kind enough to think; but I'll wager that Rassi will appear in my cell and courteously hand me, as coming from the Prince, a little flask of strychnine or of Perugia opium.

Yes, I must break with the Count in a very conspicuous manner, for I don't want to involve him in my downfall, that would be contemptible; the poor man has loved me so sincerely! My stupid mistake was to believe that a true courtier

would still have enough of a soul to be capable of love. Very probably the Prince will find some excuse for putting me in prison; he'll be afraid that I may subvert public opinion about Fabrice. The Count's a very honourable man; he'll immediately do something that the boot-lickers of this court will, in their utter amazement, call madness: he'll leave the court. I defied the Prince's authority, that evening, in the matter of his letter; I can expect anything of his wounded vanity; does a man who's born a Prince ever forget what I made him feel on that occasion? Besides, if the Count breaks with me he'll be in a better position to help Fabrice. But what if the Count, who'll be in despair over my decision, were to seek revenge?... Now that really is an idea that would never enter his head; his nature is not fundamentally base like the Prince's; the Count might, most unwillingly, countersign a shameful decree, but he's an honourable man. And then, for what might he seek revenge? For the fact that after loving him for five years without in the smallest way giving his love any cause to reproach me, I say to him: My dear Count! I knew the happiness of loving you; but that ardour has now spent itself: I no longer love you. But I know you through and through; I still feel the deepest esteem for you and you will always be the best friend I have.

What can a true gentleman say in response to such a sincere avowal?

I'll take a new lover, at least that's what people will believe. I'll tell this lover: When it comes down to it, the Prince is right to punish Fabrice's rash behaviour; but on the occasion of his name-day celebration, our gracious Sovereign will doubtless grant him his freedom. That way I'll gain six months. The new lover that prudence would select is that corrupt judge, that vile executioner, that Rassi.... he'd see himself as raised up to the nobility, and in point of fact I'd give him the entry into the best circles. Forgive me, dear Fabrice! That is something I simply cannot do. What! That monster, still drenched in the blood of Count P. and of D.! I'd faint with horror if he came near me, or rather I'd seize a knife and plunge it into his infamous heart. Don't ask the impossible of me!

Yes, most of all I must forget Fabrice! and show not a trace of anger against the Prince; revert to my customary light-heartedness, which these slimy souls will find the more appealing, first because I'll seem to be submitting graciously to their Sovereign, and secondly because, far from making fun of them, I'll be careful to draw attention to all their delightful little talents; for instance, I'll compliment Count Zurla on the beauty of the white feather on the hat he's just had brought by courier from Lyons, and which makes him so very happy.

Take a lover in the Raversi's party... If the Count leaves, that'll be the party in office; that's where the power will lie. It'll be a friend of the Raversi's who'll rule over the fortress, because that man Conti will become a minister. But however will the Prince, who's used to good society, who's an intelligent man and accustomed to the Count's charming ways of going about things, however will he be able to discuss affairs of state with that lout, that unmitigated ass whose entire life has been dedicated to resolving this important question: Ought his Highness's troops to have seven buttons on the front of their uniforms, or nine? It's those brute beasts, who're so jealous of me—this is why you're in such danger, dear Fabrice—it's those brute beasts who'll decide my fate and yours! So, I mustn't allow the Count to resign! Let him stay, even if it means being humiliated! He always supposes that resigning is the greatest sacrifice that can be asked of a Prime Minister, and every time his mirror tells him he's growing old, he offers to make this sacrifice for me: so I'll have to break with him completely; yes, and only be reconciled with him if there's no other way of preventing his leaving office. Of course I'll break off in the friendliest manner possible; but after the fawning way he omitted the words 'unjust proceedings' from the Prince's letter, I feel that in order not to hate him I must spend several months without seeing him. On that crucial evening I had no need of his wits; it was only necessary for him to write what I dictated, he had only to write those words that *I had obtained* through my own force of character; he was carried away by his slavish courtier's habits. He told me the next day that he couldn't ask his Prince to sign

an absurdity, that 'a written reprieve' would have been necessary; but good God! with people like that, with monsters of vanity and malice like these *Farnese*, you take what you can get.

At this thought, all of the Duchess's anger returned. The Prince deceived me, she said to herself, and in such a despicable way!... There's no excuse for that man: he's intelligent, and shrewd, and rational; it's only his passions that are base. The Count and I have noticed it a score of times: his thinking only becomes vulgar when he fancies someone intended to insult him. Well now! Fabrice's crime has no connection with politics; it's an insignificant little murder like a hundred others that are committed every year within his favoured domains, and the Count has sworn to me that he had the affair thoroughly investigated and that Fabrice is innocent. That man Giletti wasn't lacking in courage: realizing that he was so close to the border, he was suddenly tempted to rid himself of a successful rival.

The Duchess spent a long time considering whether it was possible to believe in Fabrice's guilt; not that she felt it to be a very grave sin, in a gentleman of the rank of her nephew, to rid himself of an insolent, second-rate actor; but, in her despair, she was beginning to be dimly conscious of the fact that she was going to have to fight to prove this innocence of Fabrice's. No, she finally told herself, here's conclusive proof: he's like poor Pietranera, there were always weapons in all his pockets, and that day he only had a paltry single-barrelled rifle, and even that was borrowed from one of the workmen.

I hate the Prince because he deceived me, and deceived me in the most despicable way; after signing his pardon, he had the poor boy arrested in Bologna, etc. But that account will be settled. About five in the morning, the Duchess, exhausted by this long paroxysm of despair, rang for her maids; on seeing her they cried out. Lying on her bed, fully dressed, wearing her diamonds, pale as the sheets and with closed eyes, she looked to them as if she were lying in state on her deathbed. They would have supposed her in a dead faint had they not remembered that she had just rung for them. From time to time a very few tears would run down her insensible

cheeks; her maids understood, from a gesture she made, that she wished to be put to bed.

The Count, after Count Zurla's reception, had twice presented himself at the Duchess's; unable to gain admittance, he wrote saying that he personally needed her advice: Should he continue in his position after the way they had dared to insult him? The Count added: 'The young man is innocent, but even were he guilty, should they arrest him without first informing me, his avowed protector?' The Duchess did not see this letter until the following morning.

The Count had no moral principles; one can even add that what Liberals mean by 'morality' (to seek the happiness of the greatest number) struck him as humbug; he believed himself bound to seek above all the happiness of Count Mosca della Rovere; but he was profoundly honourable and perfectly sincere when he spoke of resigning. Never in his life had he told the Duchess a lie; in any case, she did not pay the slightest attention to this letter; her decision, a very painful one, had been taken, to 'pretend to forget Fabrice'; after this struggle, nothing else mattered to her.

The following morning towards midday the Count, after calling many times at the Palazzo Sanseverina, was finally admitted; he was appalled at the sight of the Duchess... She looks forty! he thought, and only yesterday she was so radiant, so young!... Everyone's been telling me that during her long conversation with Clélia Conti she looked fully as young as Clélia and far more captivating.

The Duchess's voice, and its tone, were as strange as her appearance. This tone, stripped of all passion, of all human concern, of all anger, made the Count turn pale; it reminded him of the demeanour of one of his friends who, some months earlier, on the point of death, and having already received the sacraments, had asked to see him.

After a few minutes the Duchess was able to speak to him. She gazed at him with lack-lustre eyes.

'Let us part, my dear Count,' she told him in a voice that was faint but perfectly clear, and which she was trying to make sound friendly; 'let us part, we must! Heaven is my witness that for the last five years my behaviour towards you

has been beyond reproach. You've given me a brilliant existence in place of the tedium which would have been my unhappy lot at Grianta; without you I should have encountered old age several years sooner... For my part, my sole concern has been to try to ensure your happiness. It's because I love you that I'm proposing that we part "*à l'amiable*", as they'd say in France.'

The Count did not understand; she was forced to repeat herself several times. He turned deathly pale and, falling to his knees beside her bed, said everything that utter amazement and, later, intense despair could prompt an intelligent man who was deeply in love to say. He offered repeatedly to resign and follow his beloved to some refuge a thousand leagues away from Parma.

'You dare speak to me of leaving, while Fabrice is here!' she finally exclaimed, half sitting up in bed. But as she noticed that this name made a painful impression, she added after a moment's silence, while gently pressing the Count's hand: 'No, my dear friend, I won't tell you that I have loved you with that passion and ardour that one no longer experiences, it seems to me, when one is past thirty, and I am well beyond that age. People will have told you that I was in love with Fabrice, for I know that such was the rumour circulating in this *evil* court.' (Her eyes sparkled for the first time during this conversation when she uttered the word 'evil'.) 'I swear to you before God, and on the life of Fabrice, that never has the least little thing passed between him and me that could not have borne the scrutiny of a third person. Nor will I tell you that I love him exactly as a sister would; I love him instinctively, so to speak. I love his courage, which is so simple and so perfect that one can say he himself is not aware of it; I remember that this kind of admiration began on his return from Waterloo. For all his seventeen years, he was still a child; his great concern was to know whether he had really been in the battle, and if the answer was "yes", if he could say that he'd fought, since he'd never advanced to the attack of any battery or enemy column. It was during the serious discussions that we had together on this important subject that I first began to see in him an incomparable charm. His

greatness of soul became clear to me; in his position, what clever falsehoods would a fashionable young man not have set forth! In brief, if he's not happy I cannot be happy. Now that's a good way of describing the state of my heart; if it isn't the truth, at least it's all the truth that I can see.' The Count, encouraged by this frank, intimate tone, tried to kiss her hand; she pulled it away with a kind of horror. 'It's over,' she told him; 'I'm a woman of thirty-seven, I'm on the threshold of old age, I can already feel all its disheartening effects, and it may even be the case that I'm near to death. People say that that is a dreadful moment, and yet it seems to me that I long for it. I am experiencing the worst symptom of old age: my heart has been destroyed by this appalling misfortune; I can no longer love. I now see in you, my dear Count, only the ghost of someone I once loved. What's more, I can tell you that it is gratitude alone that makes me speak to you like this.'

'What is to become of me?' the Count kept asking her. 'When I feel that I love you more ardently now than in those early days when I used to see you at La Scala!'

'Shall I tell you something, my dear? Talking of love bores me, and strikes me as unseemly. Come!' she said, attempting, albeit in vain, to smile, 'be brave! Be a man of intelligence, and discernment, and, if need be, resourcefulness. Be with me as you really are in the eyes of the world, the cleverest man and the greatest politician that Italy has produced in centuries.'

The Count rose to his feet and walked about in silence for a few minutes.

'Impossible, my dear,' he finally told her; 'I'm being rent in two by the most violent passion, and you ask me to be guided by reason! Reason no longer exists for me!'

'Let us have no further talk of passion, I beg you,' she said curtly, and for the first time in the course of a two hours' conversation her voice took on some kind of expression. The Count, in despair himself, tried to comfort her.

'He deceived me,' she cried, without reacting at all to the grounds for hope that the Count was expounding; 'he deceived me in the most despicable manner!' And, for an instant, her deathly pallor vanished; but even in that moment

of violent excitement the Count noticed that she did not have the strength to raise her arms.

'Good God! Is it possible', he wondered, 'that she's simply ill? However, if that's the case it would mark the onset of some very serious illness.' So then, deeply concerned, he suggested sending for the celebrated Razoni, the best-known physician in Parma and all of Italy.

'So you wish to give a stranger the pleasure of discovering the full extent of my despair?... Is that the advice of a traitor or of a friend?' And she gave him a strange look.

'It's all over,' he told himself in distress; 'she no longer loves me! and what's far worse, she no longer even thinks of me as a man of average honour.'

'I must tell you', added the Count eagerly, 'that my first concern was to find out some details of this arrest that has filled us with such despair, and the strange thing is that I still don't know anything definite; I've had the constables at the next police station questioned, and they saw the prisoner arrive by the Castelnovo road; they were ordered to follow his *sediola*. I immediately sent Bruno off again, you know how zealous and devoted he is; he's been instructed to work back from station to station to find out where and how Fabrice was arrested.'

On hearing him utter Fabrice's name, the Duchess was overcome by a brief fit of trembling.

'Forgive me, my dear,' she said to the Count as soon as she could speak; 'I'm deeply interested in these particulars, tell me them all, make sure I understand every smallest detail.'

'Well, Signora,' replied the Count, adopting a somewhat lighter tone in an attempt to distract her a little, 'I'm thinking of sending a confidential messenger to Bruno and ordering him to go on as far as Bologna; perhaps that's where our young friend was arrested. What's the date of his last letter?'

'Tuesday, five days ago.'

'Had it been opened in the post?'

'No sign of its being opened. I must tell you that it was written on horrible paper; the address is in a woman's writing, and it's addressed to an old washerwoman who's a relative of my maid. The washerwoman thinks it's to do with a love

affair, and Chékina pays her for the carriage on the letters without giving her anything extra.' The Count, who had adopted a completely business-like tone, tried to determine, by talking it over with the Duchess, what day the arrest in Bologna could have taken place. Only then did he realize, he who was usually so tactful, that this was the right tone to adopt. These details interested the unhappy woman and seemed to distract her a little. Had the Count not been in love, this very simple idea would have occurred to him as soon as he entered the room. The Duchess sent him away so that he could transmit fresh orders to the faithful Bruno without delay. Their conversation happening to touch on the question of whether a sentence had already been passed before the Prince had signed the letter to the Duchess, the latter seized the opportunity of saying, with a kind of fervour, to the Count: 'I won't reproach you for having omitted the words "unjust proceedings" in the letter that you wrote and he signed, it was the instinct of the courtier that had you by the throat; without your being aware of it, you put your master's interest above that of your friend. You've been letting me control your actions, my dear Count, for a long time now, but it isn't in your power to change your nature; as Minister you are enormously talented, but you also have the instincts consonant with that calling. The suppression of the word "unjust" is my undoing; but far be it from me to reproach you in any way on that score, it was the fault of your instinct and not of your will.'

'Remember', she added, changing her tone and assuming her most imperious air, 'that I'm not too much upset by Fabrice's arrest, that I haven't the slightest desire to leave this country, that I feel great respect for the Prince. That is what you must say to people, and now here is what I have to say to you: As from now on I propose to take sole and complete responsibility for my own conduct, I want to part from you "*à l'amiable*", that is to say, as a good, old friend. Think of me as being sixty years old; the young woman in me is dead, no longer can I exaggerate anything at all in my own mind; no longer can I love. But I would be even more unhappy than I already am if I were to jeopardize your future. It may be that I

will find it useful to appear to take a young lover, and I would not wish you to be made miserable. I can swear to you on Fabrice's happiness,' and here she paused for an instant, 'that I have never been unfaithful to you, and that over a period of five years. That's a long time,' she said; she tried to smile; her very pale cheeks trembled, but her lips were incapable of parting. 'I can even swear to you that I've never had the intention or the desire to be unfaithful. Now that that is settled, leave me.'

Filled with despair, the Count left the Palazzo Sanseverina: he saw that the Duchess had quite made up her mind to part from him, and never had he been more passionately in love with her. This is one of those points to which I am forced to revert again and again, because they seem improbable outside of Italy. On returning home he dispatched as many as six different messengers, carrying letters, to places on the road between Castelnuovo and Bologna. But this isn't all, reflected the unhappy Count, the Prince may take it into his head to have that unfortunate youth executed, out of revenge for the tone in which the Duchess addressed him on the day of that fatal letter. I sensed that the Duchess was going beyond a line that should never be crossed, and it was in order to make amends that I was so unbelievably stupid as to omit the words 'unjust proceedings', the only words that were binding on the Sovereign... Bah! Are those people bound by anything at all? This is undoubtedly the greatest mistake of my entire life: I've risked everything that can make it worth living; I must draw on all my energy and skill to rectify this blunder; but if, even with the sacrifice of a little dignity, I can't achieve anything, I'll leave the man high and dry; with his great political ambitions, with his ideas of becoming the constitutional monarch of Lombardy, we'll see whom he finds to replace me... Fabio Conti's nothing but an idiot, and Rassi's talent is limited to arranging for a man who's incurred the Sovereign's displeasure to be hanged, within the law.

Once he had reached this firm decision to resign his portfolio if Fabrice were subjected to anything more severe than simple imprisonment, the Count said to himself: If a whim of vanity on the part of this man whom we so imprudently defied

costs me my happiness, at least I'll still have my honour... Incidentally, since I don't give a rap for my portfolio, there's countless things I can allow myself to do that even this morning would have seemed impossible. For instance, I'm going to do everything humanly feasible to help Fabrice to escape... Good God! exclaimed the Count, interrupting his reasoning, his eyes opening very wide as if at the sight of some unforeseen happiness, the Duchess didn't mention escaping to me, might she for once in her life have been less than sincere, and the reason for our rupture be the wish that I should betray the Prince? Upon my word, no sooner said than done!

The look in the Count's eyes had recovered all its sardonic shrewdness. That charming Prosecutor Rassi is paid by his master for all those sentences that bring dishonour upon us throughout Europe, but he's not a man to refuse to be paid by me for betraying his master's secrets. The bastard has a mistress and a confessor, but the mistress is of too base a type for me to be able to speak to her, the next day she'd repeat our conversation to all the neighbourhood fruit-sellers. The Count, revived by this glimmer of hope, was already on his way to the cathedral; surprised by the lightness of his step, he smiled in spite of his distress: What it is, he thought, not to be a Minister any longer! This cathedral, like many churches in Italy, serves to link two streets together; the Count saw, from a distance, one of the Archbishop's Vicars-General crossing the nave.

'Since I've run into you,' he said to him, 'would you be so kind as to spare my gout the dreadful fatigue of climbing right up to Monsignore the Archbishop's? I should be infinitely obliged to him if he would be so good as to come down to the vestry.' The Archbishop was delighted with this message, he had countless things to say to the Minister on the subject of Fabrice. But, guessing that these things were simply empty phrases, the Minister refused to listen.

'What kind of man is Dugnani, the assistant priest of St Paul?'

'A man of small mind and vast ambition,' replied the Archbishop; 'few scruples and extreme poverty, for we too have our vices!'

'Heavens, Monsignore!' exclaimed the Minister, 'you describe like Tacitus'; and with a laugh he took his leave. No sooner was he back at the Ministry than he sent for Father Dugnani.

'You're confessor to my excellent friend the Public Prosecutor Rassi, is there nothing he wishes to tell me?' And, without further speech or ceremony, he dismissed Dugnani.

CHAPTER 17

The Count considered himself as out of office. Let me try to work out, he said to himself, how many horses we'll be able to keep after my disgrace, because that's what they'll call my retirement. He calculated how he stood financially: his fortune had been 80,000 lire when he became Minister; to his great astonishment, he discovered that, taking everything into account, his current fortune did not amount to 500,000 lire; at best that's an income of 20,000, he thought. I must confess that I'm an absolute fool! There's not a single bourgeois in Parma who doesn't believe I've an income of 150,000 lire; and the Prince, on that head, is worse than his subjects. When they see me living in poverty, they'll say I'm good at keeping my money hidden away. My goodness, he exclaimed, if I stay on just three months as Minister, this fortune of mine's going to double. He saw in this idea an excuse for writing to the Duchess, and seized on it eagerly; but to ensure that he would be forgiven for the letter, in view of their present relationship, he filled this one with figures and calculations. We shall only have 20,000 lire a year, he wrote to her, for the three of us—Fabrice, you, and me—to live on in Naples. Fabrice and I will share a mount. Hardly had the Minister dispatched his letter when the Public Prosecutor Rassi was announced; Mosca received him with an arrogance bordering on impertinence.

'Now then sir,' he said to him, 'in Bologna you had a conspirator arrested who's under my protection, what's more you want to chop off his head, and yet you say nothing to me! Do you at least know the name of my successor? Is it General Conti, or you yourself?'

Rassi was filled with consternation: he was too unaccustomed to good society to judge whether the Count was serious: turning very red, he mumbled a few indistinct words; the Count was watching him and revelling in his embarrassment. Suddenly Rassi gave himself a shake and exclaimed with perfect assurance, and in the style of Figaro caught *in flagrante delicto* by Almaviva:* 'Upon my word, Count, I'm

not going to beat about the bush with your Excellency: what will you give me to reply to all your questions as I would to those of my confessor?’

‘The Cross of St Paul (the Parmesan Order), or some money, if you can provide me with a pretext for doing so.’

‘I prefer the Cross of St Paul, because it would make me noble.’

‘Really, my dear Prosecutor, so you still feel some regard for our poor nobility?’

‘If I had been born noble,’ replied Rassi with all the impudence consonant with his calling, ‘the relatives of those people I’ve had hanged would hate me, but they wouldn’t despise me.’

‘Well, I’ll save you from contempt, if you’ll cure my ignorance,’ said the Count. ‘What do you plan to do with Fabrice?’

‘Heavens, the Prince is quite at a loss; he fears that, seduced by the lovely eyes of Armida,* forgive this rather bold expression, those are the exact words of the Sovereign, he fears that, beguiled by those very lovely eyes to which he himself is not entirely insensible, you may abandon him, and there’s no one but you who can manage the Lombardy affair. I can even tell you’, added Rassi, lowering his voice, ‘that there’s a splendid opportunity for you there, well worth the Cross of St Paul that you’re giving me. The Prince would bestow upon you, as a reward from the nation, a delightful estate worth 600,000 lire that he would take from his own lands, or else a consideration of 300,000 lire, if you would agree not to concern yourself with the fate of Fabrice del Dongo, or at least not to speak to him about it except in public.’

‘I was expecting better than that,’ said the Count, ‘not to concern myself with Fabrice would mean breaking with the Duchess.’

‘Well! That’s what the Prince says too; the fact is—just between ourselves—he’s dreadfully angry with her Grace; and he’s afraid that as recompense for breaking with that charming lady, now that you’re a widower, you’ll ask him for the hand of his cousin, the old Princess Isota, who’s only fifty.’

‘He’s guessed correctly,’ exclaimed the Count, ‘our master is the shrewdest man in Parma.’

Never had the bizarre notion of marrying that old Princess entered the Count's head; nothing would have been less suited to a man who was bored to death by court ceremonial.

He began fidgeting with his snuff-box on the marble top of a little table beside his armchair. Rassi saw a possible advantage to himself in this sign of indecision; his eyes gleamed.

'I beg of you, your Lordship,' he cried, 'if your Excellency is prepared to accept either the estate of 600,000 lire or the consideration in cash, I beg that you will choose no other intermediary but myself. I would undertake', he added, lowering his voice, 'to get the cash amount increased or even to have a quite considerable forest included with the royal land. If your Excellency were prepared to inject a little meekness and tact into your manner when you speak to the Prince about that young whippersnapper who's been put in prison, it might be possible to create a Duchy of the estate that the nation in its gratitude will be giving to you. I repeat, your Excellency; for the moment the Prince loathes the Duchess, but he's quite at a loss as to what to do, to such a point that I've thought, at times, there was some secret circumstance which he dare not admit to me. Essentially, this can turn out to be a gold-mine, with me selling you his most intimate secrets, and quite openly, because I'm considered your sworn enemy. At bottom, even if he is furious with the Duchess, he also believes, as we all do, that you are the only person in the world who can bring all the secret negotiations concerning the Milanese to a successful conclusion. Will your Excellency permit me to tell him the exact words used by the Sovereign?' enquired Rassi, his excitement increasing. 'Often something is couched in a manner no paraphrase can render, and you may see more there than I do.'

'I'll permit everything,' said the Count, continuing to tap the marble table absent-mindedly with his gold snuff-box, 'I'll permit everything and I shall be grateful.'

'Give me a hereditary patent of nobility, independently of the Cross, and I'll be more than satisfied. When I mention ennoblement to the Prince, he replies: "Make a rogue like you noble! I'd have to shut up shop on the spot: no one in Parma would still want to become noble."' To get back to the

matter of the Milanese, it's not three days since the Prince was saying to me: "There's no one better than that scoundrel at keeping track of our wheeling and dealing; if I get rid of him or he goes off with the Duchess, I may as well give up any hope of one day becoming the beloved Liberal leader of all of Italy."

On hearing this the Count breathed again: Fabrice will not die, he told himself.

Never in his life had Rassi succeeded in obtaining a confidential conversation with the Prime Minister: he was beside himself with happiness; he would soon be able to discard this name of Rassi, which had become synonymous, locally, with everything that was base and vile; the common people gave the name Rassi to mad dogs; not long since, some soldiers had fought duels because one of their comrades had called them Rassi. Furthermore, not a week went by in which that unfortunate name did not figure in some monstrous sonnet. His son, a young and innocent schoolboy of sixteen, was hounded out of cafés on account of his name.

It was the searing recollection of all these amenities of his office that prompted him to commit an indiscretion.

'I've an estate,' he told the Count, drawing his chair closer to the Minister's armchair, 'it's called Riva, I'd like to be Baron Riva.'

'Why not?' said the Minister. Rassi was beside himself.

'Very well, your Lordship, I shall take the liberty of being indiscreet, I'll dare hazard a guess as to the object of your desires, you aspire to the hand of the Princess Isota, and that is a noble ambition. Once you're related, you're safe from disgrace, and you've got our friend where you want him. I will not conceal from you that the idea of this marriage to the Princess Isota appalls him; but if your interests were entrusted to someone who was both skilful and *well rewarded*, there would be no reason to despair of achieving a favourable outcome.'

'For my part, my dear Baron, I did despair; I deny, in advance, everything you may choose to say on my behalf; but the day when this illustrious alliance finally fulfils all my desires and secures me so very exalted a position in the State,

I myself will give you 300,000 lire of my own money, or else I will advise the Prince to confer upon you a mark of favour that you yourself would prefer to such a sum of money.'

This conversation will seem lengthy to our readers, yet we have spared them the greater part; it continued for a further two hours. Rassi was wild with happiness when he left the Count; the Count had great hopes of saving Fabrice, and was more determined than ever to hand in his resignation. He felt that his credit needed reviving by the presence in power of men like Rassi and General Conti; he took exquisite pleasure in a possibility he had just glimpsed, the possibility of vengeance against the Prince: he can force the Duchess to leave, he cried, but by God he'll have to give up hope of becoming the constitutional king of Lombardy. (That dream was ridiculous; the Prince was highly intelligent, but by dint of dwelling on his dream he had become desperately enamoured of it.)

The Count was beside himself with joy as he hurried to the Duchess's home to tell her about his conversation with the Prosecutor. He found her door closed to him; the porter could hardly bring himself to inform him of this order, which he had received from the Duchess herself. The Count returned sadly to the ministerial *palazzo*, the misfortune he had just experienced completely overshadowing the happiness his conversation with the Prince's confidant had given him. No longer in the mood to settle to any occupation, the Count was roaming gloomily about his picture gallery when he received, some fifteen minutes later, a note which read as follows:

'Since it is a fact, my dear, good friend, that now we are no more than friends, you must come to see me only three times a week. In a fortnight we shall reduce those visits, which are still so dear to my heart, to two per month. If you want to please me, then let this kind of separation be publicly known; if you wished to make me once again feel almost as much love for you as I used to, you would choose a new mistress. As for me, I have great plans for my amusement: I expect to go about a great deal in society, perhaps I shall even find an intelligent man who can make me forget my misfortunes. Of

course, as a friend, you will always come first in my heart; but I no longer want people to say that my actions have been governed by your wisdom; above all, I want people to be convinced that I have lost all influence over your decisions. In a word, my dear Count, please believe that you will always be my dearest friend, but never anything more. I beg you not to entertain any expectation of resuming what is past, it is all quite over. Be assured of my eternal friendship.'

This last blow was too much for the Count's spirit; he wrote a fine letter to the Prince resigning all his offices, and dispatched this to the Duchess, requesting her to forward it to the palace. A moment later his resignation came back to him, torn into several pieces, and on one of the blank scraps the Duchess had deigned to write: 'No, a thousand times no!'

It would be difficult to describe the despair of the poor Minister. I have to admit that she's right, he kept telling himself; my omission of the words 'unjust procedure' is a dreadful calamity; it may result in Fabrice's death, and his death will lead to mine. It was with a most heavy heart that the Count, who did not want to present himself at the Sovereign's Palace before being summoned there, wrote in his own hand the *motu proprio* that created Rassi a Knight of the Order of St Paul and conferred upon him a hereditary title; the Count appended to it a half-page memorandum explaining to the Prince the political justification for this measure. He took a kind of melancholy pleasure in making two fair copies of these documents, which he addressed to the Duchess.

Then, trying to guess what might be the future strategy of the woman he loved, the Count became lost in conjectures. She has no idea herself, he thought; only one thing is certain, and that is that nothing in the world would induce her to go back on a decision once she had communicated it to me. What made him still more unhappy was the fact that he was unable to blame the Duchess. In loving me she conferred a great favour upon me; now she no longer loves me, after a mistake of mine that was, it's true, unintentional, but which may carry with it a terrible consequence; I have no right to complain.

The following morning the Count heard that the Duchess had started to go out and about again in society; the previous evening she had appeared at every house where a reception was being held. Whatever would he have done if they had met in the same drawing-room? How could he speak to her? What tone should he choose to address her? And yet how could he not speak to her?

The next day was a day of gloom; it was widely rumoured that Fabrice was to be put to death, and the city was in a state of agitation. It was also reported that the Prince, out of consideration for his high birth, had graciously decided that he was to be decapitated.

I am to blame for his death, reflected the Count, I can never expect to see the Duchess again. Despite this relatively simple piece of reasoning, he could not prevent himself from calling at her *palazzo* three times; in actual fact, so as not to be noticed, he went there on foot. In his despair, he even found the courage to write to her. He had twice sent for Rassi; the Prosecutor had failed to appear. The rogue's deceiving me, thought the Count.

The following day three remarkable items of news were causing a stir among the nobles of Parma and even among the members of its middle class. Fabrice's execution was more certain than ever, and, as a strange corollary to this report, the Duchess did not seem in very great despair. Judging by appearances, she spared her young lover no more than fairly moderate regrets; she did, however, take advantage, with consummate skill, of the pallor consequent on a rather serious indisposition she had suffered at the time of Fabrice's arrest. In these details the middle-class citizens easily recognized the cold heart of a great lady of the court. Nevertheless, out of decency and as a sacrifice to the spirit of the young Fabrice, she had broken with Count Mosca. 'How immoral!' exclaimed the Jansenists of Parma. But already the Duchess—and this could hardly be believed—seemed disposed to listen to the flattery of the handsomest young bloods of the court. People had observed, among other strange details, that she had held a very lively conversation with Count Baldi, the current lover of the Marquise Raversi, and

had teased him greatly about his frequent trips to the castle of Velleja. The small shopkeepers and the common folk were full of indignation about the death of Fabrice, which these good people blamed on the jealousy of Count Mosca. Members of the court also talked a great deal about the Count, but it was to scoff at him. The third of the significant items of news that we promised was none other than the Count's resignation; everyone was making fun of a ridiculous lover who, at the age of fifty-six, was sacrificing a magnificent position to his grief at being cast aside by a heartless woman who had, furthermore, long preferred a younger man to him. Only the Archbishop had the wits, or rather the heart, to guess that honour forbade the Count from staying on as Prime Minister in a country where they were going to execute—without consulting him—a young man who was under his protection. The news of the Count's resignation had the effect of curing General Fabio Conti of his gout, as we shall relate in the proper place, when we describe the way poor Fabrice was spending his time in the fortress while the entire city was speculating about the hour of his execution.

The next day the Count once again saw Bruno, the trusted agent whom he had sent off to Bologna; he was filled with emotion when this man entered his study, for the sight of him brought to Mosca's mind his own happiness when he had dispatched him to Bologna, almost with the approval of the Duchess. Bruno had just returned from Bologna where he had learnt nothing; he had been unable to find Ludovic, whom the magistrate of Castelnuovo had kept in prison in his village.

'I'm going to send you back to Bologna,' the Count told Bruno: 'the Duchess will be eager for the dubious pleasure of knowing all the details of Fabrice's misfortune. Go and speak to the police sergeant in charge of the Castelnuovo station...

'But no!' exclaimed the Count, breaking off his instructions, 'you're to leave this very instant for Lombardy, and distribute money, lots of it, to all our agents. My object is to obtain the most encouraging kinds of reports from all those people.' Bruno, having perfectly understood the purpose of his mission, began writing his letters of credit; just as the

Count was giving him his final orders, a letter arrived for the Minister, an utterly duplicitous but very expertly written letter, such as one might imagine sent by one friend to another, requesting a favour. The friend who was writing was none other than the Prince. Having heard rumours of certain plans for retirement, he begged his friend, Count Mosca, to retain his position as Minister; he begged this of him in the name of their friendship and of *the national interest*, and as his master he commanded him to do it. He added that the King of *** had placed at his disposal two Cordons of his Order; he was keeping one for himself, and was sending the other to his dear friend Count Mosca.

‘That brute’s wrecking my life!’ the Count exclaimed in a fury to an astonished Bruno, ‘and he imagines he can win me over with the same hypocritical phrases that he and I have so often concocted as a trap for some half-wit or other.’ He refused the Order he was being offered, and in his reply spoke of the state of his health as leaving him very little hope of being able, for much longer, to carry out the onerous duties of his office. The Count was furious. A moment later the Prosecutor Rassi was announced; he treated him abominably.

‘So! Because I’ve made you noble, you’ve started behaving insolently! Why didn’t you come yesterday to thank me, as was your bounden duty, you boor?’

Rassi was quite impervious to insults; this was the style of his reception every day by the Prince; but he wanted to be a Baron, and energetically justified himself. Nothing could have been easier.

‘The Prince kept me stuck at a writing-table all day yesterday; I couldn’t leave the palace. His Highness made me copy out, in my dreadful prosecutor’s handwriting, a number of diplomatic documents that were so inane and so long-winded that I really believe his sole purpose was to keep me a prisoner. When at last I was able to take my leave, about five o’clock and ravenously hungry, he ordered me to return directly home and not go out again all evening. In fact, I saw two of his special agents, who are well-known to me, walking up and down my street until close on midnight. As soon as I was able to do so this morning, I ordered a carriage that drove

me to the door of the cathedral. I took my time getting out of the carriage, then I raced through the church and here I am. Your Excellency is at this moment the one man in the whole world whom I most ardently desire to please.'

'And I, you rogue, am not in the least taken in by all these stories, whether plausible or not. The day before yesterday you refused to speak to me about Fabrice; I respected your scruples and your oaths of secrecy, although in someone like you a sworn oath is at best a tactic for outwitting your opponent. Today I want the truth: what are these ridiculous rumours about this young man being condemned to death for murdering the play-actor Giletti?'

'No one can give your Excellency a better account of those rumours than I can, since it was I who started them, on the orders of the Sovereign; and, now that I think of it, it was perhaps to prevent my telling you this that he kept me prisoner all day yesterday. The Prince, who knows I'm not a fool, could have no doubt that I would come to you with my Cross and beg you to attach it to my buttonhole.'

'Get to the point!' exclaimed the Minister, 'and spare me the speeches.'

'Without doubt the Prince would be glad to have a death sentence passed against Signor del Dongo, but as I am sure you know, he has only been sentenced to twenty years in irons, and that was commuted by the Prince, the very next day, to twelve years in the fortress, with fasting on bread and water every Friday and various other religious capers.'

'It was because I knew that the sentence was only imprisonment that I was alarmed by the rumours of imminent execution spreading through the city; I remember the death of Count Palanza, which you finessed so cleverly.'

'That's when I should have been given the Cross!' cried Rassi, in no way disconcerted. 'I should have struck while the iron was hot, while the Prince was so eager for that death. I behaved like a ninny then, and it's because I'm the wiser for that experience that I dare advise you not to imitate me today.' (This comparison seemed in the worst possible taste to his interlocutor, who had to struggle to stop himself from kicking Rassi.)

'In the first place,' continued the latter, with the logic of a legal expert and the perfect self-assurance of a man whom no insult can offend, 'in the first place there can be no question of the execution of the said del Dongo, the Prince would not dare! The times are quite different! And in any case I, who am a noble and hope to become a Baron through your good offices, I would have nothing to do with it. Now, it is only from me, as your Excellency is aware, that the executioner can receive an order, and I swear to you that the Chevalier Rassi will never issue such an order against Signor del Dongo.'

'And in that you will be well advised,' said the Count, eyeing him severely.

'Let's be clear!' continued Rassi with a smile. 'For my part I deal only with official deaths, and if Signor del Dongo should die of the colic, don't blame it on me! The Prince is furious, and I don't know why, with la Sanseverina' (three days earlier Rassi would have said the Duchess, but, like the entire city, he knew that she had parted from the Prime Minister); the Count was struck by the omission of the title in such a mouth, and the pleasure it afforded him may easily be imagined; he gave Rassi a look full of the most intense hatred. My sweet angel! he thought, the only way I can show you my love is by blind obedience to your commands.

'I must confess,' he told the Prosecutor, 'that I'm not passionately interested in her Grace's various whims; nevertheless, since it was she who introduced me to this bad lot, Fabrice, who certainly ought to have stayed in Naples and not come here to complicate our lives, I am anxious that he should not be put to death while I am Minister, and I gladly give you my word that you will become a Baron within the week following his release from prison.'

'In that case, your Excellency, I won't be a Baron until a full twelve years have gone by, for the Prince is furious, and his hatred of the Duchess is so fierce that he tries to conceal it.'

'His Highness is too kind! Why should he bother to conceal his hatred, since his Prime Minister is no longer the Duchess's protector? Only I don't want anyone to be able to accuse

me of meanness, and especially not of jealousy: I was the one who brought the Duchess here, and if Fabrice dies in prison you will not become a Baron, and you may well get a dagger in your ribs. But let's not concern ourselves with such a trifle: the fact is I've been reckoning up my fortune; I have barely been able to find 20,000 lire in income, with which I propose most humbly to offer my resignation to the Sovereign. I have some hopes of being employed by the King of Naples; that great city will offer distractions which I need at the present moment, and which I cannot find in a hole like Parma; I should remain only if you obtained for me the hand of the Princess Isota, etc., etc.;

the conversation continued endlessly on these lines. As Rassi was leaving, the Count said to him, with an air of complete indifference:

'You know it's been said that Fabrice was double-crossing me, in the sense that he was one of the Duchess's lovers; I don't believe that rumour, and in order to give it the lie, I want you to see that Fabrice receives this purse.'

'But, your Lordship,' said Rassi in alarm, looking at the purse, 'there's an enormous sum of money there, and the regulations...'

'To you, my dear Rassi, it may seem enormous,' replied the Count with an air of the utmost contempt; 'a commoner like yourself, sending money to a friend in prison, imagines himself ruined by a gift of ten zecchini, but I insist that Fabrice shall receive these 6,000 lire and above all that the Palace know nothing of this gift.'

As the frightened Rassi began to reply, the Count impatiently closed the door on him. People of his sort, he reflected, can only recognize power if it is cloaked in insolence. So saying, this great Minister surrendered himself to an action so ridiculous that it gives us some pain to relate it; running into his office, he took a miniature of the Duchess from his desk and covered it with passionate kisses. 'Forgive me, my sweet angel,' he exclaimed, 'if with my own hands I did not hurl that scoundrel through the window for daring to refer to you in a familiar manner; but it is out of obedience to your commands that I conduct myself with such excessive restraint, and he will lose nothing by waiting!'

After a long conversation with the portrait, the Count, who felt that his heart was dead in his breast, suddenly had a ridiculous idea which he set about putting into effect with the eagerness of a child. He had a coat brought with his decorations on it, and went to call on the old Princess Isota; never before had he paid her a visit, other than on New Year's Day. He found her surrounded by a large number of dogs, and wearing all her finery, even some diamonds, as if she were going to the court. When the Count expressed his fear of upsetting the plans of her Highness, who was probably about to go out, her Highness replied to the Minister that a Princess of Parma owed it to herself to be always thus. For the first time since his misfortune the Count felt his spirits rise; I've done the right thing in coming here, he thought, and I must make my declaration this very day. The Princess had been overjoyed at the appearance in her drawing-room of a man so renowned for his wit, and who was a Prime Minister; the poor old maid was quite unaccustomed to such visits. The Count began with some shrewd prefatory remarks concerning the immense distance that would always separate an ordinary gentleman from the members of the ruling house.

'It's important to draw a distinction,' said the Princess; 'the daughter of a king of France, for example, has no hope of ever ascending the throne; but things are ordered differently in the House of Parma. That is why we Farnese must always preserve a certain dignity in our appearance; and I, the poor Princess whom you now see before you, I cannot declare it to be absolutely impossible that one day you will be my Prime Minister.'

The bizarre unexpectedness of this idea afforded the poor Count a second moment of perfect gaiety.

When he left the presence of the Princess Isota, who had blushed deeply on receiving the declaration of his passion, the Prime Minister encountered one of the messengers from the palace: the Prince demanded his attendance immediately.

'I am unwell', replied the Minister, delighted to be able to be uncivil to his Prince. Ah! you drive me to breaking-point, he exclaimed furiously; and then you expect me to serve you! But let me tell you, my Prince, that in this day and age to have

received power from Providence is no longer sufficient; you need a great deal of intelligence and a strong character to succeed in being a despot.

After dismissing the palace messenger, who was deeply shocked at the perfect good health of this invalid, the Count found it amusing to call on the two men in the court with the greatest influence on General Fabio Conti. What particularly made the Count tremble and stripped him of all his courage, was that the Governor of the fortress was believed to have rid himself, in the past, of a captain, his personal enemy, by means of the *aquetta di Perugia*.*

The Count knew that for the past week the Duchess had been disbursing insane sums of money to procure information from inside the fortress; but in his view there was little hope of success, all eyes were still far too wide open. We shall not trouble the reader with all the attempts at corruption undertaken by this unhappy woman; she was in despair, and agents of all kinds, who were utterly devoted to her, supported her. But there is perhaps only one kind of enterprise that is carried out to perfection in small despotic courts, and that is the custody of political prisoners. The Duchess's gold produced no result except to bring about the dismissal from the fortress of eight or ten men of every rank.

CHAPTER 18

Thus, for all their deep devotion to the prisoner, the Duchess and the Prime Minister had been able to do very little for him. The Prince was angry with Fabrice, while the Court and the public were out of humour with him and delighted to see trouble come his way; he had been too fortunate. In spite of the gold she distributed with lavish hands, the Duchess had not advanced one single step in her siege of the fortress; not a day went by without the Marquise Raversi or the Chevalier Riscara passing on some fresh warning to General Fabio Conti. They supported him in his weakness.

As we have already related, on the day when he was taken prisoner Fabrice was conducted first to the Governor's *palazzo*. This is an attractive little structure, built in the last century to plans of Vanvitelli,* who placed it at a height of 180 feet upon the flat roof of the vast round tower. From the windows of this small building, which stands all alone on the back of the enormous tower like a camel's hump, Fabrice could see the countryside and the Alps far in the distance; his eye followed the course of the Parma, a sort of mountain torrent, that runs below the fortress and then, four leagues from the city, bends to the right and flows into the Po. Beyond the left bank of that river, which made as it were a chain of huge white splashes in the middle of the green plain, his enchanted gaze could clearly distinguish each of the summits in the gigantic wall formed by the Alps to the north of Italy. These summits, permanently snow-covered even in the month of August, which it then was, provide, in the heart of those scorching plains, a kind of remembered coolness; the eye can pick out their tiniest details, and yet they are more than thirty leagues distant from the fortress of Parma. The extensive view from the Governor's pretty *palazzo* is obstructed at one corner on the south side by the Farnese Tower, in which a room was being hastily prepared for Fabrice. This second tower, as the reader may recall, was built on the flat roof of the great tower in honour of a Crown Prince

who, quite unlike Hippolytus,* the son of Theseus, had not rejected the attentions of a youthful stepmother. The Princess died within a few hours; the Prince's son did not regain his liberty until seventeen years later, when he ascended the throne on the death of his father. This Farnese Tower, to which Fabrice was made to climb three-quarters of an hour later, is very ugly on the outside; rising some fifty feet above the roof of the great tower, it is furnished with a number of lightning-rods. The Prince who, out of displeasure with his wife, ordered this tower built so that it would be visible from everywhere, conceived the strange notion of trying to persuade his subjects that it had been in existence for many years; this was why it was named the 'Farnese' Tower. It was forbidden to speak of this construction, and from every part of the city of Parma and the adjoining plains people had a perfect view of the masons putting into position each of the stones that make up the pentagonal building. As proof that it was ancient, they placed above the entrance, which measures four feet in height and two in breadth, a magnificent bas-relief portraying Alexander Farnese, the famous general,* forcing Henry IV to leave Paris. The Farnese Tower, which occupies such a beautiful position, has as its ground floor a hall measuring at least forty paces in length, broad in proportion, and filled with extremely squat pillars, for this immensely large room is only fifteen feet high. It functions as a guardroom, and, from its centre, the stairs spiral upward around one of the pillars; this little staircase is of iron, extremely light, barely two feet wide and worked in filigree. By climbing up this staircase, which trembled under the weight of the gaolers who accompanied him, Fabrice reached some huge rooms more than twenty feet in height, forming a magnificent first floor. They had once been furnished with the greatest possible luxury for the benefit of the young Prince who spent the seventeen best years of his life in them. At one end of this suite of rooms the new prisoner was shown a most magnificent chapel; its walls and ceiling are entirely covered with black marble; some pillars, also black and of the most noble proportions, stand in rows along the black walls without touching them, while the walls are ornamented with a

number of white marble skulls, gigantic in size, elegantly carved and resting on pairs of cross-bones. Now that's certainly something inspired by hate—hate which is prevented from actually killing—thought Fabrice, and what a devilish idea to let me see it!

A stairway of iron and very delicate filigree, also built around a pillar, provides access to the second floor of this prison, and it was in the rooms of this second storey, which are some fifteen feet high, that General Fabio Conti had for the past year been demonstrating his genius. First, under his instructions, strong bars were placed across the windows of those rooms which had originally been occupied by the Prince's servants, and which rise more than thirty feet above the flagstones forming the platform of the big round tower. It is by a dark corridor in the centre of the building that one reaches these rooms, which all have two windows; and in that very narrow corridor Fabrice noticed a succession of three iron doors made of huge bars and reaching right up to the ceiling. It was the plans, cross-sections, and scale drawings of all these fine inventions that had secured the General an audience with his master every week for the past two years. A conspirator who was put in one of these rooms could not complain to the outside world of inhumane treatment, and yet could not communicate in any way with a living soul, nor make a movement, without being heard. In each room the General had had thick oak joists placed which were made into bench-like supports three feet in height; this was his supreme invention, which had earned him a right to the Ministry of Police. Upon these supports he erected a cell made of planks, an exceedingly resonant structure ten feet tall, which did not touch the wall except on the side of the windows. On the other three sides a little corridor four feet wide ran between the original wall of the prison, which was built of enormous, square-cut blocks of stone, and the cell's planking partition. These partitions, made from four double planks of walnut, oak, and pine, were solidly put together with iron bolts and innumerable nails.

It was into one of these rooms, which had been ready for a year and were General Fabio Conti's masterpiece, the one

which had been given the splendid name of 'Passive Obedience', that Fabrice was conducted. He ran over to the windows; the view from those barred windows was sublime; just one small corner of the horizon was hidden, towards the north-west, by the flat roof of the Governor's pretty *palazzo* which was only two storeys high; the ground floor was occupied by the offices of the staff; and Fabrice's eyes were immediately drawn to one of the second-floor windows where some charming cages containing a great many birds of all kinds could be seen. Fabrice took pleasure in listening to them sing and seeing them greet the last rays of the evening light, while the gaolers were busying themselves around him. This aviary window was no further than twenty-five feet away from one of his, and about five or six feet below it, so that he looked down upon the birds.

There was a moon that day, and at the moment when Fabrice entered his prison cell it was rising majestically over the horizon, to the right, above the Alps, in the direction of Treviso. It was only half-past eight in the evening, and at the other end of the horizon, in the west, a brilliant orange-red sunset was delineating in perfect detail the outlines of Mount Viso and the other peaks of the Alps that run north from Nice towards Mount Cenis and Turin; without giving a thought to his troubles, Fabrice was moved and enchanted by this sublime spectacle. So it is in this ravishing world that Clélia Conti lives! With that pensive, serious soul of hers, she must take more delight in this view than others do; you feel here as if you are all alone in the mountains a hundred leagues from Parma. It was only after spending more than two hours at the window, admiring this horizon which spoke to his soul, and also often resting his gaze on the Governor's pretty *palazzo*, that Fabrice suddenly exclaimed: but is this a prison? Is this what I have dreaded so much? Instead of continually noting reasons for vexation and bitterness, our hero was letting himself be charmed by the pleasures of his prison.

Suddenly, his attention was recalled violently to reality by an appalling din: his wooden cell, which rather resembled a cage and was in particular extremely resonant, was being fiercely shaken; the most peculiar noise could be heard,

including the barking of a dog and some sharp little cries. What's this! Am I going to be able to escape so soon? wondered Fabrice. A moment later he was laughing more than perhaps anyone has ever laughed in prison before. By order of the General they had brought up, together with the gaolers, an English dog of very mean temper, who was given the job of guarding important prisoners, and would spend the night in the space which had been so ingeniously created all round Fabrice's cage. The dog and the gaoler were to sleep in the three-foot gap left between the stone flags of the room's original floor and the wooden planking upon which the prisoner could not take one step without being heard.

Now, at the time of Fabrice's arrival the room entitled 'Passive Obedience' was occupied by about a hundred enormous rats that fled in all directions. The dog, a kind of spaniel crossed with an English fox-terrier, was not beautiful, but proved himself on the other hand to be very alert. He had been tied up on the stone flags underneath the floor of the wooden cell; but when he became aware of the rats passing right beside him he made such extraordinary efforts that he succeeded in getting his head out of his collar; it was then that the splendid battle took place whose uproar awoke Fabrice from reveries that were anything but sad. Those rats which had escaped the first bites having taken refuge in the wooden cage, the dog pursued them up the six steps leading from the stone flags to Fabrice's cell. Then an even more appalling din ensued; the cell was shaken throughout its entire structure. Fabrice laughed like a lunatic until the tears ran down his cheeks: the gaoler Grillo, who was laughing just as much, had closed the door; the dog, as it chased the rats, was not impeded by any furniture, since the room was completely bare; the only thing that hampered the leaping dog was an iron stove in one corner. When the dog had triumphed over all his enemies Fabrice called him, patted him, and managed to make friends with him: If ever this one sees me jumping over some wall, he thought, he won't bark. But these cunning calculations were nothing but an empty show on his part: in his state of mind just then, playing with the dog gave him happiness. Through some strange circumstance upon which

he did not reflect, a secret joy reigned in the depths of his soul.

