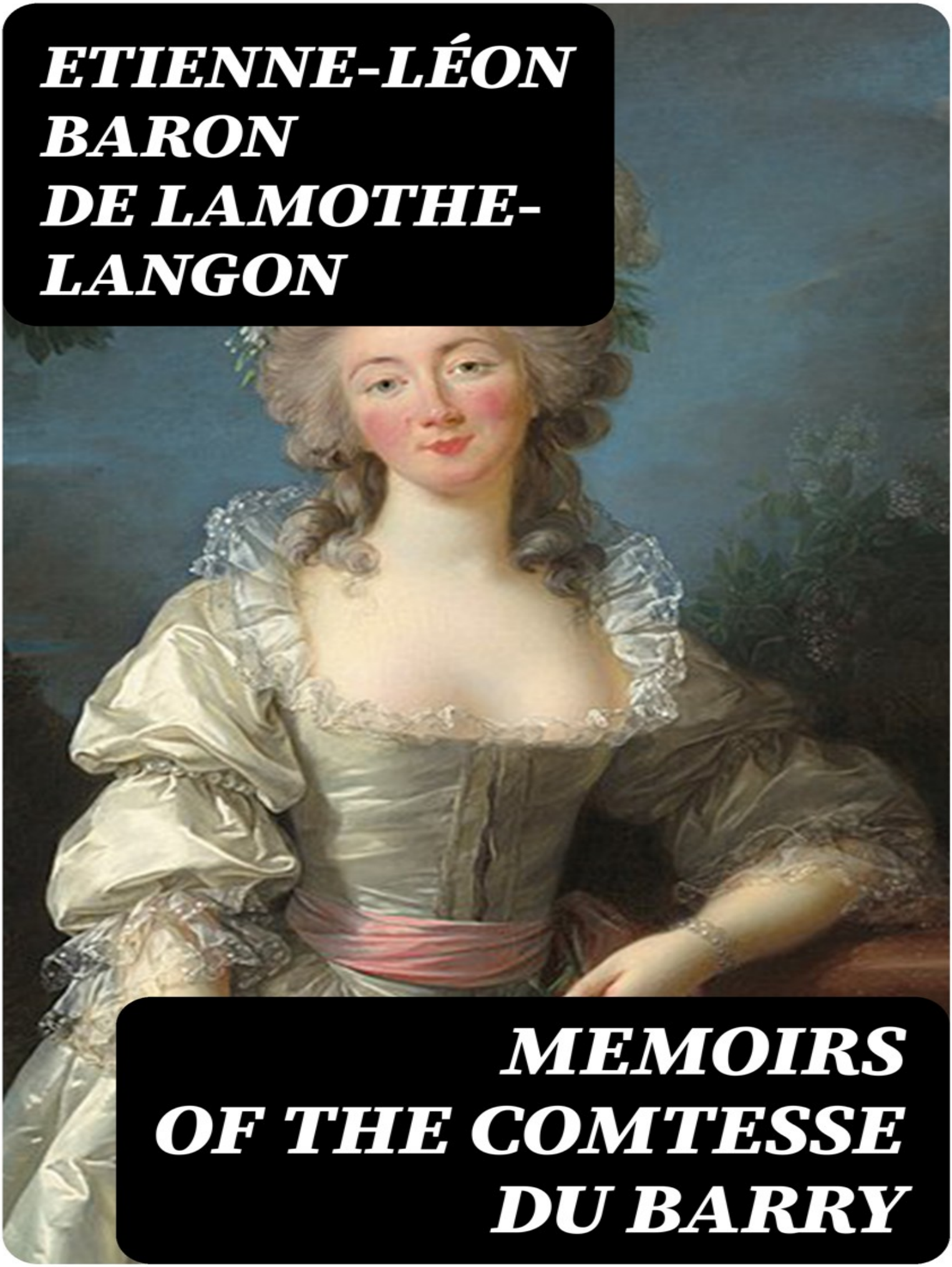
ETIENNE-LÉON BARON DE LAMOTHE-LANGON



MEMOIRS OF THE COMTESSE DU BARRY

Etienne-Léon baron de Lamothe-Langon

Memoirs of the Comtesse Du Barry

With Minute Details of Her Entire Career as Favorite of Louis XV

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SPECIAL INTRODUCTION BY ROBERT ARNOT

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Up to the time of the Du Barry the court of France had been the stage where the whole political and human drama of that country was enacted. Under Louis XV the drama had been transformed into parades—parades which were of as much importance to the people as to those who took part in them. The spectators, hitherto silent, now began to hiss and be moved. The scene of the comedy was changed, and the play was continued among the spectators. The old theatre became an ante-chamber or a dressing-room, and was no longer important except in connection with the Cardinal de Bernis and the Duc de Richelieu, or Madame de Pompadour and Madame du Barry.

