

Chapter II *Saint-Louis-en-l'Île*

The vampire existed. That was the fundamental assumption and the certainty. Whether it was a fantastic monster, as some firmly believed, or some audacious band of malefactors gathered under that pretense, as more enlightened people thought, the vampire existed.

For a month there had been rumors of numerous disappearances. The victims seemed to be carefully selected from the population of rich visitors that an interval of peace had brought to Paris. There was talk of at least twenty foreigners, all young, all of them having marked their route to Paris by considerable expenditure, who had been abruptly eclipsed without leaving a trace. Were there, in fact, twenty? The police denied it. The police had declared that there was not a shadow of truth in these rumors, and that they had been put about by a mysterious opposition which was becoming stronger every day—but the more determined the denials of the police became, the more popular opinion hardened. In the suburbs, there was talk not of twenty victims but of hundreds—there, the existence of a shadowy charnel-house beside the river was confidently asserted.

No one, it is true, knew exactly where this charnel-house could be found. Indeed, it seemed to objectors to be a literal impossibility, for it was necessary to suppose that the river connected directly with the tomb in order to explain the phenomenon of the miraculous catch, and how could one admit the presence of a canal unknown to the people of the neighborhood? In the summer months, the level of the Seine sinks and the secrets of its banks are displayed for all to see. This was certainly a powerful objection, which lent its support to the outrageous improbability of the idea itself: a secret dungeon in the 19th century!

The skeptics had a good laugh.

Paris saw no alternative but to imitate the skeptics. It laughed; it repeated over and over: it's absurd, it's impossible. But it was afraid. When country bumpkins are afraid, at night in sunken roads, they sing at the tops of their voices. Paris is the same; in the midst of its greatest fright it laughs, often and heartily. So Paris laughed while it trembled or trembled with laughter—because objections and rationalizations were powerless against certain items of evidence.

Panic developed gradually. Perhaps wise men were no longer believers, but the contagious disquiet took hold of them anyway—and the scoffers themselves fed the fever as they hawked their mockery around.

Two facts remained unassailable, though: the disappearance of several foreigners and provincials—a disappearance which began to excite a response of judiciary agitation—and that other circumstance, which the reader will judge as he pleases, but which impressed Paris even more vividly than the first: the miraculous catch of the Quai de Béthune.

There was, so to speak, a general preoccupation. Those who restricted themselves to a nod of the head acknowledging that there was “something in it” could pass for models of prudence.

Is it necessary to add that politics made its contribution to that concert? Never were there circumstances more propitious for the mingling of political melodrama with the imbroglio of private vice. Great events were brewing; terrible perils, recently averted, had left the administration fatigued and panting. The Empire, founded without much noise in the bedroom of the First Consul, afflicted the Prefecture of Police with the colics of its infancy. The Citizen Prefect, who can never have been a mastermind and who no longer called himself Comte Dubois, shuddered from top to toe every time a door slammed, thinking that he had heard an echo of that infernal machine whose explosion he had been quite unable to prevent. The somber inventors of that machine, Saint-Rejant and Carbon, had lost their heads on the scaffold but even in the depths of his disgrace, Fouché had murmured words that had reached the Head of State.

Fouché said: “Saint-Rejant and Carbon have left sons. Before them, there were Ceracchi, Diana and Arena, who left brothers. Between the First Consul and the Crown stand Republican France and Royal France alike. To make that leap will require a good horse—and Dubois is nothing but a donkey!”

The words were harsh, but the future Duc d'Otrante had a tongue of steel. There was more in the air than he-who-would-be-emperor wished to hear. As regards Louis-Nicolas-Pierre-Joseph Dubois, he was certainly no donkey, given that he dined on truffles and chicken—but he was a man prodigiously embarrassed. The cards had, in effect, been newly shuffled, and a conspiracy much more redoubtable than Saint-Rejant's threatened the First Consul.

The three or four police forces charged with the care of Paris, suddenly maddened by an invisible danger that each one sensed but of which they could find not the least palpable trace, collided in the night of their ignorance, injuring one another, thwarting one another's efforts, making reciprocal accusations with equal alacrity. Paris had such an affection for them, and such confidence in them, that the city woke up one morning saying and believing that the vampire, that connoisseur of cadavers, was the police!—that the young men who had vanished had paid with their lives for certain mistakes made by the police in happening by chance upon the pretended constructors of an infernal machine.

