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THE DIAMOND NECKLACE.

NAPOLEON AND HORTENSE.

One morning in the month of June, 1806, the Empress Josephine's jeweller was shown into a little apartment in the Tuileries, in which Napoleon was seated alone at breakfast.

"The necklace must be of a very superior kind," said Napoleon, addressing the jeweller. "I do not care about the price. Nevertheless, I shall have the jewels examined by a competent judge. Not that I doubt your honesty, M. Foucier, but because . . . in short, because I am not myself a perfect connoisseur. As soon as the necklace is finished, bring it to me; and be sure that you show it to nobody. You understand?"

"Perfectly, sire. But I should be very glad if your majesty would grant me a little more time, that I may be enabled to match the stones perfectly, one with another. Choice diamonds are very rare at present . . . and they have greatly risen in price."

At these words the emperor looked the jeweller full in the face, and rising from his chair, said—

"What do you mean, Foucier? You know that since the campaign of Germany you and your brethren are absolutely overstocked with jewels. I know it to be a fact, that the French jewellers have purchased all the diamonds offered for sale by the petty princes of the confederation, who have been ruined by rebelling against me. Go to Bapts or Mellerio. They have literally heaps of diamonds."

"Sire, I hope I shall not be under the necessity of applying to any one. The fact is, that I have now at home a superb assortment of diamonds, which I purchased for his majesty the King of Prussia, who has commissioned me to . . ."

"That is your business, sir, not mine," hastily interrupted the emperor. "But recollect, Foucier," added he, darting a sardonic glance at the jeweller, "that when you work for me, you are not serving the King of Prussia. . . . Well, well, I suppose I may depend on you. Do your best, and prove to your brethren beyond the Rhine that we can surpass them in your calling as well as in all other things."

At a sign given by Napoleon the jeweller bowed for the last time, and left the apartment.

In about a week after Foucier presented to the emperor the most magnificent diamond necklace imaginable. The pattern, the jewels, the workmanship of the mounting, all were perfect. It was quite a *chef-d'œuvre*. Even Josephine's incomparable *ecrin* contained no ornament that could equal it. Napoleon had it valued, and it was declared to be worth 800,000 francs. This was not more than the price demanded by Foucier, and accordingly the emperor was perfectly satisfied.

About this time, June 1806, the Dutch people had seated on the throne of Holland Prince Louis Bonaparte, one of Napoleon's younger brothers.

On the day on which the Dutch ambassador presented the crown of Holland to Napoleon, with the request that he would place it on his brother's head, all the French court was assembled at St. Cloud. Louis and Hortense had arrived that morning from St. Leu. Napoleon gave orders that the ceremony should take place in the *Salle du trone*; and it was performed with extraordinary pomp and splendour. The emperor, who was in charming spirits, announced to the Dutch envoys that on the following day their king and queen would depart for Holland. In the evening Hortense was informed that the emperor wished to speak with her in his cabinet; and the usher, when he threw open the folding doors, announced, for the first time, "Her majesty the Queen of Holland."

"Hortense," said the emperor, "you are called to rule a brave and good people. If you and your husband conduct yourselves wisely, the Orange family, with their old pretensions, will never again return to Holland. The Dutch people have but one fault, which is that they conceal, under an outward aspect of simplicity, an inordinate love of wealth and luxury. The vanity of being rich is their ruling passion. Now, when you go to reside in your new court, I should be sorry to hear that you were eclipsed by the vulgar wife of some burgomaster, whose pride has no foundation but her husband's bags of gold. I have purchased a little present for you, which I beg you will accept. It is this necklace. Wear it sometimes for my sake."

So saying, Napoleon clasped on the brilliant necklace round the swan-like throat of Queen Hortense. He then embraced her affectionately, and bade her farewell.

When once installed at the court of Amsterdam, Hortense did ample honour to her step-father's present; and on all state occasions at the *Maison de Bois* the splendid diamond necklace attracted general admiration.

But adverse fate approached. Napoleon's sun was beginning to set; and the radiance which it shed on the thrones of Spain, Westphalia, and Naples, was growing dim. Hortense descended from the throne, as she had mounted it, in smiling obedience. When her Dutch subjects first beheld her, on her arrival, they greeted her with cries of "Long live our lovely queen!" On her departure, they cried, "Farewell to our good queen!" To a heart like that of Hortense's this testimony of a nation's regard afforded no small compensation even for the loss of a crown. From that moment she devoted herself to the education of her children, and to the consolation of her beloved mother, who, like herself, had retired into the privacy of domestic life, after having adorned a court. Still fondly attached to France and devoted to the emperor, Hortense eagerly looked for an opportunity when she might efface from Napoleon's mind the unjust prejudices which, during his exile to Elba, had been raised against her. That opportunity soon presented itself.

The cannon of Waterloo had ceased to roar, and the emperor had been forced to quit the Elysee and to take refuge at Malmaison, the last abode of poor Josephine. Napoleon was there, not like Charles XII. at Bender, surrounded by a few faithful officers and servants, but forsaken and lonely, like Belisarius in the Hippodrome, with no companion but his faithful sword. He was sitting in mournful contemplation beside a table, on which lay a copy of his second abdication, when he was surprised by the entrance of a lady. He raised his eyes towards her, and recognised Hortense.

"Sire," said she, in a voice faltering with emotion, "perhaps your majesty may recollect a gift which you presented to me at St. Cloud. It is nine years ago this very day."

Napoleon took her hand, and gazing affectionately on the daughter of Josephine, he said—

"Well, Hortense, what have you to say to me?"

