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COUNT GUSTAVE REYNAUD, or, Danton's Gratitude Practically Solved.

CHAPTER I. One cold, wretched, gloomy evening, towards the end of the year 1788, a young man was hurrying through a small forest on the outskirts of the town of Nancy.

The traveler was a man of Herculean proportions. He was commonly, almost coarsely dressed, and there was little in either his manner or appearance to attract attention.

Although at this period the forests of Flanders were infested by bands of robbers, and every day brought with it fresh acts of theft or murder, paralyzing the scared inhabitants of Nancy and Valenciennes, still this man carried no weapon save a huge stick.

Apparently our traveler thought that of the two, he would prefer saving the former. He in a moment, without a symptom of fear, he prepared himself for a determined resistance.

Still, in so unequal a contest—one against many—he had but little chance, and the game was going against him, when suddenly a young man, unmistakably a gentleman, richly clad in the costly costume of the day, and attended by his servant, abruptly appeared upon the scene.

You are wounded, said he to the man to whose rescue he had so opportunely arrived; you are severely wounded. You must allow me and my servant to assist you to the house—it is close by—and there you shall be properly attended to.

A thousand thanks, replied the traveler, but I have not an instant to spare. My wound, he added, whilst he wrung some heavy drops of blood from his forehead, is a trifle. Not so the service you have rendered me. That is a debt which I shall never forget.

Count de Reynaud? he repeated, with a quiver on his lip and a scowl on his brow; a count? an aristocrat! My life saved by an aristocrat! But, what matters? High or low, you are still my preserver and my friend, and, as I said before, if ever

the time should come when you may want a helping hand, as I did this day, remember the name of Danton.

CHAPTER II. Count Gustave de Reynaud walked quietly home, as if nothing had happened. His life had been a brief and bright romance. Three years previously he had inherited from his father the castle to which he had just invited his stranger friend, and tired apparently of Paris and its pleasures, he suddenly resigned his place at the court, of which he was the most brilliant member, and devoted himself to a country life upon his princely domain.

For two years their happiness had been like a dream or a fairy tale.—Surrounded by vassals and tenants, they dispensed around them with a lavish hand every benefit which it was possible to bestow, and their names were never breathed without a blessing.

In the year however of which we are writing, bitter winds had scattered the orchard blossoms, heavy rains had ruined the harvest, the vines had no grapes and the fields no flowers; but the Count and Countess de Reynaud, with unwearied benevolence, heaped upon their people gifts of all kinds to recompense them for their losses, until there was but one feeling amongst them of universal gratitude.

Did I say universal! Alas, there was but one exception. Francois Gautier, a farmer on the estate, hated the Count and Countess with a hatred too deep for words, even if he had dared to utter them, and the cause from which this hatred sprang was one which, like a recent wound, was being continually torn open.

From boyhood this man had loved the beautiful Felicia Emmonet, now Countess de Reynaud; from girlhood he had been her detestation. When he saw the prize wrested from him by one so immeasurably his superior, love gave place to hatred. Envy, deep and direful, turned every drop of blood in his veins to gall; and day after day, month after month, year after year, he watched with jaundiced eye the happiness of the Count and Countess de Reynaud.

Revenge was what Gautier thirsted for; the unalloyed prosperity of his superiors filled him with rage.—Being himself a man whose mind was superior to his station, his position was a constant thorn in his side, and he felt as if it chained him to the ground, from which his ambition made him wish to soar.

Unfortunately this was a character exactly suited to the times that are now coming. A revolutionary spirit was growing in France with amazing rapidity. The nobility were marked down as especial objects of vengeance, and the mob were in the ascendant. What a moment of triumph for a man who had a private grievance to avenge!

Here, then, was at last an opening for Gautier to raise himself to power, and seeing his opportunity, he speedily availed himself of it. The moment the public press announced the disastrous turn the tide of affairs had taken, he declared himself on the side of the revolutionists, and entered heart and soul into their cause. His fortune—if such it could be called—was now made; power, place and authority were now his; and the first use he made of them was to denounce his generous master and benefactor, and sacrifice to the Republic the princely estate on which he had first drawn breath.

