

## PROLOGUE: THE VAMPIRE

### I

One October evening in 175\*, at half past five in the afternoon, one young man of about twenty-five years-old and another who was scarcely fifteen, both mounted on vigorous roan horses, were riding through the heart of the forest of Sénart, along the road from Melun to Paris. One glance sufficed to see that they were two brothers.

The child resembled the man; like him, he was dressed in a good doublet of thick blue fabric decorated with silver braid, shod in riding boots, coiffed with a small triangular felt hat, and gloved in leather, like provincial gentlemen going to Paris for the first time, and as yet unaware of the latest fashions and manners of high society.

They were trotting side by side, each with a small saddlebag, and chatting as they went.

“We’ll soon be in Paris, André,” said the elder. “If the information given to us by the woodcutter we met on the road a quarter of an hour ago is accurate, we have less than five leagues to go.”

“And we’ll be in Paris?” said the child, in a joyful tone.

“Yes, my dear André. We’re going to stay in the Rue des Enfants Rouges, in the home of a former servant of our family, whom you didn’t know, because he left our service before you were born.”

“And he keeps an inn?”

“Yes, at the sign of the Blue Dragon.”

The elder of the two horsemen gave his mount a slap with his riding-crop, and continued: “We’ll have covered fifteen leagues today, my dear André. It’s rather a long stage for someone your age, so we’ll go to bed early, in order that you’ll be ready to set out for Versailles tomorrow. There I’ll introduce you to the King, who, in memory of the services of our venerable father, will admit you to the company of his pages.”

The child was radiant when his brother spoke thus. “It appears,” he said, “that the king’s pages have beautiful embroidered clothes.”

“Yes, replied the elder brother, smiling.

“And you, Hector, what will be your uniform in the gray musketeers?”

“It will be red.”

“Well,” said young André, naively, “why are they called the gray musketeers, then?”

“Because of the color of their horses.”

“Oh! That’s different.” Then, becoming slightly melancholy, the child added: “So you won’t keep your horse, Hector?”

“No, my friend.”

“What will you do with it?”

“What I’ll do with yours. We’ll sell both of them when we arrive in Paris.”

“Poor Coco!” said the child, passing an affectionate hand over the horse’s neck.

“My dear André,” said the big brother, “We’re not rich, as you know. When he died, our father left us a poor manor in which the wind blows under the doors, surrounded by a little stone land in which oats and rye grow better than wheat. Our great aunts and our mother bled themselves white for our modest equipment, and you can imagine that, with the best will in the world, we can’t keep our old hunting companions.”

The child sighed again. “Poor Coco,” he repeated. “As long as he falls into good hands! He’s a valiant horse, Hector, and you know that ten hours at free rein haven’t tired him out.”

As young André mentioned free rein the two horses stopped abruptly, pricking their ears, snorting loudly, and one of them started to whinny joyfully. That was because, in the distant depths of the forest, a sound familiar to them rang out: a joyful fanfare, enthusiastically blown.

“Oh, my dear brother,” exclaimed André, “what fine music. Let’s pause for a moment.”

“And what a full-throated pack,” said Hector, who was leaning over the neck of his horse in order to listen more attentively to the baying of some thirty dogs, urged on vigorously by the sound of the horn.

“It’s a ten-pointer, without a doubt!” said the child.

“I believe so,” replied the big brother.

And as he spoke, the stag passed by, as rapid as lightning, crossing the highway in two bounds two or three hundred paces in front of the two young men. Then, after the stag came the pack, and after the pack, huntsmen in red coats, and behind the huntsmen, three riders, two men and a woman.

All that was rapid, and almost fantastic; the two young men were dazed by it.

André sighed. Hector pressed the shoulder of his quivering horse with his knee, and they resumed their route, to the sounds of the horn and the pack, which faded away in the forest.

The road curved to the right a little beyond the place where the stag had crossed, and reached a crossroads, in the middle of which stood a signpost bearing the indication: *Carrefour du Roi*.

Eight forest paths radiated around that signpost.

When they had arrived there, the two young men stopped again, in the hope that they might see the hunt traversing one of the eight paths.

While they were waiting they heard the sound of small bells and whip-cracks, the hoof-beats of horses on the hard and sonorous ground, and, at the same time, they saw one of the large carriages appear that the end of the last reign had made fashionable, King Louis XIV having liked to follow hunts in a vehicle toward the end of his life. It was harnessed to four vigorous horses covered in tinkling bells, mounted by postillions in red coats.

