

## **‘The Assassin’**

### Chapter I: A Deed of Horror

Before we enter upon these details we must state that our narrative commences in the summer of 1822.

The scene of the first chapter is a fine estate in the vicinity of the episcopal town of Arras, in France.

The time – evening.

It was then the hour of sunset. The heavens were irradiated with the departing glory of the god of day; not a breeze agitated the leaves of the trees; not a dark cloud sullied the expanse of purples and gold above.

Amidst the neighbouring trees were seen the gables and antique pinnacles of the old mansion on the estate above alluded to; and in another direction the Gothic towers of the cathedral of Arras lifted their mighty heads above the town appeared to slumber at their feet.

In the midst of a verdant grove upon that estate, which belonged to a gentleman of the name of Durantal, two persons were conversing together. One was a handsome young man, of two-and-twenty, with fine black eyes and a placid countenance: – the other a lovely woman of thirty.

They walked slowly up and down in the shaded avenue: and their conversation was as excited as their manner was agitated.

‘You ask me if I love you,’ said the young man in an impassioned tone; ‘how can I prove my affection ? Alas ! I was poor, wretched, and friendless when you took me by the hand; your charms obtained my love.’

‘Oh ! if I only thought that this passion of yours was permanent,’ exclaimed the lady, – ‘if I could buoy myself up with the hope that your heart would never change. I would make for you the sacrifice which you demand – I would quit the house of that brother who is so devotedly attached to me – I would accompany you whithersoever you go, – I would be to you more than I ever was to my deceased husband.’

‘Can I believe you ? may I put faith in your words ?’ cried the young man: and seizing the lady’s hand, he pressed it to his lips.

‘Yes – you may believe me,’ replied the charming widow: ‘I will dare the wrath of that brother who has sworn that if I ever contract a marriage with any one who is not my equal in birth and

fortune, he will avenge upon us both that which he terms the dishonor of his name; – that wrath – that vengeance will I dare for you !’

‘It is not enough that you have snatched me from misery !’ cried the young man: ‘you have given me your heart ! – and you promise me your hand !’

‘All that I have in the world shall be yours,’ answered the widow, ‘and, Oh ! you must never forget the extent of the sacrifice which I thus make for your love ! My brother Jacques Durantal has remained single for my sake. When I lost my husband some six years ago, my brother declared that I should henceforth dwell with him – that I should be the mistress of his abode, and his estate – and that he would abjure all thoughts of marriage in order that there might be no one to interfere with me, or to stand between me and him. Ah, this was a noble sacrifice on the part of a brother so much older than myself, and who regarded me rather as his daughter than his sister !’

‘And the sacrifice you make for me, is greater still, because –’

‘Because it involves ingratitude towards my brother,’ added the lady, a dark cloud passing over her countenance.

‘Ah ! your brother M. Durantal has commanded you not to think of the obscure and unknown young man whose affection your kindness has secured !’

‘Yes: – I do not conceal from you that my brother has suspected our attachment; and that he has sworn a terrible oath – Oh ! it makes me shudder to think of it ! for although in his calm hours he is all gentleness, goodness, and kindness, in his moments of passion he is so violent that all around him fly from his presence in affright !’

‘And it is the vengeance of such a man that you will dare for me ?’

‘Yes; and if I mention all this, it is only to prove to you the extent of my love; for, were you, in after years to repent of the union which you will have contracted, what will become of me ?’

‘Do you think me capable –’

‘I know that I am much older – much older than you; and when I am an elderly woman you will be a young man still; – and it is this which makes me tremble !’

‘Reassure yourself – tranquilize yourself on this head ! I love you – I adore you, – and not for your charms – not for your beauty, – but for your mental qualification, your noble heart, and your amiable disposition.’

‘To-morrow, then – to-morrow,’ said the lady, casting a glance of the most languishing and devoted tenderness upon that handsome youth to whose arm she clung, – ‘to-morrow,’ she murmured, ‘we shall leave this neighbourhood—we will depart together.’

The young man caught that lovely and confiding woman to his bosom, and kissed her rapturously.

At that moment a gentle rustling amongst the trees fell upon his ears.

‘Did you hear nothing?’ he said, stepping hastily back, and glancing anxiously around him.

‘No – nothing,’ was the reply.

‘I could have made certain that there was some one –’

‘We are doing wrong – we are guilty of deep ingratitude,’ said the lady impressively; ‘and it is conscience that thus creates alarm!’

‘No – that is impossible!’ exclaimed the youth; ‘we are not weak-minded – we are not children to be frightened at a shadow.’

