

V. Two Pieces of Paper

He was a man already old, of medium height, very thin, dressed in bourgeois attire, and sporting spectacles on his long, sharp nose. His face, which was remarkable ugly, had that aquiline form that many people take as a sign of good breeding, but there was something cynical and repulsive in the gaze of his eyes, as round as a vulture's. He was bald, in the particular and rather rare fashion that does not even leave the fringe of hair around the skull that protrudes from under a hat—which augmented his resemblance to the bird of prey.

We know his name, having heard it pronounced more than once in the preceding chapters; he called himself the Marquis de Tupinier, but did not have the requisite appearance, in spite of his gentlemanly nose.

Not only did he imprint, as we have said, that indecent kiss upon the charming mouth of Madame la Duchesse de Clare, but he also dragged her through the door with a very well-executed waltz-step. He closed it behind them.

"My beautiful darling," he said, good-humoredly, "you did well to come, damn it! This is the time; this is the moment—but I remind you that you should have warned me. Doesn't one love one's godfather any longer? And yet, you put the bolt on the garden door. I was obliged to climb over the wall and up to the window—at my age!"

His finger pointed to a large square cut out with a glassworker's diamond, whose opening was letting in a draught of glacial air.

Angèle stood in front of him, stupefied, as if dazed.

"You knew perfectly well that should have warned Godfather, don't you, treasure?" he went on, sniggering. "A detail. One has one's police. Let's talk about the little one, who's now worth his weight in gold. I've never lost sight of the lad—he's a little sweetie, all right. Do you have your carriage?"

"Yes," Angèle replied, mechanically.

"Good—let's go! It's a long way from here to the home of the marble-cutter on the exterior boulevard."

"Do you expect to come with me?"

"Of course! I shan't leave you again, darling."

"But..." the Duchesse began.

The Marquis cut her off, saying: "That's true! You don't have the card yourself! It could all go *bang* during our absence, and then...but all wouldn't be lost, you know. I have my own means; I've been studying the project for a long time."

"How can I call for help?" Angèle thought, aloud.

"Yes, how? You're in an uncomfortable situation. The first ploy hasn't succeeded, and you don't want him to go before the second round...I was there and I heard you, you know. You've done me over well and truly, but I don't bear any grudge. As for your bit-part role, you played it badly—very badly! It's all right to make healthy men pay dearly, but the dying have to be coddled and caressed...."

"I can't get to the antechamber in search of the valets," the Duchess continued.

"No! They'd ask you where you've sprung from. There are three or four of them, among who I recognize the virtuous Tardenois, good old Jaffret of the birds, Larsonneur...."

Angèle took a step toward the door of the room. She had lost her head. The Marquis stopped her. "No need," he said, "if it's to ring. We're in a well-equipped house where everyone has his bell. This one is as good as the other—you'll see."

He went to the mantelpiece and tugged the bell-cord twice. "Let's go!" he continued. "I'm sure that Tardenois and old Morand are already coming up the stairs four at a time. Come on!"

Angèle allowed herself to be taken by the arm. Shortly thereafter, an odor of brandy and pipe tobacco fouled the interior of the coupé that had brought the Duchesse. The Marquis carried those perfumes with him everywhere. The horse was accelerating already as it went along the Rue Saint-Antoine to reach the boulevard. The coachman had been told: "To the Montmartre cemetery!"

Angèle was curled up in a corner of the carriage and said nothing, but the Marquis chatted for two. "I don't blame you for putting the little Duc in an apprenticeship at the marble-cutter's while you kept the other with you—it's honest work, and mothers have their preferences of that sort—but why

didn't you simply take Abel's son to Monsieur de Clare and say: 'Here's the Duc'? He wouldn't have known the difference. Personally, I think that's what you intended to do."

She let her head fall into her hands.

"I expected that, to tell the truth," the Marquis went on, "and I wouldn't have said anything, provided that I had my cut—I wouldn't want to stand in your way! That's what the situation indicated, since Monsieur de Clare didn't know either one of them...."

