

A CLASSIC
IN A PAGE

DON CESAR DE BAZAN

By
Francois Penel Dumanoir

The story of "Don Cesar de Bazan" is founded upon an incident in Victor Hugo's play of "Ruy Blas"—but it is quite a different story.

In writing "Don Cesar," Dumanoir was assisted by another playwright of his day, D'Ennery. But it is to Dumanoir that the play owes its "wit, wisdom and allegory."

When the play made its first appearance in Paris it was received with so much favor that in England G. A. A. Beck and Mark Lemon at once prepared a translation of it for the English-speaking stage, and that version has been played at intervals ever since, both in this country and in England.

Don Cesar is a most witty and well-meaning ruffian, whose contempt for human life and whose sense of honor as he understands it are well brought out. A spendthrift, a ruffian, a brawler, he is yet as attractive a man as ever cheated his creditors or killed his enemies.

At Madrid knew Maritana, the gypsy dancer, who, with her songs, her tambourine and her gay dances went about the streets of the Spanish capital.

She had even attracted the attention of the Queen, who had ordered her, upon several occasions, to dance and sing before her and who had promised always to be her friend and patroness.

Now, when Maritana had danced before the Queen at the Royal palace, the King, Charles II, had looked upon her and found her passing fair. But a gypsy street dancer! A King could not stoop to dishonor one so lowly.

Nevertheless, in disguise, he would often follow her about the streets to see and hear her. In short, his majesty was thoroughly infatuated with the dancer.

One day, as the King was diverting himself thus, he was observed by Don Jose, one of his ministers of state. The King had just thrown a piece of gold into the tambourine of Maritana and was hurrying off, when the sharp eyes of Don Jose perceived him.

"I am not mistaken," said Don Jose to himself, "it is the King. Three times I have found him watching the gypsy girl, and, seemingly, spellbound by her grace and beauty."

On Dangerous Ground
Then, approaching Maritana, the wily minister handed her a doubloon, saying that he had much enjoyed her dancing and her singing.

Maritana hesitated to accept the gold piece, saying that neither her song nor dance was worth so much money.

"Why, what do you fear, pretty one?" said Don Jose.

"The influence of the glittering tempter," replied Maritana, "when I was a child my step was light, my songs the tuneful echo of my own heart. But now, when the hopes and fears of womanhood have made both heart and step less buoyant than of old my reward is greater—should I not fear?"

"I don't understand you," replied Don Jose.

"You mean that you will not," retorted Maritana, "think you that I am a woman and do not know that I am fair? Men tell me so by words and looks 100 times a day."

"The songstress of the streets treads a dangerous ground. She well knows the worth men set upon her."

"She covets gold to free her from this low, age, and grows ambitious of a higher sphere. Each word of praise is a breath to fan the sleeping flame; each gift is fuel to the fire."

Ready for His Post
Don Jose thought to himself that this was the very instrument he needed in his plots against the King and Queen. She was ambitious—and the King was infatuated with her.

There was but one obstacle—her lowly condition—he did not for a moment dream that the virtue of the street singer would prove impregnable when a King sued.

Well, he would, somehow, raise this Maritana to a station where the King might choose her for his mistress.

"And," thought he, "the mistress of the King must, necessarily, look with favor upon the man who raised her to the position—help me to keep and to increase my power."

And behind all Don Jose was working upon a darker plot. He had fallen in love with the Queen, had dared to raise his eyes to the King's wife.

He knew that the Queen was a passionate and jealous woman, and said to himself that when she learned the wrong she suffered she would resent it, and he, Don Jose, would urge his infamous suit in the moment of her anger.

For he himself would betray the King to her. These were the dark thoughts which filled his mind as he stood before the dancing woman.

To Make Dreams Realities
"Let me be the prophet of your future fortune," said he, "I have power to make your dreams realities. Your wish shall be the law for nobles."

Just then the sound of a tumult was heard in a neighboring winery—some of the gypsy followers of Maritana were attacking a shabbily dressed man who wore a sword, it is true, but whose generally dilapidated condition did not seem to warrant the importance he assumed.

Maritana rushed to the rescue of the shabby cavalier, and her people obeying her, the stranger was released from his danger and came strutting down the street to where Don Jose was still standing.

"The curs," said the shabby gentleman, "but that it would have disgraced my sword I would have split them like larks. That black scoundrel's stiletto would have found a sheath in the noble Don Cesar de Bazan but for that dancing girl!"

