



"You know me then?" said the jester in a tremulous voice.

"Not very intimately, my dear sir, but just sufficiently to appreciate your boldness or discerning sense of what your enemies might call usurpation interest. I think it was about four years ago that an honest, old man, the friend of the former king, died of broken heart, in despair at being refused by you a short renewal which he had implored on his knees."

Without replying, M. Cervantes referred to the further course which started from his offer.

"What does this mean?" asked another jester impatiently. "Have we come hither to act a scene from the *Memento de Devil?*"

"I don't know that word," replied the major, "but now I give you Monsieur de Barline, to carry on the game."

"Sir, you are important, and I shall certainly do myself the pleasure to choose you."

"As you will."

"With my sword, I shall do you the honour to make tomorrow."

An hour which, being a man of sense, I was too young to decline. You don't kill your adversaries, Monsieur de Barline? you assassinate them. Have you forgotten your duel with Monsieur de Sils, which took place, I can tell you, without a single wound? Well, I'll do for you, you treacherously struck him through the heart. The prospect of a similar catastrophe is certainly by no means enticing."

With an indistinctive movement, M. de Barline's neighbour drew off.

"The silent virtuous indignation," said the major. "It especially becomes you, Monsieur Dorin!"

"What injury are you going to sustain in my teeth?" exclaimed the good-natured jester.

"What?—more injury—simply that while Monsieur de Barline has his friends, you only dislodge yours. Monsieur Simon, whose house, table, and purse are yours, has a pretty wife."

"Major," cried another jester, "you are a villain."

"Pardon me, my dear Monsieur Calot, let us call things by their proper names. The only villain amongst us, I believe, is the man who himself set fire to his own house after having insured it at double the value of its original value, whose widow is still a widow."

"Major," said another jester, "you are a villain."

A chilled group remained from M. Calot's lips as he covered his face with his hands.

"Who are you that do not constitute yourself a self-judge?" asked another, looking fiercely at Verner.

"Who am I, Monsieur Pecan? simply one who can appreciate your very rare talents in holding court in your hand, and make the due turn up to the meeting."

M. Pecan gave a half voluntary start, and thought of his peace.

The scene, aided by the darkness of approaching night, had now assumed a terrible aspect. The color of the major rang in the ears of eleven pale, trembling men, with a cold metallic distinctness, as if each word inflicted a blow.

At length Verner burst into a sharp Moing laugh. "Well, my honourable colleagues!" he exclaimed, "does this poor Pierre Granger still appear to you unworthy of his present office?"

"M. Norgee agrees with me, Monsieur Norie," said Pierre Granger as the model of her husband.

"M. Norgee started as if he had received an electric shock. "It is fate!" he murmured, "I did not poison Eliza; she died of pulmonary consumption."

"Eliza," said the major, "you remind me of a circumstance which I had nearly forgotten. Madame Norgee, who possessed a large fortune in her own right, died without issue, five months ago. She had made out her will, but had not named an heir. Now, as far as I have been able to learn, she left her entire estate to her son-in-law for his services—if he had purchased a burial-ground, and caused to be raised to her memory a beautiful square white marble monument, with a flower epithaph in its gold letters—which there we should all have shared."

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conversation, a relative of the diplomatic, and that the night was under Bobalock, the Military Governor of Sebastopol. It is very strange that an admiral should be appointed to command an army of strange things to happen in Russia. It is also strange that the change of scene should be sudden, and it was some time before the news reached the Emperor, in which the Prince stated that 10,000 men might take Sebastopol, and that 80,000 men could be held in check for weeks.

This relieved our infantry of a deadly impulse, and they continued their magnificent and rapid progress up the hill.

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"I don't know that word," replied the major, "but now I give you Monsieur de Barline, to carry on the game."

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