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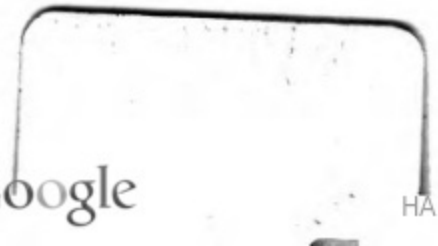

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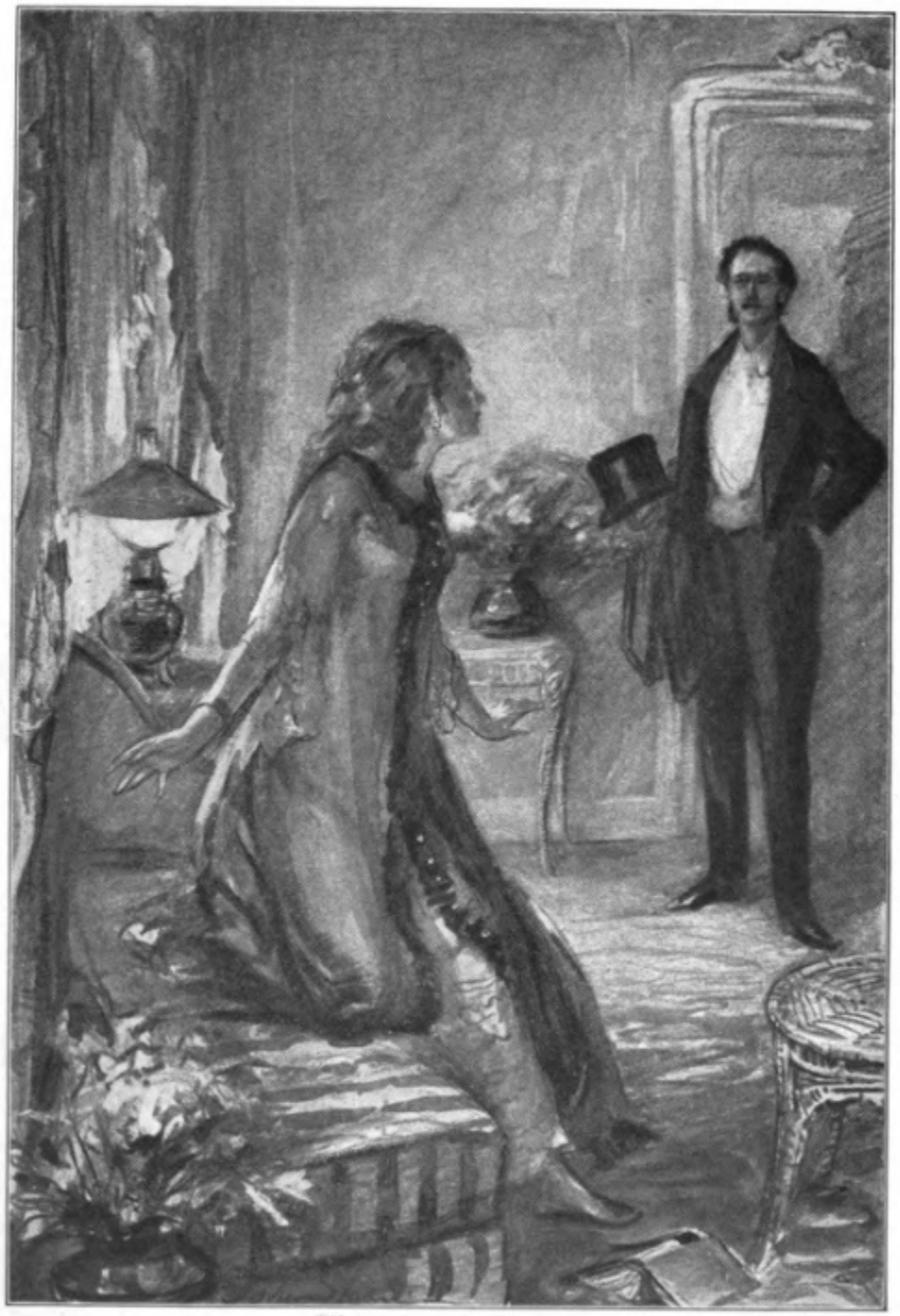

