

SECRETS OF THE CITY OF LYON

2nd Edition

MARILISE REZENDE BERTIN
by the Spirit LOUIS



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www.unieditoras.com
www.unieditoras.com.br
contato@edicoesbrasil.com.br



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Supervision: Marlene Rodrigues da Silva Aguiar
Cover Design and
Electronic Publishing: João José Ferreira de Aguiar
Proofreading: Ana Parreira - contact: villa.aspie@gmail.com

Editorial Board: Dr. Antonio Cesar Galhardi (Master's Program at Centro Paula Souza), Dra. Conceição Azenha (Outarte-IEL-UNICAMP), Dr. Daner Hornich (Postdoctoral fellow, PUC-SP), Ms. Dimas Ozanan Calheiros (Fatec Jundiaí), Dr. Eliezer Pedroso da Rocha (SEE), Dra. Erica Fernanda de Oliveira (SME-Jundiaí), Ms. João Carlos dos Santos (Fatec Jundiaí), Dr. José Fernando Petrini (Centro Paula Souza-Jundiaí), Dr. José Renato Polli (FE-Unicamp), Dr. Júlio Amstalden (CPTEn-UNICAMP), Dr. Manoel Francisco do Amaral (PAIDEIA-FE-UNICAMP), Dr. Marcos Alexandre Capellari (IFSP-Salto), Dra. Rosana Helena Nunes (Centro Paula Souza-Sorocaba), Dra. Teresa Helena Buscato Martins (IFSP), Dra. Valdirene Pereira Costa (IF-South of Minas).

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*Educate, and you will transform irrationality into intelligence, intelligence
into humanity, and humanity into angelic nature.*
Emmanuel/Chico Xavier (*Fonte Viva*, 30 – “Educa”.)

We’re a slow burning tune but we’ll get there...
Coldplay (*Music of the Spheres* - “Coloratura”.)

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A Few Words

When the human soul begins to awaken to the Divine, yet does not know it, it starts to feel a monotony that, at first, clouds its inner vision and leaves it restless. Something is not right; in vain, it tries to understand what is missing and attempts to fill the constant and growing void that torments it greatly.

As time passes, this feeling becomes unstable, stronger, and more evident; it is an intense and deeply distressing dissatisfaction. Seeking to free themselves from this distressing situation, the tortured human being projects a possible solution to their yearnings, seeking something in their environment, hoping for comfort.

The world around them, like a brightly lit showcase, excites them with its appeals. It offers an abundance of pleasures, which, when not well managed, lead to destructive excess. Excessive consumption of multiple and enticing foods awakens gluttony. Obsessive possession of gold often leads to stinginess, or excessive consumption of various material goods, making them prisoners of unnecessary expenses that afflict them; unbridled sex leads to serious problems that reflect on the spirit, even after death, causing immeasurable harm; alcohol and drugs lead to perdition, clouding the mind, destroying the physical body slowly, directing it towards difficult-to-reverse pathologies. Incarnated in a dense body, men and women mistakenly seek satisfaction that fills the void through carnal pleasures, yet their yearnings come from the soul.

Ah, human passions! They are illusions that divert the human being from their natural course: to grow and evolve towards God, that is love, justice, and charity. It is in divine goodness that we will always find the answer to all our questions, for we were created by Him, as we are His children. We must follow His laws, or rather, we must be 'obedient' to the purposes of the Highest. Love and charity are His highest premises; therefore, we must incorporate them into our daily routine in favour of our neighbour.

God did not make us the only inhabitants of the planet. Nor does this happen in the rest of the universe, where the many mansions to which Jesus referred are located. They are inhabited by beings of all evolutionary levels; from this, it can be concluded that the Other is our best gift. By assisting, helping, and truly loving them, as Jesus Christ taught us, we will recognise, through the practice of selfless love and service, with

inexhaustible affection, the necessary remedy to fill our soul with light, learning to love and understand the Creator.

Wishing you peace,

Gabi.

São Paulo, July 27, 2019.

1. The Atheist

My name is Louis Dourvignac, and through this writer, an incarnated being, I will reveal here my story, lived in France from the last quarter of the 18th century until the mid - 19th century.

Everything was still dark when I regained consciousness. I had slept poorly, tied to those musty ropes that had taken much effort to break. I didn't know how long I had been in that filthy basement, but I estimated it to be around two to three days. Confused and feverish, I caught a glimpse of light when I looked up and, deliriously, imagined that winter had arrived because my hands were freezing. My body ached immensely, and I wasn't sure if I could muster the strength to get out of that dark cubicle. It was impossible to stand, so I crouched down, sitting on my left leg, slightly damp and purple. It hurt a lot. Would I be able to escape unseen and walk with that numb and frozen leg? The bullet wound – which I didn't see where it came from – had only grazed me, and to stop the bleeding, I managed to make a makeshift bandage by tearing my old pants and exposing my leg from ankle to knee.

