

PART II. THE RED BROTHERHOOD ¹

I. As a Kind of Preface

Like a snake that swallows its tail, after an immense circuit, our narrative, as our readers have perhaps noticed, seeks to connect the mysteries and incomprehensible events which have served as its point of departure, to the place where we have arrived today.

Four murders, committed in Paris during the year 1819, surrounded by dramatic and romanesque circumstances, could create the belief in a kind of tribunal of *Francs-Juges*.² Those uncatchable and invisible phantoms worked outside the law, taking upon themselves the right to dispense high and low justice for crimes that came to their attention, and remained unknown from public condemnation.

The Marquis de Lupiano, for a time suspected of being the head of that bloody organization, had proved his innocence with that mocking and ironic serenity, which we have seen him display, when threatened by the police of every country, and even in the presence of Napoleon himself³. Such was established the doorway of the vast labyrinth through which the reader's curiosity has been walking for a long time. Today there are no more secrets in that cloudy atmosphere in which our story was born; the moment has come to clear away the clouds.

Moving from unheard-of misfortunes of which we will soon tell the extent and character, to the most somber misanthropy and the most terrifying skepticism, cultivating with rare perseverance and an unusual fecundity of imagination the detestable thoughts of evil, the man who, today, calls himself the Marquis de Lupiano had, for a long time, done nothing but work in a vacuum.

What purpose, in fact, did the famous *Sleepers' Club* that, in London, had conducted him to Newgate Prison, and the society of the *Brothers of Death*, that had brought him nothing but a stay in Charenton,⁴ and the long funereal cackle making up the occupation of his entire life, serve, if not, at most, to hold at bay his eternal need for agitation, and to sow around him terror and astonishment, equally sterile?

In the two organizations he had previously founded, his claim was to have elevated suicide to the state of a religion where, by means of an atrocious lottery, the self-immolation of human victims was carried out. But never, in that lottery, had he earned the right for himself to end an existence which weighed heavily on him. Like another Ahasverus,⁵ weary of living, yet unable to die, each time that his sinister creations were destroyed, he had thrown himself sometimes into the life of a corsair, sometimes into those immense wanderings where contraband, printing counterfeit money, and other unlawful occupations had finally put him in possession of a fabulous fortune.

Made stronger by the power of gold, he only found himself more to be pitied, because in proportion to the power of every user, the tendency to want more only increases.

In that way, the captivity that Napoleon had inflicted on him could be considered a blessing, in the sense that it finally created an obstacle on the path of that fierce determination that carried him breathlessly across dreams and aspirations to the Infinite. In the Vincennes dungeon, he had been, if one

¹ The original outline added: "or Saint-Helena" to the title.

² The Vehmic courts, or *Vehmgericht*, a vigilante tribunal system of Westphalia active during the later Middle Ages, based on a fraternal organization of lay judges called "free judges." Proceedings were often secret, leading to the alternative titles of "secret courts" or "silent courts." The peak of activity of these courts was during the 14th to 16th centuries, with scattered evidence establishing their continued existence during the 17th and 18th centuries. They were finally abolished by order of Jérôme Bonaparte, king of Westphalia, in 1811. See Volume 2, pages 77 seq.

³ See Volume 2, pages 31 seq.

⁴ Lunatics' asylum founded in 1645 by the Brothers of Charity; the Marquis de Sade was interned there.

⁵ The Wandering Jew.

can speak this way, *forced to sit down*, to gather his thoughts, and what's more, in the person of the Prince Bevillacqua—the man we now know as Comte de Montalvi—he had met a friend.

Let's be clear about that—with the composition of his mind and his character, Lupiano couldn't really be anyone's friend. He was one of those souls without a peer, who must go through life alone. But the man from Genoa, his companion in captivity, had become an admirer, a confidant, a blind follower. He spoke his thoughts aloud before that man, to bring them to complete maturity and to control their value. To sum up, it seemed to the Marquis that he had gained a third arm the day that it had been agreed between Bevillacqua and him that they should be united together, and that henceforth they would never leave each other's company.

