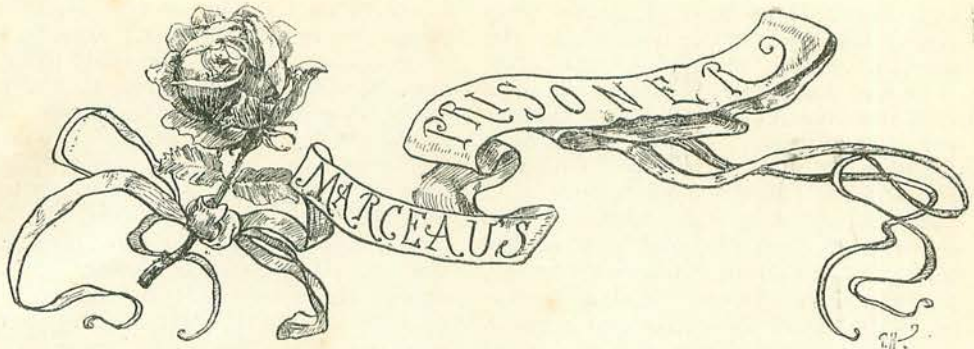


THE MASS IN THE WOOD.

(Marceau's Prisoner.)



FROM THE FRENCH OF ALEXANDRE DUMAS.

CHAPTER I.



ON the evening of the 15th of December, 1793, a traveller, pausing on the summit of the mountain at the foot of which rolls the river Moine, near the village of Saint-Crépin, would have looked down upon a strange spectacle.

He would have perceived thick volumes of smoke rising from the roofs and windows of cottages, succeeded by fierce tongues of flame, and in the crimson glare of the increasing conflagration the glitter of arms. A Republican brigade of twelve or fifteen hundred men had found the village of Saint-Crépin abandoned, and had set it in a blaze. Apart from the rest stood a cottage, which had been left untouched by the flames. At the door were stationed two sentinels. Inside, sitting at a table, was a young man, who appeared to be from twenty to twenty-two years old. His long, fair hair waved round his clear-cut features, and his blue mantle, but half concealing his figure, left revealed the epaulettes of a general. He was tracing on a map by the light of a lamp the route his soldiers must follow. This man was General Marceau.

"Alexandre," he said, turning to his sleeping companion, "wake up; an order has arrived from General Westermann," and he handed the despatch to his colleague.

"Who brought the order?"

"Delmar, the people's representative."

"Very good. Where do these poor devils assemble?"

"In a wood a league and a half from this place. It is here upon the map."

Then orders, given in a low voice, broke up the group of soldiers extended round

the ashes which had once been a village. The line of soldiers descended the roadway which separates Saint-Crépin from Mont-faucon, and when, some seconds after, the moon shone forth between two clouds upon the long lines of bayonets, they seemed to resemble a great black serpent with scales of steel gliding away into the darkness.

They marched thus for half an hour, Marceau at their head. The study he had made of the localities prevented him from missing the route, and after a quarter of an hour's further march they perceived before them the black mass of the forest. According to their instructions, it was there that the inhabitants of some villages and the remnants of several armies were to assemble to hear mass; altogether about eighteen hundred Royalists.

The two generals separated their little troop into several parties, with orders to surround the forest. As they advanced thus in a circle, it seemed that the glade which formed the centre of the forest was lighted up. Still approaching, they could distinguish the glare of torches, and soon, as objects became more distinct, a strange scene burst upon their sight.

Upon an altar, roughly represented by some piles of stones, stood the *curé* of the village of Sainte-Marie-de-Rhé, chanting the mass; grouped round him was a circle of old men grasping torches, and, upon their knees, women and children were praying. Between the Republicans and this group a wall of soldiers was placed. It was evident that the Royalists had been warned.

They did not wait to be attacked, but opened fire at once upon their assailants, who advanced without firing a single shot. The priest still continued chanting the mass. When the Republicans were thirty paces from their enemies the first rank

knelt down; three lines of barrels were lowered like corn before the wind; the volley burst forth. The light gleamed upon the lines of the Royalists, and some shots struck the women and children kneeling at the foot of the altar. For an instant wails of distress arose. Then the priest held up his crucifix, and all was silent again.