The cold was unbearable. My head still hurt from a blow I had received after the gunshot that hit my leg. My body trembled. My God... Why was I calling out to God at that moment? I didn't believe in God. I never had. That was the business of idle people or unscrupulous individuals who used that God to exploit the weak, rob the poor, and deceive the rich. No, I never allowed myself to think about the matter of divinity because many people suffered because of the misdeeds of Father Pierre Beziers¹, who ruled over that small region. Monsieur Pierre was a wicked creature who, to escape punishment for his crimes, would do anything to blame his wrongdoings on anyone who crossed his path. Woe to those who couldn't pay the exorbitant tithes imposed by that priest; they were summarily destroyed. At first, the miserable inhabitants of that village lived in anguish and fear, but they suffered in silence. They feared retaliation from God's emissary. However, over time, the humiliation and the tithing began to bother the residents.

It was because of this unbearable situation that the Brotherhood of the Elders was formed: a small group of religious and fanatic gentlemen decided to fight against injustices, abuses, and crimes committed by the

¹ In this work, the Spirit narrating the story chose not to reveal the names of the characters; therefore, all of them are fictional. Note from the Medium (M. N.).

priest. However, in a short time, the Brotherhood was discovered and betrayed. It was suspected that the denunciation came from some of Sebastian's neighbours, eager to receive a reward from God's representative. Well, why should I condemn these informants? After all, those vermin did me a huge favour by advancing my task. The priest had long suspected these secret meetings and did not believe they were strictly religious gatherings. Therefore, the task assigned to me by the priest was clear: to eliminate those damned elders who threatened to stand in his way. The priest had so decreed, and I was not a man to fear challenges. On the contrary, I had the health and strength to handle any kind of ambush. I had always been agile and determined. I knew how to read a little and understood a bit of politics. My father had served at sea as the captain's agent and had taught me that a strong man would do anything for those he served. I served the priest, and despite secretly hating him, I had to agree that he had been kind not to let me rot in jail for stealing some apples and a piece of bread. I was not a troublemaker. I acted to stay alive and did everything I could for it. Before being alone in the world, I helped my consumptive mother and my younger brothers, earning a few pennies by providing small services to the few merchants in the wretched place where we lived. My mother, in turn, couldn't bear the torment of losing her children to the plague, the disease that consumed her, and the unrequited love for my father: a man of many women and much drink who one fine day returned to the sea, leaving my poor mother alone with her children and the disease that soon took her to the grave, after the death of my brothers. The fleet my father was part of had been defeated, and my father perished in battle, ending a chapter in the history of my family. After the death of my brothers and my poor mother, shortly after the passing of my father, I, imprisoned for a piece of bread to quench my hunger, had to ally myself with the priest so as not to succumb. However, at that moment, locked up and sick, I had to trust that I would escape. The priest would come to my aid, I was certain.

However, I was confined in that tiny basement and didn't know who had thrown me there. Had I been captured by the king's men? Or by rebels who wanted the end of the monarchy? I couldn't be sure. I knew I was alone at that moment, and I thought of my father. He had once told me that he would never abandon me, that he would always help me because I resembled him. He promised to accompany me, whether alive or dead, and guide me in the best course of action. I knew, despite not believing in life after death, that he would not leave me helpless. I seemed to see him at that moment, in that small cubicle overrun by rats that scurried

away, panting, at my hoarse cries. The little creatures seemed to enjoy chasing me. They crawled on my body, licked my wound...

But I couldn't lose hope. I had faith that the priest would not fail me and would send someone to free me. He had informants, and they would come to me, sooner or later.

The priest's plan was grand and obscure.

He needed to ensure that the monarchy continued in those confusing years when the revolutionaries imposed a new system of government. The priest himself had an interest in maintaining his position as it was before, to continue exploiting the faithful. He believed that through his contacts, he could bring the right people to his side and thus maintain his degenerate life as always. He also knew that he would need a strong hand to bring down those wretched elders who sought a fairer life, away from the corrupt priest. Fraternity, that was the favourite word of that group of damned old men... A weak word that would never fit in a ruined and morally lost France. Everything was falsehood and a power play – and the ambitious priest would move to the side that favoured him the most, whichever side that was, so I believed.

Oh, God... Where was that God who did not care about the wretched? Where was that God of love who put a son to die on the cross in an ignominious way in this land of horrors? The priest himself knew that this God did not exist. Many times, I saw him laughing after the end of the mass, counting the tithes he had received. Drunk from so much expensive wine, the fat old man laughed heartily and also laughed in his room, where he opened his trunk full of gold coins and banknotes. At those times, he called his servant, the faithful Terence, and asked him to bring feather, ink, and paper to fix the new amount that the townspeople would have to contribute in the name of the Redeemed Christ, he said, laughing out loud. This God, the priest toiled, was for the cunning and the clever.