That day, Paris forgot to laugh—but it made amends the following day, when it learned that Louis-Nicolas-Pierre-Joseph Dubois had sent two hundred and fifty agents to surround the walls of the Madeleine, twelve hours after the end of a meeting held in broad daylight by Georges Cadoudal and his accomplices behind the walls of the half-built church. It seemed, in truth, that all Paris knew what Citizen Dubois did not. Citizen Dubois passed through these events full of menace, like the eternal husband of the comedy who is the only one unaware of the romps taking place in his bedroom. He searched every place where nothing could be found; he threw himself about this way and that; he sweated blood; and, in the end, “threw his tongue to the dog” in desperation.

It was during the meeting at the Madeleine church that Georges Cadoudal proposed to ex-generals Moreau and Pichegru a bold plan to stop the future Emperor in his tracks. The word bold is that of Fouché, Duc d'Otrante. To Fouché's bold we may add the word simple.

Here is the plan, so well known as to be almost famous.

The three conspirators had a heterogeneous contingent of followers in Paris, which contained all the parties opposed to the First Consul, united by a communal passion and composed of resolute men. Contemporary memoirs estimate their nucleus at two thousand combatants, at least: Vendéans, chouans, national guardsmen from Lyon, Babouvistes, and old soldiers of Condé¹. An elite of three hundred men chosen from among these partisans had been provided with uniforms like those worn by the consular guard. The Head of State was resident in the Château de Saint-Cloud. When the guard changed in the morning—with the aid of information that was never fully explained—the three hundred conspirators dressed in regimental uniforms would take control of the château. It seems that they had already been given the orders. On awakening, the First Consul would find himself in the power of the rebels.

The plan failed, not by virtue of any action by the police—who ignored it until the last moment—but because of the irresolution of Moreau. The general was subject to moral qualms. He was afraid, or remorseful. The execution of the plot was put back by four days.

The execution of plots should never be postponed.

It is said that a Breton conspirator, Monsieur de Querelles, took fright at this hesitation, that he demanded and obtained an audience with the First Consul himself, and revealed every last detail of the plot. It is said that Napoleon Bonaparte mustered his military police, his political police and his urban police—Monsieur Savary, later Duc de Rovigo; the great judge Régnier; and Monsieur Dubois—in his study. He told them the curious tale of the conspiracy; he proved to them that Moreau and Pichegru had been coming and going in the streets of Paris like honest businessmen for eight hours, and that Georges Cadoudal, a fat man of jolly demeanor, was assiduously frequenting the *cafés* of the left bank after eating his dinner.

History does not record that this discourse was strewn with warm compliments for his three *chargés d'affaires* on the grounds of their clear-sightedness. The future Emperor gave thanks only to God, and his old friend Jean-Victor Moreau, whom he had always regarded as a good weapon badly loaded and inclined to misfire.

Moreau and Pichegru were arrested. Georges Cadoudal, whose corpulence did not prevent him from passing through the eye of a needle, remained free. And Fouché rubbed his hands, saying: “You see how things go wrong when I'm not there!”

The fact is that good policemen are rare, and Fouché was often at fault himself. What difference did it make that Argus had fifty pairs of eyes, given that he was myopic? The history of police blunders is interesting and instructive, but it is so very long and monotonous that one would get bored before it was halfway through.

We have several reasons for inserting this brief historical digression here, all of which pertain to our trade as a storyteller. Firstly, it helps to construct the frame within which the cast of our drama will move; secondly, it is useful to explain—if not to excuse—the inertia of the urban police in the face of those rumors which happened to coincide, within the city, with so much political gossip. The police had other things to do, and could not devote their full attention to the vampire. The police made themselves busy, searched, rummaged around, found nothing and were quite worn out.

On the February 28, 1804—the same day that Pichegru was arrested in his bed in the Rue Chabannais, at the home of the merchant banker Leblanc—a man passed rapidly along the Marché-Neuf, towards a little edifice which was under construction at the very edge of the quay, and whose scaffolding overhung the Seine.

The stonemasons plying their tools and their overseers obviously knew the man well, for they called out to him, saying: “Boss, won’t you come look at how far we’ve got today?”

The man waved his hand at them and went on his way, continuing upriver.

The masons and their overseers smiled and exchanged knowing looks, because there was a young woman walking a few hundred paces in front of the man, her head enveloped in a mantle of black wool and her face hidden by a veil.

“That’s three days in a row the boss has headed for the night-spots on this side,” said a stonecutter.

“He’s drunk again,” added another.

