## Chapter XI - Let Loose

A late, dull autumn night was closing in upon the river Saone. The stream, like a sullied looking-glass in a gloomy place, reflected the clouds heavily; and the low banks leaned over here and there, as if they were half curious, and half afraid, to see their darkening pictures in the water. The flat expanse of country about Chalons lay a long heavy streak, occasionally made a little ragged by a row of poplar trees against the wrathful sunset. On the banks of the river Saone it was wet, depressing, solitary; and the night deepened fast.

One man slowly moving on towards Chalons was the only visible figure in the landscape. Cain might have looked as lonely and avoided. With an old sheepskin knapsack at his back, and a rough, unbarked stick cut out of some wood in his hand; miry, footsore, his shoes and gaiters trodden out, his hair and beard untrimmed; the cloak he carried over his shoulder, and the clothes he wore, sodden with wet; limping along in pain and difficulty; he looked as if the clouds were hurrying from him, as if the wail of the wind and the shuddering of the grass were directed against him, as if the low mysterious plashing of the water murmured at him, as if the fitful autumn night were disturbed by him.

He glanced here, and he glanced there, sullenly but shrinkingly; and sometimes stopped and turned about, and looked all round him. Then he limped on again, toiling and muttering.

'To the devil with this plain that has no end! To the devil with these stones that cut like knives! To the devil with this dismal darkness, wrapping itself about one with a chill! I hate you!'

And he would have visited his hatred upon it all with the scowl he threw about him, if he could. He trudged a little further; and looking into the distance before him, stopped again. 'I, hungry, thirsty, weary. You, imbeciles, where the lights are yonder, eating and drinking, and warming yourselves at fires! I wish I had the sacking of your town; I would repay you, my children!'

But the teeth he set at the town, and the hand he shook at the town, brought the town no nearer; and the man was yet hungrier, and thirstier, and wearier, when his feet were on its jagged pavement, and he stood looking about him.

There was the hotel with its gateway, and its savoury smell of cooking; there was the cafe with its bright windows, and its rattling of dominoes; there was the dyer's with its strips of red cloth on the doorposts; there was the silversmith's with its earrings, and its offerings for altars; there was the tobacco dealer's with its lively group

of soldier customers coming out pipe in mouth; there were the bad odours of the town, and the rain and the refuse in the kennels, and the faint lamps slung across the road, and the huge Diligence, and its mountain of luggage, and its six grey horses with their tails tied up, getting under weigh at the coach office. But no small cabaret for a straitened traveller being within sight, he had to seek one round the dark corner, where the cabbage leaves lay thickest, trodden about the public cistern at which women had not yet left off drawing water. There, in the back street he found one, the Break of Day. The curtained windows clouded the Break of Day, but it seemed light and warm, and it announced in legible inscriptions with appropriate pictorial embellishment of billiard cue and ball, that at the Break of Day one could play billiards; that there one could find meat, drink, and lodgings, whether one came on horseback, or came on foot; and that it kept good wines, liqueurs, and brandy. The man turned the handle of the Break of Day door, and limped in.

He touched his discoloured slouched hat, as he came in at the door, to a few men who occupied the room. Two were playing dominoes at one of the little tables; three or four were seated round the stove, conversing as they smoked; the billiard-table in the centre was left alone for the time; the landlady of the Daybreak sat behind her little counter among her cloudy bottles of syrups, baskets of cakes, and leaden drainage for glasses, working at her needle.

Making his way to an empty little table in a corner of the room behind the stove, he put down his knapsack and his cloak upon the ground. As he raised his head from stooping to do so, he found the landlady beside him.

'One can lodge here to-night, madame?'

'Perfectly!' said the landlady in a high, sing-song, cheery voice.

'Good. One can dine - sup - what you please to call it?'

'Ah, perfectly!' cried the landlady as before. 'Dispatch then, madame, if you please. Something to eat, as quickly as you can; and some wine at once. I am exhausted.'