After he had grown quite breathless from chasing about with the dog:

‘What’s your name?’ he asked the gaoler.

‘Grillo, your Excellency: at your service in everything that the regulations permit.’

‘Well, my good Grillo, a man called Giletti tried to murder me in the middle of the highway, I defended myself and I killed him; I’d kill him again if I had to: but that’s no reason why I shouldn’t enjoy myself, as long as I’m your guest. Request permission from your masters and go and ask for linen at the Palazzo Sanseverina; and buy me lots of *Asti Spumante* as well.’

This is quite a nice sparkling wine made in Piedmont, where Alfieri came from,* and which is greatly esteemed, particularly by the class of wine-fanciers to which gaolers belong. Eight or ten of these gentlemen were busy carrying into Fabrice’s wooden cell some antique, highly gilded pieces of furniture which they had removed from the Prince’s rooms on the first floor; they all most scrupulously registered in their memories Fabrice’s recommendation of *Asti* wine. Despite their efforts, the provisions made for this first night spent by Fabrice were pitiful; but he did not appear shocked except by the absence of a bottle of good *Spumante*. ‘This one seems like a nice fellow...’ said the gaolers as they left, ‘and there’s only one thing we need: that our masters allow money to be passed to him.’

When he was alone and had recovered somewhat from all the noise: Can this possibly be a prison? Fabrice asked himself, gazing at the immense horizon that stretched from Treviso to Mount Viso, the broad expanse of the Alps, the snow-covered mountain peaks, the stars, etc.; and a first night in prison at that! I can understand that Clélia Conti should like living in this aerial seclusion; here you feel you’re a thousand leagues above the pettiness and spite which fill our days down there. If those birds below my window are hers, I shall see her... When she catches sight of me will she blush? It was while considering

this important question that the prisoner fell asleep at a very late hour.

From the morning that followed this night—the first he had spent in prison, and during which he did not once lose patience—Fabrice was reduced to conversing with Fox the English dog; Grillo, the gaoler, still looked at him in a friendly manner, but a new order kept him mute, and he brought neither linen nor *Spumante*.

Shall I see Clélia? wondered Fabrice on waking. But are those birds hers? The birds were beginning to give little tweets and to sing, and up at that elevation these were the only sounds to be heard in the air. For Fabrice, the vast silence reigning at that height was a sensation full of novelty and pleasure; he listened with the utmost delight to the tiny sounds of intermittent, rapid twittering with which his neighbours the birds were greeting the day. If they belong to her, she'll appear for a moment in that room, right under my window; and while he was examining the colossal ranges of the Alps, with their row of foothills opposite which the Parma fortress rose up like a redoubt, his eyes returned every instant to the magnificent cages of lemon-wood and mahogany, decorated with gilded wires, that hung in the centre of the very bright room which served as an aviary. As Fabrice did not discover until later, this was the only room on the second floor of the building where there was shade from eleven until four; it was protected by the Farnese Tower.

How distressed I'm going to be, thought Fabrice, if, instead of that pensive, angelic countenance I'm hoping for, that may perhaps blush a little if she notices me, I see the coarse face of some utterly common maid who's been delegated to look after the birds! But if I do see Clélia, will she deign to notice me? My goodness! I must do something forward to draw attention to myself; my situation surely brings with it some privileges; besides, we're both alone here and so far from the world! I'm a prisoner, presumably what General Conti and other wretches of that ilk call one of their inferiors... But she has so much intelligence, or rather, as the Count believes, so much heart, that according to him she may perhaps despise her father's calling; that would explain her melancholy! A

noble reason for sadness! But after all, I'm not exactly a stranger to her. With what grace and modesty she greeted me yesterday evening! I clearly remember that when we met near Lake Como I said to her: One day I shall come to see your fine paintings in Parma, will you then remember this name, Fabrice del Dongo? Will she have forgotten? She was so young then!

But wait, thought Fabrice in astonishment, suddenly breaking off his train of thought, I'm forgetting to be angry! Might I be one of those valiant souls of which antiquity showed the world some examples? Am I a hero without realizing it? What! I, who was so afraid of prison, I'm in prison, and I'm forgetting to be sad! It's certainly a case of the fear being a hundred times worse than the evil. Why, I'm having to talk myself into being upset over this imprisonment, which Blanès says can as easily last for ten years as ten months! Could it be that the shock of being in this unfamiliar place is distracting me from the pain I should be feeling? Perhaps this good mood of mine, which is independent of my will and hardly rational, will suddenly vanish, perhaps in a moment I'll be plunged into the black despair I ought to be experiencing.

In any event, it's most surprising to be in prison and have to talk myself into feeling unhappy! Upon my word, I'm coming round again to my first theory, perhaps I have a great character.

Fabrice's musings were interrupted by the fortress carpenter, who came to measure his windows for shutters; it was the first time this prison cell had been used, and they had forgotten to complete this essential detail.

So, thought Fabrice, I'm to be deprived of this sublime view, and he tried to feel sad over his loss.

'What's this!' he exclaimed suddenly, speaking to the carpenter; 'won't I be able to see those pretty birds any more?'

'Oh, the Signorina's birds, that she's so fond of!' said the man in a kindly manner; 'hidden, shut out, obliterated like all the rest.'

The carpenter was just as strictly forbidden to speak as were the gaolers, but this man felt pity for the prisoner's

youth; he told him that these enormous shutters, positioned on the ledges of the two windows, and slanting inwards away from the wall, were supposed to leave only sky visible to the prisoners. 'They do this for their morals,' he told Fabrice, 'so as to foster a salutary melancholy and a wish to reform in the souls of the prisoners; the General', added the carpenter, 'also had the brainwave of removing the glass panes and replacing them in these windows with oiled paper.'

Fabrice took great pleasure in the epigrammatic style of this conversation, which is most rare in Italy.

'I'd love to have a bird to help me pass the time, I adore them; buy one for me from Signorina Clélia Conti's maid.'

'Goodness, are you acquainted with her, since you know her name so well?' exclaimed the carpenter.

'Who has not heard of such a famous beauty? But I have had the honour of meeting her several times at court.'

'The poor Signorina leads a very dull life here,' added the carpenter; 'she spends all her time with her birds. This morning she's had some fine orange trees bought, which have been put on her orders at the tower door, under your window; if it weren't for the cornice, you'd be able to see them.' This reply contained some words which were particularly precious to Fabrice; he found a tactful way of passing the carpenter some money.

'I'm guilty of two offences at once,' the man said to him; 'I'm talking to your Excellency and I'm taking money. The day after tomorrow, when I come back with the shutters, I'll have a bird in my pocket, and if I'm not alone, I'll pretend to let it go free; if I possibly can, I'll bring you a prayer-book too; you must find it very hard not to be able to recite your Offices.'

So, thought Fabrice as soon as he was alone, those birds are hers, but in two days I shall no longer be able to see them! At this thought, his eyes took on a tinge of sadness. But at last, to his inexpressible joy, after his waiting so long and looking so often, towards midday Clélia came to attend to her birds. Fabrice stood motionless, without drawing breath, against the huge bars of his window; he was very close. He noticed that she did not look at him, but her movements seemed

awkward, like those of someone who knows she is observed. Even had she wished to, the poor girl could not have forgotten that subtle smile she had seen hovering round the prisoner's lips, the previous evening, when the constables were bringing him out of the guardroom.

Although, to all appearances, she was watching over her own actions with the utmost vigilance, at the moment when she approached the aviary window she blushed quite perceptibly. Fabrice's first idea, as he stood there close up against the iron bars of his window, was to indulge in the childishness of tapping his hand against the bars, which would make a tiny sound; then, the very thought of such a want of delicacy filled him with horror. It would serve me right if for the next week she sent her maid to see to the birds. This sensitive consideration would never have occurred to him in Naples or Novara.

His gaze followed her ardently. She's certainly going to leave, he thought, without deigning to glance at this poor window, and yet she's just across from it. But, on returning from the back of the room which Fabrice, thanks to his higher position, could very clearly see, Clélia could not prevent herself from casting a surreptitious glance up at him as she walked forward, and this was enough to make Fabrice feel authorized to bow to her. Are we not alone in the world here? he thought, to bolster his courage. At his bow, the young girl stood motionless and lowered her eyes; then Fabrice saw her raise them very slowly, and, making an obvious effort to control herself, she acknowledged the prisoner's greeting in the gravest and most *distant* manner, but she could not silence her eyes; probably without her being aware of it, they expressed for an instant the most intense pity. Fabrice noticed that she blushed so deeply that the rosy pink spread rapidly right down to her shoulders, from which, when she entered the aviary, the heat had made her remove her black lace shawl. The involuntary look with which Fabrice responded to her greeting increased the young girl's discomposure. How happy that poor woman would be, she said to herself, thinking of the Duchess, if for only a moment she could see him as I see him!

Fabrice had had some slight hope of bowing to her again when she left, but in order to avoid this fresh civility Clélia

beat a skilful retreat by stages, going from cage to cage, as if, in finishing her work, she must attend to the birds closest to the door. Eventually she left; Fabrice remained motionless, staring at the door through which she had just disappeared; he was another man.

From that moment on, the sole object of his thoughts was to devise how to continue seeing her, even when they had erected that horrible shutter in front of the window looking on to the Governor's *palazzo*.

The previous evening, before going to bed, he had made himself tackle the long, tedious task of hiding most of the gold he possessed in several of the rat-holes that adorned his wooden cell. This evening I must hide my watch. Haven't I heard it said that with patience and a jagged-edged watch spring you can cut wood and even iron? So I could saw through that shutter. The job of hiding the watch, which took several hours, did not seem long to him; he was thinking about different ways of achieving his goal, and about what he knew of carpentry. If I go about it the right way, he said to himself, I'll be able to cut a piece straight out of the oak plank used to make the shutter, near the part that rests on the window-sill; I'll take it out and put it back depending on the circumstances; I'll give Grillo everything I own, if he'll be so good as not to notice this little contrivance. All Fabrice's happiness was now bound up in the possibility of carrying out this task and he thought of nothing else. If I can just manage to see her, I'm a happy man... That's not so, he thought; she must be able to see that I can see her. Throughout the entire night his head was filled with ideas about carpentry, and he probably did not spare one single thought for the Parma court, the anger of the Prince, etc., etc. We confess that he did not spare a thought either for the misery in which the Duchess must surely have been engulfed. He waited impatiently for morning, but the carpenter never reappeared; evidently he had the reputation, in the prison, of being a Liberal, and they took care to send a different carpenter, a surly-looking man who gave no reply other than an unpromising grunt to all the pleasant remarks that Fabrice's ingenuity could find to address to him. Some of the Duch-

ess's countless attempts to establish a correspondence with Fabrice had been tracked down by the Marquise Raversi's many agents and, through her, General Fabio Conti was every day warned, frightened, and put on his mettle. Every eight hours six fresh soldiers relieved those on guard in the huge ground-floor room with a hundred pillars; in addition, the Governor put a gaoler on guard at each of the series of three iron doors in the corridor, and poor Grillo, the only gaoler to see the prisoner, was, except for his weekly leave, condemned to remain always inside the Farnese Tower, a restriction not at all to his liking. He let Fabrice see his annoyance; the latter had wit enough to reply only with the words: 'Lots of *Asti Spumante*, my friend', and to give him some money.

'Well even this, which comforts us in all our troubles,' exclaimed the indignant Grillo, in a voice barely loud enough to be heard by the prisoner, 'we've been forbidden to accept and I ought to refuse, but I'll take it; in any case, it's wasted money, I can't tell you anything about anything. My goodness, you must be guilty as sin, the entire fortress is upside down because of you; her Ladyship's fine plots and plans have already got three of us the sack.'

Will the shutter be ready before midday? This was the great question that made Fabrice's heart beat faster throughout the whole of that long morning; he counted every quarter of an hour on the chimes of the fortress clock. Finally, when the third quarter past eleven was chiming, the shutter had not yet arrived; Clélia reappeared to look after her birds. Cruel necessity had so greatly increased Fabrice's audacity, and the danger of no longer seeing her seemed to him of such overriding importance, that he dared, as he gazed at Clélia, to mime, with his finger, the motion of sawing the shutter; it is true that immediately upon noticing this gesture, which in a prison is so seditious, she inclined her head slightly and disappeared.

What's this! thought Fabrice in astonishment, could she be so unreasonable as to see some absurd sort of familiarity in a gesture dictated by the most extreme necessity? I wanted to ask her to continue occasionally to look, while feeding her birds, at the window of the prison, even when she finds it

covered by an enormous wooden shutter; I wanted to show her that I would do everything that is humanly possible in order to be able to see her. Good God! Will she not come, tomorrow, because of that unguarded gesture of mine? This fear, which disturbed Fabrice's sleep, proved entirely justified; the following day Clélia had not appeared by three o'clock, when the installation of two enormous shutters in front of Fabrice's windows was completed; their various parts had been hauled up from the terrace of the great tower by means of ropes and pulleys attached on the outside to the iron bars of the windows. It is true that Clélia, concealed behind a slatted shutter in her own room, had watched with anguish everything that the workmen did; she had clearly seen Fabrice's terrible anxiety, but even so found the courage to keep the promise she had made to herself.

Clélia was a little disciple of Liberalism; in her early youth she had taken seriously all the Liberal talk she had heard in the company of her father, who was simply interested in securing a position for himself; from there she had progressed to feeling contempt and almost abhorrence for the tractable nature of the courtier; hence her antipathy to marriage. Since Fabrice's arrival she had been racked with remorse; so now, she thought, my contemptible heart is siding with those who would betray my father! He dares imitate—to me—the action of sawing through a door!... But, she immediately told herself, in dreadful distress, the whole town is talking of his approaching death! Tomorrow may be the fatal day! With those monsters who are in power, anything in the world is possible! What gentleness, what heroic serenity in those eyes which are perhaps about to close! God! What agonies the Duchess must be suffering! Indeed, she is said to be in utter despair. If I were she I would go and stab the Prince, like that heroic Charlotte Corday.*

Throughout that entire third day of his imprisonment Fabrice was in a towering rage, but only from not having seen Clélia reappear. As long as I was going to make her angry, I should have told her that I loved her, he exclaimed, for he had made this discovery. No, it's not from greatness of soul that I don't think about being in prison and am proving Father

Blanès's prophecy false; I don't deserve so much honour. In spite of myself I think of that look of sweet pity which Clélia bestowed upon me when the constables were bringing me out of the guardroom; that look wiped out the whole of my past life. Who could have told me that I would find such sweet eyes in a place like this! And just when my own sight had been polluted by the faces of Barbone and the Governor. Heaven appeared before me, in the midst of those vile creatures. How could one not love beauty and try to see it once again? No, it's not from greatness of soul that I'm indifferent to all the petty vexations which prison heaps upon me. Fabrice's imagination, rapidly reviewing every possibility, came to that of being freed. No doubt the Duchess's affection will achieve miracles on my behalf. Well! Any thanks I would give her for my freedom would be mere lip-service; this is not a place to which anyone returns! Once I was out of prison, since we move in different circles, I would almost never see Clélia again! And in fact what harm does prison do me? If Clélia condescended not to crush me with her anger, what would there be for me to ask of Heaven?

The evening of the day when he had not seen his pretty neighbour, he had a wonderful idea: with the iron cross of the rosary distributed to all prisoners on their arrival in prison, he successfully set about making a hole in the shutter. It may be a rash thing to do, he reflected before he began. Didn't the carpenters say, in front of me, that tomorrow they'll be followed by the painters? Whatever will they say if they find a hole in the shutter? But if I don't do this rash thing, tomorrow I won't be able to see her! What! By my own choice to spend a day without seeing her! And especially when she left me in anger! Fabrice's rashness was rewarded; after fifteen hours of work, he saw Clélia, and, to add to his joy, because she imagined he could not see her, she remained for a long time motionless, with her gaze fixed upon the enormous shutter; he had all the time he could wish for to read in her eyes the signs of the most tender pity. Towards the end of her visit she was obviously even neglecting her ministrations to the birds to spend whole minutes without moving, gazing at the window. Her spirit was deeply troubled; she thought of the

Duchess, whose very great misfortune had filled her with such pity, and yet she was beginning to hate her. She did not in the least understand the profound melancholy that was gaining a hold over her disposition, and she was out of humour with herself. Two or three times during the course of this visit Fabrice felt an impatient urge to shake the shutter; he felt that he was not happy as long as he could not show Clélia that he could see her. But, he told himself, if she knew that I can watch her so easily, timid and reserved as she is, she'd most probably vanish from my sight.

He was very much happier the following day (out of what trifles does love not build its happiness!): while she was staring sadly at the enormous shutter, he managed to pass a tiny piece of wire through the opening he had carved with the iron cross, and then he made signs to her that she evidently understood, at least in so far as they implied: 'I'm here and I can see you.'

In the days that followed Fabrice was unlucky. He wanted to remove from the gigantic shutter a piece of board the size of his hand, that he could replace at will and which would enable him to see and be seen, that is, to communicate, at least by signs, what was happening in his soul; but he found that the noise of the very inadequate little saw that he had constructed out of his watch spring (having cut the latter with the iron cross) made Grillo uneasy, causing him to spend long hours in Fabrice's cell. He thought he noticed, it is true, that Clélia's severity seemed to diminish as the material difficulties preventing any communication between them increased; Fabrice could clearly see that she no longer pretended to lower her eyes or to look at the birds when he was trying to signal his presence to her with the help of his wretched bit of wire; he had the pleasure of observing that she never failed to appear in the aviary at the precise moment when the third quarter past eleven was striking, and he almost had the presumption to believe himself the cause of this scrupulous punctuality. Why? This idea does not seem reasonable, but love discerns tiny distinctions invisible to the indifferent eye, and draws endless conclusions from them. For example, now that Clélia could no longer see the prisoner, almost immedi-

ately upon entering the aviary she would look up at his window. It was during those black days when no one in *Perma* doubted that Fabrice would soon be put to death; he alone was unaware of it: but this fearful thought was never out of Clélia's mind, and how could she have reproached herself for taking too great an interest in Fabrice? He was about to die—and for the cause of freedom! For it was too ridiculous to put a *del Dongo* to death for knifing a play-actor. Admittedly, this amiable young man was attached to another woman! Clélia was deeply unhappy, and, without admitting to herself with any precision what kind of interest she felt in his destiny: Certainly, she would tell herself, if they take him away to his death, I shall run off to a convent and never again appear at this court, it fills me with horror. Gentleman murderers!

On the eighth day of Fabrice's imprisonment she had good cause to feel bashful; she was staring fixedly, lost in her sad thoughts, at the shutter covering the prisoner's window; he had not yet given any sign of his presence that day: all of a sudden a small piece of the shutter, larger than a man's hand, was removed; he was looking at her cheerfully and she could see his eyes greeting her. She could not face this unexpected ordeal and, returning hastily to her birds, began attending to them; but she was trembling so much that she spilled the water she was distributing, and Fabrice could clearly see her emotion; unable to bear this situation, she put an end to it by running from the room.

This was, beyond all comparison, the most beautiful moment of Fabrice's life. With what rapture would he have refused his freedom, had he been offered it at that instant!

The following day was the day of the Duchess's utter despair. Everyone in the city was convinced that there remained no hope for Fabrice; Clélia did not have the painful courage to treat him with a harshness that was not in her heart; she spent an hour and a half in the aviary, watched all the signs he made, and often responded to him, at least by expressing the most intense and sincere interest; sometimes she would leave him for a moment, to hide her tears. Her feminine coquetry was extremely conscious of the inadequacy

of their means of communication; if they could have spoken to one another, how many different ways would she not have found to try to discover what precisely was the nature of Fabrice's feelings for the Duchess! Clélia could scarcely go on deceiving herself: she hated Signora Sanseverina.

One night Fabrice happened to think quite seriously about his aunt; to his astonishment, he had trouble recognizing her image; the memory he had kept of her had completely changed; in his mind, now, she was fifty years old.

Good God! he exclaimed vehemently, how wise I was not to tell her that I loved her! He had reached the point of hardly being able to understand why he had thought her so pretty. In this regard, little Marietta seemed to him less palpably changed; this was because he had never imagined his heart to be in any way involved in his love for Marietta, whereas he had often believed that his heart belonged unreservedly to the Duchess. The Duchess of A*** and Marietta now struck him as being like two young doves whose whole charm resided in their frailty and innocence, while the sublime image of Clélia Conti, in taking possession of his entire heart, went so far as to inspire him with terror. He was only too well aware that the eternal happiness of his life would require him to reckon with the Governor's daughter, and that it lay in her power to make him the most unhappy of men. Each day he was mortally afraid of seeing come to a sudden end, because of an impulsive decision of hers against which there could be no appeal, this strange and delightful kind of life he had found in being near her; in any event, she had already filled with joy the first two months of his imprisonment. This was the period when General Fabio Conti was saying to the Prince twice every week: 'I can give your Highness my word of honour that the prisoner del Dongo does not speak to a living soul, and spends his life in the grip of the most profound despair, or sleeping.'

Clélia used to come two or three times a day to visit her birds, sometimes just for a moment: had Fabrice not loved her so much, he would easily have seen that he was loved; but he had very grave doubts on that subject. Clélia had arranged for a piano to be put in the aviary. While she was playing the

notes, so that the sound of the instrument would justify her presence there and give the sentries patrolling beneath her window something to listen to, she would reply with her eyes to Fabrice's questions. On one subject alone she never gave any reply, and even, when the occasion warranted, would leave, disappearing sometimes for an entire day; this was when the signs Fabrice made indicated sentiments whose meaning it would be too difficult not to understand: on this point she was inexorable.

Thus, although narrowly confined within a rather small cell, Fabrice's life was a very busy one; it was entirely dedicated to finding the answer to this extremely important problem: 'Does she love me?' The result of thousands of observations, constantly repeated but also constantly questioned, was this: all her conscious gestures say no, but when her eyes move unconsciously they seem to acknowledge that she is beginning to feel warmly towards me.

Clélia hoped that she would never have to admit her love, and it was in order to avert this danger that she had refused, with an excessive show of anger, a request that Fabrice had made to her on several occasions. The pitiful range of resources available to the poor prisoner ought, it would appear, to have inspired greater pity in Clélia. He wanted to correspond with her by means of letters drawn on his hand with a fragment of charcoal—a precious discovery he had made in his stove; he would have formed the words letter by letter, one after the other. This device would have doubled their means of communicating, in that it would have allowed them to be precise. His window was about twenty-five feet away from that of Clélia; it would have been too risky to speak to each other, above the heads of the sentries patrolling in front of the Governor's *palazzo*. Fabrice doubted whether he was loved; if he had had any experience of love, he would have had no doubts left; but no woman had ever occupied his heart; moreover, he had no suspicion of a secret which would have cast him into despair had he known it: this was the very real possibility of a marriage between Clélia Conti and the Marquis Crescenzi, the richest man of the court.

CHAPTER 19

The ambition of General Fabio Conti, exacerbated to the point of mania by the problems besetting Prime Minister Mosca in mid-career and seeming to herald his downfall, had impelled the General to treat his daughter to some violent scenes; he was forever angrily telling Clélia that she would ruin his prospects if she did not finally come to a decision; at over twenty it was time to make up her mind; this cruel state of isolation, to which he was condemned thanks to her unreasonable obstinacy, must finally cease, and so on.

At first it was to avoid these constant angry attacks that Clélia escaped to the aviary so often; the only way into it was up a small and most inconvenient wooden staircase, which presented quite an obstacle to the Governor because of his gout.

For the past several weeks Clélia's soul had been in such turmoil, and she was so unsure about what she ought to hope for, that without precisely making a promise to her father, she had almost committed herself. During one of his attacks of rage the General had shouted that he'd a good mind to consign her to a life of boredom in Parma's gloomiest convent, and would leave her there cooling her heels until she condescended to make her choice.

'You know that our family, although extremely ancient, has an income of barely 6,000 lire, whereas the Marquis Crescenzi's fortune is more than 100,000 scudi a year. Everyone at Court agrees that he has the sweetest temperament; he's never given anyone any cause for complaint; he's extremely good-looking, young, very well thought of by the Prince, and I tell you that you must be out of your mind to reject his advances. If this refusal was the first, I could perhaps accept it; but there have been five or six suitors, all of them in the first rank at Court, that you've refused, you little idiot. And what would become of you, I'd like to know, if I were to be put on half-pay? How my enemies would exult, if they saw me

living in some second-floor rooms, I who have so often been talked of as a possible Minister! No, by God, my kindness of heart has led me to play the part of a Cassandra for quite long enough. You will provide me with some valid objection to that poor Marquis Crescenzi, who's so good as to be in love with you, and to be prepared to marry you without a dowry and to settle an income of 30,000 lire on you, with which I'll at least be able to find a place to live; you're going to discuss it with me reasonably or by God you'll marry him in two months' time!...'

One remark alone out of this entire speech had registered with Clélia, namely, the threat that she would be put in a convent and consequently sent away from the fortress, and at a time, furthermore, when Fabrice's life seemed to hang by a thread, for not a month went by without the rumour of his impending death again spreading through the city and the Court. However much she tried to reason with herself, she could not bring herself to run that risk; to be separated from Fabrice, and just when she feared for his life; to her eyes this seemed the greatest of evils, or at any rate the most immediate.

It was not that her heart foresaw any possibility of happiness, even if she were not separated from Fabrice; she believed him loved by the Duchess, and her heart was rent by mortal jealousy. She thought constantly of the advantages enjoyed by that woman who was so generally admired. The extreme reserve which she had imposed on herself with regard to Fabrice, the sign-language to which she had restricted him out of fear of being drawn into some indiscretion, everything seemed to conspire to deprive her of the means of clarifying his relationship with the Duchess. So each day she felt more cruelly the terrible pain of having a rival to Fabrice's heart, and each day she was less willing to expose herself to the danger of giving him the opportunity to tell the whole truth about what was taking place in that heart. But still, how enchanting it would be to hear him confess his true feelings! What happiness for Clélia to be able to dispel the dreadful suspicions that were poisoning her existence!

Fabrice was fickle; in Naples, he had had the reputation of changing mistresses quite freely. Despite all the reserve

required of a young unmarried woman, Clélia, since becoming a Canoness and appearing at court, had found out, without ever asking questions but by listening attentively, what was the reputation of each of the young men who had in turn sought her hand; well! compared with all of them Fabrice was the one who exhibited the greatest inconstancy in his love affairs. He was in prison, he was bored, he was wooing the only woman with whom he was able to communicate; what could be simpler? Indeed, what could be more *common*? And this was what was making Clélia so miserable. Even supposing that she discovered, as a consequence of a full avowal, that Fabrice no longer loved the Duchess, how could she place any trust in what he said? Even supposing she believed in the sincerity of his declarations, how could she place any trust in the duration of his feelings? And lastly, to complete the reasons which filled her heart with despair, was not Fabrice already well advanced in his ecclesiastical career? Was he not on the point of taking his life vows? Did not the very highest honours await him in that walk of life? If I still possessed the smallest glimmering of common sense, the unhappy Clélia told herself, ought I not to make my escape? Ought I not to beg my father to shut me away in some distant convent? And, to make matters even worse, it's precisely the fear of being sent away from the fortress and shut up in a convent that is dictating all my actions! It is that fear which compels me to dissemble, which forces upon me the horrible and degrading lie of pretending to accept the addresses and the public attentions of the Marquis Crescenzi.

Clélia's character was profoundly rational; she had never, throughout her entire life, had to reproach herself for an imprudent act; and yet in this her behaviour was the height of folly: so her suffering may easily be imagined. It was all the more agonizing because she did not in any way deceive herself. She was growing attached to a man who was desperately loved by the most beautiful woman at the court, a woman who was for so many reasons superior to Clélia herself! And that same man, if he were free, was not capable of a serious attachment, whereas she, she felt only too clearly, would never in her whole life love more than once.

It was therefore with a heart rent by the most terrible remorse that Clélia came each day to the aviary; drawn to that spot in spite of herself, she found that there her anxieties changed their focus, becoming less cruel, while her remorse would disappear for a brief time; then, her heart beating with unutterable force, she would watch for the moment when Fabrice could open the kind of porthole he had made in the enormous shutter masking his window. Often the presence in his room of Grillo the gaoler prevented him from communicating by signs with his dear friend.

One night, at about eleven o'clock, Fabrice heard sounds of the strangest nature inside the fortress: at night, by lying along the window-sill and putting his head through the little opening, he was able to distinguish any fairly loud noises occurring on the great flight of stairs known as 'The Three Hundred Steps' that led from the first courtyard inside the round tower to the stone platform upon which had been built the Governor's *palazzo* and the Farnese prison where he now was.

About half-way up, after 180 steps, this stairway passed from the south side of a huge courtyard to the north side; at that point there hung a very light, very narrow iron bridge, in the middle of which a guard had been stationed. This man was relieved every six hours, and he had to get to his feet and stand aside to allow anyone to cross the bridge he was guarding, which provided the only access to the Governor's *palazzo* and the Farnese Tower. All that was needed was a couple of turns to a spring lock, the key to which the Governor kept in his pocket, for this iron bridge to be cast down into the courtyard more than a hundred feet below. Once this simple precaution had been taken, since this was the only stairway in the entire fortress, and at midnight every night an officer brought the ropes from all the wells to the Governor and placed them in a closet opening off his bedroom, the latter became completely inaccessible in his *palazzo*, and it would have been equally impossible for anyone at all to reach the Farnese Tower. This was a fact which Fabrice had fully appreciated the day he arrived at the fortress, and which Grillo, who like all gaolers loved to boast about his prison,

had explained to him on several occasions; so he had no real hope of escaping. Nevertheless he remembered one of Father Blanès's maxims: 'The lover thinks more often of how to meet his mistress than the husband thinks of guarding his wife; the prisoner thinks more often of escaping than the gaoler of locking his door; so, no matter what the obstacles, the lover and the prisoner must succeed.'

That night Fabrice heard very clearly a great number of men crossing the iron bridge, known as the 'Slave's Bridge', because a Dalmatian slave had once succeeded in escaping by hurling the guard on the bridge down into the courtyard.

They're coming to abduct someone, perhaps they're going to take me away to hang me; but there may be some confusion, and I must make the most of it. He had picked up his weapons and was already removing his gold from some of his hiding-places, when suddenly he stopped.

Man's an odd creature, you have to admit! he exclaimed. If anybody could see what I'm doing, whatever would they say? Do I by any chance actually want to escape? What would become of me, the morning after I was back in Parma? Wouldn't I do anything in the world to be near Clélia again? If there is any confusion, let me use it to slip inside the Governor's *palazzo*; I might be able to speak to Clélia, perhaps I might feel sufficiently justified by the circumstances to dare to kiss her hand. General Conti, who's so very distrustful and so very vain by nature, has five sentries to guard his *palazzo*, one at each corner and a fifth at the entrance, but luckily the night's extremely dark. Fabrice crept stealthily over to see what Grillo and his dog were doing: the gaoler was fast asleep in a hammock made of hides and coarse netting, slung from the ceiling by four ropes; the dog Fox opened his eyes and, getting up, came quietly up to Fabrice and licked his hand.

Our prisoner climbed lightly back up the six steps leading to his wooden cell; the noise was growing so loud at the foot of the Farnese Tower, outside its very door, that he thought Grillo must surely awaken. Fabrice, fully armed and ready for action, supposed himself destined that night for some great adventure, when suddenly he heard the first notes of the

loveliest symphony in the world: it was a serenade in honour of the General or his daughter. He began to roar with laughter: And to think I was imagining laying about me with my dagger! As if a serenade wasn't infinitely more probable than an abduction requiring the presence of eighty people inside a prison, or than an uprising! The music was excellent and seemed enchanting to Fabrice, whose spirit had known no distraction for so many weeks; it made him shed some very sweet tears; in his rapture he addressed the most irresistible phrases to the lovely Clélia. But the following day at noon he found her in such a sadly sombre mood, she was so pale, she turned upon him a gaze in which he sometimes read so much anger, that he did not feel he had the right to ask her a single question about the serenade; he was afraid of being discourteous.

Clélia had good reason to be sad, the serenade was in her honour, a tribute from the Marquis Crescenzi; so public an action was in a sense the official announcement of their marriage. Right up until the day of the serenade, and even until nine o'clock that night, Clélia had put up the most splendid resistance, but she had been so weak-minded as to yield to her father's threat of packing her off to a convent forthwith.

What! I'd never see him again! she had told herself through her tears; it was in vain that her reason had added: I'd never again see this man who in any case will bring me misery, I'd never again see this lover of the Duchess, I'd never again see this fickle man who's known to have had ten mistresses in Naples, and to have deceived them all; I'd never again see this ambitious youth who, if he survives the sentence now hanging over him, is about to take holy orders! It would be a crime for me to look at him once he's outside this fortress, and his natural inconstancy will spare me that temptation, for what am I to him? A pretext for passing in a less boring fashion a few hours of every day he spends in prison. In the middle of all this abuse Clélia happened to recall his smile as he looked at the constables surrounding him, when he emerged from the committal office before climbing up to the Farnese Tower. Tears flooded her eyes: My dear one, what would I not do for you! You'll be my ruin, I know, for such is my

destiny; I'm actually ruining myself in a dreadful way by my presence this evening at this hateful serenade; but at noon tomorrow I shall see your eyes once more!

It was in fact on the very morrow of that day when Clélia had made such great sacrifices to the young prisoner, whom she loved with such fierce intensity; it was on the morrow of that day when, seeing all his faults, she had made him the sacrifice of her life, that Fabrice was filled with despair by her coldness. If, even using only that very imperfect language of signs, he had done the slightest violence to Clélia's heart, she would probably have been unable to control her tears, and Fabrice would have obtained an avowal of all that she felt for him; but he lacked boldness, he was too mortally afraid of offending Clélia, she could inflict too severe a punishment upon him. In other words, Fabrice had no knowledge of the kind of emotion that a woman whom one loves inspires; it was a sensation he had never experienced, ever in the faintest degree. It took him a week, after the serenade, to get back to his former friendly relationship with Clélia. The poor girl, out of a desperate fear of betraying herself, took refuge in severity, and it seemed to Fabrice that every day he was on worse terms with her.

One day, after Fabrice had been in prison for almost three months without any communication whatsoever with the outside world, and yet without finding that he was unhappy, Grillo had remained in his room very late; Fabrice could not think of how to get rid of him and was in despair; in the end, half-past twelve had struck before he could open the two little foot-high apertures he had made in that fateful shutter.

Clélia was standing at the window of the aviary, her eyes fixed on Fabrice's window, her contracted features expressing the most intense despair. Hardly had she seen Fabrice than she signalled to him that all was lost; rushing to her piano, and pretending to sing a recitative from an opera that was fashionable just then, she told him, in phrases broken by despair and by the fear of being understood by the sentries patrolling beneath the window:

'Good God! You're still alive! How very grateful I am to heaven! Barbone, that gaoler whose insolence you punished

the day you arrived here, had disappeared, he was no longer in the fortress; the evening before last he came back, and I've cause to believe that since yesterday he's been trying to poison you. He's been hanging about in the special kitchen here which supplies your meals. I know nothing for certain, but my maid believes that the only reason that hideous creature comes to the *palazzo* kitchens is because he plans to kill you. I was desperate with worry at not seeing you, I thought you were dead. Don't touch any food until you hear from me again, I'm going to move heaven and earth to send you a little chocolate. In any case, this evening at nine, if by heaven's mercy you have some string or can make a ribbon out of your linen, let it down from your window over the orange trees, I'll tie a rope to it for you to pull up and by that means I'll send you some bread and some chocolate.'

Fabrice had preserved, like a treasure, the piece of charcoal he had found in the stove of his cell: he made haste to take advantage of Clélia's emotion, and wrote on his hand a succession of letters which formed these words:

'I love you, and life is only precious to me because I can see you; above all please send me paper and a pencil.'

Just as Fabrice had hoped, the extreme terror he could read in the young girl's face prevented her from breaking off the exchange after those very bold words: 'I love you'; she contented herself with a show of considerable anger. Fabrice had the wit to add: 'It's so very windy today that I can hardly hear the warnings you're giving me while you sing; the sound of the piano drowns out your voice. For instance, what's this poison you're telling me about?'

At this, Clélia's terror returned in all its force; she quickly began drawing some big letters in ink on pages she tore from a book, and Fabrice was overjoyed to see finally established, after three months of devoted effort, this method of correspondence which he had been urging with so little success. He was careful not to abandon the little ruse which had worked so well for him, he wanted to write actual letters to Clélia, and pretended not to understand fully the words spelled out by the symbols which she held up one after another before his eyes.

She was obliged to leave the aviary to go to her father; what she feared most was that he might come and seek her there; his suspicious cast of mind would not have liked the extreme proximity of the window of this aviary to the shutter concealing the prisoner's window. A few moments before, Clélia herself had had the idea when Fabrice's non-appearance had plunged her into such mortal anxiety, that it would be possible to throw a little stone wrapped in a piece of paper over the upper part of the shutter; if it so happened that the gaoler responsible for guarding Fabrice was not inside his cell, this was a sure means of communication.

Our prisoner lost no time in making a kind of ribbon with his linen; that evening, shortly after nine o'clock, he quite distinctly heard someone tapping lightly on the tubs of orange trees standing beneath his window; he let down his ribbon which brought back to him a very long, narrow rope, with the help of which he first pulled up a quantity of chocolate, and then, to his inexpressible satisfaction, a roll of paper and a pencil. It was in vain that he let down the rope again, he received nothing more; evidently the sentries had moved nearer the orange trees. But he was mad with joy. He quickly wrote an extremely long letter to Clélia, and scarcely had he finished it when he tied it to his rope and let it down. For more than three hours he waited in vain for it to be removed; several times he pulled it up again to make some changes. If Clélia doesn't see my letter this evening, he thought, while she's still upset by her ideas about poison, perhaps tomorrow morning she'll flatly reject the idea of receiving a letter.

The truth was that Clélia had not been able to avoid going down into the town with her father; Fabrice realized something of the sort when he heard the General's carriage return at about half-past twelve, for he recognized the gait of the horses. How delighted he was, a few moments after hearing the General cross the platform and the sentries present arms to him, to feel a tug on the rope which he was still holding wound round his arms! Something very heavy was being tied to this rope, and two little tugs signalled to him to pull it up. He had some difficulty getting the weighty object he

was retrieving past a very prominent cornice underneath his window.

The object which he had found so difficult to pull up was a decanter full of water, wrapped in a shawl. It was with rapture that this poor young man, who had been living for so long in such complete solitude, covered this shawl with kisses. But no words can describe his emotion when at last, after so many days of hoping in vain, he discovered a tiny piece of paper secured to the shawl with a pin.

‘Drink no water but this, eat only chocolate; tomorrow I’ll do my utmost to send you some bread, I’ll mark it on every side with little ink crosses. It’s a dreadful thing to say, but you must be told, Barbone may perhaps have been instructed to poison you. How can you not have felt that the subject you mention in that letter you wrote in pencil is bound to displease me? So were it not for the great danger threatening you, I would not be writing to you. I have just seen the Duchess, she is well and so is the Count, but she has grown very thin; don’t write to me again on that subject, do you wish to make me angry?’

It required a great effort of virtue on the part of Clélia for her to write the penultimate line of this note. Everybody at court maintained that Signora Sanseverina was becoming extremely friendly with the very handsome Count Baldi, the former lover of the Marquise Raversi. What admitted no doubt was that he had quarrelled in the most scandalous fashion with that very Marquise who, for the past six years, had been like a mother to him, and had established him in society.

Clélia had had to rewrite her hasty little note, because in its first version it contained hints of the new love affair attributed to the Duchess by the malice of the public.

‘How base of me!’ she had exclaimed, ‘to speak ill to Fabrice of the woman he loves!...’

The next morning, long before daybreak, Grillo came into Fabrice’s cell, deposited a rather heavy parcel there, and disappeared without uttering a word. This parcel contained quite a large loaf, decorated on every side with little crosses made in ink: Fabrice covered them with kisses; he was in love.

Alongside the bread was a cylindrical packet wrapped in a great many folded sheets of paper; inside were 6,000 lire in gold coins; lastly, Fabrice found a handsome, brand-new breviary: a hand he was beginning to recognize had written these words in a margin:

'Poison! Beware of water, of wine, of everything; live only on chocolate, try to make the dog eat the dinner that you don't eat; you mustn't appear suspicious, the enemy will try something else. Don't take any chances, for God's sake! You must treat this seriously!'

Fabrice lost no time in erasing those treasured words which might compromise Clélia, and quickly tore a large number of pages from the breviary, which he used to make several alphabets; each letter was neatly drawn in powdered charcoal mixed with wine. These alphabets were dry by a quarter to twelve when Clélia appeared, a couple of paces from the aviary window. The great thing now, thought Fabrice, is for her to agree to make use of them. But luckily it turned out that she had much to tell the young prisoner about the attempt to poison him; a dog belonging to one of the maids had died after eating a dish intended for him. Clélia, far from objecting to using the alphabets, had made a magnificent one in ink. The conversation they carried on by this means, though somewhat awkward at first, lasted no less than an hour and a half, in other words the whole of the time that Clélia could spend in the aviary. On two or three occasions when Fabrice dared to say something forbidden she did not reply, and disappeared for a moment to take care of her birds.

Fabrice had persuaded her that, when she sent him some water that evening, she should also let him have one of the alphabets she had made in ink, which were much easier to read. Needless to say, he wrote a very long letter in which he was careful not to include any tender sentiments, at least not expressed in a way which might give offence. This approach was successful; his letter was accepted.

The next day, in their conversation by alphabet, Clélia did not reproach him; she told him that the danger of poison was lessening; Barbone had been attacked and almost knocked

out by the men who were courting the kitchen-maids in the Governor's *palazzo*; probably he would not risk reappearing in the kitchens. Clélia confessed that she had dared, for his sake, to steal an antidote from her father; she was sending it to him; the important thing was to reject at once any food which he thought had a peculiar taste.

Clélia had asked Don Cesare a great many questions without being able to discover the origin of the 600 zecchini Fabrice had received; in any case, this was an excellent sign; his treatment was becoming less severe.

This episode of the poison advanced our prisoner's affairs immeasurably; although he was never able to obtain an admission of anything remotely resembling love, he knew the happiness of living on the most intimate terms with Clélia. Every morning, and often in the evening, they had a long conversation by alphabet; every evening at nine Clélia accepted a long letter, and sometimes replied with a few words; she sent him the newspaper and some books; finally, Grillo had been coaxed into bringing Fabrice bread and wine, which were given to him every day by Clélia's maid. The gaoler Grillo had concluded that the Governor did not see eye to eye with those who had ordered Barbone to poison the young Monsignore, and he was very glad about this, as were all his fellow gaolers, for it had become a saying in the prison that 'you just had to look Monsignore del Dongo in the face for him to give you some money'.

Fabrice had grown very pale; the total lack of exercise was damaging his health; except for that, he had never been so happy. The tone of the exchanges between himself and Clélia was intimate, and at times very light-hearted. The only moments in Clélia's life that were not beset by dire forebodings or by remorse were those which she spent in communication with him. One day she was rash enough to say to him:

'I admire your delicacy; because I'm the daughter of the Governor, you never speak to me about wanting to be free again!'

'That's because I wouldn't dream of wanting anything so absurd,' Fabrice told her; 'once I was back in Parma, how

would I see you again? And life would become unbearable if I couldn't tell you everything that I'm thinking... No, not exactly everything that I'm thinking, you make sure of that, but anyway, in spite of your cruelty, I would find living without seeing you every day a much worse torment than this prison! I have never in my life been so happy!... Isn't it funny that happiness was waiting for me in prison?'

'On that subject there's a great deal to be said,' replied Clélia in a manner which suddenly became extremely serious, almost sinister.

'What!' said Fabrice, very alarmed, 'could I be in danger of losing the tiny place in your heart that I've managed to make my own, and which is my only joy in this world?'

'Yes,' she told him; 'I've every reason to believe that you are not being honest with me, even though you are generally believed to be very much the gentleman; but I don't want to talk about that today.'

This remarkable opening introduced considerable embarrassment into their conversation, and many times both he and she had tears in their eyes.

The Public Prosecutor Rassi still hoped to change his name; he was very tired of the one he had made for himself, and wanted to become Baron Riva. Count Mosca, for his part, laboured with all the skill at his command to reinforce this venal judge's passion for the barony, just as he sought to intensify the Prince's insane hope of becoming the constitutional king of Lombardy. These were the only means he had been able to devise to delay Fabrice's death.

The Prince would say to Rassi: 'Two weeks of despair and two weeks of hope, it's by patiently following such a regimen that we'll manage to break that proud woman's spirit; it's by being alternately gentle and harsh that one can tame the wildest horses. Apply the caustic resolutely.'

Indeed, every two weeks, a fresh rumour of Fabrice's imminent death would circulate through Parma. These reports plunged the unfortunate Duchess into the deepest despair. Faithful to her resolution of not involving the Count in her downfall, she saw him only twice a month; but she was punished for her cruelty to this poor man by the continually

recurring periods of black despair in which she passed her days. In vain did Mosca, overcoming the dreadful jealousy inspired in him by the attentions of the very handsome Count Baldi, write to the Duchess when he could not see her, passing on to her all the information he garnered through the zeal of the future Baron Riva; in order to be able to bear the appalling rumours about Fabrice that circulated continually, the Duchess would have needed to spend her time with an intelligent, warm-hearted man like Mosca; but Baldi's nothingness, abandoning her to her thoughts, made her existence unbearable, and the Count did not succeed in communicating to her his reasons for hope.

By means of a number of quite ingenious pretexts, this Minister had succeeded in persuading the Prince that the records of the very complicated intrigues, through which Ranuce-Ernest IV nurtured the completely lunatic hope of becoming the constitutional monarch of Lombardy, should be deposited in a friendly castle, deep in the heart of that beautiful country, near Saronò.

More than twenty of these highly compromising documents were in the Prince's writing or bore his signature, and in the event that Fabrice's life was seriously threatened, the Count proposed to inform his Highness that he intended to hand over these documents to a great power which could annihilate him with a word.

Count Mosca believed he could rely on the future Baron Riva, he was afraid only of poison; the attempt made by Barbone had alarmed him profoundly, so much so that he decided to take a step that on the surface seemed mad. One morning he called at the gate of the fortress and asked for General Fabio Conti, who came down to the bastion over the gate; there, while taking a friendly stroll with him, Mosca did not scruple to say, after a brief preamble which, though faintly acerbic, was perfectly polite:

'If Fabrice dies in a suspicious manner, his death may be attributed to me, people will say I'm jealous, which would make me look dreadfully ridiculous and is something I'm determined not to tolerate. Therefore, to clear myself of suspicion if he dies of an illness, *I'll kill you with my own hand,*

you may depend upon it.' General Fabio Conti made a grandiloquent reply and spoke of his own courage, but the look on the Count's face lingered in his thoughts.

A few days later, and as if he were acting in concert with the Count, the Prosecutor Rassi indulged in an imprudent act that was very strange in such a man. The public contempt associated with his name, which was proverbial among the rabble, upset him badly now that he had a reasonable hope of being able to free himself from it. He sent General Fabio Conti an official copy of the sentence condemning Fabrice to twelve years in the fortress. According to law, this was what should have been done the very day after Fabrice's committal to prison; but what was unheard of in Parma, in that land of secret measures, was that Justice should dare do such a thing without express instructions from the Sovereign. Indeed, what hope was there of every fortnight reviving the Duchess's fears and thus breaking that proud spirit, to quote the Prince's words, once an official copy of the sentence had come out of the Chancellery of Justice? On the eve of the day when General Fabio Conti received the official document from Prosecutor Rassi, he learnt that Barbone the clerk had been beaten black and blue on returning rather late to the fortress; he deduced that it was no longer the intention, in a certain quarter, to get rid of Fabrice; and, in a fit of prudence that saved Rassi from the immediate consequences of his folly, he did not, at the next audience he was granted, say anything to the Prince about the official copy transmitted to him of the prisoner's sentence. The Count had discovered, fortunately for the poor Duchess's peace of mind, that Barbone's clumsy attempt had simply been an act of personal vengeance, and he had seen to it that the clerk received the above-mentioned warning.

Fabrice was very pleasantly surprised when, after a hundred and thirty-five days of confinement in a rather small cell, the good chaplain, Don Cesare, came to fetch him one Thursday to take him out on to the keep of the Farnese Tower; he had been there barely ten minutes when, overcome by the fresh air, he fainted.

Don Cesare used this mishap as an excuse to allow him a thirty-minute walk each day. This was a foolish mistake; these

frequent walks soon restored his strength to our hero—a strength that he abused.

There were several serenades; the punctilious Governor only tolerated them because they bound his daughter Clélia to the Marquis Crescenzi; her character frightened him; he had a vague feeling that no point of contact existed between himself and her, and he lived in dread of seeing her do something impetuous. She might run away to a convent and then he would be left defenceless. However, the General was afraid that all this music, the sound of which could penetrate into the deepest dungeons reserved for the most nefarious Liberals, might contain signals. He felt uneasy, too, about the musicians themselves, so that hardly had the serenade finished than they were locked up in the large ground-floor rooms of the Governor's *palazzo* which by day served as offices for the staff; they were not allowed out again until well after sunrise the next day. It was the Governor himself who, standing on the 'Slave's Bridge', had them searched in his presence and then gave them their liberty, but not without telling them repeatedly that he would have hanged on the spot any one of them who dared undertake the most trivial errand for a prisoner. And it was well known that, in his fear of displeasing, he was a man of his word; so that the Marquis Crescenzi was forced to pay triple rates to his musicians, who were greatly put out by this night they were obliged to spend in prison.

