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his tastes and ideas in public; but as soon as his duty was ended for the day, he would hasten to leave off his uniform, which seemed to him indissolubly leagued to all the vices of the government he served, and to mingle with the new friends he had made in the city by his goodness and spirit. We loved above all to hear him talk of Venice. He had viewed it artistically, had interiorly deplored its servitude, and had come to love it, as much as a Venetian. He was never tired of wandering over it night and day—never tired of admiring it. He wished, as he said, to know it better than those who had had the happiness to be born here. In his nocturnal promenades he met the mask. At first he paid no great attention to it, but having observed that it seemed to study the city with the same curiosity and the same care as himself, he was struck with the strange coincidence, and spoke of it to several persons. They told him the stories which were current regarding the veiled woman, and advised him to be on his guard. But as he was brave to tenacity, these advertisements, instead of frightening him, excited his curiosity, and inspired him with a mad desire to make the acquaintance of the mysterious personage who had frightened the vulgar so much. Wishing to preserve the same incognito with the mask which the latter did with him, he dressed himself as a citizen and commenced his nocturnal promenades. He was not long in meeting what he sought. In the beautiful moonlight he saw the masked woman standing before the charming church of *Saints John and Paul*. She seemed to contemplate with adoration the delicate ornaments which decorated the portal. The Count approached her with slow and silent steps. She did not appear to perceive him, and did not stir. The Count stopped an instant to see if he was discovered, and then continued his way until he arrived close to her. He heard her sigh profoundly; and as he understood Venetian very little, but Italian very well, he addressed her in very pure Tuscan:

"*Salut*," said he, "*salut* and happiness to those who love Venice!"

"Who are you?" answered the mask, in a voice full and sonorous as that of a man, but sweet as that of a nightingale.

"I am a lover of beauty."

"Are you of those whose brutal love violates free beauty, or of those who kneel captive before it, and weep with its tears?"

"When the *Roi des nuits* beholds the rose flowering joyously under the breath of the breeze, he claps his wings and sings; but when he sees it wither under the burning breath of the storm, he hides his head under his wing and groans. So is my soul moved."

"Follow me, for you are one of my faithful ones."

And seizing the hand of the young man she drew him toward the church. When he felt the cold hand of the unknown, and saw her direct her course, with him, toward the sombre depths of the portal, he recalled involuntarily the sinister stories he had heard recounted, and seized all at once with a panic of terror, he stopped.

The mask turned around, and fixing on the paling face of her companion a scrutinizing look she said to him:

"You are afraid? Adieu."

Then letting go his arm she left him with rapid steps. FRANZ was ashamed of his weakness, and precipitating himself toward her, he seized her hand in his turn, and said:

"No, I have no fear. Let us go on."

Without answering him she continued to walk on. But in the place of going toward the church, as in the first instance, she plunged into one of the little streets that open upon the *place*. The moon was hidden and the most complete obscurity reigned in the city. FRANZ could hardly see where to place his foot, and could distinguish nothing in the deep shadows which enveloped him everywhere. While he followed his guide at a hazard, she, on the contrary, seemed to know her route very well. From time to time some rays of light slipping through the clouds would show to FRANZ the side of a canal, a bridge, an archway, or some unknown part of a labyrinth of deep and crooked streets—then all would fall into obscurity again. FRANZ had quickly recognized that he was lost in the streets of Venice, and was at the mercy of his guide; but, resolved to brave all, he testified no inquietude, and allowed himself to be led on without making any observations. At the end of a full hour the mask stopped.

"It is well," said she, "you have heart. If you had given the slightest sign of fear during our course, I should never have spoken to you again. But you have been impassable, and I am satisfied with you. Meet me then to-morrow at the place *Saints Jean-et-Paul*, at eleven o'clock. Seek not to follow me: it will be useless. Turn into the street at your right and you will see the place *Saint Mare*. *Au revoir*."

She pressed strongly the hand of the Count, and before he had time to answer her, disappeared behind the angle of the street. The Count remained for some time motionless, still astonished at what had come to pass, and undecided as to what he should do. But, having reflected upon the little chance he had of finding the mysterious lady again, and the risk he ran of losing himself if he pursued her, he determined to return home. He therefore took the street to the right, and, after a few minutes found himself in fact, upon the place *Saint Mare*, and from there he easily reached his hotel.

The next day the Count was faithful to the rendezvous. He arrived on the place just as the clock sounded eleven. He saw the masked woman waiting for him on the steps of the portal.

"It is well," said she; "you are exact. Let us go in."

Saying this, she turned quickly towards the church. FRANZ, who saw the door closed and knew that it was never opened for any one at night, believed the woman to be mad. But what was his surprise when he saw the door yield to the first effort! He followed his guide mechanically, who rapidly re-closed the door after he had entered. They then found themselves both in darkness; but FRANZ remembering that a second door without a lock still

separated them from the nave, conceived no inquietude, and prepared to push it before him to enter. But she arrested his arm.

"Were you ever in this church?" asked she, abruptly.

"Twenty times," answered he, "and know it as well as the architect who built it."

"Say, rather, you believe you know it, for you really do not know it yet. Enter."

FRANZ pushed open the second door and penetrated into the interior of the church. It was magnificently illuminated in every part, but completely deserted.

"What ceremony are they going to celebrate here?" asked FRANZ, stupefied.

"None. The church expected me this evening—that is all. Follow me."

The Count in vain sought the meaning of the words addressed to him by the mask: but still, subjugated by a mysterious power, he followed it with obedience. She led him to the middle of the church and caused him to remark, comprehend and admire the general harmony and *ordonnance* of things. Then, passing each part under examination, she detailed to him, one by one, the nave, the colonnades, the chapels, the altars, the statues, the paintings, and all the other ornaments—showing him the meaning of everything, unveiling to him the idea hidden under each form, making him feel all the beauties of the works which composed the *ensemble*, and making him penetrate, so to speak, into the very entrails of the church. FRANZ listened with religious attention to all the words from this eloquent mouth which pleased to instruct him, and from moment to moment recognized how little he had before comprehended this *ensemble* of works which had seemed so easy for him to understand. When she had ended, the light of the candles was growing pale in the morning light which penetrated the glass windows. Although she had spoken many hours, and had not seated herself for an instant during the whole night, neither her body nor her voice betrayed the slightest fatigue. Only her head was bowed upon her breast, which beat violently, and she seemed to listen to the sighs which it exhaled. All at once she straightened up her head, and raising both her arms to heaven, she cried:

"O, *servitude! servitude!*"

At these words, the tears falling from underneath her mask fell upon the folds of her black robe.

"Why do you weep?" cried FRANZ, approaching her.

"Meet me to-morrow," said she, "at midnight, in front of the Arsenal."

She went out by the lateral door on the left, which closed heavily behind her. At the same moment the *Angelus* sounded. FRANZ, startled by this unexpected noise of the bell, turned around and saw that all the candles were extinguished. He remained some time motionless with surprise; then he left the church by the grand door which the sacristans were just opening, and slowly returned home, seeking to divine who this woman could be, who was so bold, so artistic, so powerful so full of charm in her words, and majesty in her demeanor.

*To be concluded in our next.*