

THE BEAUTIFUL PRISONER.

AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TALISMAN.

AT noon the following day the proceedings in the large ante-room of the commissioner of the convention, were quite of a different nature from those of the previous days. There came, of course, as usual, since the beneficial influence of Thérèse Cabarrus had been known, large numbers of petitioners, imploring her sympathy and generosity on behalf of their imprisoned friends—but they did not now wait, animated by hope, as they had done on former occasions, till the Spaniard appeared, listening to every request and reporting it afterwards to Tallien. The *Sans-culottes* on duty had received orders to send away all these petitioners, and to tell them that the commissioner had strictly prohibited their admission to the ante-room,—that citizen Cabarrus was not receiving any more,—and that only written petitions, addressed to the commissioner of the convention, were received. These orders caused much uneasiness and sorrow in the ante-room, and the *Sans-culottes* interpreted all questions and requests which were pouring in upon them. No one liked to be refused, and to believe what he was told—before relinquishing the last hope, everyone sought to make another effort. But there was no deception prepared for them; the bitter truth should at last become obvious. It was to no purpose that they uttered their grievances to the *Sans-culottes*; to no purpose, that they endured their good-natured or rude jests, as if such a trial should entitle them to more consideration. And when, finally, they saw all their hopes crushed, their tears flowed with greater vehemence than ever. As Benoit had advised, Lucie likewise repaired to the Ombrière, to beg of Thérèse Cabarrus the release of her betrothed, who was not only imprisoned but threatened with a criminal process. The talisman she had received gave her great confidence that she would succeed; though she did not know the particulars about this silver cross, she had trusted the unknown man who had given it to her. The many persons she met, lamenting and weeping before the building, in the corridors, and on the stairs, gave her a foreboding that the present day was not a lucky one. Many complained to her of the disappointments they had experienced, and assured her that her errand, like theirs, would be fruitless,—that she might as well turn back without mounting the stairs, and at once abandon hope.

Lucie hesitated, her heart throbbing with anxiety; what if the tidings, which were every moment repeated to her, were true! She believed she had reason for more hope than the rest, because she carried with her the mysterious cross, to which the stranger had imputed such great influence. She wished to ascertain for herself whether with this talisman, she could be refused.

The *Sans-culottes* who had become long since impatient at the numberless repetitions of declarations, explanations and assurances, received her, as soon as she had entered, in the most discouraging manner.

"Spare yourself the trouble," cried one of them to her; "there are no more audiences; you must write down your request, if you want anything from citizen Tallien."

Lucie did not yet despair.

"Citizen," answered she quietly, "can I not speak to citizen Cabarrus?"

"No, little one; no one can be admitted. It will not do any longer, that a few tears can release a suspected."

"But, I have to speak to the citizen on an important matter which personally concerns her."

"We know that—nothing but tricks. Be off—you cannot be admitted. Write what you have to communicate to her."

"Ay," exclaimed one of the *Sans-culottes*, approaching Lucie, "truly, this is father Claude's daughter, from the 'Red Cap'!"

"It is I," answered Lucie, not a little pleased at being able to count, through this acquaintance, on greater consideration. "Ah, citizen Nicol, you could do me a great favour!"

"Two for one, my child," replied the person addressed. "But it is quite impossible here. To-day we have received strict orders to refuse every petitioner. What is your desire? Of course, you are begging for some one—you see, that cannot be done."

"Not so, citizen Nicol," said Lucie, with presence of mind, not losing sight of her object. "I wish to deliver this silver cross to citizen Cabarrus. Can this be prohibited? Or, is the citizen again a prisoner?"

"Hush!" Nicol cautioned her by the expression of his face; taking the cross in his hand and examining it, he remarked: "I will deliver it to her, Lucie; rely upon it!"

"Well, citizen Nicol, but it must be done immediately, and you must give it to her alone—you understand? It has been confided to me, and I must receive an answer."

"That can be done," replied Nicol, meditating if he was acting rightly. He found nothing to cause him to scruple, and went to the room which Thérèse Cabarrus usually occupied.

She was alone. When the *Sans-culotte* presented her the silver cross with the remark that a young girl, Lucie Claudet, had brought it and was waiting for an answer, the cheeks of the Spaniard became crimson. She was reminded of the long-forgotten Benoit. But why did he send her the cross? What did he mean, what did the bearer intend, who, no doubt, stood with him in close relationship? As Nicol could not give her any satisfactory answer to her questions, she commanded him to admit Lucie.

"It is the old thing," muttered the *Sans-culotte* to himself, returning to the ante-room. "Another will be acquitted—I should have sent her away. I would like to know what the cross means."

He called Lucie, who almost screamed with joy, when she saw that her talisman had gained her admittance, while all others had been refused. She crossed hastily the apartment between the ante-room and the boudoir of the Spaniard, cleverly evading all Nicol's questions about the cross. As soon as she beheld the beautiful Spaniard, she felt that she could trust her with her full confidence. She stood timidly at the door, until Thérèse in a friendly manner invited her to come near.

"How came you by this cross, Lucie Claudet—that is your name, is it not?"

"Yes, citizen, my name is Lucie Claudet," answered she, with that winning boldness which is natural to frank dispositions, if they have full confidence. "And this cross, a stranger gave it to me."

"A stranger?" asked Thérèse, half frightened, half incredulous, and again looking at it, to make sure that it was hers.

