



The MINISTER OF POLICE

By HENRY MONTJOY

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Synopsis. "THE MINISTER OF POLICE," by Henry Montjoy, is a romance of Paris during the Louis XV reign, a period when Europe was in a condition of foment and unrest; when Voltaire was breaking to pieces the shackles of religion; when Rousseau at the Cafe de Procope was preaching the right to think; and when a thousand men, some in the gutter, some near the throne, were preparing the great explosion of the revolution.

Madame Linden, an Austrian lady, after completing a simple mission to the French court, lingers on in Paris, enjoying the gay life there. De Sartines, the minister of police, thinks she has some other motive than pleasure in delaying her departure and surrounds her with spies to discover, if possible, whether she is dabbling in state plots.

De Lussac is a noble of exceptional character of that period. Handsome, with all the elegance of a man of the court, there is still about him something that stamps him as a man apart, something of the visionary, the enthusiast and the poet, rare in that age of animal lust, chilling wit and embrodered brutality. He is, in fact, steeped in the philosophy of Rousseau and is trying to put this philosophy into practice through his connection with a secret society that is plotting the downfall of the state. Before he has gone far enough to incriminate himself he falls in love with the beautiful Austrian, who persuades him his method of righting the wrongs of humanity is impracticable, and ends by promising to go to Vienna with her to live.

As he leaves her house a fellow conspirator, his chief, joins him, and several of their members are arrested, and entrusts the secret articles of the association to him. He then explains to De Lussac that their only hope is to intimidate the minister of police, which can be accomplished only by obtaining an incriminating contract signed by the minister of police and in the possession and safe keeping of De Richelieu, De Lussac's cousin. With this contract in their possession they can dictate terms to the minister of police, obtain the release of the members already imprisoned and be safe themselves.

De Lussac goes home, buries the papers he has just received, writes Madame Linden that he is attempting one last mission for the society, and also writes an associate telling him where the papers may be found in case of his death. Then he enters Richelieu's home and almost succeeds in getting the document, but is surprised and leaves it in a drawer which he has unlocked. Before he can make another attempt he is arrested and taken to the Bastille but not before he has told Madame Linden how nearly he succeeded in getting the document. She, realizing how desperate her lover's position is, visits Richelieu's home and succeeds where her lover has failed.

CHAPTER II (Continued.)

"Then render it by explaining yourself quickly, for my time is not my own."

"Monsieur," replied Placide, coming forward closer to Sartines, "I am in the service of Madame la Baronne Linden. I am also in her secrets." He laughed and passed for a moment.

"Proceed."

"I am not satisfied with my mistress, monsieur."

"A common complaint with servants. Proceed."

"The other day, monsieur, I discovered that the police were making inquiries about Madame la Baronne. An agent of police, disguised, attempted to enter the house by making love to Rosine, the maid. She repulsed him, and I had the honor to assist with a bucket of water. Well, monsieur, I said to myself, if the police are so anxious to find out something about Madame la Baronne, there is perhaps something to find out."

"One moment," said de Sartines.

"What is your name?"

"Placide, monsieur."

"Go on."

"Well, monsieur, heaven has given me a fine nose for hunting out intrigues, and I said to myself, Here is your chance of obtaining a post in the police agency, where the pay is good. Monsieur de Sartines is trying to find out something about Madame. Let us try if we can't help Monsieur de Sartines. Now, I said to myself, 'In a case where you want to find out anything about a woman, look for the man. Whom does Madame favor most? Why, the Comte de Lussac.'

"Aha!" said de Sartines, beginning to feel some respect for the miserable old sinner who seemed to glory in the betrayal of his mistress. "And did you follow the Comte de Lussac?"

"Oh, no, monsieur. I stuck to my mistress. She left Paris for Compiègne, taking me with her as well as the maid, Rosine. We had scarcely been two hours at the Villa Rose—for that was the name of the house where we were staying—when a messenger from Paris arrived on horseback, with a note for Madame."

"The messenger was Jasmin, Monsieur de Lussac's confidential servant."