‘Oh! this ought to be a warning,’ said the lady, glancing towards her lover with intense anxiety upon her handsome countenance: ‘let us part – let us separate for ever!’

‘No, this is childish,’ cried the young man, evidently alarmed at the turn which the conversation had taken; and he accordingly exerted all his power to soothe and console her.

This task was not a hopeless one; and the lovers resumed their walk.

‘To-morrow,’ said the young man, ‘I will make every necessary arrangement for our flight; and at one o’clock precisely a post chaise will be waiting in the road at the corner of this grove.’

‘You may rely upon me,’ returned the lady in a subdued tone.

‘And remember, dearest one,’ resumed the young man, ‘that never in after life must you reproach me wholly and solely for any consequences which may attend this step: you must leave all and unite your fortunes to mine, by your own free will – or at once let us separate forever.’

‘I will never reproach you, – I will never blame you for the evils that may be entailed upon me by this opposition to my brother’s will.’

‘And you know with whom you link your fate – you are aware of my position beforehand,’ proceeded the young man: ‘you yourself have made me what I am – you are not ignorant of my present resources and my future prospects – how mean, how miserable they are!’

‘When I married M. de Versac,’ returned the lady, ‘my own fortune was settled upon myself. We shall have enough to enable us to live happily, if not sumptuously; and then the proceeds of your pen – for, Oh ! I know you will become a great poet.’

‘May God so will it !’ ejaculated the young man enthusiastically; and at that moment he was absolutely radiant with angelic loveliness.

‘Yes, you shall be a great poet,’ continued his adoring mistress; ‘and my hands shall place the laurels and twine the bays around thy brow !’

‘None other ever shall !’ answered the ardent youth, pressing the fair hands of his companion. ‘But – heavens, that noise again – we are watched – we are discovered !’

‘There – there !’ cried the lady, pointing in a certain direction, while her countenance became ashy pale.

The lover cast his eyes towards the spot thus indicated; and he plainly beheld the black cassock of a priest moving amongst the trees.

‘It is of no consequence,’ he said, after a moment’s reflection. ‘A priest would be the last person on earth to take the trouble to watch us –’

‘And the first to betray us,’ added the lady, ready to sink with alarm.

The youth consoled her as well as he could; and smiles returned to her countenance.

The hour had now arrived when her presence was calculated to engender suspicion at the mansion: she accordingly bade her lover a tender farewell; and having renewed their appointment for one o’clock on the following day, they separated.

The lady proceeded hastily toward the mansion: the young man hurried in the opposite direction, towards Arras.

‘Is it love – is it really love that I feel for this woman ?’ he said to himself, as he wended his way through the grove: ‘or is it gratitude, commingled with a selfish desire to possess her, that I may use her fortune for my own aggrandizement ? Yet she is very beautiful – and she loves me tenderly, and so well ! A poor orphan – or worse – a foundling reared by the charity of a humble cottager and his wife, – I had no hope of ever breaking those bonds which confined me to the sphere of the lower orders. I struggled – Oh ! how strenuously I struggled to rise above my condition, none can tell save myself: the knowledge which I now possess is at least one proof ! Then came this good genius, and raised me from the dust ! She told me that I had talent – I expressed my gratitude to her in the language of poetry; – she loved me – and I have believed until this moment that I loved her in return ! And now what doubts oppress me ! If I love her

tenderly and fondly, I can forgive myself for taking her away from the home where she now dwells with a person who adores her; but if I love her not, I shall be acting as a coward – a villain – an execrable scoundrel ! And yet to resign her – to return to the peasants' lot – to herd with the vulgar mass – to assume once more a rustic garb, – Oh ! that would be to abandon the path which leads to distinction – to reject the advances of fortune – to quit the shrine of Poetry forever !'

As he uttered these words, he turned and angle in the pathway that led through the grove, and came in violent contact with an individual advancing from the opposite direction.

'M. Durantal !' he exclaimed.

'Wretch – villain !' cried the gentleman: 'our meeting is most opportune; I have a long account to settle with you.'

'With me ?' cried the young man: 'what harm have I done you ?'

'Harm !' thundered the incensed brother: 'and can you coolly ask me that ? and does your countenance remain without a blush with which you thus stand and regard me face to face ?'

'M. Durantal, I have received too much kindness at your hands to be readily offended at anything you may address to me; but either a joke can be carried too far, or a supposition may become too outrageous –'

'Silence, wretch ! Your miserable attempt to conceal your infamy beneath the cloak of a calmness which you cannot feel within, shall not deceive me. I have discovered your villainy – I have found out, when too late, the venomous nature of the serpent which I have allowed to –'

'M. Durantal, this is past bearing. Of what do you accuse me ?'