'It is very bad weather, monsieur,' said the landlady.

'Cursed weather.'

'And a very long road.'

'A cursed road.'

His hoarse voice failed him, and he rested his head upon his hands until a bottle of wine was brought from the counter. Having filled and emptied his little tumbler twice, and having broken off an end from the great loaf that was set before him with his cloth and napkin, soup-plate, salt, pepper, and oil, he rested his back against the corner of the wall, made a couch of the bench on which he sat, and began to chew crust, until such time as his repast should be ready. There had been that momentary interruption of the talk about the stove, and that temporary inattention to and distraction from one another, which is usually inseparable in such a company from the arrival of a stranger. It had passed over by this time; and the men had done glancing at him, and were talking again.

'That's the true reason,' said one of them, bringing a story he had been telling, to a close, 'that's the true reason why they said that the devil was let loose.' The speaker was the tall Swiss belonging to the church, and he brought something of the authority of the church into the discussion - especially as the devil was in question.

The landlady having given her directions for the new guest's entertainment to her husband, who acted as cook to the Break of Day, had resumed her needlework behind her counter. She was a smart, neat, bright little woman, with a good deal of cap and a good deal of stocking, and she struck into the conversation with several laughing nods of her head, but without looking up from her work.

'Ah Heaven, then,' said she. 'When the boat came up from Lyons, and brought the news that the devil was actually let loose at Marseilles, some fly-catchers swallowed it. But I? No, not I.'

'Madame, you are always right,' returned the tall Swiss. 'Doubtless you were enraged against that man, madame?'

'Ay, yes, then!' cried the landlady, raising her eyes from her work, opening them very wide, and tossing her head on one side. 'Naturally, yes.'

'He was a bad subject.'

'He was a wicked wretch,' said the landlady, 'and well merited what he had the good fortune to escape. So much the worse.'

'Stay, madame! Let us see,' returned the Swiss, argumentatively turning his cigar between his lips. 'It may have been his unfortunate destiny. He may have been the child of circumstances. It is always possible that he had, and has, good in him if one did but know how to find it out. Philosophical philanthropy teaches - '

The rest of the little knot about the stove murmured an objection to the introduction of that threatening expression. Even the two players at dominoes glanced up from their game, as if to protest against philosophical philanthropy being brought by name into the Break of Day.

'Hold there, you and your philanthropy,' cried the smiling landlady, nodding her head more than ever. 'Listen then. I am a woman, I. I know nothing of philosophical philanthropy. But I know what I have seen, and what I have looked in the face in this world here, where I find myself. And I tell you this, my friend, that there are people (men and women both, unfortunately) who have no good in them - none. That there are people whom it is necessary to detest without compromise. That there are people who must be dealt with as enemies of the human race. That there are people who have no human heart, and who must be crushed like savage beasts and cleared out of the way. They are but few, I hope; but I have seen (in this world here where I find myself, and even at the little Break of Day) that there are such people. And I do not doubt that this man - whatever they call him, I forget his name - is one of them.'

The landlady's lively speech was received with greater favour at the Break of Day, than it would have elicited from certain amiable whitewashers of the class she so unreasonably objected to, nearer Great Britain.

'My faith! If your philosophical philanthropy,' said the landlady, putting down her work, and rising to take the stranger's soup from her husband, who appeared with it at a side door, 'puts anybody at the mercy of such people by holding terms with them at all, in words or deeds, or both, take it away from the Break of Day, for it isn't worth a sou.'

As she placed the soup before the guest, who changed his attitude to a sitting one, he looked her full in the face, and his moustache went up under his nose, and his nose came down over his moustache.

'Well!' said the previous speaker, 'let us come back to our subject. Leaving all that aside, gentlemen, it was because the man was acquitted on his trial that people said at Marseilles that the devil was let loose. That was how the phrase began to circulate, and what it meant; nothing more.'