Having spent a great deal of time in secret societies, it was at first on the side of politics that the man from Genoa had tried to turn the destructive instincts and the appetite for moral anarchy that he has found so strongly developed in Lupiano. At first, Lupiano had seemed disposed to follow him in that path. He was indignant about that fashion of European gendarmerie that, following the Imperial despotism, seemed to constitute the Sovereigns of the North and almost immediately after the release from Vincennes, obliged by his unfortunate duel with General de Chandeville⁶ to leave Paris and France, it was toward Germany, where there was then a great excitement about liberal ideas, that he directed his steps.

But that excursion to the other side of the Rhine had ended in great disappointment for him. In the *Deutscher Bund*,⁷ the *Burschenschaft*,⁸ the *Arminia*⁹ and the *Black Knights*,¹⁰ he had encountered nothing but empty and mystic professors, noisy students, swallows of tankards of beer, some ambitious people, a great number of fools, and shifty informers. For wanting to put a little order into the ideas of the German democrats, and to make the Teutonic transcendent verbosity which had deafened him pass into the domain of action, he had finally ended by being mistaken for a Russian agent. Disgusted with these powerless conspiracies without a future, he decided to go to Hamburg, and from there, embark for South America.

Leaving the country at the moment when Napoleon's return from the Island of Elba¹¹ was again putting in question everything that the abdication of 1814 had seemed to decide, Lupiano went to assist Simon Bolivar in New Grenada, and, for some time, as he had confided to Lefebvre, he had served as Chief of Staff beside the hero of the Colombian Insurrection. But he grew tired of that war, the end of which one could not predict, and, still accompanied by the man from Genoa, he returned to Europe, however with a notable increase in his fortune, calculated at that time to be in the neighborhood of fifty million.

⁶ See Volume 3, pages 170 seq.

⁷ The German Confederation was an association of 39 German states in Central Europe, created by the Congress of Vienna in 1815 to coordinate the economies of separate German-speaking countries and to replace the former Holy Roman Empire, which had been dissolved in 1806. Most historians have judged the Confederation to have been weak and ineffective, as well as an obstacle to the creation of a German nation-state. The Confederation collapsed due to the rivalry between the Kingdom of Prussia and the Austrian Empire.

⁸ One of the traditional student fraternities founded in the 19th century inspired by liberal and nationalistic ideas. It was significantly involved in the March Revolution and the unification of Germany. After the formation of the German Empire in 1871, they faced a crisis, as their main political objective had been realized.

⁹ The Catholic Students Society Arminia was one of Germany's oldest Catholic male student societies. It was founded on 6 November 1863 at the University of Bonn. The name was chosen in reference to Arminius, the chief of the Cherusci who drove the Romans out of Germany and thus became a symbol of the not yet unified fatherland. In 1865 Arminia, among four other Catholic corporations, became the founder of the *Kartellverband katholischer deutscher Studentenvereine* (KV), Germany's second oldest umbrella organization of Catholic male student societies.

¹⁰ An ancient German body of knights whose existence is traced back as far as the time of King Arthur, and who, in the absence of a strict and impartial administration of justice, had banded together to help the oppressed, aid the distressed and correct wrongs done. Their device was, "Charity, Generosity, Justice."

¹¹ The Hundred Days marked the period between Napoleon's return from exile on the island of Elba to Paris on 20 March 1815 and the second restoration of King Louis XVIII on 8 July 1815 (actually 110 days).

His sojourn in Germany had been sterile. Passing into Westphalia, he had spent some time in Dortmund, formerly the principal seat of the famous *Vehmic Courts*. In that city's library, he had discovered the ancient rules of that bloody justice brought together under the title *Dortmund Code*. In reading them, he had concocted the idea of an association which was to have as a mission, to search out and punish the thousand and one crimes that had remained unknown and escaped the chastisements of official justice.

