

‘The Warrior’s Love’

It was in the evening of the 20th of December 1793 that a French officer, mounted on a handsome charger of English breed, rode hastily through the gates of Toulon, and struck into a bye-road in a north-easterly direction. No sooner was he beyond the view of the last sentries whom he passed, and who saluted him as he hastily rode onwards, than he put spurs to his horse and quickened his pace almost to a gallop. On his left hand the beams of the setting sun fell faintly upon the long and precipitous chain of mountains which overhang the naval arsenal of France; and on his right the shades of evening were already involving the horizon and distant scenery in obscurity. The temperature was, however, peculiarly mild for the season of the year; and the gallant soldier appeared to rejoice at being able to ride over the fields in the vicinity of Toulon at will.

There was a species of triumph upon his brow, a light of satisfaction in his eye, and a smile of mingled scorn and pleasure upon his lip, which betrayed the strong passions that were working in his mind, and denoted the military ardour that inspired his breast. He was below the middle height, but symmetrically formed, and of good proportions; his eyes were blue, and his hair was dark; and in his mien there was something that bespoke a consciousness of superiority or of rank. On the whole, he was an individual upon whom the passer-by would not have cast an indifferent nor careless glance; or if he had, he would turn to gaze upon that form again.

The officer pursued his way, and did not halt until he had accomplished a distance of about five miles; he then turned abruptly away from the bye-road he had been pursuing, and hastened towards a cottage situated in the midst of a field. A few yards from this habitation was a stable, in which the officer carefully put up his horse; and having performed this important duty, he proceeded to the cottage.

Arrived at the door, he gave two or three knocks with the handle of his sword, and he was immediately admitted by one of the most lovely creatures that ever saw the light of day. It were in vain to attempt to describe those faultless beauties, which no artificial means were employed to enhance. A simple gown, formed according to the prevailing fashion of the time, only partially concealed a breast of snow, which beat quickly and audibly as the soldier folded the fair tenant of that cottage in a fond embrace. Her long dark hair fell over her white shoulders in profusion; her jet black eyes flashed the fire of delight when they met the glances of her lover; and her smiling lips revealed a set of the most beautiful and even teeth in the world. Well did the warrior know how to appreciate the possession of such charms, and well did he return the fervent embrace in which he was clasped. But as soon as this first token of a mutual affection had taken place, the eye of that houri of the earth fell upon the martial garb of her lover; and, in a trembling voice she said ‘Heavens ! Victor, wherefore art thou guilty of such imprudence ? This very morning only did a party of English forage the neighbourhood –’

‘They will overrun it no more, Celeste,’ interrupted the soldier, with an ill-concealed smile of triumph: ‘this morning, also, have they evacuated the town.’

‘And the French are victorious !’ cried Celeste, again clasping him whom she named Victor in her arms. ‘And now you may fearlessly visit your own Celeste – and you will not be obliged to come in disguise and by stealth. Oh ! how I will pray for the gallant hero who has led our troops to victory – how I will worship the name of Bonaparte !’

‘It is true,’ observed the officer, slowly withdrawing himself from the arms of the fond girl, and sinking into a chair; ‘Napoleon is the victor, and he will doubtless achieve other conquests to immortalize that name at which the allies have already learnt to tremble !’

‘Ah !’ exclaimed Celeste, ‘and now you are about to fall into one of your musing moods, when the success of your fellow-soldiers should fill your heart with joy. I almost begin to think, Victor, that thou art jealous of thy commander – of this Bonaparte, who has led thee to victory.’

‘Childish idea !’ said the officer, with a smile.

‘Wherefore encourage it, then ?’ continued the tender Celeste; ‘our time is but short; you know that at ten my father returns, and that in the brief interval which we have for conversation I have much to say. I would ask you concerning the operations of the siege, and the manner in which you captured the town; but you appear angry and vexed if I mention the name of Bonaparte, and you know that I would rather die than offend you.’

The officer took the hand of Celeste and pressed it tenderly; and then looking anxiously in her face, he said ‘Young girl, you are a soldier’s daughter, and you share a soldier’s love. By the honour of those who care for you, answer me ! Does your father suspect that you receive during his absence the visit of an officer of the republican army ?’