SHE ROSE WITH A BOUND, ALMOST TERRIFIED, DROPPING THE BOOK WHICH SHE HAD IN HER HAND

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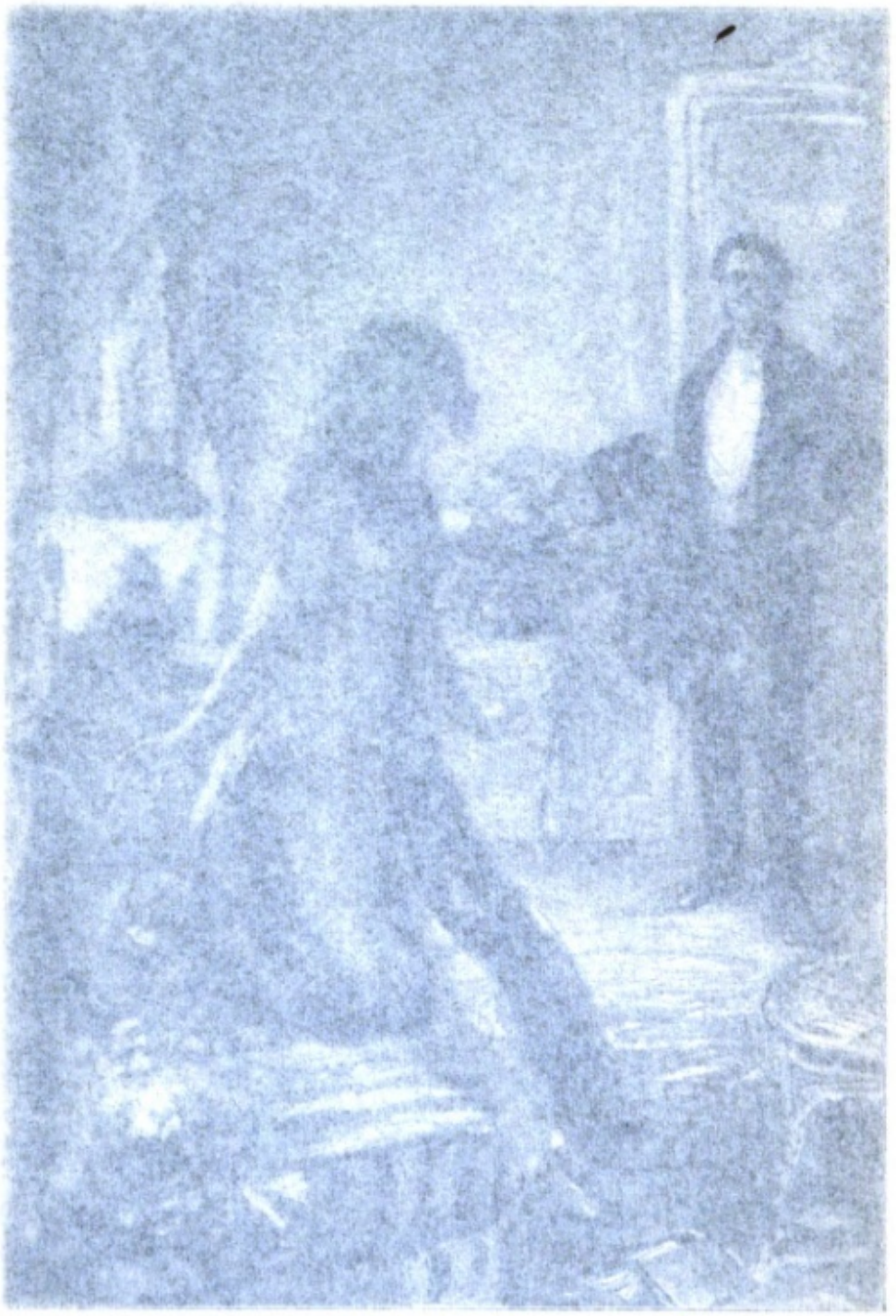

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THE CLIQUE OF GOLD

Translated from the French of

EMILE GABORIAU

Illustrated by

JOHN SLOAN

Charles Scribner's Sons

New York 1913

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ILLUSTRATIONS

She rose with a bound, almost terrified, dropping the book which she had in her hand . *Frontispiece*

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The poor fellow would probably have experienced some very rough treatment, if the "gentleman" had not come running up 518

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THE CLIQUE OF GOLD

I.

THERE is not in all Paris a house better kept or more inviting-looking than No. 23 in Grange Street. As soon as you enter, you are struck by a minute, extreme neatness, which reminds you of Holland, and almost sets you a-laughing. The neighbors might use the brass plate on the door as a mirror to shave in; the stone floor is polished till it shines; and the woodwork of the staircase is varnished to perfection.

In the entrance-hall a number of notices, written in the peculiar style which owners of houses affect, request the tenants to respect the property of others, without regard to the high price they pay for their share. "Clean your feet, if you please," they say to all who come in or go out. "No spitting allowed on the stairs." "Dogs are not allowed in the house."