'Of endeavouring to inveigle my sister away from her home, and aspiring to a connexion far – far above your reach. And now you shall give me satisfaction.'

'Do you dare to impute selfish and dishonourable motives to me ?' demanded the young man, scarcely able to restrain his alarm; for he was a coward, and afraid of death.

'I dare to state the truth,' answered the outraged brother. 'This day I discovered all: – a note from you to the woman whom I shall no longer call my sister, and which she doubtless dropped by accident unto my hands. Will you deny your own handwriting ?'

The young man was astounded – stupefied by this announcement. He made no reply, but glanced anxiously around him.

'Ah ! you meditate an escape from my vengeance !' ejaculated the infuriate man. 'Do you think I have been seeking for you the whole of the afternoon to suffer you to depart scatheless, when I

have the good fortune at length to encounter you ? No, villain ! Here – here upon this spot, and at this moment – shall you render me satisfaction.’

With these words he drew a pair of pistols from his pocket, and advancing towards the young man said in a hoarse and hollow tone ‘They are both loaded – choose whichever you prefer !’

The young man started back in dismay.

‘A duel – and without witnesses !’ he exclaimed. ‘The survivor would be accused of murder !’

‘True – true !’ cried M. Durantal; then, after a moment’s consideration, he placed the pistols carefully upon the ground, took his memorandum book from his pocket, tore out a leaf, and wrote upon it with a pencil. ‘There,’ he added, passing the paper to his foe, ‘copy that, and sign your name.’

The young man received the leaf mechanically and read these words: –

*‘Tired of life, I have adopted the only means to relieve myself of a burthen that has become insupportable. Let no one be accused of my assassination.’*

‘Then it is a duel to the very death that you contemplate ?’ said the young man, his whole frame quivering.

‘To the very death’ answered the other.

The young man wrote on a piece of paper the words of which M. Durantal had given him a copy.

He then signed the paper, and put it in his pocket.

M. Durantal followed this example. He then presented the pistols once more to his young foe, and said ‘Choose.’

The youth took one mechanically.

Durantal was at that moment standing within a yard of him. All hell mustered in the bosom of the young man; he trembled at the idea of death; and he saw but *one means* of avoiding the duel.

Quick as thought he raised the pistol, and fired it point blank at his opponent.

M. Durantal uttered one single cry, and fell down dead.

At that moment a violent rustling of the boughs was heard close by, and an elderly man, attired in the black garments of a priest, rushed forth from the grove.

‘Murderer !’ he exclaimed, hastening toward the young man, whom he caught violently by the arm.

The assassin hesitated what to do; but his indecision lasted only for a moment. Furiously dashing the priest aside, he bounded into the grove with the speed of a hound, and disappeared.

## Chapter II: The Two Families

The scene now changes to Paris; and the reader will have the kindness to suppose that a year has flown since the incidents which occupied the last chapter.

There still exists in the Rue Neuve des Mathurins a large house looking upon the street, with a garden behind it, and another large house at the extremity of this garden. Thus the back windows of the first mentioned house commanded a view of the front of the other.

The first house was inhabited by M. Moreney; the latter by M. Chambel.

M. de Moreney (who called himself the Count de Moreney, but with no very great right) was a man of about sixty. He had a large head upon a small body; and that head hung in a very peculiar manner upon the right shoulder; but, most probably to re-establish the perpendicular line, he wore a very tall conical hat. He was a furious partisan of the Bourbons, and received, at the epoch of the indemnification, after the fall of Napoleon, a sum equal to sixteen thousand pounds sterling, as an indemnity for a fortune which he proved to have lost – but which he never had to lose ! He was now the chief editor of a red hot monarchist and anti-popular journal, and was much esteemed by the aristocracy and clergy.

M. de Moreney was married to a very beautiful woman. But who was his wife ? No one knew. Some said she was a German; but one of M. de Moreney’s friends remarked that Madame de Moreney spoke French admirably, and German not at all. Nevertheless, as the lady was very handsome, very amiable, and very hospitable, no attention was paid to her ignorance of the maternal tongue.

At the period when we introduce Madame de Moreney to the reader, she was thirty-nine years of age, and endowed with that *embonpoint* which invests women at the time of life with a freshness which supplies the place of youth. Moreover, she had beautiful teeth, fine hair, handsome eyes, and feet and hands small to a fault. She had been married to M. De Moreney for nineteen years.