‘No, Victor,’ was the firm reply; ‘were he acquainted with – with – my love,’ added the beautiful girl in a low whisper, ‘he would kill me.’

‘He is, then, so truly staunch to the exiled family of the Bourbons ?’ continued the officer.

‘I have told you his secret, Victor,’ answered Celeste, ‘because I know you will not betray it – because you are a soldier, and you know what honour is – and because I have nothing concealed from you.’

‘Dear Celeste, I must not curse the fanaticism that has favoured our love,’ exclaimed the French officer in an impassioned manner; ‘I can only deplore the blindness which prompts your sire to favour a cause rejected by Heaven, and implore the Deity to protect him for his daughter’s sake.’

‘If he were detected, then, Victor, at one of those odious private assemblies which he attends nightly, what would be his fate ?’ demanded Celeste, anxiously gazing upon her lover’s countenance.

‘Death !’ returned the officer, abruptly; then, fearful that he might have said too much, he added, ‘unless intercession from powerful quarters were made in his behalf.’

‘Alas ! my dear unhappy father !’ cried Celeste, and she gave way to a violent flood of tears.

‘Console yourself, dear girl,’ exclaimed Victor, ‘and let us hope that the day is not far distant when the distracted state of this country may yield to measures of pacification and leniency. But meseems that the time has passed quickly during the happy moments I have been with thee, Celeste; and, till our next interview, may Heaven bless thee !’

‘And is the hour for parting already so near ?’ murmured the weeping girl. ‘But, you will come again soon, Victor, will you not ? for you must remember how much need I have of all your love – of all your kindness – and how dependent I am upon your affection – your attachment – your honour !’ added Celeste in a scarcely audible tone of voice, as she concealed her face upon the soldier’s breast, and clasped her arms around his neck. ‘Do you hear me, Victor; and will you not reply ?’

The officer pressed his weeping mistress to his bosom; and as she raised her angelic face to his, she felt a tear trickle upon her forehead; – and she was happy, for she knew it to be the sacred dew of tenderness and love. A few hurried words breathed on either side vows of constant and unalterable affection; and at length Victor tore himself from the arms of Celeste, hastened to the stable, leaped upon his horse, and was speedily beyond the range of those anxious glances which followed him as far as the straining eyes of the beautiful girl could send them on his road back to Toulon.

Scarcely had the echoes ceased to repeat the sounds of the retreating horse’s feet, when a venerable-looking man of about five and fifty, whose locks were as white as snow, and on whose brow misfortune had stamped untimely wrinkles, entered the cottage. ‘All is lost – hopeless !’ cried the father of Celeste, throwing himself upon a chair. ‘The allies are defeated !’

Celeste was above dissimulation; she would not feign to be ignorant of the fact just mentioned by her father; she accordingly said nothing.

‘Yes,’ continued the old man, ‘all is lost ! the charter of 1790 is no more, the cause of Louis is now hopeless, and the first naval arsenal of France is again in the hands of Barras, Freron, and this upstart Bonaparte ! The energies of the Convention will be directed against all the ancient adherents of the royal family; and even in this solitary – this old – this miserable cottage, Celeste, your father is not safe !’

While the old man thus gave vent to his indignation and anguish, Celeste spread a frugal but plentiful meal upon the table, of which, however, neither she nor her father partook with any degree of appetite. The one was occupied with all that had ensued during her interview with her lover, and the other was totally engrossed with the ruinous consequences which the recapture of Toulon would entail upon the royal cause. At a late hour they retired to rest; and on the following morning, contrary to his general habit, Celeste's father left the house early, and remained away the whole day. He returned in the evening at the usual time, and when the supper was dispensed with, in the most literal meaning of the phrase, he addressed his daughter as follows: –

‘Celeste, we must depart this night from this cottage which has sheltered us hitherto. There is no longer any security for your father in the south of France.’