All that the Duchess could obtain—with the utmost difficulty—from the cowardice of one of these men, was that he would agree to deliver a letter to the Governor. The letter was addressed to Fabrice, and in it the writer lamented the fact that after more than five months of his being in prison, his friends outside had been unable to establish the slightest communication with him.

Upon entering the fortress, the bribed musician flung himself at the feet of General Fabio Conti and confessed that a priest, unknown to him, had been so insistent that he should agree to take a letter addressed to Signor del Dongo, that he had not dared refuse; but, faithful to his duty, he was immediately placing this letter in his Excellency's hands. His

Excellency was most flattered; well aware of the resources at the disposal of the Duchess, he lived in terror of being hoodwinked. In his delight, the General went and presented this letter to the Prince, who was overjoyed.

‘So, my administration’s steadiness of purpose has brought me revenge! That proud woman has been suffering for five months! One of these days we shall have a scaffold built, and her wild imagination cannot fail to conclude that it’s destined for the young del Dongo.’

CHAPTER 20

One night, about one in the morning, Fabrice was lying along the window sill with his head thrust through the opening made in the shutter; he was looking at the stars and the vast horizon which can be seen from the top of the Farnese Tower. His gaze, roving over the countryside near the lower reaches of the Po and Ferrara, happened to notice a very small but fairly bright light which seemed to be coming from the top of a tower. That light can't be visible from the plain, Fabrice said to himself, the thickness of the tower prevents its being seen from below; it must be a signal intended for a distant place. All of a sudden he noticed that this light appeared and disappeared at very short intervals. It must be some girl speaking to her lover in the next village. He counted nine successive appearances. This is an I, he thought; that's right, I's the ninth letter of the alphabet. Next, after a pause, came fourteen flashes of light: this is an N; then, after another pause, a single flash: it's an A, the word is Ina.

What were his delight and astonishment when the next series of flashes, always separated by little pauses, completed the following words:

INA PENSA A TE.

Obviously: 'Gina is thinking of you!'

He replied immediately by repeatedly shining his lamp through the little opening he had made:

FABRICE LOVES YOU!

The dialogue continued until daybreak. That night was the one hundred and seventy-third of his captivity, and they told him that they had been signalling like this every night for the past four months. But everybody could see and understand the signals; they began that very night to set up a system of abbreviations: three flashes in quick succession meant the Duchess; four, the Prince; two, Count Mosca; two rapid flashes followed by two slow ones meant 'escape'. They agreed to use in future the old alphabet *alla Monaca*, which, in order to outwit inquisitive eyes, changes the normal value

of a letter, replacing it with an arbitrary one; A, for example, is number ten, B, three; so that three successive eclipses of the lamp signify B, ten signify A, etc.; a pause without any light denotes the break between words. They arranged to resume on the morrow at one in the morning, and the following day the Duchess came to that tower, which was a quarter of a league from the city. Her eyes filled with tears on seeing those signals made by Fabrice—Fabrice whom she had so often believed dead. She herself signalled to him with the lamp: 'I love you, courage, keep well, be hopeful. Exercise in your cell, you'll need the strength of your arms.' I've not seen him, the Duchess said to herself, since Fausta's concert, when he appeared at my drawing-room door dressed as a huntsman. Who then could have predicted what fate held in store for us!

The Duchess had signals sent which informed Fabrice that he would soon be set free, THANKS TO THE PRINCE'S BENEVOLENCE (these signals could be understood); then she continued with her loving messages; she could not tear herself away from him! It was only as dawn approached, and upon the insistence of Ludovic, who was now, because of his services to Fabrice, her factotum, that she was persuaded to discontinue the signals which might attract some hostile eye. The announcement, repeated several times, of an imminent release, cast Fabrice into a deep sadness; Clélia, noticing this the following day, was unwise enough to ask the reason.

'I can see that I'm about to cause the Duchess grave displeasure.'

'And what can she ask of you that you will deny her?' exclaimed Clélia, carried away by the most intense curiosity.

'She wants me to leave this place,' he told her, 'and that's something I'll never agree to.'

Clélia could not answer him, she looked at him and burst into tears. If he had been able to speak to her face to face, perhaps he would have obtained an avowal of feelings about which his uncertainty often plunged him into intense discouragement; he was acutely aware that life, without Clélia's love, could be for him nothing but a series of bitter sorrows or intolerable vexations. It seemed to him that life was no longer worth living, if it simply meant rediscovering those pleasures

that, before knowing love, he had thought interesting, and although suicide is not yet fashionable in Italy, he had considered it as a last resort, if fate separated him from Clélia.

The next day, he received a very long letter from her.

'You must be told the truth, my friend: ever since you've been here, time and again it's been thought in Parma that your last hour had come. It's true that you are sentenced only to twelve years' imprisonment in the fortress, but unhappily there can be no doubt that an all-powerful hostility is bent upon persecuting you, and there have been countless occasions when I've trembled lest poison should end your life; so you must take any *possible* opportunity to escape from here. You can see that for your sake I am failing in the most sacred duties; judge the imminence of your danger by the things I dare to say to you which, coming from me, are so unseemly. If you absolutely must, if there is no other way of saving yourself, then escape. Every moment that you spend in this fortress can put your life in the greatest danger; remember that there is a faction at court which the prospect of crime never deterred from carrying out its purposes. And is it not the case that all the plans made by this faction are constantly frustrated by the superior skills of Count Mosca? Now, they have found a way of ensuring his exile from Parma, and that is by driving the Duchess to despair; and are they not only too certain of achieving that despair by the death of a young prisoner? This consideration alone, which is undeniable, should make you realize your situation. You say that you feel affection for me; but first and foremost you must remember that there exist insurmountable obstacles to that feeling's ever developing into anything at all permanent between us. We may have met while we are young, we may have reached out to help one another during a period of unhappiness; destiny may have put me in this cruel place to ease your suffering, but I would reproach myself for all eternity if illusions which are quite unjustified, and will always remain so, dissuaded you from grasping every possible opportunity to escape from so terrible a danger. I have destroyed my own peace of mind by my cruel recklessness in exchanging with you some signs of true friendship. If our childish games with alphabets have led

you to harbour illusions which have so little foundation and which may prove so fatal to you, it would be vain for me, in order to justify myself, to recall the attempt made by Barbone. I myself would have cast you into a danger far more terrible, far more certain, while imagining that I was saving you from one that was temporary; and my rash actions will be eternally unpardonable if they have given rise to feelings which may induce you to resist the Duchess's advice. See what you force me to tell you again: escape, I command you to do so...'

This letter was very long; certain passages, such as the 'I command you to do so', which we have just transcribed, gave Fabrice's love some moments of delightful hope. It seemed to him that the feelings behind the words were quite tender, although the expressions used were remarkably prudent. At other moments, he paid the price of his total ignorance of this kind of warfare; he saw nothing but simple friendship, or even just the most commonplace humanity, in this letter from Clélia.

Moreover, nothing in all that she told him made him change his plans for one second: even supposing that the dangers she described actually existed, were some momentary dangers too great a price to pay for the joy of seeing her every day? What kind of life would be his when he had once again taken refuge in Bologna or in Florence? For, if he escaped from the fortress, he could not even hope to be permitted to live in Parma. And even were the Prince to relent sufficiently to set him free (which seemed hardly likely, since he, Fabrice, had become, for a powerful faction, a means of overthrowing Count Mosca), what kind of life would he lead in Parma, separated from Clélia by all the hatred that divided the two parties? Once or twice a month, perhaps, chance would bring them together in the same drawing-rooms; but even then, what kind of conversation could he have with her? How could he re-establish that perfect intimacy which he now enjoyed for several hours every day? What would be their drawing-room conversation, compared with their conversation by alphabet? And even if I must pay for this life of enchantment and this unique chance of happiness with a few slight dangers,

where's the harm? And wouldn't it be yet a further happiness to find in this a modest way of giving her a proof of my love?

Fabrice saw Clélia's letter simply as an excuse to ask for a meeting: this was the sole and unchanging object of all his desires; he had only spoken to her once, and then only for a moment, at the time of his arrival in prison, and that was now nearly 200 days ago.

There was an easy way to meet Clélia: the good Father Don Cesare allowed Fabrice to take some exercise on the roof of the Farnese Tower for half-an-hour every Thursday, during daylight hours; but on the other days of the week this concession, which could be observed by all the inhabitants of Parma and seriously compromise the Governor, did not take place until nightfall. In order to reach the roof of the Farnese Tower there were no stairs other than those of the little belfry belonging to the chapel decorated so gloomily in black-and-white marble, which the reader may perhaps recall. Grillo conducted Fabrice to this chapel and unlocked the little belfry staircase for him; it was his duty to follow him up there, but, as the evenings were beginning to grow cool, the gaoler allowed him to go up by himself, locked him into that belfry which led to the roof, and returned to his own room to keep warm. So, could not Clélia, one evening, come to the black marble chapel accompanied by her maid?

The whole of the long letter by which Fabrice replied to Clélia's was designed to obtain this interview. He also confided to her, with the most perfect sincerity, and as if he were speaking of someone else, all the reasons which made him determined not to leave the fortress.

'I would risk a thousand deaths every day for the happiness of speaking to you by means of our alphabets, which now don't hamper us at all, and you ask me to do something so idiotic as to exile myself in Parma, or perhaps Bologna, or even Florence! You want me to leave here, and separate myself from you! I would find that impossible; it would be pointless for me to give you my word, I would not be able to keep it.'

The result of this request for an interview was Clélia's absence, which lasted no less than five days; for five days she

never came to the aviary except at those times when she knew that Fabrice could make no use of the little opening he had cut in the shutter. Fabrice was in despair; he concluded from this absence that, despite certain glances which had filled him with insane hopes, he had never inspired in Clélia any feelings other than those of simple friendship. In that case, he said to himself, what do I care about life? Let the Prince take it from me, he's welcome to it; all the more reason not to leave the fortress. And it was with a feeling of deep distaste that, each night, he responded to the signals of the little lamp. The Duchess thought that he must have lost his mind completely when, in the report of the signals brought to her each morning by Ludovic, she read these strange words: 'I don't want to escape; I want to die here!'

During these five days, which were so cruel for Fabrice, Clélia was more unhappy than he was; she had had an idea which was torture to a generous heart: it's my duty to take refuge in a convent, far away from the fortress. When Fabrice finds out that I'm no longer here, and I'll see that he's told by Grillo and all the gaolers, then he'll make up his mind to try to escape. But going to a convent meant abandoning hope of ever again seeing Fabrice, and abandoning hope just when he was giving such clear proof that the feelings which might in the past have bound him to the Duchess now no longer existed! What more touching proof of love could a young man provide? After seven long months of prison, which had seriously impaired his health, he was refusing to regain his freedom. A shallow creature, such as the courtiers' gossip had portrayed Fabrice to Clélia, would have sacrificed twenty mistresses in order to leave the fortress one day earlier; and what would he not have done to leave a prison where every day poison might bring his life to an end!

Clélia lacked courage; she made the egregious mistake of not seeking refuge in a convent, which would at the same time have provided her with a natural way of breaking with the Marquis Crescenzi. Once she had made such a mistake, how could she resist this young man who was so lovable, so natural, so tender-hearted, who exposed his life to appalling dangers for the simple happiness of catching a glimpse of her

from one window to another? After five days of dreadful struggles punctuated by moments of self-contempt, Clélia made up her mind to reply to the letter in which Fabrice begged for the happiness of speaking to her in the black marble chapel. She did in fact refuse, and her refusal was quite harshly worded; but from that moment she knew no peace, her imagination incessantly showing her Fabrice succumbing to the effects of poison; she visited the aviary six or eight times a day, driven by the passionate need to see with her own eyes that Fabrice was still alive.

If he's still here in the fortress, she told herself, if he's exposed to all the terrible things that the Raversi faction may be devising against him in order to rid themselves of Count Mosca, it's purely because I've been so cowardly as not to run away to the convent! What reason would he have for remaining here, once he was certain that I had left the fortress for ever?

This young girl who was at once so timid and so proud went so far as to risk a refusal on the part of the gaoler Grillo; what was worse, she laid herself open to all the remarks that this man might indulge in, with respect to the strangeness of her behaviour. She humiliated herself to the extent of sending for him and telling him, in a tremulous voice which betrayed the whole of her secret, that Fabrice would very shortly obtain his freedom, that on the basis of this expectation the Duchess Sanseverina was involved in the most active negotiations, that often it was necessary to obtain an instantaneous response from the prisoner to certain proposals that were made, and that she instructed him, Grillo, to permit Fabrice to make an opening in the shutter masking his window, so that she could communicate to him by signs the information she received several times a day from the Signora Sanseverina.

Grillo smiled and assured her of his respect and obedience. Clélia was infinitely grateful to him for not saying a single word more; it was obvious that he was perfectly aware of everything that had been going on for the past several months. Hardly had this gaoler left the aviary than Clélia used the signal that they had agreed would summon Fabrice in an emergency; she told him everything that she had just

done. 'You are resolved to die by poison,' she added, 'one day soon I hope to have the courage to leave my father and take refuge in some distant convent; I shall be indebted to you for that; I hope that then you will no longer resist proposals which may be made to you for getting you away from here. So long as you are here, I have dreadful, irrational moments; never in my life have I been instrumental in hurting anyone, and now it seems to me that I am causing your death. If I had such an idea about a complete stranger, I should be in despair, so imagine what I feel when I imagine that a friend, whose unreasonableness gives me serious grounds for complaint but whom I have after all been seeing every day for so long, is at this very moment suffering the agony of death. Sometimes I feel the need to hear from your own lips that you are alive.

'It was to escape from this dreadful pain that I have just humiliated myself so far as to beg a favour from an inferior who could have refused me and who might still betray me. I might perhaps even be pleased if he were to betray me to my father; I'd leave immediately for the convent, I would no longer be the very reluctant accomplice of your cruel folly. But, believe me, this cannot go on long, you will do as the Duchess commands. Are you satisfied, my cruel friend? It is I who am begging you to betray my father! Call Grillo, and make him a present.'

Fabrice was so much in love, the most simple expression of Clélia's will plunged him into such terror, that even this strange communication did not convey to him the assurance of being loved. He summoned Grillo, whom he paid generously for his past complaisances, and, for the future, he told him that for every day he allowed him to use the opening cut in the shutter, he would receive a zecchino. Grillo was delighted with these conditions.

'I'm going to speak to you very frankly, Monsignore: are you willing to eat your dinner cold every day? There's a very simple way of avoiding poison. But I must ask you for the utmost discretion; a gaoler ought to see everything and know nothing, etc. Instead of one dog I'll have several, and you yourself can give them something from every dish you intend

to eat; as for the wine, I'll give you some of mine, you'll drink only from bottles that I've tasted. But if your Excellency wants to ruin me for ever, all you have to do is tell someone all these details, even Signorina Clélia; women will be women; if she should quarrel with you tomorrow, the next day as a revenge she'll describe this whole business to her father, who would take the greatest pleasure in finding reasons for hanging a gaoler. After Barbone, he's probably the most evil person in the fortress, and that's the real danger of your situation; he knows how to handle poison, you may be sure, and he'd never forgive me for this idea of three or four little dogs.'

There was another serenade. Grillo was now prepared to answer all Fabrice's questions; however, he had made up his mind to be circumspect, and not to betray Signorina Clélia who, as he saw it, while on the point of marrying the Marquis Crescenzi, the richest man in the State of Parma, was none the less making love, in so far as prison walls permitted, with that nice Monsignore del Dongo. He was answering the latter's most recent questions about the serenade when he was so thoughtless as to add: 'They think he's soon going to marry her.' The effect of this simple remark on Fabrice may easily be imagined. That night, in reply to the signals of the lamp, he said only that he was ill. The next morning when Clélia appeared in the aviary at ten o'clock, he asked her in a tone of formal politeness which was quite new between them, why she had not told him outright that she loved the Marquis Crescenzi and was on the point of marrying him.

'Because there's no truth in any of that,' answered Clélia impatiently. In actual fact, however, the rest of her reply was less clear, as Fabrice pointed out to her, taking advantage of the opportunity to renew his request for an interview. Clélia, seeing that her good faith was in question, agreed almost immediately, while making sure he understood that she was dishonouring herself for ever in Grillo's eyes. That evening, when night had fallen, she appeared, accompanied by her maid, in the black marble chapel; she waited in the middle of the room, beside the sanctuary lamp; the maid and Grillo went and stood some thirty paces away, near the door. Clélia,

who was trembling all over, had prepared a fine speech: her aim was to avoid any kind of compromising admission, but the logic of passion is compelling; the intense interest it brings to uncovering the truth does not allow it to sustain vain pretences, while at the same time the extreme devotion it feels for its beloved frees it from the fear of offending. At first Fabrice was dazzled by Clélia's beauty; for the past eight months, he had seen no one but gaolers at such close range. But at the name of the Marquis Crescenzi all his fury came back to him, and it grew greater when he saw clearly that Clélia was giving him only very carefully worded answers; Clélia herself realized that she was adding to his suspicions rather than dispelling them. She found this feeling too painful.

'Will it make you very happy,' she said to him with a kind of anger, her eyes full of tears, 'to have made me disregard everything I owe to myself? Up until the third of August of last year, I had felt nothing but aversion for the men who sought to please me. I felt an unbounded and probably exaggerated contempt for the character of the courtier; I disliked anyone who prospered at court. But on the other hand I saw remarkable qualities in a prisoner who was brought into this fortress on the third of August. I suffered, at first without realizing it, all the torments of jealousy. The attractions of a charming woman, a woman I know well, were like daggers piercing my heart, because I believed, as I am still somewhat inclined to believe, that this prisoner was attached to her. Soon the importunities of the Marquis Crescenzi, who had asked for my hand, increased; he is extremely wealthy and we have no fortune; I was rejecting his advances without the slightest hesitation when my father uttered the fatal word "convent", and I realized that if I left the fortress I should no longer be able to watch over the life of this prisoner whose fate was of concern to me. The greatest achievement of my precautions was that until that moment he had not the faintest suspicion of the terrible dangers threatening his life. I had promised myself never to betray either my father or my own secret; but this woman who possesses such admirable energy, such superior intelligence, and such an indomitable will, and

who has given this prisoner her protection, offered him, I imagine, a means of escape; he rejected this offer and tried to persuade me that he was refusing to leave the fortress so as not to separate himself from me. Then I made a terrible mistake, I struggled with myself for five days, but I should instantly have taken refuge in a convent and left the fortress; such a step would have provided me with a very simple way of breaking with the Marquis Crescenzi. I lacked the courage to leave the fortress and now I am lost; I have grown attached to a fickle man; I know how he conducted himself in Naples; and what grounds might I have for believing that his character has changed? Confined in a grim prison, he has courted the only woman he could see, who provided him with a distraction in his boredom. As it was only with considerable difficulty that he could speak to her, this amusement took on the deceptive guise of a passion. The prisoner has made a name for himself in the world for his courage, and imagines he can prove that his love is more than just a passing fancy, by exposing himself to considerable danger so as to continue seeing the person he believes he loves. But as soon as he is back in a great city, surrounded again by the enticements of society, he'll be again what he has always been, a man of the world addicted to dissipation and womanizing, and his poor prison companion will finish her days in a convent, forgotten by that fickle creature, and filled with the mortal regret of having confessed her love to him.'

This historic speech, of which we have recorded only the principal points, was (needless to say) interrupted a score of times by Fabrice. He was desperately in love, and he was also utterly convinced that he had never loved before seeing Clélia, and that his life's destiny was to live only for her.

The reader can no doubt imagine the beautiful things he was saying, when the maid warned her mistress that half-past eleven had just struck, and the General might return at any moment; the parting was very painful.

'I may be seeing you for the last time,' Clélia told the prisoner; 'a move which is obviously in the interests of the Raversi faction may provide you with a cruel means of proving you are not inconstant.' Clélia left Fabrice, choked by her

sobs and dying of shame at not being able to conceal them entirely from her maid and especially from the gaoler Grillo. A second conversation would only be possible when the General announced he was going to spend the evening in society; and because he had found it advisable, since Fabrice's imprisonment and the interest this aroused in the inquisitive courtiers, to suffer from a semi-permanent attack of gout, his excursions into the town, dependent as they were on a carefully calculated strategy, were often only decided upon at the moment of his stepping into his carriage.

After that evening in the marble chapel, Fabrice lived his life in a state of almost continuous rapture. There still seemed, it was true, to be tremendous obstacles in the path of his happiness, but when all was said and done he knew the supreme, and quite unexpected, joy of being loved by the divine creature who filled his every thought.

The third day after this interview the signals with the lamp finished very early, at about midnight. The instant they stopped, Fabrice almost had his head split open by a large leaden ball which was hurled over the upper part of the shutter covering his window, tearing its paper panes as it fell into his cell.

This very large ball was nowhere near as heavy as its size suggested; Fabrice opened it without difficulty and found a letter from the Duchess inside. Thanks to the intervention of the Archbishop, whom she flattered assiduously, she had bribed a soldier in the garrison of the fortress. This man was very skilful with a sling-shot; he either hoodwinked the sentries on duty at the corners and entrance of the Governor's *palazzo*, or came to some arrangement with them.

'You must escape using ropes: I tremble at giving you this strange piece of advice, for two whole months I've been putting off telling you this, but the official future grows darker every day, and we must prepare for the worst. By the way, begin signalling again with your lamp, straight away, to prove to us that you have received this dangerous letter; send P, B, and G (four, twelve, and two in the *Monaca* cipher); I won't breathe again until I've seen your signal; I'm at the tower, and we'll answer with N and O, seven and five. When you've seen

this reply, don't signal any more, but just concentrate on understanding my letter.'

Fabrice quickly obeyed, and sent the required signals, then he continued reading the letter.

'We must prepare for the worst; that's what I've been told by the three men whom I most trust, after I made them swear on the Gospel to tell me the truth, however cruel it might be for me. The first of these men threatened the surgeon who informed against you in Ferrara that he would set upon him with a knife; the second told you, on your return from Belgrate, that strictly speaking it would have been more prudent to put a bullet into that manservant who was walking through the wood singing and leading a handsome but rather skinny horse; the third you don't know, he's a highwayman I'm friendly with, a man of action if ever there was one, who's as brave as you are; that's why I especially asked him to tell me what you ought to do. All three told me, each without knowing that I had consulted the others, that it was better to risk breaking your neck than to spend another eleven years and four months in the constant fear of a highly probable poisoning.

'For a month you must practise climbing up and down a knotted rope in your cell. Then, one feast day, when the garrison of the fortress will have been given an extra ration of wine, you'll embark on the great enterprise. You will have three ropes of silk and hemp, as fine as a swan's quill, the first eighty feet long for climbing down the thirty-five feet between your window and the cluster of orange trees; the second of 300 feet (and that's the problem, because of the weight), for the 180 feet which is the height of the wall of the great tower; a third rope, of thirty feet, will get you down the ramparts. I spend all my time studying the great wall on the eastern, Ferrara, side; a crevice caused by an earthquake has been filled in with a buttress which provides *a sloping surface*. My highwayman assures me that he would undertake to come down on that side without too much difficulty, and at the cost of only a few scratches, by letting himself slide down the slope made by that buttress. The vertical drop is only twenty-eight feet at the very bottom; that side is the least well guarded.

‘However, on the whole, my highwayman, who’s escaped from prison three times and whom you’d like if you knew him, although he loathes people of your class, my highwayman, as I was saying, who’s as nimble and light as you are, thinks that he’d rather come down on the western side, immediately opposite the little *palazzo* which was once occupied by Fausta, and which you know well. What would make him choose that side is the fact that the wall, although it slopes only very slightly, is almost entirely covered with brushwood; there are sprigs of wood the size of your little finger which can certainly scratch if you aren’t careful, but which also provide excellent handholds. Just this morning I was examining that west side with an excellent telescope; the spot to choose is exactly beneath a new stone which was set into the top parapet two or three years ago. Coming vertically down from that stone, first you’ll find a bare expanse of about twenty feet; there you must move very slowly (imagine how my heart quails at giving you these terrible instructions, but courage consists in knowing how to choose the lesser evil, however appalling even that may be); after the bare stretch, you’ll encounter eighty or ninety feet of very large scrub, where birds can be seen flying about, then a space of thirty feet with nothing but grass, wallflowers, and nettles. After that, closer to the ground, there’s twenty feet of scrub, and finally twenty-five or thirty feet that have been recently plastered.

‘What would make me select that side is the fact that directly beneath the new stone in the top parapet there’s a wooden hut, built by a soldier in his garden, which the captain of the engineers employed at the fortress is trying to force him to pull down; this hut is seventeen feet high, and has a thatched roof which touches the great wall of the fortress. It’s this roof that tempts me; in the terrible event of an accident, it would break your fall. Once you’re there, you’ll be inside the ramparts, in an area which is not very carefully guarded; if you’re arrested there, fire your pistol and put up a fight for a few minutes. Your friend from Ferrara and another brave man, the one I call the highwayman, will have ladders, and won’t hesitate to scale that relatively low rampart and rush to your assistance.

'The rampart is only twenty-three feet high, and stands on a very broad bank. I'll be at the foot of this final wall with a good number of armed men.

'I'm hoping to send you five or six letters by the same means as this one. I shall constantly repeat the same things in different words, so that we may be in complete agreement. You can imagine what I feel when I tell you that the man who said you "should have shot the manservant" and who is, after all, the best of creatures and is overcome with remorse, believes you'll get away with just a broken arm. The highwayman, who has more experience of enterprises of this kind, thinks that if you're prepared to come down very slowly, above all without hurrying, your freedom will only cost you a few scratches. The real problem is to get some ropes to you; so I've been thinking about nothing else for the two weeks that this great idea has been occupying my every moment.

'I'm not going to reply to that lunatic message, the only stupid thing you've said in your whole life: "I don't want to escape!" The man who said you should have shot the manservant exclaimed that boredom must have made you lose your wits. I won't hide from you that we fear a very imminent danger which may possibly hasten the day of your escape. To inform you of this danger, the lamp will signal several times in a row: "The castle has caught fire!" You will reply: "Have my books been burnt?"'

This letter contained five or six more pages of details; it was written in microscopic handwriting on very fine paper.

That's all very fine and very well thought out, said Fabrice to himself; I owe an everlasting debt of gratitude to the Count and the Duchess; they may perhaps believe that I'm afraid, but I'm not going to escape. Has anyone ever escaped from a place where he's supremely happy, to rush into a terrible exile where he'll want for everything, even for air to breathe? What would I do after a month in Florence? I'd put on a disguise so I could hang about the gate of the fortress and try to catch sight of her!

The next morning Fabrice had a fright; he was standing at his window at about eleven o'clock, gazing at the magnificent landscape and waiting for the happy moment when he

could see Clélia, when Grillo came into his cell, quite out of breath.

'Quick, quick! Monsignore, lie down on your bed and pretend you're ill; three judges are on their way up here! They're going to interrogate you; think carefully before you speak; they're coming to *tie you up in knots*.'

As he was saying this Grillo hastily closed the little trapdoor in the shutter, pushed Fabrice on to his bed, and threw two or three cloaks over him.

'Tell them you feel very ill, and say very little; be sure to make them repeat the questions so you've time to think.'

The three judges came in. Three escaped convicts, thought Fabrice on seeing those mean countenances, not three judges. They were wearing long, black robes. They bowed gravely and without a word sat in the three chairs which were in the cell.

'Signor Fabrice del Dongo,' said the oldest, 'we deeply regret the melancholy mission that we are called upon to perform. We are here to inform you of the demise of his Excellency the Marquis del Dongo, your father, second Grand Majordomo, Major of the Lombardy-Venetian Kingdom, Knight Grand Cross of the orders of... etc., etc., etc.' Fabrice burst into tears; the judge continued:

'Her Ladyship the Marquise del Dongo, your mother, informs you of this event in a letter; but as she has included certain unseemly sentiments with the news, the Court of Justice, in a judgment delivered yesterday, decided that her letter will be communicated to you only in an excerpt, and it is that excerpt which Signor Bona, the clerk of the Court, is about to read to you.'

When the reading was finished, the judge approached the still-recumbent Fabrice, and let him see in his mother's letter the passages of which transcripts had just been read. Fabrice saw in the letter the words 'unjust imprisonment' and 'cruel punishment for a crime that is not a crime', and understood what had prompted the judges' visit. In any case, in his contempt for magistrates with no integrity, he said absolutely nothing to them other than:

'I am ill, gentlemen, I am extremely weak, and you will excuse me for not rising.'

When the judges had left Fabrice cried a great deal more, then said to himself: Am I a hypocrite? I thought I didn't love him.

That day and those that followed, Clélia was extremely sad; she called him several times, but barely had the spirit to say a few words to him. On the morning of the fifth day after the first meeting she told him that she would come that evening to the marble chapel.

'I can say only a very few words to you', she told him upon entering. She was trembling so much that she had to lean on her maid. After sending the latter back to the chapel door: 'You must give me your word of honour,' she added in a barely intelligible voice, 'you must give me your word of honour that you will obey the Duchess, and try to escape the day she orders you to do so and in the way she indicates, or tomorrow morning I will take refuge in a convent and I swear to you here that I shall never again speak to you in my entire life.'

Fabrice remained silent.

'Promise,' said Clélia with tears in her eyes, apparently quite overwrought, 'or else we're speaking to each other here for the last time. The life you've created for me is dreadful: you're here on account of me and every day may be your last.' At that moment Clélia was so weak that she was obliged to support herself on an enormous armchair which long ago had stood in the middle of the chapel for the use of the imprisoned prince; she was on the point of fainting.

'What must I promise?' asked Fabrice, with a defeated air.

'You know.'

'Then I swear to cast myself knowingly into dreadful misery, and condemn myself to live far from everything I love in this world.'

'Promise specific things.'

'Then I swear to obey the Duchess, and escape the day she chooses and in the manner she chooses. And what will become of me once I'm far from you?'

'Swear to escape, whatever happens.'

'What! Have you made up your mind to marry the Marquis Crescenzi as soon as I'm no longer here?'

'My God! What kind of feelings do you imagine I have?... But you must swear, or I'll never know another moment's peace.'

'Very well! I swear to escape from here the day Signora Sanseverina orders me to, and no matter what happens between now and then.'

When she had obtained this promise, Clélia felt so weak that she was forced to leave after having thanked Fabrice.

'Everything was in hand for my flight tomorrow morning,' she told him, 'if you were determined to stay. I would have been seeing you at this moment for the last time in my life, I had made that vow to the Madonna. Now, as soon as I can leave my room, I shall go and examine the terrible wall below the new stone in the parapet.'

The next day he found her so pale that he was deeply distressed. She told him, from the aviary window:

'Do not let us deceive ourselves, my dear; since our friendship is not without sin, I have no doubt that we are headed for misfortune. You will be caught trying to escape, and ruined for ever, if not worse; nevertheless we must obey the dictates of human prudence, which orders us to try everything. To climb down the outside of the great tower, you'll need a strong rope more than 200 feet in length. Despite all my efforts, since I learnt of the Duchess's plan, I've only been able to get hold of enough rope to reach about fifty feet. By a standing order of the Governor's, all the ropes found in the fortress are burned, and every evening the ropes from the wells are collected, even though they're so flimsy that they frequently break when they're pulling up their meagre burdens. But pray to God to forgive me, for I'm betraying my father, and, unnatural daughter that I am, I'm trying to do something which will be a mortal blow to him. Pray to God for me, and if your life is spared, swear an oath to devote all its moments to his glory.

'I've had this idea: a week from now I shall be leaving the fortress to attend the wedding of one of the Marquis Crescenzi's sisters. I shall return at night as is expected of me, but I shall do everything in my power not to come back until very late, and perhaps Barbone won't dare to inspect me too

closely. This wedding will be attended by the most important ladies of the court, among them, no doubt, Signora Sanseverina. In heaven's name, arrange for one of these ladies to give me a parcel containing ropes that are tightly packed together, not too thick, and reduced to the smallest possible volume. Even at the risk of a thousand deaths, I'll try any means, even the most dangerous, to bring this parcel of ropes into the fortress, in defiance, alas, of all my duties. If my father finds out about it, I shall never see you again; but whatever fate awaits me, I shall be happy—within the limits of a sister's affections—if I can help to save you.'

That very evening, by means of their nocturnal correspondence by lamp, Fabrice informed the Duchess of the unique opportunity there would be to bring a sufficient quantity of ropes into the fortress. But he begged her to keep it a secret, even from the Count, which struck her as strange. He's mad, thought the Duchess, prison has changed him, he's seeing everything in a tragic light. The following day a leaden ball shot by the slinger warned the prisoner of the greatest possible danger: the person who had undertaken to take in the ropes, he was told, was in fact quite literally saving his life. Fabrice lost no time in giving Clélia this news. The leaden ball also brought Fabrice a very exact drawing of the west wall down which he was to climb from the top of the great tower to the area enclosed by the bastions; from there it was fairly easy to escape, as the ramparts were only twenty-three feet high and fairly casually guarded. On the back of the drawing a magnificent sonnet was inscribed in small, fine handwriting: a noble spirit exhorted Fabrice to escape, and not to allow his soul to be contaminated and his body withered by the eleven years of captivity that he still had to endure.

At this point, an essential detail which partly explains how the Duchess found the courage to advise Fabrice to attempt such a dangerous escape, obliges us briefly to interrupt the story of this bold enterprise.

As is the case with any party not in power, the Raversi party was not very united. The Chevalier Riscara detested the Prosecutor Rassi, whom he blamed for having lost an important case for him in which, in point of fact, Riscara was in the

wrong. Through Riscara, the Prince received an anonymous report informing him that a copy of Fabrice's sentence had been officially communicated to the Governor of the fortress. The Marquise Raversi, that adroit party leader, was extremely put out by this false move, and had her friend the Public Prosecutor informed of it immediately; she considered it perfectly reasonable that he should want to extract something from the Minister Count Mosca, as long as Mosca remained in power. Undaunted, Rassi presented himself at the palace, confident that he would get away with just a kick or two; the Prince could not do without a clever legal expert, and Rassi had had exiled, as Liberals, a judge and a counsel who were the only men in the country capable of taking his place.

The Prince, beside himself, showered Rassi with insults and advanced upon him to hit him.

'Well, you see, the clerk made a careless mistake,' replied Rassi with complete self-possession; 'the thing's required by law, it ought to have been done the day after Signor del Dongo was committed to the fortress. That over-enthusiastic clerk must have imagined he'd slipped up, and then given me the covering letter to sign as a pure formality.'

'And you expect me to believe such barefaced lies?' exclaimed the infuriated Prince. 'Why don't you just admit that you've sold yourself to that rascal Mosca, and that's why he gave you the Cross. But by God you're going to pay for this, and not just with a few blows; I'll have you brought to trial, I'll have you dismissed.'

'I dare you to have me tried!' replied Rassi confidently, for he knew this was a sure way of calming the Prince; 'the law's on my side, and you don't have another Rassi to show you how to get round it. You won't dismiss me, because there are times when it's in your disposition to be severe; you're out for blood then, but at the same time you really want to keep the good opinion of reasonable Italians; their good opinion's a *sine qua non* for your ambitions. In short, you'll recall me the first time your disposition urges you to act with severity and, as usual, I'll secure you a sentence which will be perfectly legal and also satisfy your passions, passed by timid judges

who are reasonably honest men. Find another man in your realm who's as useful as I am!'

So saying, Rassi fled; he had got off with one well-applied blow from a ruler, and five or six kicks. After leaving the palace he set out for his estate at Riva; he was somewhat fearful of being stabbed during the period of the Prince's immediate anger but he had no doubt that within the fortnight a messenger would recall him to the capital. He used his time in the country to set up a secure way of corresponding with Count Mosca; he was desperately enamoured of the title of Baron, and he believed that the Prince had far too high an opinion of that once sublime thing, nobility, ever to confer it upon him, Rassi; whereas the Count, who was very proud of his birth, held in esteem only those nobles who could prove that their titles antedated the year 1400.

The Public Prosecutor was not mistaken in his expectations; he had spent barely a week on his estate when a friend of the Prince's, who happened to be passing, advised him to return to Parma without delay; the Prince received him with a laugh and then, assuming a very grave air, made him swear on the Gospel to keep secret everything that he, the Prince, was about to confide to him; Rassi swore with the utmost seriousness, whereupon the Prince, his eyes flaming with hatred, exclaimed that he would never be master in his own house as long as Fabrice del Dongo was alive.

'I cannot', he added, 'either send the Duchess away or endure her presence here; her eyes defy me and make it impossible for me to live.'

After letting the Prince explain himself at considerable length, Rassi, feigning intense embarrassment, finally exclaimed:

'Your Highness shall be obeyed of course, but the matter is most horribly difficult: there's no likelihood of condemning a del Dongo to death for the murder of a Giletti; it was already an astonishing achievement to have managed to get twelve years in the fortress for it. What's more, I suspect the Duchess of having found three of the peasants who were working at the dig in Sanguigna, and happened to be outside the ditch at the moment when that brigand Giletti attacked del Dongo.'

'And where are these witnesses?' enquired the Prince in annoyance.

'Hidden in Piedmont, I imagine. It would require a conspiracy against your Highness's life...'

'That has its dangers,' said the Prince, 'it gives people the idea.'

'Nevertheless,' replied Rassi with a feigned innocence, 'that's the whole of my official arsenal.'

'There's still poison...'

'But who is to administer it? That imbecile Conti?'

'Judging by what one hears, it wouldn't be the first time...'

'He'd have to be made angry first,' Rassi went on, 'and besides, when he dispatched the captain he wasn't yet thirty, he was in love, and he was infinitely less of a coward than nowadays. Of course, everything must give way to reasons of state, but taken unawares like this and on the spur of the moment, the only person I can think of to carry out the Sovereign's orders is one Barbone, the registry clerk of the prison, whom Signor del Dongo knocked down the day he arrived there.'

Once the Prince had been put at his ease, the conversation was endless; he concluded it by granting his Public Prosecutor a month's delay; Rassi had asked for two. The following day Rassi received a secret gift of 1,000 zecchini. He spent three days thinking; on the fourth day he came back to his original reasoning, which seemed to him self-evident: first, only Count Mosca will be prepared to keep his promise, because, in making me a baron, he isn't giving me anything he values; second, by warning him, I'm probably saving myself from committing a crime for which I've more or less been paid in advance; third, I'm avenging the first humiliating blows received by the Chevalier Rassi. The following night he communicated to Count Mosca his entire conversation with the Prince.

The Count was secretly courting the Duchess; it is perfectly true that he only visited her in her home once or twice a month, but almost every week, and whenever he was able to think up a reason for talking about Fabrice, the Duchess, accompanied by Chékina, would come and spend a few

moments in the Count's garden late in the evening. She was even able to deceive her coachman, who was devoted to her and believed she was paying a call at a neighbouring house.

Needless to say, after receiving the Prosecutor's terrible confidence the Count lost no time in sending the agreed signal to the Duchess. Although it was the middle of the night, she asked him, through Chékina, to come up immediately to her room. The Count, as delighted as a lover by this appearance of intimacy, nevertheless hesitated to tell the Duchess everything; he was afraid that the pain of it would drive her out of her mind.

After trying to find ways of softening the fatal news by half-hints, he finally told her everything; it was beyond his powers to keep secret something she wanted to know. For the past nine months extreme unhappiness had had a great influence on that passionate soul, it had fortified her, and the Duchess did not let herself give way to sobbing and moaning.

The following evening, she had the signal sent to Fabrice that signified great danger.

'The castle has caught fire.'

He replied perfectly correctly:

'Have my books been burnt?'

That same night she was lucky enough to succeed in sending him a letter enclosed in a leaden ball. One week later the marriage of the Marquis Crescenzi's sister was solemnized, and there the Duchess did something exceedingly rash, as we shall report in the appropriate place.

CHAPTER 21

Almost a year before the period of her misfortunes the Duchess had had a strange encounter: one evening when she was suffering from *la luna*, as the locals put it, she had set off on the spur of the moment for her villa at Sacca, beyond Colorno, on the hill overlooking the Po. She enjoyed planning improvements to this estate; she loved the vast forest which crowns the hill and stretches right up to the villa, and she occupied herself having paths made through it along picturesque routes.

'You'll find yourself abducted by brigands, beautiful Duchess,' said the Prince to her one day; 'it's impossible that a forest in which you are known to take walks should remain deserted.' The Prince glanced at the Count; he was trying to arouse his jealousy.

'I'm not afraid, Serene Highness,' replied the Duchess with an innocent air, 'when I walk in my woods; I comfort myself with this thought: I have never done anyone any harm, so who could hate me?' This remark was considered audacious; it recalled the insults proffered by the Liberals of the country, who were very insolent people.

On the day of the walk to which we are referring, the Duchess called to mind what the Prince had said when she noticed a very ill-dressed man following her through the wood at a distance. When, in continuing her walk, the Duchess took an unexpected side-turning, this stranger was so close to her that she felt afraid. Her first reaction was to call her gamekeeper whom she had left at a distance of a thousand paces, in the flower-garden close beside the villa. The stranger had time to approach her and throw himself at her feet. He was young and very handsome, although dreadfully badly dressed; his clothes had rents in them a foot long, but his eyes burned with the fire of a passionate soul.

'I've been condemned to death, I'm the physician Ferrante Palla, and I'm dying of hunger; so are my five children.'

The Duchess had noticed that he was terribly thin; but his eyes were so fine and filled with such tender exaltation that they banished any thought of crime. Pallagi,* she reflected, should certainly have given eyes like those to his St John in the Wilderness which he has just placed in the cathedral. Her idea about St John was suggested by Ferrante's incredible emaciation. The Duchess gave him three zecchini that she had in her purse, apologizing for offering him such a small sum; she had just paid her gardener's account. Ferrante thanked her effusively. 'Alas,' he told her, 'I once lived in cities and saw women of fashion; ever since the time when, by doing my duty as a citizen, I got myself sentenced to death, I've lived in the woods, and I was following you, not to beg or steal from you but like a savage who's fascinated by a heavenly beauty. It's so long since I saw a pair of beautiful white hands!'

'But do get up,' said the Duchess, for he had remained on his knees.

'Allow me to continue as I am,' replied Ferrante; 'this position proves to me that I'm not at present occupied in stealing, and it reassures me; for you must know that I steal for a living now that I've been prevented from practising my profession. But, at this moment, I'm only a simple mortal worshipping sublime beauty.' The Duchess realized that he was a bit mad, but she did not feel afraid; she could see in this man's eyes that his heart was full of ardour and goodness, and in any case she did not dislike extraordinary faces.

'I'm a physician, and I was having a love affair with the wife of Sarasine, the Parma apothecary: he caught us and threw her out, together with three children whom he suspected—with good reason—of being mine and not his. I've fathered two more since then. The mother and the five children live in the direst poverty in a sort of cabin I built with my own hands a league away from here, in the woods. For I must hide from the police, and the poor woman won't be parted from me. I was condemned to death, and quite justly; I was conspiring. I loathe the Prince, who's a tyrant. I didn't flee the country, I hadn't the money. My misfortunes are very much greater now, and I ought to have killed myself many times over; I

no longer love the unhappy woman who's given me five children and ruined herself on my account, I love another. But if I kill myself, the five children and their mother will literally die of hunger.' This man's words bore the stamp of sincerity.

'But what do you live on?' asked the Duchess compassionately.

'The children's mother spins; the eldest girl gets her food at a farm belonging to some Liberals, where she tends the sheep; as for me, I rob people on the road between Piacenza and Genoa.'

'How do you reconcile robbery with your Liberal principles?'

'I keep a record of the people I rob, and if ever I have anything, I shall repay them the sums that I've stolen. I consider that a Tribune of the common people, like myself, does work which, because of its danger, is well worth 100 lire a month; so I'm very careful not to take more than 1,200 lire a year. No, I'm mistaken, I do steal a small amount more than that, for by this means I can meet the costs of printing my works.

'What works?'

'"Will — ever have a Chamber and a Budget?"'

'What!' exclaimed the Duchess in astonishment, 'you, sir, you're the famous Ferrante Palla, one of the greatest poets of our century!'

'Famous perhaps, but extremely unfortunate, that much is certain.'

'And a man of your talents, sir, is forced to rob in order to live!'

'Perhaps that's the reason I've some talent. Until now, all our writers who have made a name were people in the employ of the government or the religion they were trying to undermine. As for me, first, I risk my life; secondly, imagine, Signora, the thoughts that torment me when I'm about to rob someone! Am I doing the right thing? I ask myself. Does a Tribune perform services that are really worth 100 lire a month? I have two shirts, the coat I'm wearing, and a few poor weapons, and I'm certain to die by the rope: I dare to

believe that I'm disinterested. I would be happy were it not for this fatal love which no longer lets me feel anything but misery with the mother of my children. I find poverty a burden because it's ugly: I love fine clothes, white hands...'

He looked at the Duchess's hands in such a way that she became afraid.

'Goodbye sir,' she said to him; 'can I be of any service to you in Parma?'

'From time to time consider this question: His job is to awaken people's hearts and prevent their being lulled by the delusive, purely material happiness that monarchies provide. Is the service he renders his fellow citizens worth 100 lire a month?... My misfortune is to love,' he said with great gentleness, 'and for almost two years now my heart has been occupied by you alone, but until today I had seen you without making you afraid.' And he took to his heels with an amazing speed that astonished and reassured the Duchess. The police would have trouble catching him, she thought; indeed, he must be mad.

'He is mad,' her servants told her; 'we've all known for a long time that the poor man's in love with the Signora; when the Signora's here, we see him wandering about in the upper parts of the wood and, as soon as she leaves, he invariably comes and sits in the same spots where the Signora stopped to rest; he carefully picks up any flowers which might have dropped from her bouquet, and he wears them for a long time in his awful old hat.'

'And you never said anything to me about this mad behaviour', remarked the Duchess, almost in a tone of reproach.

'We were afraid that the Signora would tell Minister Mosca. That poor Ferrante's such a nice fellow! He's never hurt a soul, and because he loves our Napoleon, they've condemned him to death.'

She never breathed a word about this meeting to Mosca and, as it was the first secret she had kept from him in four years, she was forever having to stop short in the middle of a sentence. She returned to Sacca with some gold, but Ferrante never appeared. Two weeks later she came again: Ferrante, after following her for a little while, cavorting about in the

wood at a distance of a hundred paces, swooped down upon her with the speed of a sparrow-hawk and, as on the first occasion, fell to his knees.

'Where were you a fortnight ago?'

'In the mountains beyond Novi, robbing mule-drivers returning from Milan where they'd sold some oil.'

'Take this purse.'

Ferrante opened the purse, took a zecchino from it which he kissed and put inside his shirt, then handed back the purse.

'You're giving me back this purse and you're a robber!'

'Of course; that's my system; I must never have more than 100 lire; now, the mother of my children has eighty at present and I have twenty-five, I've five lire too much, and if I were hanged at this moment I should feel remorse. I took this coin because it comes from you and I love you.'

The intonation of this very simple statement was perfect. He really does love me, thought the Duchess.

He seemed quite distraught that day. He said that there were people in Parma who owed him 600 lire, money that he could use to fix up his cabin, in which at present his poor children were forever catching cold.

'But I can lend you those 600 lire', said the Duchess, who was deeply affected.

'But then as I'm a public figure, wouldn't my political enemies be able to slander me, and say I'm taking bribes?'

The Duchess, full of pity, offered him a hiding-place in Parma if he would swear not, at present, to exercise his tribuneship in that city; that above all he would not carry out any of the death sentences which, he said, he had *in petto*.

'And if I'm hanged as a consequence of my rashness,' said Ferrante seriously, 'all those rascals, who do so much harm to the people, will live many more years, and who will be to blame? What will my Father say to me when he bids me welcome in heaven?'

The Duchess spoke at length about his children who might become mortally ill because of the damp; eventually he accepted the offer of a hiding-place in Parma.

The Duke Sanseverina, in the course of the single half-day he had spent in Parma since his marriage, had shown the

Duchess a very curious hiding-place that exists in the southern corner of the *palazzo* that bears his name. The exterior wall, which dates from the Middle Ages, is eight feet thick; it has been hollowed out on the inside, making a secret cavity twenty feet high but only two feet wide. This cavity is very near the spot where the visitor may admire that famous reservoir, dating from the twelfth century, that is mentioned in all the travel journals. It was made at the time of the siege of Parma by the Emperor Sigismund,* and was later enclosed within the walls of the Palazzo Sanseverina.

Access to the hiding-place is gained by moving an enormous stone mounted on an iron bar running through its centre. The Duchess was so deeply touched by Ferrante's madness and by the fate of his children, for whom he obstinately refused all gifts with any value, that for quite a long period she allowed him to use this secret place. She saw him again a month later, once more in the wood at Sacca, and since, on that occasion, he was a little calmer, he recited to her one of his sonnets which she thought as fine as, or superior to, any of the most beautiful poems written in Italy during the last two centuries. Ferrante was granted several meetings; but his love grew more fervent, becoming importunate, and the Duchess realized that this passion was following the course of any passion which is given the chance of feeling a glimmering of hope. She sent him back to the woods and forbade him to speak to her; he obeyed immediately, with the most perfect docility. That was how matters stood when Fabrice was arrested. Three days later, as night was falling, a Capuchin friar presented himself at the gate of the Palazzo Sanseverina; he said he had an important secret to communicate to the mistress of the house. The Duchess was so unhappy that she had him shown in: it was Ferrante. 'There's a fresh iniquity happening here that the people's Tribune ought to enquire into', this man crazed with love said to her. 'But if, on the other hand, I act as a private individual,' he went on, 'I can only give my lady the Duchess Sanseverina my life, and that is what I offer her.'

The Duchess was deeply touched by this totally sincere devotion on the part of a robber and a madman. She spent

a long time talking to this man who was considered the greatest poet of northern Italy, and she shed many tears. Here's a man who understands my heart, she thought. The following day he reappeared, again at the hour of the *Ave Maria*, disguised as a servant wearing livery.