Counting on the fact that in Paris, the Great Whore, better than any other place in the world, he would get an abundant harvest of those anonymous misdeeds, it was there that the Marquis de Lupiano settle, while his friend Bevilacqua took the name Montalvi, toward the end of 1818. He had come to give a shape to his idea. A famous novelist¹² appeared to have gotten wind of the Marquis' idea, and, under the title *History of the Thirteen*, in three short episodes, where unfortunately the progression of the interest appeared to be somewhat decreasing, he had seemed to want to show the work the *Red Brotherhood*, the origins of the name of which remained unknown to him. But in some ways, the famous storyteller was well informed. He was rather close to the truth in this passage from his preface:

There was then in Paris, thirteen brothers who formed a group disregarding all of society and finding themselves together one evening like conspirators, not hiding any thought from one another, they used, turn by turn, a fortune like that of the Old Man of the Mountain,¹³ having their feet in all the drawing rooms, their hands in all the safes, their shoulders in the street, their heads near ears, and making everything serve their caprices without scruples.¹⁴

Monsieur de Balzac was still truthful when he showed that red was the costume of dark societies and when he noted the disbanding of their sinister society at around the time of Napoleon's death. But he

¹² Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850). *L'Histoire des Treize* (1833-39) are three short novels concerned in part with the activities of a rich, powerful, sinister and unscrupulous secret society. While the deeds of *The Thirteen* remain frequently in the background, the individual stories are concerned with exploring various forms of desire. A tragic love story, *Ferragus* depicts a marriage destroyed by suspicion, revelations and misunderstanding. *The Duchess de Langeais* explores the anguish that results when a society coquette tries to seduce a heroic ex-soldier, while *The Girl with the Golden Eyes* offers a frank consideration of desire and sexuality. The director of the prestigious *Revue de Paris*, Rabou was Balzac's friend and published his novels in his magazine. Their mutual trust was such that Balzac entrusted him with the task of completing some of his unfinished novels after his death. Rabou uses Balzac's stories here both as a point of departure for his own story, and as a criticism of Balzac's work. For his critical aside, Rabou jumps from 1819, the time of his story at this point, to the time of the composition of *Le Cabinet Noir*, sometime before its first publication in 1848.

¹³ Nickname given to Rashid ad-Dīn Sinān (1132/1135-1192), legendary Grand Master of the Assassins and a central figure in the 3rd Crusade.

¹⁴ Rabou misquotes Balzac, whose foreword is actually much more detailed: *In the Paris of the Empire there were found Thirteen men equally impressed with the same idea, equally endowed with energy enough to keep them true to it, while among themselves they were loyal enough to keep faith even when their interests seemed to clash. They were strong enough to set themselves above all laws; bold enough to shrink from no enterprise; and lucky enough to succeed in nearly everything that they undertook. So profoundly politic were they, that they could dissemble the tie which bound them together. They ran the greatest risks, and kept their failures to themselves. Fear never entered into their calculations; not one of them had trembled before princes, before the executioner's axe, before innocence. They had taken each other as they were, regardless of social prejudices. Criminals they doubtless were, yet none the less were they all remarkable for some one of the virtues which go to the making of great men, and their numbers were filled up only from among picked recruits. Finally, that nothing should be lacking to complete the dark, mysterious romance of their history, nobody to this day knows who they were. The Thirteen once realized all the wildest ideas conjured up by tales of the occult powers of a Manfred, a Faust, or a Melmoth; and to-day the band is broken up or, at any rate, dispersed. Its members have quietly returned beneath the yoke of the Civil Code; much as Morgan, the Achilles of piracy, gave up buccaneering to be a peaceable planter; and, untroubled by qualms of conscience, sat himself down by the fireside to dispose of blood-stained booty acquired by the red light of blazing towns.*

shows himself less informed in claiming that the Red Brotherhood did not have a leader,¹⁵ and that only chance brought about their dispersion.

He also states that he knew almost little about the intimate secrets of the association. He forgot to speak about an extremely powerful lever that it had outside its own resources. Once that lever was suppressed, its existence became hardly believable, and without it, it could no longer exist or function. Finally, in presenting Lupiano's twelve *tools* as so many unknown poets, so many Manfreds,¹⁶ Fausts,¹⁷ and Melmoths,¹⁸ driven by the taste for *Asiatic pleasures* and by the horror of the platitudes of vulgar existence, the author of the *Human Comedy* manages to leave the real to approach with full sails the shores of fantasy.