‘Depart !’ exclaimed the terrified girl, turning deadly pale – ‘depart !’ she cried a second time; ‘and whither shall we go ?’

‘To Paris,’ was the firm reply.

‘To destruction, then !’ said Celeste, her heart sinking within her at the idea of her father's danger, and the thought of leaving the vicinity of her lover's station.

‘To the only place where my poor services can be useful to my king, and where suspicion of my designs can alone be avoided.’

Celeste made no reply; she heard in those few syllables the death-blow to all her hopes. Her courage gave way – she felt her heart sink within her, and pale and motionless she sat gazing upon her father with a look in which astonishment was mingled with the most terrible despair. The old man did not notice the miserable predicament into which the avowal of his resolutions had thrown his unhappy daughter; but after a few moments' reflection, he rose, kissed her forehead, took a light, and retired to his bed-chamber.

No sooner had he left the apartment, when Celeste awoke from the species of stupor into which she had been plunged, and appeared to be as energetic and decided in her actions as she had a moment before been paralyzed and uncertain what course to adopt. Having hastily enveloped herself in large cloak, and shaded her lovely though pale features beneath the folds of a hood, she silently stole away from the cottage, and pursued the road that led towards Toulon. Fortunately the weather was favourable to the task the unhappy girl had imposed upon herself, but the distance – how was she to accomplish it ?

Heaven only knows with what hopes she supported her strength and courage during the weary five long miles she had to walk in the silence and darkness of the night. True, however, it is, that in an hour and a half from the moment she left the cottage she entered the gates of Toulon, which since the recapture had been thrown open, as the allies had vacated the country. There, for the

first time, did it occur to her that she was unacquainted with the name of her lover: she knew him but as Victor. He had one day stopped at the cottage, with a small detachment of soldiers, to ask for milk to quench his thirst; from that moment he visited her as regularly as circumstances would permit. The reader divines the rest – but Celeste only knew him as Victor !

This was a dreadful embarrassment, and the heart of the poor girl nearly sank within her as she recollected that she was without information relative to her lover's abode, or money to obtain it. He had told her that he was a subaltern officer in the army commanded by Bonaparte. But this was too indefinite and slender a knowledge upon which she could address herself to a soul; and thus at twelve o'clock at night, friendless and unprotected, she found herself in the streets of Toulon.

She had seated herself upon the step of a door, and was giving vent to her grief in a violent flood of tears, when the sounds of approaching footsteps fell upon her ears. Timidly did she raise her head – a cry escaped her – she started – it could not be, and yet her sight did not deceive her; the individual who drew nigh was Victor himself !

In a moment the lovers were in each other's arms.

'For God's sake, Celeste,' said the officer in a low voice, when he had led her to a recess formed by an open gateway, and placed her upon a seat, 'what has brought you to Toulon ? Has anything happened to your father ?'

'Nothing; we leave the neighbourhood to-morrow morning,' was Celeste's laconic answer.

The officer appeared absorbed in thought.

'You are offended with me for taking this imprudent step !' said Celeste; 'but I was unhappy – I was wretched – I feared that I should never see you more; and separation from you were not only eventual disgrace, but death ! Oh ! Victor, think of all my love – my affection; recollect the sacrifice I have made for you – the sacrifice of all that woman deems, or ought to deem, most dear; and do not abandon her who holds in her bosom a counterpart of yourself !'

'Oh ! pardon me, Celeste !' exclaimed the soldier, clasping the agonized girl to his breast, 'pardon me ! Not for millions of millions of worlds would I be unkind to thee. I was merely reflecting on the danger we should have to encounter if this separation should take place.'

'My father is decided,' said the weeping Celeste.

'And to-morrow morning you depart for Paris ?'

'Irrevocably, I fear.'

‘On your arrival in Paris write to me under the name of Victor, directed to the Post-Office, Toulon,’ said the soldier, in a hurried tone of voice.

Celeste murmured an affirmative, and her heart rose with momentary hope.

‘We must now separate,’ continued Victor; ‘I will order a carriage to take you as far as the turning which leads to your cottage.’