The other house was occupied by a Monsieur Chambel. This M. Chambel was a young man whose age appeared to be about three or four and twenty. He had just published a poem which had experienced great success. He was tall, handsome, and well-formed; but his countenance was somewhat downcast, and wore an expression which his friends called pleasing melancholy, and his enemies ominously sombre.

Pierre Chambel was married; and his wife was the muse who had inspired all the love-poems in his volume. Laura was a few years older than her husband. She was of a determined and proud disposition, and exercised an omnipotent influence over Pierre Chambel; for he himself was irresolute, and, in many instances, even weak-minded. He could utter the most sublime thoughts in his poems, but he was incapable of adopting them as the ruling maxims of his life.

It was about two months after the publication of his book that Chambel took up his abode in the Rue Neuve des Mathurins; and it was only a fortnight after his arrival at that dwelling that the following scene took place at the residence of M. de Moreney.

It was eight o'clock in the evening, and Madame de Moreney was reading a novel in the parlour of her abode; M. de Moreney was lounging upon the sofa. A servant entered and announced the Abbé Norton. This ecclesiastic was a Jesuit, and the proprietor of the journal of which M. de Moreney was the editor. He was a man of sixty, and had once been handsome; but the influence of a stormy life had bowed him down, and altered his countenance.

The abbé seated himself next to M. de Moreney (who had now risen to a sitting posture) and, handing him a book, said,

‘Have you read this volume?’

The editor replied in the negative.

‘And yet I require an article in favour of it in tomorrow’s journal.’

M. de Moreney took the volume, glancing over it, while the abbé continued thus: ‘You must understand my object. The gentleman who manages our literary department is about to leave us, as you well know. The author of this book of poems is the man whom I should desire to replace him; for his work gives evidence of immense talent. You must give him an excellent review, to which you will sign your name; he will call upon you to thank you; you can then find some excuse to send him to me. I will arrange the rest.’

‘Very good,’ said M. de Moreney; and he seated himself at the table to write the *critique*. ‘*The Aurora Borealis*,’ he continued, speaking to himself as he wrote down the title of the volume, ‘*By Pierre Chambel*’.

With those words he went on writing like a perfect automaton, reviewing a book, of which he had not read a dozen lines, with ease and haste.

Madame de Moreney had paid no attention to what had passed between her husband and the abbé, until the former read the title of the work. She then laid aside her novel, and took up the volume of poems.

‘This is very strange,’ said she. ‘the author of these poems is the occupant of the house at the other extremity of the garden.’

‘Is he a young man ?’ demanded the abbé.

‘About three or four and twenty.’

‘Married ?’

‘I believe so. but is there real merit in this book ?’

The abbé regarded Madame de Moreney attentively; but he cast his eyes down the moment she glanced towards him, and answered affirmatively with the tone and manner of a man who had neither seen nor suspected anything.

M. de Moreney terminated his article, which he handed to the Abbé, who perused it, while Madame de Moreney thus mused within herself: – ‘M. Chambel must call to thank my husband for this *critique*; and I shall then have an opportunity of obtaining a close view of that handsome young man, with fine black eyes, and who has gazed at me so long and so attentively at times, when I have been walking in the garden.’

The Abbé Norton withdrew; M. de Moreney returned to his lounging position upon the sofa; and Madame de Moreney affected to resume her occupation of reading, while in reality she was the prey to profound emotions. And those emotions were produced by the trivial incident just related !

### Chapter III: The Visit – The Priest

The famous article appeared; but several days passed ere M. Chambel learnt that the journal, in which it was published, had noticed his book. There are always plenty of friends ready to acquaint a literary man with the appearance of articles abusing his works; but very few who hasten to inform him of those which praise him. At length, however, Chambel’s publisher showed him the *critique*, and the young poet was charmed to think that one of the most powerful daily journals of the period should have noticed his first effort so favourably.

Chambel hastened home to impart the good news to his wife. Laura perused the article, and, when she reached the termination where the name of M. de Moreney appeared, exclaimed, ‘But this writer who has praised you so highly is a man of keen perception, and possessed of a due appreciation of merit !’

‘The M. de Moreney who has written that article is our neighbour,’ answered Pierre.

‘Our neighbour !’ ejaculated Laura.

‘Yes, that is his house in the adjoining garden.’

‘And that lady whom I have seen sometimes in the garden,’ continued Madame Chambel, ‘must be Madame de Moreney.’

‘Yes, you are right,’ said her husband. ‘They have been married nineteen years and have no children.’