Old Friends
"If I am not mistaken," said Don Jose, "this is my old school friend at Salamanca, Don Cesar de Bazan."

They had, indeed, once been at school together, but Don Jose de Santarem had gone up in the world since that time and Don Cesar had gone down.

Don Cesar had inherited a noble name and a princely fortune. But he had been extravagant and careless from youth up and had dissipated his fortune. In spite of his relatives' paying debts over and over again, he had contracted new ones as fast he could.

When the two former schoolmates had talked for a while, telling each other of the various changes and fortunes of their lives, Don Jose remarked: "You have paid somewhat dearly for a life of pleasure, Don Cesar."

"Well," was the reply, "possibly."

Any Request but One
"Your life may be long enough for us to understand each other," was the re-

Though I have freed myself from all anxieties. I have no money—so am troubled with no poor relations."

"I have no lands—so am not troubled with grumbling peasantry. I have nothing to support but my sword, and that keeps a sharp lookout for itself."

Under Pain of Death
He confessed that he had no plans for the future and was entirely without funds. Here was a tool ready made to the hand of Don Jose—or at least so Don Jose considered.

When Don Cesar spoke boastfully of what he might do with his sword, Don Jose replied:

"Nay, there luck is also against you. Carnival week begins today and the King has issued a decree forbidding all fighting for a week under pain of death. But you will have the rest of the year to amuse yourself in," he sneered.

But Don Cesar was not destined to wait a year before his sword leaped from its scabbard.

A mere boy, one Lazirillo, a soldier and assistant to the armorer, who had charge of the arquebuses of the Royal Guard, had, for some slight neglect, been ordered by the captain to receive 60 lashes.

He was a high spirited youth who thought of the disgrace of the flogging more than of the pain which would be inflicted. It so worked upon him that he determined to commit suicide.

Still Two
A water carrier saw the boy about to make the attempt at self destruction and prevented the rash act. Then he almost forced him along the streets away from the water and argued with him upon the rashness of his conduct.

Thus arguing, they came by where Don Cesar and Don Jose were standing. Don Cesar inquired what was the matter, and the boy soldier told him.

"Oh," said he, "myself and my friend here, two noble lords, will intercede for you with the captain."

"Speak for yourself, Don Cesar," said Don Jose, "I have an especial reason for not desiring to interfere in any matter of this sort."

"Oh, well, I still say so," retorted Don Cesar; "We—Don Cesar de Bazan and his sword."

"You forget the royal edict," replied Don Jose.

The Prisoner Found
Don Cesar was about to make a remark rather profane than complimentary concerning the royal edict, but checked himself and, removing his hat for a second, merely said, "But this is Carnival Week."

At that moment came along a body of soldiers under the command of a captain. They were looking for the fugitive Lazirillo.

"There is your prisoner—secure him," commanded the captain.

"One moment," said Don Cesar, "allow me to intercede for this young man."

The captain paid no attention to Don Cesar, but said sternly to his soldiers, "Why do you pause? Execute my orders."

Lazirillo cried out, "O, mercy, mercy, captain."

"Back to your duty, sirrah, neither your pleadings nor the mouthings of this scoundrel shall move me," replied the captain.

A Challenge
All this time Don Jose stood looking on, watchful and silent—contriving how he might reap advantage from the incident, which promised, before it was over, to be a tragic one.

One word, captain," said Don Cesar, who was becoming in a serious mood. "You are a gentleman and a soldier—so am I. I have implored you for mercy upon this young man. You have refused."

"What I have before implored I will now command with my sword. Draw and defend yourself. I am Don Cesar de Bazan, Count de Garofa, who have the right to remain covered in the presence of the King."

"Huz!" said the captain, "a challenge."

"The same."

"I will give you satisfaction—follow me."

But the captain, instead of taking Don Cesar to some quiet place, where they could settle their differences with their swords, took him to the barracks and turned him over to the keeper of the military prison.

Two Hours to Live
A military court was at once assembled, and for breaking the proclamation against fighting during carnival week Don Cesar had, in the course of an hour, been arrested, tried and sentenced. He had now but two hours to live.

When told that he had only two hours more upon this earth Don Cesar replied:

"Two hours, the devil! how am I to employ my time? I shall die of ennui."

Turning to Lazirillo, who was in the prison with him, he asked, "If you had only two hours to live how would you employ your time?"