‘It is unnecessary, dear, dear, Victor ! But remember, I cannot long conceal my position from the eyes of my father.’

‘Rely upon me,’ cried Victor, ‘I will never desert my child.’

‘And the mother ?’ asked the poor girl with a sigh; but Victor was already several paces from her, and his voice, which commanded her to wait for him, fell upon her ears in a low but impressive accent.

Ten minutes glided away, and during that brief period Celeste minutely reviewed the history of her past life, the sameness of which had been interrupted by many episodes. She remembered the time when she was free, and gay, and happy, and innocent, in the magnificent hotel inhabited by herself and her father – for her mother had been long dead – in the Faubourg Saint Germain in Paris; then she thought of the volcanic burst of the terrible revolution from the bosom of the people, the speedy flight of herself and sire from their lordly halls and gilded saloons, their sojourn at the cottage, the arrival of her lover, the weakness of which her affection had rendered her culpable, and her present predicament, at the age of eighteen, without a female friend in the world to advise or console her !

But the chain of these meditations was broken by the noise of a carriage that came hastily up the street, and in another moment she again clasped in the arms of him whom she adored. A long, long embrace, an interchange of reciprocal views of attachment, and then – the separation ensued. The brain of Celeste whirled, and her mind seemed bewildered, as the carriage rolled rapidly towards the solitary cottage in which she had left her unsuspecting parent.

By the interest of some of the party with whom Celeste’s father was associated, he had obtained a passport for himself and daughter; and through the aid of this important document they arrived safely in Paris, and under assumed names took obscure lodgings in the Marais.

It may readily be supposed that Celeste’s first occupation was to write a long letter to Victor, to which he duly replied; but his epistle, though it teemed with every promise of continued attachment and love possible, nevertheless conveyed a death-blow to the hopes of the unfortunate girl, who therein learned, with terror and dismay, that Bonaparte had been appointed commandant of the conventional troops at Paris, and that Victor was to accompany him to that city; but that he dare not see her, on account of the dangers that menaced her father. The letter

also contained a hope that her sire would pardon the frailty she had committed, and concluded with all the soothing sentiments and asseverations which the evidently afflicted mind of her lover could suggest.

The letter dropped from the hands of the unhappy girl, and she fell senseless upon the floor. An aged female domestic, who attended upon herself and father, hastened to assist her; but it was long ere Celeste opened her languid eyes, and when she again glanced wildly around her, the first object that met her sight was the mourning countenance of her father, with the letter – the fatal letter – in his hand. The servant was ordered to leave the room, and Celeste fell at her parent's feet.

'Daughter,' said the old man, 'it is useless to reproach thee. A villain, a traitor to his king and to the laws of honour, has deceived – has fascinated – has beguiled thee ! Thy child will bear no father's name –'

'Oh ! say not so,' interrupted the distract Celeste; 'he is honourable – he is upright; but he is doubtless poor and unable yet to maintain a wife; for I am his wife in the sight of Heaven.'

'The child, I repeat,' said the old man, 'will bear no father's name, for that father wilt thou never see again, or full little do I know of human nature. Wherefore the assumed Christian name of *Victor* ? Wherefore this disguise ? If *you* could entrust you honour in his hands, Celeste *he* might well have confided his name to thee !'

'Alas ! it is but too true !' murmured the unhappy daughter, a horrible suspicion relative to her lover's fidelity now for the first time entering her mind.

'Too true !' cried the old man bitterly: 'ah ! indeed, it is too true. But, in these stormy times, to whom can we look – to whom can we appeal for justice ? Were I to seek the general of the Conventional troops, that upstart Bonaparte would hand me over to the tender mercies of the public accuser,'

'Oh ! dream not of it, my dear father !' screamed Celeste, in agony of woe: 'we are now alone together in the world; and though it appears too true that my lover has deserted me, I know that he is unhappy; and willingly would I resign all the joys in this life to see him at my feet, and all my hopes in another to save my father from degradation and disgrace.'