“Let us learn as soon as possible”, he would say. “Only the cunning and the rich will become richer. In no man's land, goodness does not find a home”, the representative of the church would assert emphatically, laughing heartily.

Behind the partially closed door, I observed everything that was happening. My role was to stay there, waiting for his call. When he did call, it was invariably to bring the next village virgin to serve his nefarious purposes. He hand - picked her right after the Holy Mass. It was my duty to follow the young woman who served him, to observe where the unsus-

pecting girl lived. When required, I would arm myself to the teeth and quickly head to her home. Usually, the poor chosen maiden lived alone with her mother, without any man to defend her. Her moans were already audible when I knocked on her door. At my eighteen years old, I was feared by all the inhabitants of the small village and abused my courage. Downing a bottle of liquor, well - dressed and arrogant, I was considered a cruel man among those wretched souls living in that accursed place.

They were well aware that I was a daring servant with great ambition, who wouldn't miss any opportunity to serve that odious priest to the best of my ability. Consequently, misfortunes befell one after another, and the council of the daring elders began to create problems for me. The priest's order was to exterminate them, and I needed more men to finish off the old men. However, life shows us that humans are worth no more than what they eat. The denunciation made to the cardinal about the priest's dark deeds seemed to lead nowhere, but it worried the priest greatly. He had to maintain an immaculate image as a representative of Christ, free from sins, to avoid problems and achieve his goal.

On the other hand, he was attentive to the intrigues of those who were in favour of maintaining the monarchy and the attacks of the opponents of the monarch. The king had his educated men and well - trained spies, always ready to intervene in his favour, doing everything to bring him back to power. But his well - organised adversaries did not give up. One of my tasks was to keep an eye on the 'enemies of the king' and plan their annihilation, one by one. I had some trusted men to capture the heads of these infidels. However, I was caught in an ambush so well prepared that I didn't know where it came from. Was it from the fearless elders? The treacherous neighbours? The priest's spies, whom I served? The enemies of the monarchy?

Everything was foggy, and I couldn't think. Ah, my frozen leg. My other leg hurt, my hands were cold, and my head was pounding. My body trembled, and I sweated profusely. In this moment of delirious thoughts, I remembered my mother. Despite all the difficulties she faced with my father's distance, she maintained genuine faith in the 'Father of Love'. She always told me about the divine goodness, sang hymns praising that false God she created within herself to survive life's pains. Somehow, she seemed to know that she had to insist that the kingdom of Heaven was an unquestionable truth. She must have foreseen that her son would become an atheist.

I ended up falling asleep; I don't know for how long. I woke up to a loud noise coming from above the basement where I was. Despite fee-

ling cold, the temperature outside seemed pleasant. Why was I feeling so cold? My head was spinning, and the sound of footsteps above the basement worried me, making me anxious. Loud voices, curses. They seemed to be soldiers searching for a criminal. And the criminal was undoubtedly me. A kind of pickaxe began to strike the floor above my head. They didn't take long to discover the cellar door. My horror-stricken eyes saw Elder Leblanc coming down armed with a scythe, accompanied by two other middle-aged men. Armed as best as they could be, with fury in their eyes, I realised that it was not the time to retaliate. I was outnumbered, unarmed, and had woken up in that filthy basement without knowing what had happened. There was no doubt; I had fallen into the trap of the rebellious elders. I was dragged up the stairs by the younger men and taken, still dragged, to the central location of the small town, where a cross was planted in a small elliptical garden surrounded by withered and dried plants. There, I would spend the night, tightly tied to an old pillar, a remnant of an ancient construction, deprived of drink and food, dirty and alone.

The men who had captured me disappeared, and no citizen dared to leave their homes. It seemed that some were spying through the tattered curtains of the dusty windows. Everything was dry, but the nocturnal wind promised discomfort. It was strong and cutting, like a knife, piercing my sore body and head. Dawn was breaking, and I was still tied up, my head bent forward, thirstier, and hungrier than ever.

This was my new reality, and I found myself utterly lost. I hoped fervently that the enemies of those elders, a few neighbours indebted to the priest's favours, would inform the 'holy man' of everything that had happened, and he would send his men to save me. However, I knew that the celebrations of St. Bartholomew's Day continued, especially apoteotically that night, and they could be violent. As a self-proclaimed atheist and an enemy of those people, I could indeed be hanged. It was through the gallows that the humble, or those considered heretics, ended their days.

The sun was scorching my head, and I had passed out. When I came to, I noticed that a young woman, who seemed shy and frightened, was bringing water for me to drink. She was being closely watched from a distance by stern Leblanc, who didn't let her out of his sight. Burning with fever, I eagerly, despite being tied up, struggled to drink the water she offered me in a clay amphora. I don't know how long we stayed in that situation. The young woman squatting, giving me water, and me trying to drink as much as I could until a dizziness made everything go dark, and I fainted again.

