

Tucholsky Wagner Zola Scott
Turgenev Wallace Fonatne Sydow Freud Schlegel
Twain Walther von der Vogelweide Fouqué Friedrich II. von Preußen
Weber Freiligrath Frey
Fechner Fichte Weiße Rose von Fallersleben Kant Ernst Richthofen Frommel
Engels Fielding Hölderlin Eichendorff Tacitus Dumas
Fehrs Faber Flaubert Eliasberg Eliot Zweig Ebner Eschenbach
Feuerbach Maximilian I. von Habsburg Fock Ewald Vergil
Goethe Elisabeth von Österreich London
Mendelssohn Balzac Shakespeare Rathenau Dostojewski Ganghofer
Trackl Stevenson Lichtenberg Doyle Gjellerup
Mommssen Thoma Tolstoi Lenz Hambruch Droste-Hülshoff
Dach Thoma von Arnim Hägele Hanrieder Hauptmann Humboldt
Karrillon Reuter Verne Rousseau Hagen Hauff Baudelaire Gautier
Garschin Defoe Descartes Hebbel Hegel Kussmaul Herder
Damaschke Wolfram von Eschenbach Darwin Dickens Schopenhauer Bebel Proust
Bronner Campe Horváth Aristoteles Voltaire Federer Herodot
Bismarck Vigny Gengenbach Barlach Heine Grillparzer Georgy
Storm Casanova Lessing Tersteegen Gilm Gryphius
Chamberlain Langbein Schiller Iffland Sokrates
Brentano Claudius Schilling Kralik Katharina II. von Rußland Bellamy Raabe Gibbon Tschechow
Gerstäcker Klee Hölty Morgenstem Gleim Vulpius
Löns Hesse Hoffmann Gogol Wilde Goedicke
Luther Heym Hofmannsthal Kierkegaard Kraft Kraus Musil
Roth Heyse Klopstock Puschkin Homer Mörike
Luxemburg La Roche Horaz Moltke
Machiavelli Navarra Aurel Musset Lamprecht Kind Kirchhoff Hugo
Nestroy Marie de France Laotse Ipsen Liebknecht
Nietzsche Marx Nansen Lassalle Gorki Klett Leibniz Ringelnatz
von Ossietzky May vom Stein Lawrence Irving
Petalozzi Platon Pückler Michelangelo Knigge Kock Kafka
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MONSIEUR DE CAMORS

By
OCTAVE FEUILLET

BOOK 3.

CHAPTER XV

THE COUNTESS DE CAMORS

After passing the few weeks of the honeymoon at Reuilly, the Comte and Comtesse de Camors returned to Paris and established themselves at their hotel in the Rue de l'Imperatrice. From this moment, and during the months that followed, the young wife kept up an active correspondence with her mother; and we here transcribe some of the letters, which will make us more intimately acquainted with the character of the young woman.

Madame de Camors to Madame de Teclé.

"October.

"Am I happy? No, my dearest mother! No—not happy! I have only wings and soar to heaven like a bird! I feel the sunshine in my head, in my eyes, in my heart.

"It blinds me, it enchants me, it causes me to shed delicious tears! Happy? No, my tender mother; that is not possible, when I think that I am his wife! The wife—understand me—of him who has reigned in my poor thoughts since I was able to think—of him whom I should have chosen out of the whole universe! When I remember that I am his wife, that we are united forever, how I love life! how I love you! how I love God!

"The Bois and the lake are within a few steps of us, as you know.

We ride thither nearly every morning, my husband and I!—I repeat,

I and my husband! We go there, my husband and I—I and my husband!

"I know not how it is, but it is always delicious weather to me, even when it rains—as it does furiously to-day; for we have just come in, driven home by the storm.

"During our ride to-day, I took occasion to question him quietly as to some points of our history which puzzled me. First, why had he married me?

"'Because you pleased me apparently, Miss Mary.' He likes to give me this name, which recalls to him I know not what episode of my untamed youth—untamed still to him.

"'If I pleased you, why did I see you so seldom?'

"'Because I did not wish to court you until I had decided on marrying.'

"'How could I have pleased you, not being at all beautiful?'

"'You are not beautiful, it is true,' replies this cruel young man, 'but you are very pretty; and above all you are grace itself, like your mother.'