The Republicans, still advancing, fired their second discharge, and now neither side had time to load; it was a hand-to-hand fight with bayonets, and all advantage was on the side of the well-armed Republicans. The Royalists gave way; entire ranks fell. The priest, perceiving this, made a sign. The torches were extinguished, and all was darkness. Then followed a scene of disorder and carnage, where each man struck with blind fury, and died without asking for pity.

"Mercy! mercy!" cried a heartrending voice, suddenly, at Marceau's feet, as he was about to strike. It was a young boy without weapons. "Save me, in the name of Heaven!" he cried.

The general stooped and dragged him some paces from the affray, but as he did so the youth fainted. Such excess of terror in a soldier astonished Marceau; but, notwithstanding, he loosened his collar to give him air. His captive was a girl!

There was not an instant to lose. The Convention's orders were imperative; all Royalists taken with or without weapons, whatever their age or sex, must perish upon the scaffold. He placed the young girl at the foot of a tree, and ran towards the skirmish. Amongst the dead he perceived a young Republican officer, whose figure appeared to him about the same as that of his prisoner. He stripped him quickly of his coat and hat, and returned with them to the girl. The freshness of the night had revived her.

"My father! my father!" were her first words. "I have abandoned him; he will be killed!"

"Mademoiselle Blanche!" suddenly whispered a voice behind the tree, "the Marquis de Beaulieu lives; he is saved." And he who had said these words disappeared like a shadow.

"Tinguy, Tinguy!" cried the girl, extending her arms towards the spot where he had stood.

"Silence! a word will denounce you," said Marceau; "and I wish to save you. Put on this coat and hat and wait here."

He returned to his soldiers, gave orders

for them to retire upon Chollet, left his companion in command, and came back to his prisoner. Finding her ready to follow him, he directed their steps to the road where his servant waited with horses. The young girl sprang into the saddle with all the grace of a practised rider. Three-quarters of an hour after they galloped into Chollet. Marceau, with his little escort, took his way to the *Hôtel Sans Culotte*. He engaged two rooms, and conducted the young girl to one of them, advising her, at the same time, to take some rest after the fearful night she had endured. Whilst she slept, Marceau determined on the course he would take to save her. He would take her himself to Nantes, where his mother lived. He had not seen her for three years, and it would be natural enough for him to ask permission for leave of absence. As dawn began to break he entered General Westermann's house. His demand was accorded at once, but it was necessary that his permission should be signed by Delmar. The General promised to send him with the certificate, and Marceau returned to the hotel to snatch a few moments of repose.

Marceau and Blanche were about to sit down to breakfast when Delmar appeared in the doorway. He was one of Robespierre's agents, in whose hands the guillotine was more active than intelligent.

"Ah!" he said to Marceau, "you wish to leave us already, citizen, but you have done this night's work so well I can refuse you nothing. My only regret is that the Marquis de Beaulieu escaped. I had promised the Convention to send them his head."

Blanche stood erect and pale like a statue of terror. Marceau placed himself before her.

"But we will follow his track. Here is your permission," he added; "you can start when you choose. But I cannot quit you without drinking to the health of the Republic." And he sat down at the table by the side of Blanche.

They were beginning to feel more at ease, when a discharge of musketry burst upon their ears. The General leapt to his feet and rushed to his arms, but Delmar stopped him.

"What noise is that?" asked Marceau.

"Oh, nothing!" replied Delmar. "Last night's prisoners being shot." Blanche uttered a cry of terror. Delmar turned slowly and looked at her,

"Here is a fine thing," he said. "If soldiers tremble like women, we shall have to dress up our women as soldiers. It is

"Let us start, in the name of Heaven!" she cried; "there is blood in the air we breathe here."

"Yes, let us go," replied Marceau, and they descended together.

CHAPTER II.

MARCEAU found at the door a troop of thirty men whom the General-in-Chief had ordered to escort them to Nantes.

As they galloped along the high-road, Blanche told him her history; how, her mother being dead, she had been brought up by her father; how her education, given by a man, had accustomed her to exercises which, on the insurrection breaking out, had become so useful to her in following her father.