Chambel went out; and his wife mused thus within herself: – ‘How came he to know all these particulars ? He must have made enquiries. and if so, why ? with what aim ? for what object ?’

A vague and undefinable suspicion had suddenly found refuge in the breast of Laura. But she could not command this impression, although she ventured to banish it. It would not obey her. She could not believe that her husband had learnt by accident what he seemed to know relative to the family of Moreney: her heart would not believe what her good sense suggested for her consolation. She had seen a fine woman at that house; and the vicinity of such an attraction had already vexed her – even before her husband had spoken of it.

In the meantime Chambel had been introduced into the drawing-room of his neighbour’s abode. He was received with a courtesy and kindness which might have equally flattered his vanity as an author or a handsome young man. M. de Moreney paid him the highest compliments upon his poems, and Madame de Moreney charmed him with the most tender glances. Chambel’s joy was at its height when M. de Moreney announced to him that Abbé Norton desired to form his acquaintance.

‘Perhaps,’ said Madame de Moreney, with a charming grace, ‘M. Chambel would prefer to meet the abbé at our house, than to call upon him in a formal manner. We shall have a few friends this evening, and amongst them will be the abbé: if M. Chambel would do us the honour to favour us with his company, he can meet M. Norton as it were accidentally.’

‘And that honour will be the greater,’ added M. de Moreney, ‘if M. Chambel will undertake to bring Madame Chambel with him.’

Pierre was radiant with joy as he accepted these invitations; and he returned home in a humour which, by the frankness of its delight, re-assured Laura.

That evening the families of Chambel and de Moreney became acquainted with each other. Laura and Madame de Moreney soon grew intimate; and Pierre was presented to M. Norton. These two gentlemen conversed together for a considerable time; and, at the expiration of their discourse, the abbé said ‘then I may understand, M. Chambel, that you accept my proposal, and will become the editor of the literary department of my journal, with a salary of ten thousand francs<sup>[1]</sup> a year.’

The young poet assented; and thus the objects of the Abbé Norton were accomplished.

The two drawing-rooms on the first floor opened into each other by means of large folding doors, which were thrown back on this occasion. Pierre was sitting in the backroom, talking to Madame de Moreney: Laura was in another part of the room, conversing with some ladies. The remainder of the guests were dispersed in groups about the two rooms. Suddenly a servant entered the front drawing-room and announced the Abbé Fortin.

M. Norton hastily approached Madame de Moreney and said, 'The Abbé Fortin is just come up from the country, and had occasion to call upon me on particular business: I took the liberty of inviting him hither this evening.'

'The friends of M. Norton are also our friends,' said Madame de Moreney; and the abbé hastened to receive M. Fortin, who now entered the room.

The Abbé Fortin was a venerable man, of advanced age, and with a benign though firm expression of countenance. His demeanour was imposing, his address affable, and his voice mild and agreeable. He was attired in plain black, and seemed to be unassuming and even retiring, although his appearance was in reality full of dignity.

The moment this priest entered the room, a sort of stifled cry escaped the lips of Pierre Chambel; and he precipitately left the apartment by a side door communicating with the passage. For some minutes his absence was not perceived, the entrance of the Abbé Fortin and the ceremonies of introduction having naturally attracted attention. But after a short interval Madame de Moreney looked around in vain for her handsome companion, and Laura's eyes equally fruitlessly sought her husband amidst the gay throng.

'Where is M. Chambel ?' asked Madame de Moreney.

'I am at a loss to conceive,' replied Laura, feeling alarmed.

Half an hour passed away, and still he did not return. Madame Chambel hastened home to ascertain if he was unwell, and had been compelled to leave the party abruptly.

'Pierre, what in the name of heaven is the matter ?' demanded his wife, hastening towards him.

'Nothing – nothing: a sudden indisposition – it is nearly over – '

'Illness does not produce such effects as this. You are alarmed – you are shocked ! Tell me – tell me what has happened !'

'Nothing, I repeat – nothing,' answered Chambel, endeavouring by a desperate effort to recover and air of composure.

‘Pierre,’ said his wife, ‘I cannot believe that indisposition alone has changed you. You know not how appalling were your looks when I entered this room. I conjure you – keep nothing secret from me; tell me all – whatever this horrible secret may be !’

‘Laura, I can assure you that a sudden indisposition of a most poignant nature overtook me – and the pain was so acute that I could not resist it.’

The wife was compelled to be satisfied with this reply; but she could not avoid entertaining a suspicion that her husband had concealed from her the true cause of his emotions – for he had appeared to be suffering rather from mental than physical anguish.