"Sire," she replied, "when you conferred upon me the title of queen, you presented me with this necklace. The diamonds are of great value. I am no longer a queen, and you are in adversity. I therefore entreat, sire, that you will permit me to restore the gift."

"Keep your jewels, Hortense," said Napoleon, coolly. "Alas! they are now perhaps the only property that you and your children possess."

"They are indeed, sire. But what of that? My children will never reproach their mother for having shared with her benefactor the riches which he was pleased to confer on her."

As Hortense uttered these words, she melted into tears. Napoleon, too, was deeply moved.

"No," said he, turning aside, and gently repelling the hand which Hortense held out to him. "No, it must not be."

"Take it, sire, I conjure you. There is no time to lose. Moments are precious. They are coming, sire. Take it, I beg of you!"

By the urgent entreaties of Hortense, the emperor was at length prevailed on to accept the necklace, and in a few hours after it was sewed tightly within a siken girdle which he wore under his waistcoat.

About six weeks after this time Napoleon left the Bellerophon to go on board the Northumberland. The persons who accompanied the ex-emperor, and who had obtained permission to share his exile, were requested to deliver up their arms.

Whilst the search of the baggage was going on, Napoleon was walking with Count de Las Cases on the poop of the Bellerophon. After looking round him cautiously, and still continuing to converse on subjects quite foreign from the one he was thinking of, he drew from beneath his waistcoat the girdle in which the necklace was concealed. Placing it in the hands of his interlocutor, he said, with a melancholy smile, "My dear Las Cases, a certain Greek philosopher, whose name I think was Bias, used to say that he carried all his fortune about his person, though he had not a shirt to his back. I don't know how he managed, but I know that since my departure from Paris, I have been carrying the bulk of my fortune under my waistcoat—I find it troublesome—I wish you would keep it for me." Without making any reply, M. de Las Cases took the girdle, fastened it round his waist, and buttoned his coat over it.

It was not until Napoleon's arrival at St. Helena that he informed M. Las Cases of the value of the deposit which he had con-

fided to his care six months previously. He then told him that it was a diamond necklace, worth 800,000 francs. On several subsequent occasions Las Cases proposed to restore it; but the emperor declined receiving it:—

"Does it incommode you, Las Cases?" said he.

"No, sire," replied Las Cases; "but . . ."

"Nonsense, keep it," said the emperor. "Cannot you fancy it to be an amulet or a charm, and then you will find it no annoyance."

About fifteen months afterwards (in Nov. 1816), M. de Las Cases was removed from St. Helena. One day when he was at Longwood, engaged in conversation with the emperor, a messenger entered and informed him that the English colonel was waiting to communicate to him something from Sir Hudson Lowe. Las Cases replied that he was engaged with his majesty, and could not attend the colonel at that moment.

"Go, count, go," said Napoleon. "See what they want; but be sure you return and dine with me."

Count de Las Cases never beheld the emperor again. A party of dragoons were already stationed round the house. M. de Las Cases and his son (who was then very ill), were conducted from Longwood to Plantation House, where they were closely guarded until they embarked for the Cape of Good Hope.

Meanwhile Las Cases still retained the diamond necklace in his possession; and this circumstance gave him not a little uneasiness. Time was hurrying on, and he learned that he had only a few days to remain at St. Helena. He was tormented by the fear of being compelled to depart without having an opportunity of restoring the treasure to its illustrious owner. What was to be done?—all communication with Longwood was strictly prohibited. An idea struck him, and he resolved at all risks to carry it into effect. There was an English officer who had recently arrived at St. Helena, and with whom Las Cases had formed some slight acquaintance. He had been pleased with the gentlemanly manners of this Englishman, and the liberal and generous feeling indicated in the little conversation he had had with him. This officer happened to come to Plantation House, and Count Las Cases, being left alone with him for a few moments, made him his confidant.

"Sir," said Las Cases to the officer, who spoke French tolerably well, "I believe you to be a man of honour and feeling, and I have resolved to ask you to render me a service, which will put those qualities to the test. In the first place, let me assure you that the favour I am about to request will involve no violation of your duty; but it deeply concerns my honour, and that of my family. To come at once to the point, I wish to restore to the emperor a valuable deposit which he placed in my hands. Will you take charge of it, and contrive some means of returning it to him? If you will, my son shall seize an opportunity of slipping it unperceived into your pocket."

At this moment some one approached, and the officer could reply only by a look and gesture expressive of his assent. He then retired to a little distance. Young Las Cases, who was with his father, had received his instructions, and Queen Hortense's necklace was soon placed in the officer's pocket, unperceived by any one, though all the governor's staff was within sight.

But the most difficult part of the undertaking was yet to be performed—namely, to restore the necklace to its destination. An interval of two years elapsed ere this could be accomplished.

After the departure of Count Las Cases, the emperor fancied he could perceive that the *surveillance* exercised over him was even more rigid than before. He could not stir out of the house at Longwood without seeing an English officer who, from a little distance, closely watched all his movements. In the morning, in the evening, or at whatever time he went out, this same officer was always hovering about him like his shadow. This sort of inquisition was the more annoying, inasmuch as the officer had several times manifested the intention of speaking to him. The consequence was, that as soon as the emperor saw him approach, he made it a rule to cut short his promenade and go in-doors.

One day Napoleon thought he was much more closely watched than usual, and turning round angrily, he exclaimed, "What means this annoyance? Can I not come out to inhale a little fresh air, without having a spy on all my footsteps?" The emperor walked towards the house and the officer, who had heard the words which fell from him, quickened his pace, followed, and overtook him. In a few moments he stood before Napoleon. "Sire!" said he, in a tone of profound respect,—"Be gone, sir! be gone!" interrupted Napoleon, with a gesture of contempt.