From that point, faithful to his poetic writing so dear to ladies, given over to the incessant domination of those feminine interests to which he has sacrificed so much in his books, he becomes contemptuous of what he calls the stories of tunnels and cadavers, and instead of bloody dramas and novels full of terror which his readers must be waiting for, he is careful to invent, as he says, gentle adventures where the woman is radiant with beauty and virtue or where members of the stock exchange are the heroes.¹⁹

This, one must understand, is the true novel of the Red Brotherhood, barely looked into previously, their story having been made insipid. To use a fashionable word, their real story is here in all its rawness and crudity.

Not only did the Red Brotherhood have a leader, they had a dictator, and that dictator was that pale sickly man with an almost ridiculous appearance who has revealed himself to us under many diverse identities before, until he incarnated himself in the personage of the Marquis de Lupiano.

Later the reader will recognize that it was not a matter of chance but a very sovereign and thought-out act of his will that, shortly after the death of Napoleon on the island of Saint-Helena, he dispersed and annihilated the elements of the organization that he had formed. In that organization, there were not twelve poets. What he would have made of them, only the Good Lord might know! But here was a man of genius and superior will power who had not drawn his ideas of revolt against the social order either from the frenzied need of suffering, or from the vulgarities of existence. That man, that desperate man, that bloodied mocker, was Lupiano, who, believing that he had an account to settle with the horrible mockery of his destiny, had made for himself so many playthings with the laws of society and of justice, merely in order to escape confrontation with his thoughts.

As for the *Condottieri*²⁰ that he employed, they were all men of action, terrible rogues, for the most part, since, before coming back to France, Lupiano had taken care to skim them off from almost all the jails in the universe.

He had hired these men, gave them a meager existence, ordered them to appear not to know each other, and by the ascendance of his genius, the strong discipline with which he had bent them to his will, the solidarity he had created, giving them all the same opportunities, he had generated a true feeling of

¹⁵ Somewhat untrue, since Balzac writes: *The aforesaid leader was still an apparently young man with fair hair and blue eyes, and a soft, thin voice which might seem to indicate a feminine temperament. His face was pale, his ways mysterious. He chatted pleasantly, and told me that he was only just turned forty. He might have belonged to any one of the upper classes. The name which he gave was probably assumed, and no one answering to his description was known in society. Who is he, do you ask? No one knows.*

¹⁶ Poem (1816-17) by George Gordon, Lord Byron.

¹⁷ Rabou must have had in mind Goethe's work (1829).

¹⁸ Gothic novel (1820) by Charles Maturin.

¹⁹ Balzac writes: *When a writer has a true story to tell, he should scorn to turn it into a sort of puzzle toy, after the manner of those novelists who take their reader for a walk through one cavern after another to show him a dried-up corpse at the end of the fourth volume, and inform him, by way of conclusion, that he has been frightened all along by a door hidden somewhere or other behind some tapestry; or a dead body, left by inadvertence, under the floor.*

²⁰ Leaders of the professional military free companies (or mercenaries) contracted by the Italian city-states and the Papacy from the late Middle Ages and throughout the Renaissance.

union and common devotion. He had made a single bundle from their separate wills, so coherent and docile that the Superior of a monastery wouldn't have been more religiously obeyed. But beyond all those elements of strength, the Marquis felt himself in possession of incommensurable power when, by way of Madame de Camembert, he had found himself in possession of all the secrets of the Secret Bureau. The way in which he had begun his intimacy with that lady is already known to the reader. It remains now to show that, despite its strangeness, their first encounter came about very naturally; that as always, Lupiano hadn't asked anything of chance, and with that precious conquest, he had brought it about with complete and entire premeditation.

II. The Court of France

It was the name given in 1819 to a kind of modern-day Court of Miracles²¹ located on the exterior boulevard, between the barriers of d'Enfer and of Mont-Parnasse.

Formed of vast irregular constructions, it held the remains of a farm, the outside wall of which, erected in 1787, had enclosed the outbuildings within the city limits. That unpaved enclosure, encumbered with piles of gravel, manure, and garbage, was closed on the boulevard side by an unsightly carriage door surrounded by two wooden posts and a palisade made of ship's planks holding up a collapsed wall for two-thirds of its length. A hauling enterprise that had not prospered had followed the farm. Then, to take advantage of those buildings whose dilapidation and abandon threatened them with near destruction, the owner, by making numerous interior improvements, such as workshops, sheds, and small house accommodations, had adapted them to the needs of the poor and worker population.