The monarchy had still a step to take towards its downfall. It had already created the *Pare aux Cerfs* (Louis XV's seraglio), but had not yet descended to the Parisian house of prostitution. It made this descent leaning on the arm of Madame du Barry. Madame du Barry was a moral sister to Manon Lescaut, but instead of taking herself off to Louisiana to repent, she plunged into the golden whirlpool at Versailles as a finish to her career. Could the coaches of a King mean more than the ordinary carriage of an abandoned girl?

Jeanne Vaubernier—known in the bagnios by the name of Mademoiselle Lange—was born at Vaucouleurs, as was Jeanne d'Arc. Better still, this later Jeanne said openly at Versailles—dared she say otherwise?—that she was descended in a straight line from the illustrious, the venerated, the august, sacred, national maid, Jeanne. "Why

did Du Barry come to Paris?’” says Leon Gozlan in that account of the Château de Lucienne which makes a brilliant and learned chapter in the history of France. “Does one ever know precisely why things are done? She obeyed the magnet which attracts to Paris all who in themselves have a title to glory, to celebrity, or to misfortune. Du Barry had a pretty, provincial face, bright and charming, a face astonished at everything, hair soft and ash-colored, blue eyes, veiled and half open, and a skin fair with rose tints. She was a child of destiny. Who could have said, when she crossed the great town in her basket cart, which rolled lazily along on its massive, creaking wheels, that some day she would have equipages more beautiful than any of those which covered her with mud in passing, and on her arms more laces and diamonds than any of these ladies attended by footmen in liveries?”

When Jeanne left the provinces to come to Paris, she found her native country. She was granted the freedom of the city, and expanded in her joy like a delicate plant transplanted into a hothouse. She found herself at home for the first time; and felt that she could rule as a despot over all frequenters of the streets. She learned fashion and love at one and the same time. Gourdan had a hat made for her, and, as a reward, initiated her into the customs. But she was called to other destinies.

One day, when she was walking in the Tuileries, a lunatic—and lunatics have second sight—asked her favor when she should become queen. Du Barry said to herself: “This man is mad.” But then she thought of the Pompadour, blushed—it was the only time—and turned her eyes towards Versailles.

But Versailles was an unhoped-for shore to such a girl as this, a girl known to all Paris. Would the King care to be the lover of one who had ruled all his courtesans? Who could say? The King often wearied of what he had. Had not a poet already been found who compared her to Venus:

O Jeanne, thy beauty seduces
And charms the whole world;
In vain does the duchess redden
And the princess growl;
They know that Venus rides proudly
The foam of the wave.

The poet, while not Voltaire, was no less a man than Bouffiers.

While the King was seeking a mistress—a nocturnal reverse of Diogenes, fleeing from the lanterns of the wise—he found Jeanne Vaubernier. He thought he could love her for one evening. “Not enough,” said she, “you must love me until broad daylight.” So he loved her for a whole day. What should one eat in order to be loved by royalty? Was it necessary to have a coat of arms? She had them in number, because she had been loved by all the great names in the book of heraldry. And so she begged the Viscount Jean du Barry to give her the title of viscountess. “Better still,” exclaimed Jean, “I will give you the title of countess. My brother will marry you; he is a male scamp, and you are the female. What a beautiful marriage!”

So they were united. The newly made countess was solemnly presented at court by a countess of an ancient date, namely, the Countess de Bearn. King Voltaire protested, in a satire entitled “*The Court of King Petaud*” (topsy-turvy), afterwards denying it. The duc de Choiseul protested, France protested, but all Versailles threw itself passionately at the feet of the new countess. Even the daughters of the King paid her court, and allowed her to call them by their pet names: Loque, Chiffe, and Graille. The King, jealous of this gracious familiarity, wished her to call him by some pet name, and so the Bacchante, who believed that through the King she held all France in her hand, called him “La France,” making him a wife to his Gray Musketeers.

Oh, that happy time! Du Barry and Louis XV hid their life—like the sage—in their little apartments. She honeyed his chocolate, and he himself made her coffee. Royalty

consecrated a new verb for the dictionary of the Academy, and Madame du Barry said to the King: “At home, I can love you to madness.” The King gave the castle of Lucienne to his mistress in order to be able to sing the same song. Truly the Romeo and Juliet *de la main gauche*.

Du Barry threw out her fish-wifely epithets with ineffable tenderness. She only opened her eyes half way, even when she took him by the throat. The King was enchanted by these humors. It was a new world. But someone said to him: “Ah, Sire, it is easy to see that your Majesty has never been at the house of Gourdan.”