“Listen here!” said a third. “Drink doesn’t come into it. A man in his position has a lot on his mind. He needs a few laughs.”

An old mason, whose jacket was whitened with plaster, murmured: “I’ve known the boss for thirty years; he doesn’t laugh like everyone else.”

Meanwhile, the man was moving on at a rapid pace. He was already lost to sight behind the hovels clustered on the Marché-Neuf, at the end of the Rue de la Cité. As for the veiled girl, she had completely disappeared.

The man was old, but he was tall and well put together, and he moved freely enough. He carried his freshly-laundered clothes, which seemed to mark him as a bourgeois, very well indeed. He had the appearance of a man who indulged in physical exercises of a kind usually reserved to members of the upper classes. Between the edifice under construction and the Pont Notre-Dame several men raised their hats to the man as he passed by; he was evidently well-respected in the quarter. He responded to these salutations with cordial and friendly gestures, but he did not pause for an instant. His course seemed calculated not so much to catch up with the young woman as never to let her out of his sight.

His quarry, whose legs were not as long as his, was going as fast as she could. She had no idea that she was being followed; at least, she never once turned her head to look behind her. Her eyes and her concentration were fixed in a forward direction. In front of her there was a proud and elegant young man, who was just crossing the Quai de la Grève. Was she following him?

The closer the man that the stonemasons of the Marché-Neuf called “boss” came to the Town Hall, the less numerous became the men who greeted him as if they knew him. Paris is full of celebrities whose fame does not extend beyond some particular street or some particular house-number. Once the man had reached the Quai des Ormes, no one offered him any further salutations. Meanwhile, “the boss” was enjoying a good view, whether he was bound for the night-spots or not. In spite of the dusk that had begun to restrict his visibility, he could see not merely the young woman but also the charming cavalier that the girl seemed to be following. That one turned on to the Pont-Marie, which he crossed in order to enter the Ile Saint-Louis; the girl did likewise; the boss took the same route.

The girl was slowing down noticeably, her breathing labored. This did not escape the attention of the boss, for when she sighed very heavily he murmured: He’ll kill us! Must he take such pleasure in causing us such misery!”

The young cavalier was no longer visible. He had turned the corner of the Rue Saint-Louis-en-l’Ile and the Rue des Deux-Ponts. The girl was now winking with an effort so obvious that the boss made a movement, as if he wanted to throw himself forward to help her. But he did not give way to temptation, merely adjusting his pace in such a way as to have a good view of the course she steered after quitting the Rue des Deux-Ponts.

She turned to the left and unhesitatingly went through the door of the church of Saint-Louis.

Dusk had already fallen in the narrow street. In the shadow of the church, in front of the entrance, there was a luxurious carriage whose silver lanterns were lit.

The Republic slept, allowing the Empire to wake up. A small truce had been made with the extravagant luxury of the Directory ⁱⁱ, which put no proscription on aristocratic grandeur. The carriage halted at the door of the church of Saint-Louis was fit for a prince. It was splendidly equipped; the interior was furnished with exquisite elegance and the livery was spotless.

In those days, the Rue Saint-Louis-en-l'Île was not in the least distinguished by any exceptional activity. The quarter was usually somnolent and almost deserted; it did not serve as an arterial road and offered no popular destination. An observer might have taken it for the main street of some market town a hundred leagues away from Paris. Nowadays, Paris has no deserted quarters. Commerce has taken possession of the Marais and the Île Saint-Louis alike—dishonouring those magnificent old town-houses, some say, though others call it regeneration. In this respect, commerce has not quite made up its mind. It does not ask for rehabilitation; it is not afraid to get its hands dirty. It wishes to make money, and makes a mockery of everything else.

Under the Consulate, Paris had scarcely more than five hundred thousand inhabitants. The entire eastern part of the city was a desert, abandoned by the *noblesse de robe* ⁱⁱⁱ and having no local industry as yet. It was undoubtedly for this reason that the resplendent carriage stationed at the door of the church had attracted an unusual crowd of curiosity-seekers. You could easily have counted a dozen busybodies in the street, and an equal number of children. This twilight council was presided over by a doorman.

This doorman, typical of his species, had an austere philosophy, detesting all that was beautiful because he was frightfully ugly. He was preaching a sermon against vile luxury. The street-urchins were staring at the gleam of the lanterns and prancing like horses. The old women were saying: "If Heaven were just, that kind of mud would stick to us, the world's poor."