Nevertheless, this admirably-kept house "enjoyed" but a sorry reputation in the neighborhood. Was it worse than other houses,—No. 21, for instance, or No. 25? Probably not; but there is a fate for houses as well as for men.

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The first story was occupied by the families of two independent gentlemen, whose simplicity of mind was only equalled by that of their mode of life. A collector, who occasionally acted as broker, lived in the second story, and had his offices there. The third story was rented to a very rich man, a baron as people said, who only appeared there at long intervals, preferring, according to his own account, to live on his estates near Saintonge. The whole fourth story was occupied by a man familiarly known as Papa Ravinet, although he was barely fifty years old. He dealt in second-hand merchandise, furniture, curiosities, and toilet articles; and his rooms were filled to overflowing with a medley collection of things which he was in the habit of buying at auctions. The fifth story, finally, was cut up in numerous small rooms and closets, which were occupied by poor families or clerks, who, almost without exception, disappeared early in the morning, and returned only as late as possible at night.

An addition to the house in the rear had its own staircase, and was probably in the hands of still humbler tenants; but then it is so difficult to rent out small lodgings!

However this may have been, the house had a bad reputation; and the lodgers had to bear the consequences. Not one of them would have been trusted with a dollar's worth of goods in any of the neighboring shops. No one, however, stood, rightly or wrongly, in as bad repute as the doorkeeper, or *concièrge,* who lived in a little hole near the great double entrance-door, and watched over the safety of the whole house. Master Chevassat and his wife were severely "cut" by their colleagues of adjoining houses;

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and the most atrocious stories were told of both husband and wife.

Master Chevassat was reputed to be well off; but the story went that he lent out money, and did not hesitate to charge a hundred per cent a month. He acted, besides, it was said, as agent for two of his tenants,—the broker, and the dealer in second-hand goods, and undertook the executions, when poor debtors were unable to pay. Mrs. Chevassat, however, had even graver charges to bear. People said she would do anything for money, and had aided and encouraged many a poor girl in the house in her evil career.

It was also asserted that the estimable couple had formerly lived in the fashionable Faubourg St. Honoré, but had been compelled to leave there on account of several ugly occurrences. They were, finally, reported to have a son called Justin, a handsome fellow, thirty-five years old, who lived in the best society, and whom they nearly worshipped; while he was ashamed of them, and despised them, although he came often at night to ask them for money. No one, it must, however, be confessed, had ever seen this son; and no one knew him.

The two Chevassats shrugged their shoulders, and said it would be absurd if they should trouble themselves about public opinion, as long as their consciences were clear, and they owed nobody anything.

Towards the end of last December, however, on a Saturday afternoon, towards five o'clock, husband and wife were just sitting down to dinner, when the dealer in old clothes, Papa Ravinet, rushed like a tempest into their room.

He was a man of middle size, clean shaven, with

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small, bright, yellowish eyes, which shone with restless eagerness from under thick, bushy brows. Although he had lived for years in Paris, he was dressed like a man from the country, wearing a flowered silk vest, and a long frock-coat with an immense collar.

"Quick, Chevassat!" he cried, with a voice full of trouble. "Take your lamp, and follow me: an accident has happened upstairs."

He was so seriously disturbed, although generally very calm and cool, that the two Chevassats were thoroughly frightened.

"An accident!" exclaimed the woman: "that was all that was wanting. But pray, what has happened, dear M. Ravinet?"

"How do I know? This very moment, as I was just coming out of my room, I thought I heard the death-rattle of a dying person. It was in the fifth story. Of course I ran up a few steps. I listened. All was silent. I went down again, thinking I had been mistaken; and at once I heard again a sighing, a sobbing—I can't tell you exactly what; but it sounded exactly like the last sigh of a person in agony, and at the point of death."

"And then?"

"Then I ran down to tell you, and ask you to come up. I am not sure, you understand; but I think I could swear it was the voice of Miss Henrietta,—that pretty young girl who lives up there. Well, are you coming?"

But they did not stir.

"Miss Henrietta is not in her room," said Mrs. Chevassat coldly. "She went out just now, and told me she would not be back till nine o'clock. My dear M.

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Ravinet, you must have been mistaken: you had a ringing in your ears, or"—

"No, I am sure I was not mistaken! But never mind: we must see what it is."

During this conversation, the door of the room had been open; and several of the lodgers, hearing the voice of the merchant and the exclamations of the woman as they crossed the hall, had stopped and listened.

"Yes, we must see what it is," they repeated.

Master Chevassat dared no longer oppose the general desire so peremptorily expressed,—

"Let us go then, since you will have it so," he sighed.