His tenants were a renter of carriages, a laundress, who, at the same time, served as the concierge for the little colony, a nursemaid, a Cartwright, and other artisans of diverse nature: organ grinders, an animal trainer, acrobats, professional beggars, and even some convicts wanted by the law.

One fine morning, hiding behind the name of a third party, Lupiano had come to acquire that unusual property, and after having turned out the peaceful households and workers, which could have become an obstacle to this place becoming the general quarters of his mysterious operations, he replaced them with some of his associates to create the semblance of diverse industries. There also he stored material and equipment necessary for his various projects. Thus, he had procured some old rebuilt rental carriages and turned them, in the language of thieves, into what was called then hackney cabs. Identified with a fictitious license number, but having the honest appearance of vehicles registered with the police, they could, in the evening, be used for some suspicious job without there being any way to find them again. The Marquis's foresight even went so far as building fake hearses that he held in reserve either for one of his mortuary mystifications or, if needed, for clandestine burials.

Better informed than Madame de Camembert because, when she had bought the former Terray townhouse, she had had only a vague understanding of its subterranean connections, the Marquis de Lupiano, when he had become the proprietor of the Court of France, knew with certain knowledge that, under the hovels and buildings that he was going to populate with his associates, extended vast caves and tunnels, including one with a vaulted passage that reached the townhouse on the Rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs. When the two proprietors came to an agreement, nothing was easier than to connect the two buildings with such different aspects and value with a passage that had been closed for many years.

When Lupiano was thinking about being able to say that there would soon be no longer a wall between the Court of France and the Camembert townhouse, was precisely the time when the Marquise was making the most noise in the Parisian salons with her dreaded malicious gossip and that universal knowledge of others' lives that most folks were not far from attributing to a supernatural explanation. That townhouse, having its official entry in Paris, was to be of inestimable value to the Red Brotherhood, giving them a secret entry *extra muros*. It would have come even more strongly to the attention of the Marquis because of its then-owner, Madame de Camembert. In a woman so beautiful, rich, intelligent,

²¹ Slum district of Paris where beggars lived and from which they entered the wealthier sections of Paris to beg as cripples, blind, or maimed. When they returned to their hovels, they became "miraculously" healed.

coldly wicked, having the reputation of taking pleasure in dark things, and having the habit of procuring for herself rare insights right into the most inaccessible recesses of private life, it was impossible for Lupiano to not anticipate an interesting personality to study, perhaps even a desirable colleague to procure.

He felt himself drawn to that woman, and could easily have met her in society, become acquainted with her, and then recruit her into his schemes. But for the future and the usefulness of their alliance, to remain strangers to each other in the eyes of the outside world was infinitely more convenient. Seemingly working in isolation, at different points, their two clandestine powers could cover a great deal more horizon. Separately, they would be better able to throw off the curious interested in learning about them off their scent. In addition, if, in the terrible liberties that Lupiano was proposing to take with the social order, he experienced some serious failure, the Marquise would remain outside the scope of his misfortunes. Instead of having to defend herself as his accomplice, she could still serve very effectively the interests of the Brotherhood in peril. In addition, the natural aversion of the Marquis for the beaten paths, and the unusual pleasure that he experienced in astonishing and strongly striking imaginations, were well known. That explained his strange way of introduction to the Marquise, whom he had correctly judged when he thought that form of melodramatic appearance would be welcomed by her. From that point on, the mode of nocturnal communication between them continued for some time. Soon, the student having surpassed all the hopes of her master, they had no secrets from each other, and the two knew each other to the depth.

When Lupiano knew the price at which the Marquise had bought the indiscretions of Lefebvre, he claimed that, even in ridding her of that demanding and inconvenient informer, he could still maintain the intelligence established with the Secret Bureau, understanding the value of the lucrative business which he had just discovered. Not only did he claim to exploit it for himself, but he also claimed to do so on a larger scale and with much more results.