"Please could you tell me," asked the boss of the stonemasons of the Pont-Neuf, "to whom that carriage belongs?"

The street-urchins, the old women and the doorman looked him up and down.

"It's not from around here," the urchins said.

"Is he working for the police?" one of the women asked.

"What's your name, pal?" the doorman demanded. "We don't have any truck with foreigners." The gentlefolk of Paris were foreigners to the insular inhabitants of this other world, separated from the rest of the universe by the two arms of the Seine.

Just as the boss began his reply, the door of the church opened—and he fell back three paces, letting loose an exclamation of surprise, as if he had seen a ghost.

It was, at any rate, a charming phantom: a young and very beautiful woman, whose blond hair fell in graceful curls about an adorable face. This woman was on the arm of a young man of twenty-five or thirty, who was definitely not the one who had recently been followed by our young girl. Certain aspects of his costume suggested that he was German.

"Ramberg!" murmured the boss.

The delectable blonde was already seated in the cushioned interior of the carriage, and the young German took his place beside her. A soft and musical voice issued the command: "The hotel!"

And the carriage-door closed.

The fine horses immediately broke into a trot, setting off in the direction of the Pont-Marie.

"That's a *ci-devant* ^{iv}, I tell you," the doorman said.

"Not at all!" one of the women replied. "It's a duchess from Turkey, or somewhere else."

"One of Pitt's spies, or maybe Coburg's ^v."

The street-urchins, to whom a few small coins had been thrown, ran after the carriage crying: "*Vive la Princesse!*"

The boss remained quite still for a little while. His gaze was lowered, his pale forehead was furrowed with thought.

"Ramberg!" he repeated. "Who is that woman? Who will give me the key to the mystery...? Baron von Ramberg was supposed to have left eight days ago, and it's only two weeks since Comte Wenzel disappeared... the girl I saw him with was a brunette, but those were exactly the same features..."

Without further troubling the little assembly, which was now examining him suspiciously, he mounted the steps of the church pensively, and went through the doorway.

The church seemed to be quite empty. The uncertain gleam of the last rays of sunset coming through the windows scarcely penetrated the shadows. The lamp that was never extinguished shed its eternally-faded gleam upon the high altar. There was not the slightest noise to indicate a human presence in the nave.

The boss was, however, absolutely sure that he had seen the young girl enter the church—and if the girl had come in, there must be some trace of the person she had been following.

The boss had already passed along one of the aisles, peering into each of the side-chapels, and was halfway along the other when he was touched by a hand extended from behind a pillar. He stopped, but said nothing, because the human creature who was there, hidden in the deep covert behind the pulpit, placed a finger upon its lips and drew him towards a confessional situated a few paces away.

The boss knelt down, assuming an attitude of prayer. Immediately, the door of the confessional opened, and a young priest whose tonsure was a white clearing in the middle of a black forest of hair made straight for the altar of the Virgin and prostrated himself before it.

After a brief prayer, during which he struck his breast three times, the priest kissed the stone beyond the balustrade and went into the vestry. The shadow then emerged from its hiding-place and said: “Now we are alone.”

It was a child—or so, at least, it seemed, for its head did not reach as far as the shoulder of its companion, although the voice had a virile ring to it and what little that could be seen of the features contradicted the slightness of the figure.

“Have you been here long, Patou?” asked our man.

“Monsieur Guardian,” the shadow replied, “Doctor Loysel’s lecture finished at precisely three o’clock. I was here at twelve minutes past, and it’s a long way from the School of Medicine to Saint-Louis-en-l’Île.”

“What have you seen?” asked he who was here addressed as Monsieur Guardian and previously as “the boss.”

This time, instead of replying, the pretended child swept a hand briefly through the shock of hair bristling on his strong head and murmured as if talking to himself: “I would have come sooner, but Professor Loysel was giving a lecture on Samuel Hahnemann’s *Organon* ^{vi}. During the eight hours that the discourse seemed to last, it was not so much a lecture as a deluge. This Samuel Hahnemann is so often insulted at the School that I am beginning to think of him as a great scientist...”

“Patou, my friend,” the guardian interrupted, “you student doctors are all chatterboxes. This Samuel—who must be a Jew, or some German jabberer, since his name ends in mann—is irrelevant. What have you seen? Tell me!”

“Ah, Monsieur Guardian,” Patou replied, “the strangest thing, on my word of honor! The policemen would certainly be amused, because the only time I have played the spy I have been entertained like an angel! What a lovely woman!”

“What woman?”

“The Countess.”