And, taking up his lamp, he began to ascend the stairs, followed by the merchant, his wife, and five or six other persons.

The steps of all these people were heard all over the house; and from story to story the lodgers opened their doors to see what was going on. And, when they heard that something was likely to happen, they almost all left their rooms, and followed the others.

So that Master Chevassat had nearly a dozen curious persons behind him, when he stopped on the fifth floor to take breath.

The door to Miss Henrietta's room was the first on the left in the passage. He knocked at first gently, then harder, and at last with all his energy, till his heavy fists shook the thin partition-walls of all the rooms.

Between each blow he cried,—

"Miss Henrietta, Miss Henrietta, they want you!"

No reply came.

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"Well," he said triumphantly, "you see!"

But, whilst the man was knocking at the door, M. Ravinet had knelt down, and tried to open the door a little, putting now his eye, and now his ear, to the keyhole and to the slight opening between the door and the frame.

Suddenly he rose deadly pale.

"It is all over: we are too late!"

And, as the neighbors expressed some doubts, he cried furiously,—

"Have you no noses? Don't you smell that abominable charcoal?"

Everybody tried to perceive the odor; and soon all agreed that he was right. As the door had given way a little, the passage had gradually become filled with a sickening vapor.

The people shuddered; and a woman's voice exclaimed,—

"She has killed herself!"

As it happens strangely enough, but too frequently, in such cases, all hesitated.

"I am going for the police," said at last Master Chevassat.

"That's right!" replied the merchant. "Now there is, perhaps, a chance yet to save the poor girl; and, when you come back, it will of course be too late."

"What's to be done, then?"

"Break in the door."

"I dare not."

"Well, I will."

The kind-hearted man put his shoulder to the worm-eaten door, and in a moment the lock gave way. The bystanders shrank instinctively back: they were frightened. The door was wide open, and masses of va-

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pors rolled out. Soon, however, curiosity triumphed over fear. No one doubted any longer that the poor girl was lying in there dead; and each one tried his best to see where she was.

In vain. The feeble light of the lamp had gone out in the foul air; and the darkness was frightful.

Nothing could be seen but the reddish glow of the charcoal, which was slowly going out under a little heap of white ashes in two small stoves. No one ventured to enter.

But Papa Ravinet had not gone so far, to stop now, and remain in the passage.

"Where is the window?" he asked the *concièrge*.

"On the right there."

"Very well: I'll open it."

And boldly the strange man plunged into the dark room; and almost instantly the noise of breaking glass was heard. A moment later, and the air in the room had become once more fit for breathing, and everybody rushed in.

Alas! it was the death-rattle which M. Ravinet had heard.

On the bed, on a thin mattress, without blankets or bedclothes, lay a young girl about twenty years old, dressed in a wretched black merino dress, stretched out at full-length, stiff, lifeless.

The women sobbed aloud.

"To die so young!" they said over and over again, "and to die thus."

In the meantime the merchant had gone up to the bed, and examined the poor girl.

"She is not dead yet!" he cried. "No, she cannot be dead! Come, ladies, come here and help the poor child, till the doctor comes."

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And then, with strange self-possession, he told them what to do for the purpose of recalling her to life.

"Give her air," he said, "plenty of air: try to get some air into her lungs. Cut open her dress; pour some vinegar on her face; rub her with some woollen stuff."

He issued his orders, and they obeyed him readily, although they had no hope of success.

"Poor child!" said one of the women. "No doubt she was crossed in love."

"Or she was starving," whispered another.

There was no doubt that poverty, extreme poverty, had ruled in that miserable chamber: the traces were easily seen all around. The whole furniture consisted of a bed, a chest of drawers, and two chairs. There were no curtains at the window, no dresses in the trunk, not a ribbon in the drawers. Evidently everything that could be sold had been sold, piece by piece, little by little. The mattresses had followed the dresses,—first the wool, handful by handful, then the covering.

Too proud to complain, and cut off from society by bashfulness, the poor girl who was lying there had evidently gone through all the stages of suffering which the shipwrecked mariner endures, who floats, resting on a stray spar in the great ocean.

Papa Ravinet was thinking of all this, when a paper lying on the bureau attracted his eye. He took it up. It was the last will of the poor girl, and ran thus:—

"Let no one be accused: I die voluntarily. I beg Mrs. Chevassat will carry the two letters which I enclose to their addresses. She will be paid whatever I may owe her. HENRIETTA."

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There were the two letters. On the first he read,—

COUNT VILLE-HANDRY,
Rue de Varennes, 115.

