

Marx Hardy Machiavelli Joyce Austen  
Defoe Abbot Melville Montaigne Cooper Emerson Hugo  
Stoker Wilde Christie Maupassant Haggard Chesterton Molière Eliot Grimm  
Garnett Engels Byron Schiller  
Goethe Hawthorne Smith Kafka  
Cotton Dostoyevsky Hall  
Baum Henry Kipling Doyle Willis  
Leslie Dumas Flaubert Nietzsche Turgenev Balzac  
Stockton Vatsyayana Crane  
Burroughs Verne  
Curtis Tocqueville Gogol Busch  
Homer Tolstoy Whitman  
Darwin Thoreau Twain  
Potter Zola Lawrence Dickens Plato Scott  
Kant Freud Jowett Stevenson Andersen Burton Harte  
London Descartes Cervantes Wells Hesse  
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# **Jack 1877**

Alphonse Daudet

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# JACK

By Alphonse Daudet

Translated by Mary Neal Sherwood

From The Fortieth Thousand, French Edition.

Estes And Lauriat, 1877

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### JACK

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JACK

## CHAPTER I.~~VAURIGARD.

"With a *k*, sir; with a *k*. The name is written and pronounced as in English. The child's godfather was English. A major-general in the Indian army. Lord Pembroke. You know him, perhaps? A man of distinction and of the highest connections. But—you understand—M. l'Abbé! How deliciously he danced! He died a frightful death at Singapore some years since, in a tiger-chase organized in his honor by a rajah, one of his friends. These rajahs, it seems, are absolute monarchs in their own country,—and one especially is very celebrated. What is his name? Wait a moment. Ah! I have it. Rana-Ramah."

"Pardon me, madame," interrupted the abbé, smiling, in spite of himself, at the rapid flow of words, and at the swift change of ideas. "After Jack, what name?"

With his elbow on his desk, and his head slightly bent, the priest examined from out the corners of eyes bright with ecclesiastical shrewdness, the young woman who sat before him, with her Jack standing at her side.

The lady was faultlessly dressed in the fashion of the day and the hour. It was December, 1858. The richness of her furs, the lustrous folds of her black costume, and the discreet originality of her hat, all told the story of a woman who owns her carriage, and who steps from her carpets to her coupé without the vulgar contact of the streets. Her head was small, which always lends height to a woman. Her pretty face had all the bloom of fresh fruit. Smiling and gay, additional vivacity was imparted by large, clear eyes and brilliant teeth, which were to be seen even when her face was in repose. The

mobility of her countenance was extraordinary. Either this, or the lips half parted as if about to speak, or the narrow brow,—something there was, at all events, that indicated an absence of reflective powers, a lack of culture, and possibly explained the blanks in the conversation of this pretty woman; blanks that reminded one of those little Japanese baskets fitting one into another, the last of which is always empty.

As to the child, picture to yourself an emaciated boy of seven or eight, who had evidently outgrown his strength. He was dressed as English boys are dressed, and as befitted his name spelled with a *k*. His legs were bare, and he wore a Scotch cap and a plaid. The costume was in accordance with his years, but not with his long neck and slim figure.

He seemed embarrassed by it himself, for, awkward and timid, he would occasionally glance at his half-frozen legs with a despairing expression, as if he cursed within his soul Lord Pembroke and the whole Indian army.

Physically, he resembled his mother, with a look of higher breeding, and with the transformation of a pretty woman's face to that of an intelligent man. There were the same eyes, but deeper in color and in meaning; the same brow, but wider; the same mouth, but the lips were firmly closed.

Over the woman's face, ideas and impressions glided without leaving a furrow or a trace; in fact, so hastily, that her eyes always seemed to retain a certain astonishment at their flight. With the child, on the contrary, one felt that impressions remained, and his thoughtful air would have been almost painful, had it not been combined with a certain caressing indolence of attitude that indicated a petted child.

