

## THE BEAUTIFUL PRISONER.

A HISTORICAL ROMANCE.

## CHAPTER XV.—Continued.

All eyes turned towards him. Many knew him personally, and pronounced his name. Joy and happiness beamed in their eyes, while their cheerful exclamations were the expressions of their hearts. He was welcomed as their preserver; for as soon as he was recognized, and his office known by his scarf, the conviction arose that he had come to open their prison.

"Tallien! Lambert!" shouted a voice in the exultation of bliss, and before his eyes could rest upon the graceful figure in the surrounding group, she broke through the crowd and flew to his breast.

"You are the preserver, the conqueror, the deliverer of France from her dragon!" exclaimed she in the greatest happiness, and in her pride in his love. "Yes, yes, I see by the glitter of your eyes, by the glowing of your countenance, that it is so. You have fought a battle, and are coming from the victory!"

"My darling!" replied he, pressing her vehemently to his heart, "I have you again!"

"You have me again, you have liberated me a second time, and fought for me twice."

"I will never leave you! There will be no more separation, Thérèse."

"None, my cavalier. Oh, how proudly I gaze on you. You have fought a great battle!"

"Hot was the struggle, but we have conquered. Our enemies are destroyed. At this moment Robespierre, St. Just, and Couthon are standing their trial."

"And the gates of the prisons are open, is it not so?" asked she.

"For you, at once, my beloved; for the others, soon," replied he.

These words produced a visible sadness on those who heard them.

Tallien perceiving it, added encouragingly:

"Citizens, believe me, no innocent shall any longer mourn for the loss of his liberty. But be just, and have patience. A distinction must be made between guilty and innocent, and time is required to do so; I will, however, not lose one hour to make unfortunates happy, and prisoners free."

Thérèse Cabarrus looked around to espy her two friends, to take leave of them. They were standing behind her, and had sympathizingly witnessed the meeting with her lover. Thérèse embracing them, said, with tears in her eyes:

"We will soon meet again, perhaps to-morrow—depend upon it. We will then never separate." She drew both ladies towards her, and turning round to Tallien, said in introducing them:

"Madame de Beauharnais, Madame Recamier. My companions in affliction. Shall they not participate in my happiness?"

"Have patience for one day more, ladies, and you will be free," replied Tallien, politely.

"Console yourselves, my dears," said Thérèse, smiling. "What is a day, if it teems with hope and happiness?"

She shook hands with her friends, and bowed to the many who pressed towards her to take leave. Notwithstanding the hope that was given them, a painful sensation seized them when Thérèse Cabarrus, the only happy person of this day, left them on the arm of her lover. Her parting caused sorrow amidst the joy, for every one felt her loss wofully.

How happy she was when she passed by his side through the gloomy corridor in which her cell was situated; she was enjoying already, before the grated gates had opened, and the full light of liberty shone upon her, all the bliss produced by her safe delivery from distress and sorrow. How animated was the glitter of her eyes as she fixed them on Tallien!

The jailer had preceded them, opening the outer gate. At this gate stood a pale, gloomy-looking man. He stood so motionless that the happy couple did not perceive him. They passed out into the street, and Thérèse screamed with joy when she inhaled the air of liberty. The pale man, who had listened, was Benoit.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## THE POWER OF LOVE.

Yes, poor Benoit was suddenly deprived of all his hopes! The fortunate lover had carried off a second time as a prize the goddess he adored, whom he idolized with the enthusiasm of a fanatic, while he, with all his imaginations and dreams, saw himself piteously deceived by reality. Her graceful figure passed like a vision before his eyes, and he was left behind to awaken from his dreams. In a more frightful manner the breaking down of his hopes could not have come on the unfortunate man, who was not able to control his passion. His head was confused when he returned to the sick room to perform his duties—these duties gave him now no satisfaction, and he was thoroughly disgusted with them. For her sake he had looked for, and accepted the situation; for her sake he had undergone all the trouble and burden of this office. But what should he do now? He longed to go away, far away to whatever place it might be. Here, as everywhere, there was nothing that could captivate him, nothing that could lend a charm to his life. Her image was ever before his eyes in the gloomy melancholy to which he gave himself up, augmenting his torture, while, some months before, it had given him great consolation. Had he not done all and risked all in his love

for her, and in what had she repaid him for it? It was madness that he had ever loved her, and had not forgotten her long ago. Yes, seven months before Thérèse Cabarrus had been a poor prisoner in Bordeaux, whose life seemed irretrievably lost. As her guardian he had loved the beautiful woman, and why should he not have done so? Does the affection of the heart care whether it can express itself? It only cares whether it will be accepted. His sentiments were so pure and genuine that he believed she ought to appreciate them. Could she not give him hope? then she could grant him some reward by saying: Benoit, I know you love me dearly! The natural want of harmony between heart and reason became clearer to him, the more he suffered; he thought to love Thérèse as an unattainable goddess, while it was his torture to find that she was beyond his reach.