When first the blow fell, Count Gustave de Reynaud fondly hoped that the care and consideration he had always had for his people might shelter him from the storm; but he little knew with whom he had to deal. Vain all hope while Francois Gautier wielded the sceptre. With savage delight this monster led the way to the castle, and had not a few grateful hearts warmed towards the unhappy young couple their very lives might have fallen a sacrifice. As it was, flight saved them for the moment.

Disguised, and with money and jewels concealed about them, the count and countess wandered from forest to forest both by night and by

day, terrified lest they should be discovered. Soon, however, privation and exposure began to tell upon the health of Madame de Reynaud; she was utterly prostrated by terror and fatigue; and they were compelled to seek refuge in a cottage at Nancy. Here, however, despite the courage and kindness of their host, they were at last hunted out, and seized, not the countess, but her husband; and, deaf to all her frantic entreaties, he was torn from her side.

Save your tears cried one of the myrmidons with a laugh of derision; your turn will come next. But what is my crime? Whither would you take me? asked the count. Your crime will be told you by him before whom we are about to take you—the President of the Tribunal of Justice, was the reply.

And who may he be? said the victim with an intonation of scorn which he could not repress. Francois Gautier, answered the men with one voice; and from that moment both Count Gustave and his wife knew that their fate was sealed, and that they could expect no mercy.

CHAPTER III. The Count de Reynaud's quondam tenant sat in a large arm-chair, his head resting upon his hand, and his dark, cadaverous countenance telling the tale of those sanguinary days as plainly as though it had been written there—telling the story of the frightful scenes into which his ambition and his thirst for vengeance had led him. The table before him was covered with documents and papers of all kinds.

Well, is it all done for to-day? asked he savagely, as they led away from his presence a prisoner just condemned to death. Not quite, citizen-president.—Here is a woman who has been running about the passages of the Hotel de Ville all day—

Before the speaker had time to conclude his sentence, a girl, young and strikingly lovely, rushed into the chamber and stood before Gautier. Her dishevelled hair was streaming over her shoulders, her eyes seemed starting from their sockets, and her face was almost livid with grief and terror. Though dressed in the costume of a Flemish peasant, the delicacy of her features, the beauty of her figure, and the grace of her movements, frantic as they were, told that she wore it only as a disguise, and Gautier smiled with malignant triumph as he recognized her.

Be seated, citizeness, said he with a marked tone of insolent irony. Sir, began Madame de Reynaud, the clasping her hands and fixing her eyes imploringly on his face. Call me citizeness, he interrupted roughly. We allow no aristocratic titles in these good old days of equality.

Alas! cried the countess, you must forgive me; I know not what I say. My ideas are scattered—my brain reels, but, oh, citizen-president,—if such is the name by which I should address you—have mercy! They have arrested my husband; they have taken him prisoner to the Hotel de Ville. Yet he is innocent. I swear to you, by all I hold most sacred, that he is innocent! Suffer me to ask you what is to be his fate?

The fate which traitors and the enemies of the Republic must expect, replied Gautier laughing derisively. But he is neither, cried the countess in a voice of agony; he has never lifted a hand against his country, neither has he joined in any conspiracy. Of what can you accuse him, Monsieur Gautier, unless, indeed, of having overwhelmed you with kindness? Oh, sir! speak and tell me!—What is his supposed crime?

Crime! echoed Gautier furiously. Is he not an aristocrat?—has he not trodden the people beneath his feet? For a moment the countess looked at the accuser in mute astonishment and indignation, and then in faltering accents, exclaimed: This accusation from you!

—did he not place you in the best farm on his estate, and stand godfather to your child? And now—and now—(tears half choked her words)—a wanderer—an outcast—bereft of all! Oh, sir, if you can save his life, save it!

Countess de Reynaud, whispered the president, bending down to her ear, in days gone by I knelt at your feet as you now do at mine. I implored your pity and your mercy as you now implore mine! Did you listen to me?—did you grant my prayer? No! The love I sought you gave to him! That injury of blackest dye I now wash out—but only with his blood! Long years have passed since you refused to listen to me, but day and night have I never ceased to thirst for my revenge, and I grasp it in my hand! Mercifully I shall let it go? No!