Yet Du Barry was adored by poets and artists. She extended both hands to them. Jeanne’s beauty had a penetrating, singular charm. At once she was blonde and brunette—black eyebrows and lashes with blue eyes, rebellious light hair with darker shadows, cheeks of ideal contour, whose pale rose tints were often heightened by two or three touches—a lie “formed by the hand of Love,” as anthology puts it—a nose with expressive nostrils, an air of childlike candour, and a look seductive to intoxication. A bold yet shrinking Venus, a Hebe yet a Bacchante. With much grace Voltaire says:

“Madame:

“M. de la Borde tells me that you have ordered him to kiss me on both cheeks for you:

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“What! Two kisses at life’s end
What a passport to send me!
Two is one too much, Adorable Nymph;
I should die of pleasure at the first.
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“He showed me your portrait, and be not offended, Madame, when I tell you that I have taken the liberty of giving that the two kisses.”

Perhaps Voltaire would not have written this letter, had he not read the one written by the King to the Duc de Choiseul, who refused to pay court to the left-hand queen:

“My Cousin,

“The discontent which your acts cause me forces me to exile you to Chanteloup, where you will take yourself within twenty-four hours. I would have sent you farther away were it not for the particular esteem in which I hold Madame de Choiseul. With this, I pray God, my cousin, to take you into His safe and holy protection.

“Louis.”

This exile was the only crime of the courtesan. On none of her enemies did she close the gates of the Bastille. And more than once did she place a pen in the hands of Louis XV with which to sign a pardon. Sometimes, indeed, she was ironic in her compassion.

“Madame,” said M. de Sartines to her one day, “I have discovered a rogue who is scattering songs about you; what is to be done with him?”

“Sentence him to sing them for a livelihood.”

But she afterwards made the mistake of pensioning Chevalier de Morande to buy silence.

The pleasures of the King and his favorite were troubled only by the fortune-tellers. Neither the King nor the countess believed in the predictions of the philosophers, but they did believe in divination. One day, returning from Choisy, Louis XV found under a cushion of his coach a slip of paper on which was transcribed this prediction of the monk Aimonius, the savant who could read all things from the vast book of the stars:

“As soon as Childeric had returned from Thuringia, he was crowned King of France And no sooner was he King than he espoused Basine, wife of the King of Thuringia. She came herself to find Childeric. The first night of the marriage, and before the King had retired, the queen begged Childeric to look from one of the palace windows which opened on a park, and tell what he saw there. Childeric looked out and, much terrified, reported to the princess that he had seen

tigers and lions. Basine sent him a second time to look out. This time the prince only saw bears and wolves, and the third time he perceived only cats and dogs, fighting and combating each other. Then Basine said to him: I will give you an explanation of what you have seen: The first figure shows you your successors, who will excel you in courage and power; the second represents another race which will be illustrious for their conquests, and which will augment your kingdom for many centuries; but the third denotes the end of your kingdom, which will be given over to pleasures and will lose to you the friendship of your subjects; and this because the little animals signify a people who, emancipated from fear of princes, will massacre them and make war upon each other."

Louis read the prediction and passed the paper to the Countess: "After us the end of the world," said she gaily. The King laughed, but the abbé de Beauvais celebrated high mass at Versailles after the carnival of 1774, and dared to say, in righteous anger: "This carnival is the last; yet forty days and Nineveh shall perish." Louis turned pale. "Is it God who speaks thus?" murmured he, raising his eyes to the altar. The next day he went to the hunt in grand style, but from that evening he was afraid of solitude and silence: "It is like the tomb; I do not wish to put myself in such a place," said he to Madame du Barry. The duc de Richelieu tried to divert him. "No," said he suddenly, as if the Trappist's denunciation had again recurred to him, "I shall be at ease only when these forty days have passed." He died on the fortieth day.

Du Barry believed neither in God nor in the devil, but she believed in the almanac of Liège. She scarcely read any book but this—faithful to her earliest habits. And the almanac of Liège, in its prediction for April, 1774, said: "A woman, the greatest of favorites, will play her last role." So Madame the Countess du Barry said without ceasing: "I shall

not be tranquil until these forty days have passed.” The thirty-seventh day the King went to the hunt attended with all the respect due to his rank. Jeanne wept in silence and prayed to God as one who has long neglected her prayers.

Louis XV had not neglected his prayers, and gave two hundred thousand livres to the poor, besides ordering masses at St. Geneviève. Parliament opened the shrine, and knelt gravely before that miraculous relic. The least serious of all these good worshippers was, strange to say, the curate of St. Geneviève: “Ah, well!” said he gaily, when Louis was dead, “let us continue to talk of the miracles of St. Geneviève. Of what can you complain? Is not the King dead?”

At the last moment it was not God who held the heart of Louis—it was his mistress. “Ask the Countess to come here again,” he said.