The carriage came straight toward the crossroads. If they had wanted to continue on their route, the two young men would have been obliged to cross its path, but they did not think of that, dominated as they were by a somewhat provincial curiosity.

In fact, the carriage, in addition to its opulent and bizarre team in harness, was flanked to either side by two riders whose costume was even more bizarre. They were clad in furs, shod in funnel-topped boots, which had not been fashionable in France for a long time, and coiffed in small pointed bonnets that were also covered in animal-hide.

As the carriage was coming toward them, a man on horseback emerged from a thicket and approached them. He was wearing a blue uniform with silver braid—that of the king’s huntsmen, for Sénart was a royal domain. Looking at Hector, he said: “I can see that your Lordship is surprised to see those savages of a sort?”

“Indeed,” replied Hector. “Who are those men?”

“Cossacks.”

“Indeed?”

“And in that carriage there’s an eccentric of whom there has been much talk for the last two years.”

“Oh,” said the two brothers, with an increasing curiosity. “Who is that person, then?”

“A great Tartar lord.”

“Truly?”

“He’s almost six feet tall,” the huntsman continued, “and is proportionately rich.”

“What does that mean?”

“It’s said that he has more than six thousand livres a day to consume.”

“Damn!” murmured Hector. “The king surely doesn’t have as much.”

“That’s quite possible,” replied the huntsman.

“And he goes about thus, with those men clad in bearskins and horses overloaded with bells?”

“He’s following the hunt.”

“What? That pack...”

“Is his.”

“And he follows it in a carriage?”

“It’s not what amuses him the most, but what means has he of doing otherwise? He can no longer walk.”

“He’s an old man, then?”

“Now, yes—but six months ago, he was a young one. One wouldn’t have thought him any older than thirty. He went hunting every week in the company of Monsieur de Clermont, who is, as you know, the king’s cousin,<sup>1</sup> and they went to supper in the home of the young Marquis de Brunoy,<sup>2</sup> whom they drove mad by striving to make him drink.” The huntsman continued, obligingly: “He was a solid fellow then, the Tartar, and it appears that all the women at court and elsewhere were fighting over him, and that he put them all in accord. It’s no bad thing, moreover, to have so much money, and when one gives away diamonds by the handful as one might hand out beans.” He smiled as he concluded.

“What happened to him, then?” asked Hector, seriously.

“No one knows, exactly.”

“In truth!”

“But one morning, he woke up with his body covered by a kind of black crust, his lips swollen and his eyes bloodshot, horrible to behold.”

“And since then?”

“Since then, he can no longer walk. But he says that he’ll be cured, and ladies continue to flock to his door.”

While the valet was speaking, the carriage arrived at the crossroads.

The two Cossacks dismounted; two valets got down from the seat and started unpacking an immense wooden hamper.

“That’s milord’s snack,” said the huntsman, and drew away.

Hector and his brother, as surprised by what they could see as by what they had just heard, did not think of continuing on their way. Both of them were staring at the carriage, which was scarcely ten paces away, and they would have liked to see the singular person of whom mention had just been made to them. The curtains of the carriage were hermetically closed at the front, however, and in order to glimpse the Tartar it would have been necessary for them to go to the side-doors, which would have been extremely impolite.

While they were hesitating, the Cossacks removed successively from the hamper a cloth, which they spread on the grass next to the signpost, and venerable bottles covered with cobwebs, which they placed on the cloth, along with an enormous venison pâté, smoked meat, a wild boar ham and various delicacies that fascinated the gaze of the two travelers. They were young, well mounted, and had made a long journey; their last meal had been eaten in Fontainebleau five or six hours before, and they were not expecting to eat supper until Paris, still five leagues distant.

Young André said to his brother, naively: “Since this Tartar’s rich, he might invite us to dinner.”

Hector smiled. “We’ll dine as well in the Rue des Enfants Rouges,” he said. “Let’s go, little brother.”

But before he had pressed the shoulder of his horse with his knee, Hector was obliged to focus his gaze on the carriage, one of the doors having just opened.

A man got down.

If the huntsman had told the truth, it was not the Tartar, for, apart from the fact that the man appeared to the two young men to be short rather than tall, he had no dark wounds on his face. He was a middle-

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<sup>1</sup> Louis de Bourbon, Comte de Clermont (1709-1771), one of the “Princes of the Blood” fathered by Louis XIV on his mistresses, acquired a distinctly equivocal reputation, partly because of his scandalous abuses of his aristocratic authority and partly because he was said to be the Grand Master of French Freemasonry.