'I haven't left Parma; I've heard people talking of an abomination that my tongue shall not repeat; but here I am. Consider, Signora, what you are refusing! The being who stands before you is not a plaything of the court, he is a man!' He was on his knees as he uttered these words with an air that gave them added force. 'Yesterday I said to myself,' he added, 'she wept in my presence; therefore, she's a little less unhappy!'

'But sir, consider what dangers surround you: you'll be arrested in this city!'

'The Tribune's answer will be: "what does life matter, Signora, when duty calls?" The unhappy man, who suffers the pain of no longer feeling any passion for virtue now that he is consumed by the fires of love, will add: "Fabrice, my lady, a man with a great heart, is perhaps about to die; don't reject another such man who offers himself to you! Here is a body of iron and a heart which fears nothing in the world but your displeasure."''

'If you speak to me again of your feelings, I shall shut my door to you for ever.'

The Duchess did actually have the idea, that evening, of telling Ferrante she would make his children a small allowance, but she was afraid he would kill himself as soon as he left her presence.

Hardly had he departed than, full of morbid presentiments, she said to herself: I too may die, and I pray God that I could do so, and soon, if only I could find a man worthy of the name to whom I could entrust my poor Fabrice.

A thought occurred to the Duchess: taking a sheet of paper, she acknowledged, in a document which included the few legal expressions known to her, having received from Signor Ferrante Palla the sum of 25,000 lire, on the express condition of her paying a life annuity of 1,500 lire to Signora Sarasine and her five children. The Duchess added: 'In addi-

tion, I bequeath an annuity of 300 lire to each of his five children, on condition that Ferrante Palla will provide my nephew Fabrice del Dongo with medical attention, and will be a brother to him. I request him to do this.' She signed the paper, antedated it by a year, and put it away.

Two days later Ferrante reappeared. It was at the time when the entire city was seething with rumours of Fabrice's imminent execution. Would this melancholy ceremony be carried out inside the fortress, or under the trees of the public promenade? That evening a number of working-class men took a stroll in front of the fortress gates, trying to see whether a scaffold was being erected; this spectacle had filled Ferrante with emotion. He found the Duchess in floods of tears and quite unable to speak; she greeted him with a gesture and indicated a seat. Ferrante, who was dressed that day as a Capuchin friar, was superb; instead of taking the seat he fell to his knees and prayed to God in a devout murmur. At a moment when the Duchess seemed a little calmer, without altering his position, he briefly interrupted his prayer to say these words: 'Once again he offers his life.'

'Think about what you're saying', exclaimed the Duchess, with that hollow-eyed look which, following upon tears, declares that anger is taking over from grief.

'He offers his life to thwart the consummation of Fabrice's fate, or to avenge it.'

'There might be circumstances', replied the Duchess, 'in which I could accept the sacrifice of your life.'

She was gazing at him with grim attention. A spark of joy gleamed in his eyes, and he quickly stood up, raising his arms to heaven. The Duchess went to fetch a piece of paper hidden in the secret compartment of a large walnut cupboard. 'Read this', she told Ferrante. It was the bequest to his children we have already mentioned.

Ferrante's tears and sobs prevented him from reading to the end; he fell to his knees.

'Give me back that document,' said the Duchess, and then, in his presence, she burned it in the flame of the candle.

'If you're caught and executed,' she added, 'my name mustn't be involved, it's much too dangerous for you.'

'Happiness for me is to die harming the tyrant, but a far greater happiness is to die for you. With this stated and clearly understood, be so good as to make no further mention of this matter of money; it would have insulting implications in my eyes.'

'If you are compromised, I may be too,' the Duchess continued, 'and Fabrice as well; it's for that reason, and not because I doubt your courage, that I require that the man who is breaking my heart be poisoned and not killed with a weapon. For the same reason which is important to me, I order you to do everything you possibly can to save yourself.'

'I shall carry out your orders faithfully, exactly, and prudently. I foresee, my lady, that my revenge will be blended with yours; even were it otherwise, I should still carry out your orders faithfully, exactly, and prudently. I may not succeed, but I shall employ all the strength of my manhood.'

'It's a matter of poisoning Fabrice's murderer.'

'I'd guessed as much, and during the twenty-seven months I've been leading this abominable life of vagrancy, I've often dreamed of doing such a thing on my own account.'

'If I am discovered and condemned as an accomplice,' continued the Duchess in a tone full of pride, 'I don't want anyone to be able to accuse me of having seduced you. I order you not to try to see me again until the time comes for our vengeance; you must not kill him before I give you the signal. His death at this moment, for example, far from being of use to me, would be disastrous. Probably his death ought not to occur for several months, but it will occur. I insist that he die by poison, and I would prefer to let him live rather than see him be killed by gunshot. For reasons that I do not wish to explain to you, I insist that your life be saved.'

Ferrante was overjoyed at this authoritative tone used by the Duchess to address him; his eyes shone with intense happiness. As we have said, he was horribly thin, but it was clear that he had been extremely handsome in his early youth, and he imagined he still was what he had been in the past. Am I mad, he asked himself, or might the Duchess intend that some day, when I have given her this proof of my devotion, she will make me the happiest of men? And in point of fact,

why not? Am I not worth every bit as much as that puppet Mosca, who in the event has not been able to do anything for her, not even arrange for Monsignore Fabrice's escape?

'I may want him dead as early as tomorrow,' continued the Duchess, still in the same authoritative tone. 'You know that huge reservoir of water by the corner of the *palazzo*, close to the hiding-place you've occasionally used: there's a secret way of letting all that water pour into the streets; well that shall be the signal of my vengeance. You will see, if you are here in Parma, or if you are living in the woods you will hear tell of it, that the great reservoir of the Palazzo Sanseverina has burst. Then you must act at once, but by poison, and above all risk your own life as little as possible. No one must ever know I have had a hand in this affair.'

'Words are useless,' replied Ferrante with an enthusiasm he could barely control; 'I have already decided the means I shall employ. The life of this man is to me more detestable than it was, since I shall not dare to see you again as long as he is alive. I shall await the signal of the reservoir flooding the streets.' He gave a hasty bow and left the room. The Duchess watched him go.

When he was in the next room, she called him back.

'Ferrante!' she cried, 'you sublime creature!'

He returned, as though impatient at being detained; his countenance was superb at that instant.

'And your children?'

'Signora, they will be richer than I am; you will perhaps make them some small allowance.'

'Here,' said the Duchess, handing him a sort of large case made of olive wood; 'here are all the diamonds I have left; they're worth 50,000 lire.'

'Ah, Signora, you humiliate me!...' said Ferrante with a horrified gesture, and his expression changed completely.

'I shall never see you again before the event; take them, that is what I wish,' added the Duchess in a haughty manner that terrified Ferrante; he put the case into his pocket and left.

He had closed the door. The Duchess called him back once again and he entered with an air of unease; she was standing

in the middle of the drawing-room, and she threw herself into his arms. Ferrante, after a moment, was on the point of fainting from joy; the Duchess freed herself from his embrace and with a glance showed him the door.

That's the only man who has ever understood me, she thought; Fabrice would have behaved like that, had he been able to understand me.

There were two points about the Duchess's character: what she had once wanted, she always wanted; and she never reconsidered anything once she had made up her mind about it. She would quote in this connection a saying of her first husband, the amiable General Pietranera: 'What disrespect towards myself!' he used to say. 'Why should I believe I'm cleverer today than I was when I first made this decision?'

From that moment a sort of gaiety was once again evident in the Duchess's character. Before the fateful decision, wherever her spirit journeyed, whenever she observed something new, she was conscious of her inferiority *vis-à-vis* the Prince, of her weakness, of her credulity; the Prince, as she saw it, had deceived her despicably, and Count Mosca, with his courtier's instincts had, albeit innocently, aided and abetted the Prince. As soon as the revenge had been determined she became conscious of her own strength; each step taken by her spirit gave her happiness. It seems probable to me that the immoral happiness the Italians find in revenge is related to that nation's strength of imagination; the inhabitants of other countries do not precisely forgive, they forget.

The Duchess did not see Palla again until towards the end of Fabrice's imprisonment. As the reader will perhaps have guessed, the idea of escaping came from him. In the woods some two leagues from Sacca stood a partly ruined medieval tower, more than 100 feet in height; before he spoke to the Duchess a second time about escape, Ferrante begged her to send Ludovic, with some trustworthy men, to set up a series of ladders beside this tower. In the presence of the Duchess he climbed up it by the ladders, and then came down it on a simple knotted rope; he repeated the experiment three times, then again explained his idea. A week later, Ludovic also tried out the descent of this old tower by means of a knotted rope,

and it was then that the Duchess communicated the idea to Fabrice.

During the final days before the attempt at escape, which might bring about the death of the prisoner in more ways than just one, the Duchess knew not a moment's peace except when she had Ferrante at her side; the courage of this man galvanized her own; but it will readily be understood that she felt she must conceal this strange partnership from the Count. She was afraid, not that he would refuse to co-operate, but that she would be upset by his objections, which would reinforce her own anxieties. What! To choose as a close advisor a man whom everyone knew was mad, and who was under sentence of death! And, added the Duchess to herself, a man who, afterwards, might do such strange things! Ferrante was in her drawing-room when the Count told her about the Prince's conversation with Rassi; and, when the Count had gone it was all she could do to stop Ferrante from leaving immediately to carry out a dreadful purpose.

'Now I am strong,' exclaimed the madman; 'I no longer have any doubt that this deed is justified!'

'But, in the moment of anger that must inevitably follow, Fabrice would be put to death!'

'But that way we would spare him the danger of this escape; it's feasible, indeed easy,' he added, 'but this young man has no experience.'

The marriage was celebrated of the Marquis Crescenzi's sister, and at the party given to mark that occasion the Duchess met Clélia and was able to speak to her without arousing suspicion among the fashionable guests. The Duchess herself gave the parcel of ropes to Clélia in the garden, where the ladies had gone for a moment for a little fresh air. These ropes, half hemp and half silk, had been made with extreme care; they were knotted and were very thin and reasonably flexible; Ludovic had tested their strength and every one of them could carry a weight of eight hundredweight. They had been packed in such a way as to form several parcels each shaped like a quarto volume; Clélia took them, and promised the Duchess that everything humanly possible would be done to ensure that they reached the Farnese Tower.

'But your timid nature makes me apprehensive; and besides,' added the Duchess politely, 'why should you care about a stranger?'

'Signor del Dongo is in trouble, and *I promise you that he shall be saved by me!*'

But the Duchess, who placed but little reliance on the presence of mind of a young twenty-year-old, had taken other precautions which she was most careful not to mention to the Governor's daughter. As one would expect, the Governor was present at the party celebrating the marriage of the Marquis Crescenzi's sister. The Duchess told herself that if she arranged for him to be given a strong narcotic, the first thing people might think was that he had suffered an apoplectic seizure, and then, instead of his being put into his carriage to return to the fortress, it might be possible, if one went about it with a little ingenuity, to make it seem a better idea to use a litter, which by chance would be available in the house where the party was taking place. There would also be a number of quick-witted men there, dressed like servants at the party, who, in the general commotion, would obligingly volunteer to transport the sick man all the way up to his *palazzo*, which was situated at such a great height. These men, under the direction of Ludovic, were carrying a considerable number of ropes, cleverly concealed beneath their coats. It is clear that the Duchess's mind had become quite unhinged since she had begun to think seriously about Fabrice's escape. The danger threatening that precious being was too great for her soul to bear, and above all had continued for too long. By her excessive precautions she risked making the escape miscarry, as we shall see. Everything happened as she had planned, the only difference being that the effect of the narcotic was too powerful; everybody, even those with medical knowledge, believed that the General had actually suffered an apoplectic seizure.

Fortunately Clélia, who was in despair, never entertained the slightest suspicion of the Duchess's most criminal venture. The confusion was so great at the moment when the litter containing the moribund General was brought through the fortress gates that Ludovic and his men entered without

hindrance; they were only searched as a matter of form at the 'Slave's Bridge'. When they had carried the General right up to his bed, they were taken to the servants' hall, where the staff treated them handsomely; but after that meal, which did not finish until nearly morning, it was explained to them that prison regulations required them to be locked up in the lower rooms of the *palazzo* for the remainder of the night; they would be set free after sunrise the next morning by the Governor's second-in-command.

These men had managed to give Ludovic the ropes they had been carrying, but Ludovic found it extremely difficult to attract Clélia's attention even for a second. Eventually, at a time when she was passing from one room into another, he made certain she saw him setting down some packets of rope in a dark corner of one of the first-floor reception rooms. Clélia was profoundly struck by this strange circumstance, and immediately formed some dreadful suspicions.

'Who are you?' she asked Ludovic. And, upon hearing the latter's exceedingly ambiguous reply, she added:

'I ought to have you arrested; you or your men have poisoned my father!... Tell me this instant what kind of poison you used, so that the physician of the fortress may administer the proper remedies; tell me this instant, or else you and your accomplices shall never leave this fortress!'

'The Signorina has no cause to be alarmed,' replied Ludovic in the most urbane and courteous manner; 'there's no question of poison; someone was so rash as to give the General a dose of laudanum, and it appears that the servant responsible for this criminal act put a few drops too many into the glass; we shall reproach ourselves eternally on this account but the Signorina may rest assured that, thanks be to heaven, there's no danger whatsoever; his Excellency the Governor should be treated for having mistakenly taken an overdose of laudanum; but I have the honour to repeat to the Signorina that the footman entrusted with the execution of this crime did not use real poisons, as did Barbone when he attempted to poison Monsignore Fabrice. There was no intention of seeking revenge for the danger to which Monsignore Fabrice was exposed; the incompetent footman was

given only a flask containing laudanum, the Signorina has my sworn oath! But it must be clearly understood that if I were interrogated officially, I should deny everything.

‘Moreover, if the Signorina were to breathe a word to anyone at all, were it only to that excellent Don Cesare, about laudanum and poison, Fabrice will be killed by the Signorina’s very own hand. She will render every plan of escape impossible, and the Signorina knows better than I that it’s not simply with laudanum that they want to poison Monsignore; she knows also that someone has granted a delay of only a month for this crime to be accomplished, and that already more than a week has passed since the fatal order was received. So, if she has me arrested, or if she just says one word to Don Cesare or anyone else, she sets back all our projects by much more than a month, and I have good reason to say that she will kill Monsignore Fabrice with her own hand.’

Clélia was terrified by Ludovic’s strange calm.

So, here I am having a proper conversation, she reflected, with the man who poisoned my father, and who uses polite turns of phrase in addressing me! And it’s love that has led me to all these crimes!...

Her remorse left her with barely the strength to speak; she said to Ludovic:

‘I’m going to lock you in this room. I’ll hurry to the doctor and tell him it’s just laudanum, but, good God! how shall I explain how I myself found this out? Then I’ll come back and let you out. But,’ said Clélia, running back to the door, ‘did Fabrice know anything about the laudanum?’

‘Good heavens no, Signorina, he would never have agreed to it. Besides, what would have been the point of an unnecessary confidence? We are acting with the most extreme caution. It’s a question of saving Monsignore’s life, he’s going to be poisoned within the next three weeks; the order came from someone who usually encounters no obstacles to his desires; and, to tell the Signorina everything, they say it was the terrible Public Prosecutor Rassi who received this order.’

Horror-stricken, Clélia took to her heels: she placed such reliance in the absolute integrity of Don Cesare that, after

taking a certain precaution, she risked telling him that the General had been given laudanum, and not something else. Without answering or questioning her, Don Cesare hurried to the doctor.

Clélia returned to the drawing-room where she had locked Ludovic, intending to question him closely about the laudanum. She found he was no longer there; he had managed to escape. On a table she saw a purse filled with gold coins and a little box containing various kinds of poison. The sight of these poisons made her shudder. How do I know, she thought, that they've given nothing but laudanum to my father, and that the Duchess hasn't tried to take revenge for Barbone's attempt?

Good God! she exclaimed, here I am having dealings with my father's poisoners! And I'm letting them escape! And perhaps that man, if he'd been interrogated, would have confessed to something other than laudanum.

Clélia promptly fell to her knees, burst into tears, and addressed a fervent prayer to the Madonna.

Meanwhile the fortress doctor, very much surprised by the information he had received from Don Cesare that it was only laudanum he had to reckon with, administered the appropriate remedies which soon caused the most alarming symptoms to disappear. As dawn was breaking the General began to come to his senses. His first action that showed he was conscious was to heap insults upon the Colonel who was second-in-command at the fortress, and who had dared issue some exceedingly simple orders while the General lay unconscious.

Next the Governor flew into a tremendous rage with a kitchen-maid who, on bringing him some broth, dared to utter the word 'apoplexy'.

'Am I of an age', he shouted, 'to suffer an apoplectic fit? Only my worst enemies could enjoy spreading that kind of rumour. And anyway, have I been bled, that even slanderous tongues should dare speak of apoplexy?'

Fabrice, deeply absorbed in preparations for his escape, could not make out the strange noises that filled the fortress when the half-dead Governor was being brought in to it. At first he had some idea that his sentence had been changed,

and that they were coming to put him to death. Then, seeing that nobody appeared in his cell, he thought that Clélia had been betrayed, that on her return to the fortress the ropes she was probably carrying in had been taken from her, in short, that his escape plans would henceforth be impossible. The next morning at dawn a man he did not know came into his cell and, without saying a word, deposited a basket of fruit in it; concealed beneath the fruit lay the following letter:

'Filled with the most intense remorse for what has been done, not, thanks be to heaven, with my consent, but as a result of an idea of mine, I have made a vow to the blessed Virgin that if through her holy intercession my father is saved, I will never refuse to carry out his orders; I will marry the Marquis as soon as he asks me to do so, and I will never see you again. However, I believe it my duty to complete what has been begun. Next Sunday, on returning from the Mass where you will be taken at my request (be sure to prepare your soul, for you may kill yourself during that difficult venture), on returning from Mass, I repeat, delay for as long as you can the moment when you go back to your cell; in it you will find all you need to carry out what has been planned. If you perish, it will break my heart! Will you blame me for having contributed to your death? Did not the Duchess herself tell me on several occasions that the Raversi faction now has the upper hand? They plan to bind the Prince to them by means of a cruel deed which will divide him forever from Count Mosca. The Duchess, in tears, has sworn to me that no other recourse remains; you will die if you do nothing. I can no longer look at you, I have sworn an oath; but if on Sunday towards evening you see me at the usual window dressed entirely in black, it will be the signal that, in so far as my feeble powers allow, everything will be ready for that night. After eleven o'clock, perhaps not until midnight or one in the morning, a little lamp will appear at my window; that will be the decisive moment; commend yourself to the protection of your patron saint, quickly put on the priest's clothing you have been given, and go.

'Farewell, Fabrice, I shall be at prayer, and weeping the most bitter tears, you may be certain, while you are in such

extreme danger. If you die, I shall not survive you; good God! What am I saying? But if you succeed, I shall never see you again. After Mass on Sunday you will find money, poisons, ropes in your cell, sent by that terrible woman who loves you passionately, and who has assured me no less than three times that this is what has to be done. May God keep you, and the blessed Virgin!

As a gaoler Fabio Conti was always uneasy, always sick at heart, always dreaming that one of his prisoners had escaped; he was loathed by everyone inside the fortress; but since misfortune inspires all men with the same ideas, the poor prisoners, even those who were chained in dungeons three feet high, three feet wide and eight feet long, in which they could neither stand nor sit, even they, I repeat, had the idea of asking for a *Te Deum* to be sung at their expense when they learnt that their Governor was out of danger. Two or three of these wretches wrote sonnets in honour of Fabio Conti. Oh! The power of misfortune over men! Let he who would blame them be brought by his destiny to spend a year in a dungeon three feet high, with eight ounces of bread a day and *fasting* every Friday!

Clélia, who never left her father's room except to pray in the chapel, said that the Governor had decided there would be celebrations only on the Sunday. On the morning of that Sunday Fabrice was present at the Mass and at the *Te Deum*; in the evening there were fireworks, and down in the ground-floor rooms of the *palazzo* the soldiers were given four times the amount of wine authorized by the Governor. Some unknown person had even sent several barrels of brandy that the soldiers broached. The generosity of the soldiers who were getting drunk could not allow the five doing sentry-duty outside the *palazzo* to suffer on that account; as soon as they reached their sentry-box a trusty servant gave them wine, and no one knows whose hand also provided a glass of brandy to those going on duty at midnight and throughout the remainder of the night; in each case the brandy bottle was absent-mindedly left beside the sentry-box (as was established in the subsequent enquiry).

The commotion lasted longer than Clélia had expected, and it was almost one o'clock when Fabrice, who a week

earlier had sawn through two bars of his window (the one not overlooking the aviary), began to take down the shutter; he was working almost over the heads of the sentries guarding the Governor's *palazzo*, but they heard nothing. He had only made some additional knots in the immense rope needed to climb down that terrible height of 180 feet. He wound this rope across his chest and over one shoulder; being so huge in bulk it was very much in his way; the knots prevented its being compressed and it stuck out more than eighteen inches from his body. Here's the real obstacle, he thought.

Having arranged this rope as best he could, Fabrice took the one with which he planned to climb down the thirty-five feet separating his window from the platform where the Governor's *palazzo* stood. But since, however drunk the sentries might be, he could not exactly climb down right on to their heads, he left, as we have said, by the other window in his cell, the one looking out over the roof of a huge kind of guardhouse. Spurred by an invalid's odd fancy, General Fabio Conti, as soon as he had been able to speak, had ordered 200 soldiers moved into this former guardhouse, which had been out of commission for a century. He said that, after having poisoned him, someone now meant to murder him in his bed, and the 200 soldiers were supposed to guard him. The effect of this unforeseen measure on Clélia's feelings may be imagined; that pious young girl was very much aware of the extent to which she was betraying her father, a father who had just been nearly poisoned in the interests of the prisoner she loved. She almost saw, in the unexpected arrival of these 200 men, a decree of Providence which forbade her to proceed any further and to give Fabrice his freedom.

But everyone in Parma was talking about the imminent death of the prisoner. This gloomy topic had even been discussed at the party given to celebrate the marriage of Signora Giulia Crescenzi. If, for a trifle such as that—an ill-considered sword-thrust given to an actor—a man of Fabrice's birth was not set free after nine months of prison, even though he enjoyed the protection of the Prime Minister, it was because politics were involved in his case. Therefore, people had said, it was pointless to think about him any more; if it didn't suit

the authorities to have him put to death in public, he'd soon die of a sickness. A locksmith who was summoned to General Fabio Conti's *palazzo* spoke of Fabrice as of a prisoner who had long since been done away with, and whose death was being hushed up for political reasons. This man's remarks decided Clélia.

CHAPTER 22

During the course of the day Fabrice was assailed by some serious and unpleasant thoughts, but as he heard the hours strike that brought him closer to the moment of action, he felt cheerful and ready to begin. The Duchess had written to him that he would find the fresh air a shock, and that once he was out of his cell he might be unable to carry on; if that happened, it was better to risk being recaptured than fall from the top of a 180-foot wall. If I do have that bad luck, reflected Fabrice, I'll lie down beside the parapet and sleep for an hour, then I'll start again; since I've sworn to Clélia to try it, I'd rather fall from the top of a rampart, no matter how high, than be forever wondering about the taste of the bread I'm eating. What horrible pains you must suffer before the end, when you die by poison! Fabio Conti wouldn't have any scruples, he'd make them give me the arsenic he uses to kill the rats in his fortress.

Towards midnight one of those dense, white fogs which the Po sometimes casts over its banks spread first right across the city, and then reached the flat roof and the bastions in the centre of which the great tower of the fortress rises up. It looked to Fabrice as if, from the parapet round the flat roof, it would no longer be possible to see the little acacias that edged the gardens the soldiers had made at the foot of the 180-foot wall. Now that's excellent, he thought.

Shortly after half-past twelve had struck, the signal of the tiny lamp appeared at the aviary window. Fabrice was ready to act; he crossed himself, then tied on to his bed the short rope intended to help him climb down the thirty-five feet separating him from the flat roof on which the *palazzo* stood. He encountered no problems in reaching the roof of the guardhouse, occupied since the preceding day by the reinforcement of 200 men already mentioned. Unfortunately the soldiers, at twelve forty-five as it then was, were still not asleep; as he tiptoed across the roof of large pantiles, Fabrice could hear them saying that the devil was on the roof and that

they'd better try to kill him with a musket-shot. A few voices asserted that this was a most impious wish, while others declared that if they fired their muskets without killing anything, the Governor would put them all in prison for having alarmed the garrison unnecessarily. The result of all this fine argumentation was that Fabrice walked across the roof as quickly as possible, and made a great deal more noise. It is a fact that at the moment when, hanging on his rope, he passed in front of the windows (luckily at a distance of four or five feet because of the overhanging roof) the windows were bristling with bayonets. Some have claimed that Fabrice, crazy as ever, had the idea of pretending to be the devil, and flung a handful of zecchini to the soldiers. What is certain is that he had scattered zecchini over the floor of his cell, and he had also, in crossing from the Farnese Tower to the parapet, scattered them over the flat roof, so as to give himself the chance of distracting any soldiers who might set off in his pursuit.

When he had reached the flat roof and was surrounded by sentries who routinely shout an entire sentence every quarter of an hour—'all's well at my post'—he walked towards the parapet on the west side and searched for the new stone.

What seems incredible and could raise doubts about the event, had its outcome not been witnessed by an entire city, was that the sentries stationed along the parapet did not see and arrest Fabrice; as a matter of fact the fog we have already mentioned was beginning to rise, and Fabrice has said that when he was on the flat roof it seemed to him that the fog had already reached half-way up the Farnese Tower. But this fog was not thick, and he could quite clearly see the sentries, some of whom were walking about. He added that, as if impelled by a supernatural force, he positioned himself boldly between two sentries who were quite close to one another. He calmly unwound the big rope he was carrying round his body and which twice became tangled; it took him a long time to disentangle it and lay it out along the parapet. He could hear the soldiers talking all round him, and was quite determined to stab any who approached him. 'I wasn't in the least anxious,' he added, 'I felt as if I were carrying out a ceremony.'

When he had finally disentangled his rope he tied it to an opening made for draining rainwater through the parapet and, climbing up on to that parapet, prayed fervently to God; then, like a hero of the days of chivalry, he thought for a moment of Clélia. How different I am, he said to himself, from the fickle, libertine Fabrice who came here nine months ago! Finally he started to climb down that astonishing height. He was moving automatically, he said, as he would have done in broad daylight, climbing down in front of friends to win a wager. About half-way down, he suddenly felt his arms lose their strength; he believes that he even let go of the rope for an instant, but he soon caught hold of it again; he may perhaps, he said, have held on to the shrubs he was sliding over, and which scratched him. From time to time he was conscious of an excruciating pain between his shoulders, it was so acute it prevented him from breathing. He was swinging about in a very uncomfortable fashion; he was constantly flung back and forth between the rope and the shrubs. He was struck by several quite large birds that he disturbed, which knocked into him as they flew away. At first he thought he was being attacked by people from the fortress who were pursuing him by the same route he had taken, and he prepared to defend himself. Eventually he reached the foot of the large tower without any mishap other than bleeding hands. He describes how, after reaching the middle of the tower, he found its slope very helpful; he brushed against the wall as he climbed down it, and the plants growing between the stones slowed him up considerably. On reaching the bottom, where the soldiers' gardens were, he fell into an acacia which, seen from above, looked to be four or five feet high, and which in actual fact measured fifteen or twenty feet. A drunkard lying asleep beneath it took him for a thief. Fabrice almost dislocated his left arm in falling out of this tree. He raced off towards the ramparts, but, as he describes it, his legs felt like cotton-wool; he had no strength left at all. In spite of the danger, he sat down and drank a little of his remaining brandy. For a few moments he dozed off sufficiently for him not to recognize where he was; when he came to, he couldn't understand why, being in his cell, he could see trees. After a while the terrible

truth came back to his memory. Immediately, he went over to the rampart and climbed up it on some big steps. The sentry on duty very close by was snoring in his box. Lying in the grass he found a cannon to which he tied his third rope; this rope turned out to be a little too short, and he fell into a muddy ditch with about a foot of water in it. While he was getting to his feet and trying to pull himself together, he felt himself being grabbed by two men; he knew a moment of fear, but soon heard a soft voice whisper close to his ear: 'Ah! Monsignore! Monsignore!' Vaguely realizing that these men were with the Duchess, he promptly collapsed in a deep faint. Some time later, he was conscious of being carried by some men who were walking in silence, very fast; then they stopped, which made him very uneasy. But he did not have the strength either to speak or to open his eyes; he could feel himself being clasped in someone's arms. Suddenly, he recognized the scent of the Duchess's garments. This scent revived him; he opened his eyes; he was able to say: 'Ah! Dear friend!' then fell once more into a deep faint.

The faithful Bruno, with a squad of policemen loyal to the Count, lay in readiness a couple of hundred feet away; the Count himself was concealed in a small house very close to where the Duchess was waiting. Had the need arisen, he would not have hesitated to draw his sword in the company of some reserve officers who were his close friends; he considered himself under an obligation to save the life of Fabrice, whom he believed in grave danger, and whose pardon would long since have been signed by the Prince had not he, Mosca, been so stupid as to want to save the Sovereign from putting something stupid in writing.

Since midnight the Duchess, surrounded by men armed to the teeth, had been pacing up and down in total silence in front of the fortress ramparts; unable to keep still, she imagined herself fighting to rescue Fabrice from his pursuers. That feverish imagination of hers had taken innumerable precautions which it would be too time-consuming to describe here, all unbelievably reckless. It has been estimated that more than eighty agents were on the alert that night, ready to fight for some extraordinary cause. Fortunately

Ferrante and Ludovic were in command of that side of things, and the Minister of Police was not hostile; but the Count himself observed that the Duchess was not betrayed by a single person, and that he, in his ministerial capacity, heard nothing.

The Duchess, on seeing Fabrice again, completely lost her head; she clasped him convulsively in her arms, and then saw, to her despair, that she was covered in blood. The blood was from Fabrice's hands but she thought he was gravely wounded. Helped by one of the servants, she was removing his coat in order to dress his wounds when Ludovic, who fortunately happened to be there, insisted on putting both her and Fabrice into one of the little carriages that had been hidden in a garden near the city gate; they set off at full speed to cross the Po near Sacca. Ferrante, with twenty well-armed men, made up the rear-guard, and had pledged his life to stop any pursuit. The Count, alone and on foot, did not leave the neighbourhood of the fortress until two hours later, when he saw that nothing was stirring. I'm guilty of high treason! he said to himself in great jubilation.

Ludovic had had the excellent idea of putting into a carriage a young surgeon attached to the Duchess's household, who was very similar in appearance to Fabrice.

'Make your escape in the direction of Bologna,' he told him; 'do lots of stupid things, and try to get arrested; contradict yourself answering their questions and eventually admit you're Fabrice del Dongo; the main thing's to gain time. Be clever with your blunders, you'll get off with a month's imprisonment, and the Signora will give you fifty zecchini.'

'Who thinks of money when they're being of service to her Grace?'

He set off and was arrested several hours later, which gave the most agreeable pleasure to General Fabio Conti and also to Rassi, who, because of the danger Fabrice was in, thought he had seen the last of his barony.

The escape was not discovered at the fortress until six in the morning, and it was not until ten that they dared inform the Prince. The Duchess had been so well served that, in spite of her stopping the carriage three times because she believed

Fabrice's deep sleep to be a dead faint, she was crossing the Po in a boat as four o'clock was striking. Fresh horses were waiting on the left bank and they covered two more leagues with great rapidity, then they had to stop for over an hour while their passports were examined. The Duchess had passports of every sort for herself and Fabrice, but she was not quite sane that day; she took it into her head to give the Austrian police official ten napoleons, clasped him by the hand, and burst into tears. The clerk, extremely alarmed, began to examine the passports all over again. They travelled post; the Duchess paid so extravagantly that she aroused suspicion everywhere, in that country where all foreigners are suspect. Once more Ludovic came to her aid; he explained that her Grace the Duchess was beside herself with distress because of the persistent fever of the young Count Mosca, the son of the Prime Minister of Parma, whom she was taking to consult the doctors in Pavia.

It was not until they were ten leagues beyond the Po that the prisoner woke up completely; he had a dislocated shoulder and a great many scratches. The Duchess was still behaving in such an extraordinary fashion that the landlord of a village inn, where they had dinner, believed he was in the presence of a Princess of the Imperial House, and was on the point of according her the honours he imagined were her due, when Ludovic told the man that the Princess would be certain to have him put in prison if he ordered the bells to be rung.

Finally, about six in the evening, they reached Piedmontese territory. Only then was Fabrice completely safe; they took him to a little village off the main route; his hands were dressed and he slept for a few more hours.

It was in this village that the Duchess indulged in an action which not only was horrible from the moral point of view, but which also proved fatal to the tranquillity of the rest of her life. Several weeks before Fabrice's escape, on a day when the whole of Parma had gone to the fortress gate to try to see the scaffold that was being erected in the courtyard in his honour, the Duchess had shown Ludovic (now the factotum of her household) the secret of how to withdraw, from within a small,

very artfully concealed iron frame, one of the stones forming the bottom of that famous thirteenth-century reservoir in the Palazzo Sanseverina to which we have already referred. While Fabrice lay sleeping in the *trattoria* of that little village, the Duchess summoned Ludovic; he thought she must have gone mad, she was looking at him in such a strange way.

'You're probably expecting me to give you several thousand lire,' she said to him; 'well, I'm not going to do that; I know you, you're a poet, you'd soon go through the money. I'm giving you the little estate of La Ricciarda, a league from Casal-Maggiore.' Beside himself with joy, Ludovic threw himself at her feet, protesting in heartfelt tones that it had not been to earn money that he had helped save Monsignore Fabrice; he had always been particularly fond of him ever since the occasion when, in his capacity as third coachman to the Signora, he had had the honour of driving him. When this man, who was genuinely good-hearted, felt he had occupied quite enough of the time of such a great lady, he took his leave; but she said to him, her eyes glittering:

'Don't go.'

She was silently pacing up and down that inn room, from time to time turning her incredible eyes upon Ludovic. Eventually, seeing that this strange pacing of hers looked as if it would never end, he thought it appropriate to address his mistress.

'The Signora has made me such an extraordinarily generous gift, so greatly in excess of anything a poor man like myself could imagine, and especially so much greater than the paltry services I have had the honour to render, that I believe I cannot in good conscience keep her estate at La Ricciarda. I have the honour to return this estate to the Signora and beg her to grant me an annuity of 400 lire.'

'How many times,' she asked him with the most sombre arrogance, 'how many times in your life have you heard it said that I had abandoned a project once I had announced it?'

After saying this, the Duchess walked about for a few more minutes, then, coming to a sudden halt, she exclaimed:

'It's by chance, and because he managed to attract that young girl, that Fabrice's life's been saved! Had he not had

charm he would be dead. Could you tell me that isn't so?' she said as she advanced upon Ludovic, her eyes blazing with the blackest fury. Ludovic recoiled a few steps; he believed she was mad, which made him feel intensely uneasy about his rights to his estate at La Ricciarda.

'Well!' continued the Duchess in the sweetest and most light-hearted tone—she had become a different woman—'I want my good people at Sacca to enjoy a day of wild celebration that they'll remember for a long time. You're to return to Sacca. Have you any objection? Do you think you'll be in any danger?'

'Nothing to speak of, Signora: nobody at Sacca will ever mention that I was in Monsignore Fabrice's service. Besides, if I may make so bold, I'm dying to see my property at La Ricciarda: it seems so funny to be a landowner!'

'Your pleasure delights me. The tenant who's farming La Ricciarda owes me, I believe, three or four years' rent; I'll make him a present of half of what he owes, and I give you the other half of all those arrears, but on the following condition: you'll go to Sacca, you'll say that the day after tomorrow is the feast of one of my patron saints, and on the evening following your arrival you'll have my villa illuminated in the most splendid fashion. Spare neither money nor trouble; remember that this is a matter of the greatest happiness of my life. I've long been preparing for these illuminations; it's three months since I collected, in the cellars of the house, everything that might be wanted for this splendid festivity; I've entrusted the gardener with all the fireworks necessary for a magnificent display; you're to set them off on the terrace overlooking the Po. I have eighty-nine large casks of wine in my cellars, you're to set up eighty-nine wine fountains in the park. If, the next day, there's one single bottle of wine left, I'll say you don't love Fabrice. When the fountains of wine, the illuminations, and the fireworks are all nicely in hand, you'll slip away quietly, for it's a possibility, and indeed it's what I hope, that in Parma all these fine things will be seen as insolence.'

'It isn't a possibility, it's an absolute certainty; just as it's also a certainty that it'll make the Prosecutor Rassi, who

signed Monsignore's sentence, die of rage. And...' added Ludovic timidly, 'if the Signora wished to give her poor servant even greater pleasure than in letting him have half the arrears due on La Ricciarda; she would permit me to play a little joke on that Rassi...'

'You're a good soul!' exclaimed the Duchess in delight, 'but I absolutely forbid you to do anything to Rassi; it's my intention to have him publicly hanged, later. As for you, try not to be arrested in Sacca, everything would be spoiled if I lost you.'

'Me, Signora? When I tell people I'm celebrating the feast day of one of the Signora's patron saints, if the police sent thirty constables to interfere with anything, rest assured that before they'd got as far as the red cross in the middle of the village not one of them would still be on his horse. They don't do things by halves, the people of Sacca don't, they're all experienced smugglers and they adore the Signora.'

'Finally,' continued the Duchess in a peculiarly casual tone, 'if I'm giving wine to my good people of Sacca, I want to flood the inhabitants of Parma with water; the same evening that my villa is illuminated, take the best horse in my stable, race over to my *palazzo* in Parma, and open the reservoir.'

'Oh! That's an excellent idea of the Signora's!' cried Ludovic, laughing like a maniac; 'wine for the good people of Sacca, water for the burghers of Parma who were so certain, the wretches, that Monsignore Fabrice was going to be poisoned like that poor L***.' Ludovic's delight knew no end; the Duchess complacently watched his crazy bursts of laughter; he went on repeating: 'Wine for the people of Sacca and water for the people of Parma! No doubt the Signora knows better than I do that when they rashly emptied the reservoir, twenty or so years ago, there was as much as a foot of water in several of the Parma streets.'

'And water for the people of Parma,' the Duchess continued with a laugh. 'The avenue leading up to the fortress would have been full of people if Fabrice had been beheaded... Everyone refers to him as "the great criminal"... But above all be careful how you do this, no living

soul must ever know that this flood was started by you or ordered by me. Fabrice and even the Count himself must not know about this mad joke... But I was forgetting the poor of Sacca; off you go and write a letter to my agent that I'll sign; tell him that for my saint's day he's to distribute 100 zecchini to the poor of Sacca and that he's to obey you in everything relating to the illuminations, the fireworks, and the wine; that above all there mustn't be a full bottle remaining in my cellars the following day.'

'The Signora's agent will have a problem with only one thing: during the five years the Signora has owned the villa, she has not left ten people in Sacca who are poor.'

'*And water for the people of Parma*', resumed the Duchess in a sing-song voice. 'How will you carry out this joke?'

'My plan's already made: I leave Sacca about nine, at half-past ten my horse is at the inn of the Trois Ganaches on the road that leads to Casal-Maggiore and *my* estate at La Ricciarda; at eleven I'm in my room in the *palazzo*, and at a quarter past eleven there'll be water for the people of Parma, more than they would like, to drink the health of the great criminal. Ten minutes later I'm on my way out of the city by the Bologna road. As I pass by it I make a deep bow to the fortress upon which Monsignore's courage and the Signora's quick wit have just brought dishonour; I take a path across country that I know very well and I make my entry into La Ricciarda.'

Ludovic glanced up at the Duchess and was frightened; she was staring fixedly at the bare wall six feet in front of her, and, it must be confessed, her stare was terrifying. Oh, my poor estate! thought Ludovic; the fact is she's mad! The Duchess looked at him and read his thoughts.

'Ah, Signor Ludovic the great poet, you want your gift in writing; go and get me a sheet of paper.' Ludovic did not need telling twice, and in her own hand the Duchess wrote a long receipt antedated by a year, in which she declared having received the sum of 80,000 lire from Ludovic San-Micheli, and having given him as security the estate of La Ricciarda. If, after twelve months had passed, the Duchess had not repaid to Ludovic the 80,000 lire, the estate at La Ricciarda would

be his in perpetuity. It's a fine thing, reflected the Duchess, to give to a faithful servant roughly a third of what I have left for myself.

'Now listen,' she told Ludovic, 'after the joke of the reservoir, I'm only letting you have two days for enjoying yourself in Casal-Maggiore. So that the conveyance will be legal, say that it goes back more than a year. Come and join me in Belgirate, just as soon as you possibly can; Fabrice may perhaps be going to England, and you will follow him there.'

Early the next day the Duchess and Fabrice reached Belgirate.

They settled in this enchanting village, but a devastating sorrow awaited the Duchess by that beautiful lake. Fabrice was completely changed; from the first moments when he awoke from the kind of comatose sleep that followed his escape, the Duchess noticed that something extraordinary was happening in his heart. The deep-rooted emotion which he took great pains to conceal was indeed strange, being simply this: he was in despair at no longer being in prison. He was very careful not to admit this reason for his sadness; such an admission would have led to questions which he did not want to answer. 'But surely!' the astonished Duchess kept saying to him, 'surely that horrible sensation when, to avoid fainting, hunger made you eat one of those disgusting dishes sent from the prison kitchens, that sensation—does this have a funny taste, am I being poisoned at this moment—didn't that sensation fill you with horror?'

'I thought of death', answered Fabrice, 'as I suppose soldiers think of it: as a possibility I believed I was clever enough to avoid.'

And so, what anxiety, what pain for the Duchess! Before her very eyes, this beloved, exceptional, high-spirited, inimitable creature was henceforth sunk in the most engrossing of daydreams; he preferred solitude even to the pleasure of talking about anything and everything, quite freely, with the best friend he had in the world. He was always kind, attentive, grateful towards the Duchess; as in the past, he would have given his life a hundred times over for her; but his heart was elsewhere. They often covered four or five leagues on that

sublime lake without saying a word. The kind of conversation that was possible between them now—a languid exchange of ideas—might perhaps have seemed pleasant to others; but they, especially the Duchess, still remembered what their conversation had been before the fatal fight with Giletti that separated them. Fabrice owed the Duchess the story of the nine months he had spent in a horrible prison and, as it turned out, he had nothing but brief and incomplete remarks to offer about that experience.

This was bound to happen sooner or later, the Duchess told herself in dismal misery. Sorrow has aged me, or else he really is in love, and I now occupy only the second place in his heart. Mortified and crushed by this greatest of all possible griefs, the Duchess would sometimes say to herself: It seems to me that if, by the will of Heaven, Ferrante were to go completely mad or his courage fail him, I should be less unhappy. From that moment, this semi-remorse contaminated the esteem the Duchess felt for her own character. So, she told herself bitterly, here I am regretting a decision already taken: therefore I'm no longer a *del Dongo*!

It is Heaven's will, she went on: Fabrice is in love, and what right have I to wish he were not in love? Has there ever been a single word of real love exchanged between us?

This eminently reasonable idea deprived her of her sleep; in fact—and this shows that, for her, the onset of old age and a weakening of spiritual strength had coincided with the prospect of a spectacular revenge—she was a hundred times more unhappy at Belgirate than she had been in Parma. As for the person who was the cause of Fabrice's strange day-dreaming, this scarcely admitted of any reasonable doubt; Clélia Conti, that very pious girl, had betrayed her father, since she had agreed to arrange for the garrison to be plied with liquor, and Fabrice never spoke of Clélia! But, added the Duchess, striking her breast in despair, if the garrison had not been made drunk, all my contriving, all my precautions would have been to no avail: so she it is who saved him!

It was with extreme difficulty that the Duchess extracted from Fabrice some details of the events of that night which, she told herself, in days past would have provided the subject

of a conversation constantly renewed. In those happy times he would have talked for a whole day, with constantly renewed animation and high spirits, about the smallest trifle that I felt like bringing forward.

As it was necessary to foresee every possible eventuality, the Duchess had established Fabrice in the port of Locarno, a Swiss town at the far end of Lake Maggiore. Each day she went to fetch him for a lengthy boat expedition on the lake. Well, on one occasion when she decided to go up to his room, she found its walls covered with a number of views of the city of Parma, which he had ordered from Milan or even from Parma itself, a place he ought to have detested. His little sitting-room, transformed into a studio, was cluttered with all the accoutrements of a painter in water-colours, and she found him completing a third view of the Farnese Tower and the Governor's *palazzo*.

'There's only one thing you have yet to do,' she told him with some asperity, 'and that's paint the portrait, from memory, of that charming Governor who simply wanted to poison you. And while I think of it,' continued the Duchess, 'you should write him a letter of apology for having taken the liberty of escaping and making his fortress look ridiculous.'

The poor woman had no idea how close she came to the truth; scarcely had he reached a place of safety than Fabrice lost no time in writing to General Fabio Conti a letter that was perfectly polite and in a sense utterly absurd; he asked his forgiveness for having escaped, alleging as an excuse that a certain subordinate in the prison staff had, he believed, been instructed to poison him. Little did he care what he wrote, Fabrice hoped that Clélia's eyes would see this letter, and his face was bathed in tears as he wrote it. He finished it in a most amusing manner: he dared to remark that, now he was free, he often found himself missing his little room in the Farnese Tower. This was the principal point of his letter, and he hoped Clélia would understand it. While in this epistolary mood, and still with the hope of being read by someone, Fabrice sent his thanks to Don Cesare, the kind chaplain who had lent him books on theology. A few days later Fabrice engaged the little Locarno bookseller to travel to Milan, where this bookseller,

who was a friend of the celebrated book-collector Reina,* bought the most magnificent editions he could find of the works lent by Don Cesare. The good chaplain received these books and a fine letter telling him that in moments of impatience, which were perhaps excusable in a poor prisoner, the margins of his books had been filled with foolish notes. The writer therefore entreated Don Cesare to replace them in his library by these volumes which, with a sense of the most lively gratitude, he ventured to present to him.

It was very modest of Fabrice to describe simply as notes the endless scribblings with which he had filled the margins of a folio volume of the works of St Jerome. In the hope that he would be able to return this book to the good chaplain and exchange it for another, he had kept an extremely accurate day-by-day journal in its margins, recording everything that happened to him in prison; the great events were nothing other than the ecstasies of 'divine love' (this word divine replaced another that he dared not write). At times this divine love led the prisoner into deep despair, at other times a voice that came to him through the air rekindled a little hope and brought on transports of joy. All this, fortunately, was written in a prison ink made of wine, chocolate and soot, and Don Cesare had done no more than glance at it as he replaced the volume of St Jerome in his library. If he had perused the margins, he would have seen that one day the prisoner, believing himself poisoned, was congratulating himself on dying less than forty feet away from what he loved best in this world. But, since the escape, an eye other than the good chaplain's had read that page. This beautiful thought: 'To die close to what one loves!', expressed in a hundred different ways, was followed by a sonnet describing how the soul, separated after atrocious torments from the fragile body it had inhabited for twenty-three years, and impelled by that instinct for happiness which was natural in everything that had ever existed, would not, the instant it was free, rise up to Heaven to mingle with the angelic choirs (always supposing that the awful Judgement granted him forgiveness for his sins) but that, more blessed after death than it had been in life, it would go to a place close by the prison where it had suffered

for so long, and be united with all that it had loved in this world. 'And so,' read the final line of the sonnet, 'I shall have found my paradise on earth.'

Although in the Parma fortress Fabrice was never referred to other than as an infamous traitor who had transgressed against the most sacred of obligations, nevertheless the good priest Don Cesare was delighted at the sight of the handsome volumes sent by a stranger; for Fabrice had been so thoughtful as not to write for several days after dispatching the books, lest his name should result in the parcel's being indignantly returned. Don Cesare said nothing about this thoughtfulness to his brother, who became enraged at the mere mention of Fabrice's name; but since the latter's escape Don Cesare had reverted to all his former intimacy with his amiable niece; so, having in the past taught her a few words of Latin, he let her see the handsome volumes he had received. That was what the traveller had hoped. Suddenly, Clélia blushed deeply; she had recognized Fabrice's writing. Long, very narrow strips of yellow paper had been inserted at different places in the book as markers. And, since it is true to say that, in the midst of the sordid monetary concerns and the drab, cold, and prosaic thoughts that fill our days, the actions inspired by a genuine passion rarely fail to produce their effect, so, as if a propitious deity were carefully leading them by the hand, Clélia, guided by this instinct and by the thought of one thing only in the whole world, asked her uncle if she might compare the old volume of Saint Jerome with the one he had just received. What words could do justice to her rapture, in the midst of the black misery into which Fabrice's absence had cast her, when she found, in the margins of the old St Jerome, the sonnet we have mentioned, and the day-by-day recording of the love she had inspired!

From the first day she knew the sonnet by heart; she would sing it, leaning against her window, across from the henceforth deserted window where she had so often seen a little opening appear in the shutter. This shutter had been taken down to be placed in the office of the lawcourts and serve as an exhibit in a ridiculous case that Rassi was preparing against Fabrice, who was accused of the crime of escaping or, as the

Prosecutor himself laughingly put it, 'of having abstracted himself from the mercy of a magnanimous Prince!'

Every one of the steps Clélia had taken was for her the occasion of bitter remorse, and now that she was unhappy her remorse was all the more bitter. She sought to temper her self-reproach somewhat by recalling the vow 'never again to see Fabrice' which she had made to the Madonna when the General had been half-poisoned, a vow she renewed daily.

Her father had been made ill by Fabrice's escape and had, furthermore, been on the verge of losing his position when the Prince, in his fury, dismissed all the gaolers of the Farnese Tower and imprisoned them in the town gaol. The General had been saved in part through the intercession of Count Mosca, who preferred seeing him shut away at the top of his fortress to having him as an active, scheming rival in court circles.