“Sire, you know that she has gone away,” they answered.

“Ah! has she gone? Then I must go!” So he departed.

His end drew forth some maledictions. There were insults even at his funeral services. “Nevertheless,” said one old soldier, “he was at the battle of Fontenoy.” That was the most eloquent funeral oration of Louis XV.

“The King is dead, long live the King!” But before the death of Louis XVI they cried: “The king is dead, long live the Republic!”

Rose-colored mourning was worn in the good city of Paris. The funeral oration of the King and a lament for his mistress were pronounced by Sophie Arnould, of which masterpiece of sacred eloquence the last words only are preserved: “Behold us orphaned both of father and mother.”

If Madame du Barry was one of the seven plagues of royalty, she died faithful to royalty. After her exile to Pont aux Dames she returned to Lucienne, where the duc de Cossé Brissac consoled her for the death of Louis XV. But

what she loved in Louis was that he was a king; her true country was Versailles; her true light was the sun of court life. Like Montespan, also a courtesan of high order, she often went in these dark days to cast a loving look upon the solitary park in the maze of the Trianon. Yet she was particularly happy at Lucienne.

I have compared her to Manon Lescaut, and I believe her to have been also a sister to Ganesin. All three were destroyed by passion.

One day she found herself still young at Lucienne, although her sun was setting. She loved the duc de Brissac, and how many pages of her past romance would she that day have liked to erase and forget!

“Why do you weep, Countess?” asked her lover.

“My friend,” she responded, “I weep because I love you, shall I say it? I weep because I am happy.”

She was right; happiness is a festival that should know no to-morrow. But on the morrow of her happiness, the Revolution knocked at the castle gate of Lucienne.

“Who goes there?”

“I am justice; prepare for destiny.”

The Queen, the true queen, had been good to her as to everybody. Marie Antoinette remembered that the favorite had not been wicked. The debts of Du Barry were paid and money enough was given to her so that she could still give with both hands. Lucienne became an echo of Versailles. Foreign kings and Parisian philosophers came to chat in its portals. Minerva visited shameless Venus. But wisdom took not root at Lucienne.

For the Revolution, alas! had to cut off this charming head, which was at one time the ideal of beauty—of court beauty. Madame du Barry gave hospitality to the wounded at the arrest of the queen. “These wounded youths have no other regret than that they have not died for a princess so worthy

as your Majesty," she said. "What I have done for these brave men is only what they have merited. I consoled them, and I respect their wounds when I think, Madame, that without their devotion, your Majesty would no longer be alive. Lucienne is yours, Madame, for was it not your beneficence which gave it to me? All I possess has come to me through the royal family. I have too much loyalty to forget it."

But negro Zamor became a citizen like Mirabeau. It was Zamor who took to Du Barry her lover's head. It was Zamor who denounced her at the club of the Jacobins. "The fealty (faith) of the black man is white," said the negro. But he learned how to make it red. Jeanne was imprisoned and tried before Dumas.

"Your age?"

"Forty-two years." She was really forty-seven. Coquetry even at the guillotine.

The public accuser, Fouquier Tinville, was not disarmed by the sweet voluptuousness still possessed by this pale and already fading beauty. He accused her of treason against the nation. Could the defender of Du Barry, who had also defended Marie Antoinette, find an eloquent word? No; Fouquier Tinville was more eloquent than Chauveau-Lagarde. So the mistress of Louis was condemned. It was eleven o'clock in the evening—the hour for supper at Versailles when she was queen!

She passed the night in prayer and weeping, or rather in a frenzy of fright. In the morning she said it was "too early to die"; she wished to have a little time in order to make some disclosures. The Comité sent someone to listen to her. What did she say? She revealed all that was hidden away at Lucienne; she gave word by word an inventory of the treasures she had concealed, forgetting nothing, for did not each word give her a second of time?

“Have you finished?” said the inquisitor. “No,” said Jeanne. “I have not mentioned a silver syringe concealed under the staircase!”

Meanwhile the horses of destiny stamped with impatience, and spectators were knocking at the prison gate. When they put her, already half dead, on the little cart, she bent her head and grew pale. The Du Barry alone—a sinner without redemption.

She saw the people in the square of Louis XV; she struck her breast three times and murmured: “It is my fault!” But this Christian resignation abandoned her when she mounted the scaffold—there where the statue of Louis XV had been—and she implored of the executioner:

“One moment, Mr. Executioner! One moment more!”

But the executioner was pitiless Sanson. It was block and the knife—without the “one moment!”

Such was the last bed of the Du Barry. Had the almanac of Liège only predicted to her that the one who would lead her to her bed for the last time would not be a King but a citizen executioner, it might have been—but why moralize?