“Ah!” said the guardian. “She’s a countess!”

“That’s what Abbé Martel called her. Did you think that I meant your Angela, poor sweetheart, when you asked ‘What woman?’ ”

“You have not seen Angela?”

“That I have... very pale, with tears in her lovely eyes.”

“And René?”

“René too... even paler than Angela, but with a mad gleam in his eyes.”

“And have you discovered...?”

“Patience! In a sickbed, he who expresses the clearest symptoms never finds a cure. There are savants and there are doctors: those who profess to know, and those who heal... I will give you the facts: I am the savant; you shall be the doctor, if you can figure out the key to the charade... or charades, for there is more than one disease in this, I’m sure of it.”

A clink of keys sounded at that moment from the side of the vestry, and the verger began his rounds, saying in a raised voice: “The doors will soon be closed!”

Save for the guardian and Patou there was no one in the church. The guardian moved towards the main door, but Patou held him back and set him to walk in the opposite direction. As they passed the little basin close to the side door, the guardian dipped the fingers of his right hand therein and offered the holy water to Patou—who refused with thanks, laughing.

The guardian crossed himself soberly.

“I have not yet investigated its properties,” Patou said. “Yesterday I made fun of Samuel Hahnemann; today I would willingly put his name on my hat. When I have completed my medical studies, perhaps I

shall study a little theology and become a monk. He interrupted himself to add, while indicating the door: “Monsieur René went out this way, and Mademoiselle Angela went after him.”

The guardian was thoughtful. “Perhaps you need reasons for all your studies, Patou my friend,” he said, rather tiredly. “Personally, I have never studied anything but music, fencing and men...”

“That’s no excuse!” said the medical student.

“It’s too late to study the rest,” the guardian concluded. “I’m the past, you’re the future. The past knows what you don’t. Doubtless you only believe that which you can understand; for myself, I wish to believe because it’s good to believe. I believe in the God who created me; I believe in the Republic that I love, and in my conscience, which has never deceived me.”

Patou jumped on to the pavement of the Rue Poulitier and performed a series of four *entrechats*, of which one would not have thought his short limbs capable. “You, boss, are as innocent as a child, as muscular as an athlete and as silly as a pretty girl,” he said, then burst out laughing. “Your ideas are all mixed up. I have a little nephew who said to me the other day: I love mummy and apples. Just like you! That little blonde countess has put ideas into my head. What a subject for dissection!... I’m studying the particular diseases of women at the moment, and I have a great need of someone... someone as young and as well-proportioned as that... a magnificent specimen... how would you like to have that in your blessed vault, Monsieur Jean-Pierre?”

ⁱ The terms “Vendeans” and “chouans” are interchangeable; les guerres de Vendée, named for one of the main départements of Brittany, were the conflicts between the Breton rebels and the Revolutionary forces. Babouvistes were followers of François Babeuf (1760-1797), a proto-communist who agitated for land reform before and during the Revolution and duly went to the guillotine. Louis-Joseph, Prince de Condé (1736-1818) was another famous opponent of the Revolution, who left France in 1792 to form an army at Coblenz, on the Rhine.

ⁱⁱ The Directory was the body of five men who held executive power in France from November 1st, 1795, when it succeeded the Convention, to Brumaire 18 (November 9), 1799, when it was overthrown by Napoleon’s *coup d’état*. It was modified halfway through its career by the coup of Fructidor 18 (September 4), 1797, when the Republicans wrested control from the reactionaries.

ⁱⁱⁱ The *noblesse de robe* was a sector of the French aristocracy whose position of privilege was entirely dependent on the King, because they had no hereditary estates.

^{iv} “*Ci-devant*” means “formerly”; the word acquired a particular significance after the Revolution of 1789, when everyone became a Citizen, and all aristocratic titles were prefaced *ci-devant*.

^v William Pitt the younger (1759-1806) was the English Prime Minister in 1804. Friedrich Josias, Prince of Saxe-Coburg (1737-1815), was an Austrian general who had won a significant battle against the French in 1793 but had been comprehensively defeated at Fleurus in 1794.

^{vi} Christian Friedrich Samuel Hahnemann (1755-1843) announced his new system of medicine, homeopathy, in 1796. Strictly speaking, Professor Loysel cannot have been lecturing on Hahnemann’s *Organon der rationele Heilkunde* in 1804 because it was not published until 1810—nor could Germain Patou have owned a copy (as is alleged when he sells his books in chapter XXVII).