

"Perfectly."

"He has returned unbidden from his banishment. He is now in Paris, in the disguise of a mechanic, and threatens my life."

"For what?"

"An old feud between our families. Would it please your majesty to grant me a file of soldiers to lodge him within the Bastile?"

"Most assuredly, cousin, if your life is in danger," replied Louis, writing a few lines and giving it to St. Almer. "Here is an order to that effect."

St. Almer bowed, upon receiving the paper, and drawing his hat over his face, left the apartment. The following morning, just at day-break, the key of the gloomy Bastile was turned upon Pierre Martel.

That day, a grand court was held by the royal family. Upon the throne sat Louis the Sixteenth, of France, and by his side, his consort, the unfortunate Maria Antoinette. The lillies of France, upon silken banners, drooped over their heads, and a body of the faithful Swiss Guard, with fixed bayonets, were drawn in double lines about the base of the throne. Immediately in front, was a table costly decorated, around which were gathered the nobles and peers of the Realm. At the foot of the throne, on the right, stood the Count St. Almer, and upon the left M. de Launay, Governor of the Bastile. The rest of the individuals present consisted of the body-guard, household officers and troops, servants and retainers.

"My Lords and Nobles," said Louis, rising, "it is with extreme regret we have learned the depredation that was committed but yesterday upon the property of a good and loyal subject, the Count St. Almer. Sire de Launay, you will see that the rebellious soldiery, who yesterday refused to fire upon the mob according to your orders, are arrested and brought before us. The Count will furnish you with a list of the ring-leaders of the riot, you will attend to it."

"May it please your majesty," said Launay.

"What say you," replied Louis.

"It were best to station a few troops at the Bastile, as I fear the next building the mob assault will be that."

"It shall be done," said Louis. "Now bring in the prisoner."

The trumpet sounded. The retainers at the lower end of the hall divided, and the Gunsmith appeared between a file of soldiers.

"Release him," said Louis—"It was done."

"Are you Pierre Martel?"

"By that name, I am addressed," replied the Gunsmith.

"But Victor Morain, Count of Chavoigne, is your true title, is it not?"

"It is."

"Were you not banished from the Court of France by an edict of the late King?" continued Louis.

"Most true," replied the Gunsmith.

"For what term?"

"Twenty-five years."

"Has it yet expired?"

"Scarce half."

"Why, then, dared you return, without permission?" demanded Louis.

"Because it suited my convenience. If that be not satisfactory, find an answer to content yourself."

"Audacious subject," thundered Louis, but checking himself, said in a calmer tone, "you are accused of meditating violence against the life of the Count St. Almer—nay, you have been heard to declare he should perish by your hand. Call the witnesses."

"It is unnecessary," interrupted Martel, "I deny it not."

"You then acknowledge yourself guilty."

"I have already told you, trembling nobleman, he should not survive the thirteenth of July. I still say it."

"Neither shall you, Victor Morain," interrupted Louis. "We here appoint that day for your execution; and to see the sentence carried into effect, St. Almer, we appoint you officer of the day."

"So please your majesty," said St. Almer, "Pray you excuse me."

"I have said it," replied Louis, decisively, "away with the prisoner."

"Break up the court," continued he—"St. Almer, we would speak with you in private."

Time flies. The scene is changed to the great hall of the Bastile. The time, July thirteenth, 1789. A file of soldiers were drawn out. Upon one side stood the Count St. Almer, Sire de Launay and a Priest, who was performing the last sad offices for a criminal under sentence of death. Upon the other stood an executioner, with his axe and block, and kneeling upon one knee—his neck bared, his head resting upon the block, was Pierre Martel, the Gunsmith of Paris.

"Victor Morain," said St. Almer, as the Priest closed the book.

The Gunsmith looked up.

"The thirteenth of July has arrived."

"But its sun has not yet set," replied Martel with a bitter smile.

"Executioner," said Launay, "raise your axe."