On the following morning Chambel proceeded to the office of the journal with which he was now connected. The Abbé Norton was already there.

‘You disappeared most strangely last night, M. Chambel,’ said the abbé, with a smile.

‘A sudden indisposition – an acute pain – ’

‘And Madame de Moreney appeared particularly touched at your departure,’ added the abbé, without raising his eyes towards the young man: then, after a moment, he observed: ‘Had you remained you would have enjoyed the conversation of a very intelligent man – the Abbé Fortin.’

‘Ah ! the Abbé Fortin !’ said Chambel.

‘Yes. Do you know him ?’

‘No – not at all. Does he reside in Paris ?’

‘He lives in the country; and he returns to his own abode this very evening.’

‘Ah, indeed,’ said Chambel. ‘I suppose he travels by the Diligence?’

‘What a strange question !’ ejaculated the abbé, bursting out into a

hearty laugh. ‘No – since you are so curious to ascertain that point, I can inform you that the Abbé Fortin will travel post, that he will leave Paris at eight this evening and that he proceeds by the faubourg Montmartre towards Saint Denis. Are you satisfied now ?’

Chambel made no reply, but seated himself at the table and turned

over a file of papers. For a few moments the Abbé Norton regarded him in silence; then with a smile he said, ‘Really, M. Chambel, one would think by your manner that you had lost your heart last evening, and that your thoughts were playing the unfaithful towards Madame Chambel. But

enough of pleasantries: – there are three books for review: you can let me have the articles this evening.’

Chambel rose, received the books, and took his departure.

‘Ah, Madame de Moreney – Madame de Moreney,’ said the Abbé Norton aloud, as soon as he was alone, ‘how many more victims will you add to the list of those who have already been dragged in triumph after your chariot !’

Meanwhile, Chambel proceeded homewards; and on his arrival at his own abode he hastened to his study. There he sat down to write the reviews required; but to judge of the difficulty which he experienced in composing them, and even in settling his mind to the subject, it was to be presumed that deep emotions agitated him within.

The evening came: Chambel despatched his manuscripts to the office of the journal, and then sat down to dinner with his wife. He attempted to appear even more gay, and in better spirits than usual; but the keen eye of woman penetrated through this flimsy disguise, assumed to conceal an unsettled state of mind. She did not however appear to suspect him; but endeavoured to sustain the gay tone which he had given to the conversation, to the utmost of her power.

At seven o’clock, Chambel rose from the table, and observed that he was compelled to go out for a few hours upon business connected with the journal.

‘You need not sit up for me, Laura,’ he said to his wife; ‘as it is possible that I may not return until a late hour.’

‘You are going to the office of the journal ?’ remarked his wife interrogatively.

‘Yes – certainly’ replied Pierre. ‘You need not therefore alarm yourself’ he added with a smile; and having embraced his wife affectionately, he hurried from the door.

But before he left the house., he proceeded to his study, and secreted a pair of pistols and a dagger about his person.

About an hour after his departure, a letter addressed to him and marked ‘*Private*’ in the corner, was left at the house. The hand was neat, but somewhat stiff and formal, as if it were that of a woman endeavouring to imitate the writing of a man. Laura hesitated for one moment whether she should open it: – there was a suspicion in her mind, which required elucidation – but she triumphed over the desire to violate her husband’s correspondence; and accordingly despatched the letter without any further delay to the office of the Abbé Norton’s journal.

In half an hour the servant came back; and returned the letter to Madame Chambel, saying ‘M. Chambel has not been at the office this evening; neither is he expected !’

The domestic withdrew; and Laura, throwing herself back into her chair, bust into a flood of tears, exclaiming ‘He is deceiving me ! he loves me no longer !’

#### Chapter IV: The Recognition

It was until six o’clock in the morning that Pierre Chambel returned home. He was then ghastly pale, disordered in attire, and bewildered in manner. His wife had been sitting up for him. She was alarmed at his appearance; but he consoled her – or endeavoured to do so by a variety of frivolous excuses.

‘And you have been at the office of the journal ?’ said Laura, surveying him attentively.

‘Certainly. Where else could I have been ?’

‘And yet when I forward this letter to you last evening, the servant returned with the information that you had not been in the office, neither were you expected.’

‘Ah, a letter,’ said Chambel, without noticing the other portion of his wife’s observations; and taking the document in his hands, he tore it open and read it hastily. ‘Oh, it is nothing – merely an invitation to dinner from a friend,’ he exclaimed crushing it in his hand and throwing it into the fire.