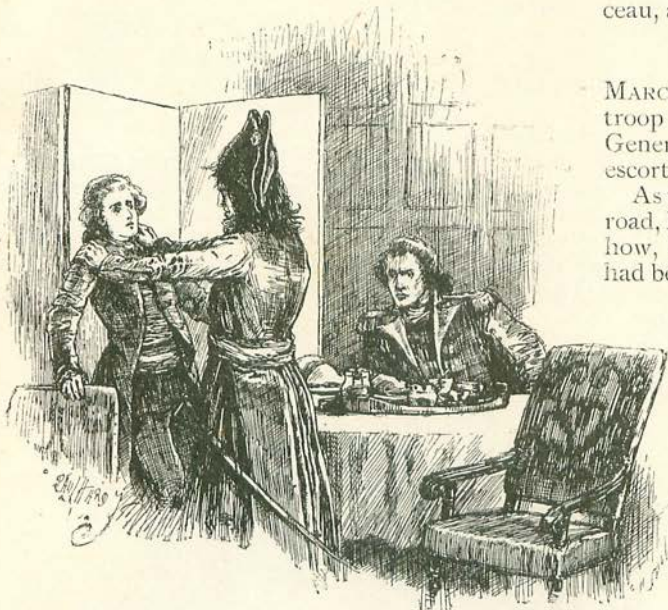
As she finished her story, they saw twinkling before them in the mist the lights of Nantes. The little troop crossed the Loire, and some seconds after Marceau

was in the arms of his mother. A few words sufficed to interest his mother and sisters in his young companion. No sooner had Blanche manifested a desire to change her dress than the two young girls led her away, each disputing which should have the pleasure of serving her as lady's-maid. When Blanche re-entered, Marceau stared in astonishment. In her first costume he had hardly noticed her extreme beauty and gracefulness, which she had now resumed with her woman's dress. It is true, she had taken the greatest pains to make herself as pretty as possible; for one instant before her glass she had forgotten war, insurrection, and carnage. The most innocent soul has its coquetry when it first begins to love.

Marceau could not utter a word, and Blanche smiled joyously, for she saw that she appeared as beautiful to him as she had desired.

In the evening the young *fiancé* of Marceau's sister came, and there was one house in Nantes—one only, perhaps—where all was happiness and love, surrounded, as it was, by tears and sorrow.

And now, from this time forth, a new life began for Marceau and Blanche. Marceau saw a happier future before him, and it was not strange that Blanche should



"HE SCANNED HER CLOSELY."

true you are very young," he continued, catching hold of her and scanning her closely, "you will get used to it in time."

"Never, never!" cried Blanche, without dreaming how dangerous it was for her to manifest her feelings before such a witness. "I could never get used to such horrors."

"Boy," he replied, loosing her, "do you think a nation can be regenerated without spilling blood? Listen to my advice; keep your reflections to yourself. If ever you fall into the hands of the Royalists they will give you no more mercy than I have done to their soldiers." And saying these words he went out.

"Blanche," said Marceau, "do you know, if that man had given one gesture, one sign, that he recognised you, I would have blown his brains out?"

"My God!" she said, hiding her face in her hands, "when I think that my father might fall into the hands of this tiger, that if he had been made a prisoner, this night, before my eyes—it is atrocious. Is there no longer pity in this world? Oh! pardon, pardon," she said, turning to Marceau, "who should know that better than I?"

At this instant a servant entered and announced that the horses were ready.

desire the presence of the man who had saved her life. Only from time to time as she thought of her father tears would pour from her eyes, and Marceau would reassure her, and to distract her thoughts would tell her of his first campaign; how the school-boy had become a soldier at fifteen, an officer at seventeen, a colonel at nineteen, and a general at twenty-one.

Nantes at this time writhed under the yoke of Carrier. Its streets ran with blood, and Carrier, who was to Robespierre what the hyæna is to the tiger, and the jackal to the lion, gorged himself with the purest of this blood. No one bore a reputation more blameless than that of the young general, Marceau, and no suspicion had as yet attacked his mother or sisters. And now the day fixed for the marriage of one of these young girls arrived.

Amongst the jewels that Marceau had sent for, he chose a necklace of precious stones, which he offered to Blanche.

She looked at it first with all the coquetry of a young girl; then she closed the box.

"Jewels are out of place in my situation," she said. "I cannot accept it, whilst my father, hunted from place to place, perhaps begs a morsel of bread for his food, and a granary for his shelter."