And, on the other,—

M. MAXIME DE BRÉVAN,
62 *Rue Laffitte.*

A sudden light seemed to brighten up the small yellowish eye of the dealer in old clothes: a wicked smile played on his lips; and he uttered a very peculiar, "Ah!"

But all this passed away in a moment.

His brow grew as dark as ever; and he looked around anxiously and suspiciously to see if anybody had caught the impression produced upon him by the letters.

No, nobody had noticed him, nobody was thinking of him; for everybody was occupied with Miss Henrietta.

Thereupon he slipped the paper and the two letters into the vast pocket of his huge frock-coat with a dexterity and a rapidity which would have excited the envy of an accomplished pickpocket. It was high time; for the women who were bending over the bed of the young girl were exhibiting signs of intense excitement. One of them said she was sure the body had trembled under her hand, and the others insisted upon it that she was mistaken. The matter was soon to be decided, however.

After, perhaps, twenty seconds of unspeakable anguish, during which all held their breath, and solemn stillness reigned in the room, a cry of hope and joy broke forth suddenly.

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"She has trembled, she has moved!"

This time there was no doubt, no denial possible. The unfortunate girl had certainly moved, very faintly and feebly; but still she had stirred.

A slight color returned to her pallid cheeks; her bosom rose painfully, and sank again; her teeth, closely shut, opened; and with parted lips she stretched forth her neck as if to draw in the fresh air instinctively.

"She is alive!" exclaimed the women, almost frightened, and as if they had seen a miracle performed,—"she is alive!"

In an instant, M. Ravinet was by her side.

One of the women, the wife of the gentleman in the first story, held the head of the girl on her arm, and the poor child looked around with that blank, unmeaning eye which we see in mad-houses. They spoke to her; but she did not answer: evidently she did not hear.

"Never mind!" said the merchant, "she is saved; and, when the doctor comes, he will have little else to do. But she must be attended to, the poor child, and we cannot leave her here alone."

The bystanders knew very well what that meant; and yet hardly any one ventured timidly to assent, and say, "Oh, of course!"

This reluctance did not deter the good man.

"We must put her to bed," he went on; "and, of course, she must have a mattress, bedclothes and blankets. We want wood also (for it is terribly cold here), and sugar for her tea, and a candle."

He did not mention all that was needed, but nearly so, and a great deal too much for the people who stood by. As a proof of this, the wife of the broker

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put grandly a five-franc piece on the mantlepiece, and quietly slipped out. Some of the others followed her example; but they left nothing. When Papa Ravinet had finished his little speech, there was nobody left but the two ladies who lived on the first floor, and the *concièrge* and his wife. The two ladies, moreover, looked at each other in great embarrassment, as if they did not know what their curiosity might cost them. Had the shrewd man foreseen this noble abandonment of the poor girl? One would have fancied so; for he smiled bitterly, and said,—

"Excellent hearts—pshaw!"

Then, shrugging his shoulders, he added,—

"Luckily, I deal in all possible things. Wait a minute. I'll run down stairs, and I'll be back in a moment with all that is needed. After that, we shall see what can be done."

The face of the *concièrge's* wife was a picture. Never in her life had she been so much astonished.

"They have changed Papa Ravinet, or I am mad."

The fact is, that the man was not exactly considered a benevolent and generous mortal. They told stories of him that would have made Harpagon envious, and touched the heart of a constable.

Nevertheless, he re-appeared soon after, almost succumbing under the weight of two excellent mattresses; and, when he came back a second time, he brought much more than he had mentioned.

Miss Henrietta was breathing more freely, but her face was still painfully rigid. Life had come back before the mind had recovered; and it was evident that she was utterly unconscious of her situation, and of what was going on around her. This troubled the two ladies not a little, although they felt very much

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relieved, and disposed to do everything, now that they were no longer expected to open their purses.

"Well, that is always the way," said Papa Ravinet boldly. "However, the doctor will bleed her, if there is any necessity."

And, turning to Master Chevassat, he added,—

"But we are in the way of these ladies: suppose we go down and take something? We can come back when the child is comfortably put to bed."

The good man lived, to tell the truth, in the same rooms in which the thousand and one things he was continually buying were piled up in vast heaps. There was no fixed place for his bed even. He slept where he could, or, rather, wherever an accidental sale had cleared a space for the time,—one night in a costly bed of the days of Louis XIV., and the next night on a lounge that he would have sold for a few francs. Just now he occupied a little closet not more than three-quarters full; and here he asked the *concièrge* to enter.

He poured some brandy into two small wineglasses, put a teakettle on the fire, and sank into an arm-chair; then he said,—

"Well, M. Chevassat, what a terrible thing this is!"