Yes, Madame de Fontenay-Cabarrus was beyond his reach. Nevertheless, he resigned his office and left Bordeaux, longing to meet her again and to enjoy her presence. Chance would have it that he saw in the castle of Montreuil his most ardent wishes realized; he could daily be near her; but he was a servant, she a noble lady. Who that feels the difference in the social positions, can level them? The one must always of his own accord elevate the other; but neither he nor she thought of it. His affection asked only for quiet tolerance. The arrest of Thérèse produced in him energy for action. After her escape was frustrated, her liberation was ever his

to-morrow his idol would be snatched from him for ever, all his hopes crushed, and his dear, though destructive dreams annihilated. He did not know what to do. His good-natured, noble character, refrained from all desires of mean revenge. Though he hated Tallien, he did not like to harm him; though he loved Thérèse, he would not disturb her happiness. To leave Paris appeared to him the best thing to do. He felt he was too weak to endure any longer the tortures of remaining a miserable nonentity in the presence of their accomplished happiness. Away from her, he could perhaps forget her, her enchanting image would lose its power over him—he might recover from the madness of his life. The word "marriage" changed all his sentiments. Madame Tallien was no more for him the same woman as Thérèse Cabarrus, who had been his idol; to love Madame Tallien excited less his sorrow than his anger.

But he would see her once more before he would move for ever out of the course of her life. He would see Thérèse, whom he had so unhappily loved, speak once more to her for whom he would unhesitatingly have sacrificed his life. He felt that he had a right to this satisfaction, claiming by it a well-deserved reward due to him. Who would refuse it to him? And more self-possessed than ever he did not any longer think of the difference in their social positions. Now was the time appointed for the civil marriage; so he had learned by enquiry.

He would previously take leave of her; he therefore started for Tallien's house where, since her release, she was living. He had put on his best suit; a brown carnation, brown knee-breeches, blue stockings, and shoes. His features were pallid from agony of mind and want of rest; his eyes hollow and inflamed. He was dreadfully excited, and suffered with all the tortures a lover feels who buries his hopes and happiness.

He found the door of Tallien's dwelling open—no one was in the ante-room to announce him. He hesitated a moment, then approached a door which he opened, and with a low exclamation of fright arrested his steps. Thérèse Cabarrus was standing before a mirror, adorning herself in all her beauty for the marriage. Her toilette was not yet completed; her bridal robe lay over a chair, her luxurious hair fell loosely over her shoulders, while she was just in the act of fastening it with a golden clasp. Having heard Benoit's exclamation, which informed her of his presence, she shrieked with surprise, but immediately recovering herself, greeted the trembling Benoit with a smile.

"Ah, my friend," said she, extending her hand to him. "You here? Was no one there to announce you? Well, no matter; I am glad to see you. Take a seat, Benoit, and let us have a chat. I will in the mean time continue my toilette without any ceremony."

Benoit became greatly confused by these familiar and adable words, for which he was not the least prepared, and his voice could not command the proper tone to answer.

"Why do you not speak?" continued she, commencing again her toilette before the looking-glass. "We have so much to tell each other. How did it occur that you became turnkey in the Luxembourg, and wished to rescue me?"

Benoit blushed. Could she not be at all aware that his heart was beating so faithfully for her in an unhappy love; that he had for months lived but for her, seeking the task of his life in relieving her from the dangers that threatened her?

"Oh, Madame . . . Citizen!" stammered he. "You see me confused. Excuse me, I came to take leave of you."

"Leave?" exclaimed she in surprise. "Whither are you going?"

"Any where, only away from here."

"Then you do not like Paris? Of course the position as a turnkey in the prison is not pleasant; but, dear Benoit, do you imagine I would not endeavour to find a better place for you? At last the time has arrived for me to show myself grateful to you."

Thus spoke the noble patroness to her protégé. How could he speak to her of his love?

"You are very kind, citizen," replied he, his eyes assuming a gloomy expression. He seemed to reflect how he could change the tone of a conversation so mortifying to him, and find an opportunity to give vent to his feelings.

The happy bride attributed Benoit's embarrassment to his modesty.

"So," said she, examining her coiffure with great complacency: "This becomes me excellently. Is it not so, Benoit?"

"Oh yes, citizen," he burst forth, devouring her with his eyes.

"This is Grecian, my friend," she informed him jestingly. "Thus the goddesses in Olympus were clad when they took Ambrosia with Jupiter. This is now the garb of Thermidor; it is the fashion which, I may tell you, I have brought in vogue. Do you understand the meaning of it?"

"No, citizen, I understand nothing at all."

"I believe so, dear Benoit. You live so quietly. Well, I will tell you. So far the revolution had a Roman character; coarse patriotism, destruction without mercy. We Thermidorians now give it a Grecian cut; fine education, improved manners, luxury. Ah, Benoit," added she, "please hand me the robe from there."

Benoit obeyed; but he could not conceal the excitement under which he suffered.

"What is the matter with you?" asked she kindly. "You look miserable. Are you sick?"

"Sick?" repeated he, now taking courage to unburden his



I am going, Thérèse—oh, forget me not.

proud aim, the realization of which would prepare for him a triumph, if he could prove his affection by a heroic deed. He asked for nothing more, his wishes and hopes did not go beyond it.

And now the months of troubles had been in vain. Capricious fate had not permitted him to accomplish his plan. Instead of which he had to witness how the fortunate Tallien carried off the palm, and disgraced him in a similar way as in Bordeaux. This was the sorrow that afflicted him, and made him meditate how to escape it.

As soon as possible he left the service of the jailer of the Luxembourg. What he should now begin, he did not know. He thought only of Thérèse Cabarrus, her lover and his own defeat, and this thought tormented him without ripening in him any resolutions. Suddenly he heard that Tallien and Thérèse were to be married. Every one in Paris spoke of it, as since the 9th Thermidor no one was spoken of but the bold victor, the chief of those men called Thermidorians, who had now the management of the government and convention. Tallien was the man of the day, Thérèse Cabarrus the object of the worship of Paris.

The next day the marriage-ceremony was to take place in the "Mairie," and great festivities were to follow. On hearing this news, Benoit became feverish. He now realized that