"All these obscure points being cleared up to the complete satisfaction of Miss Mary, Miss Mary took to fast galloping; not because it was raining, but because she became suddenly—we do not know the reason why—as red as a poppy.

"Oh, beloved mother! how sweet it is to be loved by him we adore, and to be loved precisely as we wish—as we have dreamed—according to the exact programme of our young, romantic hearts!

"Did you ever believe I had ideas on such a delicate subject? Yes, dear mother, I had them. Thus, it

seemed to me there were many different styles of loving — some vulgar, some pretentious, some foolish, and others, again, excessively comic. None of these seemed suited to the Prince, our neighbor. I ever felt he should love, like the Prince he is, with grace and dignity; with serious tenderness, a little stern perhaps; with amiability, but almost with condescension — as a lover, but as a master, too — in fine, like my husband!

"Dear angel, who art my mother! be happy in my happiness, which was your sole work. I kiss your hands — I kiss your wings!

"I thank you! I bless you! I adore you!

"If you were near me, it would be too much happiness! I should die, I think. Nevertheless, come to us very soon. Your chamber awaits you. It is as blue as the heavens in which I float. I have already told you this, but I repeat it.

"Good-by, mother of the happiest woman in the world!

"MISS MARY,

"Comtesse de Camors."

.....

"November.

"MY MOTHER:

"You made me weep — I who await you every morning. I will say nothing to you, however; I will not beg you. If the health of my grandfather seems to you so feeble as to demand your presence, I know no prayer would take you away from your duty. Nor would I make the prayer, my angel mother!

"But exaggerate nothing, I pray you, and think your little Marie can not pass by the blue chamber

without feeling a swelling of the heart. Apart from this grief which you cause her, she continues to be as happy as even you could wish.

"Her charming Prince is ever charming and ever her Prince! He takes her to see the monuments, the museums, the theatres, like the poor little provincial that she is. Is it not touching on the part of so great a personage?

"He is amused at my ecstasies—for I have ecstasies. Do not breathe it to my Uncle Des Rameures, but Paris is superb! The days here count double our own for thought and life.

"My husband took me to Versailles yesterday. I suspect that this, in the eyes of the people here, is rather a ridiculous episode; for I notice the Count did not boast of it. Versailles corresponds entirely with the impressions you had given me of it; for there is not the slightest change since you visited it with my grandfather.

"It is grand, solemn, and cold. There is, though, a new and very curious museum in the upper story of the palace, consisting chiefly of original portraits of the famous men of history. Nothing pleases me more than to see these heroes of my memory passing before me in grand procession—from Charles the Bold to George Washington. Those faces my imagination has so often tried to evoke, that it seems to me we are in the Elysian Fields, and hold converse with the dead:

"You must know, my mother, I was familiar with many things that surprised M. de Camors very much. He was greatly struck by my knowledge of science and my genius. I did no more, as you may imagine, than respond to his questions; but it seemed to astonish him that I could respond at all.

"Why should he ask me these things? If he did not know how to distinguish the different Princesses of Conti, the answer is simple.

"But I knew, because my mother taught me. That is simple enough too.

"We dined afterward, at my suggestion, at a restaurant. Oh, my mother! this was the happiest moment of my life! To dine at a restaurant with my husband was the most delightful of all dissipations!

"I have said he seemed astonished at my learning. I ought to add in general, he seemed astonished whenever I opened my lips. Did he imagine me a mute? I speak little, I acknowledge, however, for he inspires me with a ceaseless fear: I am afraid of displeasing him, of appearing silly before him, or pretentious, or pedantic. The day when I shall be at ease with him, and when I can show him my good sense and gratitude—if that day ever comes—I shall be relieved of a great weight on my mind, for truly I sometimes fear he looks on me as a child.

"The other day I stopped before a toy-shop on the Boulevard. What a blunder! And as he saw my eye fixed on a magnificent squadron of dolls—

"Do you wish one, Miss Mary?" he said.

"Was not this horrible, my mother—from him who knows everything except the Princesses of Conti? He explained everything to me; but briefly in a word, as if to a person he despaired of ever making understand him. And I understand so well all the time, my poor little mother!

"But so much the better, say I; for if he loves me while thinking me silly, what will it be later!

"With fond love, your

"MARIE."

.....

"December.