His visitor had been well drilled by his wife, and said neither yes nor no; but the old merchant was a man of experience, and knew how to loosen his tongue.

"The most disagreeable thing about it," he said with an absent air, "is, that the doctor will report the matter to the police, and there will be an investigation."

Master Chevassat nearly dropped his glass.

"What? The police in the house? Well, good-by, then, to our lodgers: we are lost. Why did that stu-

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pid girl want to die, I wonder! But no doubt you are mistaken, my dear sir."

"No, I am not. But you go too fast. They will simply ask you who that girl is, how she supports herself, and where she lived before she came here."

"That is exactly what I cannot tell."

The dealer in old clothes seemed to be amazed: he frowned and said,—

"Halloo! that makes matters worse. How came it about that Miss Henrietta had rooms in your house?"

The *concièrge* was evidently ill at ease: something was troubling him sorely.

"Oh! that is as clear as sunlight," he replied; "and, if you wish it, I'll tell you the story: you will see there is no harm done."

"Well, let us hear."

"Well, then, it was about a year ago this very day, when a gentleman came in, well dressed, an eyeglass stuck in his eye, impudent like a hangman's assistant, in fact a thoroughly fashionable young man. He said he had seen the notice that there was a room for rent up stairs, and wanted to see it. Of course I told him it was a wretched garret, unfit for people like him; but he insisted, and I took him up."

"To the room in which Miss Henrietta is now staying?"

"Exactly. I thought he would be disgusted; but no. He looked out of the window, tried the door if it would shut, examined the partition-wall, and at last he said, 'This suits me: I take the room.' And thereupon he hands me a twenty-franc piece to make it a bargain. I was amazed."

If M. Ravinet felt any interest in the story, he took pains not to show it; for his eyes wandered to and fro

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as if his thoughts were elsewhere, and he was heartily tired of the tedious account.

"And who is that fashionable young man?" he asked.

"Ah! that is more than I know, except that his name is Maxime."

That name made the old merchant jump as if a shower-bath had suddenly fallen upon his head. He changed color; and his small yellowish eyes had a strange look in them.

But he recovered promptly, so promptly, that his visitor saw nothing; and then he said in a tone of indifference,—

"The young man did not give you his family name?"

"No."

"But ought you not to have inquired?"

"Ah, there is the trouble! I did not do it."

Gradually, and by a great effort, Master Chevassat began to master his embarrassment. It looked as if he were preparing himself for the assault, and to get ready for the police-officer.

"I know it was wrong," he continued; "but you would not have acted differently in my place, my dear sir, I am sure. Just think! My room belonged to M. Maxime, for I had his money in my pocket. I asked him politely where he lived, and if there was any furniture to come. I caught it nicely. He laughed me in the face, and did not even let me finish my question. 'Do I look,' he said, 'like a man who lives in a place like this?' And when he saw I was puzzled, he went on to tell me that he took the room for a young person from the country, in whom he took an interest, and that the contract and the receipts for rent

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must all be made out in the name of Miss Henrietta. That was clear enough, wasn't it? Still it was my duty to know who Miss Henrietta was: so I asked him civilly. But he got angry, and told me that was none of my business, and that some furniture would be sent presently."

He stopped, waiting for his host to express his approbation by a word or a sign; but, as nothing came, he went on,—

"In fine, I did not dare to insist, and all was done as he wanted it done. That very day a dealer in second-hand furniture brought the pieces you have seen up stairs; and the day after, about eleven o'clock, Miss Henrietta herself appeared. She had not much baggage, I tell you: she brought every thing she owned in a little carpet-bag in her hand."

The old merchant was stooping over the fire as if his whole attention was given to the teakettle, in which the water was beginning to boil.

"It seems to me, my good friend," he said, "that you did not act very wisely. Still, if that is really all, I don't think they are likely to trouble you."

"What else could there be?"

"How do I know? But if that young damsel had been carried off by M. Maxime, if you were lending a hand in an elopement, I think you would be in a bad box. The law is pretty strict about it, in the case of a minor."

The *concièrge* protested with a solemn air.

"I have told you the whole truth," he declared.

But Papa Ravinet did not by any means seem so sure of that.

"That is your lookout," he said, shrugging his shoulders. "Still, you may be sure they will ask you

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how it could happen that one of your tenants should fall into such a state of abject poverty without your giving notice to anybody."

"Why, in the first place, I do not wait upon my lodgers. They are free to do what they choose in their rooms."

"Quite right, Master Chevassat, quite right! So you did not know that M. Maxime no longer came to see Miss Henrietta?"

"He still came to see her."