'How do they call him?' said the landlady. 'Biraud, is it not?'

'Rigaud, madame,' returned the tall Swiss.

'Rigaud! To be sure.'

The traveller's soup was succeeded by a dish of meat, and that by a dish of vegetables. He ate all that was placed before him, emptied his bottle of wine, called for a glass of rum, and smoked his cigarette with his cup of coffee. As he became refreshed, he became overbearing; and patronised the company at the Daybreak in certain small talk at which he assisted, as if his condition were far above his appearance.

The company might have had other engagements, or they might have felt their inferiority, but in any case they dispersed by degrees, and not being replaced by other company, left their new patron in possession of the Break of Day. The landlord was clinking about in his kitchen; the landlady was quiet at her work; and the refreshed traveller sat smoking by the stove, warming his ragged feet.

'Pardon me, madame - that Biraud.'

'Rigaud, monsieur.'

'Rigaud. Pardon me again - has contracted your displeasure, how?'

The landlady, who had been at one moment thinking within herself that this was a handsome man, at another moment that this was an ill-looking man, observed the nose coming down and the moustache going up, and strongly inclined to the latter decision. Rigaud was a criminal, she said, who had killed his wife.

'Ay, ay? Death of my life, that's a criminal indeed. But how do you know it?'

'All the world knows it.'

'Hah! And yet he escaped justice?'

'Monsieur, the law could not prove it against him to its satisfaction. So the law says. Nevertheless, all the world knows he did it. The people knew it so well, that they tried to tear him to pieces.'

'Being all in perfect accord with their own wives?' said the guest.

'Haha!'

The landlady of the Break of Day looked at him again, and felt almost confirmed in her last decision. He had a fine hand, though, and he turned it with a great show. She began once more to think that he was not ill-looking after all.

'Did you mention, madame - or was it mentioned among the gentlemen - what became of him?' The landlady shook her head; it

being the first conversational stage at which her vivacious earnestness had ceased to nod it, keeping time to what she said. It had been mentioned at the Daybreak, she remarked, on the authority of the journals, that he had been kept in prison for his own safety. However that might be, he had escaped his deserts; so much the worse.

The guest sat looking at her as he smoked out his final cigarette, and as she sat with her head bent over her work, with an expression that might have resolved her doubts, and brought her to a lasting conclusion on the subject of his good or bad looks if she had seen it. When she did look up, the expression was not there. The hand was smoothing his shaggy moustache. 'May one ask to be shown to bed, madame?'

Very willingly, monsieur. Hola, my husband! My husband would conduct him up-stairs. There was one traveller there, asleep, who had gone to bed very early indeed, being overpowered by fatigue; but it was a large chamber with two beds in it, and space enough for twenty. This the landlady of the Break of Day chirpingly explained, calling between whiles, 'Hola, my husband!' out at the side door.

My husband answered at length, 'It is I, my wife!' and presenting himself in his cook's cap, lighted the traveller up a steep and narrow staircase; the traveller carrying his own cloak and knapsack, and bidding the landlady good night with a complimentary reference to the pleasure of seeing her again to-morrow. It was a large room, with a rough splintery floor, unplastered rafters overhead, and two bedsteads on opposite sides. Here 'my husband' put down the candle he carried, and with a sidelong look at his guest stooping over his knapsack, gruffly gave him the instruction, 'The bed to the right!' and left him to his repose. The landlord, whether he was a good or a bad physiognomist, had fully made up his mind that the guest was an ill-looking fellow.

The guest looked contemptuously at the clean coarse bedding prepared for him, and, sitting down on the rush chair at the bedside, drew his money out of his pocket, and told it over in his hand. 'One must eat,' he muttered to himself, 'but by Heaven I must eat at the cost of some other man to-morrow!'