Robert Arnot

To the Reader

As the early part of Madame du Barry’s career had little to differentiate it from the life of an ordinary courtezan, the editor has deemed it best to confine the memoirs to the years in her life which helped to make history.

—Editor
* “Editor here means the author, who is assuming
the persona of the editor of the Comtesse’s memoirs.

CHAPTER I

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Letter from Lebel—Visit from Lebel—Nothing conclusive—
Another visit from Lebel—Invitation to sup with the king—
Instructions of the comte Jean to the comtesse

One morning comte Jean entered my apartment, his face beaming with delight.

“Read,” said he, giving me a letter, “read, Jeannette: victory is ours. News from Morand. Lebel is coming to Paris, and will dine with us. Are we alone?”

“No, there are two of your countrymen whom you invited yesterday.”

“I will write and put them off. Morand alone must dine with Lebel; he ought to have a place at the feast which he furnishes with such good music. Come, my dear girl, we touch the moment of importance, it is in your beauty and power of pleasing that I place all my hopes. I think I may rely on you; but, above all, do not forget that you are my sister-in-law.”

“Brother-in-law,” said I, laughing, “it is not unnecessary that I should know decidedly to which of family I am married? The custom in France is not that a woman be the undivided property of three brothers.”

“That only happens in Venice,” replied the comte; “my brother Elie is too young, you must be the wife of Guillaume, my second brother.”

“Very well; I am the comtesse Guillaume du Barry; that does famously well; we like to know whom we are married to.”

After this conversation, comte Jean insisted on presiding at my toilette. He acquitted himself of the task, with a most laughable attention. During two good hours, at least, he

tormented first Henriette, and then the female hairdresser, for I had not yet followed the mode, which began to be very general, of having my hair dressed by a man. Comte Jean passed alternately from my dressing-room to the kitchen. He knew Lebel was a gallant and a gourmand, and he was anxious to please him in all senses at once.

At one o'clock I was under arms, and prepared to receive him on whom my destiny depended. As soon as I reached the drawing-room, comte Jean compelled me to submit to the test of a rigid examination.

His serious air amused me much as he gazed at me some time in solemn silence. At length his forehead relaxed, a smile of satisfaction played on his lips, and extending his arms to me, without venturing to touch me, "You are charming, divine," he said; "Lebel ought to go and hang himself if he does not fall down at your knees."

Soon afterwards the folding-doors were hastily opened, and a servant announced M. Lebel, *premier de sa Majesté*, with M. Morand. The comte went to meet the arrivals, and as I now saw Lebel for the first time, he presented him to me formally.

"Sister, this is M. Lebel, *premier de sa Majesté* , who has done us the honor to come and dine with us."

"And he confers a real pleasure on us," said I, looking smilingly on M. Lebel. My look had its effect, for Lebel remained mute and motionless from admiration at my person. At length he stammered out a few incoherent words, which I imagined to be compliments. The comte watched Lebel anxiously, and Morand began to rub his hands, saying:

"Well, sir, what think you of our celestial beauty?"

"She is worthy of a throne," replied Lebel, bending his head before me, and taking my hand, which he pressed respectfully to his lips. This reply was, perhaps, inadvertently made, but I took it as a good augury. "Yes,"

added Lebel, “you are the most lovely creature I ever met, though no one is more in the habit of seeing handsome females than myself.”

“And of causing them to be seen by others,” replied comte Jean.

This was an opening which was not followed up by Lebel. His first enthusiasm having passed, he measured me from head to foot, as if he would take an accurate description of my person.

For my part I began to support the looks of Lebel with more assurance. He was a man of no particular “mark or likelihood,” but had made his way. Living at Versailles had given him a certain air of easy impertinence, but you could not discover anything distinguished in his manners, nothing which concealed his humble extraction. The direction of the *Parc aux Cerfs* gave him much influence with the king, who found the convenience of such a man, who was willing to take upon himself all the disagreeable part of his clandestine amours. His duties placed him in contact with the ministers, the lieutenant of police, and the comptroller-general. The highest nobility sought his friendship with avidity. They all had a wife, a sister, a daughter, whom they wished to make the favorite sultana; and for this it was necessary to get the ear of Lebel. Thus, under a libertine prince, the destinies of France were at the mercy of a *valet de chambre*.

I should tell you, however, that I never had occasion but to speak well of him, and that I have the utmost gratitude for all he did for me. The attachment he testified on our first meeting has never been altered. He gave me his protection as far as it was necessary for me, and when the favor of the king had accorded to me a station, whence all the court sought to hurl me, Lebel seconded me with all his power in my efforts to preserve it. I will say, that it is to his vigilance that I owe the overthrow of more than one conspiracy

against me. He was a warm and sincere friend, and not at all interested in the services he rendered. He did a great deal of good, as well as harm, in private. I know poor families whom he has assisted with his own purse, when he could obtain nothing for them from the king, for Louis was only prodigal in his pleasures.