2. *Saint Bartholomew*

I knew very well that the celebrations in honour of Saint Bartholomew's Day² were warm and enthusiastic. But in those times, violence was considered a virtue, not a flaw. That impious people praised honour as an excuse to commit all sorts of evils. Were you hurt? You had the right to hurt others. Were you deceived? You had the right to be compensated. The law of retaliation. The contrite religious claimed that Christ had come almost two millennia ago and preached goodness and forgiveness of offenses. Nevertheless, his teachings lay dormant, like an embryo awaiting development or a seed rehearsing to become a flower. Misery, at all levels, roamed freely, enveloping all men with its pestilential breath.

I lay half-dead, tied to that pillar, as some movement of people in the square became evident. Strong men carried or pulled together, with tightly bound ropes, some tree trunks that they piled on top of each other. They were placed in the centre of the square, surrounded by small houses. After a few hours of rough work, the men decided that the trunks were enough. It was then that a commanding cry from Leblanc echoed from inside one of the small houses, and something astonishing happened: some women, accompanied by youths and children, brought baskets with hammers, nails, and other tools and left them next to the pile of wood before departing. The men began to build a large scaffold with two ropes.

Perplexed, I understood what I could never have imagined existing. The Brotherhood of the Elders, which fought against the priest's abuses, seemed to have gained the support of many inhabitants. At a signal from Leblanc, his rough servants appeared, pushing some villagers who came tied up. These poor men were taken to the gallows and hanged. The present crowd - men, women, youths, and children - shouted slogans:

“Death to the enemies of the Brotherhood of the Elders!”

“Death to the informers!”

Amidst the uproar, Leblanc's voice rose:

2 “The massacre of St. Bartholomew's Day was an episode in the history of France during the repression of Protestantism. According to tradition, it is believed to have been instigated by the French queen Catherine de' Medici, who was Catholic. These killings (ranging from 2,000 to 70,000 people, according to a source attributed to a Roman Catholic apologist) took place between August 23 and 24, 1572, in Paris, on the eve of St. Bartholomew's Day.” Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St._Bartholomew%27s_Day_massacre#Death_toll (Accessed on January 16, 2021) (M. N.).

“My gentlemen, we are a Christian people! We do not tolerate anyone against Christ among us! Where is the damned priest who bleeds our pockets with his greed? Where is that infamous man who abuses our women?”

In despair, I noticed that many were filled with hatred. Others, however, were clearly repeating the cries out of fear of reprisal, fearing for their own fate. Leblanc continued to shout invectives against the priest and yelled:

“Long live Saint Bartholomew! Away with the accursed priest! Away with the lord’s prince who exploits us so much! Where is he? Where is the monster? We are a free country! We despise corrupt religious. Beautiful France is free!”

And he continued, frenzied:

“Observe, my gentlemen, this is the end of all those who walk against divine laws! Death on the gallows! Are you listening? Death on the gallows!”

In his hateful speech, Leblanc vociferated:

“Where is the priest right now? Where is he? He fled like the coward he is! Let’s not waste time. Forward to the devil’s house! Let’s destroy everything inside. “Boys,” he yelled to the men holding trembling torches, “search the church, bring him here, and if possible, find out where the scoundrel hides our gold. Go! I order you!”

A general commotion took over the square. Suddenly, in the dark night, men, women, and children flocked from all sides; the adults carried trembling torches. The church was already beginning to burn. In the confusion, some people fell and, often, were trampled by the frenzied mob. A torch fell near where I was, threatening to hit my injured leg. I shrank as much as the ropes allowed and wondered how long this hellish scene would last.

After a while, Leblanc’s servants returned empty-handed, saying they had found an open chest but empty, in the priest’s quarters, which had collapsed along with the church, consumed by the flames. How many would die in that village on Saint Bartholomew’s Day? That was the question that terrified me to my core.

And that horror was not yet over. Looking in my direction, bloodshot eyes, Leblanc, in an instant, shouted to his followers to take me to the gallows. Released from the pillar by three men, I screamed in agony, trying to free myself as best I could; of medium height, I was strong wi-

thout being brutal and, despite being sick and weak, I used the little strength I had left to break free. All in vain, though. Once on the scaffold, I awaited the moment when the deadly rope would be placed around my neck. My life would finally end. I did not close my eyes at any moment. I was not a coward. I would die with honour.