Marceau pressed her in vain. She would accept nothing but an artificial red rose which was amongst the jewels.

The churches being closed, the ceremony took place at the village hotel. At the door of the hotel a deputation of sailors awaited the young couple. One of these men, whose face

appeared familiar to Marceau, held in his hand two bouquets. One he gave to the young bride, and, advancing toward Blanche, who regarded him fixedly, he presented her with the other.

"Tinguy, where is my father?" said Blanche, growing very pale.

"At Saint-Florent," replied the sailor. "Take this bouquet. There is a letter inside."

Blanche wished to stop him, to speak to him, but he had disappeared. She read the letter with anxiety. The Royalists had suffered defeat after defeat, giving way before devastation and famine. The Marquis had learnt everything through



"SHE WOULD ACCEPT NOTHING BUT AN ARTIFICIAL RED ROSE."

the watchfulness of Tinguy. Blanche was sad. This letter had cast her back again into all the horrors of war. During the ceremony a stranger who had, he said,

affairs of the utmost importance to communicate to Marceau had been ushered into the saloon. As Marceau entered the room, his head bent towards Blanche, who leant upon his arm, he did not perceive him. Suddenly he felt her tremble. He looked up. Blanche and he were face to face with Delmar. He approached them slowly, his eyes fixed on Blanche, a smile upon his lips. With his forehead beaded with cold sweat, Marceau regarded him advance as Don Juan regarded the statue of the commandant.

"You have a brother, citizeness?" he said to Blanche. She stammered. Delmar continued—

"If my memory and your face do not deceive me, we breakfasted together at Chollet. How is it I have not seen you since in the ranks of the Republican army?"

Blanche felt as if she were going to fall, for the eye of Delmar pierced her through and through. Then he turned to Marceau; it was Delmar's turn to tremble. The young general had his hand upon the hilt of his sword, which he gripped convulsively. Delmar's face resumed its habitual expression; he appeared to have totally forgotten what he was about to say, and taking Marceau by the arm he drew him into the niche of a window, and talked to him a few minutes about the situation in La Vendée, and told him he had come to consult with Carrier on certain rigorous measures about to be inflicted on the Royalists. Then he quitted the room, passing Blanche, who had fallen cold and white into a chair, with a bow and a smile.

Two hours after Marceau received orders to rejoin his army, though his leave of absence did not expire for fifteen days. He believed this to have some connection with the scene which had just passed. He must obey, however; to hesitate were to be lost.

Marceau presented the order to Blanche. He regarded her sadly. Two tears rolled down her pale cheeks, but she was silent.

"Blanche," he said, "war makes us murderous and cruel; it is possible that we shall see each other no more." He took her hand. "Promise me, if I fall, that you will remember me sometimes, and I promise you, Blanche, that if between my life and death I have the time to pronounce one name—one alone—it shall be yours." Blanche was speechless for tears, but in her eyes were a thousand promises more tender than that which Marceau demanded. With one hand she pressed Marceau's, and

pointed with the other to his rose, which she wore in her hair.

"It shall never leave me," she said.

An hour after he was on the road to rejoin his army. Each step he took on the road they had journeyed together recalled her to his mind, and the danger she ran appeared more menacing now that he was away from her side. Each instant he felt ready to rein in his horse and gallop back to Nantes. If Marceau had not been so intent upon his own thoughts he would have perceived at the extremity of the road and coming towards him, a horseman who, after stopping an instant to assure himself he was not mistaken, had put his horse at a gallop and joined him. He recognised General Dumas. The two friends leapt from their horses and cast themselves into each other's arms. At the same instant a man, his hair streaming with perspiration, his face bleeding, his clothing rent, sprang over the hedge and, half fainting, fell at the feet of the two friends, exclaiming—

"She is arrested!"

It was Tinguay.

"Arrested! Who? Blanche!" cried Marceau.

The peasant made an affirmative sign. He could no longer speak. He had run five leagues, crossing fields and hedges in his flight to join Marceau.

Marceau stared at him stupidly.

"Arrested! Blanche arrested!" he repeated continually, whilst his friend applied his gourd full of wine to the clenched teeth of the peasant.