'Oh ! still endeared daughter !' cried the old man, folding that lovely image of Niobe to his breast; 'twas my fault; for had I watched thee as I ought, all this would not have happened.' – 'But tell me,' he said after a momentary pause, during which the father and child mingled their tears together in sweet communion, 'does *he*—does this Victor know my name and rank ?'

Celeste murmured an affirmative.

‘Then are we again wanderers on the face of the earth !’ exclaimed the venerable supporter of the old *régime*; and with these words he hastily left the room abandoning Celeste to all the agonies of grief and despair.

An hour elapsed, and he returned with a passport in his possession. Celeste guessed well her father’s resolves, and dared not combat them; but when the post-chaise, that was to bear them to a frontier town, left the faubourgs of the mighty city behind it, her tears flowed plenteously, and she felt that the only consolation which she now possessed was the hope of speedily becoming a mother.

Time wore away; and days, like the grains of sand in the hour-glass, marked in successive order the lapse of those even portions which man has designated in the vast scale of eternity. Celeste became a mother in a strange land; and Britain was the birth-place of her son, on whom she bestowed the name of Victor.

Five years passed away, and still the active agents of the exiled dynasty of France did not despair of again accomplishing a revolution favourable to the interests of the royalists; and the disturbances and disaffections amongst parties in Paris in 1799 appeared to furnish a proper opportunity for the renewal of their intrigues. Accordingly, Celeste’s father, in spite of the remonstrances and prayers of his daughter, proceeded to Paris, and conferred with the secret supporters of the Bourbons. But he had not been long in the French metropolis when he was arrested, and brought to a summary trial before the revolutionary tribunals. The result of the examination, as the reader may suppose, was that sentence of death was passed upon Henri, Count d’Armanon – Celeste’s father !

The fatal morning arrived – and the unhappy man, who had charged a faithful friend to make his daughter aware of the sad event in case no reprieve should be granted, was led forth to execution. He mounted the scaffold in the Place Louis XVI with a firm step, and was prepared to submit to his doom, when a gendarme galloped through the crowd and presented a letter to the officer on duty. That functionary broke the seal, read the inclosure, and handed it to the prisoner. The count seized it, ran his eye hastily over its contents, and perused the following words: – ‘Order of reprieve and free passage over the French frontiers accorded to citizen d’Armanon, commonly known as Henri, Count of that name,

The Consular Committee,

November 11, 1799. Bonaparte, Sieyes and Ducas.’

The Count breathed a prayer to Heaven for this unexpected act of republican mercy, and was about to return the precious document to the officer on duty, when a few words written with a pencil inside the envelope met his eyes. He did not hesitate to make himself acquainted with their import; and to his increased and inexpressible surprise he read these lines:

‘Victor, for the injuries not wantonly inflicted upon a daughter, has interceded with his superiors, and obtained, as a slight reparation of the wrongs done to a noble family, the reprieve of a father’s life.’

The Count wiped away a tear from his eye as he descended the steps which led from the scaffold where his fortunes had experienced so great a vicissitude in so short time. The Consular Committee had only been organised the day before, and this act of mercy was one of its earliest decrees. In a few days the count was again clasped in the arms of his affectionate daughter, whose astonishment may readily be conceived when her father recounted the adventures he had met with in the French metropolis.

Another five years elapsed, and the little Victor had numbered nine summers, when a missive for his grandfather recalled the exiled family to France. Napoleon had just been declared Emperor of the French; his brothers, Joseph and Louis, were raised to the rank of princes; and the soldier of fortune now became the dictator of the destinies of Europe. A free permission to return to his native land, on a solemn pledge being given that he would not meddle with the political intrigues of the loyalists, was accorded to the Count d’Armanon; and a brief letter, which accompanied the official document, intimated that this act of grace was also the work of the penitent Victor. Gladly did the count and his daughter, with her promising boy, avail themselves of this license; and they arrived in Paris towards the end of November 1804, in time to witness the coronation of the Emperor and the Empress Josephine, at which the head of the Catholic church was invited to be present. The venerable pontiff crossed the snow-clad Alps in that dreary season, in obedience to the commands of the controller of the fate of nations, and prepared himself to anoint, with the oil of sanctity, the imperial hero, whose sceptre was the glittering sword and whose orb was the thunderbolt of war.