General Fabio Conti was really ill, and it was during the fortnight that the uncertainty about his disgrace lasted that Clélia had the courage to carry out the sacrifice she had announced to Fabrice. She had had the good sense to be ill on the day of the general rejoicing, which, as the reader may recall, was also the day of the prisoner's escape; she was ill again the following day and, in a word, acted with such discretion that, apart from the gaoler Grillo, whose special responsibility it was to guard Fabrice, nobody suspected her complicity, and Grillo kept silent.

But as soon as Clélia had no more anxieties on that score, she became still more cruelly racked by her well-justified remorse. What motive can there be in the entire universe, she would ask herself, that can lessen the crime of a daughter who betrays her father?

One evening, after spending almost the whole day in tears in the chapel, she begged her uncle Don Cesare to go with her to see the General, whose fits of rage frightened her all the more since at every turn he peppered his fulminations with curses against Fabrice, that abominable traitor.

Once in the presence of her father, she had the courage to tell him that if she had always refused to give her hand to the Marquis Crescenzi, it was because she felt no inclination

towards him, and was convinced she would find no happiness in such a union. At these words the General flew into a rage, and Clélia had considerable difficulty in continuing. She added that if her father, seduced by the Marquis's great fortune, believed it incumbent upon him actually to order her to marry him, she was prepared to obey. The General was absolutely astonished by this conclusion, which he was very far from expecting; he ended, however, by being delighted. 'So,' he said to his brother, 'I shan't be reduced to living in some second-floor rooms, if that wretch Fabrice loses me my position by his damnable behaviour.'

Count Mosca did not fail to make plain his outrage over the escape of that 'ne'er-do-well' Fabrice, and when the occasion arose would repeat the dictum Rassi had produced about the contemptible behaviour of this young man—such a common young man, furthermore—who had 'abstracted himself from the mercy of the Prince'. This witticism, consecrated by polite society, had no success with the common people. Left to their own good sense, and even though fully convinced of Fabrice's guilt, they admired the resoluteness needed to cast oneself off from such a high wall. Not one person at the court admired this courage. As for the police, who were deeply mortified by their failure, they had officially discovered that a troop of twenty soldiers, suborned with money distributed by the Duchess, that atrociously ungrateful woman, whose name was now never uttered without a sigh, had provided Fabrice with four ladders tied together, each forty-five feet in length; Fabrice, having let down a rope which they tied on to the ladders, deserved credit only for the very ordinary achievement of pulling up those ladders. Several Liberals known for their imprudence, among them the physician C*** (an agent paid directly by the Prince), added, even though their remarks compromised them, that this atrocious police-force had had the barbarity to shoot eight of the unfortunate soldiers who had helped that ingrate, Fabrice, to escape. So then he was blamed even by the genuine Liberals for having, by his imprudence, caused the death of eight poor soldiers. It is by such means that petty tyrants reduce to nothing the value of public opinion.

CHAPTER 23

Amid this widespread vituperation, only the Archbishop Landriani remained faithful to the cause of his young friend; he dared to repeat—even at the Princess's court—the legal maxim which states that in any proceedings, one ear must be kept free from all prejudice to hear the justifications of an absent party.

On the day following Fabrice's flight several people received a somewhat mediocre sonnet extolling this escape as one of the finest deeds of the century, and comparing Fabrice to an angel arriving on earth with wings spread wide. Two days later, in the evening, all of Parma was reciting a sublime sonnet. It was Fabrice's monologue as he was sliding down the rope and reflecting upon the various events in his life. Two magnificent lines of this sonnet established Fabrice's claim to public regard; every connoisseur recognized the style of Ferrante Palla.

But here I have need of an epic style: for where am I to find suitable tones to depict the torrents of indignation which suddenly flooded the heart of every right-minded person, on hearing of the appalling insolence of that illumination of the Sacca villa? Everyone joined in condemning the Duchess, even the genuine Liberals, who considered that her gesture would compromise in a barbarous fashion the poor suspects being held in various prisons, and also provoke the Sovereign, to no avail. Count Mosca declared that there remained only one recourse for the former friends of the Duchess, and that was to forget her. The chorus of execration was, therefore, unanimous: a stranger passing through the town would have been struck by the strength of public opinion. But in that part of the country where people relish the pleasures of revenge, the illumination of Sacca and the splendid party given in the park to more than 6,000 peasants were a tremendous success. Everyone in Parma kept repeating that the Duchess had ordered 1,000 gold pieces distributed among her peasants; that was how they explained the rather harsh reception meted

out to some thirty constables whom the authorities had been so half-witted as to send to the little village, thirty-six hours after that sublime evening and the universal drunkenness that followed. The constables, greeted by a volley of stones, had fled, and two of them who fell off their horses had been flung into the Po.

As for the breaching of the great reservoir of the Palazzo Sanseverina, this passed almost unnoticed: some streets had been more or less flooded during the night, and the next morning you might have supposed it had been raining. Ludovic had been careful to break the panes of one of the *palazzo* windows, to explain how the thieves were able to get in.

A small ladder had even been found. Count Mosca was the only person to recognize the genius of his beloved.

Fabrice was quite determined to return to Parma as soon as he could; he dispatched a long letter to the Archbishop via Ludovic, and that faithful servant travelled back as far as the first village in Piedmont, Sannazzaro, to the west of Pavia, to post a Latin epistle written to his young protégé by the worthy prelate. We will add a detail which, together with some others, may well seem tedious to readers in countries where it is no longer necessary to take precautions. The name Fabrice del Dongo was never written down; all the letters intended for him were addressed to Ludovic San Micheli, at Locarno in Switzerland or at Belgirate in Piedmont. The envelope was of coarse paper, the seal badly affixed, the address barely legible and at times embellished with admonitions worthy of a cook; all the letters were postmarked from Naples six days before the actual date.

From the Piedmontese village of Sannazzaro, near Pavia, Ludovic hurried back to Parma; he had been entrusted with a mission of the greatest importance to Fabrice; it was no less a matter than to deliver to Clélia Conti a silk handkerchief printed with a sonnet of Petrarch's. It is true that a word had been changed in this sonnet: Clélia found it on her table two days after receiving the thanks of the Marquis Crescenzi, who declared himself the happiest of men, and there is no need to describe the impression made on her heart by this emblem of a still-constant memory.

Ludovic had instructions to find out in the greatest possible detail what was happening in the fortress. It was he who communicated to Fabrice the sad news that the marriage of the Marquis Crescenzi now seemed a settled thing; hardly a day passed without the Marquis arranging some kind of festivity inside the fortress to honour Clélia. A conclusive proof of the marriage was that the Marquis, who was immensely rich and consequently very miserly, as is usually the case with the wealthy of Northern Italy, was making tremendous preparations, and yet he was marrying a girl 'with no dowry'. It is true that General Fabio Conti, his vanity deeply shocked by this comment (the first thing to spring to the minds of all his compatriots), had just bought an estate worth 300,000 lire, and, for all that he was penniless, had paid for this estate in cash, presumably with the Marquis's money. The General had then announced he was giving this estate to his daughter as a wedding gift. But the costs of the deeds and other documents, amounting to more than 12,000 lire, struck the Marquis, an eminently logical being, as a most ridiculous expense. For his part, he was having made in Lyons some magnificent tapestries in colours very skilfully blended and arranged to appeal to the eye, designed by the celebrated painter Pallagi, of Bologna. These tapestries, each containing a section of the coat of arms of the Crescenzi family, which, as the whole world knows, is descended from the famous Crescentius who was Consul of Rome in 985, were to decorate the seventeen reception rooms forming the ground floor of the Marquis's *palazzo*. The tapestries, clocks, and chandeliers delivered to Parma cost more than 350,000 lire; the value of the new mirrors, added to those which the house already possessed, amounted to 200,000 lire. With the exception of the two drawing-rooms, which were famous as the work of Parmigianino, the greatest painter of Parma after the divine Correggio, all the rooms of the first and second floors were now occupied by the famous painters of Florence, Rome, and Milan, who were decorating them with frescos. Fokelberg, the great Swedish sculptor, Tenerani of Rome, and Marchesi of Milan had for the last year been working on ten bas-reliefs depicting as many heroic deeds of Crescentius, that truly great

man. Most of the ceilings, painted with frescos, also made some reference to his life. There was general admiration for the ceiling, on which Hayez of Milan* showed Crescentius being received in the Champs Elysées by Francisco Sforza, Laurence the Magnificent, King Robert, the Tribune Cola di Rienzi, Machiavelli, Dante, and the other great men of the Middle Ages. Admiration for these exceptional souls is generally viewed as an epigrammatic commentary on those actually in power.

The attention of the nobles and bourgeois of Parma was wholly occupied by all these magnificent details, which pierced our hero to the heart when he read their description—full of naïve admiration—in a long letter of more than twenty pages dictated by Ludovic to a customs officer in Casal-Maggiore.

And I so poor! thought Fabrice, an income of 4,000 lire all told for everything! It's really very presumptuous of me to dare to be in love with Clélia Conti, for whom all these miracles are being wrought.

A solitary item in Ludovic's long letter (but one which was written in his own poor hand) informed his master that, at nightfall, he had come upon Fabrice's former gaoler Grillo, who looked as if he wished to avoid being seen; he had been imprisoned, then released. He had begged a zecchino from Ludovic, who had given him four in the Duchess's name. The recently released former gaolers—there were twelve of them—were preparing to greet their successors the new gaolers with a knifing party (*a trattamento di cortellate*) if they ever succeeded in encountering them outside the fortress. Grillo had said that there was a serenade in the fortress almost every day, that the Signorina Clélia looked very pale, was frequently ill, and 'other things like that'. This ridiculous phrase resulted in Ludovic's receiving, by return, the order to come back to Locarno. He did so, and the details that he conveyed in person were even more depressing to Fabrice.

Just how kindly Fabrice felt towards the unfortunate Duchess can readily be surmised; he would have died a thousand deaths rather than utter the name of Clélia Conti in her presence. The Duchess detested Parma whereas, for Fabrice,

everything that reminded him of that city was at once sublime and poignant.

Never had the Duchess been less likely to forget about her revenge; she had been so happy before the incident of Gil-etti's death, and now, what a fate was hers! She was living in the expectation of a dreadful event about which she would never breathe a word to Fabrice, she who in the past, when making her arrangement with Ferrante, had believed that she would please Fabrice so much by telling him that one day he would be avenged.

The reader will now be able to form some idea of the charm of the conversations between Fabrice and the Duchess; a gloomy silence reigned between them almost all the time. To add to the appeal of their relations, the Duchess had succumbed to the temptation of playing a mean trick on that nephew she loved too well. The Count wrote to her nearly every day; evidently he sent couriers as he used to do when they were courting, for his letters were always postmarked from some little Swiss town. The poor man would rack his brains to avoid writing too overtly about his love, and to compose amusing letters, but these were barely skimmed over by the Duchess's abstracted glance. Alas, what good is the devotion of a lover she esteems, to a woman whose heart is pierced by the coldness of the man she prefers to him?

In the course of two months the Duchess replied to him only once, and that was to ask him to test the waters with the Princess, and find out whether, despite the insolence of the fireworks, a letter from the Duchess would be received with pleasure. The letter he was to present, if he deemed it suitable to do so, requested the position of Gentleman-in-Waiting to the Princess, which had recently fallen vacant, for the Marquis Crescenzi, and begged that this be conferred upon him in recognition of his marriage. The Duchess's letter was a masterpiece; it was filled with the most tender and elegantly expressed respect; its courtly periods did not include a single word whose most remote implications would not give pleasure to the Princess. The reply to it, in consequence, breathed a tender affection that was suffering agonies over the absence of a friend.

'My son and I', wrote the Princess, 'have not spent a single tolerably pleasant evening since your sudden departure. Does my dear Duchess no longer remember that it was through her influence that I am now consulted in the nomination of the officers of my household? Does she feel herself required to give reasons for appointing the Marquis, as if her expressed desire were not in my eyes the best possible reason? The appointment shall go to the Marquis if I have any say in the matter; and in my heart there will always be a place, the first place, for my dear Duchess. My son speaks of you in precisely the same terms, which perhaps sound a trifle exaggerated in the mouth of a grown-up boy of twenty-one, and begs that you will let him have some mineral specimens from the Val d'Orta, near Belgirate. You can send your letters, which will, I hope, be frequent, to the Count, who still detests you and whom I am particularly fond of on that account. The Archbishop has also remained faithful to you. We all hope you will come back one day; remember, you must come back. The Marquise Ghisleri, my Grand Mistress, is preparing to depart this world for a better one; the poor woman has caused me much displeasure; she is annoying me yet further by departing in so untimely a fashion; her illness makes me think of the name I would once have taken such pleasure in putting in the place of hers, if indeed I had been able to obtain such a sacrifice from the independence of that unique woman who, in leaving us, carried away with her all the joy of my little court, etc., etc.'

It was therefore with the consciousness of having hastened, in so far as she was able, the marriage which filled Fabrice with despair, that the Duchess saw him every day. Thus they would sometimes spend four or five hours together, being rowed about on the lake, without exchanging a word. Fabrice's goodwill was complete and unalloyed; but he was thinking of other things, and his artless, simple soul did not furnish him with anything to say. The Duchess saw this fact, and it was torture for her.

We omitted to mention in the appropriate place that the Duchess had taken a house in Belgirate, a charming village which truly fulfils the promise of its name (a beautiful bend in

the lake). The Duchess could step into her boat from the French window of her drawing-room. She had chosen a very ordinary boat, for which four oarsmen would have sufficed, but she engaged twelve men, making sure that she had one from each of the villages in the neighbourhood of Belgirate. On the third or fourth occasion when she found herself in the middle of the lake with all these carefully chosen men, she ordered them to stop rowing.

‘I think of you all as my friends,’ she said to them, ‘and I’m going to trust you with a secret. My nephew Fabrice has escaped from prison; perhaps they may, treacherously, try to recapture him, even though he’s here on this lake of yours, a place of political asylum. Keep your ears open, and warn me of anything you hear. I give you permission to enter my room by day or night.’

The oarsmen responded with enthusiasm; she knew how to make herself loved. But she did not believe that there would be an attempt to recapture Fabrice; all these precautions were for herself and, before the fatal order to open the reservoir of the Palazzo Sanseverina, they would not have occurred to her.

Her prudence had also prompted her to find rooms for Fabrice in the port of Locarno; every day he came to see her, or she herself went into Switzerland. One can judge how much pleasure they took in being constantly alone together from the following detail: the Marquise and her daughters came to see them twice, and they enjoyed the company of these strangers; for, despite the ties of blood, one can apply the word ‘stranger’ to someone who knows nothing about one’s dearest concerns, and whom one sees but once a year.

One evening the Duchess was visiting Fabrice’s rooms in Locarno together with the Marquise and her two daughters. The Archpriest of the area and the local priest had come to pay their respects to the ladies; the Archpriest, who had connections with a commercial venture and kept very much abreast of the news, was suddenly inspired to announce:

‘The Prince of Parma is dead!’

The Duchess turned extremely pale; she could hardly find the strength to say:

‘Are any details known?’

'No,' replied the Archpriest, 'the report only mentions his death, which is certain.'

The Duchess looked at Fabrice. I did that for him, she thought; I would have done things that are far far worse, and there he stands in front of me, quite indifferent, dreaming of another woman! This dreadful thought was too much for the Duchess to bear, and she collapsed in a dead faint. Everyone rushed to her assistance but, as she came to, she noticed that Fabrice was exerting himself less than the Archpriest and the *cure*; as usual, he was dreaming.

He's thinking of returning to Parma, the Duchess said to herself, and perhaps of stopping the marriage between Clélia and the Marquis; but I'll find a way of preventing that. Then, remembering the presence of the two priests, she hastened to add:

'He was a great prince, who was much maligned! It is a tremendous loss for us!'

The two priests took their leave and the Duchess, in order to be alone, announced she was going to bed.

It would very likely be prudent, she thought, to wait a month or two before returning to Parma; but I feel I shall never have the necessary patience; I am too miserable here. The spectacle of this endless dreaming, this silence of Fabrice's, is more than my heart can bear. Who would ever have supposed that I would find it boring to row about with him on this delightful lake, the two of us alone together, just at the time when I have done more to avenge him than I can ever tell him! After such a spectacle, death is nothing. I am paying, now, for that rapturous happiness and childish joy that I felt when I welcomed Fabrice to my *palazzo* in Parma, after his return from Naples. If I had said a word, it would all have been settled, and it's possible that, bound to me, he would never have given a thought to that little Clélia; but I found that word horribly repugnant. Now she's triumphed over me. What could be simpler? She's twenty; whereas I, so altered in appearance by anxiety, and ill, I'm twice her age!... I must die, I must make an end of it! A woman of forty is no longer of any interest except to those men who loved her in her youth. Now I shall know only the pleasures of vanity, and are they

worth living for? All the more reason to go to Parma and amuse myself. If matters were to take a certain direction, my life would be forfeit. Well! Where's the harm in that? I'll die a magnificent death, and just before the end, but not until then, I'll say to Fabrice, 'You ungrateful creature! I did this for you!...' Yes, Parma is the only place where I can find a way of filling the brief time I have left to live; I shall play the great lady there. What a blessing it would be if, now, I were capable of appreciating all those honours which in the past used to make la Raversi so miserable! Then, to see my own happiness, I needed to look with the eyes of envy... There's one consolation for my vanity: with the possible exception of the Count, no one will have been able to guess what event it was that put an end to the life of my heart... I shall love Fabrice, I shall be devoted to furthering his interests; but he must not stop Clélia's marriage, he must not end up marrying her himself... No, that shall never happen!

The Duchess had reached this point in her sad soliloquy when she heard a loud noise in the house.

Good! she thought; they're coming to arrest me; Ferrante's let himself be taken and he must have talked. Well, so much the better! I'm going to have something to occupy me; I'm going to do battle with them for my life. But *primo*, I mustn't let myself be caught.

Half-dressed, the Duchess fled to the bottom of her garden; she was already contemplating climbing over a little wall and escaping into the countryside when she saw that someone had entered her drawing-room. She recognized Bruno, the Count's confidential servant; he was alone with her maid. She went up to the French window. This man was talking to her maid about the wounds he had received. The Duchess went back into the house and Bruno threw himself at her feet, begging her not to inform the Count of the absurd hour at which he had arrived.

'Upon the death of the Prince,' he added, 'the Count immediately issued orders to all post-houses not to hire out any horses to subjects of the State of Parma. I therefore travelled the whole way to the Po with our own horses, but when we were leaving the boat my carriage was overturned,

broken, wrecked, and I was so badly bruised that I couldn't get on a horse, as I was in duty bound to do.'

'Well!' said the Duchess; 'it's three in the morning; I'll say you arrived at midday; but don't go and contradict me.'

'How like the Signora to be so very kind!'

Politics, in a literary work, is like a pistol shot in the middle of a concert: something loud and out of place to which we are none the less compelled to pay attention.

We are about to speak of some very ugly matters on which, for a number of reasons, we should prefer to remain silent; but we are obliged to relate events which come within our province, since they have as their theatre the hearts of our characters.

'But, good heavens, how did that great Prince die?' the Duchess asked Bruno.

'He was out shooting migratory birds, in the marshes alongside the Po, two leagues from Sacca. He fell into a hole that was hidden by some tufts of grass: he was sweating a lot and caught a chill; they carried him to a lonely house, where he died after a few hours. Some people say that Signor Catena and Signor Borone are dead as well, and that the whole accident happened because of the copper saucepans in the peasant's house they went to, which were full of verdigris. They had lunch in the man's house. In fact that hot-headed lot, the Jacobins, who say whatever suits them, talk of poison. I know that my friend Toto, the palace quartermaster, would have died if it hadn't been for the kind ministrations of a villager who seemed to have a great deal of medical knowledge, and made him take some very strange remedies. But everyone's already stopped talking about this death; in point of fact the Prince was a cruel man. When I left, people were gathering together to kill the Public Prosecutor Rassi; they also wanted to set fire to the fortress gates, so that the prisoners could escape. But some said that Fabio Conti would fire his guns. Others declared that the gunners at the fortress had poured water on their powder and wouldn't massacre their fellow-citizens. But here's something that's much more interesting: while the surgeon of Sandolaro was fixing my poor arm, a man arrived from Parma who said that when the mob

came upon Barbone, that famous clerk from the fortress, in the street, they beat him unmercifully, and then went and hanged him, in the avenue, from the tree closest to the fortress. The mob had set off to smash up that fine statue of the Prince in the royal gardens. But his Excellency the Count took a battalion of Guards and stood them in front of the statue, and then sent word to the people that anyone entering the gardens wouldn't come out alive, and they were frightened. But what's really strange, and that man who'd just come from Parma, who's a former constable, told me several times over, is that his Excellency the Count kicked General P., the commandant of the Royal Guards, and had him marched out of the gardens by two fusiliers after tearing off his epaulettes.'

'That's just like the Count,' exclaimed the Duchess with a thrill of joy that, a moment earlier, she would never have foreseen; 'he'll never permit our Princess to be insulted; and as for General P., in his devotion to his legitimate masters he never agreed to serve the usurper, whereas the Count was less scrupulous, and took part in all the Spanish campaigns, for which he was frequently reproached at court.'

The Duchess had opened the Count's letter, but kept interrupting her reading of it to ask Bruno a host of questions.

The letter was very amusing; the Count had used the most lugubrious language, and yet the most intense joy shone through every word: he avoided giving details about the death of the Prince, and finished his letter with these words:

'I'm sure you will be returning, my sweet angel, but I advise you to wait a day or two for the courier that the Princess will dispatch to you, or so I hope, today or tomorrow; your return must be as magnificent as your departure was audacious. As for the great criminal you have with you, I confidently expect to have him tried by twelve judges chosen from every part of this state. But, in order to punish that monster in the manner he deserves, I must first tear up the original sentence, if it still exists.'

The Count had reopened his letter:

'Now to a very different matter: I have just distributed ammunition to the two battalions of Guards; I am going to

fight, and do all I can to merit that epithet of "Cruel" with which the Liberals have for so long honoured me. That old fossil General P. dared to talk, in the barracks, of opening negotiations with the people, who are in a state of semi-revolt. I am writing to you from the street; I am on my way to the palace, which no one shall enter save over my dead body. Farewell! If I die, I shall die as I have lived, adoring you in spite of everything! Don't forget to send for the 300,000 lire deposited in your name with D*** in Lyons.

'Here comes that poor devil Rassi, pale as death and without his wig; you simply can't imagine what he looks like! The people are absolutely set on hanging him; that would be doing him a great wrong, he deserves to be torn limb from limb. He was trying to take refuge in my *palazzo*, and ran down the street after me; I really don't know what to do with him... I don't want to take him to the palace, for that would touch off the revolt in that neighbourhood. F. shall judge whether I love him; the first thing I said to Rassi was: "I need the sentence that was passed against Signor del Dongo, as well as all the copies in your possession, and you must tell all those infamous judges who are the cause of this revolt that I shall have every one of them hanged, and you, my dear friend, also, if they breathe a word about this sentence, which never existed. I'm sending a company of grenadiers to the Archbishop, in Fabrice's name." Farewell, my sweet angel! My *palazzo* will be burnt down, and I shall lose the charming portraits I have of you. I'm hurrying to the palace to get that infamous General P. relieved of his command; he's still up to his tricks; he's fawning upon the people in the basest fashion, just as he used to fawn upon the late Prince. All the generals are scared out of their wits; I think I shall have myself appointed Commander-in-Chief.'

The Duchess was so unkind as not to have Fabrice woken up; she felt, towards the Count, a rush of admiration that was very close to love. All things considered, she said to herself, I shall have to marry him. She wrote to him immediately to this effect, and sent the letter by one of her servants. That night the Duchess had no time to feel unhappy.

About noon the following day she saw a boat rowed by ten oarsmen speeding across the waters of the lake; she and

Fabrice soon recognized a man wearing the livery of the Prince of Parma: it was indeed one of his couriers who, before setting foot on land, called to the Duchess: 'The revolt has been stamped out!' This courier gave her several letters from the Count, a marvellous one from the Princess, and a decree of Prince Ranuce-Ernest V, naming her Duchess of San Giovanni and Grand Mistress to the Princess Dowager. This young prince, who was well-versed in mineralogy and whom she had thought of as an imbecile, had had the wit to write her a little note; but at the end of it there was a hint of love. The note began in this way:

'The Count says, Duchess, that he is pleased with me; the fact is that he and I stood side by side under fire and my horse was hit; judging by the fuss over such a trifle, I dearly long to take part in a real battle, but not against my own subjects. I owe everything to the Count; all my generals, who have never been in a war, behaved like a lot of chickens; I believe that two or three of them fled as far as Bologna. Since my accession to power, following a momentous and deplorable event, I have signed no decree that has given me such pleasure as the decree appointing you Grand Mistress to my mother. My mother and I have been recalling that one day you admired the fine view one enjoys from the *palazzeto* of San Giovanni, which once belonged to Petrarch, or so they say; my mother wished to give you that little estate; and I, knowing not what to give you, and not daring to offer you everything that is your due, have made you a Duchess in my own principality; I am not sure whether you are sufficiently learned to be aware that Sanseverina is a Roman title. I have just given the Grand Cordon of my order to our worthy Archbishop, who displayed resoluteness very rare in a man of seventy. You will not be displeased with me for recalling all those ladies in exile. I am told that henceforth I must not sign my name without first writing the words "your affectionate"; it vexes me that I should be obliged to make free with an assurance that is only completely sincere when I write to you.

Your affectionate,
Ranuce-Ernest.'

Judging by the language of this letter, who would not have supposed that the Duchess was about to enjoy the highest favour? Nevertheless, she found something extremely odd about other letters from the Count that she received two hours later. Without elaborating further, he advised her to delay her return to Parma for several days, and to write to the Princess saying that she was very unwell. Even so, the Duchess and Fabrice still left for Parma immediately after dinner. The Duchess's intention (which she did not, however, admit to herself) was to hasten the marriage of the Marquis Crescenzi; Fabrice, for his part, made the journey in a frenzy of happiness that struck his aunt as ridiculous. He had hopes of soon seeing Clélia again; he fully expected to run off with her or even to abduct her against her will if that was the only way of preventing her marriage.

The Duchess and her nephew passed their journey in a very cheerful manner. At the stage before Parma Fabrice stopped for a few moments to put on clerical attire; as a rule he dressed like a man in mourning. When he returned to the Duchess's room:

'There's something peculiar, something I don't understand, about these letters of the Count's', she said to him. 'If you take my advice, you'll wait here for a few hours; I'll send a courier to you as soon as I've spoken to our great Minister.' It was with the utmost reluctance that Fabrice agreed to follow this reasonable advice. The Count welcomed the Duchess, whom he addressed as his wife, with transports of joy worthy of a fifteen-year-old. For a long time he refused to talk politics, and, when eventually the cold voice of reason took over:

'You were absolutely right to stop Fabrice appearing in Parma officially; we're in full reaction here. Can you guess the name of the colleague the Prince has appointed as my Minister of Justice? Rassi, my dear, Rassi whom I treated as the wretch he is, the day of our great happenings. By the way, I should warn you that everything that occurred here has been hushed up. If you read our newspaper, you'll see that one of the fortress clerks, Barbone by name, died from a fall from a carriage. As for the sixty-odd rascals I had shot down when

they were attacking the statue of the Prince in the gardens, they're all quite well, only they're away on their travels. Count Zurla, the Minister of the Interior, went in person to the home of each of these unfortunate heroes, and gave fifteen gold pieces to their families or their friends, ordering them to say that the deceased was travelling, and adding a very specific threat of prison, if they should happen to mention that he had been killed. A man from my own Ministry for Foreign Affairs has been dispatched on a mission to the journalists in Milan and Turin, to see that nothing is said about the "unfortunate incident" (that's the official expression). This man's going on to Paris and London, in order to deny, in all the newspapers and in a semi-official way, anything that might possibly be said about our troubles. Another agent's headed for Bologna and Florence. I just shrugged my shoulders.

'But the amusing thing is that—at my age—I felt a thrill of enthusiasm when I was talking to the soldiers of the Guard and tearing the epaulettes off that contemptible General P. At that moment I'd have given my life, without hesitation, for the Prince; I admit, now, that it would have been a really stupid way to end. Today the Prince, for all he's a good young man, would give 100 scudi to see me die of some malady; as yet he does not dare ask for my resignation, but we speak to one another as rarely as possible, and I send him lots of little reports in writing, as I used to do with the late Prince after Fabrice was imprisoned. Incidentally, I haven't torn up the sentence passed against him, for the excellent reason that that rascal Rassi hasn't given me it. So you were very wise to prevent Fabrice from arriving officially. The sentence is still in force; however, I don't believe that Rassi would dare to have our nephew arrested today, but he might dare to do so two weeks from now. If Fabrice insists on coming back to Parma, let him stay with me.'

'But what's the reason for all this?' exclaimed the Duchess in astonishment.

'They've persuaded the Prince that I'm giving myself airs as a dictator and a saviour of the country, and that I wish to treat him like a child; what's more, I'm supposed, in referring to

him, to have uttered the fatal words: "this child". That may indeed have happened, as I was very exhilarated that day, for example, I pictured him as a great man, because he wasn't too frightened by being in the thick of the first musket-shots he's heard in his whole life. He's not unintelligent, and indeed his style is superior to his father's; in short—and I cannot repeat this too often—in his heart of hearts he's honourable and good; but that sincere young heart shudders when they tell him about some piece of knavery, and he believes that one's own soul would itself have to be very black for one to notice such things: think of the education he received!...

'Your Excellency should have remembered that he would be master one day, and set an intelligent man at his side.'

'In the first place, we have the example of the Abbé de Condillac, who, when appointed by my predecessor the Marquis de Felino, succeeded only in turning his pupil into the King of Fools. He used to walk in religious processions and, in 1796, he didn't have the wit to negotiate with General Bonaparte, who would have tripled the size of his realm. Secondly, I never imagined I would continue as Minister for ten straight years. Now that I'm totally disillusioned, as I've been for the past month, I want to amass a million before abandoning this bear-garden that I've saved to its own devices. Without me, Parma would have been a republic before two months were out, with the poet Ferrante Palla for dictator.'

This remark made the Duchess blush; the Count knew nothing.

'We'll be reverting to a typical eighteenth-century monarchy: the confessor and the mistress. At heart the Prince loves only mineralogy, and perhaps you, Signora. Since he came to the throne his valet, whose brother I have just made a captain—this brother having seen nine months' service—his valet, as I say, has gone and put it into his head that he ought to be happier than anybody else because his profile will be on the coinage. This bright idea has brought boredom in its train.

'Now he needs an aide-de-camp to remedy his boredom. Well! If he were to offer me that famous million that we

require in order to live well in Naples or Paris, I wouldn't want to be his remedy for boredom, and spend four or five hours each day with his Highness. Besides, as I'm more intelligent than he, he'd think me a monster after a month.

'The late Prince was cruel and envious, but he had served in the war and commanded troops, and that had given him a dignified presence; he had princely material in him, and I, as his Minister, was free to be good or bad. With this upright, open, and genuinely good son of his, I'm forced into being a schemer. So now I'm the rival of the most inconsequential little woman in the palace, and a most inferior rival, because I shall not bother about hundreds of necessary details. For example, three days ago one of those women who every morning put out fresh towels in all the rooms had the idea of mislaying the key to one of the Prince's English writing-desks. Whereupon his Highness refused to deal with all those matters for which the necessary documents were in that desk; in point of fact, for twenty lire the boards forming the bottom could have been removed, or a skeleton key used, but Ranuce-Ernest V told me that that would encourage bad habits in the court locksmith.

'Up to now he has found it absolutely impossible to keep to the same opinion for three days running. If he had been born Marquis of such-and-such, and wealthy, this young Prince would have been one of the most esteemed men at the court, a kind of Louis XVI; but how, given his pious naïveté, is he to escape all the cunning traps that surround him? So your enemy la Raversi's circle is more powerful than ever; they've discovered that I, who ordered the people fired upon, and who was, if need be, prepared to kill 3,000 men rather than permit the statue of the Prince who had been my master to be desecrated, I am an out-and-out Liberal, I wanted to get a constitution signed, and a hundred similar absurdities. With all this republican talk, the crackpots would prevent us from enjoying the best of monarchies... In a word, Signora, you are the only member of the present Liberal party, of which my enemies have declared me to be the leader, about whom the Prince has not expressed himself in disobliging terms; the Archbishop, as always irreproachably honourable, is in utter

disgrace for having spoken in a reasonable manner about what I did on that "unfortunate day".

'On the morrow of the day which was not yet dubbed "unfortunate", when it was still true that the revolt had occurred, the Prince told the Archbishop that, in order to avoid your having to take a lesser title on marrying me, he would make me a duke. Today I rather think it's Rassi, whom I made a noble when he was selling me the late Prince's secrets, who's going to be a count. A promotion such as that will make me look a real fool.'

'And the poor Prince will be up to his knees in the mire.'

'Undoubtedly; but ultimately he is *master*, a title which in a very short time makes ridicule disappear. So, my dear Duchess, let us do as they do in backgammon, let us "bear off".'

'But we shall not be exactly wealthy.'

'Basically, neither you nor I have need of luxury. In Naples, give me a seat in a box at the San Carlo and a horse, and I'll be more than satisfied; it will never be a lesser or greater degree of luxury that ensures a position in society to you and me, it will be the pleasure that intelligent people of the area may find in drinking a cup of tea in your drawing-room.'

'But,' went on the Duchess, 'what would have happened, on the "unfortunate day", if you had kept out of things, as I hope you will do in the future?'

'The troops would have fraternized with the common people, and there'd have been three days of killing and burning (for it'll take this country a hundred years for a republic to be anything but an absurdity) then a fortnight's looting, until two or three regiments belonging to a foreign power arrived to put a stop to it all. Ferrante Palla was right there in the thick of the mob, as full of courage and fury as ever; he probably had a dozen friends acting in concert with him; Rassi will call that a great conspiracy. What is certain is that, though wearing an unbelievably dilapidated coat, he was distributing gold by the handful.'

The Duchess, amazed by these reports, hurried off to thank the Princess.

When the Duchess entered the room the Mistress of the Robes handed her the little golden key that is worn at the

waist, signifying supreme authority in that part of the palace which is the domain of the Princess. Clara Paolina lost no time in sending everybody away; once she was alone with her friend she continued for a few moments to express herself in roundabout terms. The Duchess, uncertain as to what exactly she was being told, made only guarded replies. Finally, the Princess burst into tears and, throwing herself into the Duchess's arms, exclaimed: 'My days of unhappiness are beginning once again: my son will treat me worse than his father did!'

'That's something I won't allow to happen,' the Duchess replied sharply. 'But first,' she continued, 'I must humbly beg your Serene Highness to accept, at this moment, the assurance of my sincerest gratitude and most profound respect.'

'What do you mean?' exclaimed the Princess very apprehensively, afraid that the Duchess was about to tender her resignation.

'What I mean is that every time your Serene Highness permits me to turn to the right the nodding head of that Chinese figure on the mantelpiece, she will also allow me to call things by their true names.'

'Is that all, my dear Duchess?' cried Clara Paolina, getting up and herself hurrying over to move the figure into the correct position. 'You may, my dear Grand Mistress, speak with perfect freedom', she said in a charming tone of voice.

'Madame,' continued the Duchess, 'your Highness has perfectly understood the situation; you and I are in very great danger; the sentence against Fabrice has not been revoked; consequently, whenever someone wishes to get rid of me and insult you, he will be put back in prison. Our position is as bad as ever. As far as I personally am concerned, I am going to marry the Count, and we'll settle in Naples or Paris. The latest act of ingratitude of which the Count is at this moment a victim has inspired in him such utter distaste for public office that, were it not for his concern for the interests of your Serene Highness, I should not advise him to carry on in this shambles unless the Prince were to give him an enormous sum of money. I should like your Highness's permission to explain that the Count, whose fortune amounted to 130,000 lire when he was first in office, today enjoys an income of

barely 20,000 lire. I tried over a long period of time to persuade him to think of his own pocket, but to no avail. While I was away he picked a quarrel with the Prince's farmers-general,* who were rogues; the Count's replaced them with some other rogues who've given him 800,000 lire.'

'What! My goodness, I'm really sorry to hear that!' exclaimed the astonished Princess.

'Madame,' replied the Duchess with the greatest self-possession, 'ought I to turn the Chinaman's head to the left?'

'Goodness, no!' cried the Princess, 'but I'm really sorry that a man of the Count's character should have thought of making money in such a way.'

'He'd have been despised by every upright citizen had he not indulged in this speculation.'

'My God! Is that possible?'

'Madame,' continued the Duchess, 'with the exception of my friend the Marquis Crescenzi, who has an income of three or four hundred thousand lire, everybody here steals; and how could this be otherwise in a country where gratitude for the greatest of services lasts barely a month? The only thing, therefore, that's real, and outlives political disgrace, is money. I shall take the liberty, Madame, of telling you some terrible truths.'

'I give you permission to do so,' said the Princess with a deep sigh, 'and yet I find them acutely painful.'

'Very well! The Prince your son, Madame, who is a perfect gentleman, can make you much more unhappy than his father did; the character of the late Prince was more or less like anyone else's. Our present Sovereign isn't certain of wanting the same thing for three days in succession; consequently, in order to be sure of him one must be constantly with him and not let him speak to anybody. As this fact is not difficult to grasp, the new Ultra party, controlled by those two hard-headed individuals, Rassi and the Marquise Raversi, is going to try to provide a mistress for the Prince. This mistress will have permission to make her own fortune and to fill certain minor posts; but she will be responsible to the party for keeping the master from changing his mind.'

'For my part, in order to be securely established at your Highness's court I need to have Rassi exiled and disgraced; I

also wish Fabrice to be tried by the most honest judges that can be found; if those gentlemen recognize, as I hope they will, that he is innocent, it will be natural to grant his Grace the Archbishop's desire that Fabrice be his coadjutor with eventual succession. If I fail, the Count and I leave Parma; in that event I offer this parting advice to your Serene Highness: she should never forgive Rassi, nor ever leave her son's realm. While she is close to him, that good son will do her no real harm.'

'I have followed your reasoning with the necessary close attention,' replied the Princess with a smile; 'should I then undertake to find a mistress for my son?'

'No, Madame, but you should make sure, first and foremost, that your drawing-room is the only one in which he enjoys himself.'

The conversation continued endlessly along these lines, while the scales fell from the eyes of the innocent, quick-witted Princess.

A courier sent by the Duchess went to Fabrice and told him he could return to the city, but incognito. He was hardly noticed: he spent his days disguised as a peasant, in a chestnut-vendor's wooden shack opposite the entrance to the fortress, under the trees in the avenue.

CHAPTER 24

The Duchess organized a number of delightful receptions at the palace, which had never known such gaiety; never had she been as charming as she was that winter, and yet she was living in the midst of the most extreme danger; but also, during that critical time, she hardly ever thought with any appreciable regret about the strange alteration in Fabrice. The young Prince would arrive very early at the pleasant evening parties given by his mother, who always said to him:

‘Off you go and govern; I’ll wager there are twenty or more reports on your desk waiting for a yes or a no, and I don’t want our European neighbours to accuse me of turning you into a do-nothing king, in order to reign in your stead.’

These admonitions had the disadvantage of being prof-fered at the most inopportune moments, that is, when his Highness, having overcome his timidity, was acting in some charade that he found highly entertaining. Twice a week there were open-air parties to which, on the pretext of winning over to the Sovereign the affection of his people, the Princess invited the prettiest women of the middle class. The Duchess, who was the heart and soul of this joyful court, hoped that these lovely commoners, all of whom were filled with terrible envy as they watched the commoner Rassi’s fortunes soar, would tell the Prince about one or other of the innumerable villainies committed by that Minister. For, among other childish notions, the Prince claimed he had a ‘moral’ administration.

Rassi had too much sense not to realize just how dangerous these brilliant gatherings, organized at the Princess’s court by his enemy, were for him personally. He had not been prepared to hand over to Count Mosca the perfectly legal sentence passed against Fabrice; it therefore followed that either the Duchess or he himself would have to disappear from the court.

The day of the popular uprising, which it was now good form to deny had ever occurred, money had been distributed to the mob. Rassi began with that fact; dressed even more shabbily than usual, he climbed up to the most poverty-stricken attics in the town and spent hours in earnest conversation with their needy occupants. So much effort was well repaid: after a fortnight of living in that manner he was certain that Ferrante Palla had been the secret leader of the uprising, and—more importantly—that Palla, who all his life had been penniless, after the fashion of great poets, had had eight or ten diamonds sold in Genoa.

Among others, five valuable stones were mentioned, worth in reality more than 40,000 lire, which, 'ten days before the Prince's death', had been let go for 35,000 lire, because, the vendor had said, 'the money was needed.'

How can I portray the transports of joy with which the Minister of Justice greeted this discovery? He was aware, every day, of being made fun of at the court of the Princess Dowager, and on several occasions the Prince, in discussing official business with him, had laughed in his face with all the artlessness of youth. It must be admitted that Rassi had some singularly plebeian habits: for example, as soon as a discussion interested him, he would cross his legs and grasp his shoe in his hand; if his interest intensified, he would spread his red cotton handkerchief over his leg, etc., etc. The Prince had laughed heartily at the joke of one of the prettiest of the commoners, who, knowing incidentally that her own leg was very shapely, had set about imitating this elegant gesture of the Minister of Justice.

Rassi requested a special audience and said to the Prince: 'Would your Highness be willing to give 100,000 lire in order to find out exactly how his august father met his death? With such a sum, the law would be in a position to arrest the guilty parties, supposing they exist.' There was only one possible reply the Prince could make.

Some time later Chékina informed the Duchess that she had been offered a large sum of money to allow her mistress's diamonds to be examined by a jeweller; she had indignantly refused. The Duchess told her off for refusing, and, a week

later, Chékina had the diamonds to show. On the day chosen for displaying the diamonds, Count Mosca stationed two reliable men to watch each of the Parma jewellers, and at midnight he came to tell the Duchess that the inquisitive jeweller was none other than Rassi's brother. The Duchess was in very high spirits that evening (at the palace they were acting a *commedia dell'arte*, that is, a play in which each character makes up his lines as he goes along, with only the outline of the play being posted up in the wings); the Duchess had a part in it, and Count Baldi, the former lover of the Marquise Raversi (who was attending the performance), played her suitor. The Prince, the most bashful man of the realm but one who was also very handsome and very tender-hearted, was studying Count Baldi's role, which he planned to act at the second performance.

'I've very little time,' said the Duchess to the Count; 'I'm on in the first scene of the second act; let's go into the guardroom.'

There, surrounded by twenty soldiers of the bodyguard who were all wide awake and most attentive to the conversation between the Prime Minister and the Grand Mistress, the Duchess laughingly told her friend:

'You always scold me when I tell you a secret unnecessarily. It is because of me that Ernest V was called to the throne; I wanted to avenge Fabrice, whom I then loved far more than I do today, although my love was always perfectly innocent. I know very well that you have little faith in that innocence, but it doesn't really matter, since you love me in spite of my crimes. Well then! Here's an actual crime; I gave all my diamonds to a most interesting sort of lunatic called Ferrante Palla, I even embraced him, so that he would arrange for the death of the man who was trying to have Fabrice poisoned. Where's the harm in that?'

'Ah! So that's where Ferrante got the money for his uprising!' said the Count in some astonishment; 'and you're telling me this in the guardroom!'

'That's because I'm in a hurry, and now Rassi's on the track of the crime. I can truthfully declare that I never said a word about insurrection, because I detest the Jacobins. Think this over, and when the play's finished tell me what you advise.'

'I'll tell you straight away that you must make the Prince fall in love with you... But in a completely respectable and honourable manner, I need hardly say!'

The Duchess was being summoned for her entrance on stage, and hurried off.

A few days later the Duchess received in the mail a long and preposterous letter, signed with the name of a former chambermaid of hers; this woman wrote requesting a job at court, but the Duchess instantly realized that neither the handwriting nor the style was hers. Upon unfolding the sheet of paper to read the second page, the Duchess noticed that a tiny miraculous picture of the Madonna, tucked inside a printed page from an old book, had fallen to the ground at her feet. The Duchess glanced at the picture, then read a few lines of the old printed page. Her eyes sparkled as she read these words:

'The Tribune has taken no more than 100 lire a month for himself; he has used the rest to try to rekindle the sacred flame in souls that self-interest has turned to ice. The fox is close upon my heels, which is why I have not sought, one last time, to meet the being I adore. I told myself, she doesn't like republics, she who is as superior to me in mind as she is in graces and beauty. Besides, how can one create a republic without republicans? Could I be mistaken? Six months from now I shall be travelling on foot through the small towns of America, armed with my microscope, and I shall see whether it is still right for me to love the only rival you have in my heart. If, Baroness, this letter reaches you, and no profane eye has perused it before yours, order a branch to be broken off one of those young ash trees that grow twenty paces from the spot where I dared address you for the first time. I shall then have buried in the garden, beneath the big boxwood that you once remarked on during the time when I was happy, a casket containing some of those works for which people who think as I do are slandered. I should certainly never have written had the fox not been close upon my heels, and had there been no risk that he might reach that celestial being; look under the boxwood two weeks from now.'

Since he has a printing-press at his command, reflected the Duchess, we shall soon have a collection of sonnets; God only knows what name he'll give me in them!

The Duchess's coquetry prompted her to devise a little test; for a week she was indisposed, and there were no more pleasant evening parties at court. The Princess, very shocked at all the things that she had been forced to do, out of fear of her son, since becoming a widow, went to spend this week in a convent associated with the church in which the late Prince was buried. This interruption of the evening gatherings left the Prince with an enormous amount of leisure on his hands, and brought about a striking reversal in the credit of the Minister of Justice. Ernest V realized the extent of the boredom threatening him if the Duchess were to leave the court, or even were just to cease being a source of joy in it. The parties began again, and the Prince showed an ever-increasing interest in the *commedia dell'arte*. It was his intention to act a part himself, but he did not dare confess to this ambition. One day, blushing deeply, he said to the Duchess: 'Why should I not also act a part?'

'All of us here are at your Highness's orders; if your Highness condescends so to command me, I shall have the outline of a play drawn up, all the striking scenes in your Highness's role will be with me, and as at first everyone tends to be a little hesitant, if your Highness watches me closely, I will indicate the replies your Highness should make.' Everything was arranged, and with the most consummate skill. The extremely shy Prince was ashamed of being shy; the trouble the Duchess took to avoid causing him embarrassment on account of this innate shyness made a deep impression on the young ruler.

On the day of his first appearance the performance began half-an-hour earlier than usual, and at the moment when they all proceeded into the theatre there were in the drawing-room only eight or ten elderly ladies. Those individuals did not really intimidate the Prince, and in any case, having been brought up in Munich in accordance with true monarchical principles, they always applauded anyway. On the strength of her authority as Grand Mistress, the Duchess locked the door

through which the rank and file of the courtiers were admitted to the performance. The Prince was of a literary cast of mind and had a handsome face, and he acquitted himself very well during the first scenes; he repeated intelligently the lines he read in the Duchess's eyes, or that she gave him in a whisper. At a moment when the few spectators were applauding with all their might, the Duchess made a sign, the ceremonial doors were opened, and in an instant the theatre was filled with all the pretty women of the court who, on seeing the Prince's charming looks and very happy air, began to applaud; the Prince blushed with pleasure. He was playing the part of a lover of the Duchess's. Far from having to suggest words to him, she soon found herself obliged to ask him to shorten the scenes; he spoke of love with an enthusiasm that frequently embarrassed the actress; his replies went on for five minutes. The Duchess was no longer the dazzling beauty of the previous year; Fabrice's imprisonment and, even more, the period spent on Lake Maggiore with a moody and silent Fabrice, had aged the lovely Gina by ten years. Her features had become more clearly defined, showing greater intelligence and less youthfulness.

Only very rarely now did they sparkle with the playfulness of earlier days; but on the stage, helped by rouge and all the resources that art furnishes to actresses, she was still the prettiest woman at the court. The long, impassioned speeches that the Prince declaimed put the courtiers on the alert; they were all saying to one another that evening: 'Here's the Balbi of this new reign.' The Count was filled with suppressed indignation. When the play ended, the Duchess said to the Prince, in the presence of the entire court:

'Your Highness is too good an actor; people will say that you are in love with a woman of eight-and-thirty, which will ruin my hopes of sharing my future with the Count. So I shall not perform again with your Highness, unless your Highness swears to address me only as he would a woman of a certain age, the Marquise Raversi, for example.'

The same play was put on three times; the Prince was beside himself with delight; one evening, however, he appeared extremely worried.

'I am either much mistaken,' said the Grand Mistress to her Princess, 'or Rassi is plotting some caper against us; I would suggest that your Highness choose a play for tomorrow; the Prince will act badly and, because he'll be very upset, he'll tell you something.'

The Prince did indeed act very badly; he was barely audible, and could not complete his sentences. At the end of the first act he almost had tears in his eyes; the Duchess remained at his side, but stood motionless and impassive. The Prince, finding himself alone with her for a moment in the green-room, went and shut the door.

'I shall never', he told her, 'be able to do the second and third acts; I absolutely refuse to be applauded out of politeness; the applause I received this evening cut me to the heart. Please advise me: what ought I to do?'

'I shall walk to the front of the stage, I shall make a deep curtsey to her Highness and another to the public, just like a real stage-manager, and announce that because the actor playing the part of Lelio has suddenly been taken ill, the show will conclude with some pieces of music. Count Rusca and the little Ghisolfi woman will be overjoyed to be able to show off their shrill little voices to such a brilliant assembly.'

The Prince took the Duchess's hand and kissed it rapturously.

'Why aren't you a man?' he said to her; 'you would advise me well. Rassi has just placed upon my desk 182 depositions against the alleged assassins of my father. In addition to the depositions, there's an indictment of more than 200 pages; I have to read all of that and, furthermore, I've given my word not to say anything about it to the Count. This will lead straight to executions; he already wants me to have Ferrante Palla, that great poet whom I admire so much, seized in France, near Antibes. He's living there under the name of Poncet.'