"I, it was, who opened the door and took the note; Madame was in her bath, and I promised to deliver it to her as soon as she was visible."

"I opened the note, monsieur, and it was of such an extraordinary nature that I made a fair copy of the contents. This it is." He took a folded paper from his pocket and handed it to de Sartines, who read:

"Today I am burying in the earth of the first orange tree on the right as you enter my courtyard a packet of vital importance to the S. de M. Should I be arrested, or should I die, show this letter to Jasmin, my valet. He is entrusted to be trusted. Unearth the packet and make use of it as your wisdom sees fit."

"Armand de Lussac."

"Mon Dieu!" said de Sartines, casting his eyes again over this most vital piece of writing. "And what did you do with the original?"

"I gave it to Madame la Baronne," replied Placide. "It was only the egg shell. I had abstracted the meat."

"Did she notice that you had tampered with the letter?"

"No, monsieur; I am not such a bungler in my work as that."

De Sartines had now in his hand the means of obtaining those papers of the society of the Midi which he knew to exist and for which he had been hunt-

gering. He had not only de Lussac fully in his power, but de Lussac's mistress, the Baronne Linden, by attachment. But the deep satisfaction that filled his mind left him quite unenthusiastic as to Placide, the fount and origin of this precious information.

The perfidy of Placide did not occur to him at all in relation to the information, nor did it mar his satisfaction. But when it came to the question of reward, Placide's perfidy shocked Monsieur de Sartines and chilled his tone as he said, "This information may be important as a means of carrying out the ends of justice. We shall see."

"Yes, monsieur," replied Placide, without moving an inch. "I think you will find it most important. And now to the small question of my reward."

"You have done your duty to the state," replied the minister. "Let your reward consist in the satisfaction of that thought. There is no question of reward. All citizens are required to assist the police in protecting the social order. Well, what are you waiting for?"

The old villain seemed completely taken aback by this cool pronouncement; his beard wagged, his mouth opened and closed. Then, to de Sartines' astonishment, he began to laugh.

"Oh, monsieur," said he, "the only reward I require, is for you to say, 'Placide, you are in my service,' with, of course, the ordinary police pay for my services, which, added to my salary, will not be so bad."

"Oh," said de Sartines, "you can serve me every day, if you like, as you served me today. Ma foi, if that is what you want, the thing is done. Placide, you are in my service."

"Thank you, monsieur."

"Now you can go," said de Sartines. "Continue to keep your eyes open and apply to Monsieur Beauregard for your salary, starting from yesterday. He will pay you weekly in advance."

Placide left the room, and de Sartines summoned Monsieur Beauregard.

"Monsieur Beauregard," said de Sartines, "go at once with half a company of guards to the house of Monsieur le Comte de Lussac, in the Rue de Valois. Surround it, arrest all the servants, place a man in each room; should your entrance be contested, break the doors down."

Immediately you enter the court yard, examine the first orange tree tub on the right; examine it carefully, to see if the soil has been disturbed. Then, with your own hands remove the soil and bring me the packet of papers you find concealed there. It is of vital importance. It is concealed in the mold. Do not fear to dirty your hands."

Beauregard laughed.

"And the servants, monsieur?"

"Have them all removed under a strong guard to the conciergerie; and by the way, that old scoundrel who has just left the room—enter him on your pay list as an agent, and pay him the first class agent's salary weekly in advance."

"Yes, monsieur."

Beauregard saluted and went out.

CHAPTER III.

ROSINE TELLS TALES.

Placide left the Hotel de Sartines and took his way to the Rue Coq Heron.

He had no need to ring. Rosine was at the gate, taking the air, glancing up and down the street. It was a lovely evening, warm and perfumed with the scent of flowers from the little gardens behind the Rue Coq Heron.

The instant Placide's eyes fell on Rosine standing at the gate of the court yard he knew that Madame la Baronne must be out.

"Well, idler," said Rosine, "where have you been? Ma foi, but when Madame la Baronne returns you will catch it."

"So Madame is out? Where has she gone to?"