"By recalling the errors of my past life," replied the boy.

"What! in two hours?" exclaimed Don Cesar, "you must be very ignorant of my biography. Two hours?—no, there is no time for that."

"O, I have been the cause of bringing you to this condition," sobbed the boy; "there are no friends of yours who will intercede with the King on your behalf? No one has yet interceded for you?"

One Friend
"O, yes, there was an old man," replied Don Cesar; he threw himself before the royal carriage and risked being trampled on by the royal mules. He lifted up his aged hands and cried out, "Pardon, mercy for Don Cesar."

"I can guess who that was," said the boy. "It was the old Count—your father."

"Not a bit," laughed Don Cesar. "See how wrong you are—it was one of my creditors."

But Don Cesar was not entirely deserted in his dungeon by his noble friends—Don Jose came to see him.

"You wronged me when you thought that I had deserted you in your need," said Don Jose. "The proof of the fact that I am true to you is that now, when you are abandoned by all others, I come to see you. You have but two hours more to live."

Don Cesar glanced at the clock and replied: "I beg your pardon; I have only an hour and three-quarters. It is a matter of little importance, perhaps—but let us be accurate; life is very short."

Any Request but One
"Your life may be long enough for us to understand each other," was the re-



What do I see? I have been deceived.

ply. "It has come into my power to grant any demand that would be your dying request."

"My dying request is to live, to be sure," retorted Don Cesar.

"That I cannot grant," replied Don Jose, "but whatever else you ask shall be granted you."

"It is odd," answered Don Cesar, "that life is now about the only thing I care to ask for and the only one that is denied me."

"But, however, since it must be so, let me die by the guns of a dozen brave soldiers—rather than by the rope like a common criminal. Let the arquebuses of the guard execute me."

"And also before the soldiers execute this pleasant task I should like to drink with them. I've drunk in worse company than this."

Don Jose promised not only that Don Cesar should be shot instead of hanged, but that he should drink and eat with the men who were to shoot him. A banquet and plenty of wine he ordered at once.

One Condition
"But," said Don Jose, "there is one condition. I will give you a banquet such as you never had before, even in your most rollicking days. You shall be shot like a gentleman. But before that you must be married."

Don Cesar could not at first imagine the cause of this remarkable condition. He let his chin sink upon his chest and looked suspiciously at Don Jose. Finally he said:

"I see it all, my name still has a value. Some woman desires to be called a countess. Well, she shall have her wish. The bargain is struck and I will marry with my eyes shut."

Don Jose then said that the woman to whom Don Cesar was to be married would appear heavily veiled and that Don Cesar was not to even try to see her face. Also he said that he would provide Don Cesar with clothing suitable for his rank—and for a wedding.

"Deck me as gayly as you will," said Don Cesar, "crown me with roses ere you lead me to the altar—I shall then be more fitted for the sacrifice."

Delaying a Pardon
As a matter of fact Don Jose had in his intrigues worked upon the ambition of Maritana and had made use of the queen's influence upon her. She had consented to the queen's command to the marriage—and to the conditions of it.

There was another little joke which Don Jose had prepared with regard to Don Cesar—one upon which he prided himself not a little.

While he was waiting for the banquet and the wedding to be arranged he took from his pocket some papers and laughed with a sinister grin.

"Hem," said he, "a pardon for Don Cesar. It is well that Charles should once in awhile do a good act—especially if his minister gets the credit for it. A subject is condemned to death—the king's heart is touched—of course, upon the advice of his minister."

"By—by one of those inexplicable accidents which occur—nobody except the minister knows how—the pardon arrives an hour too late. It is a sad affair."

"Don Cesar is to be executed at 7—this pardon will arrive at 8. But the king and his minister will be blessed for the exercise of clemency."

The Last Gay Banquet
"It was a gay banquet the soldiers and Don Cesar had. He called upon them all to drink to the Countess de Bazan and her happy widowhood; he sang, he called the wine his old and early friend; no one would have supposed, to see him leading the revelry, that marriage and death were waiting for him outside the room."

A judge came in with a document graciously, in which it was set down that Don Cesar de Bazan the privilege of being shot, instead of hanged.

The soldiers, who had not been informed of the reason of their being invited to feast with Don Cesar, or of what was expected of them after dinner, were struck with consternation.

But Don Cesar only called for another verse of the song they had been singing.