<sup>2</sup> Marquis de Brunoy was one of the titles of Jean-Pâris de Marmontel (1690-1766), which was popularized long after his death by the anonymous satire *Les Folies du Marquis de Brunoy, ou Ses Mille et Une Extravagances* (1804), and was also featured in an 1836 play credited to Alexandre Dumas and two collaborators, based on an article by Léon Gozlan, with which the author was undoubtedly familiar. The real Marmontel was, of course, not young in the 1750s.

aged man, paltry in appearance, going bald, with russet side-whiskers, clad in a long brown robe edged with fur, and coiffed in a conical astrakhan bonnet.

The man advanced toward Hector and bowed courteously.

Hector returned the salute, increasingly astonished.

The unknown man addressed him in French, but with a strong German accent.

“Gentleman, my name is Hermann Schutzberg, and I’m a physician of the Faculty of Heidelberg.”

Hector bowed again.

The short man went on: “I’m attached to the personnel of the Russian Prince Trespatky, to whom that carriage belongs, and the pack that you might have seen passing by just now.”

The young gentleman nodded his head, and waited

“Listen—one can hear the halloo out there, in the distance, and the hunt must be over,” Hermann Schutzberg went on. “Monsieur le Comte de Clermont, Prince of the Blood, and the beautiful Princess Woïna, the prince’s sister, will come to share this meal.”

At the final words, young André, who was dying of hunger, shivered with a secret joy.”

“Prince Trespatky,” Herman Schutzberg concluded, “has asked me to invite you both to dinner.”

Hector did not have time to respond. A man put his head out of the carriage window, and the two young men uttered a gasp of alarm. They had just perceived a kind of monster covered in leprosy, who shouted: “Well, Hermann, do the messieurs accept my invitation?”

At the same time, the Tartar set for on the ground and advanced painfully, on crutches, to meet Hector. That latter, like his brother, was mute with horror. The monster perceived that, and his ulcerated lips grimaced an odious smile.

“I frighten you,” he said, “but don’t worry. Hermann will cure me, and in six months, I’ll appear to you as beautiful as daylight.

At the same time he darted a glance at young André of singular covetousness.

In spite of the assurance he gave the young people of his imminent cure, they were nevertheless about to draw away when a newcomer arrived at the signpost.

It was a woman: the amazon that they had perceived at a distance following the hunt. And, on seeing her, Hector no longer had the strength to flee; he remained there, as if petrified by admiration. Princess Woïna was as beautiful and as radiant as her brother was horrible and repulsive.

“Oh, how beautiful she is!” murmured Hector, dazzled.

## II

Hector de Pierrefeu—that was the young gentleman's name—was fascinated by the woman, while his brother, too young as yet to experience emotions of that sort, was subject to a different attraction. He had turned his eyes away from the monster to watch the preparations for the picnic. His fifteen-year-old stomach was speaking as loudly as the inflammable heart of his big brother.

The beautiful Woïna dismounted, and threw her bridle to one of the Cossacks. Then she went to her brother, to whom she extended her hand.

There was a ten-second conversation between the horrible Tartar and the woman as beautiful as an angel—a conversation of which Hector did not hear a word, for it took place in the Russian language, but which, he divined, concerned the two of them.

Then the beautiful Woïna, turning her head, looked at Hector and his brother. She advanced toward them and said to them, in a voice as harmonious as a caress: “You won't refuse, will you, Messieurs?”

Hector, dazzled, stammered a few scarcely intelligible words, and dismounted. His brother imitated him.

At that moment, another rider arrived at the signpost. It was the Comte de Clermont—the king's cousin, as the huntsman had said.

The curiosity excited in them by that young lord, who was still young and handsome, finished reconciling the two young men to the repulsive face of the Tartar. The latter, in any case, was careful to place his sister beside Hector.

Young André marveled at the amber yellow wines that the Cossacks poured into sculpted gold goblets. Hector only had eyes for the beautiful Woïna; he only heard the celestial music of her voice.

The Comte de Clermont and the Tartars were in a very good mood. The hunt provided the first topic of conversation; then they progressed to intimate details.

Young André babbled like a warbler in a bush, with the aid of the wine. Thus, while his brother was admiring the beautiful Tartar woman, he confessed that his name was André de Pierrefeu, that he was the son of a Burgundian gentleman who had died in the king's service, that he was going to Paris with his brother, he to enter into the company of pages and his brother to the gray musketeers. He added that they would both be staying at the Blue Dragon Inn in the Rue des Enfants Rouges.