Now leaning against his mother, with one hand in her muff, he listened to her words with adoring attention, and occasionally looked at the priest and at all the surroundings with timid curiosity. He had promised not to cry, but a stifled sob shook him at times from head to foot. Then his mother looked at him, and seemed to say, "You know what you promised." Then the child choked back his tears and sobs; but it was easy to see that he was a prey to that

first agony of exile and abandonment which the first boarding-school inflicts on those children who have lived only in their homes.

This examination of mother and child, made by the priest in two or three minutes, would have satisfied a superficial observer; but Father O— — —, who had been the director for twenty-five years of the aristocratic institution of the Jesuits at Vaurigard, was a man of the world, and knew too well the best Parisian society, all its shades of manner and dialect, not to understand that in the mother of his new pupil he beheld a representative of an especial class.

The self-possession with which she entered his office,—self-possession too apparent not to be forced,—her way of seating herself, her uneasy laugh, and above all, the overwhelming flood of words with which she sought to conceal a certain embarrassment, all created in the mind of the priest a vague distrust. Unhappily, in Paris the circles are so mixed, the community of pleasures and similarity of toilets have so narrowed the line of demarcation between fashionable women of good and bad society, that the most experienced may at times be deceived, and this is the reason that the priest regarded this woman with so much attention. The principal difficulty in arriving at a decision arose from the unconnected style of her conversation; but the embarrassed air of the mother when he asked for the other name of the child, settled the question in his mind.

She colored, hesitated. "True," she said; "excuse me; I have not yet presented myself. What could I have been thinking of?" and drawing a small, highly-perfumed case from her pocket, she took from it a card, on which, in long letters, was to be read the insignificant name—

*Ida de Barnacy*

Over the face of the priest flashed a singular smile.

"Is this the child's name?" he asked.

The question was almost an impertinence. The lady understood him, and concealed her embarrassment under an assumption of great dignity.

"Certainly, sir, certainly."

"Ah!" said the priest, gravely.

It was he now who found it difficult to express what he wished to say. He rolled the card between his fingers with a little movement of the lips natural to a man who measures the weight and effect of the words he is about to speak.

Suddenly he arose from his chair, and approaching one of the large windows that looked on a garden planted with fine trees, and reddened by the wintry sun, tapped lightly on the glass. A black silhouette was drawn on the window, and a young priest appeared immediately within the room.

"Duffieux," said the Superior, "take this child out to walk with you. Show him our church and our hot-houses; he is tired of us, poor little man!"

Jack supposed that he was sent out to walk so that he might be spared the pain of saying good-bye to his mother, and his terrified, despairing expression so touched the kind priest that he hastily added,—

"Don't be frightened, Jack. Your mother is not going away; you will find her here."

The child still hesitated.

"Go, my dear," said Madame de Barancy, with a queenly gesture.

Then he went without another word, as if he were already conquered by life, and prepared for all its evils.

When the door closed behind him, there was a moment of silence. The steps of the child and his companion were heard on the frozen gravel, and dying away, left no sound save the crackling of the fire, the chirps of the sparrows on the eaves, the distant pianos, and an indistinct murmur of voices—the hum of a great boarding-school.

"This child seems to love you, madame," said the Superior, touched by Jack's submission.

"Why should he not love me?" answered Madame de Barancy, somewhat melodramatically; "the poor dear has but his mother in the world."

"Ah! you are a widow?"

"Alas! yes, sir. My husband died ten years ago, the very year of our marriage, and under the most painful circumstances. Ah! Monsieur l'Abbé, romance-writers, who are at a loss to invent adventures for their heroines, do not know that many an apparently quiet life contains enough for ten novels. My own story is the best proof of that. The Comte de Barancy belonged, as his name will tell you, to one of the oldest families in Touraine."

She made a fatal mistake here, for Father O — — — was born at Amboise, and knew the nobility of the entire province. So he at once consigned the Comte de Barancy to the society of Major-General Pembroke and the Rajah of Singapore. He did not let this appear, however, and contented himself with replying gently to the *soi-disant* comtesse, —

"Do you not think with me, madame, that there would be some cruelty in sending away a child that seems so warmly attached to you? He is still very young; and do you think his physical health good enough to support the grief of such a separation?"