"Versailles." She moved back, for Placide, with a pretense of mock gallantry, had attempted to slip his arm around her waist. Placide was a fine example of the snuffy old man servant nobility of that age. The old retainer, a product of feudalism, impudent with family pride, insolent to the lower orders, making love to the maids and stealing his master's snuff; open of speech, garrulous, and licensed to be drunk on holidays; often dominating the household as old servants sometimes will.

"Oh, Versailles! And where has she gone to at Versailles?"

"What is that to you, impudence?"

"Nothing, for you are not speaking the truth. Madame la Baronne has gone to the reception of Madame de Stenlis."

"I tell you, Madame has gone to Versailles, to the house of Monsieur le Duc de Richelieu; gone in a carriage with two horses and with directions to the driver not to spare them. Well, what do you say to that?"

"Only that you have told me all I want to know," replied Placide, turning on his heel. "I'm off."

"Where to?"

"A cabaret. If Madame is gone to Versailles, she won't be back for a good time yet."

Rosine grumbled as she watched him depart.

"And the silver?" she cried after him. "You have not cleaned it."

"Ma foi," said Placide, "clean it yourself. The exercise will do you good."

He walked off.

He left the Rue Coq Heron and passed through several streets till he reached the Rue de la Ville l'Evêque, where he entered the Couronne, a posting inn possessing one of the best stables in Paris.

He had determined to follow the baroness to Versailles, and as a stage was just starting, he took his place in it.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GALLANTRY OF DE RICHELIEU.

That evening Monsieur de Richelieu was in very good humor. He had finished supper and his digestion was behaving itself; he had got rid of his half-yearly accounts with the assistance of Raffe, examined minutely his financial position and found himself with 2,000 louis more in hand than he had expected; besides, politics were shaping favorably. De Choiseul, not destined to fall for another seven months, seemed on the point of falling and the fall of De Choiseul as minister meant, every one said, the elevation of Monsieur de Richelieu.

He had supped alone, and after supper, followed by Raffe, he returned to his library.

"Ma foi!" said the marshal, as he entered the room, "I have had over 70 years' experience of life, only to learn that he who sups alone sups best. In company we eat too much, to cover our boredom, and drink too much, to live on our wits."

Raffe laughed the little noiseless laugh peculiar to him. Monsieur de Richelieu's philosophy always left him quite cynical.

"Well," said he, "if monsieur will pursue politics, he must expect what he finds."

"And what do you think he may expect to find—grumbler?"

"Oh, ma foi! what else but dull dinner parties and indigestions, not to speak of headaches, pitfalls, traps and rogues."

"It's true," said De Richelieu, taking his seat at the bureau. "Every politician is a rogue, with this difference, that whereas most rogues are amusing, all politicians are dull."

"And since monsieur is a politician—"

"I am not. It is true that yesterday, when De Choiseul seemed on the point of falling, as he will fall some day, I was prepared, for the good of France, and not for any personal reason—I say I was prepared—"

"To take his portfolio."

"Yes, for the good of France."

"Ay, ay," said Raffe, with another silent, lithe laugh. "For the good of France, the old motto of the politicians."

"Silence!" said De Richelieu. "For what other reason would I mix myself up in affairs of state? What ambitions have I, who possess everything. An old man—"

"True," said Raffe.

"Yet not too old to strike a blow—"

"For the good of France."

"For the good of France. All the same, there are younger men. Why should I waste the last years of my life struggling against rogues, avoiding pitfalls, laboring under the weight of a portfolio heavy with the mistakes of my predecessor? No, mordiieu! give me peace, my hawks and hounds, quietude and the friends I care for; all better than a dozen portfolios."

"True," said Raffe, "but it seems to me, monsieur, that there is someone at the door."

Someone, in fact, had knocked at the door. It was a servant, bearing in his hand a heavy gold savor, upon which lay a letter with a yellow seal. The king alone sealed his letters with yellow wax, and De Richelieu's eyes lighted up as he stretched out his hand and took the letter.

He broke the seal and read:

"Dear Marshal: Our friend De C. is very ill; so hold yourself in readiness should the worst occur."