"Alexandre," cried Marceau, "I shall return to Nantes; I must follow her, for my life, my future, my happiness, all is with her!" His teeth chattered violently, and his body trembled convulsively.

"Let him beware who has dared to put his hand on Blanche. I love her with all the strength of my soul; existence is no longer possible for me without her. Oh, fool that I was to leave her! Blanche arrested! And where has she been taken?"

Tinguay, to whom this question was addressed, commenced to recover. "To the prison of Bouffays," he answered.

The words were hardly out of his mouth when the two friends were galloping back to Nantes.

Marceau knew he had not an instant to lose: he directed his steps at once to Carrier's house. But neither menaces nor prayers could obtain an interview from the deputy of the "Mountain."



"SHE IS ARRESTED."

Marceau turned away quietly; he appeared in the interval to have adopted a new project, and he prayed his companion to await him at the gate of the prison with horses and a carriage.

Before Marceau's name and rank the prison gates were soon opened, and he commanded the gaoler to conduct him to the cell where Blanche was enclosed. The man hesitated; but, on Marceau repeating his desire in a more imperative tone, he obeyed, making him a sign to follow him.

"She is not alone," said his guide, as he unlocked the low-arched door of a cell whose sombre gloom made Marceau shudder, "but she will not be troubled long with her companion; he is to be guillotined to-day." Saying these words he closed the door on Marceau, and determined to keep as quiet as possible concerning an interview which would be so compromising to him.

Still dazzled from his sudden passage from day to darkness, Marceau groped his way into the cell like a man in a dream. Then he heard a cry, and the young girl flung herself into his arms. She clung to him with inarticulate sobs and convulsive embraces.

"You have not abandoned me, then,"

she cried. "They arrested me, dragged me here; in the crowd which followed I recognised Tinguy. I cried out 'Marceau! Marceau!' and he disappeared. Now you have come, you will take me away, you will not leave me here?"

"I wish I could tear you away this moment, if it were at the price of my life; but it is impossible. Give me two days, Blanche, but two days. Now I wish you to answer me a question on which your life and mine depend. Answer me as you would answer to God. Blanche, do you love me?"

"Is this the time and place for such a question? Do you think these walls are used to vows of love?"

"This *is* the moment, for we are between life and death. Blanche, be quick and answer me; each instant robs us of a day, each hour, of a year. Do you love me?"

"Oh! yes, yes!" These words escaped from the young girl's heart, who, forgetting that no one could see her blushes, hid her head upon his breast.

"Well! Blanche, you must accept me at once for your husband."

The young girl trembled.

"What can be your design?"

"My motive is to tear you from death; we will see if they will send to the scaffold the wife of a Republican general."

Then Blanche understood it all; but she trembled at the danger to which he must expose himself to save her. Her love for him increased, and with it her courage rose.

"It is impossible," she said, firmly.

"Impossible!" interrupted Marceau, "what can rise between us and happiness, since you have avowed you love me? Listen, then, to the reason which has made you reject your only way of escape. Listen, Blanche! I saw you and loved you; that love has become a passion. My life is yours, your fate is mine; happiness or death, I will share either with you; no

human power can separate us, and if I quitted you, I have only to cry '*Vive le roi!*' and your prison gates will reopen, and we will come out no more except together. Death upon the same scaffold, that will be enough for me."

"Oh, no, no; leave me, in the name of Heaven, leave me!"

"Leave you! Take heed what you say, for if I quit this prison without having the right to defend you, I shall seek out your father—your father whom you have forgotten, and who weeps for you—and I shall say to him: 'Old man, she could have saved herself, but she has not done so; she has wished your last days to be passed in mourning, and her blood to be upon your white hair. Weep, old man, not because your daughter is dead, but because she did not love you well enough to live.'"

Marceau had repulsed her, and she had fallen on her knees beside him, and he, with his teeth clenched, strode to and fro with a bitter laugh; then he heard her sob, the tears leapt to his eyes, and he fell at her feet.

"Blanche, by all that is most sacred in the world, consent to become my wife!"

"You must, young girl," interrupted a strange voice, which made them tremble and rise together. "It is the only way to preserve your life. Religion commands you, and I am ready to bless your union." Marceau turned astonished, and recognised the *curé* of Sainte-Marie-de-Rhé, who had made part of the gathering which he had attacked on the night when Blanche became his prisoner.