"But you are mistaken, sir," she answered, promptly. "Jack is a very robust child; he has never been ill. He is a little pale, perhaps, but that is owing to the air of Paris, to which he has never been accustomed."

Annoyed to find that she was not disposed to comprehend him, the priest continued, —

"Besides, just now our dormitories are full; the scholastic year is very far advanced; we have even been obliged to decline receiving new pupils until the next term. You would be compelled to wait until then, madame; and even then —"

She understood him at last.

"So," she said, turning pale, "you refuse to receive my son. Do you refuse also to tell me why?"

"Madame," answered the priest, "I would have given much if this explanation could have been avoided. But since you force it upon me, I must inform you that this institution, whose head I am, exacts from the families who confide their children to us the most unexceptionable conduct and the strictest morality. In Paris there are

many laical institutions where your little Jack will receive every care, but with us it would be impossible. I beg of you," he added, with a gesture of indignant protestation, "do not make me explain further. I have no right to question you, no right to reproach you. I regret the pain I am now giving, and believe me when I say that my words are as painful to myself as to you."

While the priest spoke, over the countenance of Madame de Barancy flitted shadows of anger, grief, and confusion. At first she tried to brave it out, throwing her head back disdainfully; but the kind words of the priest falling on her childish soul made her burst suddenly into a passion of sobs and tears.

"She was so unhappy," she cried, "no one could ever know all she had done for that child! Yes, the poor little fellow had no name, no father, but was that any reason why a crime should be made of his misfortune, and that he should be made responsible for the faults of his parents? Ah! M. l'Abbé, I beg of you —"

As she spoke she took the priest's hand. The good father sought to disengage it with some little embarrassment.

"Be calm, dear madame," he cried, terrified by these tears and outcries, for she wept, like the child that she was, with vehement sobs, and with the abandonment in fact of a somewhat coarse nature. The poor man thought, "What could I do with her if this lady should be taken ill?"

But the words he used to calm her only excited her more.

She wished to justify herself, to explain things, to narrate the story of her life, and, willing or not, the Superior found himself compelled to follow her through an obscure recital, whose connecting thread she broke at every step, without looking to see how she should ever get back again to the light.

The name of Barancy was not hers, but if she should tell him her name, he would be astonished. The honor of one of the oldest families in France was concerned, and she would rather die than speak.

The Superior hastened to assure her that he had no intention of questioning her, but she would not listen to him. She was started, and a wind-mill under full sail would have been more easily arrest-

ed than her torrent of words, of which probably not one was true, for she contradicted herself perpetually throughout her incoherent discourse, yet withal there was something sincere, something touching even in this love between mother and child. They had always been together. He had been taught at home by masters, and she wished now to separate from him only because of his intelligence and his eyes that saw things that were not intended for his vision.

"The best thing to do, it seems to me," said the priest, gravely, "would be to live such a life that you need fear neither the scrutiny of your child nor of any one else."

"That was my wish, sir," she answered. "As Jack grew older, I wished to make his home all that which it ought to be. Besides, before long, my position will be assured. For some time I have been thinking of marrying, but to do this it was necessary to send my boy away for a time that he might obtain the education worthy of the name he ought to bear. I thought that nowhere could he do as well as here, but at one blow you repulse him and discourage his mother's good resolutions."

Here the Superior arrested her with an exclamation of astonishment. He hesitated a moment; then looking her straight in her eyes, said,—

"So be it, madame. I yield to your wishes. Little Jack pleases me very much; I consent to receive him among our pupils."

"My dear sir!"

"But on two conditions."

"I am ready to accept all."

"The first is, that until the day that your position is assured, the child shall spend his vacations under this roof, and shall not return to yours."

"But he will die, my poor Jack, if he does not see his mother!"

"Oh, you can come here whenever you please; only—and this is my second condition—you will not see him in the parlor, but always here in my private room, where I shall take care that you are not interfered with and that no one sees you."

She rose in indignation.