The Tartar and Monsieur de Clermont listened, smiling.

An hour went by.

It was a delightful hour for Hector, who could not weary of admiring Woïna, and a charming hour for the child, to whom Monsieur de Clermont promised mountains and marvels. In the end, however, it was necessary to separate, and it was not without regret on the part of the two young men. The beautiful Woïna had darted Hector a tender glance.

The Comte de Clermont, passing his hand over young André's rosy cheek, said to him: “I'm going to Versailles next week; I shall see the king, and you'll be well treated, on my recommendation.”

A few minutes later, the two brothers were in the saddle and drawing away from their hosts at the Carrefour du Roi.

Hector sighed. When one is twenty-five and has a little imagination, the heart beats rapidly, and it is easy to dream of adventures. In the year of grace 175\*, every gentleman quitting his province to come and seek his fortune in Paris immediately dreamed about some beautiful lady, who would hold him in high esteem and enable him make rapid progress.

Hector had solicited humbly, in a tremulous voice—and discreetly, to be sure—permission to present himself at the Tartar's town house on the Quai des Tournelles. Woïna had replied with a smile, and that smile was an acquiescence. So, during the rest of the journey, Hector said little, replying distractedly to the questions multiplied by his little brother, and they entered Paris at eight o'clock in the evening, André slightly sobered up and Hector half-crazy with amour for the beautiful Woïna.

They went in via the Faubourg Saint-Antoine and followed the street of that name as far as that of the Temple. There, they were within a short distance of the Rue des Enfants Rouges.<sup>3</sup> They were obliged nevertheless to ask the way.

“The second street on the left,” an honest bourgeois sitting on his doorstep told them.

“Thank you,” said Hector.

“Are you going to the Blue Dragon?” asked the bourgeois.

“Yes.”

The bourgeois shook his head. “There are better inns in the quarter,” he said.

“But we know the innkeeper,” said Hector, and he continued on his way.

The bourgeois watched the draw away. “Those are handsome young fellows,” he murmured, leaning toward his wife, who had joined him on the doorstep, “who don’t appear to be anxious about the Blue Dragon’s sinister reputation.”

“Shut up, fool,” his wife replied. “Why get mixed up in things that don’t concern you?”

And, as if she were afraid that the husband’s words might be overheard by someone, she swiftly dragged him back into the house and closed the door.

In the meantime, Hector and André were going into the courtyard of the Blue Dragon. It was a veritable inn, such as there were in Paris then but which no longer exist today, except perhaps in one of the remoter outlying districts. There was a stable for the horses, a large table for their riders, a well-furnished cellar, and a kitchen as vast as a guard-room, in which a fire was blazing joyously before a Homeric spit placed on large wrought-iron forks.

Who, then, would have said that it was not a good inn? The bourgeois, to whom his wife had reprimanded him sharply, had to be a simple calumniator. The Blue Dragon was surely the best hostelry in the whole Saint-Martin quarter. And what service for travelers! Scarcely had the hooves of the horses struck the cobblestones of the courtyard than maidservants, scullions and stable-hands came running—and in their midst, the hotelier himself.

He was a short stout man with graying hair and a majestic appearance, who answered to the name of Master Boniface, and was the churchwarden of the Église Saint Martin-des-Champs. He had a jovial face when visitors of a certain age arrived, but his face darkened if, perchance, instead of mature men, the newcomers were young. He therefore frowned on seeing Hector and his brother dismount and hand their bridles to the stable-hands.

Hector ran toward him, and held out his hand.

“Bonjour, my good friend Boniface,” he said. “Don’t you recognize me?”

Master Boniface shuddered and took a step back. “It seems to me,” he stammered, “yes...in fact...no...it’s not possible!”

“What!” said the young man, “You don’t recognize your little Hector, then?”

“Lord God! Is it really true?”

“Yes, it’s really me, Hector de Pierrefeu!”

“Ah!” said the landlord, who went very pale.

“How distraught you are!”

“Excuse me, Monsieur le Comte—you were only ten years old when I left the château. The emotion of seeing you again...the joy...you understand...”

“Yes, yes, my good friend.”

Boniface wiped away large drops of sweat that were pearly on his brow.

“This is my brother,” said Hector, taking André by the hand.

Boniface went even paler. “Are you going to stay here?” he asked, in a strangled voice.