The note was addressed from Luclennes. His majesty, who had been seized with a scribbling fit, had dispatched it by special messenger. It had no significance at all; the position of De Choiseul had not altered a whit since yesterday, but it amused the mischief-loving king to excite hopes doomed to destruction, and certainly it would have amused him to watch the little comedy that followed.

De Richelieu, having read the note, turned to Raffe.

"De Choiseul has fallen."

"Oho!" said Raffe.

"He is not quite overturned, but a few more days will do it."

"Well, monsieur," replied Raffe, "I do not see how that affects us who have declared for a quiet life, who care nothing for portfolios, who would avoid the struggle against rogues—"

"I am asked to hold myself in readiness," went on the marshal, without regarding the other's words. "The king's mind is made up."

"Of contrarities."

"He has chosen me as De Choiseul's successor. Well, grumbler, what do you say to that? From all the men in France I am chosen."

"To follow Monsieur de Choiseul?"

"No, to precede him."

"Well, monsieur," replied Raffe, "I congratulate you on the compliment his majesty has paid you. Your knowledge of men will, doubtless, stand you in good stead when the heavy portfolio comes under your arm; and your knowledge of women, and if I may say so, the fascination you still exercise over them."

Raffe was De Richelieu's bitter tonic; unpleasant as his gallantry and cynicism might be, it was at least always sincere. He helped De Richelieu to digest all the poisoned sugar of the court, the falsities and the absurdities. But there was one subject on which even Raffe, privileged as he was, dared scarcely to touch, and that was the love affairs of his master.

When a man is nearly 80, his amours form a target that even a blind man can hit, and Raffe, to do him justice, rarely expended his ammunition on so easy a mark.

"Have some knowledge of women," said De Richelieu stiffly, "and what is better than that, though I have some influence over them, they have none over me. It is a power, that—though, mordiieu! one pays for it by growing old. Had De Choiseul made a study of women as I have done, he would not now be on the eve of destruction."

"Listen, monsieur," said Raffe, raising his hand. "Is not that a carriage?"

Faint and far away came the sound of carriage wheels on gravel. It ceased. A carriage rapidly driven had turned into the avenue way and drawn up before the door.

Coming as it did on the message of the king, this arrival of some one unknown seemed ominous. De Richelieu, sitting idly in his chair, listened intently. Notwithstanding his age, his campaigns, his affectation of weariness with the world, the old marshal that most men leave behind them at 60. To be chief minister of state, to match the stature of the great Cardinal Richelieu, to complete in diplomacy the wonderful career that had commenced in war, this was the chief ambition of the Duc de Richelieu at the present moment.

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Here's the overheard conversation that made the day seem more spring-like:

"Those people next door to us have been married a long time, haven't they?"

"Perhaps they have. But their honeymoon isn't over yet."

"How do you figure that out?"

"Well, it was awfully sloppy last night. But when he came home she made him step inside and kiss her before she told him to go back on the porch and wipe his feet."

"Well, honey, would you—"

"No, I wouldn't! We've got a new rug!"

Surprising Information.
"So your little boy is in the hospital?"

"Yes; the doctor said he would have to have his asteroids taken out."

"My stars!"

"Coining False Monies."

"Binks appears to be a hopeless dreamer."

"Yes; he spends most of the time trying to realize on the silver lining of clouds."

A birth is announced in Holland by a silk pincushion on the doorknobbed for a boy, and white for a girl.

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Exception.

One evening the guests were all seated around the table earnestly talking on an important topic. Little Frank came running in shouting: "Papa, papa!"

"Hush, Frank, little children should be seen and not heard."

Frank subsided into silence and pensively sucking his finger. Later his father said: "Well son, what did you want to say before?"

"Just that the bathtub was overflowing."

Similarity.

Jackson—Whew! That's some cliff!

Johnson—Seems to fascinate you.

Jackson—Yes. That's the way my desk will look when I get back.—Judge.

What with motors and aeroplanes, it looks as if the horse-shoe superstition would outlast the horse.

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