Next, everything happened very quickly. I heard the whistle of a bullet and saw one of the men holding me fall dead while another reached for the rope. Another shot, this time from behind, and another man fell next to the first. An infernal outcry followed by the trotting of horses, which neighed loudly, carrying royal guards dressed in white and blue, firing in all directions, while the bewildered crowd sought shelter in the houses, fleeing from the fearless riders who continued shooting. Among them, I spotted a man carrying the flag of the King of France, followed by others. A soldier stopped in front of me, dismounted, and quickly climbed the scaffold, carrying my half-dead body on his back, and threw me over his horse as if I were a sack of oats. He threw the ropes over my back and secured them tightly to the animal's back. Making sure I was securely fastened, he mounted and, at full speed, rode off with me following other comrades who were heading north.

I couldn't tell where they were taking me, what my fate would be from then on. They were men of the king! Yes, they served the king! Nor would I be able to explain why, for the first time in my life, I envisioned, in the depths of my debilitated soul, that Christ of love my mother spoke about in the daily Christian readings she used to do for us, her children, when we were still young. I awkwardly thanked Him in some way, feeling somewhat moved and... somewhat humble.

3. The Monarchists

The journey was long and exhausting. It felt like I wouldn't last much longer on the back of that animal. The rider wasn't very considerate. The soldiers were in a hurry and rode all night. The soldier who was leading me followed a little more slowly and occasionally looked back to make sure I hadn't fallen or escaped. Little did he know that my condition was critical. I lost consciousness several times and was very thirsty, so thirsty. I thought of dying.

The day was breaking when we arrived at a very well-organized camp. The tents surrounded a central area where campfires flickered, but my recent experience in the village where I had been made the crackle of the flames terrifying. I felt very nauseous. But upon closer observation of those fires, I realised they were roasting meat that would undoubtedly serve as a meal for everyone there. The rider suddenly stopped the horse, and I thought I would fall straight to the ground. But that didn't happen. He dismounted, greeted some soldiers who saluted him, and stayed there, engaged in frank and heated conversations. When a masked soldier arrived, silence fell. I was startled by the presence of that man. Surely, he must be the leader of all, as he dressed impeccably, with gleaming boots and clean, well-fitted clothes. In his left hand, he had a ring with a deep blue gem that reflected the brightness of the intense sunlight. Matching the gem, he carried on his shoulders a dark blue cloak richly embroidered and a chain adorning his neck, ending in a blue stone cross resting on his chest. He was robust, but I couldn't tell his age. The mask covered a large part of his face. I could make out his wide nostrils, thin lips, and wondered why that silver, aristocratic mask covered part of his face, which seemed proud and inquisitive.

My thoughts were interrupted by the soldier who had brought me there. He approached the horse, and while another soldier calmed the animal by patting its back, the rider untied the ropes and pushed me to the ground. In an instant, I felt like a sack of flour thrown onto the red earth. The soldiers present burst into laughter and, shouting, ordered me to get up. However, even if I wanted to, I couldn't get up. Lying on the ground, mocked by all, like a wretched criminal, I thought, once again, that I was going to die. I had no strength left. After some time of mockery, the masked man ordered silence, and everyone promptly obeyed. He instructed the soldier to take the horse to bathe in a nearby lake of clear waters. The rider directed the horse to the lake and made sure that it didn't stray too

far from the other soldiers and horses, which were refreshing themselves in those waters that seemed tepid and revitalising to me. With a nod from the masked man, an eager servant hurried over to him, and the chief ordered him to tell me to get up and go to the lake as well. Approaching me, the servant shouted for me to get up. I did nothing. I couldn't take it anymore; I was weak, ill, and my left leg wouldn't obey me. The little man started kicking me hard in the hip region, but I didn't react. Seeing that I was almost dead, the masked man called a soldier and ordered him to take me for a bath in the lake. Fortunately, the strong soldier was careful. He lifted me up and, holding me firmly in his arms, carried me into the lake, entering it with me. He released me into the water, but I couldn't swim, sinking quickly, and for a moment, I believed I would drown. I was choking and going under when the soldier pulled me back to the surface and began to hold me carefully, as if I were a newborn baby in his first bath.

The water, which initially felt cold, gradually became more comforting. Passing through the rags that covered me, it enveloped my body in an indescribable feeling of well-being. However, this well-being was not complete because my body was trembling non-stop. At some point, the soldier submerged my head in the water so I could drink and quench my thirst. Once again, I thought I would drown, but soon I adapted and drank eagerly for a while. After I had had my fill of water, the man took me to the edge of the lake and resting for a few seconds at the shore, placed me on the ground, where I stayed for a short while. I looked around for the first time and saw, at a short distance, some women of various ages moving around, carrying soldiers' uniforms. They brought voluminous trays with raw meat to be roasted on the lit fires. To my astonishment, among the women, there was a young woman who seemed familiar. I couldn't remember where I knew her from. She seemed to recognise me too because she returned my gaze but immediately lowered her head. Was she afraid of something? I couldn't tell. At that moment, the soldier who had accompanied me stood up and carried me to a tent, where I saw a mattress, a small table, and a jug filled with a liquid that seemed like wine.