"He gave it to me, citizen, that you should believe me, if I warn you."

"Warn me? of whom? of what?"

"Of a malicious man, a Jacobin, called Gilbert Cardourel, who now has become president of the revolutionary committee, and who is dreaded on account of his power and vindictiveness by all who know him."

Thérèse had listened to these words with more pleasure than alarm. Chance placed a new proof in her hands, that Cardourel was such a dangerous character, that her lover would now no longer hesitate in dealing the decisive blow.

yet greater sorrow, because he is so malicious. It is his caprice that I shall marry his friend Timm—on these conditions he will even let off his cousin. But I do not like the clerk, because I love Henry Tourguet, as sure as you."

Alarmed at the familiar words she had uttered in haste, she beseechingly raised her black eyes, full of tears, to the Spaniard. Thérèse smiled, and her manner appeased Lucie.

"Is it for this reason that you have come?" asked she. "That I shall release from prison your betrothed? Ah, I dare not interfere any more, my child."

"Oh!" cried Lucie in despair, imploringly folding her hands before the beautiful Spaniard who musingly gazed at her; "do not refuse your help, citizen—I have counted firmly upon you, as the stranger assured me that you would grant my request, and you know the cross with which he has entrusted me."

"You shall not be disappointed," replied she after a while, thinking of Benoit and the cross. "But first tell me sincerely: do you know the man who gave you the cross?"

"No, citizen—I have scarcely seen him."

"What is he like?"

"Like a discharged soldier. He is still young, and one arm seems to be maimed. But his eyes look so faithful and kind, his face serious and melancholy. He must be in trouble."

"But what has induced him to send you to me?"

"You see, citizen, he was yesterday morning with us and drank his can of wine. There he overheard how Cardourel shandered you. Afterwards when we thought we were alone, and I said to my parents that I would go to you, to beg for Henry Tourguet, he suddenly stepped forward from his retired seat, gave me the cross and said: 'Take it to citizen Cabarrus, warn her of Cardourel and beg her to release your betrothed—she will not refuse you.' But the cross you must return to me."

Thérèse nodded several times, as though the communication satisfied her, and then returned the jewel.

"Lucie, understand, never speak of this cross to any one, particularly to the citizen commissioner to whom I will now report your request, and who may perhaps hear from your lips how Cardourel has threatened me. This is the gratitude I expect from you."

After these words she stepped to the next room, leaving Lucie, who looked at the cross almost waggishly, elated by the highest hopes.

Thérèse had only exchanged a few words with Tallien in the morning—his business had called him to his office. She did not yet know to what decision the commissioner had come in connection with the conversation held the previous day, the opportunity had now arrived to return to the all-important and threatening subject. Tallien was sitting gloomily at his desk; even the entrance of Thérèse did not alter the expression of his face; he rather looked as though he did not wish to be disturbed.

"My friend?" she accosted him in a caressing tone. "You are busy—excuse me if I come to trouble you with a request! A young girl has procured an interview with me, to warn me of the man whom yesterday I pointed out to you as a dangerous character. The affair itself is not so distressing for me, but it reminds us anew of the danger, and admonishes us to be prepared for it. Lambert—can you be angry with me, if I am anxious for you?"

"Appaise yourself, Thérèse," answered he seriously; "I have taken my resolution." The decided tone in which Tallien had spoken these words taught Thérèse that the commissioner had accurately calculated how to act. She embraced him joyfully, exclaiming:

"Tallien, you will hurl lightning among the spies."

"I expect Cardourel, my inspector," said he sarcastically. "I am sorry I have no list of persons to be released to submit to his gracious approbation."

"Ah, I guess, you will give him no chance of acting in his new charge?"

"Full of doubt, she sought to read Tallien's thoughts, his next words however relieved her.

"I will show this citizen Cardourel that I do not need him."

"Ah, my friend, if I, seeing you fearless again of this man, once more implore your mercy for a prisoner, will you refuse me?"

"Thérèse," said he reproachfully, but kindly. "I did not expect that you would tempt me to-day."

"I did not intend to do so, my dear; but the girl of whom I spoke expects from me, as return for her communications, the release of her lover, Henry Tourguet, who was yesterday arrested, for having boxed Cardourel's ears. He is his full cousin—thence you may infer the malicious vindictiveness of this true patriot."

Tallien smiled; this episode excited his humour.

"He has boxed Cardourel's ears?" asked he. "Ah, the dear cousin deserves to be rewarded. I could be induced to acquit him for this reason alone—friend Cardourel would show himself not a little enraged at it. Really, Thérèse, this prospect puts me in good humour," added he laughingly, ransacking his papers; "I could not play the patron better than by presenting to him his cousin, as the only one whom I to-day consider worthy of grace."

"Excellent, excellent!" exclaimed she, clapping her hands.

"It is correct," resumed Tallien, reading over a passage in his papers; "Henry Tourguet was yesterday delivered up to prison, accused by the revolutionary committee of having shown great disrespect against the patriots. That must be the box on the ear," remarked he jestingly. "Well, this crime may be pardoned him. You have had a happy choice, Thérèse; send the girl to me, that she may give me the particulars of the occurrence."

Thérèse, delighted with the success of her intercession, but, at the same time, in strange uneasiness about the termination of the Cardourel game, produced by the singular manner in which Tallien used this episode, she hastened to Lucie and



Thérèse Cabarrus as petitioner.