'The day you have a Liberal hanged, Rassi will be bound to the Ministry by chains of iron, which is what he wants above all else; but your Highness will no longer be able to announce, two hours in advance, that you are going out. I shall say nothing to the Princess nor to the Count about the cry of

anguish that has just escaped you; but, since I have sworn an oath to keep no secret from the Princess, I would be pleased if your Highness would repeat to your mother those same things which you have divulged to me.'

This idea distracted the Sovereign from the distress that overwhelmed him as an actor who had flopped.

'Very well! Please inform my mother; I'm going to her study.'

The Prince left the wings, crossed the reception room leading into the theatre, and curtly dismissed the High Chamberlain and the aide-de-camp on duty who were following him; the Princess, for her part, hastily left the theatre; when the Grand Mistress reached the study she curtsied deeply to mother and son and left them alone. The excitement at the court may be imagined; it is things of that nature that make a court so entertaining. An hour later the Prince himself appeared at the study door and summoned the Duchess; the Princess was in tears, and her son's face was quite haggard.

These are weak people who are out of humour, thought the Grand Mistress, and they're looking for an excuse to be angry with someone. At first, mother and son kept interrupting one another in giving the Duchess all the details; the latter took great care, in her replies, not to put forward a single idea. For two mortal hours the three actors in this boring scene never departed from the roles we have just outlined. The Prince himself went to fetch the two enormous portfolios that Rassi had left on his desk; as he emerged from his mother's study, he found the entire court waiting outside. 'Go away, stop bothering me!' he exclaimed in a very impolite tone which no one had ever heard him use before. The Prince did not want to be seen carrying the two portfolios, a Prince is not supposed to carry anything. The courtiers disappeared in a twinkling. On his return the Prince found only the footmen who were putting out the candles; he dismissed them furiously, as he did poor Fontana, the aide-de-camp on duty, who, in his zeal, had been so tactless as to remain behind.

'Everyone's making a point of provoking me this evening', he remarked crossly to the Duchess on returning to the

study; he believed her very clever and was in a rage over her evident determination not to give an opinion. She, for her part, was resolved to say nothing unless she was *quite expressly* asked for her opinion. At least another good half-hour passed before the Prince, who had a sense of his own dignity, brought himself to say to her: 'But Madame, you have said nothing.'

'I am here to serve the Princess, and to forget, very quickly, what is said in my presence.'

'Well, Madame!' declared the Prince, turning very red, 'I command you to give me your opinion.'

'Crimes are punished in order to prevent their repetition. Was the late Prince poisoned? That is highly uncertain. Was he poisoned by the Jacobins? That is what Rassi would dearly like to prove, for then he would become indispensable to your Highness for evermore. In that event your Highness, whose reign is just beginning, will have many more evenings like this one to look forward to. In general your subjects say, and with perfect truth, that there is goodness in your Highness's character; as long as your Highness has not had some Liberal hanged, you will continue to enjoy this reputation, and most certainly no one will think of arranging to poison you.'

'Your conclusion is obvious,' exclaimed the Princess angrily, 'you don't want my husband's assassins to be punished!'

'That is because, Madame, it would appear that I am bound to them by ties of tender affection.'

The Duchess could read, in the Prince's eyes, that he believed she and his mother were in complete agreement about dictating a plan of action for him to follow. A fairly rapid succession of sharp exchanges between the two women ensued, at the conclusion of which the Duchess protested that she would not say another word, and she was true to her resolution; but the Prince, after a long discussion with his mother, again ordered her to express her opinion.

'I swear to your Highnesses that I shall do no such thing!'

'But this is positively childish!' exclaimed the Prince.

'I beg you to speak, Duchess', said the Princess with an air of dignity.

'I beseech you to pardon me, Madame; but your Highness', added the Duchess, addressing the Prince, 'reads French perfectly; to calm our agitated spirits, would you read us a fable of La Fontaine's?'

The Princess considered this 'us' extremely insolent, but she seemed both astonished and amused when the Grand Mistress, who had, with the greatest composure, gone to open the book-case, returned with a volume of La Fontaine's *Fables*; she leafed through it for a few moments, then said to the Prince, as she handed it to him:

'I entreat your Highness to read the *whole* fable.'

*Le Jardinier et son Seigneur**

Un amateur de jardinage
Demi-bourgeois, demi-manant,
Possédait en certain village

Un jardin assez propre, et le clos attenant.
Il avait de plant vif fermé cette étendue:
Là croissaient à plaisir l'oseille et la laitue,
De quoi faire à Margot pour sa fête un bouquet,
Peu de jasmin d'Espagne et force serpolet.
Cette félicité par un lièvre troublée
Fit qu'au seigneur du bourg notre homme se plaignit.

'Ce maudit animal vient prendre sa goulée
Soir et matin,' dit-il, 'et des pièges se rit;
Les pierres, les bâtons y perdent leur crédit:
Il est sorcier, je crois.' 'Sorcier! je l'en défie,'
Repartit le seigneur: 'fût-il diable, Miraut
En dépit de ses tours l'attrapera bientôt.
Je vous en déferai, bonhomme, sur ma vie.'
'Et quand?' 'Et dès demain, sans tarder plus longtemps.'

La partie ainsi faite, il vient avec ses gens.
'Ça, déjeunons,' dit-il; 'vos poulets sont-ils tendres?'
L'embarras des chasseurs succède au déjeuner.

Chacun s'anime et se prépare;
Les trompes et les cors font un tel tintamarre
Que le bonhomme est étonné.

Le pis fut que l'on mit en piteux équipage
Le pauvre potager. Adieu planches, carreaux;
Adieu chicorée et poireaux;
Adieu de quoi mettre au potage.

Le bonhomme disait: 'Ce sont là jeux de prince.'

Mais on le laissait dire; et les chiens et les gens
 Firent plus de dégât en une heure de temps
 Que n'en auraient fait en cent ans
 Tous les lièvres de la province.

Petits princes, videz vos débats entre vous;
 De recourir aux rois vous seriez de grands fous.
 Ils ne les faut jamais engager dans vos guerres,
Ni les faire entrer sur vos terres.

This reading was followed by a long silence. The Prince, after himself returning the volume to its place, was pacing about the room.

'Well, Madame,' said the Princess, 'will you condescend to speak?'

'Indeed I shall not, Madame! Not until his Highness appoints me Minister; by speaking here, I should risk losing my position as Grand Mistress.'

A fresh silence ensued, lasting a good quarter of an hour; eventually the Princess remembered the role played, long ago, by Marie de Médicis, the mother of Louis XIII; during the preceding days the Grand Mistress had had M. Bazin's excellent *History of Louis XIII* read aloud by the Princess's Reader. The Princess, although greatly vexed, reflected that the Duchess might easily leave the country, and then Rassi, of whom she was horribly afraid, might well imitate Richelieu and make her son banish her.* At that moment the Princess would have given anything in the world to humiliate her Grand Mistress, but she could not; she rose and, with a somewhat forced smile, went over and took the Duchess's hand, saying to her:

'Come, Madame, show me you are my friend, by speaking.'

'All right! Just two words and no more; burn, here in this fireplace, all the documents assembled by that venomous Rassi, and never admit to him that you burned them.'

She added very softly, in a familiar manner, in the Princess's ear:

'Rassi could be Richelieu!'

'But confound it! These papers cost me more than 80,000 lire!' exclaimed the Prince angrily.

'My Prince,' replied the Duchess vehemently, 'that's the price you pay for employing scoundrels of low birth. Would to God that you might lose a million, and never give credence to the vile wretches who prevented your father from sleeping during the last six years of his reign.'

The expression 'low birth' had greatly pleased the Princess, who considered that the Count and his beloved attached too exclusive an importance to intelligence, which always tends to be a close relative of Jacobinism.

During the brief interval of complete silence that was filled with the Princess's thoughts, the palace clock struck three. The Princess rose, made a deep curtsey to her son, and said to him: 'My health does not permit me to continue this discussion any longer. Never let there be a minister of "low birth"; you will not cure me of the notion that your Rassi has robbed you of half the money that he's made you spend on spying.' The Princess took two candles from the candelabra and put them in the fireplace, in such a way as not to extinguish them; then, going up to her son, she added: 'For me, the La Fontaine fable is more persuasive than is the legitimate desire to avenge a husband. Will your Highness permit me to burn these documents?' The Prince did not move.

His face is really stupid, thought the Duchess; the Count's right: the late Prince would never have made us stay up until three in the morning before making up his mind.

The Princess, who was still standing, added:

'That little Prosecutor would be very proud of himself if he knew that his bits of paper, which are packed with lies and designed to secure his advancement, had kept the two most important personages of the realm busy all night.'

The Prince pounced like a madman on one of the portfolios and emptied its entire contents out into the fireplace. The mass of papers nearly extinguished the two candles; the room filled with smoke. The Princess saw in her son's eyes that he was tempted to pick up a carafe and save those papers which had cost him 80,000 lire.

'Open the window!' she shouted angrily at the Duchess. The Duchess hastily obeyed; immediately all the papers simultaneously went up in flames; there was a great roar in

the chimney and it soon became apparent that this had caught fire.

The Prince had a petty soul when it came to anything to do with money; he imagined his palace in flames and all the treasures it contained destroyed; he ran to the window and, his voice quite different, called the guard. The soldiers rushed helter-skelter into the courtyard on hearing the voice of the Prince; he returned to the fireplace which was drawing in air from the open window with a truly terrifying sound; then, losing patience, he swore, strode a couple of times round the study like a man beside himself, and finally ran out of the room.

The Princess and her Grand Mistress remained standing, facing one another, in complete silence.

Is she going to be angry again? wondered the Duchess. Upon my word, I've won my case. And she was preparing to be extremely impertinent in her replies, when a thought struck her: she saw that the second portfolio was still intact. No, my case is only half won! She said to the Princess, her manner rather cold:

'Does your Highness order me to burn the rest of these papers?'

'And where will you burn them?' asked the Princess crossly.

'In the drawing-room fireplace; if I throw them in one at a time, there's no danger.'

The Duchess put the portfolio overflowing with papers under her arm, picked up a candle and went into the adjoining room. She took the time to verify that it was the portfolio with the depositions, wrapped five or six bundles of papers in her shawl, very carefully burned the remainder, and then disappeared without taking leave of the Princess.

This is a fine piece of impertinence, she told herself laughingly; but her pretence of being an inconsolable widow almost lost me my head on the scaffold.

The Princess, on hearing the sound of the Duchess's carriage, was beside herself with rage at her Grand Mistress.

Despite the very late hour, the Duchess sent for the Count; he was at the palace fire, but soon appeared with the news that it was over. 'That young Prince really showed

himself to be very courageous, and I congratulated him heartily on it.'

'Take a quick look through these depositions, and then let's lose no time in burning them.'

The Count read them, and turned pale.

'My God, they were getting very close to the truth; these enquiries have been very cleverly conducted, they're right on the tracks of Ferrante Palla; and if he talks, we'll be in real trouble.'

'But he won't talk,' exclaimed the Duchess; 'that man is a man of honour; let's burn them, let's burn them.'

'Not yet. Let me note down the names of twelve or fifteen witnesses who are dangerous, and whom I'll take the liberty of having removed, if ever Rassi should try to begin again.'

'Allow me to remind your Excellency that the Prince gave his word to say nothing to his Minister of Justice about our nocturnal adventure.'

'Out of timidity and fear of a scene, he'll keep it.'

'This night, my love, has greatly helped to advance our marriage; I should not have wished to bring you a criminal trial as dowry, especially one arising from an offence committed because of my interest in another.'

The Count was in love; he took her hand, protesting; there were tears in his eyes.

'Before you leave, advise me as to how I should conduct myself with the Princess; I'm tired to death, I was acting a part in the theatre for one hour, and for five in the study.'

'You're sufficiently revenged for the Princess's sour remarks, which were just weakness, by the impertinent style of your departure. Tomorrow go back to the tone you were using this morning; thus far Rassi is neither in prison nor exiled; we haven't yet torn up Fabrice's sentence.'

'You asked the Princess to make a decision, a request which always annoys princes and even prime ministers; in a word, you're her Grand Mistress, which means her humble servant. There'll be a reaction—there's always a reaction with weak people—so that three days from now Rassi will be more in favour than ever; he'll try to get someone hanged; as long as he hasn't compromised the Prince, he's not sure of anything.'

‘There was a man hurt in last night’s fire, a tailor, who I must say showed the most extraordinary courage. Tomorrow I’m going to persuade the Prince to take my arm and come with me to call on the tailor; I shall be armed to the teeth and very much on the watch; in any case, this young Prince is not yet hated. For my part, I want to accustom him to walking about in the streets, it’s a trick I’m playing on Rassi, who is certainly going to succeed me, and will no longer be able to permit such imprudent behaviour. On our way back from the tailor’s I shall take the Prince past the statue of his father; he’ll see the marks from the stones which broke the Roman toga in which that idiot of a sculptor rigged him out; and, in short, the Prince will be very dull-witted if he doesn’t remark, quite unprompted: “This is what you get by hanging Jacobins.” To which I shall reply: “You have to hang ten thousand or not a single one; the Saint Bartholomew Massacre* wiped out the Protestants in France.”

‘Tomorrow, my dear, before this expedition of mine, have yourself announced to the Prince and say to him: “Last night I acted as your minister, I advised you, and, on your orders, I incurred the displeasure of the Princess; you ought to recompense me.” He’ll be expecting to be asked for money and will frown; leave him in the grip of this unpleasant notion as long as you can; then say to him: “I beg your Highness to command that Fabrice be tried, in Fabrice’s own presence, by the twelve most highly respected judges of your realm.” And immediately thereupon you will give him a little order to sign written in your own fair hand that I shall dictate to you; I shall of course include a statement to the effect that the first sentence is quashed. There’s only one objection to this; but, if you pursue the matter energetically, it will not occur to the Prince. He could say to you: “Fabrice must surrender himself for committal to the fortress.” To which you will reply: “He will surrender himself for committal to the town gaol” (as you know, that gaol is under my control; your nephew will come and see you every evening). If the Prince answers you: “No, his escape brought dishonour on my fortress, and I desire, for the sake of appearances, that he return to the cell which he occupied formerly”, you in your turn will

reply: "No, because there he would be at the mercy of my enemy Rassi"; and, in one of those feminine utterances which you deliver to such good effect, you'll give him to understand that, in order to persuade Rassi, you might well tell him about last night's *auto-da-fé*; if he insists, you will announce that you're leaving to spend two weeks at your villa at Sacca.

'You will send for Fabrice and ask his opinion about this move which could lead to his imprisonment. In order to foresee every eventuality, if, while he is behind bars, Rassi grows too impatient and has me poisoned, Fabrice may be in danger. But this is rather unlikely; as you know, I've brought in a French cook, who is the most light-hearted of men and makes puns; well, puns are not compatible with assassination. I've already told our friend Fabrice that I've found all the witnesses of his fine, courageous action; obviously it was Giletti who tried to murder him. I didn't say anything about these witnesses to you, because I wanted to surprise you, but this plan has fallen through; the Prince refused to sign. I've told our Fabrice that I would certainly procure him a high ecclesiastical office; but this will be very difficult for me if his enemies in the papal court can cite a murder charge as an objection.

'Do you not feel, Signora, that unless he is tried under the most formal conditions, the name of Giletti will cause him distress his entire life? It would be the extreme of cowardice not to seek a trial, when one is certain of one's innocence. In any case, even were he guilty I would have him acquitted. When I spoke to him, the impetuous young man didn't let me finish, he grabbed the official almanac and together we chose the twelve most upright and learned judges; when the list was finished, we erased six names, to replace them with six legal experts who are personal enemies of mine and, as we could find only two enemies, we completed the list with four rascals who are devoted to Rassi.'

The Duchess was intensely worried by this proposal of the Count's, and with good cause; eventually she saw reason and, under the Minister's dictation, wrote the order naming the judges.

The Count did not leave her until six in the morning; she tried to sleep, but in vain. At nine she breakfasted with Fabrice, whom she found burning with the desire to be brought to trial; at ten she was at the Princess's, who was not visible; at eleven she waited upon the Prince, who was holding his *levée*, and signed the order without raising the slightest objection. The Duchess sent the order to the Count, and went to bed.

It might perhaps be amusing to describe Rassi's fury on being obliged by Mosca to countersign, in the presence of the Prince, the order that the latter had signed that morning, but events oblige us to move on.

The Count debated the merits of each judge, and offered to change them. But the reader may be somewhat weary of all these procedural details, no less than of all these court intrigues. From which one may draw this moral: that the man who comes near a court compromises his happiness, if he is happy, and in every case, makes his future depend on the intrigues of a chambermaid.

On the other hand, in a republic like America you have to suffer the tedium of fawning upon the common shopkeepers all day long and becoming as stupid as they are; and over there, there's no opera.

When she rose from her bed that evening the Duchess knew a moment of intense anxiety: Fabrice was nowhere to be found; finally, towards midnight, while attending the play at court, she received a letter from him. Instead of surrendering himself for committal at the *town gaol*, where the Count was in control, he had returned to his old cell in the fortress, only too happy to be living within a few steps of Clélia.

This was an event of tremendous import; in that place, he was more than ever exposed to the danger of poison. This act of folly cast the Duchess into despair; she forgave the reason for it—Fabrice's desperate passion for Clélia, because Clélia would undoubtedly be marrying the rich Marquis Crescenzi in a few days' time. This act of folly restored to Fabrice all his former influence over the Duchess's heart.

It's that accursed piece of paper I had signed that's going to bring about his death! What fools men are with their ideas of honour! As if there were any point in worrying about honour

with an absolutist government, in a country where someone like Rassi is Minister of Justice! We should simply have gone ahead and accepted the pardon that the Prince would have signed just as willingly as he signed the order convening that special tribunal. After all, what does it matter if a man of Fabrice's birth should virtually be accused of taking up his sword to kill a second-rate actor like Gilettil!

Hardly had she received Fabrice's note than the Duchess hastened to see the Count, whom she found looking very pale.

'Great God! My dearest, I've a most unfortunate touch with that child, and you're going to be angry with me again. I can prove to you that yesterday evening I sent for the gaoler of the town prison, your nephew would have come every day to take tea with you. What is appalling is that it's impossible for either you or me to say to the Prince that there's a danger of poison, and of poison administered by Rassi; such a suspicion would strike him as the height of immorality. Nevertheless, if you insist, I'm prepared to go to the palace; but I'm sure of what the reply would be. I'll do more: I'll offer you a means which I would not resort to for myself. Since I came to power in this country I have not caused the death of a single man and, as you know, I am so simple-minded in that regard that sometimes, as night is falling, I still think of those two spies whom I rather over-hastily ordered to be shot in Spain. Well then! Do you want me to rid you of Rassi? The danger threatening Fabrice because of him is incalculable; he's found a sure means of smoking me out.'

This proposal greatly pleased the Duchess, but she did not adopt it.

'When we're living in retirement beneath that beautiful Neapolitan sky,' she told the Count, 'I do not want you to be thinking black thoughts at nightfall.'

'But, my dearest, it seems to me that all we have is a choice between different black thoughts. What's to become of you, what's to become of me, if Fabrice is carried off by some sickness?'

This question started the discussion off again with renewed vigour, until the Duchess concluded it with the following remark:

'Rassi owes his life to the fact that I love you better than I love Fabrice; no, I do not propose to poison all the evenings that we plan to spend together in our old age.'

The Duchess hurried to the fortress; General Fabio Conti took great pleasure in being able to confront her with the precise wording of the military regulation: no one may enter a state prison without an order signed by the Prince.

'But do not the Marquis Crescenzi and his musicians come to the fortress every day?'

'That's because, for them, I have obtained an order from the Prince.'

The poor Duchess was not aware of the extent of her misfortunes. General Fabio Conti had considered himself personally dishonoured by Fabrice's flight: when he saw him arrive at the fortress he ought not to have accepted him, for he had not received any such order. But, he told himself, heaven has sent him to me to restore my honour and save me from the ridicule which would blight my military career. It's important not to miss this chance; they're sure to acquit him, and I only have a few days in which to take my revenge.

CHAPTER 25

Our hero's arrival filled Clélia with despair: the poor girl, who was sincerely pious and free from self-deception, could not conceal from herself the fact that she would never know happiness separated from Fabrice; but she had promised the Madonna, when her father was almost poisoned, that she would make him the sacrifice of marrying the Marquis Crescenzi. She had vowed never to see Fabrice, and already she was gripped by the most terrible remorse on account of the admission she had been drawn into in her letter to Fabrice written on the eve of his escape. How is one to describe the feelings that filled her sorrowing heart when, sadly employed in watching her birds fly about, and fondly raising her eyes in her customary way to the window from which, in the past, Fabrice used to gaze down at her, she saw him there once more, greeting her with tender respect?

She imagined he was a vision sanctioned by heaven in order to punish her, and then her mind grasped the terrible truth. He's been recaptured, she thought, and he is lost! She remembered what was said in the fortress after the escape; the lowliest of the gaolers considered themselves mortally insulted. Clélia gazed at Fabrice, and in spite of herself that gaze perfectly reflected the passion that filled her with despair.

Do you imagine, she seemed to be saying to Fabrice, that I shall find happiness in the sumptuous *palazzo* that's being prepared for me? My father never ceases to repeat that you're as poor as we are; but God knows how happily I would share that poverty! But, alas, we must never see one another again.

Clélia did not have the strength to use the alphabets: while gazing at Fabrice she grew faint, and sank down on to a chair beside the window. Her head was resting on the window-sill and, as she wanted to look at him until the very last moment, her face was turned towards Fabrice who could see it perfectly. When, after a few moments, she again opened her eyes, she looked first at Fabrice; she saw tears in his eyes; those

tears, however, were the effect of intense happiness; he could tell that absence had not made her forget him. The two poor young people remained for some time as if spellbound by the sight of one another. Then, as though accompanying himself on the guitar, Fabrice ventured to sing a few improvised lines that said: 'I have returned to prison *in order to see you again*; I am going to be tried.'

These words seemed to revive all of Clélia's virtue; rising quickly to her feet, she covered her eyes and with most animated gestures attempted to convey to him that she must never see him again; this was what she had promised the Madonna, and it was out of forgetfulness that she had just looked at him. When Fabrice dared to speak once more of his love, Clélia fled in indignation, swearing that she would never see him again, for such were the precise terms of her vow to the Madonna: '*My eyes shall never look on him again.*' She had written them on a scrap of paper that her uncle Don Cesare had allowed her to burn on the altar at the moment of the offertory, while he was saying Mass.

But, in spite of all these vows, Fabrice's presence in the Farnese Tower restored Clélia to all her former habits. As a rule she spent every day alone in her room. Hardly had she recovered from the unlooked-for agitation brought on by the sight of Fabrice, than she began to roam about the *palazzo* and, as it were, renew acquaintance with all her friends among the servants. A very garrulous old woman who worked in the kitchens said to her in a mysterious manner: 'This time, Signor Fabrice won't be leaving the fortress.'

'He'll never make the mistake again of climbing out over the walls,' said Clélia, 'but he'll leave by the gate, if he's acquitted.'

'I'm telling your Excellency—and I know what I'm talking about—that he won't leave the fortress except feet first.'

Clélia turned extremely pale, a fact which the old woman noticed and which put a stop to her garrulity. She told herself she had been rash in speaking in this way to the Governor's daughter, who would be in duty bound to tell everyone that Fabrice had died of an illness. As she was returning to her room Clélia met the prison doctor, a decent, timid sort of

man who said to her with an air of great alarm that Fabrice was gravely ill. Barely able to keep on her feet, Clélia searched everywhere for her uncle, the good Father Cesare, eventually finding him in the chapel, where he was praying fervently; his face betrayed his deep distress. The bell rang for dinner. At table, the two brothers did not exchange one word until towards the end of the meal, when the General addressed a few acid remarks to his brother. The latter glanced at the servants, who left the room.

‘General,’ said Don Cesare to the Governor, ‘I have the honour to inform you that I am leaving the fortress; please accept my resignation.’

‘Bravo! Bravissimo! To make me look suspect! And for what reason, may I ask?’

‘My conscience.’

‘Come on! You’re nothing but a wretched priest! You don’t know the first thing about honour!’

Fabrice is dead, thought Clélia; his dinner was poisoned, or else it’s planned for tomorrow. She hurried to the aviary, determined to sing, while accompanying herself on the piano. I’ll go to confession, she told herself, and I’ll be forgiven for breaking my vow in order to save a man’s life. What was her consternation when, on reaching the aviary, she saw that the shutters had been replaced by planks fixed to the iron bars! In her desperation she tried to warn the prisoner by shouting, instead of singing, a phrase or two. There was no reply of any kind; already the silence of death reigned over the Farnese Tower. It’s all over, she thought. Terror-stricken, she ran downstairs, then returned to supply herself with what little money she possessed, as well as a pair of tiny diamond earrings; she also took, in passing, the bread remaining from dinner, which had been put away in a sideboard. If he’s still alive, it’s my duty to save him. Going up in an imperious manner to the little door of the tower, she found it standing wide open; at that very moment, eight soldiers had just been stationed in the ground-floor room with all the pillars. Clélia stared defiantly at these soldiers: she had intended speaking to the sergeant commanding them, but he was not there. She raced up the little iron staircase that climbed in a spiral round

a pillar; the soldiers watched her in utter stupefaction but, perhaps because of her lace shawl and her hat, did not dare say anything to her. There was no one on the first floor but, when she reached the second and entered the passage which (as the reader may recall) was secured by three iron-barred doors and led to Fabrice's cell, she met a turnkey whom she did not know and who said to her in a flustered manner:

'He hasn't had his dinner yet.'

'I am quite aware of that,' replied Clélia haughtily. The man did not dare stop her. Twenty paces further on Clélia encountered, sitting on the first of the six wooden steps leading to Fabrice's cell, another turnkey who was very old and very red-faced, and who asked her in a determined voice:

'Signorina, have you an order from the Governor?'

'Don't you know who I am?'

Clélia, at that moment, was filled with supernatural strength, she was possessed. I'm going to save my husband, she kept telling herself.

While the old turnkey was exclaiming: 'But my duty does not permit me...' Clélia raced up the six steps and threw herself at the door; an enormous key was in the lock; she needed all her strength to turn it. At that moment the half-drunk old turnkey grabbed hold of the hem of her dress; she rushed into the room, tearing her dress as she reclosed the door and, while the turnkey was trying to open it and follow her inside, she fastened the door with a bolt she found under her hand. Looking round the room, she saw Fabrice seated at an extremely small table upon which his dinner was laid. Dashing to the table, she overturned it and, grabbing Fabrice by the arm, asked him:

'Have you eaten?'

Fabrice was transported with joy on hearing Clélia use the familiar '*tu*'. In her agitation, she for the first time relinquished her maidenly reserve, and let her love be seen.

Fabrice had been about to begin that fatal meal: he took her in his arms and covered her with kisses. My dinner was poisoned, he thought; if I tell her that I haven't touched it, religion will reclaim its rights and Clélia will leave. If, on the other hand, she believes I'm dying, I'll be able to persuade her

to stay with me. She wants to find a way of breaking off her detestable marriage, and now by chance we are being offered one: the gaolers will be here soon, they'll break down the door, and there'll be such a scandal that the Marquis Crescenzi may possibly take fright, and the marriage be called off.

During the moment of silence while he was occupied by these reflections, Fabrice became aware that Clélia was already trying to free herself from his embrace.

'I don't feel any pain yet,' he told her, 'but soon it will prostrate me at your feet; help me to die.'

'Oh my only beloved!' she said to him, 'I will die with you.' As if in a frenzy she clasped him in her arms.

She looked so beautiful, with her dress disarranged and in her state of heightened passion, that Fabrice could not resist an almost involuntary impulse. He encountered no opposition.

Transported by the ardour and generosity which follows upon intense happiness, he said without thinking:

'I do not want a shameful lie to spoil the first moments of our happiness; were it not for your courage I would be nothing but a corpse, or else I would be thrashing about in the most hideous agony; but when you arrived I was about to begin my dinner, and I have not touched these dishes.'

Fabrice dwelt on these dreadful images in order to ward off the indignation that he could already read in Clélia's eyes. For a few moments, torn between two fierce and conflicting emotions, she gazed at him, then flung herself into his arms. There was a tremendous noise in the corridor, the three iron doors were being violently opened and shut, people were shouting at each other.

'Ah, if only I had some weapons!' cried Fabrice. 'They made me hand them over before they would let me in. They're probably coming to finish me off! Farewell, my Clélia, I bless my death since it has brought about my happiness.' Clélia kissed him and gave him a tiny, ivory-handled dagger with a blade scarcely longer than that of a penknife.

'Don't let yourself be killed,' she told him, 'defend yourself to the very last moment; if my uncle Don Cesare hears the

noise, he's brave and good, he'll save you; I'm going to speak to them.' So saying, she rushed to the door.

'If you are not killed,' she said fervently, her hand on the bolt of the door and her head turned towards him, 'let yourself die of starvation rather than touch any food whatsoever. Always keep this bread with you.' The noise was drawing nearer. Seizing Clélia by the waist, Fabrice took her place beside the door and, opening it violently, hurled himself down the six wooden steps. In his hand he held the tiny, ivory-handled dagger, which he very nearly thrust into the waistcoat of General Fontana, the Prince's aide-de-camp. The latter very hastily retreated, exclaiming in considerable alarm: 'But I'm here to save you, Signor del Dongo.'

Climbing up the six steps, Fabrice called into his cell: 'Fontana has come to save me.' Then, returning down the wooden staircase to the General, he addressed him with composure. He begged him, at great length, to pardon him for his initial angry impulse. 'They meant to poison me; the dinner they served me is poisoned; I had the wits not to touch it but I must confess that this behaviour has shocked me. When I heard you approaching I imagined they were coming to finish me off with their daggers... General, I demand that you give the order that no one may enter my cell; the poison would be removed, and our good Prince must be fully informed about this matter.'

The General, white-faced and highly disconcerted, transmitted the orders Fabrice had suggested to the select body of gaolers accompanying him; these men, very shamefaced at the discovery of the poison, lost no time in descending the stairs; they went ahead of the General, ostensibly so as not to hold up the Prince's aide-de-camp on the very narrow staircase, but in reality to make their getaway and disappear. To the great astonishment of General Fontana, Fabrice hung back for a good fifteen minutes on the little iron stairway that spiralled round that ground-floor pillar: he wanted to give Clélia time to conceal herself on the first floor.

It was the Duchess who, after a number of reckless attempts, had managed to get General Fontana sent to the fortress; she had achieved this by a fluke. On leaving Count

Mosca (whose alarm was as great as her own) she had hurried to the palace. The Princess, to whom energy—which she thought vulgar—was intensely repugnant, believed her mad, and did not seem in the least disposed to take any extraordinary step on her behalf. The Duchess, quite beside herself and weeping bitterly, could only repeat over and over again:

‘But, Madame, in a quarter of an hour Fabrice will be dead from poison!’

On seeing the Princess’s perfect composure, the Duchess became frantic with grief. She did not make this moral reflection, which would not have escaped a woman raised in one of those northern religions which permit self-examination: it was I who first used poison, and now I am perishing by poison. In Italy reflections of that nature, when expressed in moments of passion, seem the product of an exceedingly commonplace mind, much as a pun would do in similar circumstances in Paris.

In desperation, the Duchess ventured into the drawing-room where the Marquis Crescenzi, on duty that day, happened to be. When the Duchess returned to Parma he had thanked her effusively for his appointment as Gentleman-in-Waiting which, without her, he would have had no hope of securing. There had been, on his part, no lack of assurances of unbounded devotion. The Duchess greeted him with these words:

‘Rassi means to poison Fabrice, who’s a prisoner in the fortress. I’m going to give you some chocolate and a bottle of water; take them in your pocket; go to the fortress, and restore me to life by telling General Fabio Conti that you’ll break with his daughter if he does not permit you, personally, to give this water and chocolate to Fabrice.’

The Marquis turned pale, and his face, far from responding with animation to these words, expressed the most humdrum embarrassment; he could not believe in the possibility of so heinous a crime in a city as moral as Parma, ruled by so great a Prince, etc.; and these platitudes, furthermore, were uttered very slowly. In a word, the Duchess found herself dealing with a man who, though decent, was extremely weak, and incapable of decisive action. After a string of similar remarks—inter-

rupted by Signora Sanseverina's cries of impatience—he hit on a splendid idea: the oath he had sworn as Gentleman-in-Waiting forbade his involving himself in schemes against the government.

Who could possibly imagine the anxiety and despair of the Duchess, who was conscious that time was racing by?

'But at least see the Governor, and tell him that I will pursue Fabrice's assassins to the very gates of hell!'

The Duchess's natural eloquence was heightened by her despair, but all this fervour succeeded only in frightening the Marquis still more and intensifying his indecisiveness; at the end of an hour he was less disposed to take action than he had been at the very first moment.

That unfortunate woman, being now in the ultimate reaches of despair, and convinced that the Governor would refuse nothing to so wealthy a son-in-law, went so far as to fling herself at his feet; at that, the Marquis's pusillanimity seemed to grow even greater; confronted with this strange spectacle he feared he might unwittingly be compromised; but then an odd thing happened to him; the Marquis, a good man at heart, was touched by the tears and the posture, kneeling there at his feet, of a woman who was so beautiful and above all so powerful.

I myself, who am so noble and so rich, he thought, perhaps one day I too may be on my knees before some republican! The Marquis began to weep, and eventually it was agreed that the Duchess, in her capacity as Grand Mistress, would present him to the Princess, who would give him permission to hand to Fabrice a small basket, the contents of which, he would declare, he knew nothing about.

The previous evening, before the Duchess learnt that Fabrice had so imprudently gone to the fortress, a *commedia dell'arte* had been performed at the court; the Prince, who always reserved for himself the role of the Duchess's lover, had been so passionate in telling her of his love that he would have seemed ridiculous if, in Italy, a passionate man (or a Prince) could ever be ridiculous!

Though extremely shy, the Prince took very seriously anything relating to love; he came upon the Duchess in one of the

palace corridors, as she was conducting a highly agitated Marquis Crescenzi to the Princess's apartments. The Prince was so astonished and so dazzled by the impassioned beauty that despair had bestowed upon the Grand Mistress that for the first time in his life he behaved decisively. With a more than imperious gesture he dismissed the Marquis and began making a very formal declaration of love to the Duchess. The Prince had doubtlessly thought this out a long time in advance, for his declaration contained some quite sensible things.

'Since the conventions of my rank deny me the supreme happiness of marrying you, I will swear to you, on the holy sacrament, never to marry without your written permission. I am well aware', he added, 'that because of me you would be relinquishing the hand of a Prime Minister, an intelligent and most agreeable man; but after all he is fifty-six years old, and I am not yet twenty-two. I should be afraid of insulting you, and of meriting a rejection, were I to allude to certain advantages which are extraneous to love; but everyone at my court who prizes money speaks with admiration of the proof of love the Count has given you, in leaving you in complete control of everything he possesses. I should be only too happy to imitate him in that regard. You would make a better use of my fortune than I would myself, and you would have complete jurisdiction over the moneys which my ministers hand over every year to the Treasurer for the Crown; thus it would be you yourself, Madame, who would decide on the sum I could spend every month.' The Duchess found these details interminable; the dangers threatening Fabrice pierced her to the heart.

'Evidently, my Prince, you are not aware', she cried, 'that at this very moment Fabrice is being poisoned in the fortress! Save him! I believe all your assurances.'

The style of these remarks was the height of ineptitude. At the mere mention of poison all the ease, all the sincerity which this poor high-minded Prince was bringing to the conversation disappeared in a split second; the Duchess did not notice her blunder until it was too late to remedy it, and her despair increased, a thing she had supposed impossible. If I hadn't

mentioned poison, she thought, he would have granted me Fabrice's freedom. Oh my dear Fabrice! she added, it is therefore ordained that I must be the one who, through my stupidity, stabs you in the heart!

It took the Duchess considerable time and considerable coquetry to bring the Prince back to his declarations of passionate love; but he remained deeply alarmed. It was only his intellect that spoke; his heart had been chilled first by the idea of poison, and then by another idea, which was as disagreeable as the first had been terrible: poison is being administered in my lands, and it's being done without my being informed! Rassi must want to disgrace me in the eyes of Europe! God knows what I shall read next month in the Paris newspapers!

Suddenly, as this very timid young man's heart fell silent, an idea took shape in his mind.

'Dear Duchess! You know how devoted to you I am. Your terrible notions about poison are, as I hope and believe, without foundation; but they give me something to think about, and they almost make me forget, for a moment, the passion that I feel for you, which is the only one I have ever experienced. I am aware that I am not lovable; I am only a child who is very much in love; but at least put me to the test.'

The Prince, while expressing himself in this manner, was growing quite animated.

'Save Fabrice, and I'll believe all your assurances. No doubt I am carried away by a mother's irrational fears; but have Fabrice fetched from the fortress this instant, so that I may see him. If he's still alive, send him from the palace to the city prison; he can stay there for months, if your Highness so desires, until he is tried.'

The Duchess saw, to her despair, that, instead of agreeing with a word to such a simple request, the Prince now looked grave; very red in the face, he stared at the Duchess, then lowered his gaze; his cheeks turned pale. The idea of poison, so inopportunistically advanced, had suggested to him a thought worthy of his father or of Philip II; but he did not dare put it into words.

'Now, Madame,' he said to her finally, as if with a great effort, and in a most ungracious tone: 'you despise me as a child, and what's more, as someone lacking in personal charm; well! I'm going to say something horrible to you, but it's something that has this moment been inspired by the deep and genuine passion that I feel for you. If I believed in the slightest degree about the poison, I should have acted already, my duty would have obliged me to do so; but I see your request as nothing but a whim sparked by passion, and a whim whose implications, permit me to observe, I may possibly not grasp to the full. You wish me to act without consulting my ministers, I who have been on the throne for barely three months! You ask me to make a significant departure from my usual style of procedure, a style which I must confess I consider perfectly reasonable. It is you, Madame, who are at this moment absolute sovereign here, you give me hope in the matter which is everything to me personally; but an hour from now, when this imagined threat of poison, this nightmare, has vanished, my presence will become irksome to you, I shall no longer be in favour with you, Madame. So! I require a solemn oath; swear, Madame, that if Fabrice is returned to you safe and sound, I shall, within the next three months, obtain from you all that my love can desire; you will ensure the happiness of my entire life by placing at my disposal one hour of yours; and you will be wholly mine.'

At that moment the palace clock struck two. Ah! Perhaps it is too late, thought the Duchess.

'I swear,' she cried, wild-eyed.

The Prince instantly became another man; he raced to the far end of the gallery where the room for the aides-de-camp was situated.

'General Fontana, ride like the devil to the fortress, don't waste a second in going to the cell where they're keeping Signor del Dongo, and bring him to me, I must speak to him in twenty minutes, fifteen if possible.'

'General!' cried the Duchess, close on the Prince's heels; 'one moment may mean life or death to me. A report, which must surely be false, makes me fear Fabrice may be poisoned; call to him, as soon as you are within earshot, not to eat

anything. If he has touched his food, make him vomit, tell him it's my wish, use force if you have to; tell him I am following close behind you, and I shall be in your debt my entire life.'

'Duchess, my horse is saddled, I'm known to be a good horseman, and I'll go like the wind; I'll be at the fortress eight minutes before you are.'

'And I, Madame,' exclaimed the Prince, 'I ask you to give me four of those eight minutes.'

The aide-de-camp had vanished; he was a man whose sole talent consisted in being a good rider. Hardly had he closed the door than the young Prince, who was showing himself to be decisive, grasped the Duchess by the hand.

'Be so good, Madame,' he said to her in a passionate tone, 'as to come with me to the chapel.' The Duchess, at a loss for the first time in her life, followed him in silence. The Prince and she raced along the entire length of the palace's great gallery: the chapel was at the far end. Once inside the chapel the Prince fell to his knees, almost as much before the Duchess as before the altar.

'Repeat your oath,' he said fervently; 'if you had been fair, if I were not handicapped by this wretched princely rank of mine, you would have given me, out of pity for my love, what you now owe me because you have sworn an oath.'

'If I see Fabrice again and he has not been poisoned, if he is still alive a week from now, if your Highness names him Coadjutor and eventual successor to Archbishop Landriani, my honour, my dignity as a woman, it shall all be brought low, and I shall give myself to your Highness.'

'But, *my sweet*,' said the Prince with a combination of anxious timidity and tenderness that was highly amusing, 'I fear some obstacle that I'm not allowing for and which could destroy my happiness; it would be the death of me. If the Archbishop confronts me with one of those ecclesiastical objections which can go on being argued for years at a time, what will become of me? You can see that I am behaving with perfect good faith; are you going to be a little Jesuit with me?'

'No, in good faith; if Fabrice is saved and if you use all your power to appoint him Coadjutor and future Archbishop, I will dishonour myself and be yours.'

'Does your Highness undertake to write "approved" in the margin of a request that the Archbishop will present to you in a week's time?'

'For you I will sign a blank sheet of paper; reign over me and over my country!' exclaimed the Prince, flushing with happiness and really beside himself. He made the Duchess swear another oath. His emotion was such that he forgot the timidity so natural to him, and in that palace chapel, where they were alone, he murmured to the Duchess things which, three days earlier, would have changed her opinion of him. But in her heart the despair inspired by Fabrice's danger had been replaced by horror at the promise she had been compelled to make.

The Duchess was overwhelmed by what she had just done. If she was not yet fully sensible of the bitter pain of the promise she had given, this was because her attention was focused on the question of whether General Fontana could reach the fortress in time.

To escape from this boy's wildly amorous declarations, and to change the subject a little, she praised a famous painting of Parmigianino's which hung over the high altar in the chapel.

'Be so kind as to permit me to send it to you,' said the Prince.

'I accept,' said the Duchess, 'but please allow me to go to meet Fabrice.'

In great agitation she told her coachman to set the horses to a gallop. On the bridge over the moat to the fortress she met General Fontana and Fabrice, who were emerging on foot.

'Have you eaten?'

'No, by a miracle.'

The Duchess threw her arms round Fabrice's neck, then collapsed in a faint that lasted an hour and gave rise to fears, first for her life, then for her reason.

Governor Fabio Conti had turned white with rage on seeing General Fontana; he had been so dilatory in obeying the Prince's order that the General, who supposed that the Duchess was about to become the reigning royal mistress, had finally lost his temper. The Governor had counted on making Fabrice's illness last two or three days; but now, he told himself, here's the General, a member of the court, about

to find the insolent fellow thrashing about in agonies that give me my revenge for that escape of his.

Deep in thought, the Governor remained behind in the guardroom on the ground floor of the Farnese Tower, and hastily dismissed the soldiers; he wanted no witnesses to the scene that was going to take place. Five minutes later he was dumbfounded to hear Fabrice's voice, and to see him, full of vim and vigour, describing to General Fontana the layout of the prison. He vanished.

In his interview with the Prince Fabrice showed himself to be a perfect 'gentleman'. In the first place, he was anxious not to seem like a child who takes fright for no reason at all. When the Prince kindly enquired how he felt: 'Like a man, Serene Highness, who is dying of hunger, having (most fortunately) neither breakfasted nor dined.' After having had the honour of thanking the Prince, he requested permission to call on the Archbishop, before presenting himself at the town prison. The Prince had turned extraordinarily pale when the idea penetrated his childish brain that the poison was not purely a fantasy born of the Duchess's imagination. Absorbed in this cruel thought, he did not at first reply to the request to visit the Archbishop that Fabrice addressed to him; then he thought himself obliged to make amends for his absent-mindedness by excessive graciousness.

'Leave by yourself, sir, walk through the streets of my capital without a guard of any kind. Present yourself at the prison at ten or eleven o'clock; I hope that you will not spend long there.'

On the morrow of this memorable day, which was the most remarkable of his life, the Prince thought of himself as a little Napoleon; he had read that that great man had been well treated by several of the beauties at his court. Once established as a Napoleon with the ladies, he recollected that he had been a Napoleon in the face of gunfire. His heart was still filled with exaltation over his conduct with the Duchess. For the space of a fortnight, the consciousness of having accomplished something difficult made of him a quite different man; he became amenable to magnanimous considerations, he showed some character.

On that day he began by burning the letters-patent creating Rassi a count, which had been lying on his desk for a month. He removed General Fabio Conti from office, and demanded the truth about the poison from Colonel Lange, his successor. Lange, a fine Polish officer, terrified the gaolers and told the Prince that there had been a plan to poison Signor del Dongo's breakfast; however, too many people would have had to be involved. Arrangements had gone better over the dinner and, had it not been for General Fontana's arrival, Signor del Dongo would be dead. The Prince was filled with dismay; but, as he was really very much in love, he found consolation in being able to tell himself: It appears that I really did save Signor del Dongo's life, and the Duchess will not be able to go back on the promise she made me. Then another idea occurred to him: My calling is much more difficult than I had thought; everyone agrees that the Duchess is immensely clever, and in this context wise policy is in harmony with my heart. What heaven it would be for me if she were willing to act as my Prime Minister!

That evening, the Prince was so angered by the horrors he had uncovered that he refused to take part in the play.

'I should be only too happy,' he told the Duchess, 'if you would consent to rule over my State as you rule over my heart. As a start, I am going to tell you how I spent my day.' He then told her exactly what he had done: the burning of the letters-patent making Rassi a count, the appointment of Lange, his report on the poisoning, etc., etc. 'I find myself very inexperienced as a ruler. The Count humiliates me with his jokes, he even makes jokes in council meetings, and, in society, he passes remarks which you will tell me he never said: he declares I am a child whom he can lead as he chooses. One may be a Prince, Madame, but one is still a man, and such remarks rankle. In order to render the stories Signor Mosca might relate less credible, I was persuaded to include that dangerous rascal Rassi in my ministry, and now here's General Conti imagining Rassi to be still so powerful that he dares not admit it was Rassi or la Raversi who ordered him to kill your nephew; I've a good mind simply to commit General Fabio Conti for trial; the judges will see whether he's guilty of attempted poisoning.'

'But, Prince, do you have any judges?'

'What!' exclaimed the Prince in astonishment.

'You have some learned jurists who parade about in the streets looking important; but as to everything else, they will always decide cases so as to please the most powerful party at your court.'

While the horrified young Prince was saying things which revealed his naïveté much more than his sagacity, the Duchess was asking herself:

Does it really suit me to have Conti disgraced? No, definitely not, for then the marriage of his daughter to that decent, dull Marquis Crescenzi will be impossible.

There followed an endless discussion on this topic between the Duchess and the Prince. The Prince was overwhelmed with admiration. In consideration of the marriage of Clélia Conti to the Marquis Crescenzi, but on that express condition (which he himself angrily made clear to the ex-Governor), he pardoned him for the attempt at poisoning; but, on the advice of the Duchess, he exiled Conti until the time of his daughter's marriage. The Duchess believed she no longer felt love for Fabrice, but she still passionately desired the marriage of Clélia Conti and the Marquis; in this connection she nursed a vague hope of seeing Fabrice's obsession very gradually fade away.

Overcome with happiness, the Prince wanted, that very evening, to remove Rassi from office in the most public manner. With a laugh, the Duchess said to him:

'Do you know what Napoleon used to say? A man in a high position, where everyone can see him, should not permit himself to make any sudden, violent movement. But it's too late this evening, let's put off these decisions until tomorrow.'

She wished to give herself time to consult the Count, to whom she gave a most exact account of the evening's entire conversation, although she did suppress the frequent references made by the Prince to a promise that was poisoning her existence. The Duchess fondly hoped to make herself so indispensable to the Prince that she would be able to obtain an indefinite adjournment, by telling him: If you are so barbarous as to force me to suffer this humiliation, for

which I will never forgive you, I shall leave your principality the next day.

Consulted by the Duchess on the subject of Rassi's fate, the Count showed his great wisdom. General Fabio Conti and Rassi set off on a trip to Piedmont.

An extraordinary difficulty arose in connection with Fabrice's trial: the judges wanted to acquit him by acclamation, and to do this at the very first session. The Count had to use threats to ensure that the trial would last at least a week, and that the judges would take the trouble to hear all the witnesses. These people are all the same, he thought.

The day after his acquittal, Fabrice del Dongo finally took possession of the office of Vicar-General to the good Archbishop Landriani. The same day, the Prince signed the necessary documents for Fabrice to be named Coadjutor with eventual succession, and less than two months later he was installed in that position.

Everyone complimented the Duchess on her nephew's grave manner; the truth is that he was in despair. On the morrow of his rescue from prison, an event which was followed by the destitution and exile of General Fabio Conti and the high favour enjoyed by the Duchess, Clélia had taken refuge with her aunt Countess Contarini, a very rich, very old lady whose sole interest was her own health. Clélia could have seen Fabrice, but anyone aware of her previous commitments and who watched her behaviour now might have concluded that her passion for her lover had ended at the same time as the dangers that beset him. Not only did Fabrice walk past the Palazzo Contarini as often as he decently could, but he had also succeeded, after endless difficulties, in renting a small apartment opposite the first-floor windows of that building. On one occasion, Clélia having imprudently approached a window to watch a procession go past, she instantly stepped away as though terror-stricken; she had caught sight of Fabrice, who, dressed in black, but in the style of a very poor labourer, was watching her from one of the windows of his hovel, which had panes of oiled paper in place of glass, like his cell in the Farnese Tower. Fabrice would have been pleased to be able to believe that Clélia was avoid-

ing him because of her father's disgrace, which rumour blamed on the Duchess; but he was only too aware of another reason for this withdrawal, and nothing could rouse him from his melancholy.

He was quite unmoved by his acquittal, by his accession to exalted duties, the first he had been called upon to perform in his entire life, by his fine position in society, or indeed by the assiduous court paid to him by all the ecclesiastics and all the devout church-goers of the diocese. The charming apartments that he occupied in the Palazzo Sanseverina were no longer adequate. To her great delight, the Duchess had to hand over to him the entire second floor of her *palazzo* as well as two handsome first-floor drawing-rooms, which were always filled with people waiting for the opportunity to pay court to the young Coadjutor. The clause assuring his eventual succession had produced a surprising effect in Parma; all those steadfast qualities of Fabrice's character that had, in the past, so greatly scandalized the poor, silly courtiers, were now acclaimed as virtues.

