

pression which hinted of indecision; then shrugging his shoulders, he stepped a pace nearer.

"Oh, very well," said he, indifferently, "it does not much matter. The signature of Monsieur le Baron will suffice. I write it very well. I wonder I did not think of that before. Now, look you; the door is locked, and no one will interrupt us."

"But if you are killed?" I asked.

For answer he pointed to the panel which hid the secret passage.

"No one knows of that," said he. "It will be your only means of escape."

"But what of mademoiselle?"

"She is safe and comfortable. No harm shall come to her. If you live, which is not likely, your wits will tell you what to do for her. There is a squadron of hussars quartered at the village."

"I perceive that you still have some sense of honor left," I answered, at the same time seizing a dagger and the heavy sabre which my uncle had carried at Morengo. Then placing the pistol upon the desk, I turned to give Montluc attention.

We moved the furniture out of the way, and pulled off our coats and waistcoats. In another moment the fight began.

I have been in some desperate engagements, but I think none of them was equal to this, unless it was at Borodino, where I received this sabre cut across my face. There was a great object in view, and each was determined to kill the other. The hope of helping Mademoiselle de Catinac gave me strength, and I fought as I had never fought in my life. It was not an incident of parry and thrust, as with rapiers, but the regular cavalry exercise of guard, cut, parry, thrust, slash, feint, and our heavy sabres clattered and rang, and hissed, and flashed fire in a manner which I shall never forget.

Montluc was a good swordsman, with a strong wrist, and had the advantage in a sabre three inches longer than mine. But I soon discovered that I knew some tricks of which he was ignorant, and as the fight progressed I gained confidence. Whether it was due to a righteous Providence, or my own fierce energy, I do not know, but it was not long before I was master of the situation, and it gave my opponent all he could do to resist my desperate onslaught.

I touched him twice upon the shoulder, and drew blood. Then the point of his blade pricked me in the right arm. Twice he struck at me with his dagger, but I parried both cuts beautifully. I crowded him, and he gave way a step, then another, and another until I had him cornered. His eyes were glaring like a demon's; his breath came thick and fast; the moisture rolled down his face in rivulets, and his shirt was soon saturated with blood and perspiration. He was at my mercy.

"Ah, ah, Monsieur Montluc!" I cried, triumphantly, "I have you now, and I think my ace will yet win."

His answer was to lunge at me with sudden fury, which served to tire him the more. His heated condition was telling on him severely. I was heated myself, and my clothing was soon wringing wet, yet the clatter of our weapons rang smartly through the room.

"It is nearly time," said I, to myself, "and I can do it."

But at that moment he struck my dagger from my grasp, and laid open the back of my hand. The pain angered me, and I determined to end the matter. Finally I made a feint which he did not understand, and as he attempted to parry, I drove my point above his guard and lunged as one would with a rapier. My sabre went through him nearly to the hilt. He dropped his sword and dagger, and with one hand clutching at his side, went reeling about the room like a man drunk with wine, grasping desperately with his right hand at things which came in his way, while an expression of extreme agony settled upon his face. Finally he lunged at a heavy curtain which draped one of the windows, tore it from its fastenings, and fell in a heap beneath it. Instantly I sprang to the secret passage and escaped. Hurrying to the barracks I secured a squad of Hussars and went back to the rescue. Madame de Cré could tell you what a gallant I was in capturing all those bandits and in setting her at liberty. The next day I found my uncle's old notary, Monsieur de Corbonneau, and told him of what had happened. Leaving matters in his hands, I continued my journey to Paris.

THE END.