I stayed there, lying down, until a woman of about fifty years old appeared with thick cloths and a clean uniform, the coat of which was blue and the pants white. Along with her came a well-dressed and serious man. When I saw the soldiers' uniforms, servants of the king, I refused to wear those clothes. I served the priest and was loyal to him. I would never betray him, I added. The man told me to shut up under penalty of death and informed me that only after being appropriately dressed and fed would I have the honour of having an audience with the chief.

I couldn't retaliate. I was very weak and feverish. Seeing that I had acquiesced, the man left, followed shortly after by the humble nurse who, at the time, had given me some drops to drink mixed with a little wine. I believe that those drops, and my debilitated state contributed to me falling asleep - and I slept for several days, as I later found out. Meanwhile, I had a high fever, and in the delirium of nightmares, I saw myself being hanged by Leblanc.

I woke up weak and sweaty. I had the feeling that my left leg was asleep, but the wound hurt too much. I don't know how long I lay there until a young woman entered the tent. A feeling of surprise came over me at that moment. She was the same young woman I had seen by the lake and whom I had the impression of knowing. She brought me soup, but before I could eat, she changed the bed linen and made a new dressing on my leg. I asked what had happened, and she told me that I had a very high fever for several days, and she had been tasked with staying by my bedside all the time. I ate slowly, enjoying the food that I hadn't had for a long time. When the soup was finished, I thought about asking for more, but I decided to stay quiet. My leg was bothering me a lot, and I was about to express my pain when two men entered the tent. One of them was a soldier, the other, much older, wasn't wearing a uniform and he carried a kind of backpack. The young woman said her goodbyes and left with her head bowed, humbly. That servile attitude bothered me. I was confused.

At that moment, I was interrupted in my thoughts by the man holding the backpack. He told me he was a doctor and had taken care of me while I was delirious. He said I had narrowly escaped death, but my leg had suffered severe damage due to the uncomfortable position during the days I was trapped in that basement. According to him, my muscles and nerves were affected, and I had lost the ability to move my leg forever. He asserted that I would be lame for the rest of my life! The pain I felt was immense. I wanted to scream, but I couldn't. Thick tears bathed my emaciated face, and the doctor and the soldier accompanying him left. How could I accept a crippled leg? How could I find work in the future being lame? Adding to this concern, another worry took hold of me. My appearance was something that weighed on the arrogant young man I used to be at that time. I didn't consider myself ugly. My short black and straight hair contrasted with my light brown eyes. I had a slender face with thin lips. My stature was average and strong enough. I could have been a handsome man if it weren't for the rebellion and crimes that were evident in my hard and anguished eyes. But being lame for the rest of my days was a reality hard to accept...

Sometime later, another soldier entered the tent and informed me that his chief wanted to see me. I asked for help to get up, but I heard, “Hurry up, the chief doesn’t like to wait.” I got up as best as I could, with enormous difficulty, dressed, and followed the soldier from a distance to a large tent, the largest I had seen until then. I waited outside, barely able to stand, until the soldier asked me to come in. Limping heavily, I tried to straighten myself up to make a better impression. The soldier left me alone in the tent, and I admired the luxury in such a small space. A beautiful, red-carved wooden table held colourful and exotic porcelain. Two wooden chairs of the same colour as the table, were placed on opposite sides, with seats covered in black velvet. A colourful carpet adorned the earthen floor. The chief was at the back, which seemed like another entrance to the tent.

“Sit down, Mr. Louis Dourvignac”, he said politely but firmly. I was startled: how did he know my name? Nevertheless, I obeyed and sat down with difficulty, facing the sombre smile of that impressive man.

“Let’s talk a little”, he continued.

The man carefully removed his mask, so his long curly hair wouldn’t get dishevelled, and to my horror, I recognised the face of Monsieur Raison himself, who observed me with curiosity, showing satisfaction and haughtiness.

4. *New Paths*

Time passed slowly and silently until Monsieur Raison finally decided to speak. He was an extraordinary man. It seemed he knew the state of my soul and took delight in my painful and pitiable situation. I served one of his enemies, yet he chose to keep me alive! Yes, alive. He saved me from the gallows and most likely would provide me with shelter and food. But why had he done all this? What did he want from me? No matter how much I pondered, I couldn't find a plausible answer. My mind wandered in different directions, creating various hypotheses, trying to make sense of it all, but to no avail. It was as if all the likely paths led nowhere, and I was once again trying to figure out what would happen to me from that moment on. It seemed that all the recent painful experiences had dulled my mind, refusing to comprehend it all.