A sob lifted the breast of Duchesse Angèle, who was struggling against her anguish. It was obvious that she was not hoping for pity. "I love both my children," she murmured. "I'm alone and helpless; if I've hidden one of them...."

The Marquis interrupted her with a loud outburst of laughter. "Well, well!" he said. "So it was to hide him, was it? And perhaps because of me, eh, darling? Poor little love! You have no strength against Godfather!" After a pause, he added: "And what if you aren't going to find your little Duc at the shop any longer, my dear? Have you thought about that...?"

At the moment when the bell rang in the antechamber of the Hôtel Fitz-Roy, Tardenois, Jaffret and the Duc de Clare's other domestics were bivouacking around a big fire lit in the hearth. Monsieur Morand was standing to one side, and Tilde was asleep in a corner, covered with the coachman's cloak.

Monsieur Morand stood up and said: "My friends, the Duc has forbidden anyone to enter that room except me. I beg you, however, to come upstairs and stay within earshot. I know no more about what's happening there than you do, but I fear that tonight might see a great misfortune."

He headed swiftly for the staircase; the others followed him.

He went into the room with the four windows alone, and came out again almost immediately, all a-tremble. "A doctor, immediately!" he said. "At any price!"

Tardenois raced outside. "Come and help me," Morand said to those who remained behind.

The Duc's bed was empty; the Duc was lying face down on the floor, seemingly dead.

There was a trunk set against the wall, which had been unloaded from the *berline* and brought upstairs at the same time as the Duc, on his express orders. It was in trying to reach that trunk, in order to open it, that the sick man had lost consciousness. That leapt to the eyes; he was still holding the key to the trunk in his hand, and his extended right arm was stretched out immediately beneath the lock.

He was picked up once again and carried to the bed, without giving any sign of life. The hands of the clock previously started by Morand stood at quarter to ten.

After twenty minutes or so, Tardenois came back and said: "I've found a doctor." And he stood aside to let the physician in.

He was a man of serious appearance, but young and remarkable handsome. In the rules of the Quakers, it is said, there is an article that orders a frank gaze, no matter what transpires. It is a good rule, entirely to the honor of the Quakers. Such was the calm and mild gaze with which the young physician scanned the audience as he crossed the room.

He went to the bed. The sick man seemed to him to be about his own age.

The young doctor examined his new client artfully and very attentively, but also very rapidly, like a man certain of what he was doing. "He's not dead," he said, "but his hours are numbered now."

"Will he recover consciousness?" asked Morand.

"I think so. Pour some water into a glass."

The young doctor had taken a box covered with black shagreen from his pocket; it was slightly larger than a snuff-box, and a Latin phrase could be read thereon, engraved in golden letters: *simila similibus curantur*. He opened it and chose, from among many others, a tiny crystal bottle, whose microscopic stopper he removed. The people around him watched curiously; the actions of physicians practicing Samuel Hahnemann's method were much less popular then than they are now.

While the transparent droplets fell one by one into the glass of pure water, Tardenois whispered: "All the quarter's physicians have left! It's Providence that set my hand on this one. He was coming out of the nearby guard-post, where he had revived a poor woman who had collapsed from cold or hunger, and I caught him by chance."

Having stirred his mixture, which remained as clear as a rock-pool, the doctor deposited the glass on the night-stand and lightly pressed the sick man's temples with the extended fingers of his right

hand. In the gap of the broad V produce by the position of his fingers he blew cold air on to the middle of the forehead. Then, having lifted up the sheet, he placed his left hand flat on the epigastrium.

After a few minutes, the Duc's chest deflated, in a long sigh that everyone was able to hear. The young doctor took a spoonful of water from the glass and trickled it into the invalid's open mouth.

Almost immediately thereafter, the latter opened his eyes. "Where is she?" he asked, in a voice that seemed to come from the other world.

"Of whom is he speaking?" the physician asked—and, as no one answered him, he leaned over the sick man to repeat the question: "Of whom are you speaking?"

There was still no response. The sick man's eyes had closed again.

The physician picked up his hat, preparing to withdraw. "Give him another spoonful every quarter of an hour," he said.