However, we dined, and Lebel praised me incessantly to the very skies, and that with so much warmth, that I was fearful at one time he would fall in love with me himself, and would not resign me to another. Thank heaven, Lebel was a faithful servant.

After dinner, when we left the table, Lebel paid me some compliments; then pulling out his watch, he spoke of an appointment at the Marais, and left without saying a word of seeing us again.

At this abrupt departure, comte Jean and I looked at each other with astonishment. As for Morand, he was overjoyed.

“Well, comtesse,” said he, “behold the number of your slaves increased by an illustrious adorer. You have made a conquest of M. Lebel, and I am certain he has gone away deeply smitten.”

“I hope we shall see him again,” said comte Jean.

“Do you doubt it?”

“Assure him,” said I, “of the pleasure it will afford us to receive him as he merits.”

Several persons entered, and M. Morand, profiting by the bustle which their entrance occasioned, approached me, and said, in a low tone,

“You are in possession of his heart, will you charge me with any message to him?”

“M. Morand,” was my reply, “what are you thinking of? A woman of my rank throw herself at any person’s head?”

“No, certainly not; but you can send him a kind word, or some affectionate token.”

“I could not think of it; M. Lebel appeared to me a most agreeable man, and I shall be at all times delighted to see him.”

Morand asked nothing more than this, and there our conversation ended.

Two days elapsed without being marked by any event. Comte Jean had spent them with much anxiety. He was absent, when, on the third morning, Henriette came hastily into my room. “Madame,” she said, “the *valet de chambre* of the king is in the drawing-room, and inquires if you will receive him.”

At this news I was surprised and vexed. M. Lebel took me unawares; my toilette was not begun. I gave a hasty glance at my mirror, “Let M. Lebel come in”; and M. Lebel, who was on the heels of my maid, entered instantly. After having saluted me, he said,

“It is only you, Madame, whom one might thus surprise. Your beauty needs no ornament, your charms are decoration sufficient.”

I replied to this compliment with (of course) much modesty, according to custom. We entered into conversation, and I found that Lebel really thought me the sister-in-law of comte Jean; and I remarked the involuntary respect that attended even his familiarity. I left him in his error, which was material to my interests. He talked to me some time of my attractions, of the part which a female like myself might assume in France. But fearing to compromise myself, I made no reply, but preserved the reserve which my character imposed upon me. I am not clever, my friend, I never could conduct an intrigue: I feared to speak or do wrong; and whilst I kept a tranquil appearance, I was internally agitated at the absence of comte Jean.

Fortune sent him to me. He was passing the street, when he saw at our door a carriage with the royal livery. Lebel always used it when his affairs did not demand a positive incognito. This equipage made him suspect a visit from Lebel, and he came in opportunely to extricate me from my embarrassment.

“Sir,” said Lebel to him, when he entered, “here is the lady whose extreme modesty refuses to listen to what I dare not thus explain to her.”

“Is it anything I may hear for her?” said the comte, with a smiling air.

“Yes, I am the ambassador of a mighty power: you are the minister plenipotentiary of the lady, and with your leave, we will go into your private room to discuss the articles of the secret treaty which I have been charged to propose to you. What says madame?”

“I consent to anything that may come from such an ambassador.”

Comte Jean instantly led him into another room, and when they were alone, Lebel said to him, “Do you know that your sister-in-law is a most fascinating creature? She has occupied my thoughts since I have known her, and in my enthusiasm I could not help speaking of her in a certain quarter. So highly have I eulogized her, that his majesty desires an interview with her, that he may judge with his own eyes if I am an appreciator of beauty.”

At these words comte Jean felt a momentary agitation, but soon recovering himself, he replied:

“I am exceedingly obliged to you, sir, for the favorable disposition you have evinced towards the comtesse du Barry. She and I have as much respect as love for his majesty; but my sister-in-law has not been presented, and, consequently, I can scarcely see how she can be allowed to pay her respects to his majesty.”

“Do not let that disturb you; it is not intended that she shall go and partake of the magnificence of Versailles, but be admitted to an intimacy much more flattering. Would you refuse to grant him that pleasure?”

“It would be a crime of *lèse-majesté* ,” said the comte Jean, laughing, “and my family have too much respect for their monarch. We should not be content with a fugitive favor.”

“You may expect everything from the charms of the comtesse; I am certain they will have the utmost success; but for me, I can give you no guarantee. You must run the chance.”

“Your protection, however, is the only thing which encourages my sister-in-law in this affair. But tell me when is this meeting to take place?”

“Instantly. The king is impatient to see the comtesse and I have promised that she will sup with him to-morrow evening in my apartment at Versailles.”