Then being anxious to avoid any further explanation with, or questions from, his wife, he hurried from the room. The moment the door closed behind him, Laura rushed to the grate, and drew the only half-consumed but still burning letter from the fire. The bottom portion of the written page was still entire: Laura cast her eyes upon it and read these words:

\* \* \* and if my proud hope has not deceived me – if your looks and mute signs of months’ past, and your words of to-night, have not misled me, – Oh ! then I shall be happy in your love; and the world will contain no being more truly joyous than

Your ever sincere and devoted

Emilie de Moreney

‘Emilie de Moreney !’ ejaculated Laura, consigning the remainder of the letter to the flames in a paroxysm of rage: ‘Oh ! now all my worst fears are confirmed; my husband no longer loves me – he loves another !’ – and the unhappy lady covered her face with her hands, while her tears and sobs gave evidence of the powerful emotions that filled her breast.

Meanwhile Pierre Chambel had retired to his couch; and though his mind was also a prey to the most painful reflections, he sank into slumber through sheer exhaustion.

Two hours passed away, and at the expiration of that time a messenger arrived from the Abbé Norton, requesting that M. Chambel would immediately repair to the office of the journal.

Laura hastened to her husband's room, and was hesitating whether she should awake him, when he started up from his sleep uttering an ejaculation of horror.

'Heavens ! Pierre,' exclaimed Laura, 'what means this mental agony ? I know – I feel convinced that you are labouring under some misfortune which you conceal from me.'

'No, dearest,' he said, assuming a sudden air of composure: 'it was a dream – a fearful dream – nothing more.'

'God grant that it may be so !' said Laura; and she then delivered the Abbé Norton's message.

Chambel hastily dressed himself and repaired to the office, where he found the Abbé and M. de Moreney.

'My dear sir,' said M. Norton, 'we have sent for you on a most important matter. The truth is, that the Abbé Fortin, whom you saw the night before last, is one of the most staunch and active members of the Society of Jesus – that society whose interests we have the honour to support by means of our journal. The consequence is that the abbé has many enemies; and we have every reason to believe that those enemies are not inactive. In a word, the abbé was attacked in his carriage – on the northern road – last night, by an individual wearing a black mask: and had it not been for the postillion, at whom the desperado vainly discharged a pistol –'

At that moment the door opened, and M. de Moreney exclaimed, 'Here comes M. Fortin to tell his own tale; so that M. Chambel may draw it up with all its details for our journal.'

The Abbé Fortin started when he beheld Chambel; and the young man uttered an ejaculation of horror as his eyes fell on the countenance of the Jesuit.

'Miscreant,' cried the Abbé Fortin, rushing forward and seizing Chambel by the collar, 'Justice will have at length its due.'

'What do you mean ?' exclaimed the Abbé Norton: 'this gentleman is one of the editors of my journal. You must be deceived, brother !'

'No,' answered the Abbé Fortin, 'in this wretch I find the assassin of my friend, Jacques Durantal.'

'Impossible,' cried M. de Moreney.

'It is true !' said the Abbé Fortin; 'let him deny it if he can. Call the gendarmes.'

‘Mercy – mercy !’ ejaculated Chambel: ‘do not ruin me – do not expose me – do not hand me over to the executioner ! Pity for my poor wife, if not for me !’

‘Pity, vile wretch !’ cried the ecclesiastic, who still held him in his grasp, ‘had you any pity for Jacques Durantal ?’

And the abbé rang the bell violently. The summons was immediately answered by a domestic.

‘Procure the attendance of a guard to arrest a murderer,’ said the Abbé Fortin in a firm tone, while the Abbé Norton and M. de Moreney exchanged looks of the deepest horror and dismay.

This command was obeyed: and in a few minutes Pierre Chambel was in the custody of the officers of justice.

## Chapter V: The Catastrophe

Six weeks after the events which are detailed in the preceding chapter, the following scene took place at the residence of the Chambels.

Laura was lying upon her death-bed; and by the side of that couch sat the Abbé Norton and Madame de Moreney. The mark of the Destroying Angel was already upon the countenance of the dying woman: she breathed with difficulty; and her eyes, once so brilliant, were cold and glazed.

‘My dear madam,’ said the abbé, ‘console yourself. M. Fortin is exercising all his influence – and it is great – to obtain a commutation of the fearful sentence; but I dare not tell you to hope. The deed for which M. Chambel is condemned – coupled with the murderous attack on the abbé, – that attack which was so singularly proved to have been committed by your unhappy husband –’

‘Alas ! I know that there is no hope,’ murmured Laura faintly. ‘But let me exert myself to speak the few words which I desired you, Madame de Moreney – to hear – and to hear which,’ she added emphatically, ‘I this morning requested you to come hither.’