For Fabrice it was a great lesson in philosophy to find himself totally unmoved by all these honours, and much more unhappy in his magnificent apartments, with ten footmen wearing his livery, than he had been in his wooden cell in the Farnese Tower, surrounded by hideous gaolers and in constant fear for his life. His mother and his sister, the Duchess V***, who came to Parma to see him in his splendour, were struck by his deep sadness. The Marquise del Dongo, now the least romantic of women, was so profoundly alarmed by this that she believed he must have been given some slow-acting poison in the Farnese Tower. In spite of her extreme discretion, she felt she ought to ask him about this quite extraordinary melancholy; Fabrice answered her only with tears.

A host of advantages arising out of his brilliant position had no effect on him other than to make him ill humoured. His brother, that vain soul irremediably poisoned by the vilest selfishness, wrote him an almost official letter of congratulation, in which he enclosed a draft for 50,000 lire, so that he might, as the new Marquis put it, buy a carriage and horses

worthy of his name. Fabrice sent this money to his younger sister, who had not married well.

Count Mosca had had a beautiful Italian translation made of the genealogy of the Valserra del Dongo family, originally published in Latin by Archbishop Fabrice of Parma. He had this printed in a magnificent edition with the Latin text on alternate pages; the engravings had been reproduced by superb lithographs executed in Paris. The Duchess had requested that a fine portrait of Fabrice be placed opposite that of the earlier Archbishop. This translation was published as being the work of Fabrice during his first imprisonment. But everything, even the vanity so natural to man, had been annihilated in our hero; he did not deign to read one single page of this work attributed to him. His position in society compelled him to present a magnificently bound copy to the Prince, who felt he owed him some recompense for the cruel death he had so narrowly escaped, and granted him the right of entry to his grand *levée*, a privilege which confers the title of 'Excellency'.

CHAPTER 26

The only moments in which Fabrice had some chance of shaking off his intense depression were those he spent hidden behind a glass pane with which he had replaced the square of oiled paper covering the window of his room opposite the Palazzo Contarini. As we have said, Clélia had taken refuge in that *palazzo*; on the few occasions when he had seen her since leaving the fortress, he had been deeply distressed by a striking change in her, which seemed to him ominous in the extreme. Since her lapse, Clélia's countenance had taken on an air of nobility and gravity that was truly remarkable; one might have supposed her to be thirty years old. Fabrice perceived, in this extraordinary change, the mark of some unyielding resolve. Every moment of the day, he told himself, she is promising herself that she will faithfully keep the vow she made to the Madonna, and never see me again.

Fabrice could guess only a part of Clélia's troubles; she knew that her father, now in deep disgrace, could not return to Parma and reappear at court (without which life for him was impossible) until the day of her marriage to the Marquis Crescenzi; she wrote to her father that she desired that marriage. The General had taken refuge in Turin, where his woes had made him ill. The effect of her great resolve had indeed been to age her by ten years.

She had easily discovered that Fabrice had a window opposite the Palazzo Contarini, but only once had she suffered the misfortune of seeing him; as soon as she caught sight of a man whose face or bearing bore some resemblance to his, she would instantly close her eyes. Her intense piety and her trust in the help of the Madonna were henceforth her sole resources. She knew the pain of feeling no respect for her father; she considered the character of her future husband to be utterly commonplace and in conformity with the usual level of sensibility of those in high society; she adored a man whom she must never see again, yet who had certain claims on her. She felt that these elements of her destiny had so

combined as to create unalloyed misery, and we must acknowledge that she was right. She would have needed to live, after her marriage, at a distance of 200 leagues from Parma.

Fabrice was aware of Clélia's profound modesty; he knew how any unusual venture, which if discovered might give rise to gossip, was certain to displease her. Nevertheless, driven to desperation by his extreme melancholy and by those invariably averted glances of Clélia's, he risked trying to bribe two servants of Signora Contarini, her aunt. One day, as night was falling, Fabrice, dressed as a prosperous countryman, came to the door of the *palazzo*, where one of the servants he had bribed awaited him; he declared himself to be from Turin, and bearing letters for Clélia from her father. The servant went to deliver his message, and showed him into a vast antechamber on the first floor of the *palazzo*. It was there that Fabrice spent what were perhaps the most anxious fifteen minutes of his life. If Clélia rebuffed him he could no longer hope for any peace. In order to put an end to the vexatious duties with which my new distinction burdens me, I shall rid the Church of a bad priest and take refuge in some monastery under an assumed name. Finally, the servant came to tell him that Signorina Clélia Conti was prepared to receive him. Our hero's courage failed him completely; he almost fainted from fright while climbing the stairs to the second floor.

Clélia was sitting beside a small table on which a single candle stood. No sooner did she recognize Fabrice beneath his disguise than she fled to the far end of the room, where she hid herself.

'So this is how much you care about my salvation', she cried, covering her face with her hands. 'Yet you surely do know that when my father was on the point of dying from poison I made a vow to the Madonna never to see you again. I have kept that vow except for that day, the unhappiest day of my life, when I thought it my duty to save you from dying. It is already a very great concession that—by a forced and probably criminal interpretation of my vow—I should be willing to listen to you.'

This final sentence so astonished Fabrice that it took him several seconds before he could rejoice at it. He had been prepared for the most violent anger, and for seeing Clélia flee; eventually his wits returned and he extinguished the solitary candle. Although he believed he had correctly understood Clélia's wishes, he was shaking all over as he approached the far end of the drawing-room where she had taken refuge behind a sofa; he did not know whether he would offend her if he kissed her hand; but she was trembling with love, and threw herself into his arms.

'Dear Fabrice,' she said to him, 'how long you have been in coming! I can speak to you only for a moment, for I dare say it is a great sin; and when I vowed never to see you I undoubtedly meant to promise never to speak to you either. But how could you so cruelly pursue my poor father because he wanted to avenge himself? For after all it was he who was nearly poisoned first, in order to help you escape. Ought you not to have done something for my sake, when I had so gravely compromised my reputation in order to save you? And in any case you are now completely bound by holy orders; you could no longer marry me, even if I found a way to get rid of that hateful Marquis. And then, that evening of the procession, how could you dare try to see me in full daylight, and thus violate in the most flagrant manner the holy vow I made to the Madonna?'

Fabrice, beside himself with surprise and joy, clasped her in his arms.

A conversation that began with so much to be said could not soon come to an end. Fabrice told her the exact truth about her father's exile; the Duchess had had no hand in it, for the excellent reason that she had never for one second believed the idea of poison to have been General Conti's; she had always thought it an inspiration of the Raversi faction, who wanted to drive Count Mosca away. The full and detailed account of that actual circumstance made Clélia very happy; she was very distressed at having to hate anyone belonging to Fabrice. She now no longer felt any jealousy of the Duchess.

The happiness arising out of that evening lasted only a few days.

The excellent Don Cesare arrived from Turin, and, drawing courage from the perfect goodness of his heart, he dared to have himself presented to the Duchess. After asking for her assurance that she would not abuse the confidence he was about to make, he confessed that his brother, misled by a mistaken idea of honour, and believing he had been defied and dishonoured in the eyes of the public by Fabrice's escape, had considered it his duty to take revenge.

Hardly had Don Cesare been speaking for two minutes when his case was already won; his absolute integrity had touched the Duchess, who was not accustomed to such a spectacle. He appealed to her as a novelty.

'Hasten the marriage of the General's daughter to the Marquis Crescenzi, and I give you my word that I'll do all I can to see that the General is received as if he were returning from his travels. I'll invite him to dinner: does that satisfy you? At the beginning there will of course be a certain amount of coolness, and the General must be in no hurry to ask for his position back as Governor of the fortress. But, as you know, I am well disposed towards the Marquis, and I shall not harbour a grudge against his father-in-law.'

Emboldened by these words, Don Cesare went to his niece and told her that she held in her hands the life of her father, who was ill from despair. It was several months since he had appeared at any court.

Clélia decided to go and see her father, who had taken refuge under an assumed name in a village near Turin; he supposed that the court of Parma was attempting to have him extradited by the Turin court, in order to bring him to trial. She found him ill, and almost demented. That very evening she wrote Fabrice a letter telling him that they must part for ever. On receiving this letter Fabrice, who was developing a character exactly like that of his mistress, went into retreat at the monastery of Velleja, in the mountains, ten leagues from Parma. Clélia's letter was ten pages long; she had once sworn never to marry the Marquis without his consent; she was now asking for that consent, which Fabrice gave her from the depths of his seclusion at Velleja, in a letter filled with the purest friendship.

When she received this letter, the friendliness of which, it must be admitted, provoked her, Clélia herself fixed the day of her marriage; the celebrations of this occasion further enhanced the brilliance of the Parma court that winter.

Ranuce-Ernest V was a miser at heart; but he was desperately in love, and hoped to secure the Duchess to his court: he begged his mother to accept an extremely large sum of money, and arrange some festivities. The Grand Mistress managed to make admirable use of these additional funds; the Parma celebrations, that winter, brought to mind the finest days of the Milan court and that charming Prince Eugène, Viceroy of Italy, whose kindness has left so enduring a memory.

His duties as Coadjutor had recalled Fabrice to Parma; but he announced that, for spiritual reasons, he would continue his retreat in the modest apartments which his protector, Monsignore Landriani, had forced him to accept in the Archbishop's palace; and he shut himself away there, with a single servant. Thus he did not attend any of the brilliant social occasions at the court, a fact which earned him, in Parma and in his future diocese, a very great reputation for saintliness. An unexpected consequence of this retreat—entirely and solely inspired by Fabrice's deep and hopeless misery—was that the good Archbishop Landriani, who had always loved him, and who, in fact, had himself had the idea of making him Coadjutor, began to feel a trifle jealous of him. The Archbishop rightly thought it his duty to attend all the court festivities, as is the custom in Italy. On those occasions he would wear his ceremonial robes, which are more or less the same as those he could be seen wearing in the choir of his cathedral. The hundreds of servants who had gathered in the colonnaded entranceway to the palace never failed to rise and beg the Monsignore's blessing; the Archbishop most willingly stopped and gave them it. It was in one of those moments of solemn silence that Monsignore Landriani heard a voice saying: 'Our Archbishop's going to the ball, and Monsignore del Dongo never leaves his room!'

From that moment the immense favour Fabrice had enjoyed in the Archbishop's Palace came to an end; but he

could now stand on his own feet. All of this behaviour, inspired solely by the despair into which he had been cast by Clélia's marriage, was seen as the effect of a simple, sublime piety, and devout believers read the translation of his family genealogy (a work characterized by the most inordinate vanity) as if it were a work of moral edification. The booksellers produced a lithographed edition of his portrait which was bought up in a few days, mostly by the common people; the engraver inadvertently reproduced, around Fabrice's portrait, several of the decorations which may be used only on the portraits of bishops, and to which a coadjutor is in no way entitled. The Archbishop saw one of these portraits, and his fury knew no bounds; he sent for Fabrice, and addressed to him some very harsh observations, couched in language which his passionate anger at times made exceedingly offensive. As may readily be imagined, Fabrice found no difficulty in behaving as Fénelon would have done in similar circumstances; he heard the Archbishop out with all possible humility and respect; then, when the prelate had stopped talking, he told him the whole story of the translation of that genealogy, which had been made on Mosca's orders, at the time of his first imprisonment. It had been published for worldly ends, which Fabrice had always thought hardly appropriate for a man of his calling. As for the portrait, he had had nothing whatever to do with that second work (any more than he had had to do with the first); the bookseller had sent him, during his retreat at the Archbishop's Palace, twenty-four copies of this second edition, so he dispatched his servant to buy a twenty-fifth; having discovered, by this means, that the portrait was being sold for thirty soldi, he sent 100 lire as payment for the twenty-four copies.

All these points, though they were explained in the most reasonable tone by a man whose heart was tormented by troubles of a very different nature, goaded the Archbishop in his anger to the point of frenzy; he went so far as to accuse Fabrice of hypocrisy.

'This is what the lower classes are like,' thought Fabrice, 'even when they are intelligent!'

A more serious concern was on his mind just then: he had received letters from his aunt demanding that he return to his apartments in the Palazzo Sanseverina, or at least that he come and see her sometimes. There Fabrice was certain of hearing about the splendid celebrations given by the Marquis Crescenzi in honour of his marriage; he was not, however, confident that he could bear this without making a spectacle of himself.

When the marriage ceremony took place, there was an entire week during which Fabrice maintained the most complete silence, after ordering his servant and the palace staff with whom he dealt never to speak to him.

Monsignore Landriani, on hearing of this fresh affectation, sent for Fabrice much more frequently than usual, and tried to engage him in long conversations; he even made him hold discussions with certain canons from the surrounding countryside, who claimed that the archdiocese had infringed their privileges. Fabrice accepted all these things with the perfect indifference of a man whose thoughts are elsewhere. It would be better for me, he thought, if I became a monk; I should suffer less amid the rocks of Velleja.

He went to see his aunt, and could not restrain his tears as he embraced her. She found him so greatly changed, with eyes that, owing to his extreme thinness, seemed larger than ever, so that they appeared to start out of his head, and he himself looking so wretched and miserable in the threadbare little black habit of a simple priest, that on first seeing him the Duchess also could not restrain her tears; but a moment later, when she had told herself that all these changes in the appearance of this handsome young man had been caused by Clélia's marriage, her feelings were almost equal in vehemence to the Archbishop's, although they were more skilfully controlled. She was cruel enough to talk at length about certain pictureque details which had distinguished the charming celebrations given by the Marquis Crescenzi. Fabrice made no reply; but a tiny convulsive spasm closed his eyes slightly, and he grew even paler than before, which at first had seemed impossible. His pallor, in these moments of intense suffering, took on a greenish tinge.

Count Mosca joined them, and what he saw (which seemed to him incredible) finally cured him completely of the jealousy which Fabrice had never ceased to inspire in him. That accomplished man employed the most subtle and ingenious language in an attempt to revive, in Fabrice, some interest in worldly matters. The Count had always felt great respect and a certain degree of friendship for him; this friendship, being no longer counterbalanced by jealousy, changed at that instant to something akin to devotion. He has indeed paid dearly for his splendid good fortune, reflected the Count, recollecting all Fabrice's tribulations. On the pretext of showing him Il Parmegianino's painting which the Prince had sent the Duchess, the Count took Fabrice aside:

'Now then, my friend, let's talk man to man: can I be of use to you in any way? Have no fear that I shall question you; but would money be of any help to you, is there anything that power could do on your behalf? Speak, I'm at your command; if you prefer to write, write to me.'

Fabrice embraced him affectionately, and talked of the painting.

'Your conduct is a masterpiece of the most subtle diplomacy,' the Count told him, reverting to a light conversational tone; 'you are setting up a very pleasant future for yourself, the Prince respects you, the people revere you, that threadbare little black habit of yours is giving Monsignore Landriani some sleepless nights. I have a certain amount of experience in these matters, and I can promise you that I do not know what advice to give you as to how you could perfect what I see. With your first move in society, at the age of twenty-five, you have attained perfection. At court you are talked about a great deal; and do you know to what you owe this distinction, which is unique in someone of your age? To that threadbare little black habit of yours. The Duchess and I, as you are aware, have at our disposal Petrarch's old house on that beautiful hill in the middle of the forest, near the Po; if it ever comes about that you weary of envy's ugly little machinations, it has occurred to me that you might become a successor to Petrarch, whose fame would enhance your own.' The Count was racking his brains for a way to bring a smile to those

austere lips, but to no avail. What made the change more striking is that until this present period, if Fabrice's countenance could have been said to have a defect, it was that occasionally, at inappropriate moments, it bore a sensual, lighthearted expression.

The Count did not let him leave without telling him that even though he was in retreat, it might perhaps be considered an affectation if he were not to appear at court the following Saturday, which was the Princess's birthday. This remark was a stab in the heart for Fabrice. Good God! he thought, why ever did I come here! He could not think without a shudder of the encounter that might take place at court. This idea overpowered every other; he decided that his only possible recourse was to arrive at the palace at the exact moment when the doors to the drawing-rooms were opened.

And indeed the name of Monsignore del Dongo was one of the first to be announced at this very grand reception, and the Princess received him with the greatest possible distinction. Fabrice kept his eyes riveted on the clock, and as soon as it indicated the twentieth of the minutes he had spent in the drawing-room he was rising to take his leave, when the Prince arrived at his mother's party. After paying his respects to him for a few moments, Fabrice was approaching the doors by carefully calculated moves when to his misfortune he fell victim to one of those trivial happenings of court life which the Grand Mistress orchestrated with such skill: the Chamberlain-in-Waiting hurried over to tell him that he had been chosen to play whist with the Prince. This, in Parma, was a signal honour, well above the rank the Coadjutor occupied in society. To play whist with the Prince was a remarkable honour even for the Archbishop. Stricken to the heart by the Chamberlain's words, Fabrice, in spite of his deadly hatred of any public scene, was on the point of telling him that he had suddenly been overcome with vertigo; but then he reflected that he would be subject to enquiries and commiseration, which would be even more unbearable than the whist. That particular day he found talking abhorrent.

Fortunately the Superior-General of the Franciscans was among the important personages who had called to pay their

respects to the Princess. This friar, an exceedingly learned man, a worthy rival of your Fontanas and your Duvoisins,* had stationed himself in a remote corner of the drawing-room: Fabrice stood in front of the Superior-General, in such a position as to be unable to see the entrance doors, and spoke to him of theology. But he could not prevent himself hearing the announcement of the arrival of the Marquis and Marquise Crescenzi. Contrary to his expectations, Fabrice experienced a violent surge of anger.

If I were Borso Valserra, he thought (this was one of the generals to the first Duke Sforza), I'd go and stab that dim-wit of a Marquis, with the very same tiny, ivory-handled dagger Clélia gave me that happy day, and I'd teach him not to be so insolent as to turn up with his Marquise in a place where I am present!

His countenance changed so markedly that the Superior-General of the Franciscans said to him:

'Does your Excellency feel unwell?'

'I have an appalling headache... these lights hurt my eyes... and the only reason I'm still here is because I've been chosen to play whist with the Prince.'

On hearing this the Franciscan Superior-General, a bourgeois, was so disconcerted that, not knowing what to do, he began bowing to Fabrice who, for his part, being far more upset than the Franciscan, began speaking with extraordinary volubility; he could hear the whole room falling silent behind his back, but did not want to look. Suddenly a baton was rapped against a music stand; a *ritornello* was played; and the celebrated Madame P*** sang this melody of Cimarosa's which was once so famous:

*Quelle pupille tenere!**

Fabrice held out for the first few measures, but his anger soon disappeared and he felt a fierce urge to burst into tears. Good God! what a ridiculous scene! And I a priest! He thought it wisest to talk about himself.

'These excessive headaches, when I try to suppress them, as I've done this evening,' he told the Superior-General, 'end in bouts of weeping which in a man of our calling might provide food for slander; therefore I beg your most illustrious

Reverence to permit me to weep as I look at you, and not to pay any attention whatsoever.'

'Our Father Provincial at Catanzara suffers from the same affliction', said the Franciscan, and in a low voice he embarked on an interminable story.

The absurdity of this story, which included details of this Father Provincial's evening meals, made Fabrice smile, a thing which had not happened to him in a long time; but soon he stopped listening to the Superior-General. Madame P*** was singing, most exquisitely, an air of Pergolesi's* (the Princess was fond of old-fashioned music). There was a tiny sound close behind Fabrice; he looked round for the first time that evening. The armchair that had just made the parquet creak slightly was occupied by the Marquise Crescenzi, whose eyes, filled with tears, looked straight into those of Fabrice, which were hardly in a better state. The Marquise bent her head; Fabrice went on looking at her for a few seconds: he was familiarizing himself with that head laden with diamonds, but his expression spoke of anger and contempt. Then, repeating to himself: *and my eyes shall never look upon you*, he turned again to his Father-General, saying to him:

'Now my trouble's coming on worse than ever.'

Fabrice did indeed weep bitterly for more than half-an-hour. Fortunately a Mozart symphony, excruciatingly performed as is invariably the case in Italy, came to his rescue and helped him to stem his tears.

He kept his resolve and did not turn his eyes towards the Marquise; but Madame P*** sang again, and Fabrice's soul, calmed by his tears, reached a state of perfect repose. Then, he saw things in a fresh light. Can I expect, he asked himself, to be able to forget her completely right from the start? Would that be possible for me? Then he was struck by this idea: Can I be more unhappy than I have been for the past two months? And if nothing can increase my suffering, why should I resist the pleasure of seeing her? She has forgotten her vows; she is fickle; are not all women like that? But who could deny that hers is a celestial beauty? She has a gaze which fills me with rapture, whereas I have to force myself to look at those

women who are generally considered the greatest beauties! Well then! Why not let myself be enchanted? I should at least know a moment of respite.

Fabrice had some knowledge of men, but no experience of the passions, or he would have told himself that this momentary pleasure, to which he was about to succumb, would bring to naught all the efforts he had made, during the past two months, to forget Clélia.

That poor woman had only attended this function at the insistence of her husband; she had hoped that she would at least be permitted, for reasons of health, to leave after half-an-hour, but the Marquis had told her that to summon her carriage to take her home while many carriages were still arriving, would be something quite unheard of, and which might even be interpreted as an indirect criticism of the Princess's reception.

'In my position as Gentleman-in-Waiting,' added the Marquis, 'I must remain in the drawing-room, at the Princess's orders, until everyone has left; there may be—there certainly will be—instructions to give the servants, they are so unreliable! And do you want an ordinary equerry of the Princess's to usurp that honour?'

Clélia resigned herself; she had not seen Fabrice; she still hoped he had not come to this party. But when the concert was about to start the Princess gave the ladies permission to sit down. Clélia, who was not at all quick in these matters, let others appropriate all the best places close to the Princess, and was forced to find herself a seat at the back of the room, right in the distant corner where Fabrice had taken refuge. When she reached her armchair her eye was caught by the Franciscan Superior-General's costume, which was so unusual a sight in that setting, and at first she did not notice the thin man wearing plain black who was speaking to him; but then some secret impulse drew her eyes to this man. Everyone here is wearing uniform or a very ornate coat; who can this young man be, with his plain black coat? She was looking at him with close attention when a lady, in taking her seat, gave Clélia's armchair a little push. Fabrice looked round; she did not recognize him, he was so changed. At first she said to

herself: there's someone who looks like him, it must be his elder brother; but I thought he was only a few years older than him, and this is a man of forty. All of a sudden she recognized him by a movement of his mouth.

Poor man, how he has suffered! she thought; and she bent her head, overcome with pain, and not out of fidelity to her vow. Her heart was engulfed with pity; how different from this he looked after nine months in prison! She was no longer watching him but, without precisely turning her eyes in his direction, she saw all his movements.

After the concert she saw him approach the Prince's whist table, which was placed very close to the throne; with Fabrice now a long way away from her, she breathed again.

But Marquis Crescenzi had been extremely vexed to see his wife relegated so far from the throne; he had spent the whole evening trying to persuade a lady seated three chairs away from the Princess, and whose husband owed him money, that she would be well advised to change places with the Marquise. As the poor woman quite naturally objected, he went to fetch the beholden husband, who made his better half listen to the sad voice of reason; at length the Marquis had the pleasure of effecting the exchange, and went in search of his wife. 'You're always too modest,' he told her; 'why do you look down like that when you're walking? People will take you for one of those middle-class wives who are quite amazed to find themselves here, and whom everyone's amazed to see here. That crazy Grand Mistress is always doing things like that! And they talk of slowing the advance of Jacobinism! Remember that your husband holds the most important male appointment at the Princess's court; and even if the republicans succeed in abolishing the court and even the aristocracy, your husband would still be the richest man in this state. That's an idea you don't keep sufficiently in mind.'

The armchair in which the Marquis had the pleasure of installing his wife was a mere six feet away from the Prince's whist table; she could only see Fabrice in profile, but he looked so much thinner, and in particular he gave the impression of being so far above all the affairs of this world, he who in former days had never let a single incident pass without

commenting on it, that eventually she reached this terrible conclusion: Fabrice was completely changed; he had forgotten her; if he was so much thinner, it was the effect of the severe fasting which his piety imposed. Clélia's sad theory was confirmed by the conversation of all her neighbours; the name of the Coadjutor was on everyone's lips; there was speculation as to the reason for the unprecedented favour of which he was the object: to be included, at his age, in the Prince's whist game! They were amazed at the polite indifference and aloof manner with which he played his cards, even when he was trumping his Highness.

'But this is incredible,' exclaimed some of the old courtiers; 'the favour his aunt is enjoying has gone to his head... but, heaven be thanked, it won't last; our Sovereign doesn't like it when people put on these little airs of superiority.' The Duchess went up to the Prince; the courtiers, who stood at a very respectful distance from the card table, so that they could only hear a few chance words of the Prince's conversation, observed that Fabrice was blushing deeply. 'His aunt must have rebuked him', they said to one another, 'for those disdainful manners of his.' Fabrice had just heard Clélia's voice; she was answering the Princess who, as she proceeded round the ballroom, had addressed a remark to the wife of her Gentleman-in-Waiting. The moment came when Fabrice had to change his place at the whist table; he then found himself exactly opposite Clélia, and several times allowed himself the happiness of gazing at her. The poor Marquise, feeling his eyes upon her, did not know where to look. On more than one occasion she forgot what her vow required of her and, in her desire to discover what was happening in Fabrice's heart, fixed her gaze upon him.

When the Prince's card game had finished, the ladies rose to go into the supper room. There was some confusion. Fabrice found himself very close to Clélia; his resolve was still firm, but he recognized a very faint perfume she used on her gowns; this sensation overthrew everything he had promised himself. He went up to her and, in a soft voice, as if speaking to himself, repeated two lines of that sonnet of Petrarch's which he had sent her from Lake Maggiore,

printed on a silk handkerchief: 'What happiness was mine when the world believed me unhappy, and now how different is my destiny!'

No, he has not forgotten me, thought Clélia, filled with rapture. That noble heart is not inconstant! She dared to repeat to herself these two lines from Petrarch:*

No, you will never see me change,
Fair eyes that taught me how to love.

The Princess withdrew immediately after supper; the Prince had followed her to her apartments and did not reappear in the drawing-rooms. As soon as this became generally known everyone wanted to leave at once; there was total confusion in the anterooms; Clélia found herself right beside Fabrice; the deep unhappiness portrayed in his features filled her with pity. 'Let us forget the past,' she told him, 'and keep this memento of *friendship*.' As she said this, she put her fan down in such a way that he could take it.

Everything changed in Fabrice's eyes; in an instant he was another man; the very next day he declared that his retreat was over, and returned to his magnificent quarters in the Palazzo Sanseverina. The Archbishop said (and believed) that the favour the Prince had shown him by including him in his whist game had made this brand-new saint lose his head completely; the Duchess saw that he had come to some understanding with Clélia. This idea, reinforcing the misery inspired by the memory of a fatal promise, finally decided her to go away. People wondered at such folly. What! To leave the court just when the favour she was enjoying seemed to know no bounds! The Count, perfectly happy now that he saw there was no love affair between Fabrice and the Duchess, said to his beloved: 'This new prince is virtue personified, but I referred to him as "this child"—will he ever forgive me? I can see only one way of truly being restored to his favour, and that is by absenting myself. I propose to be a perfect model of charm and respect, and then I shall fall sick and beg leave to retire. You will permit me to do this, since Fabrice's future success is assured. But will you make me the tremendous

sacrifice', he continued with a laugh, 'of changing the sublime title of duchess for another which is much inferior? Just for the fun of it, I'm leaving everything here in bewildering confusion; I had four or five people in my various ministries who really did work, and I retired them two months ago, because they read French newspapers; I've replaced them with unbelievable boobies.

'After our departure the Prince will find himself in such difficulties that, despite the revulsion he feels for Rassi's character, I have no doubt that he will be forced to recall him, and I only await an order from the tyrant who controls my destiny, to write a warmly affectionate letter to my friend Rassi, telling him that I have every reason to hope that very soon his talents will be justly appreciated.'

CHAPTER 27

This serious conversation took place the day after Fabrice returned to the Palazzo Sanseverina; the Duchess was still in shock from seeing the joy that radiated from everything Fabrice did. So, she told herself, that sanctimonious little creature deceived me! She wasn't able to resist her lover for three months.

The certainty of a favourable outcome had given that most faint-hearted of beings, the young Prince, the courage to love; he heard something of the preparations for departure that were in train at the Palazzo Sanseverina, and his French valet, who had little faith in the virtue of great ladies, strengthened his resolve with regard to the Duchess. Ernest V allowed himself to take a step which was severely criticized by the Princess and by all sensible members of the court; the common folk saw it as setting the seal on the astonishing favour enjoyed by the Duchess. The Prince came to see her in her *palazzo*.

'You are leaving,' he said to her in a serious tone which the Duchess found hateful; 'you are leaving; you are going to betray me and break your word! And yet, had I delayed for ten minutes in granting you Fabrice's pardon, he would be dead. And you're leaving me in this miserable state! Without your promises I should never have had the courage to love you as I do! So have you no honour?'

'Consider this very carefully, my Prince. Have you ever, in your entire life, known any period as happy as the four months that have just passed? Your reputation as a sovereign and, I dare to think, your happiness as a charming man have never been so great. Here's what I propose: if you are so good as to agree, I will not be your mistress just for a fleeting instant and because of a vow extorted through fear, but I shall devote every moment of my life to assuring your happiness, I shall always be what I have been for the past four months, and it may perhaps come about that love will put the crowning touch to friendship. I would not swear to the contrary.'

'Well!' cried the Prince in delight, 'accept a different role; be even more than that, rule both over me and over my realm, be my Prime Minister; I offer you a marriage such as the wretched conventions of my rank permit; we have an example close at hand; the King of Naples has just married the Duchess of Partana.* I offer you all that lies in my power, a marriage of a similar kind. And I am going to add a sad political footnote, to show you that I am no longer a child and that I have thought of everything. I ask no credit for the condition I am imposing on myself of being the last sovereign of my line, or for the heartache of watching, while I am still alive, as the great powers decide on who shall succeed me; I bless these very real vexations, since they offer me one more way of proving to you that I respect and adore you.'

Not for one instant did the Duchess hesitate; the Prince bored her, whereas she thought the Count perfectly amiable; there was only one man in the world who could be preferred to him. Besides, she ruled over the Count, and the Prince, controlled by the requirements of his rank, would more or less have ruled over her. And then, he might become inconstant and take mistresses; the difference in age would, in a few years, seem to entitle him to do so.

From the very first moment, the prospect of being bored had settled the matter; nevertheless the Duchess, who wished to be charming, requested permission to think it over.

It would take too long to record here all the near-tender phrases and infinitely gracious expressions in which she managed to envelop her refusal. The Prince lost his temper; he could see all his happiness slipping away. What would become of him after the Duchess had left his court? Besides, what humiliation to be refused! And whatever will my French valet say when I tell him of my defeat?

The Duchess was skilful enough to calm the Prince, and bring the discussion back, by slow degrees, to what it was really about.

'If your Highness deigns to consent not to insist on the fulfilment of a fatal promise, a promise that is horrible in my eyes because it will entail my despising myself, I shall spend my whole life at your court, and that court will always be what

it has been this winter; every moment of my life shall be dedicated to enhancing your happiness as a man and your reputation as a ruler. If your Highness obliges me to keep my promise, then you will have sullied the remainder of my days, and I shall, that very moment, leave your realm never to return. The day on which I lose my honour will also be the last day on which I see you.'

But the Prince, like all cowards, was obstinate; besides, his pride as a man and a sovereign was offended by the refusal of his hand; he thought of all the difficulties which he would have had to surmount for this marriage to be accepted, and which he had, nevertheless, made up his mind to overcome.

For three hours both parties kept going over the same points, frequently using quite heated language. The Prince exclaimed:

'Do you therefore wish to make me think, Madame, that you have no honour? If I had hesitated as long as this on the day when General Fabio Conti was poisoning Fabrice, today you would be occupied in erecting a tomb to him in one of the Parma churches.'

'Certainly not in Parma, in this land of poisoners.'

'Then leave Parma, Madame,' retorted the Prince angrily, 'and my contempt will go with you.' As he was departing, the Duchess said to him in a low voice:

'Very well, come here at ten o'clock this evening, in the strictest incognito, and you'll be making a fool's bargain. You will be seeing me for the last time, and I would have dedicated my life to making you as happy as an absolute prince can be in this century of Jacobins. And think what your court will be like when I am no longer here to rescue it by force from its native banality and mediocrity.'

'You, for your part, are refusing the crown of Parma, and more than the crown, for you would not have been like the common run of princesses, married for political reasons and not loved; my heart is yours alone, and you would have found yourself, for ever, absolute mistress of my actions and of my government.'

'Yes, but your mother the Princess would have had the right to despise me as a vulgar schemer.'

‘Well, I would have made the Princess an allowance and banished her.’

The sharp rejoinders continued for a further three-quarters of an hour. The Prince, who had a sensitive soul, could neither bring himself to make use of his prerogative nor to let the Duchess go. He had been told that after the first favours are granted, no matter how they are obtained, women come round.

Sent packing by the indignant Duchess, he dared to reappear, trembling all over and very miserable, at three minutes to ten. At half past ten the Duchess stepped into her carriage and set off for Bologna. She wrote to the Count as soon as she was outside the Prince’s domains:

‘The sacrifice has been made. Do not, for a month, ask me to be cheerful. I shall never see Fabrice again; I shall await you in Bologna, and I will become Countess Mosca whenever you wish. I only ask one thing of you, that you never require me to return to the country I am leaving, and that you always bear in mind that instead of an income of 150,000 lire, you will have at most thirty or forty thousand. The fools have all been watching you in open-mouthed amazement, and will no longer respect you except in so far as you willingly abase yourself sufficiently to understand all their petty ideas. “You asked for it, Georges Dandin!”’*

The marriage was solemnized in Perugia a week later, in a church which contains the tombs of the Count’s ancestors. The Prince was in despair. He had dispatched three or four couriers to the Duchess, who had not failed to return his letters in fresh envelopes with the seals unbroken. Ernest V had granted the Count a magnificent pension, and given the Grand Cordon of his order to Fabrice.

‘That is what I found particularly gratifying about his leave-taking. We said goodbye to one another’, the Count told the new Countess Mosca della Rovere, ‘like the very best of friends; he gave me a Spanish Grand Cordon, and some diamonds which are worth quite as much as the Grand Cordon. He told me he would make me a duke, were it not that he wanted to keep that as a means of attracting you back to his country. I have consequently been instructed to inform

you—what a fine errand for a husband!— that if you are so good as to return to Parma, even were it only for a month, I would be made a duke, with a title of your choice, and you would be given a splendid estate.'

This the Duchess refused with something akin to horror.

After the scene that took place at the court ball, and which seemed fairly decisive, Clélia appeared no longer to remember the love which, for an instant, she had seemed to share; the most intense remorse had taken hold of that virtuous and pious soul. Fabrice perfectly understood this, and despite all the hope he tried to nurture in himself, his heart was none the less gripped by sombre misery. This time, however, his misery did not force him into retreat, as it had done at the time of Clélia's marriage.

The Count had begged 'his nephew' to send him full reports of what was happening at court and Fabrice, who was beginning to grasp just how much he owed Mosca, had made up his mind to carry out this mission most faithfully.

Fabrice, along with everyone in the city and the court, never doubted that his friend intended to return to the ministry, and with more power than ever before. The Count's expectations were soon fulfilled: less than six weeks after his departure Rassi became Prime Minister; Fabio Conti, Minister of War; and the prisons, which the Count had almost emptied, were once again being filled. In appointing these men to positions of power the Prince fancied he was having his revenge on the Duchess; he was madly in love, and above all hated Count Mosca as a rival.

Fabrice had a great deal to do; Monsignore Landriani, now seventy-two years old, had fallen into a state of extreme languor and, as he now hardly ever left his palace, it fell to the Coadjutor to carry out almost all his duties.

The Marquise Crescenzi, overcome with remorse and frightened by her confessor, had hit on an excellent way of avoiding being seen by Fabrice. Taking advantage of the end of a first pregnancy, she had made a prison of her own *palazzo*; but this *palazzo* had a huge garden. Fabrice succeeded in entering this garden; along the walk which was Clélia's favourite he placed bouquets of flowers arranged in

such a manner as to convey a message, just as she had once sent him flowers each evening, during his final days of imprisonment in the Farnese Tower.

The Marquise was angered by this move; the feelings of her heart were controlled now by remorse, now by passion. For several months she did not allow herself to go even once into her *palazzo* garden; she even made a point of not so much as glancing into it.

Fabrice was beginning to believe that he was separated from her for ever, and despair started to take possession of his heart also. The society in which he spent his days filled him with deep aversion, and had he not been totally convinced that the Count could find no peace of mind outside the ministry, he would have gone into retreat in his little apartment in the Archbishop's palace. He would have found it sweet to live only with his own thoughts, and never again to hear the human voice except in the exercise of his official responsibilities.

But there's no one, he told himself, to replace me in watching over the interests of the Count and Countess Mosca.

The Prince continued to treat him with a distinction which placed him in the first rank at court, and this favour was due in large part to Fabrice himself. His extreme reserve, which in his case was the result of an indifference bordering on revulsion for all the affectations and petty passions which fill men's lives, had stung the young Prince's vanity; he would often remark that Fabrice was as clever as his aunt. The Prince's artless soul was vaguely conscious of this fact: that among those who approached him, nobody did so with feelings like those of Fabrice. What no one, not even the common run of the courtiers, could fail to notice was that the esteem gained by Fabrice was not that of a simple Coadjutor, but was greater even than the respect the Sovereign accorded the Archbishop. Fabrice wrote to the Count that if ever the Prince had wit enough to observe the confusion into which those ministers, Rassi, Fabio Conti, Zurla, and others, had plunged his affairs, he, Fabrice, would be the natural channel he would employ for making an approach without seriously compromising his pride.

‘Were it not for the memory of that fatal expression: “this child”,’ he wrote to the Countess Mosca, ‘employed by a man of genius to refer to an august personage, the august personage would already have exclaimed: “Come back immediately and rid me of all these good-for-nothings.” Even at this moment, if the wife of the man of genius condescended to make some overture, however trivial, the Count would be recalled with great delight; but he will return in far grander style if he waits for the time to be ripe. On other matters, we are being bored to death in the Princess’s drawing-rooms, where the only entertainment is Rassi’s lunacy; now that he’s a Count he’s become a maniac about blue blood. Strict orders have just been issued that anyone who cannot prove eight quarters of nobility *shall no longer* dare present himself at the Princess’s evening receptions (that is the wording of the edict). Every man now entitled to enter the grand gallery in the morning and to be there when the Sovereign passes by on his way to Mass will continue to enjoy this privilege, but new arrivals must show proof of the eight quarters. Which has prompted people to remark that obviously Rassi can show no quarter.’

It may be imagined that such letters were not entrusted to the post. Countess Mosca replied from Naples: ‘Every Thursday we have a concert and every Sunday a *conversazione*: you can’t move in our drawing-rooms. The Count is delighted with his excavations, he spends a thousand lire a month on them, and has just brought in some workers from the mountains of the Abruzzi, who only cost him twenty-three soldi a day. You really ought to come and see us. This is more than the twentieth time, you heartless creature, that I have made this request.’

Fabrice had no intention of obeying; he found the simple letter he wrote daily to the Count or the Countess an almost intolerable burden. One can pardon him when one learns that an entire year passed in this manner, without his being able to address one single word to the Marquise. All his attempts to establish some kind of correspondence had been rejected with horror. The habitual silence which Fabrice, out of distaste for life, everywhere observed, except in the exercise of his functions and at court, together with the absolute purity of his

morals, had resulted in his being held in such extraordinary veneration that he finally decided to follow his aunt's advice.

'The Prince feels such veneration for you', she wrote to him, 'that you must expect soon to find yourself out of favour; his low esteem for you will be made very apparent, and the courtiers, following his lead, will treat you with outrageous contempt. These petty despots, however decent they may be, are as fickle as fashion and for the same reason: boredom. Your only defence against the Sovereign's whims lies in preaching. You are so good at writing impromptu verse! Try to talk for half-an-hour about religion; at first you'll say things that are heretical, but pay a learned, discreet theologian to come to your sermons and tell you of your mistakes, and you can correct them the next day.'

The kind of misery with which thwarted passion fills the soul means that anything requiring concentration and action becomes an insupportable burden. But Fabrice told himself that his influence over the common people, if he were able to obtain it, could one day be of use to his aunt and to the Count, for whom with each passing day he felt a more profound respect as his own experience in public affairs taught him to know how evil men are. He made up his mind to preach, and his success, for which his emaciated figure and threadbare habit prepared the way, was without precedent. People were conscious of an aura of intense sadness in his sermons which, together with his charming face and the reports of the high favour he enjoyed at court, won him every female heart. The ladies dreamed up a story about his having been one of the bravest captains in Napoleon's army. Soon this absurd fact was considered indisputable. Places were reserved in the churches where he was to preach; the poor would occupy seats there, as a speculation, by five in the morning.

His success was such that eventually Fabrice had the idea, which completely changed his whole outlook, that, were it only out of simple curiosity, the Marquise Crescenzi might some day come to hear one of his sermons. All of a sudden the delighted public observed that his talents were increasing; he allowed himself, when he was moved, images the boldness

of which would have made the most experienced orator tremble; occasionally he would forget himself, surrendering to moments of passionate inspiration, when his entire audience dissolved in tears. But in vain did that frowning glance of his seek among so many faces turned towards the pulpit the one whose presence would have been for him of such tremendous import.

But, he reflected, if I ever have that good fortune, either I shall be taken ill or I shall be unable to say another word. To avoid the latter difficulty, he had composed a sort of prayer full of tenderness and passion, that he always kept on a high stool in his pulpit; he planned to begin reading this piece if ever the presence of the Marquise rendered him incapable of finding anything to say.

One day he heard, from those servants of the Marquis who were in his pay, that orders had been given for the *Casa Crescenzi's* box at the principal theatre to be prepared for the morrow. A year had passed since the Marquise had attended any kind of performance; a tenor who was all the rage and filled the theatre every evening was the cause of this break with habit. Fabrice's first reaction was one of intense joy. At last I shall be able to see her for an entire evening! They say she is extremely pale. And he tried to imagine what that charming face would look like, with its colours half faded by conflicts of the soul.

His friend Ludovic, greatly dismayed at what he called his master's madness, obtained—with considerable difficulty—a box on the fourth level, almost opposite that of the Marquise. An idea occurred to Fabrice: I hope to make her think of attending my sermon, and I'll choose a church which is very small, so that I'll be able to see her properly. Fabrice generally preached at three o'clock. On the morning of the day when the Marquise would be going to the theatre he announced that, because one of his duties as Coadjutor required his presence all day long at the Archbishop's palace, he would on this one occasion preach at eight-thirty in the evening in the little church of Santa Maria della Visitazione, which was situated exactly opposite one of the wings of the Palazzo Crescenzi. Ludovic presented the nuns of Santa Maria, on

behalf of Fabrice, with an enormous quantity of candles, and requested them to make their church as bright as day. He had an entire company of grenadier guards at his disposal, and placed a sentry with fixed bayonet at the entrance to each chapel, to prevent thefts.

Although the sermon had been announced for half-past eight, at two o'clock the church was completely filled, and the din in the secluded street overlooked by the noble architecture of the Palazzo Crescenzi may be imagined. Fabrice had announced that, in honour of Our Lady of Pity, he was going to preach on the pity that a generous soul should feel for someone unfortunate, even if that person were guilty.

Disguised with the greatest possible care, Fabrice entered his box at the theatre the moment the doors were opened, before the lights had been lit. The performance began about eight o'clock, and a few minutes later he knew a joy which no heart that has not experienced it can imagine, he saw the door of the Crescenzi box open; shortly after that, the Marquise entered; he had not seen her so clearly since the day when she gave him her fan. Fabrice thought he would suffocate from happiness; his sensations were so extraordinary that he wondered: Perhaps I'm about to die! What an enchanting way to end this miserable life! Perhaps I'm about to collapse here in this box; the faithful gathered in Santa Maria will wait in vain for my arrival, and tomorrow will discover that their future Archbishop fell from grace in a box at the opera, and, furthermore, disguised as a servant wearing livery! Farewell to my reputation! And what do I care for my reputation!

Nevertheless, at about a quarter to nine Fabrice took a hold of himself; he left his box on the fourth floor and made his way with great difficulty, on foot, to the place where he was to remove his livery and dress in something more appropriate. Not until it was almost nine did he reach the church of Santa Maria, looking so pale and weak that the rumour spread through the church that his Excellency the Coadjutor would not be able to preach that evening. He took refuge in the nuns' inner parlour, and the attentions the sisters lavished on him through the grille may be imagined. These ladies were very talkative and Fabrice asked to be left alone for a few

moments; then he hurried over to his pulpit. At about three o'clock one of his aides-de-camp had informed him that the church of Santa Maria was entirely filled, but by people of the humblest social class, who had apparently been attracted there by the sight of the illuminations. Fabrice, on climbing into the pulpit, was agreeably surprised to find all the chairs occupied by young people of fashion and by individuals of the very highest distinction.

He began his sermon with some words of apology which were received with suppressed cries of admiration. There then followed the impassioned description of the hapless creature whom one must pity in order to honour in an appropriate manner Our Lady of Pity, who herself suffered so greatly on this earth. The orator was deeply moved; there were times when he could barely enunciate his words so as to be heard in every part of that small church. To the eyes of all the women and a good number of the men, he gave the impression of himself being the hapless creature on whom they should take pity, so extreme was his pallor. A few minutes after the words of apology with which he had begun his sermon, it was observed that he was not his usual self; his sadness, that evening, struck people as more profound and more tender than usual. At one point he was seen to have tears in his eyes; instantly a collective sob arose in the auditorium, so loud as to interrupt the sermon completely.

This first interruption was followed by ten more; there were cries of admiration and outbursts of weeping; at every moment exclamations could be heard such as 'Ah! Holy Madonna! Ah! Almighty God!' The emotion was so universal and so overwhelming among this select audience that no one felt ashamed of crying out, and those impelled to do so did not appear ridiculous to their neighbours.

During the interval of rest which is customary in the middle of a sermon, Fabrice was told that there was absolutely nobody left in the theatre; one lady only could still be seen in her box, the Marquise Crescenzi. During this interval there was suddenly a great deal of noise in the body of the church: the faithful were resolving to erect a statue to his Excellency the Coadjutor. The reception accorded the second part of his

sermon was of so wild and so worldly a nature, the manifestations of Christian contrition being replaced to such a marked degree by totally profane cries of admiration, that on leaving the pulpit he felt obliged to address a kind of reprimand to his audience. Upon which everyone together went out of the church, moving in a strange, formal manner; outside in the street they all began clapping furiously and shouting: '*È viva del Dongo!*'

Fabrice hurriedly consulted his watch and ran to a little barred window which lighted the narrow passage leading from the organ-loft to the interior of the convent. Out of consideration for the extraordinary, unprecedented crowd which filled the street, the porter of the Palazzo Crescenzi had placed a dozen torches in those iron sconces one sees projecting from the façade of mansions built in the Middle Ages. After some minutes, and long before the shouting had ceased, the event that Fabrice was awaiting so eagerly occurred; the Marquise's carriage, returning from the performance, appeared in the street; the coachman was forced to stop, and it was only at a very slow pace, and by dint of shouting, that the carriage could drive up to the entrance.

The Marquise had been touched by the sublime music, as are those whose hearts are grieving, but even more by her complete solitude at the performance, once she had learnt of its cause. In the middle of the second act, with the superb tenor actually on stage, even the audience in the pit had suddenly deserted their places to go and try their luck at penetrating inside the church of Santa Maria. The Marquise, finding herself stopped by the crowd outside her door, burst into tears. I didn't make a bad choice! she thought.

But precisely because of this moment of soft-heartedness, she firmly resisted the urging of the Marquis and of all the family friends, who could not understand why she did not go to hear such an amazing preacher. 'After all,' they said, 'he's even better than the best tenor in Italy!' I'm lost if I see him, the Marquise kept telling herself.

In vain did Fabrice, whose talent every day seemed more brilliant, preach several more times in that same little church near the Palazzo Crescenzi, he never saw Clélia, who even, in

the end, grew annoyed at his disturbing the seclusion of her street, after having already driven her out of her own garden.

For some time now Fabrice, as he glanced at the faces of the women who were listening to him, had noticed one that was small, dark, and very pretty, with eyes that flashed fire. Those magnificent eyes were usually bathed in tears by about the eighth or tenth sentence of his sermon. When Fabrice was obliged to say things that he himself found long or boring, he was quite glad to rest his eyes on that countenance which pleased him because of its youth. He learnt that this young person was called Anetta Marini, and was the only daughter of, and heiress to, the richest draper in Parma, who had died several months earlier.

Soon the name of this Anetta Marini, the draper's daughter, was on everyone's lips; she had fallen madly in love with Fabrice. When the famous sermons began, arrangements had already been made for her marriage to Giacomo Rassi, the Minister of Justice's eldest son, to whom she was not at all averse; but hardly had she heard Monsignore Fabrice preach twice, than she declared that she no longer wished to marry; and as she was asked the reason for such an extraordinary change, she replied that it was not right for a decent girl to marry one man when she was desperately in love with another one. Her family tried, at first without any success, to discover who this other might be.

But the scalding tears shed by Anetta at the sermons suggested where the truth might lie; her mother and her uncles asked her if she loved Monsignore Fabrice, and she boldly replied that, since they had discovered the truth, she would not demean herself by lying; she added that, having no hope of marrying the man she adored, she at least would like no longer to have her eyes offended by the ridiculous sight of *Contino* Rassi's face. This derision of the son of a man whom the entire middle class envied became, within a couple of days, the talk of the whole town. Anetta Marini's reply struck people as delightful, and everyone repeated it. It was talked of at the Palazzo Crescenzi as it was talked of everywhere else.