The head of the Secret Bureau was in a position to be differently informed than Lefebvre, who was only a simple employee. The name of the man currently in charge, Monsieur de Saint-Rambert, had been given to the Marquis by Madame de Camembert as being a man of very approachable integrity. Lupiano had at first presented himself to Saint-Rambert with the intention of putting down all the money necessary to purchase that integrity. But, when, in the person of this high-ranking and secret civil servant he had recognized Rempailleux, the former leader of the *Chauffeurs* and the *Invisibles*,²² who, later, under the name of Dulac, had joined the Sleepers' Club, but had refused to be the *brother who must die*, a clause to which all the members of their association had submitted under their charter, and instead had gone to denounce the association to the English Police,²³ the negotiations found themselves unusually simplified.

Partly by fear of the indiscretions and the brutalities of the terrible Marquis, by whom, for one hour he remembered having been within minutes of hanging, and partly by the addition of an income of sixty million francs offered to him over and above his appointment as Director of the Secret Bureau, Saint-Rambert had promised to deliver to Lupiano all the secrets of which his functions made him the depository. It remained agreed that the Marquis would be careful that no use of such secrets would be made that could be traced to his revelations.

When she found out that the mysterious power that she had for a long time possessed had thus been transferred to the Marquis, Madame de Camembert was all the more eager to follow the fortune of the extraordinary man who had revealed himself to her. With surprising virility, she had wanted to be associated without reserve to all his projects and to all his luck, even if, according to her, she had occupied the *thirteenth chair* in the association that still remained to be filled.

But, Lupiano only wanted her in his murderous brotherhood as an honorary member, or a foreign associate, and to bring about a complete liberty in their relations, he had begun by inventing the farce of the *Girl with the Death's Head*. The self-assurance and the cleverness that the Marquise had put into

²² See Volume 1, pages 149 seq.

²³ See Volume 1, pages 328 seq.

playing that personage assuredly had nothing unbelievable about it, if one will recall the manner in which she got disentangled from Lefebvre.

Somewhat later, to tie more tightly her life with that of the Marquis, whom she had come to call her venerated father, she pretended to sell her townhouse to him, and play the comedy of retiring in the Convent of the Sacred-Heart in Turin, while secretly staying in Paris under that macabre disguise. She was now free to become completely absorbed into her new family, and to espouse its morals, lifestyle, ideas, and interests.

However, it must be said that, during the episode during which she became annoyed with Lelouard, she showed herself regrettably female. Her insistence on being right and in revenging herself for what it pleased her to call a terrible affront, by practicing a cruel hoax on the merchant, might perhaps have ended by causing the Brotherhood serious trouble if Lupiano—as it remains for us to tell—hadn't managed to make the threatening Statue of the Commandatore one of his most active and intelligent agents.

The day of his masked ball, we left the Marquis in a *tête-à-tête* with Lelouard. Recognizing in all of that man's actions, as he had previously told Madame de Camembert, an energy and a strength of invention that he himself wouldn't have disavowed, he had decided to initiate him into all the mysteries of his shady enterprise. Bringing up the matter frankly, he said:

"Monsieur, I must ask you to take back the 20,000 francs which you have just given me for the Doctor. They were not won from you honestly."

"You astonish me," Lelouard responded. "I don't think I'm easy to dupe, and I watched closely my adversary's play..."

"To catch him cheating," Lupiano interrupted. "And you would have, if he hadn't been one of the cleverest of prestidigitators. But I surround myself only with first-class virtuosos of every kind. In addition, you were able to see with what art everything was carried out to bring you right to the denouement of the comedy, from which you have just taken your revenge very cleverly."

"Then you will admit, Monsieur le Marquis that in my turn I have finally intrigued you a little?"

"To the point that I have the greatest curiosity to learn how you have been able to prepare this interesting vengeance."

"*Mon Dieu!* Nothing was simpler. The day after the day the Doctor had taken me in so well, I went to a sculptor friend to ask him to open his purse to me. He had just finished a bust of Monsieur de Lucheux, made from a plaster mold of the face of the dead man. You understand that, from the same mold, I could obtain a frighteningly real mask."

"Very good! But the part that the Marquise played in the death of Monsieur de Lucheux, who told you that?"

"After having been exemplarily discreet about his relationship with Madame de Camembert, Lefebvre admitted everything to me when he found she didn't even deign to remember his name.

"Then he has returned, that excellent Commandant Lefebvre?"