As he sat pondering, and mechanically weighing his money in his palm, the deep breathing of the traveller in the other bed fell so regularly upon his hearing that it attracted his eyes in that direction. The man was covered up warm, and had drawn the white curtain at his head, so that he could be only heard, not seen. But the deep regular breathing, still going on while the other was taking off his worn shoes and gaiters, and still continuing when he had laid aside

his coat and cravat, became at length a strong provocative to curiosity, and incentive to get a glimpse of the sleeper's face.

The waking traveller, therefore, stole a little nearer, and yet a little nearer, and a little nearer to the sleeping traveller's bed, until he stood close beside it. Even then he could not see his face, for he had drawn the sheet over it. The regular breathing still continuing, he put his smooth white hand (such a treacherous hand it looked, as it went creeping from him!) to the sheet, and gently lifted it away.

'Death of my soul!' he whispered, falling back, 'here's Cavalletto!'

The little Italian, previously influenced in his sleep, perhaps, by the stealthy presence at his bedside, stopped in his regular breathing, and with a long deep respiration opened his eyes. At first they were not awake, though open. He lay for some seconds looking placidly at his old prison companion, and then, all at once, with a cry of surprise and alarm, sprang out of bed.

'Hush! What's the matter? Keep quiet! It's I. You know me?' cried the other, in a suppressed voice.

But John Baptist, widely staring, muttering a number of invocations and ejaculations, tremblingly backing into a corner, slipping on his trousers, and tying his coat by the two sleeves round his neck, manifested an unmistakable desire to escape by the door rather than renew the acquaintance. Seeing this, his old prison comrade fell back upon the door, and set his shoulders against it.

'Cavalletto! Wake, boy! Rub your eyes and look at me. Not the name you used to call me - don't use that - Lagnier, say Lagnier!'

John Baptist, staring at him with eyes opened to their utmost width, made a number of those national, backhanded shakes of the right forefinger in the air, as if he were resolved on negativing beforehand everything that the other could possibly advance during the whole term of his life.

'Cavalletto! Give me your hand. You know Lagnier, the gentleman. Touch the hand of a gentleman!'

Submitting himself to the old tone of condescending authority, John Baptist, not at all steady on his legs as yet, advanced and put his hand in his patron's. Monsieur Lagnier laughed; and having given it a squeeze, tossed it up and let it go.

'Then you were - ' faltered John Baptist.

'Not shaved? No. See here!' cried Lagnier, giving his head a twirl; 'as tight on as your own.'

John Baptist, with a slight shiver, looked all round the room as if to recall where he was. His patron took that opportunity of turning the key in the door, and then sat down upon his bed.

'Look!' he said, holding up his shoes and gaiters. 'That's a poor trim for a gentleman, you'll say. No matter, you shall see how Soon I'll mend it. Come and sit down. Take your old place!'

John Baptist, looking anything but reassured, sat down on the floor at the bedside, keeping his eyes upon his patron all the time.

'That's well!' cried Lagnier. 'Now we might be in the old infernal hole again, hey? How long have you been out?'

'Two days after you, my master.'

'How do you come here?'

'I was cautioned not to stay there, and so I left the town at once, and since then I have changed about. I have been doing odds and ends at Avignon, at Pont Esprit, at Lyons; upon the Rhone, upon the Saone.' As he spoke, he rapidly mapped the places out with his sunburnt hand upon the floor. 'And where are you going?'

'Going, my master?'

'Ay!'

John Baptist seemed to desire to evade the question without knowing how. 'By Bacchus!' he said at last, as if he were forced to the admission, 'I have sometimes had a thought of going to Paris, and perhaps to England.'

'Cavalletto. This is in confidence. I also am going to Paris and perhaps to England. We'll go together.'

The little man nodded his head, and showed his teeth; and yet seemed not quite convinced that it was a surpassingly desirable arrangement.

'We'll go together,' repeated Lagnier. 'You shall see how soon I will force myself to be recognised as a gentleman, and you shall profit by it. It is agreed? Are we one?'