“How is she to be introduced to the king?”

“I am to entertain four of my friends.”

“Who are they?”

“ ‘First, the baron de Gonesse.”

“Who is he?”

“The king himself.”

“Well, who next?”

“The duc de Richelieu.”

“Who else?”

“The marquis de Chauvelin.”

“Well?”

“The duc de la Vauguyon.”

“What, the devotee?”

“The hypocrite. But never mind: the main point is, that you must not appear to recognize the king. Instruct your sister-in-law to this effect.”

“Certainly; if she must sin, she had better do so with some reason.”

While these gentlemen were thus disposing of me, what was I doing? Alone, in my room, I waited the result of their conference with mortal impatience. The character I had to play was a superb one, and at the moment was about to enter on the stage, I felt all the difficulties of my part. I feared I should not succeed, but fail amid the insulting hisses of the Versailles party.

My fears at once disappeared, and then I pictured myself sitting on a throne, magnificently attired; my imagination wandered in all the enchantments of greatness;—then, as if from remorse, I recalled my past life. The former lover of Nicholas blushed before the future mistress of Louis XV. A thousand different reflections crowded upon me, and mingled in my brain. If to live is to think, I lived a whole age in one quarter of an hour. At length I heard some doors open, a carriage rolled away, and comte Jean entered my chamber.

“Victory!” cried he, embracing me with transport. “Victory! my dear Jeanne, to-morrow you sup with the king.”

On this information I turned pale, my strength forsook me, and I was compelled to sit down, or rather to fall into a chair; for, according to Jean Jacques Rousseau, my legs shook under me (*flageolaient*). This, however, was the only movement of weakness which I betrayed. When I recovered a little, the comte Jean told me the conversation he had had with Lebel. I joked about the title of baron de Gonesse, and I promised to treat the king as if ignorant of his incognito. One thing only made me uneasy, and that was supping with the duc de Richelieu, who had seen me before at madame

de Lagarde’s; but the idea that he would not remember me gave me renewed courage.

On so important an occasion, comte Jean did not forget to repeat his instructions over again. These are nearly his words, for I think I learnt them by heart.

“Remember that it is on your first interview that your safety depends. Let him learn, through you, those utter tendernesses which have been sought for him in vain heretofore. He is like the monarch of old, who was willing to pay the half of his crown for an unknown pleasure. Lebel is wearied in seeking every week for new fruit. He is quite disposed to serve you, and will second you in the best manner. You are about to become the centre of attraction to all courtiers, and noble *courtisanes*. You must expect that they will endeavor to cry you down, because you will have carried off from them a gem to which every family has its pretensions. You must at first stand firmly before the storm, but afterward you will find all enlist themselves under your banner, who have no wife, sister, nor daughter; that is, all who have no mistress to offer to the king. You must attach these to you by place and favor: they must be first thought of, and then you must think of yourself and me, my dear girl.”

“All this is well enough,” I replied, “but as yet I am nothing.”

“*Morbleu*! to-morrow you will be everything,” cried comte Jean, with his determined energy. “But we must think about this morrow. Make haste, noble comtesse; go to all the milliners, seek what is elegant rather than what is rich. Be as lovely, pleasing, and gay as possible; this is the main point, and God will do all the rest.”

He pronounced this blasphemy in a laughing tone, and I confess I could not help joining in the laugh, and then hastened to comply with his directions.

CHAPTER II

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A slight preface—Arrival at Versailles—*"La toilette"*—Portrait of the king—The duc de Richelieu—The marquis de Chauvelin—The duc de la Vauguyon-Supper with the king—The first night—The following day—The curiosity of comte Jean—Presents from the king—How disposed of

The chances against our succeeding in our enterprise were at least a thousand to one. The sea upon which, trusting to the favorable influence of my leading star, we were about to venture, was filled with rocks and shoals which threatened the poor mariner who should direct his bark near them. In the first place, I had to dread my obscure birth, as well as the manner in which my life had been passed; and still more had I to fear the indifferent reputation of comte Jean. There was more than sufficient in all this to disturb a head far stronger than I could boast. However, thanks to my thoughtfulness, no troublesome thoughts interfered to break my rest on the night preceding a day so important to me, and I slept as tranquilly as though upon waking I had no other occupation for my time than a walk on the boulevards, or a drive to the Bois de Boulogne.

Comte Jean, however, had passed a very different night; for once, the whisperings of ambition had overcome even his natural indifference and carelessness, and tired of tossing upon a sleepless pillow, he arose at the first break of day, reproached me for slumbering so long, and allowed me neither peace nor rest till I joined him dressed for our journey. At length, we set out according to our agreement with Lebel; I was closely muffled up in my large *calèche*—the carriage rolled along till we reached Versailles, where we had for the last month engaged a lodging, which might be useful to us in all events; we alighted, and after vainly seeking a few moments' repose, proceeded on foot to Lebel,

in whose apartments we were to attire ourselves in a suitable manner.