"The poor man! On the contrary, he is on his way to Madagascar, where he is probably going to find other deceptions after those of the *Champ d'Asile*, but before his departure, I was able to talk to him at some length."

"Here?" Lupiano asked.

"Oh, no, Monsieur le Marquis. In Texas, where I've come from."

"What! You undertook that voyage just to get that information from him?"

"Exactly. Wouldn't you have done the same?"

"Well, yes; but except for you and I, I hardly know any man capable of going so far to get information"

"On leaving you," Lelouard continued, "I was desperate, the victim of one of the most humiliating jokes. Under the burden of a debt that didn't allow me to get revenge for that detestable trick, I was prey to a furious desire for vengeance. In thinking about it deeply, I persuaded myself that between Lefebvre and Madame de Camembert, there must have been something more than what he had told me. You yourself, Marquis, had excited my curiosity to the highest degree, and it wasn't difficult to see that,

around you, if one managed to put himself in a not respectable situation, there was something to glean. To write to Lefebvre would not have been very conclusive. To be sure of getting all the truth from him, I had to talk to him in person. Thanks to my friend the Sculptor, and to a business man to whom I sold my arrears from the State at a discount, I had, and well beyond that, the sum necessary for my trip. Then, being in possession of your secrets and those of Madame de Camembert, I had been back about a week when the advertisement of your masked ball gave me the idea to put into operation, under this disguise, the precious discoveries that I have reported.”

“You are far from knowing all of my secrets,” Lupiano replied, “but you are, nonetheless, a man of resolution and unusual perspicacity; and instead of merely gleaning, it is up to you to harvest until your hands are full around me. But before I open myself to you without reservations, there is one last curiosity. What did you say to Madame de Camembert to cause her to faint? She isn’t a woman to be easily intimidated. And, under her mask, how could you be sure you were speaking to her?”

“It was precisely talking to her about the small mark on her shoulder that helped me to recognize her, and I was able to frighten her to the point of making her lose consciousness. But I must give her justice: when I accused her of having been the cause of the death of Monsieur de Lucheux, she didn’t blink.”

“But that mark,” Lupiano asked. “What is so unusual about it?”

“Monsieur,” the wholesaler said, “the first time that I went to see Madame Camembert, I noticed that she had a little bright red stain on her shoulder, that could have been taken for an insect bite. Certainly, during our first encounter, if she had received me as I had a right to expect, instead of sending me away so rudely, I would have called her attention to the danger that threatened her rare beauty.

“What!” said Lupiano. “You believe that something so little apparent that even I didn’t even notice it, could be a sign of something serious?”

“I am speaking, Marquis,” Lelouard answered, “from my personal experience. Ten years ago, something of the same nature appeared on one of my arms. I didn’t pay any attention to it, just like Madame Camembert. It grew larger, became swollen, and when I finally spoke to my doctor about it, he recognized what they called a *tissu érectile*, a kind of subcutaneous fungus, capable of taking on enormous dimensions.²⁴ I got rid of it only with a bloody operation which left a large scar.”

“The Devil!” Lupiano said. “A scar on the shoulder of a pretty woman—that’s a thought that would made the most courageous faint.”

“The danger is not yet great,” Lelouard said, “but in about six months, that mark that I noticed, because there is no better observer of a pathological case than the one who himself has gone through it, appears to me to have made some notable progress, and if the Doctor is as clever a medical practitioner as he is a clever piquet player, you would do well, my dear Marquis, to place her in his hands.”

“Yes, certainly,” said Lupiano. “It will be taken care of. The dear Marquise is our joy and pride, and something that might spoil her beauty would become a cause for mourning, a calamity for everyone of us.”

It isn’t necessary to reproduce here the content of the confidences into which Lupiano entered almost immediately with the new recruit. These two men were evidently made to understand each other, and the next day, with the enrollment of Lelouard, the thirteenth seat in the Red Brotherhood, until then still vacant, couldn’t have been more usefully filled.

²⁴ Rabou is confusing erectile tissues with what looks like a mycosis, or fungal infection of the skin. *Tinea versicolor*, for example, is caused by a fungus that lives in the skin and produces spots that are either lighter than the skin or a reddish brown.