In the most natural manner in the world, Papa Ravinet raised his arms to heaven, and exclaimed as if horror-struck,—

"What! is it possible? That handsome young man knew how the poor girl suffered? he knew that she was dying of hunger?"

Master Chevassat became more and more troubled. He began to see what the old merchant meant by his questions, and how unsatisfactory his answers were.

"Ah! you ask too many questions," he said at last. "It was not my duty to watch over M. Maxime. As for Miss Henrietta, as soon as she is able to move, the serpent! I tell you I'll send her off pretty quickly!"

The old merchant shook his head, and said in his softest voice,—

"My dear sir, you won't do that, because from to-day I'll pay the rent for her room. And, more than that, if you wish to oblige me, you will be very kind to the poor girl, you hear, and even respectful, if you please."

There was no misunderstanding the meaning of the word "oblige," from the manner in which he pronounced it; and yet he was about to enforce the rec-

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longer to live; but God will not pardon you. I feel it; I shall be avenged. And, if it should require a miracle, that miracle will be done, so as to inform that honorable man who thought you were his friend, how and why the poor girl died whom he had intrusted to your honor. H."

The old man was furious.

"The honor of Maxime de Brévan!" he growled with a voice of intense hatred,—"the honor of Maxime de Brévan!"

But his terrible excitement did not keep him from manipulating the other letter, addressed to Count Ville-Handry, in the same manner. The operation was successful; and, without the slightest hesitation, he read:—

"DEAR FATHER,—Broken down with anxiety, and faint from exhaustion, I have waited till this morning for an answer to my humble letter, which I had written to you on my knees.

"You have never replied to it; you are inexorable. I see I must die. I shall die. Alas! I can hardly say I die willingly.

"I must appear very guilty in your eyes, father, that you should abandon me thus to the hatred of Sarah Brandon and her people. And yet—ah! I have suffered terribly. I have struggled hard before I could make up my mind to leave your house,—the house where my mother had died, where I had been so happy, and so tenderly beloved as a child by both of you. Ah, if you but knew!

"And yet it was so little I asked of you!—barely enough to bury my undeserved disgrace in a convent.

"Yes, undeserved, father; for I tell you at this hour, when no one utters a falsehood, if my reputation was lost, my honor was not lost."

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Big tears rolled down the cheeks of the old man; and he said in a half-stifled voice,—

"Poor, poor child! And to think that for a whole year I have lived under the same roof with her, without knowing it. But I am here. I am still in time. Oh, what a friend chance can be when it chooses!"

Most assuredly not one of the inmates of the house would have recognized Papa Ravinet at this moment: he was literally transfigured. He was no longer the cunning dealer in second-hand articles, the old scamp with the sharp, vulgar face, so well known at all public sales, where he sat in the front rank, watching for good bargains, and keeping cool when all around him were in a state of fervent excitement.

The two letters he had just read had opened anew in his heart more than one badly-healed and badly-scarred wound. He was suffering intensely; and his pain, his wrath, and his hope of vengeance long delayed, gave to his features a strange expression of energy and nobility. With his elbows on the table, holding his head in his hands, and looking apparently into the far past, he seemed to call up the miseries of the past, and to trace out in the future the vague outlines of some great scheme. And as his thoughts began to overflow, so to say, he broke out in a strange, spasmodic monologue,—

"Yes," he murmured, "yes, I recognize you, Sarah Brandon! Poor child, poor child! Overcome by such horrible intrigues! And that Daniel, who intrusted her to the care of Maxime de Brévan—who is he? Why did she not write to him when she suffered thus? Ah, if she had trusted me! What a sad fate! And how can I ever hope to make her confide in me?"

An old clock struck seven, and the merchant was

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suddenly recalled to the present: he trembled in all his limbs.

"Nonsense!" he growled. "I was falling asleep; and that is what I cannot afford to do. I must go up stairs, and hear the child's confession."

Instantly, and with amazing dexterity, he replaced the letters in their envelopes, dried them, pasted them up again, and smoothed them down, till every trace of the steam had entirely disappeared. Then looking at his work with an air of satisfaction, he said,—

"That was not so badly done. An expert in the post-office would not suspect it. I may risk it."

And, thus re-assured, he rapidly mounted up to the fifth story; but there Mrs. Chevassat suddenly barred his way, coming down stairs in a manner which showed clearly that she had lain in wait for him.

"Well, my dear sir," she said with her sweetest manner: "so you have become Miss Henrietta's banker?"

"Yes: do you object to it?"

"Oh, not at all! It is none of my business, only"—

She stopped, smiling wickedly, and then added,—

"Only she is a prodigiously pretty girl; and I was just saying to myself, 'Upon my word, M. Ravinet's taste is not bad.'"