'Oh, surely, surely!' said the little man.

'Then you shall hear before I sleep - and in six words, for I want sleep - how I appear before you, I, Lagnier. Remember that. Not the other.'

'Altro, altro! Not Ri - ' Before John Baptist could finish the name, his comrade had got his hand under his chin and fiercely shut up his mouth.

'Death! what are you doing? Do you want me to be trampled upon and stoned? Do YOU want to be trampled upon and stoned? You would be. You don't imagine that they would set upon me, and let my prison chum go? Don't think it!' There was an expression in his face as he released his grip of his friend's jaw, from which his friend inferred that if the course of events really came to any stoning and trampling, Monsieur Lagnier would so distinguish him with his notice as to ensure his having his full share of it. He remembered what a cosmopolitan gentleman Monsieur Lagnier was, and how few weak distinctions he made.

'I am a man,' said Monsieur Lagnier, 'whom society has deeply wronged since you last saw me. You know that I am sensitive and brave, and that it is my character to govern. How has society respected those qualities in me? I have been shrieked at through the streets. I have been guarded through the streets against men, and especially women, running at me armed with any weapons they could lay their hands on. I have lain in prison for security, with the place of my confinement kept a secret, lest I should be torn out of it and felled by a hundred blows. I have been carted out of Marseilles in the dead of night, and carried leagues away from it packed in straw. It has not been safe for me to go near my house; and, with a beggar's pittance in my pocket, I have walked through vile mud and weather ever since, until my feet are crippled - look at them! Such are the humiliations that society has inflicted upon me, possessing the qualities I have mentioned, and which you know me to possess. But society shall pay for it.'

All this he said in his companion's ear, and with his hand before his lips.

'Even here,' he went on in the same way, 'even in this mean drinking-shop, society pursues me. Madame defames me, and her guests defame me. I, too, a gentleman with manners and accomplishments to strike them dead! But the wrongs society has heaped upon me are treasured in this breast.'

To all of which John Baptist, listening attentively to the suppressed hoarse voice, said from time to time, 'Surely, surely!' tossing his head and shutting his eyes, as if there were the clearest case against society that perfect candour could make out.

'Put my shoes there,' continued Lagnier. 'Hang my cloak to dry there by the door. Take my hat.' He obeyed each instruction, as it was given. 'And this is the bed to which society consigns me, is it? Hah. Very well!'

As he stretched out his length upon it, with a ragged handkerchief bound round his wicked head, and only his wicked head showing above the bedclothes, John Baptist was rather strongly reminded of what had so very nearly happened to prevent the moustache from any more going up as it did, and the nose from any more coming down as it did.

'Shaken out of destiny's dice-box again into your company, eh? By Heaven! So much the better for you. You'll profit by it. I shall need a long rest. Let me sleep in the morning.'

John Baptist replied that he should sleep as long as he would, and wishing him a happy night, put out the candle. One might have Supposed that the next proceeding of the Italian would have been to undress; but he did exactly the reverse, and dressed himself from head to foot, saving his shoes. When he had so done, he lay down upon his bed with some of its coverings over him, and his coat still tied round his neck, to get through the night.

When he started up, the Godfather Break of Day was peeping at its namesake. He rose, took his shoes in his hand, turned the key in the door with great caution, and crept downstairs. Nothing was astir there but the smell of coffee, wine, tobacco, and syrups; and madame's little counter looked ghastly enough. But he had paid madame his little note at it over night, and wanted to see nobody - wanted nothing but to get on his shoes and his knapsack, open the door, and run away.

He prospered in his object. No movement or voice was heard when he opened the door; no wicked head tied up in a ragged handkerchief looked out of the upper window. When the sun had raised his full disc above the flat line of the horizon, and was striking fire out of the long muddy vista of paved road with its weary avenue of little trees, a black speck moved along the road and splashed among the flaming pools of rain-water, which black speck was John Baptist Cavalletto running away from his patron.