The idea that she could never enter the parlor, or be present on the reception-days, when she could astonish the other guests with the beauty of her child, with the richness of her toilette, that she could never say to her friends, "I met at the school, yesterday, Madame de C— —, or Madame de V— —," that she must meet Jack in secret, all this revolted her.

The astute priest had struck well.

"You are cruel with me, sir. You oblige me to refuse the favor for which I have so earnestly entreated, but I must protect my dignity as woman and mother. Your conditions are impossible. And what would my child think—"

She stopped, for outside the glass she saw the fair, curly head of the child, with eyes brightened by the fresh air and by his anxiety. Upon a sign from his mother, he entered quickly.

"Ah, mamma, how good you are! I was afraid you were gone!"

She took his hand hastily.

"You will go with me," she answered; "we are not wanted here."

And she sailed out erect and haughty, leading the boy, who was stupefied by this departure which so strongly resembled a flight. She hardly acknowledged the respectful salute of the good father, who had also risen hastily from his chair; but quickly as she moved, it was not too quick for Jack to hear a gentle voice murmur, "Poor child! poor child!" in a tone of compassion that went to his heart. He was pitied—and why? For a long time he pondered over this.

The Superior was not mistaken. Madame la Comtesse Ida de Barancy was not a comtesse at all. Her name was not Barancy, and possibly not even Ida. Whence came she? Who was she? No one could say. These complicated existences have fortunes so diverse, a past so long and so varied, that one never knows the last shape they assume. One might liken them to those revolving lighthouses that have long intervals of shadow between their gleams of fire. Of one thing only was there any certainty: she was not a Parisian, but came from some provincial town whose accent she still retained. It was said that at the Gymnase, one evening, two Lyons merchants

thought they recognized in her a certain Mélanie Favrot, who formerly kept an establishment of "gloves and perfumery;" but these merchants were mistaken.

Again, an officer in the Hussars insisted that he had seen her eight years before at Orleans. He also was mistaken. And we all know that resemblances are often impertinences.

Madame de Barancy had however travelled much, and made no concealment of the fact, but an absolute sorcerer would have been needed to evolve any facts from the contradictory accounts she gave of her origin and her life. One day Ida was born in the colonies, spoke of her mother, a charming créole, of her plantation and her negroes. Another time she had passed her childhood in a great chateau on the Loire. She seemed utterly indifferent as to the manner in which her hearers would piece together these dislocated bits of her existence.

As may be imagined, in these fantastic recitals, vanity reigned triumphant, the vanity of a chattering paroquet. Bank and money, titles and riches, were the texts of her discourse. Rich she certainly was. She had a small hotel on the Boulevard Haussmann; she had horses and carriages, gorgeous furniture in most questionable taste, three or four servants, and led a most indolent existence, trifling away her life among women like herself, less confident in her bearing, perhaps, than they, from her provincial birth and breeding. This, and a certain freshness, the result of a childhood passed in the open air, all kept her somewhat out of the current of Parisian life, where, too, being so newly arrived, she had not yet found her place.

Once each week, a man of middle age, and of distinguished appearance, came to see her. In speaking of him, Ida always said "Monsieur" with an air of such respect that one would have supposed him to be at the court of France in the days when the brother of the king was so denominated. The child spoke of him simply as "our friend." The servants announced him as "M. le Comte," but among themselves they called him "the old gentleman."

The old gentleman was very rich, for madame spared nothing, and there was an enormous expenditure going on constantly in the house. This was managed by Mademoiselle Constant, Ida's waiting-maid. It was this woman who gave her mistress the addresses of the

tradespeople, who guided her inexperience through the mazes of life in Paris; for Ida's pet dream and hope was to be taken for a woman of irreproachable character, and of the highest fashion.

Thus it will be seen into what state of mind the reception of Father O— — had thrown her, and in what a rage she left his presence. An elegant coupé awaited her at the door of the Institution. She threw herself into it with her child, retaining only sufficient self-command to say "home," in so loud a voice that she was heard by a group of priests who were talking together, and who quickly dispersed before this whirlwind of furs and curled hair. In fact, as soon as the carriage-door was closed, the unhappy woman sank into a corner, not in her usual coquettish position, but overwhelmed and in tears, stifling her sobs in the quilted cushions.