After what felt like an eternity, I gave up on reaching a conclusion. I was exhausted and defeated, not knowing what to think, say, or do. Monsieur Raison's behaviour surprised me. Curiously, I sensed that he knew what was going through my mind and patiently waited for me to exhaust my ideas before attacking me completely unprepared. He was undoubtedly a skilled player, which was no surprise. A man of his calibre would not be matched by someone like me. I, who always considered myself clever, had finally encountered an opponent far more prepared, I thought in my prideful arrogance. I had to admit that he had won. I surrendered, as they say.

Finally, Monsieur Raison rose from his seat and, while savouring a glass of wine, walked to the table where the bottle was. Arriving at the table, he filled a second glass that rested next to the bottle and, to my embarrassment, offered it to me.

"Come, drink, my young man", he said, with a challenging smile on his lips.

Feeling somewhat awkward and deeply irritated, I considered refusing his offer. I couldn't stand being cornered like this at the moment. The pride of a young Frenchman, now a poor but ambitious aristocrat, wouldn't easily bow to that nobleman, even though, according to my understanding, he was internally conflicted, fighting tooth and nail for the king's continuance on the throne.

"From what I see, the arrogant and ambitious young man still struggles to stand tall! Sit down", he ordered, pointing to the chair in

front of him, where he sat. There was no way around it. I had to respect his command. I waited for him to be seated before doing the same.

Monsieur Raison had a challenging smile on his lips.

“Checkmate, young man. You haven’t quite grasped the situation. You are in the presence of one of the greatest representatives of the monarchy! Are you not afraid for your life? Have you not realised your situation? It is I who holds the cards now. You have no way out.”

“Dear sir”, I replied, flustered, confusing thoughts and words but striving to appear firm, “I believe you know that I serve the priest, Monsieur Pierre, who favours me with his services, and I dutifully attend to them. Forgive me for my audacity, but I must continue serving the priest, to whom I am eternally grateful.”

“Eternally grateful, young man? Well, you poor people are nothing more than miserable creatures! Your protector destroyed your family and, after committing so many atrocities, gave you a job. You carry out his orders, helping him perpetrate the same crimes committed against your family and other unfortunate souls like you! Do you not mind repeating, with others, the same evil you suffered?”

I was stunned by his words. How did he know my most intimate secrets? Where did he get information about my family? He surely knew everything and all the horrors I had committed. What to do now?

“Yes”, he continued, “the brave young man. Laughing at the poor inhabitants of that tiny town, whose meagre savings served to be handed over to the ‘holy father’. How much did you surreptitiously take from many, claiming to the priest that not everyone paid? Do you not regret the punishments inflicted on so many innocent people by the priest? Do you not mind being the executioner who administers the punishments to those poor souls? Do you want me to give you all the details of the amount you have accumulated over the years? I have all the information here”, he continued, taking out a scroll from a red drawer in the table. “Do you want me to read it all, my ‘good’ young man? We have a lot to read, but we have time, my young man”, he reiterated with a sardonic smile.

I realised that this man knew about my past and all my misdeeds. There was no alternative. I had to accept whatever came my way. I remained silent, humbled, finally defeated. However, he was in no hurry. He went to the small table, filled his glass with more wine, and savoured it with delight and voluptuousness. He observed me with the tranquillity and assurance of someone who truly knew how to play.

“We can talk now, can’t we?” he inquired finally.

“Yes”, I replied, dejected, “I am at your service.”

“From now on, that is how you should speak, my dear. Despite the miserable life you’ve had until now, you have noble lineage and are the son of Monsieur Jordan, the captain’s agent, who rendered excellent service for the sovereign. Therefore, you will stay with us. Please take off those soldier’s clothes that are of no use to you anymore. You are a wretched cripple. I will employ you as a servant to my personal secretaries, and they will tell you what you need to do. Among other tasks, they will also have the mission to keep a close eye on you, observing your every move. Make no mistake, young man: I always know everything that happens in France, as I have loyal and dedicated companions scattered all around. Otherwise, my spies would have already received the reward of the gallows. From today on, prepare yourself to serve my trusted assistants. Do everything that is assigned to you, and, at the end of a year, if you prove yourself worthy, you will earn another position in which you will have more freedom to serve me. Now, please leave. Be ready to leave tomorrow before dawn. I tolerate no delays, much less betrayals.”

With that, our first and only encounter ended. The nobleman called his three assistants, to whom I would now serve. I had no hope, quite the opposite. It was clear that I was a prisoner of that powerful man who knew me like the back of his hand. The priest I served could take revenge on me in the future, but for now, I had no choice. I had to obey Monsieur Raison’s orders. I also worried about my new situation as a young cripple, very limiting indeed. How would I manage future tasks? I was also concerned about my relationship with Monsieur Raison’s three secretaries. They did not inspire confidence, and I foresaw problems by their side. I was finally disheartened because, from that moment on, I would be obliged to serve a cause that I believed to be lost.