Clélia was very careful not to utter a word on such a subject in her drawing-room, but she questioned her chambermaid

and, the following Sunday, after hearing Mass in the chapel of the *palazzo*, she took her maid with her in her carriage and went to hear a second Mass in Signorina Marini's parish church. She found all the town dandies assembled there for the same reason; these gentlemen were standing near the door. Soon, from the great commotion in their midst, she realized that this Signorina Marini was entering the church; it so happened that she was very well placed to see her and, despite her piety, she hardly paid any attention to the Mass. Clélia noted a little air of self-assurance in this middle-class beauty which, she felt, would have better fitted a woman who had been married for at least several years. Other than that, she was short with an extremely good figure, and her eyes, as they say in Lombardy, seemed to converse with whatever they were looking at. The Marquise made her escape before the end of the Mass.

The following day, the friends of the Crescenzi family who always came to spend the evening with them had a fresh absurd exploit of Anetta Marini's to recount. Since her mother, fearing she might do something rash, left very little money at her disposal, Anetta had gone to the famous Hayez, in Parma at that time to work on the Crescenzi drawing-rooms, had offered him a magnificent diamond ring (a gift from her father), and had asked for the portrait of Signor del Dongo; but she wanted him to be dressed simply in black, and not as a priest. Now, the previous evening little Anetta's mother had been very surprised and even more scandalized to find in her daughter's bedroom a magnificent portrait of Fabrice del Dongo, set in the handsomest frame to have been gilded in Parma in the course of the last twenty years.

CHAPTER 28

Swept along by the pressure of events, we have had no time to portray the comic breed of courtiers who abound at the court of Parma, and who made the oddest comments about the events we have recounted. The thing which, in Parma, entitles a member of the lesser nobility with an income of three or four thousand lire to present himself (attired in black stockings) at the Prince's *levées*, is first and foremost never to have read Voltaire and Rousseau: this requirement is not hard to fulfil. It was further necessary to be able to speak with tender concern about the Sovereign's cold, or about the latest case of mineralogical specimens that he had received from Saxony. If in addition this noble did not fail to attend Mass on one single day in the entire year, if he could count among his intimate friends two or three fat monks, the Prince would condescend to address him once each year, either a fortnight before or a fortnight after the first of January, which gave him considerable consequence in his parish, and the collector of taxes would not dare to harass him too much if he was late with the annual sum of 100 lire at which his modest estates were assessed.

Signor Gonzo* was a poor devil of this sort, of very noble birth, who, in addition to the modest fortune he possessed in his own right, had obtained through the influence of the Marquis Crescenzi a magnificent position worth 1,150 lire a year. This man could have dined in his own home, but he had one passion: he did not feel at ease, and happy, unless he was in the drawing-room of some important personage who would say to him from time to time: 'Hold your tongue, Gonzo, you're an absolute fool.' This opinion was prompted by ill humour, for Gonzo was almost always more intelligent than the important personage. He could converse on every subject and did so with reasonable grace; furthermore, he was prepared to change his opinion if he saw the master of the house frown. To be truthful, although he was exceedingly shrewd where his own interests were concerned, he had not

one solitary idea, and when the Prince did not have a cold he sometimes found himself at a loss upon entering a drawing-room.

What had earned Gonzo a reputation in Parma was a magnificent tricorne hat, embellished with a somewhat dilapidated black plume, which he sported even when he was wearing evening dress; but you really needed to see the way he bore that plume, whether on his head or in his hand, for this revealed both talent and presumption. He would enquire with genuine anxiety about the state of health of the Marquise's little dog, and if the Palazzo Crescenzi had caught fire he would have risked his life to save one of those handsome gold brocade armchairs, on which his black silk breeches had for so many years been catching, when it chanced that he dared sit down upon one of them for a moment.

Seven or eight individuals of this kind turned up every evening at seven o'clock in the Marquise Crescenzi's drawing-room. Hardly had they seated themselves than a footman magnificently dressed in a pale yellow livery, entirely covered in silver braid—as was the red waistcoat which put the final touch to this magnificence—approached and took the poor devils' hats and canes. Immediately behind him came a manservant bearing an absolutely minute cup of coffee in a silver filigree holder; and every half-hour a butler wearing a sword and a magnificent coat in the French style brought round ices.

Half-an-hour after the shabby little courtiers, five or six officers would arrive, usually discussing, in their loud, very military tones, the quantity and style of the buttons which a soldier's coat should display in order to ensure victories for the general. It would not have been prudent, in that drawing-room, to quote from a French newspaper; for, even when the item of news was exceedingly agreeable in nature, for example, that fifty Liberals had been shot in Spain, the narrator would nevertheless be proven guilty of having read a French paper. For all of those individuals, the supreme achievement of their abilities was to obtain, every ten years, an increase of 150 lire in their stipend. It is by such means that the Prince shares with his nobility the pleasure of ruling over the peasants and the middle classes.

The principal guest to frequent the Crezcenzi drawing-room was without any doubt the Chevalier Foscarini, a genuinely decent man; he had, therefore, seen the inside of a prison, off and on, under every administration. He was a member of that famous Chamber of Deputies in Milan which rejected the Registration Act* presented by Napoleon, an event almost without precedent in history. The Chevalier Foscarini, after having been for twenty years the lover of the Marquis's mother, was still very influential in the household. He always had some amusing story to tell, but nothing escaped his penetration; and the young Marquise, who deep in her heart felt herself at fault, trembled in his presence.

As Gonzo felt a genuine passion for great noblemen who spoke rudely to him and once or twice a year made him shed tears, it was his habit to try to render them small services; and if he had not been paralysed by the habits of extreme poverty, he would sometimes have succeeded, for he was not without a certain measure of subtlety and a very much larger measure of impudence.

This Gonzo, from what we have observed, rather despised the Marquise Crescenzi, for never once had she addressed an uncivil word to him; but after all, she was the wife of that famous Marquis Crescenzi, Gentleman-in-Waiting to the Princess, who would say to Gonzo once or twice a month: 'Hold your tongue, Gonzo, you're an absolute fool.'

Gonzo noticed that anything said about little Anetta Marini would rouse the Marquise for an instant from the dreamy, apathetic state in which she generally remained sunk until the moment when eleven o'clock struck; she would then make the tea and offer it to every man in the room, addressing him by name. After that, just when she was about to retire to her own apartments, she seemed to liven up very briefly, and this was the moment chosen for reciting satirical sonnets to her.

This is a form at which Italians excel; it is the only literary genre which still has some life in it; as a matter of fact it is not subject to censorship, and the courtiers of the *Casa Crescenzi* always introduced their sonnet in the following fashion: 'Will your Ladyship graciously permit me to recite a very poor sonnet to her?' And when the sonnet had made people laugh

and had been repeated a couple of times, one of the officers would be sure to exclaim: 'His Excellency the Minister of Police really ought to see about having the authors of these infamous verses hanged a bit.' Among the middle classes, on the other hand, these sonnets are received with the frankest admiration, and copies of them are sold by lawyers' clerks.

From the kind of curiosity evinced by the Marquise, Gonzo deduced that people had spoken in her presence with too much admiration of the beauty of the little Marini girl, whose fortune amounted to a million lire, and that she was jealous of her. As Gonzo's unwavering smile and unqualified brashness in dealing with anyone who was not noble opened every door to him, the very next day he entered the Marquise's drawing-room carrying his plumed hat in a certain exultant manner which he affected only once or twice each year, when the Prince had said to him: 'Goodbye, Gonzo.' After respectfully greeting the Marquise, Gonzo did not move away, as he usually did, to take the seat which had been pushed forward for him. He positioned himself in the middle of the circle and brusquely exclaimed: 'I've seen the portrait of Monsignore del Dongo.' Clélia was so taken aback that she had to support herself on the arm of her chair; she tried to control her agitation, but was soon forced to leave the drawing-room.

'One must admit, my poor Gonzo, that you're quite exceptionally tactless', exclaimed one of the officers arrogantly, as he was finishing his fourth ice. 'How can you be unaware that the Coadjutor, who was one of the bravest colonels in Napoleon's army, once played a very dirty trick on the Marquise's father, by walking out of the fortress commanded by General Conti, as if he were walking out of the Steccata?' (This is the principal church in Parma.)

'I am indeed unaware of a great many things, my dear Captain; I am a poor imbecile who puts his foot in it all day long.'

This reply, very much to the Italian taste, raised a laugh at the expense of the sharp-witted officer. The Marquise soon returned; she had summoned up all her courage, and was not without a vague hope of herself being able to admire that portrait of Fabrice, which was said to be excellent. She

praised the talents of Hayez, who had painted it. Quite unconsciously, she gave Gonzo some charming smiles; he was casting malicious glances at the officer. As all the other household parasites were indulging in the same pleasure, the officer made his escape, not without first swearing mortal enmity towards Gonzo; the latter was exultant and, when he made his farewells that night, received an invitation to dinner the following day.

'I've something else to tell you!' cried Gonzo the next day, when dinner was over and the servants had left the room, 'it seems our Coadjutor's fallen in love with the Marini girl!...'

The agitation that filled Clélia's heart on hearing such an extraordinary statement may be imagined. The Marquis himself was discomposed.

'But Gonzo, my good friend, your mind's wandering as usual. And you should speak with a little more restraint about a person who has had the honour of partnering his Highness at whist eleven times!'

'Well, your Lordship,' replied Gonzo with the crudeness of people of that type, 'I can promise you that he'd be only too willing to partner the little Marini girl as well. But it's enough for me that these details are not to your taste; they no longer exist for me, who am above all eager not to shock my beloved Marquis.'

After dinner the Marquis always retired to have a siesta. He had no intention, that day, of doing so; but Gonzo would sooner have cut out his tongue than say another word about the Marini girl; and, at every turn, he embarked on some story designed to make the Marquis hope that he was about to revert to the loves of that little bourgeoisie. Gonzo possessed, to an outstanding degree, that Italian gift which consists in delaying most pleasurably the utterance of the longed-for word. Dying of curiosity, the poor Marquis was forced to make advances; he told Gonzo that when he had the pleasure of dining with him, he ate twice as much as usual. Gonzo did not take the point, and began describing a magnificent gallery of portraits that Marquise Balbi, the mistress of the late Prince, was collecting; on two or three occasions he referred to Hayez, in slow tones full of profound admiration. The

Marquis would say to himself: 'Good! He's finally going to get to the portrait commissioned by the Marini girl!' But Gonzo had no intention of doing so. Five o'clock struck, which greatly annoyed the Marquis, who was in the habit of going out in his carriage to the Corso at half-past five, after his siesta.

'Look what you're doing, carrying on like this with your silly stories!' he said rudely to Gonzo, 'you'll make me arrive at the Corso after the Princess, when I'm her Gentleman-in-Waiting, and she may have some orders to give me. Come on! Hurry up! Tell me in a few words, if you can, what the story is of this so-called love affair of Monsignore the Coadjutor's?'

But Gonzo wanted to save that story for the ear of the Marquise, who had invited him to dinner; so he 'hurried up' and, in very few words indeed, gave the required account; the Marquis, half asleep, then rushed off to take his siesta. Gonzo adopted a totally different approach with the poor Marquise. She was still so young and naïve, in the midst of her tremendous wealth, that she felt impelled to make amends for the rudeness with which the Marquis had just spoken to Gonzo. Charmed with this success, the latter recovered all his eloquence and made it a pleasure, no less than a duty, to enter into endless detail with her.

Little Anetta Marini would pay as much as a zecchino for each seat that was reserved for her at the sermon; she always arrived accompanied by two of her aunts and her father's former cashier. These seats, which she had had kept for her since the preceding evening, were generally so placed as to be opposite the pulpit but slightly towards the side of the high altar, for she had noticed that the Coadjutor often turned in the direction of the altar. Now—as the members of the congregation had in their turn noticed—the young preacher 'not infrequently' enjoyed resting his very eloquent eyes on the young heiress, whose beauty was so striking; and evidently with some consciousness, for as soon as he had fixed his eyes upon her his sermon became learned; it was packed with quotations, and no longer notable for those surges of emotion which come from the heart; and the ladies, whose interest in the sermon almost instantly vanished, would begin staring at Anetta and passing unkind remarks about her.

Clélia made Gonzo go over these curious details as many as three times. With the third repetition she became very pensive; she was calculating that she had not seen Fabrice for exactly fourteen months. Would it be really very wrong, she was wondering, to spend an hour in a church, not to see Fabrice, but to listen to a famous preacher? Besides, I'll sit a long way away from the pulpit, and I'll only look at Fabrice once when I go in and again at the end of the sermon... No, Clélia told herself, it's not Fabrice that I'm going to see, I'm going to listen to this astonishing preacher! In the midst of all these considerations the Marquise felt some pangs of remorse; her conduct had been so perfect for fourteen months! Well, she thought, in an effort to find some peace of mind, if the first lady to arrive this evening has heard Monsignore del Dongo preach, I'll go too; if she has not, I shall stay away.

Having reached this decision, the Marquise made Gonzo very happy by saying to him: 'Will you try to find out on which day the Coadjutor is to preach, and in which church? Before you leave this evening I may have an errand for you.'

Hardly had Gonzo departed for the Corso than Clélia went into her *palazzo* garden to take the air. She did not stop to tell herself that for ten months she had not set foot there. She felt full of life and animation; her colour was high. That evening, each time some tiresome nonentity entered the drawing-room, her heart gave a flutter of excitement. Finally Gonzo was announced, and he saw at a glance that during the coming week he was destined to be quite indispensable; the Marquise is jealous of the Marini girl; upon my word this would make a nice little comedy, he said to himself, with the Marquise in the principal role, little Anetta playing the lady's-maid, and Monsignore del Dongo the lover! Upon my word, the entrance tickets wouldn't be overpriced at a couple of lire! He was quite beside himself with happiness and, throughout the evening, kept interrupting everybody and telling the most absurd tales (for example, the one about the famous actress and the Marquis of Pequigny, which he had heard the previous day from a French traveller). The Marquise, for her part, could not sit still; she paced about in her drawing-room,

and in an adjoining gallery where the Marquis had hung only pictures costing more than 20,000 lire apiece. That evening those pictures spoke in language so clear that they exhausted the Marquise's heart with the power of their emotion. At last, on hearing both sides of the folding doors being opened, she hurried into the drawing-room; it was the Marquise Raversi! But as she greeted the Marquise in the customary fashion, Clélia realized that her voice was deserting her. The Marquise had to ask her to repeat her question: 'What do you think of our celebrated preacher?' which she had not at first heard.

'I used to think he was a common little schemer, a worthy nephew to the illustrious Countess Mosca; but the last time he preached—as a matter of fact it was in the Church of the Visitation, opposite your *palazzo*—he was so sublime that my dislike has all vanished and I now think him the most eloquent man I've ever heard.'

'So you've heard one of his sermons?' asked Clélia, trembling with happiness.

'What?' said Marquise Raversi with a laugh. 'Weren't you listening to me? I wouldn't miss going for anything in the world. People say he has consumption and will soon preach no more.'

Hardly had the Marquise left her than Clélia called Gonzo into the gallery.

'I have almost made up my mind', she told him, 'to hear this preacher who's so highly spoken of. When is he going to preach?'

'Next Monday, three days from now; and you might suppose that he's guessed your Excellency's intentions, for he's coming to preach in the Church of the Visitation.'

There were further details to discuss, but Clélia found she could no longer trust her voice; she paced round the gallery five or six times without saying another word. Gonzo was thinking: 'She's obsessed with the idea of revenge. How can anyone be so insolent as to escape from prison, particularly when one has the honour to be guarded by a hero like General Fabio Conti!'

'Besides, there's no time to be lost,' he added with subtle irony, 'he's consumptive. I heard Doctor Rambo say that he

hasn't a year to live; God is punishing him for his transgression in treacherously escaping from the fortress.'

The Marquise sat down on the sofa in the gallery, and gestured to Gonzo to do likewise. After a few moments she handed him a small purse in which she had placed some gold coins.

'Have four seats reserved for me.'

'Would it be permissible for your humble servant Gonzo to slip in, in your Excellency's retinue?'

'Of course; have five seats kept... I am not in the least interested in being close to the pulpit, but I should like to see Signorina Marini, who they say is so pretty.'

The Marquise could hardly live through the three days which separated her from the famous Monday, the day of the sermon. Gonzo, for whom it was a signal honour to be seen in public in the retinue of so great a lady, was wearing his French coat with a sword; and that was not all, for, taking advantage of the proximity of the *palazzo*, he had a magnificent gilded armchair carried into the church for the Marquise; this struck the ordinary townsfolk as the height of insolence. The feelings of the poor Marquise on seeing this chair, which had been placed immediately opposite the pulpit, may be imagined. Clélia felt so embarrassed as she sat, with downcast eyes, shrinking into a corner of the vast armchair, that she could not even bring herself to look at the little Marini girl, whom Gonzo was pointing out to her with an effrontery which she found beyond belief. Anyone not of noble birth was as nothing in the eyes of that courtier.

Fabrice appeared in the pulpit; he was so thin, so pale, so *wasted* that Clélia's eyes instantly filled with tears. Fabrice said a few words, then stopped, as if his voice was failing him completely; several times he tried in vain to begin a sentence; turning around, he picked up a paper with writing on it.

'Brethren,' he said, 'an unhappy soul, fully deserving of all your pity, beseeches you, through my voice, to pray for the end of his anguish, which will cease only with his life.'

Fabrice read the rest of his paper very slowly; but the expression of his voice was such that before he was half-way through the prayer everyone was weeping, even Gonzo. At

any rate nobody will notice me, the Marquise told herself as she burst into tears.

As he read the writing on the paper, two or three ideas came to Fabrice about the state of the unhappy man on whose behalf he was soliciting the prayers of the faithful. Soon his ideas came thick and fast. While seeming to be addressing the congregation, he was speaking only to the Marquise. He finished his sermon a little sooner than usual, for despite all his efforts, he was so overcome by tears that he could no longer speak in an intelligible way. The connoisseurs found this sermon strange, but, so far as its pathos was concerned, at least the equal of the famous sermon preached in the illuminated church. As for Clélia, hardly had she heard the first ten lines of the prayer that Fabrice was reading than she felt it was a heinous crime to have been capable of spending fourteen months without seeing him. On her return home she retired to bed, so that she could think about Fabrice with complete freedom; and rather early the following morning Fabrice received a note which ran as follows:

'The writer relies upon your honour; find four bravoos whose discretion you trust, and tomorrow, when the Steccata clock strikes midnight, be outside a small door bearing the number 19 in the Strada San Paolo. Remember that you may be attacked; do not come alone.'

Upon recognizing these divine characters Fabrice fell to his knees and burst into tears: 'At last,' he exclaimed, 'after fourteen months and eight days! Farewell, sermons.'

It would take too long to describe all the different kinds of folly by which the hearts of Fabrice and Clélia were assailed that day. The small door mentioned in the note was none other than the door to the orangery of the Palazzo Crescenzi, and ten times in the course of the day Fabrice found an excuse to go and look at it. He provided himself with weapons and, a little before midnight, was walking rapidly past this door alone when, to his inexpressible joy, he heard a very familiar voice murmur softly:

'Come in here, my beloved.'

Fabrice entered cautiously and found he was indeed in the orangery, but opposite a heavily barred window standing

three or four feet above the ground. It was extremely dark; Fabrice had heard sounds from this window, and was running his hand over the bars when he felt another hand which, passing through the bars, grasped his own and carried it to lips which kissed it.

'It is I,' a dear voice said to him; 'I have come here to tell you that I love you, and to ask you if you are willing to obey me.'

Fabrice's reply, his joy and his amazement may be imagined; when the first raptures had passed, Clélia said to him:

'I have sworn an oath to the Madonna, as you know, never to see you; that is why I am meeting you like this in total darkness. I want you to understand well that if ever you forced me to look at you in daylight, everything would be over between us. But first of all, I don't want you to preach in front of Anetta Marini, and please don't think I was the one who was so foolish as to have an armchair brought into the house of God.'

'My dearest angel, I shall not preach again in front of anyone at all; I only preached because I hoped that one day I would see you.'

'Don't say such things, remember that I myself am not permitted to see you.'

At this point we ask leave to pass over, without a word, a period of three years.

At the time when we once again take up our story, Count Mosca had long been back, as Prime Minister, in Parma, and was more powerful than ever.

After these three years of sublime happiness, Fabrice's heart was overcome by a capricious yearning which changed everything. The Marquise had a charming little boy of two, Sandrino, who was the light of his mother's life; he was always with her or sitting on Marquis Crescenzi's knees; Fabrice, by contrast, hardly ever saw him; he did not want the boy to become used to loving another father. He conceived the plan of abducting the child before his memories became very distinct.

During the long hours of each day when the Marquise could not see her lover, the presence of Sandrino consoled

her; for we must confess something which will seem very strange north of the Alps: despite her sins, she had remained faithful to her vow; she had promised the Madonna, as the reader will perhaps recall, '*never to see*' Fabrice; those had been her exact words; consequently she received him only at night, and there were never any lights in the room.

But every night he visited his mistress; and what was admirable was that, in the midst of a court consumed by curiosity and boredom, Fabrice's precautions were so cleverly thought out that this *amicizia*, as they call it in Lombardy, was never even suspected. Their love was too intense for there not to be quarrels; Clélia was very prone to jealousy, but almost all their quarrels sprang from a different cause. Fabrice would take advantage of some public ceremony to be in the same place as the Marquise and look at her, she would find some pretext for leaving very promptly, and would then banish her lover for a long period of time.

It was considered astonishing, at the court of Parma, that there should be no intrigues associated with a woman so remarkable for her beauty and the distinction of her mind; she aroused passions which inspired many acts of folly, and often Fabrice, too, was jealous.

The good Archbishop Landriani had long been dead; Fabrice's piety, his exemplary morals, and his eloquence were such that the Archbishop was forgotten; Fabrice's elder brother had died and all the family fortune had reverted to him. From that time on he distributed each year to the curates and parish priests of his diocese the more than 100,000 lire that he received from the archdiocese of Parma.

It would have been difficult to imagine a more honoured, more honourable, and more useful life than that which Fabrice had made for himself, when everything was ruined by that accursed caprice of paternal affection.

'Because of that vow which I respect, but which nevertheless makes my life miserable because you will not see me by day,' he said to Clélia on one occasion, 'I am forced to live alone all the time, without any distraction other than work; and there is not even enough of that. In the long hours of each day which I spend in this austere, depressing manner, an idea

has come to me which tortures me and against which I have been struggling in vain for the past six months; my son will never love me; he never hears my name. Brought up amid the pleasant luxury of the Palazzo Crescenzi, he hardly knows who I am. On the few occasions when I see him I think about his mother, whose celestial beauty he recalls to my mind and whom I may not look at, and he must think me a serious person, which for children means dreary.'

'Well?,' asked the Marquise, 'what do all these alarming remarks mean?'

'That I want my son back; I want him to live with me; I want to see him every day, I want him to get used to loving me; I myself want to be able to love him at my leisure. Since my destiny, which is without parallel in this world, has deprived me of the happiness that so many loving hearts enjoy, and I cannot live my life in the company of those that I adore, I want at least to have at my side a being who recalls you to my heart, who can in a sense replace you. In my enforced solitude I find men and their concerns a burden; you know that for me ambition has been an empty word since the moment when I was lucky enough to be imprisoned by Barbone; and anything other than what I feel in my heart seems to me to be absurd, in the melancholy which engulfs me when I am away from you.'

The intense pain with which poor Clélia's heart was filled at her beloved's suffering may be imagined; her distress was all the greater because she felt that in a way Fabrice was right. She went so far as to wonder whether she ought not to try to nullify her vow. In that event she would receive Fabrice during the day just like any other member of society, and her virtuous reputation was too well established for there to be any gossip. She told herself that with a great deal of money she could obtain a dispensation from her vow, but she also felt that this purely worldly arrangement would not satisfy her conscience, and perhaps Heaven in its anger would punish her for this fresh crime.

If, on the other hand, she agreed to yield to Fabrice's very natural wish, if she sought not to cause the unhappiness of that loving soul which she knew so well, and whose

tranquillity she had so strangely endangered with her extraordinary vow, what likelihood was there of kidnapping the only son of one of the principal noblemen of Italy without the deception's being discovered? The Marquis Crescenzi would lavish enormous sums, would himself lead the enquiries, and sooner or later the kidnapping would be discovered. There was only one way to counter such a danger, the child would have to be sent far away, to Edinburgh, for example, or to Paris; but that was something which a mother's love could not contemplate. The other method proposed by Fabrice, and which was in fact more rational, had, in the eyes of this distraught mother, something ill-omened and even more dreadful about it; they must, said Fabrice, pretend the child was ill; he would grow ever-more gravely ill and eventually, while Marquis Crescenzi was away from home, would die.

An intense aversion on Clélia's part, amounting to terror, was the occasion of a breach which could not last long.

Clélia asserted that they must not tempt God; that this beloved son was the fruit of a sin, and that if they further provoked the divine wrath God would not fail to recall the child to His bosom. Fabrice spoke again of his own strange destiny: 'the station in life in which chance has placed me,' he told Clélia, 'together with my love, compel me to live in perpetual solitude; unlike the majority of my fellow-men, I am not able to enjoy the sweetness of a close relationship, since you are prepared to meet me only in darkness, which reduces to just minutes, as it were, the part of my life which I can spend with you.'

Many tears were shed. Clélia fell ill; but she loved Fabrice too well to persist in denying him the terrible sacrifice he was asking of her. Ostensibly, Sandrino became ill; the Marquis quickly summoned the most celebrated doctors, and immediately Clélia came up against a terrible obstacle she had not foreseen; she had to prevent this beloved child taking any of the remedies prescribed by the doctors; this was no simple matter.

The child, confined to bed longer than was good for his health, became genuinely ill. How could the doctor be told the cause of this sickness? Torn between two conflicting

interests that were both so dear, Clélia almost lost her mind. Ought she to agree to an apparent recovery, and thus sacrifice all the fruits of that long, painful deception? Fabrice, for his part, could neither forgive himself for the violence he was doing to his mistress's heart, nor abandon his plan. He had found a way of being admitted, each night, to the sick child's room, and this had given rise to another complication. The Marquise would come to take care of her son, and sometimes Fabrice was obliged to see her by the light of the candles, which seemed to Clélia's poor, sick heart a horrible sin, and one which portended the death of Sandrino. It was in vain that the most famous casuists, consulted about obedience to a vow in a case where such obedience would cause palpable harm, had replied that the vow could not be considered to have been broken in a criminal way, as long as the person bound by a promise to the Deity failed to keep it not out of vain, sensual pleasure but in order to avoid causing manifest harm. The Marquise was none the less in despair, and Fabrice could see the time approaching when his strange idea would bring about the death of Clélia and that of his son.

He turned for help to his close friend Count Mosca, who, seasoned old Minister though he might be, was touched by this love story of which he had known almost nothing.

'I can arrange for the Marquis to be away for at least five or six days; when would you like that to happen?'

A short while later, Fabrice came and told the Count that everything was prepared for them to take advantage of the Marquis's absence.

Two days after that, as the Marquis was riding home from visiting one of his estates on the outskirts of Mantua, a group of bandits, apparently in the hire of someone seeking a personal revenge, carried him off and, without maltreating him in any way, put him into a boat which took three days to travel down the Po, following the same itinerary Fabrice had once travelled after the famous affair with Giletti. On the fourth day the bandits deposited the Marquis on a deserted island in the Po, after carefully robbing him of all his possessions, leaving him with neither money nor any object of the smallest value. It took two whole days for the Marquis to reach his

palazzo in Parma; he found it draped with black and all his family and servants in great affliction.

This abduction, carried out extremely skilfully, had a most disastrous consequence: Sandrino, established secretly in a large, handsome house where the Marquise came to see him almost every day, died after a few months. Clélia supposed that she had been punished as she deserved, for having broken her vow to the Madonna; she had seen Fabrice by candlelight so often, and even twice in full daylight, and with such tender rapture, during Sandrino's illness! She only survived that dearly loved son by a few months, but she knew the sweetness of dying in the arms of her lover.

Fabrice was too much in love and too devout to have recourse to suicide; he hoped to be reunited with Clélia in a better world, but he was too intelligent not to feel that he had a great deal to atone for.

A few days after Clélia's death he signed various deeds granting a pension of 1,000 lire to each of his servants, and keeping a similar pension for himself; he gave lands worth about 100,000 lire in revenue to the Countess Mosca; an equal amount to his mother, the Marquise del Dongo; and anything still remaining of his patrimony to one of his sisters, who had not made a good marriage. The next day, after forwarding to the appropriate authority the resignation of his Archbishopric and of all the appointments which the favour of Ernest V and the friendship of the Prime Minister had successively showered upon him, he retired to the Charter-house of Parma, which stands in the woods beside the Po, two leagues from Sacca.

The Countess Mosca had been strongly in favour of her husband's return to the ministry some years earlier, but never had she been willing to set foot again in Ernest V's dominions. She held her court at Vignano, a quarter of a league from Cassal-Maggiore, on the left bank of the Po, and consequently on Austrian territory. In that magnificent *palazzo* in Vignano, which the Count had built for her, she received all of Parma's high society every Thursday, and her numerous friends every day. Surely, some day, Fabrice would have come to Vignano. In short, in the Countess were united all the

outward signs of happiness, but she only survived for a very short time after the death of Fabrice, whom she adored, and who spent no more than a year in his Charterhouse.

The Parma prisons were empty, the Count immensely rich, and Ernest V was adored by his subjects, who compared his government to that of the Grand Dukes of Tuscany.

TO THE HAPPY FEW

EXPLANATORY NOTES

3 *zabaione*: eggs beaten up with sugar and wine.

7 *cicisbeo*: a 'gallant'.

Charles V and Philip II: the Emperor Charles V (1500–58) and his son Philip II of Spain (1527–98). As Holy Roman Emperor from 1519 to 1556, Charles's empire included Spain, the Low Countries, large areas of present-day Germany, the kingdom of Naples, and Lombardy (where his victories over the French were celebrated by Ariosto in *Orlando furioso* (see below, note to p. 53). His son Philip became King of Spain when his father abdicated in 1555 and retired to a monastery: the title of Holy Roman Emperor fell to Charles V's younger brother, Ferdinand I (1503–64). In Stendhal's guidebook-cum-anecdotal history *Rome, Naples and Florence* (1826), the father and son are said to have ruled Italy with 'cruel laws'.

8 *the Encyclopédie and Voltaire*: edited under the general supervision of Denis Diderot (1713–84), the *Encyclopédie* appeared in seventeen volumes of text and eleven of plates between 1751 and 1772, with additional volumes being published between 1776 and 1780. Ostensibly an objective encyclopedia of the knowledge of the day, it was also a vehicle for anti-Catholic freethinkers (the *philosophes*). Voltaire (1694–1778)—whose first major work attacking political and religious oppression in France, the *Letters concerning the English Nation*, date from 1733—published, amongst many things, a series of philosophical tales (for example, *Candide* in 1759 and *The Ingenu* in 1767) and polemical treatises in which he satirized and denounced the Christian Church and many of its dogmas while at the same time propounding his deist beliefs and the values of the Enlightenment.

the Archduke, who resided in Milan: the Archduke Ferdinand (1754–1806), who governed Milan for the Austrians between 1791 and 1796.

Gros: Antoine-Jean, Baron Gros (1771–1835), Romantic painter famous for battle-scenes.

10 *Herodias by Leonardo*: there is no painting on this subject by Leonardo. According to Henri Martineau, Stendhal was thinking of a *Salomé* in the Uffizi Gallery, Florence, now attributed

to Luini. Stendhal uses the same image later to refer to the Duchess.

11 *they gave us assignats*: *assignats* were a paper currency issued by a Revolutionary decree on 19 December 1789, for which the newly appropriated wealth of the Church had been 'assigned' as collateral.

13 *a second lieutenant in the Italian Legion*: the Italian, or Lombard, Legion was created by Napoleon in September 1797 and consisted of some 700 infantry and 300 cavalry.

14 *the Directorate government in Paris*: the Directoire succeeded the Convention on 27 October 1795 and governed until Napoleon seized power on 9 November 1799.

until Marengo: the Battle of Marengo (in Piedmont in northern Italy) on 14 June 1800 represented a decisive victory for Napoleon over the Austrians.

Bocche di Cattaro: the Gulf of Kotor, an inlet on the Adriatic coast south of Dubrovnik.

15 *the example of many serious authors*: Stendhal has in mind the far from serious example of Laurence Sterne in *Tristram Shandy* (1759-67), where the hero begins the narrative of his life with the comic circumstances of his conception.

17 *Prince Eugène, Viceroy of Italy*: Prince Eugène (1780-1824) was appointed Viceroy of Italy on 26 May 1805.

24 *the disaster of Beresina!*: during the retreat from Moscow (begun on 19 October 1813), Napoleon's armies found themselves under attack from Russian forces and unable immediately to cross the River Beresina because of a sudden thaw (in late November) which had caused its ice to weaken. After pontoons were laid they began to cross, but many were drowned or killed by enemy fire. Some 90,000 men were lost during the retreat from Moscow: Stendhal himself, who had travelled to Moscow with dispatches from the Empress Josephine, was one of the survivors.

25 *Count Prina, former Minister to the King of Italy*: Count Joseph Prina had been Napoleon's finest minister in Milan and was assassinated there on 20 April 1814 by a mob who had been stirred to action by representatives of the political right.

The worthy General Bubna: Count Bubna von Littitz (1772-1825) was Austrian ambassador to France in 1813 and became the military governor of Lombardy in 1818.

- 31 *two superb ballets of Vigano's at La Scala*: Stendhal was a great admirer of the ballets composed by Salvatore Vigano (1769–1821).

Napoleon had just disembarked at the Gulf of Juan: having escaped from Elba, Napoleon landed with some 700 French troops on the Southern French coast near Antibes on 1 March 1815 and would reach Paris within three weeks.

- 33 *the famous poet Monti*: Vincenzo Monti (1754–1828), a poet of classical tastes and shifting political allegiance. Fabrice is paraphrasing lines from 'In morte di Lorenzo Mascheroni', in which Monti laments the death of the geometer Mascheroni who had welcomed the Napoleonic 'liberation' of Italy.

- 39 *you were born in Piedmont... in France last year, etc., etc.*: since Piedmont was part of the French Empire, its male inhabitants were subject to conscription into the French army. Following the fall of Napoleon in 1814 the last batch of conscripts (from 1813) were demobbed on 15 May 1814. Fabrice could claim to have spent the preceding year in France.

- 42 *a napoleon*: a gold coin worth 20 francs (somewhere between a £50 note and a \$100 bill at today's values).

the horse belonging to the four sons of Aymon: *The Four Sons of Aymon* is the better-known title of a late-twelfth- or early thirteenth-century *chanson de geste* (a narrative poem of epic or legendary character), also called *Renaud de Montauban*, which tells of the heroic exploits of Renaud and his three brothers, sons of Aymon of Dordogne. After Renaud has killed Charlemagne's nephew in a fight, Renaud and his brothers escape from court, and in the long war which ensues Renaud is well served by his sword Flamberge and his wondrous horse Bayard. Renaud figures as Rinaldo in Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* (see following note).

- 53 *the heroes of Tasso and Ariosto*: son of Bernardo Tasso, who served the Sanseverino family as diplomat and administrator, the Italian poet Torquato Tasso (1544–95) was patronized by the Este family, rulers of Ferrara. His great epic *Gerusalemme liberata* (Jerusalem Delivered) was completed by 1575 but not published until 1581. Ludovico Ariosto (1474–1533), who spent his adult life also in the service of the Este family, wrote *Orlando furioso* (1st version 1516; definitive version 1532), in which the epic heroes of the French *chanson de geste* (Orlando [or

Roland], Charlemagne, etc.) find themselves embroiled in adventure and romance.

- 56 *Para v. P. y E. 15 x. 38*: Stendhal's coded message is thought to mean (in Spanish), 'Para vosotras, Paquita y Eugenia, 15 décembre 1838'. The account of Waterloo is thus dedicated to two young girls (daughters of the Count and Countess of Montijo) whom Stendhal had often regaled with stories. Eugenia (1826-1920) later became the wife of Napoleon III and Empress of France.
- 60 *in the pocket of the Bourbons*: the Bourbons had ruled France since Henri IV came to the throne in 1589. Following the Revolution, the execution of Louis XVI (1793), and Napoleon's Empire, they were restored to the throne with the accession of Louis XVIII in 1815.
- 67 *it's got a cathedral and Fénelon*: François de Salignac de la Mothe-Fénelon (1651-1715), theologian and churchman, was appointed tutor to the Duc de Bourgogne, grandson of Louis XIV, in 1689, for whom he wrote his famous pedagogical romance *Télémaque* (c.1695). He was appointed Archbishop of Cambrai in 1695, but later fell out of royal favour.
- 81 *Signor Pellico*: Silvio Pellico (1789-1854), whose account of his years of imprisonment by the Austrian authorities, *Le Mie Prigioni* (My Prisons), was published in 1832.
- 89 *Sigg. Pellico and d'Andryane*: see previous note. Andryane's *Memorie di un prigionero di Stato allo Spielberg* (Memoirs of a Political Prisoner in the Spielberg) is another account of imprisonment under the Austrians. The Spielberg, referred to later in this chapter, was an Austrian fortress-prison in Brno, in which both Pellico and Andryane were held.
- The design of the Emperor Francis II*: the Emperor Francis II (1768-1835) ruled the Austrian empire from 1806 until his death. An opponent of the French revolutionary governments and of Napoleon, he was later forced to allow his daughter Marie-Louise to marry Napoleon after the latter had divorced the Empress Josephine.
- 91 *where Bayard was killed*: Pierre du Terrail, chevalier de Bayard (c.1473-1524), 'le chevalier sans peur et sans reproche' (the fearless and blameless knight), who died in the Italian wars. His deeds were recorded in a biography by an anonymous author known as the 'loyal serviteur'.

- 95 *the Marimis... the Pietragruas*: Stendhal is here listing the names of women he had known himself in Milan, notably Angela Pietragrua with whom he had been passionately in love.
- 96 *the famous architect San-Micheli*: the architect San-Micheli (1484-1559) is noted for several buildings, particularly in Venice and Verona.
- to read the 'Constitutionnel'*: founded in 1815, the French newspaper *Le Constitutionnel* represented the voice of Liberal opinion and was consequently banned throughout Austrian territory.
- 100 *talking about Jacobins and the Paris Directorate*: the Club des Jacobins was the most famous of the political clubs spawned by the French Revolution. Founded at Versailles in 1789, it moved to Paris with the *Assemblée constituante* in October that year and met in the former convent of the Dominican friars in the Rue Saint-Honoré (Dominicans being known as 'jacobins' because their first monastery in Paris had been situated in the rue Saint-Jacques). It became a powerful revolutionary body with many affiliated clubs outside Paris: it supported Robespierre (1758-94) and the Committee of Public Safety (1793-5), the principal instruments of the Terror.
- 114 *scagliola*: mosaic-work.
- Joseph II*: (1741-90), Austrian Emperor.
- 115 *General Lafayette's noble affability*: Marie-Joseph, Marquis de Lafayette (1757-1834), an enthusiastic supporter of the Enlightenment and the cause of liberty, fought in the American War of Independence and on his return to France played a prominent part in the Revolution, notably in bringing about the 'Declaration of the Rights of Man'. Stendhal had met him on several occasions and was struck precisely by his 'noble affability'.
- 119 *a canoness*: an honorary title conferred on lay persons of the female sex by certain religious communities.
- on the principal transparencies*: these were transparent panels lit from behind on which it was then fashionable at receptions to display the name, monogram, or device of an honoured guest.
- 126 *Raynal*: the Abbé Raynal (1713-96), historian and *Encyclopédiste*.
- 139 *Le Moniteur. La Gazette nationale ou le Moniteur*, liberal French daily paper, founded in 1789.

- 139 *did get herself just a trifle hanged!*: during the occupation of Naples by General Championnet and following the establishment of the Parthenopean Republic, the Marquesa de San-Felice (1768–1800) was instrumental in revealing the existence of an anti-republican plot: its two leaders, the Backer brothers, were executed. When the Royalists regained control of the kingdom of Naples in 1799 the Marquesa was arrested for her part in exposing them and condemned to death: since she was pregnant, her execution was deferred until July 1800.
- 140 *that Polyeucte... at the Opera last week*: the only opera of this name to have been identified by scholars is Donizetti's *Polyeucte*, which was composed in 1838 but not performed until 1840 (after *The Charterhouse of Parma* was published).
- 152 *the play was Goldoni's 'La locandiera'*: the Italian comic playwright Carlo Goldoni (1707–93) wrote over 200 plays, of which *La locandiera* (1753) was regarded as his masterpiece. In it the eponymous landlady of a tavern becomes betrothed to a young man called Fabrizio (= Fabrice).
- 157 *a 'sediola'*: literally, a chair. Stendhal may have intended a *sediolo*, which was a light two-wheeled carriage or gig.
- 174 *Mercadante, who was fashionable in Lombardy at that period*: Mercadante (1795–1870) was a Neapolitan opera composer.
- 181 *Napoleon's letter... Themistocles*: Napoleon's letter of 14 July 1815 to the Prince-Regent, asking to be put under the protection of the British law, and comparing himself with Themistocles, the Athenian general, who was exiled from Athens and put himself under the protection of *his* former enemy the king of Persia.
- 187 *his famous pastoral letter... in support of the Cisalpine Republic*: on Christmas Day, 1797, Cardinal Chiaramonti published a pastoral letter in which he welcomed republicanism and pointed to the close parallels between Christianity and the ideals promoted by the French Revolution. He became Pope Pius VII in 1800.
- 189 *vetturino*: coachman.
- 198 *the Charterhouse at Velleja*: an invention of Stendhal's.
- 209 *the famous Madonna of Cimabue*: no Madonna by the thirteenth-century Italian painter Cimabue is to be found in the church at San Petronio.
- baiocchi*: a *baiocco* was a copper coin of low value formerly in use in the Papal States and comparable with a farthing.

- 219 *the Reno Waterfall*: the Caseleccio Falls on the River Reno, some seven kilometres west of Bologna.
- 220 *the Bouffes*: an Italian theatre company in Paris specializing in comedy.
- 221 *Tancredi*: one of the heroes in Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*.
the first-rate Venetian poet Burati: Burati (1778–1832) was a satirist and poet who wrote in Venetian dialect and whom Stendhal knew personally.
- 238 *a Mrs Starke... a glass of milk, etc., etc.*: Mariana Starke had first published a guidebook entitled *Travels in Italy, between 1792 and 1798; containing a view of the late revolution. Also a supplement comprising instructions for travelling in France* (2 vols., London, 1802), which she then revised and expanded over the following years. The last edition published before Stendhal wrote *The Charterhouse of Parma* was in fact the eighth, entitled *Travels in Europe for the use of travellers on the continent and likewise in the Island of Sicily. To which is added, an account of the remains of ancient Italy* (London, 1833). A ninth, 'enlarged' edition appeared in 1839.
- 263 *Parmigianino*: (1503–40) also known as Parmigiano, a painter noted particularly for his church paintings and his portraits.
podestà: the mayor or chief magistrate of a Northern Italian city.
Intelligenti pauca: 'for an intelligent person [only] a few things [or items of information, are needed for him or her to understand]'.
- 270 *Guido Reni*: (1575–1642), early Italian baroque painter, particularly noted for his frescos and etchings.
- 281 *There's the old story of Judith*: The Hebrew Judith, in the story from the Apocrypha, saved the town of Bethulia by seducing Holofernes, the enemy general, and decapitating him while he slept.
- 296 *Figaro... Almaviva*: the Count Almaviva and his manservant Figaro, characters in Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* and Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*, both based on plays by the French playwright Beaumarchais (1732–99).
- 297 *the lovely eyes of Armida*: Armida figures in Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*: see above, note to p. 53.
- 309 *the acquetta di Perugia*: *acquetta* was a kind of poison composed of arsenic, lead, and antimony.

- 310 *to plans of Vanvitelli*: the celebrated Neapolitan architect (1700–73).
- 311 *Hippolytus*: in Greek legend, Hippolytus, son of Theseus, rejects the love of his stepmother Phaedra. The legend is treated in Euripides' *Hippolytus* and Racine's *Phèdre*.
- Alexander Farnese, the famous general*: not to be confused with the Alessandro Farnese who became Pope Paul III in 1534 and died in 1549, this Alessandro Farnese (1545–92) was appointed Governor of the Low Countries by Philip II of Spain and subsequently sent to the aid of French Catholics in their struggle with Henri IV. His son (1569–1622) ruled the Low Countries as Ranuce I.
- 315 *Piedmont, where Alfieri came from*: Vittorio Alfieri (1749–1803), the leading Italian poet and dramatist of the Romantic period.
- 322 *that heroic Charlotte Corday*: following the overthrow of the moderate Republicans known as the Girondins in June 1793 by the more extremist Montagnards, one of whose leaders was Jean-Paul Marat (1743–93), Charlotte Corday d'Armont (1768–93) came to Paris and stabbed Marat to death in his bath on 13 July 1793. She was guillotined four days later.
- 369 *Pallagi*: Pelagio Palagi (1775–1860), a Bolognese painter.
- 373 *It was made at the time of the siege of Parma by the Emperor Sigismund*: the Emperor Sigismund (1387–1437) in fact came to Parma in the fifteenth century, not the twelfth, and without any intention of besieging it. Stendhal is confusing him with the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa (c.1122–90).
- 401 *the celebrated book-collector Reina*: Francesco Reina (1770–1826) of Milan.
- 408 *Fokelberg... Hayez of Milan*: all artists living in Italy at the time of the novel. *Fokelberg* (1786–1854), a Swedish sculptor based in Rome. *Marchesi* (1789–1858), a sculptor already mentioned in Chapter 2. *Tenerani* (1789–1869), sculptor, a pupil of Canova and Thorwaldsen. *Hayez* (1791–1882), a Venetian painter much admired by Stendhal.
- 424 *farmers-general*: tax-collectors.
- 435 *Le Jardinier et son Seigneur* (The Gardener and his Lord): 'There was in a certain village a lover of gardening, a man part-bourgeois, part-yokel, who owned a nicely tended garden with a vegetable plot adjoining it. He had enclosed his land

with a quickset hedge: sorrel and lettuce grew there in profusion, with flowers enough to make Margot a posy on her birthday, some Spanish jasmine too, and a goodly supply of thyme. When a hare disturbed this felicity, our man complained to the lord of the manor. "This cursed beast comes at dawn and dusk to eat his fill", said he, "and laughs at traps; stones and clubs have no effect; I do believe he's a sorcerer." "A sorcerer? I defy him to be that", his lord retorted. "Were he the devil, Miraut will soon catch him, whatever tricks he's up to. I'll rid you of him, my good man, I swear." "When?" "No later than tomorrow." The matter settled thus, he turns up with his men. "Now, let's eat," says he, "are your chickens tender?"

'After the meal comes the confusion of the hunt. Everyone eagerly prepares to be off: the trumpets and horns set up such a racket that the good fellow is quite stunned. The worst thing was that the poor kitchen garden was left in a pitiable state; farewell, flower-beds and frames, farewell, chicory and leeks, farewell, anything that might go into the stockpot. The good fellow said: "These are the games that princes play." But they paid him no heed; and hounds and hunters did more damage within one hour than would have been caused in a hundred years by all the hares of the Province.

'Princelings, settle your disputes among yourselves; you would be utter fools to turn to kings for help. You never should involve them in your wars, *nor invite them to set foot within your borders*' (trans. Margaret Mauldon). From the *Fables* of Jean La Fontaine (1621-95). Lines 21-38 and 47-52 have been omitted by Stendhal from the original.

- 436 *imitate Richelieu and make her son banish her*: during the reign of Louis XIII (1601-43), the son and successor of Henri IV, his mother Marie de Médicis ruled as Regent until 1617. She lost her influence to Armand du Plessis, Cardinal de Richelieu (1585-1642), who subsequently became the king's principal minister from 1624.
- 440 *the Saint Bartholomew Massacre*: the massacre of Huguenots in Paris and other large cities in France on St Bartholomew's Eve (23-4 August 1572), which was ordered by Charles IX (1550-74) at the instigation of his mother Catherine de Médicis (1519-89).
- 473 *of your Fontanas and your Duvoisins*: both churchmen renowned for their learning, the former (1750-1822) was imprisoned by Napoleon (for drafting the papal bull which excommunicated

him) and rose to become a cardinal in 1815; while the latter (1744–1813) was one of Napoleon's ecclesiastical advisers and became Bishop of Nantes.

- 473 *the celebrated Madame P*** sang... tenere*: Mme Pasta, the great opera-singer of her day, who had sung 'Quelle pupille tenere' (those gentle eyes) from *Gli Orazi e Curiazi* by Domenico Cimaroso (1749–1801) in Paris in 1823.
- 474 *an air of Pergolesi's*: Giovanni Battista Pergolesi (1710–36), best known for his setting of the *Stabat Mater* and the comic intermezzo *La serva padrona*.
- 478 *these two lines from Petrarch*: in fact these two lines were originally four, and written by the poet, dramatist, and librettist Pietro Metastasio (1698–1782). The original Italian—in Metastasio's *Ciro riconosciuto*, III. xii—runs: 'Nò, non vedrete mai | Cambinar gl' affeti miei, | Bei lumi onde imparai | A sospirar d'amor.' The lines are also quoted in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse* (1761), Part I, Letter 34.
- 481 *the King of Naples has just married the Duchess of Partana*: in 1815 Ferdinand IV of Naples, a widower, married Lucia d'Artano, the widow of the Prince of Partanna.
- 483 *George Dandin*: a reference to Molière's prose comedy *George Dandin*, in which the hero reflects ruefully at the end of Act I that he has brought his misfortunes upon himself by marrying a daughter of the nobility: 'You asked for it, George Dandin, my old friend, you asked for it and it serves you right.'
- 494 *Signor Gonzo*: in Italian *gonzo* means simpleton, fool, clown.
- 496 *the Registration Act*: a measure introduced by Count Prina (see above, note to p. 25) to facilitate the raising of war taxes.