"Is that all?" asked Tardenois.

"That's all."

"But what if you're needed?"

"I won't be needed."

"Even so...." Morand persisted.

The doctor, who was already nearing the threshold, stopped and reached for his wallet, from which he extracted a card. He handed it to Morand, and went out. The card bore the name: *Doctor Abel Lenoir*.

The people who were still there looked at one another. None of them had ever seen the man before, but they all knew the name.

"Has he gone?" asked the sick man, in a scarcely-intelligible voice. On receiving an affirmative response, he opened his eyes without overmuch effort and, seeing everyone around him, appeared to experience a fit of anger. He raised his hand as if to point to the door.

"Does Monsieur le Duc want us to leave?" Tardenois translated.

A movement of the head replied: *Yes*.

"And no one should remain with Monsieur le Duc—not even me?" the favorite valet added.

The sick man succeeded in articulating: "No, except for my cousin Morand."

The domestics immediately withdrew, and the dying man's wan face expressed contentment. He beckoned Morand to come closer. "I need a drink," he said.

Morand hastened to fill the spoon, but the sick man pushed it away, and said: "Wine."

"Aren't you afraid...?" Morand began, anxiously.

"I'm no longer afraid of anything. Wine!"

The poor cousin dared not disobey. He went to the side-table, uncorked a bottle, and poured a finger of wine into the bottom of a glass. The sick man had succeeded in raising himself on to his elbow, trembling from head to foot. He looked at the glass and said: "More!"

Morand poured out a few more drops.

"More!" the invalid repeated, shivering with fever and impatience.

This time Morand half-filled the glass and brought it over, saying: "It's only to obey you, cousin."

The Duc seized the beverage avidly. He spilled some of it before being able to lift it to his mouth, for his wretched hand was shaking pitifully, but the glass finally clinked against his teeth, which were biting convulsively, and he drank.

"Ah!" he said, exhausted, dropping the glass—which rolled down the slope of the bedclothes and broke on the parquet. A moment later, he added: "It's fire that's in my throat." Then a red tint rose abruptly to his cheeks, and he sat up, demanding: "Have you sent word to my respectable friend Colonel Bozzo?"

"Yes."

"Will he come?"

"He promised."

"Perhaps he came while I was unconscious?"

"No; I assure you that he hasn't come yet."

"Open the trunk."

Morand still had the key in his hand, which he had taken out of his noble relative's stiff fingers a little while before. He knelt in front of the trunk and released the lock.

The trunk was full of carefully-folded clothes.

“Take out all that,” said the sick man, whose voice had become firm again, and who was sitting up straight. “I would have been able to do it myself—I’m strong now. Come on, hurry! Put that lot in a heap—you know full well that I’ll have no more need of it.”

The trunk was emptied in an eye-blink. At the very bottom, there was a layer of papers.

“Bring them!” the sick man ordered.

Morand gathered the papers into a single sheaf, and set them on the bed. His face red and his eyes hollowed out by fever, the Duc immediately began rifling through them angrily. His hand was firm; his speech was no longer quavering. He threw the first papers he consulted out of the bed, saying: “Burn them!”

Morand, picking them up off the parquet one by one, carried them to the hearth, where they were rapidly consumed. They were mostly letters. The Duc kissed a few of them as he released them, but he still said: “Burn! Burn!”

And Morand burned.

At the pace at which the task proceeded, it only required a few minutes to complete the triage. The heap of papers had disappeared; all that remained were two yellowed sheets, which looked like official documents.

“This is the name of my son,” said the Duc, “if I have a son; this is his life and his fortune. Listen to me carefully, Cousin Stuart; in all my life I have only known one man in whom I have absolute confidence. Swear to me that, if I die or lose consciousness before that man arrives, that you will not fail to give him these two documents.”

“What is the man’s name?” asked Morand.

“Colonel Bozzo-Corona.

Morand held out his right hand and said: “I swear that I will not fail to give these two documents to Colonel Bozzo-Corona.”