Gorgeous was the *cortège* that on the morning of the 2nd of December – a few days after the arrival of the Count – proceeded to the Cathedral of Nôtre Dame; and fondly did the anxious Celeste hope that in the glittering cavalcade she might behold the father of her child. She did not doubt that he was indeed attached to the imperial train or held some public office of importance; and while fond anticipations filled her breast, she strained her eyes to gaze on each individual of the procession as it passed by the house which the Count inhabited on the Quai des Orfevres, in its progress towards Nôtre Dame.

The banners which the French had wrested from the hands of the Egyptians and the Austrians – those emblems of the battles of the Pyramids, Marengo, Hohenlinden, &c. &c. – fluttered gaily to the breeze and proclaimed the triumphs of the hero of France. The mighty train swept onwards like a vast rolling ocean: to use the expressive words of de Béranger:

‘And they were blythe and happy all,

Through crowds admiring moving on;

While thousands cried, 'May blessings fall

From heaven on Gallia's fav'rite son.'

Even the aged count himself enjoyed the jocund sight; and while he deplored the downfall of the ancient dynasty he revered, he nevertheless felt proud of calling those heroes his fellow-countrymen who had already filled worlds with their fame, and who threatened to give laws to the universe.

Time had made sad changes in Celeste. Her eyes had lost much of their fire, and their glance trembled with melancholy and sadness. Her cheek was pale, and a hectic tinge of red replaced the hues of youth and health which had decked it in former times. Her luxuriant hair alone retained its primal beauty; for the eye of the most indifferent could readily discern that afflictions and sorrows had deeply lacerated the heart of her who, however, retained the burthen of her woes locked up in her own breast. She had never ceased to encourage a distant hope that Victor might still be faithful, should fortune prosper his undertakings; and this hope alone armed her with that fortitude which was necessary to nerve her to bring up her child, as if she could one day present him to his father, and bid that sire be proud of a promising offspring. Had the chord of that hope been snapped in her heart, it is more than probable that the strings of life would have broken simultaneously; for if she did not now love with so fiery, ardent, a passion as in her early youth, she at least loved as tenderly and as well.

Deeply anxious was she therefore to watch the various heroes who formed the imperial cavalcade, and ascertain if Victor were not among them.

'The emperor is now approaching, Celeste,' said the count, 'the foot-soldiers have all passed by – and the imperial guards are in sight.'

'Perhaps he may be with them !' murmured Celeste in an almost inaudible tone of voice.

'Indulge not in hopes that may never be fulfilled, dearest child,' said the old man, tenderly glancing towards his daughter. 'Remember the words I uttered to you in Paris some years ago – "Your son shall never bear a father's name;" for that of Victor was too obviously an assumed one.'

This was uttered in such a tone that the innocent boy heard not the remark; and Celeste turned mournfully once more towards the window to watch the ranks of the imperial guards that were now passing down the quay.

At length the carriage in which the Emperor and Empress were seated came into sight; and handkerchiefs were waving – and garlands were flung on all sides – and shouts of loyalty rent the air, to welcome Napoleon !

‘If Victor be attached to the emperor – as I am inclined to suppose he is,’ observed the count, ‘we shall see him now.’

But scarcely had the words issued from the old man’s lips when his daughter uttered a piercing shriek, and sank senseless upon the floor just as the imperial carriage passed the window.

‘Heavens, Celeste,’ cried the terrified father; ‘you have then discovered him who you love?’

The wretched mother opened her dying eyes, pressed her child to her bosom, folded him in a long and wild embrace, and then glancing towards her father, she said in a low but impressive tone – ‘My son, indeed, can never bear his parent’s name.’

‘And that name?’ cried the count, in an agony of mind scarcely to be imagined, much less described; for he saw that his daughter had received a death-blow, and that the vital spark was hovering upon her lips ready to depart to a purer world: ‘and that name – what is it?’

‘NAPOLEON!’ returned the dying mother; as she fell backwards, to rise no more.