

ONLY A LACQUEY.

BY BEATRICE ALSAGER JOURDAN.

YES, Paris was a gay and witty place in those days, before the great Revolution swept over it like a devastating storm—gay and witty, and, I am afraid, wicked enough, though many good people dwelt in it, all unheard of by the world at large, as even the prophet had not heard of the seven thousand who never bowed the knee to Baal. I have reason to know something about it, since (except for a yearly sojourn at a cha'cau in Berri) I remained in that fair city from the time when a few black clouds were first seen rising in the horizon until those clouds had gathered and had darkened the whole sky, and were beginning to flash and thunder ominously.

I was living as English governess to the two daughters of the Comte and Comtesse de Valcé, people of rank and high standing in society. Madame la Comtesse was looked up to as the ruling power in the household, her authority being far beyond that of her husband—an immensely fat man, very phlegmatic in temperament. For the sake of peace and quietness, he submitted to be governed by his wife; but, feeling his position becoming insecure, it was a great relief to him when she consented to tear herself away from Paris and the Tuilleries—where the king and queen, though virtually prisoners, still kept up a sort of state—and seek a refuge in dull, prosaic, melancholy England, whither many of her friends had already fled.

Not a moment too soon did we start on our journey; some of the old noblesse had already fallen victims to the fury of the populace, and the difficulty we experienced in obtaining passports was in itself a warning against delay. We travelled in a large coach, and were accompanied by an armed outrider, for, as I suspected, we were carrying with us a vast amount of property in the shape of money and jewels. We met with some alarms and detentions, and our distress was considerable, when, towards the close of the first day of our journey, a snowstorm came on—rather late for the time of the year, for it was early in March. I thought, if no one else did, of the two poor waiting-maids who were seated outside the coach, and knowing that they must be shivering with cold, I would very gladly have made room for them, but merely to propose doing such a thing would have been enough to set Madame's powdered hair on end with horror! What could the biting weather possibly matter to them? they were only of plebeian blood, and had no right to any feelings at all!

On, on, the poor horses struggled with increasing difficulty, and the Comte, a little maliciously perhaps, began to speak of the dangers of delay. "As for Mées Valusey," he said, he never could learn to pronounce aright my name of Walmsey, "she, without doubt, will be suffered to go free, and so also, I hope, will Christine and Julie; but you and I Madame, must prepare ourselves for the worst. Bah! there are wretches who if they recognise us, would very gladly carry us *à la lanterne*, as they did poor Lemours, the other day." "The Marquis de Lemours!" cried Madame, "you do not mean that he has been sacrificed?" "Yes, assuredly," said her husband, coolly tapping his diamond snuff-box; "his house was attacked last Tuesday by the rabble, and they murdered him—hung him, I believe, on a lamp post in his own courtyard. That was the end of his sporting the tricolour, and setting himself up as the friend of the people! He wanted to draw a thorn from the lion's foot, and was devoured for his pains!" "How did you hear the news of his death?" said the Comtesse, shuddering. "It came through one of the servants—Henri the lacquey, I believe. The poor menial was in despair, Lemours had on some occasion assisted or protected his mother, or grandmother, an old fish-woman, I believe, one of the *dames de la halle*. Interesting personage to help! But he was something of a Don Quixote that Lemours! Still, I am very sorry for him—foolish fellow."

And I, two, was sorry, far more so than I should have cared to betray by look or word. M. le Marquis de Lemours was the only Frenchman of rank whose notice I, a simple governess, had been able to endure. They were, many of them, gallant enough, paying me magnificent compliments on my *jolis yeux bleus*, but his gallantry was tempered by respect, and he looked at me with frank and honest eyes.

He had, I know, some very good and noble qualities, but ah! he avowedly was not a Christian. I had heard him discuss religious matters with M. de Valcé, far more reverently than the latter did, it is true; he acknowledged an overruling Providence, but of the Christian faith he spoke with a species of contempt, which wounded me to the heart's core.

"Did you ever read the Gospels through, Monsieur?" I ventured to ask him, addressing him voluntarily for the first and only time.

"I, Mademoiselle? Never," he replied, with a smile and an almost imperceptible shrug of the shoulders, as if he accounted them quite beneath his notice. "Ah, I was forgetting! Mademoiselle is, without doubt, well acquainted with them. She is a Protestant," he presently resumed, and he would gladly, I think, have continued the subject had not circumstances rendered it impossible.

And now he was gone—murdered by the very people whose welfare he had had deeply at heart. Oh, how sorry I felt that he should not have been a Christian!

Madame de Valcé, though startled at first by hearing of his death, was too much occupied by her own anxieties and troubles to bestow upon him more than a few passing regrets; but I was thinking of him still when, in a wild and lonely part of the road, we came, we know not why, to a sudden halt. My pupils, who seldom opened their lips in their parents' presence, gave utterance to a half-suppressed shriek, and I was desired to put down the glass of the window nearest to me and ask what was the matter. The outrider appeared at the coach-door. He was sorry, he said, to inform Madame that her lacquey Henri had been taken seriously ill; he had dismounted from the coach to pick up a cloak dropped by one of the waiting-maids, and had fallen fainting to the ground, overpowered with fatigue and cold. "He is still insensible," he added; "and we have placed him on a bank by the road-side. He cannot possibly proceed with us, Madame. What, therefore, are we to do?"

"Press on, press on, at all hazards," she cried. "We must leave him, and save ourselves. Every moment is precious! Desire the postillions to drive on at all speed."

"But, Madame," I exclaimed, "would you leave him to die in the snow?"

She turned upon me an angry frown. "What would you have me do, Mademoiselle? Sacrifice ourselves for him? He will not die! He is young and strong, and, after all, he is only a lacquey."

But I had already risen from my seat. "Madame," I said imploringly, "permit me to leave the coach for one moment. I see a little hut in that wood, and will run there and try if I cannot find help for that poor man. One moment, only a moment! or you need not stay for me; drive on, and I will overtake the coach. I can walk faster than the horses can make their way through the snow."

By dint of importunity I gained my point. The ponderous steps of the carriage were let down, and I alighted, casting a glance at the poor, pale-faced lacquey, before I ran off to seek the aid he so sorely needed. I had some difficulty in finding a path that would lead me through the little wood, and on reaching the door of the hovel I discovered that it was closed and barred, probably to keep out the snow. For several minutes I applied my knuckles to it in vain, but at length an old woodman and his wife appeared in answer to my call. They were dull-looking people, with a trodden down air, as if they had known much oppression in their day. Mistaking me for an aristocrat, they eyed me suspiciously, and only consented to follow me on receiving an assurance that I wanted their succour not for a noble, but for a lowly serving man.

On returning to the spot where Henri was lying, I found that Madame had taken me at my word. The coach had driven on, and was already disappearing in the misty distance. I felt a little uneasy and alarmed, but to leave the sick man as yet was impossible. Drawing from my pocket my silver vinaigrette, I applied it to his nostrils, bending over him until he opened his eyes, and looked up at me with a conscious expression. He had only very lately entered Madame's service, and I did not know his features well, but he recognised me at once, murmuring my name. "Mademoiselle, my good angel," he said, adding with great effort, "leave me to die; save yourself, I implore," and then a deadly faintness seized him again, rendering him speechless, though not, I believe, insensible.

"I must indeed leave you," I answered cheerily, "but not, I hope, to die. I have brought to you some worthy people