"All Paris has returned once more, my dear mother, and for fifteen days I have been occupied with visits. The men here do not usually visit; but my husband is obliged to present me for the first time to the persons I ought to know. He accompanies me there, which is much more agreeable to me than to him, I believe.

"He is more serious than usual. Is not this the only form in which amiable men show their bad humor? The people we visit look on me with a certain interest. The woman whom this great lord has honored with his choice is evidently an object of great curiosity. This flatters and intimidates me; I blush and feel constrained; I appear awkward. When they find me awkward and insignificant, they stare. They believe he married me for my fortune: then I wish to cry. We reenter the carriage, he smiles upon me, and I am in heaven! Such are our visits.

"You must know, my mother, that to me Madame Campvallou is divine. She often takes me to her box at the Italiens, as mine will not be vacant until January. Yesterday she gave a little fete for me in her beautiful salon: the General opened the ball with me.

"Oh! my mother, what a wonderfully clever man the General is! And I admire him because he admires you!

"The Marquise presented to me all the best dancers. They were young gentlemen, with their necks so uncovered it almost gave me a chill. I never before had seen men bare-necked and the fashion is not becoming. It was very evident, however, that they considered themselves indispensable and charming. Their deportment was insolent and self-sufficient; their eyes were disdainful and all-conquering.

"Their mouths ever open to breathe freer, their coat-tails flapping like wings, they take one by the waist—as one takes his own property. Informing you by a look that they are about to do you the honor of removing you, they whirl you away; then, panting for breath, inform you by another look that they will do themselves the pleasure of stopping—and they stop. Then they rest a moment, panting, laughing, showing their teeth; another look—and they repeat the same performance. They are wonderful!

"Louis waltzed with me and seemed satisfied. I saw him for the first time waltz with the Marquise. Oh, my mother, it was the dance of the stars!

"One thing which struck me this evening, as always, was the manifest idolatry with which the women regard my husband. This, my tender mother, terrifies me. Why—I ask myself—why did he choose me? How can I please him? How can I succeed?

"Behold the result of all my meditations! A folly perhaps, but of which the effect is to reassure me:

"Portrait of the Comtesse de Camors, drawn by herself.

"The Comtesse de Camors, formerly Marie de Tecele, is a personage who, having reached her twentieth year, looks older. She is not beautiful, as her husband is the first person to confess. He says

she is pretty; but she doubts even this. Let us see. She has very long limbs, a fault which she shares with Diana, the Huntress, and which probably gives to the gait of the Countess a lightness it might not otherwise possess. Her body is naturally short, and on horseback appears to best advantage. She is plump without being gross.

"Her features are irregular; the mouth being too large and the lips too thick, with—alas! the shade of a moustache; white teeth, a little too small; a commonplace nose, a slightly pug; and her mother's eyes—her best feature. She has the eyebrows of her Uncle Des Rameures, which gives an air of severity to the face and neutralizes the good-natured expression—a reflex from the softness of her heart.

"She has the dark complexion of her mother, which is more becoming to her mother than to her. Add to all this, blue-black hair in great silky masses. On the whole, one knows not what to pronounce her.

"There, my mother, is my portrait! Intended to reassure me, it has hardly done so; for it seems to me to be that of an ugly little woman!

"I wish to be the most lively of women; I wish to be one of the most distinguished. I wish to be one of the most captivating! But, oh, my mother! if I please him I am still more enchanted! On the whole, thank God! he finds me perhaps much better than I am: for men have not the same taste in these matters that we have.

"But what I really can not comprehend, is why he has so little admiration for the Marquise de Campvallon. His manner is very cold to her. Were I a man, I should be wildly in love with that superb woman! Good-night, most beloved of mothers!

.....

"January.

"You complain of me, my cherished one! The tone of my letters wounds you! You can not comprehend how this matter of my personal appearance haunts me. I scrutinize it; I compare it with that of others. There is something of levity in that which hurts you? You ask how can I think a man attaches himself to these things, while the merits of mind and soul go for nothing?

"But, my dearest mother, how will these merits of mind and of soul —supposing your daughter to possess them—serve her, unless she possesses the courage or has the opportunity to display them? And when I summon up the courage, it seems to me the occasion never comes.

"For I must confess to you that this delicious Paris is not perfect; and I discover, little by little, the spots upon the sun.