VI. *The Mummy*

The fire, momentarily activated by the combustion of the papers, had relented, and was brooding beneath its ashes. The last murmurs of the silent Marais had died away, and once could scarcely hear the distant noise of the occasional carriage rolling along the Rue Saint-Antoine at widely-spaced intervals.

The sick man had followed the course of the fire. The temporary animation that had entered into him had fallen away; nevertheless, he was still far from the state of prostration in which we saw him a little while ago. "Thank you," he said to old Morand. "I know that I can count on you, Cousin. Colonel Bozzo knows my last wishes, and the mission I'm entrusting to him. He'll do something for you; I want you and your daughter to live in ease henceforth. A drink, if you please!" Even before Morand had moved to obey, though, he changed his mind, and said: "No, what good would it do? I've done everything I wanted to do. What good would it do me from now on to be strong?"

He had picked up the casket from the night-stand. "Cousin Stuart," he said, suddenly. "Look me in the eye and speak frankly: do I look like a man who's dying?"

The other hesitated momentarily, then replied: "When the doctor came, I thought you were dead, but his potion has worked a miracle. If you'd care to follow his orders and take a spoonful every quarter of an hour, who knows what might happen?"

"It's not his potion!" the Duc exclaimed. "It's the wine! You're only an old fool—shut up!" Then, with sudden violence, he added: "She never lies! She told me everything! I don't know whether it was honesty or effrontery. I hate her terribly, but I love her as no woman was ever loved before. I should not have left my son with her. Have you heard that I have been mad? If I had known! She scorns those who adore her on their knees; I was too good—I should have taken command; she wanted a master!" The two documents that he had kept were in the casket. He closed it, and repeated: "A master! That man's son is her master! She has obeyed his every caprice, has poisoned him with caresses; he has become her tyrant and her idol. She loves him! She loves him madly...do you understand?"

"No," said Morand, "but talking too much is exhausting you."

"I was too good, I tell you!" cried the Duc, prey to extravagant wrath. "Wine! Give me wine! I want to have the strength of a man for one hour more! And if she comes, I shall be her master! I shall break her; she will love me!"

His hand, which had resumed its convulsive somersaults, pointed imperiously at the open bottle on the side-table. His livid face was marbled with red. Frightened, Morand tried to resist, but the sick man put his hands together, and stammered: "It's life that I'm asking of you, wretch! Are you trying to murder me?"

Morand ran to the table; he was trembling like a leaf as he poured the wine, and Monsieur de Clare said: "A full glass! A full glass! I'm athirst with strength! I'm athirst with hatred! Can't you tell? She'll put her son in my son's place. Who else knows the two children? Who, then, will discover the trick? And my son will be a pauper! And the other's son will be the Duc de Clare! Ah, by God, I don't want that! A full glass, Cousin! A full glass!"

Morand brought the full glass, holding it in two hands, for fear was shaking him from top to toe.

It was also with two hands that the Duc took the glass. Once again, the sound of crystal rattling, quivering and clinking against convulsively clenched teeth was heard. Monsieur de Clare drained the glass and remained there, eyes wide open and mouth agape, motionless in petrified stupor. As before, that lasted for half a minute. Then the greenish tint of his cheeks became inflamed, and his immeasurably dilated eyes gleamed.

"There's strength!" he said. "I shall be her master! Go away!" He lifted up his bedclothes and placed the casket underneath. "You can see that I've thought of everything," he went on, with an arrogant smile. "She won't discover that. I'll deceive her. Go away. She's in the garden. She'll come running. I'll master her! Get out!"

He gripped the glass and brandished it. Morand hardly had time to flee; the glass, launched by the whirling arm, broke against the door.

Almost at the same moment, the other door opened and gave passage to the disheveled Angèle. Her clothes were in disarray, and the pure lines of her facial features had dissolved. She could hardly stand up.

On seeing her, Monsieur de Clare uttered a cry of triumph. "Come here!" he said, harshly. "I won't beg you anymore; it's for me to command, for you to love."

She tottered across the room; she had not understood, or even heard. She collapsed at the foot of the bed, saying effortfully, in a voice that evoked pity: "They've stolen my son! Your son, William! It's that man, that monster—the Marquis!"