"Oh, my father," he cried, seizing his hand, "obtain her consent!"

"Blanche de Beaulieu," replied the priest, with solemn accents, "in the name of your father, whom my age and friendship give me the right of representing, I command you to obey this young man."

Blanche seemed agitated with a thousand different emotions; at last she threw herself into Marceau's arms.

"I cannot resist any longer," she said. "Marceau, I love you, and I will be your wife." Their lips joined; Marceau was at the height of joy; he

seemed to have forgotten everything. The priest's voice broke in upon their ecstasy.

"We must be quick," he said, "for my moments are numbered."

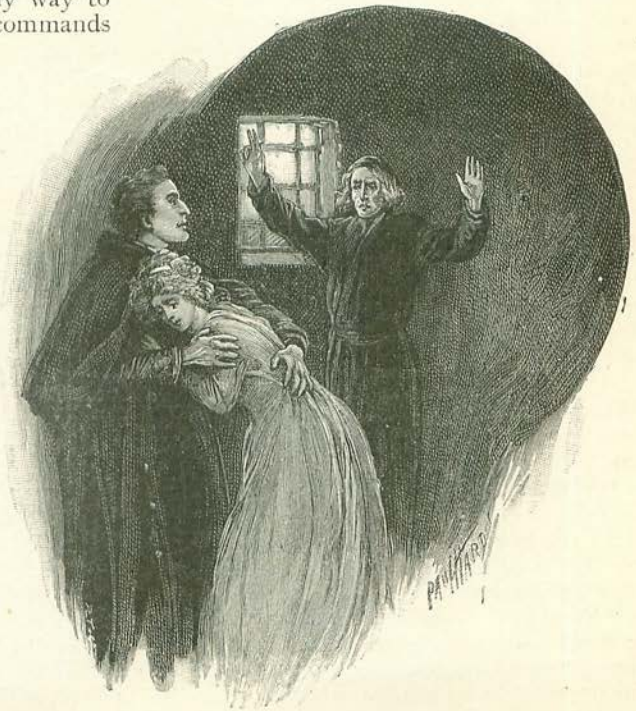
The two lovers trembled; this voice recalled them to earth. Blanche glanced around the cell with apprehension.

"What a moment," she said, "to unite our destinies! Can you think a union consecrated under vaults so sombre and lugubrious can be fortunate and happy?"

Marceau shuddered, for he himself was touched with superstitious terror. He drew Blanche to that part of the cell where the daylight struggling through the crossed bars of a narrow air-hole rendered the shadows less thick, and there, falling on their knees, they awaited the priest's blessing. As he extended his arms above them and pronounced the sacred words, the clash of arms and the tread of soldiers was heard in the corridor.

Blanche cast herself in terror into Marceau's arms.

"Can they have come to seek me already?" she cried. "Oh, my love, how frightful death is at this moment!" The young General threw himself before the door, a pistol in each hand. The astonished soldiers drew back.



"BLANCHE CAST HERSELF IN TERROR INTO MARCEAU'S ARMS."

"Reassure yourselves," said the priest; "it is I whom they seek. It is I who must die."

The soldiers surrounded him.

"My children," he cried, in a loud voice, addressing himself to the young pair. "On your knees; for with one foot in the tomb I give you my last benediction, and that of a dying person is sacred." He drew, as he spoke, a crucifix from his breast, and extended it towards them; himself about to die, it was for them he prayed.

There was a solemn silence.

Then the soldiers surrounded him, the door closed, and all disappeared.

Blanche threw her arms about Marceau's neck.

"Oh, if you leave me, and they come to seek me, and you are not here to aid me! Oh, Marceau, think of me upon the scaffold far from you, weeping, and calling you, without response! Oh, do not go! do not go! I will cast myself at their feet; I will tell them I am not guilty, that, if they will leave me in prison with you all my life, I will bless them!"

"I am sure to save you, Blanche; I answer for your life. In less than two days I shall be here with your pardon, and then, instead of a prison and a cell, a life of happiness, a life of liberty and love!"

The door opened, the gaoler appeared. Blanche clung more closely to her lover's breast, but each instant was precious, and he gently unwound her arms from about him, and promised to return before the close of the second day.