“Of course—you wouldn’t want us to go elsewhere?”

“That’s true...you’re right...it’s a great honor for me...”

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<sup>3</sup> There is no Rue des Enfants Rouges in Paris, but there is a Marché des Enfants Rouges—i.e., a market—in the Marais, founded in the 17th century, which still exists today. Red was the color of charity in 17th century Paris, so the children in a nearby orphanage were dressed in that color, and the market took its name from them.

Master Boniface's emotion was increasing rather than calming down.

"We've come to ask you for supper and a bed," said Hector. "Then, tomorrow..."

"Tomorrow?" said Boniface, anxiously.

"We're going to Versailles."

The hotelier appeared to breathe out, and his anguish calmed down slightly. He took the two young men into the main room of the inn, which was also the kitchen. A woman was sitting by the fireside in front of the spit, which was rotating, garnished with an enormous quarter of beef. The woman, who was tall and thin, of sinister aspect in spite of a certain vulgar beauty, darted a strange gaze at the young men.

"Look, wife," said Boniface, whose voice resumed trembling slightly, "this is the son of my former master, the Comte de Pierrefeu."

"Handsome young men," she said, with a smile that made the hotelier shiver.

Hector and his brother were installed by the fireside.

Boniface leaned toward his wife, and whispered: "You'll answer for these two with your head!"

The woman shrugged her shoulders. Then, with a pitying smile, she said: "Are we the masters?"

"This time, we shall be..."

"Imbecile!"

Boniface consulted the large walnut-framed clock in the corner of the room with his gaze. "Eight o'clock," he said. "The man won't come."

"I hope so, for your sake," his wife replied, in a muted and ironic tone.

Boniface bowed his head, and did not say another word. He turned his inn upside down in order to give the sons of his former master an appropriate welcome, but he did not want the table in the kitchen to be laid.

"Where are you going to give us supper, then?" asked Hector.

"In your room, Monsieur le Comte."

"Why?"

"Because you'll be more tranquil there."

"As you wish," said the young man, who was still thinking about the beautiful Woïna.

While Boniface conducted the young men to their lodgings, the stable-lad said in a loud voice: "These gentlemen are doubtless leaving early in the morning. At what time is it necessary to have the horses ready?"

The hotelier looked at him askance. "The gentlemen are leaving in broad daylight, after breakfast," he replied. "You can go to bed."

Hector and his brother ate moderately. André was not hungry, but he was tired. Hector was thinking about the beautiful Tartar woman.

Doubtless to do them honor, Boniface had wanted to serve them personally. When they had finished their meal he said to Hector: "You'd do well to lock your doors carefully, Monsieur le Comte."

"Bah! There are thieves in Paris, then?" asked Hector, laughing.

"Which is to say," Boniface replied, "that for seven or eight months, there's been talk of nothing but murders and thefts in the quarter. Only last week, someone tried to force the doors of the stable to steal the horses of a Norman gentleman who was lodging here."

"Well, I'll lock my door carefully," Hector replied.

"It wouldn't do any harm to put your sword under your bolster."

"Bah!"

"And a good pair of pistols on your night-stand."

"You're frightening me!"

The hotelier did not have time to justify his fears, for the door opened and his wife came in.

"Don't listen to my husband, Monsieur le Comte," she said, pulverizing the unfortunate Boniface with a glance. "He's a little mad...since the evening when he was beaten crossing the Pont Neuf, he sees nothing but thieves, assassins and prowlers everywhere. That was as well once, but today, thank God, the Lieutenant de Police mounts a good guard."

At the same time, she dismissed Boniface with an imperious gesture. The man must have feared his wife at least as much as thieves, for he went out, uttering deep sighs, without even turning his head.

Then Madame Boniface said to Hector: "Here's a letter for you."

"A letter!" said the young man, astonished.

The innkeeper's wife had taken a small folded sheet of paper from beneath her apron, sealed with blue wax that exhaled a mysterious perfume.

"It's a woman who brought it," added Madame Boniface.

Hector took the letter, tremulously, and cast his eyes over the address, which read: *To Monsieur le Comte Hector de Pierrefeu, at the Blue Dragon.*

The letter really was for him. Who, then, could be writing to him?

The writing revealed a woman's hand. And what other woman that the beautiful Woïna could know that young Hector de Pierrefeu was staying at the Blue Dragon in the Rue des Enfants Rouges?

The young man, seized by a violent heartbeat, broke the seal on the letter with a tremulous hand.