"Paris is the most charming place! The only pity is that it has inhabitants! Not but that they are agreeable, for they are only too much so; only they are also very careless, and appear to my view to live and die without reflecting much on what they are doing. It is not their fault; they have no time.

"Without leaving Paris, they are incessant travellers, eternally distracted by motion and novelty. Other travellers, when they have visited some distant corner—forgetting for a while their families, their duties, and their homes—return and settle down again. But these Parisians never do. Their life is an endless voyage; they have no home. That which elsewhere is the great aim of life is secondary here. One has here, as elsewhere, an establishment—a house, a private chamber. One must have. Here one is wife or mother, husband or father, just as elsewhere; but, my poor mother, they are these things just as little as possible. The whole interest

centres not in the homes; but in the streets, the museums, the salons, the theatres, and the clubs. It radiates to the immense outside life, which in all its forms night and day agitates Paris, attracts, excites, and enervates you; steals your time, your mind, your soul – and devours them all!

"Paris is the most delicious of places to visit – the worst of places to live in.

"Understand well, my mother, that in seeking by what qualifies I can best attract my husband – who is the best of men, doubtless, but of Parisian men nevertheless – I have continually reflected on merits which may be seen at once, which do not require time to be appreciated.

"Finally, I do not deny that all this is miserable cynicism, unworthy of you and of myself; for you know I am not at heart a bad little woman. Certainly, if I could keep Monsieur de Camors for a year or two at an old chateau in the midst of a solitary wood, I should like it much. I could then see him more frequently, I could then become familiar with his august person, and could develop my little talents under his charmed eyes. But then this might weary him and would be too easy. Life and happiness, I know, are not so easily managed. All is difficulty, peril, and conflict.

"What joy, then, to conquer! And I swear to you, my mother, that I will conquer! I will force him to know me as you know me; to love me, not as he now does, but as you do, for many good reasons of which he does not yet dream.

"Not that he believes me absolutely a fool; I think he has abandoned that idea for at least two days past.

"How he came thus to think, my next letter shall explain.

"Your own
"MARIE."

CHAPTER XVI

THE REPTILE STRIVES TO CLIMB

"March.

"You will remember, my mother, that the Count has as secretary a man named Vautrot. The name is a bad one; but the man himself is a good enough creature, except that I somewhat dislike his catlike style of looking at one.

"Well, Monsieur de Vautrot lives in the house with us. He comes early in the morning, breakfasts at some neighboring cafe, passes the day in the Count's study, and often remains to dine with us, if he has work to finish in the evening.

"He is an educated man, and knows a little of everything; and he has undertaken many occupations before he accepted the subordinate though lucrative post he now occupies with my husband. He loves literature; but not that of his time and of his country, perhaps because he himself has failed in this. He prefers foreign writers and poets, whom he quotes with some taste, though with too much declamation.

"Most probably his early education was defective; for on all occasions, when speaking with us, he says, 'Yes, Monsieur le Comte!' or 'Certainly, Madame la Comtesse!' as if he were a servant. Yet withal, he has a peculiar pride, or perhaps I should say insufferable vanity. But his great fault, in my eyes, is the scoffing tone he adopts, when the subject is religion or morals.

"Two days ago, while we were dining, Vautrot allowed himself to indulge in a rather violent tirade of this description. It was certainly contrary to all good taste.

"My dear Vautrot,' my husband said quietly to him, 'to me these pleasantries of yours are indifferent; but pray remember, that while you are a strong-minded man, my wife is a weak-minded woman; and strength, you know, should respect weakness.'

"Monsieur Vautrot first grew white, then red, and finally green.

He

rose, bowed awkwardly, and immediately afterward left the table.

Since that time I have remarked his manner has been more reserved.

The moment I was alone with Louis, I said:

"You may think me indiscreet, but pray let me ask you a question.

How can you confide all your affairs and all your secrets to a man

who professes to have no principles?'

"Monsieur de Camors laughed.

"Oh, he talks thus out of bravado,' he answered. 'He thinks to make himself more interesting in your eyes by these Mephistophelian airs. At bottom he is a good fellow.'

"But,' I answered, 'he has faith in nothing.'

"Not in much, I believe. Yet he has never deceived me. He is an honorable man.'

"I opened my eyes wide at this.