"Love me for ever," he said, rushing out of the cell.

"For ever," said Blanche, half fainting, and showing him in her hair the red rose that he had given her. Then the door closed upon him like the gate of the Inferno.

CHAPTER III.

MARCEAU found his companion waiting for him at the porter's lodge. He called for ink and paper.

"What are you about to do?" asked his friend.

"I am going to write to Carrier, to demand a respite of two days, and to tell him his own life depends on Blanche's."

"Wretched man!" cried his friend, snatching the unfinished letter away from him. "You threaten him, you who are in his power, you who have set his orders to rejoin your army at defiance. Before an

hour passes you will be arrested, and what then can you do for yourself or her?"

Marceau let his head fall between his hands, and appeared to reflect deeply.

"You are right," he cried, rising suddenly; and he drew his friend into the street.

A group of people were gathered round a post-chaise.

"If this evening is hazy," whispered a voice at Marceau's ear, "I do not know what would prevent twenty strong fellows from entering the town and freeing the prisoners. It is a pity that Nantes is so badly guarded."

Marceau trembled, turned, and recognised Tinguay, darted a glance of intelligence at him, and sprang into the carriage.

"Paris!" he called to the postillion, and the horses darted forward with the rapidity of lightning. At eight o'clock the carriage entered Paris.

Marceau and his friend separated at the square of the Palais-Egalité, and Marceau took his way alone on foot through the Rue Saint-Honoré, descended at the side of Saint-Roch, stopped at No. 366, and asked for Robespierre. He was informed that he had gone to the Théâtre de la Nation. Marceau proceeded there, astonished to have to seek in such a place the austere member of the Committee of Public Welfare. He entered, and recognised Robespierre half hidden in the shadow of a box. As he arrived outside the door he met him coming out. Marceau presented himself, and gave him his name.

"What can I do for you?" said Robespierre.

"I desire an interview with you."

"Here, or at my house?"

"At your house."

"Come, then."

And these two men, moved by feelings so opposite, walked along side by side, Robespierre indifferent and calm, Marceau passionate and excited. This was the man who held within his hands the fate of Blanche.

They arrived at Robespierre's house, entered, and ascended a narrow staircase, which led them to a chamber on the third floor. A bust of Rousseau, a table, on which lay open the "Contrat Social" and "Emile," a chest of drawers, and some chairs, completed the furniture of the apartment.

"Here is Cæsar's palace," said Robespierre, smiling; "what have you to demand from its president?"

"The pardon of my wife, who is condemned to death by Carrier."

"Your wife condemned to death by Carrier! The wife of Marceau, the well-known Republican! the Spartan soldier! What is Carrier then doing at Nantes?"

Marceau gave him an account of the atrocities which Carrier was superintending at Nantes.

"See how I am always misunderstood," cried Robespierre, with a hoarse voice, broken by emotion. "Above all, where my eyes cannot see, nor my hand arrest. There is enough blood being spilt that we cannot avoid, and we are not at the end of it yet."

"Then give me my wife's pardon."

Robespierre took a leaf of white paper.

"What was her name?"

"Why do you wish to know that?"

"It is necessary in cases of identity."

"Blanche de Beaulieu."

Marceau told him all.

"Young fool and madman!" he said. "Must you ——" Marceau interrupted him.

"I ask from you neither insults nor abuse. I ask for her life. Will you give it me?"

"Will family ties, love's influence, never lead you to betray the Republic?"

"Never."

"If you find yourself armed, face to face with the Marquis de Beaulieu?"

"I will fight against him as I have already done."

"And if he falls into your hands?"

Marceau reflected an instant:

"I will bring him to you, and you shall be his judge."

"You swear it to me?"

"Upon my honour."

Robespierre took up his pen and finished writing.

"There is your wife's pardon," he said.

"You can depart."