In his turn, Monsieur de Clare had undoubtedly neither heard nor understood, for his face gave no sign of emotion, and he replied: "I don't believe that you have ever been more beautiful. You did well to let down your hair. Come and give me a kiss—you owe me that; you're my wife!"

"My son—my son is lost, I tell you!" cried the Duchesse, extending her arms toward him. "He's worth his weight in gold—those are that man's very words. I hid him, you say that I don't love him. Look at me and see how I'm suffering!"

"Beautiful, beautiful! You've never been so beautiful! It's in your arms that I shall die!" So saying, the Duc made an effort to get out of bed.

She launched herself forward to hold him back, and he wrapped his arms around her, shivering with the terrible fever of the final hour.

"You mustn't die!" she cried, trying to avoid the sinister kiss that sought her lips. "You must get better, William, and I will love you! You're rich; you're powerful. You can put all those who know how to search in motion, all those who are able to find. Oh, William, my husband, listen to me, and give me back my son!"

Something of the meaning of these words penetrated the dying man's intoxicated brain—for Monsieur de Clare really was dying now, in spite of the false strength that was galvanizing him, and which was about to abandon him forever.

"Your son," he said, pursuing Angèle's contracted mouth with his own, wounding it, "our son, the little Prince de Souzay, the Duc de Clare! He shall be with us. See, I'm no longer begging; I'm ordering. I'm your master. Love me!"

"Will you find him?" she demanded, stifling beneath her maternal passion the horror that the living cadaver inspired in her—and her lips allowed themselves to be reached.

She uttered a strangled cry and recoiled. Something cold had touched her, and all of a sudden, her husband's body was weighing upon her like an inert burden.

As soon as he was no longer supported, Monsieur le Duc de Clare collapsed, his head hanging over the edge of the bed. He was dead.

Just as the panic-stricken Duchesse was standing up to call for help, she saw that the door through which she had come was wide open, and that Monsieur le Marquis de Tupinier, who had come in without being heard, was standing at the foot of the bed.

"F-i-n-i-t-o," he said. "Finished! And my word, how gaily! The brave fellow took his leave in a kiss—it's anacreontic."

The Duchess made a movement as if to hurl herself toward the door that let out on to the great staircase—but Tupinier's heels flexed. With the bound of a tiger or an acrobat, he reached Angèle and grabbed her wrists.

"None of that, Lirette!" he said. "The child's made of gold, it's true, but only on the condition of having the two little papers of which you came here in search—and I want them myself, since I'm the one who has the child."

"You don't even deny it!" cried Angèle, exasperated.

"What good would that do, daughter of my heart?" And, counterfeiting the tone that she had adopted a little while before, in speaking to Monsieur de Clare, he repeated: "'It's that man, that monster....' Well, yes, my dear, it's Godfather who has pulled off the coup. At certain difficult moments, Godfather has also been a marble-cutter; from time to time, he might have needed an apprentice. Our little Clément is a skillful scratcher...tee hee! The Duc is dead, darling—long live the Duc! If you're good, you'll have a slice of the cake."

She made a sudden effort, which almost extracted her from his grip, and shouted: "Help me, Tardenois!" But she did not have time to repeat it. Employing all his strength, as if he were fighting a man, the Marquis overwhelmed her brutally, without letting go of her hands, and applied his bald forehead to her mouth so violently that she uttered a moan of distress.

“It’s a gag as good as any other,” he said, with his hateful self-composure. “But as I need both hands, I must put a real one on you, my dear. You’re strong, you know—but Godfather is stronger than you are!”

She was, in fact, strong. It was a true battle, in which the Marquis had to employ all of his remarkable vigor and all of his bandit’s skill. Several times, he lashed out without pity or control. One of Angèle’s hands, which the hazard of the struggle had freed, was bleeding. The ferocious beast had bitten it.

Finally, she remained still, vanquished, both her hands tied and her mouth wadded by Tupinier’s solidly-knotted cravat. “Now,” he said, shooting the bolts of the main door, “you’ll be as good as gold, and we’ll search for what’s needed to make a Duc.”