What a blow! The priest had refused to take her child, and at the first glance had discovered the humiliating truth that she believed to have thoroughly disguised under the luxurious surroundings of a woman of the world and of an irreproachable mother.

Her wounded pride recalled with renewed flushes of shame the keen eyes of the good father. She recalled all her falsehood, all her folly, and remembered his incredulous smile at almost her first words.

Silent and motionless in the other corner of the carriage sat Jack, looking sadly at his mother, unable to comprehend her despair. He vaguely conceived himself to be in fault, the dear little fellow, and yet was secretly glad that he had not been left at the school.

For a fortnight he had heard of it night and day; his mother had extorted a promise from him not to weep; his trunk was packed, and all was ready, and the child's heart was full of trouble; and now at the last moment he was reprieved.

If his mother had not been in so much trouble now, he would have thanked her; how happy would he have been curled up at her side, under her furs, in the little coupé in which they had had so many happy hours together—hours which were now to be repeated. And Jack thought of the afternoons in the Bois, of the long drives through the gay city of Paris—a city so new to both of them,

and full of excitement and interest. A monument, perhaps, or even a mere street incident, delighted them.

"Look, Jack —"

"Look, mamma —"

They were two children together, and together they peered from the window,—the child's head with its golden curls close to the mother's face tightly veiled in black lace.

A despairing cry from Madame de Barancy aroused the boy from all these sweet recollections. "*Mon dieu!*" she cried, wringing her hands, "what have I done to be so wretched?"

This exclamation naturally elicited no response, and little Jack, not knowing what to say, or how to console her, timidly caressed her hand, even at last kissing it with the fervor of a lover.

She started and looked wildly at him.

"Ah! cruel, cruel child, what harm you have done me in this world!"

Jack turned pale. "I? What have I done?"

He loved but one person on the face of the earth, his mother. He thought her absolutely perfect; and without knowing it, he had injured her in some mysterious way. The poor child was now overwhelmed with despair also, but remained utterly silent, as if the noisy demonstrations of his mother had shocked him, and made him ashamed of any manifestations on his own part. He was seized with a sort of nervous spasm. His mother took him in her arms. "No, no, dear child, I was only in jest; be sensible, dear. What! must I rock my long-legged boy as if he were a baby? No, little Jack, you never did me any harm. It is I who did wrong. Come, do not weep any more. See, I am not crying."

And the strange creature, forgetful of her recent grief, laughed gayly, that Jack too might laugh. It was one of the privileges of this inconsequent nature never to retain impressions for any length of time. Singularly enough, too, the tears she had just shed only seemed to add new freshness and brilliancy to her youthful beauty, as a sudden shower upon a dove's plumage seems to bring out new lustre without penetrating below the surface.

"Where are we now?" said she, suddenly dropping the window that was covered with mist. "At the Madeleine. How quickly we have come! We must stop somewhere; at the pastry-cook's, I think. Dry your eyes, little one, we will buy some meringues."

They alighted at the fashionable confectioner's, where there was a great crowd. Rich furs and rustling silks crushed each other; and women's faces with veils half lifted were reflected in the surrounding mirrors which were set in gilt frames and cream-colored panels; glittering glass, and a variety of cakes and dainties delighted the spectators. Madame de Barancy and her child were much looked at. This charmed her, and this small success following upon the mortification of the previous hour, gave her an appetite. She called for a quantity of meringues and nougat, and finished by a glass of wine. Jack followed her example, but with more moderation, his great grief having filled his eyes with unshed tears and his heart with suppressed sighs.

When they left the shop the weather was so fine, although cold, and the flower-market of the Madeleine so fragrant with the sweet perfume of violets, that Ida determined to dismiss the carriage and return on foot. Briskly, and yet with a certain slowness of step, that indicated a woman accustomed to admiration, she started on her walk, leading Jack by the hand. The fresh air, the gay streets and attractive shops, quite restored Ida's good-humor. Then suddenly, by what connection of ideas I know not, she remembered a masqued ball to which she was going that night, preceded by a restaurant dinner.