‘You speak bitterly,’ said Madame de Moreney: ‘I know not how I can have earned for myself your anger.’

‘It was precisely to explain this that I have requested your presence,’ continued Laura, rising a little in her bed, and supporting herself upon the pillows.

‘Proceed: I listen,’ said Madame de Moreney.

‘Shall I retire ?’ demanded the Abbé Norton.

‘No, sir,’ exclaimed Laura; ‘you are a friend of Monsieur and Madame de Moreney; and it will be as well for you to hear what I now have to say. Madam,’ she continued, turning towards the lady who sat by her bed-side, ‘you love my husband ! Nay, deny it not: I had positive proof that you, the woman of mature age, dared address a confession of tenderness to my husband, a young man whose passions unfortunately have not been curbed by the experience of years.’

‘Ah ! Madame Chambel,’ ejaculated Madame de Moreney, ‘take care what you say ! Why assail my character at a moment when –’

‘When I am about to appear before my Maker,’ added Laura solemnly: ‘and therefore is my assertion the more worthy of belief, and should convey a more impressive lesson to your mind. Yes, madam, I read a portion of your letter – of that letter which you addressed to the unfortunate young man who owed so deep a debt of gratitude, if not love, to me. You should know that I sacrificed everything for that young man, and that my affection for him led to the fatal crime for which he is doomed to suffer. He was obscure – and I raised him up; he was poor – and I made him comparatively wealthy; he had talent – and I encouraged him to cultivate it. He had no place, no rank, no name in society, until I gave him all. An orphan, or at least a foundling, whom poor peasants reared in charity, he owed everything to me. Ah ! madam, it was cutting to my soul to see him inveigled into your meshes. You weep, madam; but you would appreciate all my feelings had you seen that young man as I first saw him – in an obscure state – dwelling in a miserable hut on Vans-la-pavée common –’

‘Vans-la-pavée common !’ ejaculated Madame de Moreney, with horror depicted on her countenance, down which the tears were trickling from her eyes.

‘Vans-la-pavée common,’ proceeded Laura, surprised at this interruption; ‘and that hut was the residence of him who is now my husband.’

‘And the names of those peasants who brought him up ?’ cried Madame de Moreney, with singular wildness of manner: ‘speak – speak ! their names ? – what were their names ?’

‘Lemoine,’ answered Laura.

‘And the Christian name of your husband ?’

‘Oh, we disguised our real names when we came to live in Paris,’ said Laura: ‘my husband was known in his childhood as Auguste.’

‘Merciful heavens, it is the same !’ cried Madame de Moreney; then, turning towards the Abbé Norton, she said in a hoarse and hollow tone, ‘He whom we have known as Pierre Chambel is our son –our child – the fruit of our love in my early youth ! Heaven have mercy upon me !’

‘Our son ! what mean you, wretched woman ?’ cried the abbé. ‘Was the story that you told me of his death, ere I left the army and entered the church –’

‘That story was false,’ said Madame de Monterey: ‘I entrusted the innocent little being to those peasants, and promised to provide for his maintenance. But I left the neighbourhood with my family, as you well know and –’

‘My husband your son !’ cried Laura. ‘Oh, madam now all earthly influence must be used to save him ! Tell me, madam – tell me – you will do all you can to save your son ?’

‘I will, I will, Laura !’ said Madame de Moreney, sobbing violently; then, turning towards the Abbé Norton, she said ‘You possess the power to save him: the Archbishop of Paris is your patron – you have only to ask and he will accede. His influence with the court can secure the royal mercy. Go – lose not a moment.’

‘Yes,’ cried the Abbé, ‘I will save my son – he shall be saved.’

And the priest rushed from the room in a state of mind more readily imagined than described.

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Pierre Chambel’s life was saved, but on condition that he should remain for a period of ten years in a gloomy prison.

On the same day that this commutation of his original sentence was made known to the heart-broken wife, the hand of death closed her eyes for ever. But she died with a smile upon her lips; for she reflected that the unhappy young man had now ample time for repentance; and that in another clime, at the expiration of his term of imprisonment, he might yet atone for the errors and crimes of his earlier years.

This hope has been fulfilled; but it was only when Madame de Moreney was upon her death-bed seven years ago that Pierre Chambel became acquainted with the names of the authors of his being.

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<sup>[1]</sup> £400 at the time of publication.