I arrived at the tent assigned to me, loosened the belt of my pants to sleep more comfortably. I had a confusing dream. I saw my mother in front of a cross, with Christ, with open and radiant arms, seeming to look at me with great pity. My mother cried tears of joy and said that I was now embarking on the path of lights that would lead me back to the loving Shepherd. However, deep down, I believed that this would be a journey of pain and tears.

5. *The Journey*

I woke up with a heavy heart and a mind full of uncertainty. It was around three in the morning, and the camp was bustling with activity. Men were cleaning and loading their weapons with gunpowder, while women tended to the clothes, dishes, and preserved food they would carry during the journey. Two carts full of supplies led the way, escorted by many skilled and alert soldiers. Lord Raison rode ahead, mounted on a majestic white horse, standing out among a small troop of about fifty men protecting him. As for me, an aspirant to anything, I followed closely behind, riding a worn-out brown horse, as per the commander's wishes, I thought to myself.

The cannons followed behind, guarded by elite soldiers. Their attire was slightly different from the others; they wore white trousers, but their jackets were dark blue, not light like the majority of the soldiers. Each soldier bore a replica of the blue cross on their chest, the same emblem that glimmered on the chain of the lord who had interviewed me. It distinguished the king's allies from other rebel groups. The noise was deafening – shouts, curses, complaints, and pleas for help filled the air. Everyone was preparing for the journey, or rather, the escape, as they were being pursued by the king's enemies. The word among the revolutionaries, whispered behind closed doors, was to leave no one alive, except for Lord Raison, who would be judged, condemned, and imprisoned, or worse.

Once the preparations and the alignment of the large entourage were completed, the troop of over three hundred people stood ready to depart. The tension was palpable among them. There was much talk until the sound of a gunshot silenced everyone. It was an emissary from the leader, ordering silence. At that moment, everyone made way for the steed guided by the nobleman who had spoken to me the night before. From a slightly elevated position, with his face uncovered, Lord Raison, mounted on his horse, addressed all the members of the group. He spoke loudly and solemnly about the urgent need for everyone to remain loyal to the Great Cause and fight for the restoration of the monarchy. When the speech ended, the soldiers were animated and confident. Lord Raison was astute; he knew how to manipulate people's minds with his words.

The cries of approval were unanimous and intense. I was impressed by the sense of patriotism in these people. They truly believed that they could do much for their country. They genuinely believed that the young king would return to the throne and that their lives would genuinely im-

prove. They were willing to die fighting for the cause. As for me, I was a born pessimist. I didn't believe that any form of government, be it a monarchy or any other, could truly improve the situation of the French people. To me, France was a miserable country, where a wealthy minority lived in abundance and opulence while the majority languished in near-absolute poverty.

With such thoughts, I had to find strength to keep going. My destiny was uncertain, and after the warm applause from the king's followers, the departure order was given. The drums of that strange group, full of confidence, joy, but also fear of the future, began to beat. The fear hidden in the faces of the women, the soldiers, and the nobleman who had spoken to me and now wore a mask to hide his identity, as if a simple mask could protect him from being recognised – hiding from oneself, I thought.

The journey was long and exhausting. There were many stops to satisfy the hunger and thirst of both people and animals. The soldiers had to remain sober under the threat of being whipped, but it wasn't always possible. The climate was dry and hot, and throats always needed a sip. I had got used to the pain in my leg and limped less, but I was still a cripple. And I would remain so for the rest of my life.

The journey continued, always under the threat of the arrival of the rebels who wanted to end us. The king's messengers, during our journey to Lyon, came and went, bringing fresh news about the movements of the enemies. They had their informants, spies favourable to the king's reign, infiltrated among the extremist rebels who were getting closer to us. However, we pressed on without stopping towards Lyon, which would provide us shelter. The people of Lyon, under the command of the king's sympathisers, had organised a well-planned uprising against the extremists fighting against the monarchy. They were willing to fight against the rebels with their own lives if necessary.

Die for an ideal... Would it be believable that a population composed mostly of poor wretches would let themselves be swayed by the interests of wealthy monarchists, genuinely believing that their lives would improve? I couldn't understand such an attitude. I despised anyone who thought that way. I would never allow myself to think differently. Nevertheless, I had to continue my game, seeking solace in the arms of whoever offered me bread. A cursed life. But which life could be blessed in a world like this?

Finally, we arrived near the city and were welcomed as heroes by the inhabitants, as the crowd of the city grew around us, shouting enthu-

siastically in support of the monarch. Lyon soldiers reluctantly formed a protective perimeter around us, allowing us to enter the city and head towards the centre, where we were greeted by feverish citizens awaiting an emotional speech in favour of the monarchy from the masked nobleman. Truthfully, our group was exhausted, in need of rest, food, drink, and nothing more.