“You are welcome,” said the comte, “pray consider yourself as at home.”

“I accept your augury,” replied I, “it would be amusing enough to find that my young prophet had predicted rightly.”

“Well then,” said my conductor, laughing, “I recommend you to manage a slip on the staircase, it would be taking possession after the manner of the ancients.”

“No, no, I thank you,” answered I; “no falls if you please, they are not propitious in France.”

Whilst we were thus speaking, we were crossing a long suite of chambers, and reached the one at which we were expected. We knocked cautiously at a door, which was opened to us with equal caution. Scarcely had we entered, than Lebel came eagerly forward to receive us.

“Ah, madame!” cried he, “I began to fear you might not come, you have been looked for with an impatience—”

“Which can hardly equal mine,” interrupted I; “for you were prepared for your visitor, whilst I have yet to learn who is the friend that so kindly desires to see me.”

“It is better it should be so,” added Lebel; “do not seek either to guess or discover more, than that you will here meet with some cheerful society, friends of mine, who will sup at my house, but with whom circumstances prevent my sitting down at table.”

“How!” said I, with affected surprise, “not sup with us?”

“Even so,” replied Lebel; and then added with a laugh, “*He* and I sit down to supper together! What an idea! No! you will find that just as the guests are about to sit down at table, I shall suddenly be called out of the room, and shall only return at the close of the repast.”

All this was but of small import to me. Nevertheless, I affected to regret the unavoidable absence of Lebel. In fact, I believe that the first breath inspired at court is fraught with falsehood and deceit, entirely destructive to every feeling of natural candor.

Lebel, with the most ceremonious gallantry, conducted me to a private dressing-room, where I found several females waiting to assist me at my toilet; I abandoned myself to their cares, which were, indeed, most skilfully exercised in my behalf. They wrought wonders in my appearance, bathing me after the Eastern fashion, adorning my hair and person, till I issued from their hands blooming and beauteous as an houri.

When I returned to the room in which Lebel was expecting me, his surprise was almost overpowering.

“You are, indeed,” exclaimed he, “the new sun which is to rise upon Versailles.”

“Excellent!” cried I, laughing extravagantly, “but like the planet you are pleased to compare me with, I must reserve my splendid rising till I have obtained fresh powers from the aid of night.” *

* *Mais avant de me lever il faut que je me couche*, is the witty reply in the original, but which it is impossible to render fully and piquantly through the dilution of a translation.—tr.

The comte entered, and joined his congratulations upon the beauty of my appearance; all at once the hasty, sound of a bell, violently pulled, was heard.

“The object of your attack approaches,” said Lebel to me, “it would be as well to reconnoitre a little. Remember, not a word of his rank, no cast down, timid looks at his sovereign power; no bending of knees, or faltering of voice.”

The advice thus given was useless. Comte Jean, who bore the reputation of, at least, a man of much cool impudence, was, I am certain, more deficient than myself in courage upon the occasion, and I verily believe, asked himself

several times whether he dared appear before his prince with one whom he was falsely asserting to be his sister-in-law. However these thoughts might or might not have disturbed him, we proceeded onwards till we reached the apartment where our invited friends were expecting us; and here I will, with the reader’s permission, digress awhile, in order to say a few introductory words respecting the four personages with whom I had the honor of supping.

And first, Louis XVth, king of France (or as he was upon the present occasion styled the baron de Gonesse), was one of those sentimental egotists who believed he loved the whole world, his subjects, and his family; while in reality, the sole engrossing object was *self*. Gifted with many personal and intellectual endowments, which might have disputed the palm with the most lively and engaging personages of the court, he was yet devoured by ennui, and of this he was well aware, but his mind was made up to meet this ennui, as one of the necessary accompaniments of royalty. Devoid of taste in literary matters, he despised all connected with the *belles-lettres*, and esteemed men only in proportion to the number and richness of their armorial bearings. M. de Voltaire ranked him beneath the lowest country-squire; and the very mention of a man of letters was terrifying to his imagination from its disturbing the current of his own ideas; he revelled in the plenitude of power, yet felt dissatisfied with the mere title of king. He ardently desired to signalize himself as the first general of the age, and prevented from obtaining this (in his opinion) highest of honors, entertained the utmost jealousy of Frederick II, and spoke with undisguised spleen and ill-humor of the exploits of his brother of Prussia.

The habit of commanding, and the prompt obedience he had ever met with, had palled upon his mind, and impressed him with feelings of indifference for all things which thus appeared so easily obtained; and this satiety and