"Mercy! I had forgotten. Hurry! little Jack—quick!" She wanted flowers, a bouquet, a dozen forgotten trifles: and the child, whose life had always been made up of just such trifles, and who felt as much as his mother the subtle charm of these elegances, followed her in high glee, delighted by the idea of the fête that he was not to see. The toilette of his mother always interested him, and he fully appreciated the admiration her beauty excited as they went through the streets and into the various shops.

"Exquisite! exquisite! Yes, you may send it to me—Boulevard Haussmann."

Madame de Barancy tossed down her card, and went out, talking gayly to Jack of the beauty of her purchases. Suddenly she assumed a graver air. "Remember, Jack, what I say. Do not tell our good friend that I went to this ball; it is a great secret, It is five o'clock. How Constant will scold!"

She was not mistaken.

Her maid, a tall, stout person of forty years, ugly and masculine, rushed toward Ida as she entered the house.

"The costume is here. There is no sense in being so late. Madame will not be ready in season. No one could make her toilette in such a little while."

"Don't scold, Constant. If you only knew what had happened. Look!" and she pointed to Jack.

The factotum seemed utterly out of patience. "What! Master Jack back again! That is very naughty, sir, after all you promised. The police will have to come and take you to school; your mother is too good."

"No, no, it was not he. The priest would not have him. Do you understand? They insulted me!" Whereupon she began to cry again, and to ask of heaven why she was so unhappy. What with the meringues and the nougat, the wine and the heat of the room, she soon felt very ill. She was carried to her bed; salts and ether were hastily sought. Mademoiselle Constant acquitted herself with the propriety of a woman who is no stranger to such scenes, went in and out of the room, opened and shut wardrobes, with a certain self-possession that seemed to say, "This will soon pass off." But she did not perform her duties in silence.

"What folly it was to take this child to the Fathers! As if it was a place for him in his position! It would not have been done certainly, had I been consulted. I would engage to find a place for this boy at very short notice."

Jack, terrified at seeing his mother so ill, had seated himself on the edge of the bed; where, looking at her anxiously, he in silence asked her pardon for the sorrow he had caused her.

"There! get away, Master Jack. Your mother is all right. I must help her dress now."

"What! You do not mean, Constant, that I must go to this ball. I have no heart to amuse myself."

"Pshaw! I know you, madame. You have but five minutes. Just look at this pretty costume, these rose-colored stockings, and your little cap."

She shook out the skirts, displayed the trimming, and jingled the little bells which adorned it, and Ida ceased to resist.

While his mother was dressing, Jack went into the boudoir, and remained alone in the dark. The little room, perfumed and coquetish, was, it is true, partially illuminated by the gas lamps on the boulevard. Sadly enough the child leaned against the windows and thought of the day that was just over. By degrees, without knowing how, he felt himself to be "the poor child" of whom the priest had spoken in such compassionate tones.

It is so singular to hear one's self pitied when one believes one's self to be happy. There are sorrows, in fact, so well concealed, that those who have caused them, and even sometimes their victims, do not divine them.

The door opened — his mother was ready.

"Come in, Master Jack, and see if this is not lovely."

Ah! what a charming Folly! Silver and pink, lustrous satin and delicate lace. What a lovely rustling of spangles when she moved!

The child looked on in admiration, while the mother, light and airy, waving her Momus staff, smiled at Jack, and smiled at herself in the Psyche, without at that time asking heaven why she was so unhappy. Then Constant threw over her shoulders a warm cloak, and accompanied her to the carriage, while Jack, leaning over the railing, watched from stair to stair, moving almost as if she were dancing the little pink slippers embroidered with silver, that bore his mother to balls where children could not go. As the last sound of the silver bells died away, he turned towards the salon, disturbed and anxious for the first time by the solitude in which he ordinarily passed his evenings.