The countess gazed wildly at him. She seemed unable to comprehend the magnitude of her misery, yet she stammered out, Mercy!—mercy! Yes, continued Gautier, in the same low tone; but mercy costs dear. I have money—I still have jewels! shrieked the countess. Gautier shook his head and laughed—the laugh of a demon. Not enough, said he. He robbed me, and for that theft—

CHAPTER IV. The next morning thirty soldiers were drawn up in a small court near the Hotel de Ville, specially devoted to executions of this kind. In face of them stood a young man. His countenance betrayed no sort of emotion; except, perhaps, that on his lip a curl of scorn; and that, though the expression was calm and determined, a deadly pallor overspread his face. In his hand he was permitted to hold the handkerchief with which they would have bound his eyes.

Now and then his eyes seemed to wander into the distant crowd, as if in search of some loved object which met them not. Suddenly a piercing shriek rent the air—a figure came flying across the court—and the haughty composure and nerve with which Count Gustave de Reynaud had been about to meet death, instantly forsook him; he started, trembled visibly, and held out his arms. In a moment his wife rushed into them, and whilst locked in his embrace, wound her own frantically round his neck.

But the scene was brief and transient as a flash of lightning. The great window of the Hotel de Ville was thrown up in violence, and Francois Gautier appeared upon the balcony. His eyes glared upon his victim, and at a hurried sign, which he made to the officer on duty, Madame de Reynaud, fainting and half dead, was torn from the arms of her husband, and forcibly dragged from the scene of horror.

Hardly was the space cleared between the soldiers and the prisoner, when a loud murmur was heard, and a post-chaise—the horses covered with foam—dashed into the court, and a man of colossal stature and ferocious countenance, rendered still more so by the mass of black hair which hung round it, sprang from the carriage, and, after gazing intently on the various groups before him, walked up to the officer and ordered him to suspend the execution.

As for the prisoner, he added, let him follow me to the Hotel de Ville. In the hall of the revolutionary tribunal he turned towards Monsieur de Reynaud, and fixing his eyes on him in surprise, inquired what were the circumstances of his arrest and sentence.

Whilst the count was detailing them, the countenance of the stranger darkened, and his lip trembled with fury. Hardly was the recital finished, than he folded his arms, and striding rapidly across the hall towards Gautier, asked him in a voice of thunder what excuse he had to offer for his conduct. My object is the good of the Republic, was the reply. The good of the Republic, cried the stranger, can never be gained by acts of tyrannical cruelty. The death you have prepared for an innocent man shall be your own! Soldiers, I sentence Francois Gautier to be shot. Remove him, and let the sentence be immediately executed.

In a moment the president of the revolutionary tribunal was surrounded and secured. In vain he strove to justify himself—he was not allowed to plead. In vain he implored a respite of at least one hour.

Not one moment! was the reply. When Francois Gautier found that all hope was over, he acted like a madman; he became perfectly infuriated. He raved, he struggled, he foamed at the mouth. He snatched the tri-colored cap from his head, and tearing it into pieces, stamped upon it with his feet.

If this, cried he, is all the gratitude that the friends of liberty receive, may the Republic perish. At the same window from which, one short half-hour before, Francois Gautier, had hoped to witness the death of his rival, did the stranger now stand, and not until the volley of musketry announced that all was over, did he quit his position. He then turned towards a table by which stood Count Gustave de Reynaud, and after writing a few hastily lines, he looked up at him with a softened expression of face.

Citizeness, said he in a trembling voice, take this pass. It will insure the safety of yourself and your wife. Do not leave France—do not mix yourself up in politics; keep free from all party spirit, and you will have nothing to fear. And now, only word more—do you remember me? Monsieur de Reynaud looked bewildered. Pardon me, said he, passing his hand over his forehead, but the events of the last few days seem to have deprived me of my memory. I cannot recollect if we have met before.

Possibly not, replied the stranger, for those who bestow favors and blessings forget easily. It is for those who receive them to remember.—Count Gustave de Reynaud, I had a debt to pay you, and I have paid it; we are now quits. Should you be asked from whom you obtained that pass, you may feel perhaps that it was from the man whose life you once saved; but you need only answer—It was from Danton!

A new minister at New Bedford, took a stroll before breakfast, on the first Sunday he was there, and, after walking a dozen blocks, was slightly confused by a shabby individual, with: "You needn't look any further; there ain't nary a saloon open."

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