The Memory of a Voice
Now it should be stated that Maritana, although she knew that she had been married to the Count de Bazan, did not know that he was the same shabby cavalier whom she had rescued from the Gypsies in the Madrid wine shop.

Nor did she know—what afterward she knew—that Don Cesar de Bazan had once, many years before, when she was a young girl in a city of southern Spain, avenged an insult offered to her by a gallant who thought it no crime to try to kiss a Gypsy on the public streets.

On the day of her marriage she had been so veiled and muffled up that not only had Don Cesar been unable to see the face of his bride, but the bride had been unable to see the face of her husband.

Still, she had heard his voice and there seemed something about it which had awakened an echo in her heart.

Reason for Wonder
At any rate, she wanted this equivocal and mysterious situation ended as soon as possible, and when informed that her husband was to be there that night began to muse intently upon the strange combination of events.

Don Jose had left the room, apparently to receive the "person" whom he expected," as the servant had put it.

"Marquis," said she, turning to the man to whose care she had been confided, "what does it all mean? Why this mystery, this marriage which I was told was by the order of my gracious patroness, the Queen? If I ask to see the Queen I am told to wait. Marquis, has Don Jose been deceiving me?"

"I hope not," replied the Marquis, "for then he might be capable of deceiving me and—and—here he dropped his voice so low that Maritana could not hear his words, and murmured of certain offices which Don Jose had promised him."

Remembered, but Not With Pleasure
Don Jose returned to the room and told the Marquis to retire—which that nobleman, filled with curiosity, did with a bad grace.

"You wish us to be alone," said Maritana, "now tell me something of my husband."

"He is at hand," replied Don Jose. "He is obliged to keep himself concealed, being in hourly danger from the law. For your sake and yours alone, he ventures here."

"O, we will find him a place of refuge," cried Maritana, "where is he?" At that moment there entered from behind a screen—not Don Cesar de Bazan, but the King!

de Rotondo," said Don Jose to an attendant, and those two people, whose fortunes had been made by Don Jose, and who were, consequently, from sheer gratitude, always at his service, were ushered into the room as witnesses to the ceremony.

A Long-Lost Niece
The marriage was a hasty one and at its close Don Cesar was led off to execution, while Maritana was handed over to the Marquis by Don Jose, who said:

"I wish you joy, Marquis. You had better now return to your palace at San Fernando with the Countess de Bazan, your niece."

"My niece!" exclaimed the astonished Marquis.

"Yes, your niece," replied Don Jose emphatically, "who you have not seen for five years."

"Yes, I think it is rather longer than that myself," retorted the Marquis.

But the man was in no position to dispute with Don Jose. He held his peace and prepared to obey orders.

It was to the Marquis and his wife that Don Jose intended to commit Maritana until such time as he could bring the King again within the power of her charms—no longer the charms of a common street dancer, but the charms of a lady bearing one of the most ancient titles in Spain.

Not a Little Puzzled
Now Maritana had been a little puzzled by the whole proceeding of her marriage. But she believed that all would come out right in the end—that Don Jose and the Queen had some reasons, good and sufficient, for not telling her the whole story.

That she was to be parted from her husband after the marriage ceremony she knew—but thought the arrangement would be only temporary. He was, she thought, to be brought to her later and she would reveal herself and standing before him unveiled would throw herself upon his love and mercy.

That he was to be led from the altar to execution she had no idea of.

As the Marquis was about to lead Maritana from the room there was heard the sound of a fusillade. Some presentiment seemed suddenly to come over Maritana, who started and shuddered and asked, "What's that?"

"Hum, nothing," answered Don Jose aloud. But under his breath he said, "Farewell, Don Cesar."

Expecting a Guest
The scene of our story must now shift to the summer palace of the Marquis de Rotondo. Maritana had taken easily to her new life, and, though awaiting anxiously for the time when she should see her husband, enjoyed the luxury and pomp for which she had always yearned.

Don Jose was there, of course, and the Marquis was given an entertainment.

A servant whispered to Don Jose that the person whom he was expecting had arrived. Going up to the Marquis Don Jose whispered to him to "Get rid of these people at once."

The Marquis obeyed by summoning his guests into the refreshment room. As Maritana was about to follow Don Jose stopped her.

"The lovely Countess de Bazan had better remain here," said he; "you have sometimes complained that the absence of your husband created a void in your heart which can not be filled. This fete shall be completed, even to the filling of that void. Your husband will be here tonight—at once."

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