It did not take long; having observed that the trunk was empty and looked around, the Marquis discovered the outline of the casket under the bedclothes. He immediately took possession of it and opened it. A veritable surge of joy gripped him at the sight of the two documents. “Victory!” he cried. “Talent is finally rewarded!”

He wrapped his arms round the casket amorously. He began to twirl as in a waltz between the dead man and the tied-up woman. He was no longer in possession of himself; he had been overtaken by the intoxication of a man who had hit the jackpot.

Suddenly, however, he stopped, and his legs shook, as if he had received a sledge-hammer blow on his skull.

“Well, well, well, well,” a faint voice had said behind him. “It’s my old comrade Cadet-l’Amour.”

The Marquis did not even turn round; he had no need to see to know.

On the threshold of the second door—the one through which Angèle and Tupinier had come in one by one, a strange creature was standing, supporting himself on the door frame with both hands. It was an old man who seemed to have surpassed the most fantastic limits of age. He was all wrinkled, like a desiccated apple, completely shriveled, more dried up than a mummy, and so thin that his bones seemed near to piercing his quilted jacket. For all that, he had a venerable air of mockery, suggestive of an excellent character.

“Come in, my dear Doctor Samuel,” he said, speaking to a second person who was not yet visible. “I think that your care will be futile now, but you can certify the death.”

A man of about forty, austere and grave in appearance, joined him in response to this invitation.

“Well, l’Amour,” the living mummy continued, “things don’t look good for you at all—not at all, not at all, Article 37 of our statutes punishes by death brethren of the first and second degree who work outside the association. Put the casket on the night-stand and ring the bell; it’s necessary that everything happens in a regulation manner.”

The Marquis obeyed without saying a word; he was literally annihilated.

Before the domestics arrived, Monsieur de Clare was replaced very properly between his sheets, with his head on the pillow. Angèle was released from her bonds; she had fainted.

“Bonjour, Morand, how is your daughter?” the mummy asked, when the people from the antechamber had come in. “Bonjour, Tardenois. Bonjour Jaffret. Monsieur le Duc has died quietly, in the arms of the dear Marquis, and Madame la Duchesse has been taken ill. It’s a nice family.”

Morand went to the dead man and kissed his forehead. Tardenois was weeping.

“I can testify that my unfortunate cousin’s last wish,” Morand said, “was to see Colonel Bozzo before dying.”

“I’m the one who took the message from my master to the Colonel,” Tardenois said, supportively.

The mummy wiped his eyes. “And I’m carrying out the Duc de Clare’s last wish in giving Colonel Bozzo this casket,” Morand continued. “Take it, Colonel.”

The mummy, who was a colonel, took the casket and made it disappear inside his quilted coat, saying: “My friends, that’s in obedience to the orders of the one who is no more. You’re witnesses; the object will still be at the disposal of the law; doubtless it’s his will. Now, I charge you with the necessary responsibilities; we need a priest, of course. I shall leave Doctor Samuel here for the certification and whatever care Madame la Duchesse requires. Monsieur le Marquis will accompany me. Goodnight.”

“As you wish,” Monsieur Tupinier replied, offering him an arm.

A quarter of an hour later, that respectable man Colonel Bozzo-Corona, the only one on Earth in whom Monsieur de Clare had confidence, was in his closed carriage with the Marquis de Tupinier. “Hey, Cadet-l’Amour,” he said after a silence. “Are you asleep, old chap?”

“Certainly not,” the Marquis replied.

“What are you thinking about?”

“You’ve just condemned me to death, Master.”

“I have the casket; we’re alone. I’m worth no more than a fly, and you’re the most ferocious assassin I know—and I know many assassins. Why don’t you strangle me, Cadet?”

The Marquis clenched his fists, but he replied: “What good would it do? What can one do against the Devil?”

The mummy laughed dryly. After a further pause, he said: “If I forgive you, Cadet, will you be my servant?”

“I’ll do better than that.”

“My slave?”

“Your dog, Master!”

“Agreed, Cadet! I need a dog—and I forgive you.”