Marceau took his hand and wrung it with force. He wished to speak, but tears choked his utterance; and it was Robespierre who said to him—

"Go! there is not an instant to lose. *Au revoir!*"

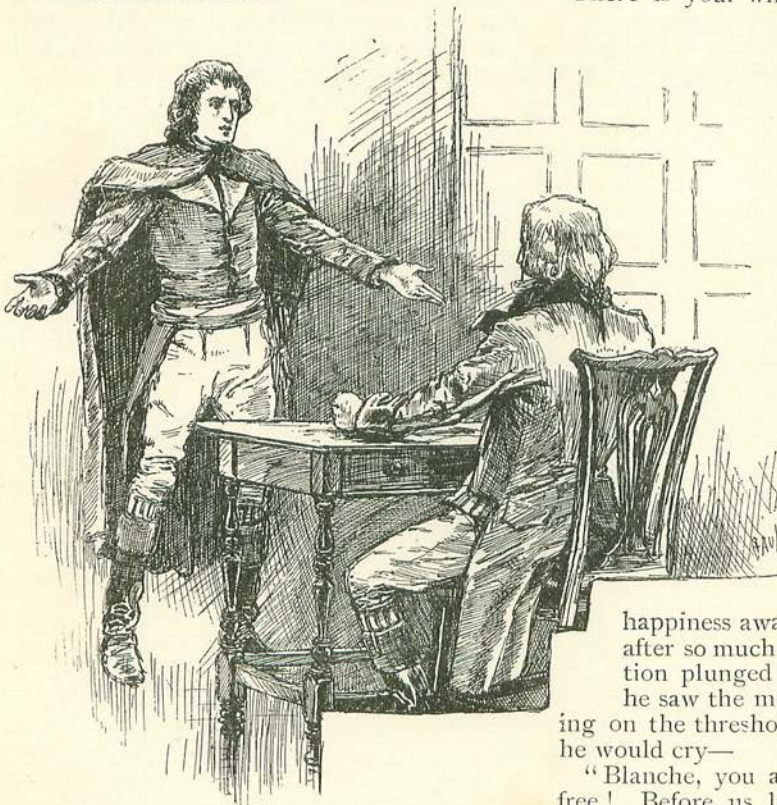
Marceau sprang down the stairs and into the street, and ran toward the Palais-Egalité, where his carriage waited.

From what a weight his heart was freed! What

happiness awaited him! What joy after so much grief! His imagination plunged into the future, and he saw the moment when, appearing on the threshold of the prison-cell, he would cry—

"Blanche, you are saved! You are free! Before us lies a life of love and happiness."

Yet from time to time a vague uneasiness tormented him; a sudden chill struck cold upon his heart. He spurred on the postillions by lavish promises of gold, and the horses flew along the road. Everything



"GIVE ME MY WIFE'S PARDON."

Robespierre let his pen fall.

"What? The daughter of the Marquis de Beaulieu, the chief of the Royalists of La Vendée. How is it that she is *your* wife?"

seemed to partake of the feverish agitation of his blood. In a few hours he had left Versailles, Chartes, Le Mans, La Flèche behind him. They were nearing Angers, when suddenly, with a terrible crash, the carriage heeled over on its side, and he fell. He rose hurt and bleeding, separated with his sabre the traces which bound one of the horses, and, leaping on its back, reached the next post; and, taking a fresh horse, rapidly continued his course.

And now he has crossed Angers, he perceives Nigrande, reaches Varade, passes Ancenis; his horse streams with foam and blood. He gains Saint-Donatien, then Nantes—Nantes, which encloses his life, his happiness! Some seconds after he passes the gates, he is in the town, he reins in his horse before the prison of Bouffays. He has arrived. What matters all their troubles now? He calls—

"Blanche, Blanche!"

The gaoler appears and replies—

"Two carts have just left the prison. Mademoiselle de Beaulieu was in the first."

With a curse upon his lips, Marceau springs to the ground, and rushes with the hustling crowd towards the great square. He comes up with the last of the two carts; one of the prisoners inside recognises him. It is Tinguay.

"Save her! save her!" he cries out, "for I have failed!"

Marceau pushes on through the crowd; they hustle him, they press around him, but he hurls them out of his path. He arrives upon the place of execution. Before him is the scaffold. He flourishes aloft the scrap of paper, crying—

"A pardon! a pardon!"

At that instant the executioner, seizing by its long, fair hair the head of a young girl, held it up before the terrified crowd.

Suddenly from the midst of that silent crowd a cry was heard—a cry of anguish, in which there seemed to have been gathered all the forces of human agony. Marceau had recognised between the teeth of this uplifted head the red rose which he had given to his young bride.