The merchant was on the point of giving her a pretty sharp, indignant reply; but he controlled himself, because he knew how important it was to mislead the woman; and, forcing himself to smile, he said,—

"You know I count upon your being discreet."

When he got up, he found that he ought, at least, to give credit to Mamma Chevassat and the two ladies from the first floor, for having employed their time well, and for having skilfully made use of the articles

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he had contributed. The room, a short time ago cold and bare, had an air of comfort about it now, which was delightful. On the bureau stood a lamp with a shade to prevent the light from hurting the patient's eyes; a bright fire blazed on the hearth; several old curtains had been hung before the window, one before the other, to replace for the time the missing panes; and on the table stood a teakettle, a china cup, and two small medicine-bottles.

Evidently the doctor had been here during Ravinet's absence. He had bled the poor girl, prescribed some medicines, and left again, with the assurance that nothing more was needed but perfect quiet.

In fact, there was no trace left of the sufferings and the terrible danger from which the patient had so marvellously escaped, except the deep pallor of her face. Stretched out at full-length on her comfortable bed with its thick mattresses and snow-white sheets, her head propped up high on a couple of pillows, she was breathing freely, as was easily seen by the steady, regular rising and falling of her bosom under the cover.

But life and consciousness had also brought back to her a sense of the horror of her position, and of her capacity for suffering.

Her brow resting on her arm, which was almost concealed by masses of golden hair, immovable, and her eyes fixed steadily upon infinite space, as if trying to pierce the darkness of the future, she would have looked like a statue of sorrow rather than of resignation, but for the big tears which were slowly dropping down her cheeks.

Her exquisite beauty looked almost ethereal under the circumstances; and Papa Ravinet, when he saw

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her, remained fixed by admiration, standing upon the threshold of the open door. But it occurred to him at once that he might be looked upon as a spy, and that his feelings would be sure to be misinterpreted. He coughed, therefore, to give warning, and then stepped in.

At the noise he made, Henrietta roused herself. When she saw the old merchant, she said in a faint, feeble voice,—

"Ah! it is you, sir. These kind ladies have told me all. You have saved my life." Then, shaking her head, she added,—

"You have rendered me a sad service, sir."

She uttered these words so simply, but in a tone of such harrowing grief, that Papa Ravinet was overcome.

"Unhappy child!" he exclaimed, "you do not think of trying it over again?"

She made no answer. It was as good as if she had said, Yes.

"Why, you must be mad!" said the old man, excited almost beyond control. "Only twenty years old, and give up life! That has never been done before. You are suffering now; but you can hardly imagine what compensation Providence may have in store for you hereafter"—

She interrupted him by a gesture, and said,—

"There was no future for me, sir, when I sought refuge in death."

"But"—

"Oh, don't try to convince me, sir! What I did, I had to do. I felt how life was leaving me, and I only wished to shorten the agony. I had not eaten any thing for three days when I lit that charcoal. Even

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to get the charcoal, I had to risk a falsehood, and cheat the woman who let me have it on credit. And yet God knows I was not wanting in courage. I would have done the coarsest, hardest work cheerfully, joyously. But how did I know how to get work? I asked Mrs. Chevassat a hundred times to obtain employment for me; but she always laughed at me; and, when I begged hard, she said"—

She stopped; and her face became crimson with shame. She dared not repeat what the wife of the *concièrge* had said. But she added in a voice trembling with womanly shame and deep indignation,—

"Ah, that woman is a wicked creature!"

The old merchant was probably fully aware of the character of Mrs. Chevassat. He guessed only too readily what kind of advice she had given this poor girl of twenty, who had turned to her for help in her great suffering. He uttered an oath which would have startled even that estimable woman, and then said warmly,—

"I understand, Miss Henrietta, I understand. Do you think I don't know what you must have suffered? I know poverty, as well as you. I can understand your purpose but too well. Who would not give up life itself when everybody abandons us? But I do not understand your despair, now that circumstances have changed."

"Alas, sir, how have they changed?"

"How? What do you mean? Don't you see me? Do you think I would leave you, after having been just in time to save your life? That would be nice! No, my dear child, compose yourself: poverty shall not come near you again, I'll see to that. You want somebody to advise you, to defend you; and here I am:

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if you have enemies, let them beware! Come, smile again, and think of the good times a-coming."

But she did not smile: she looked frightened, almost stupefied. Making a supreme effort, she looked fixedly at the old man to see if she could read in his face what were his real thoughts. He, on his part, was seriously troubled by his failure to inspire her with confidence.

"Do you doubt my promises?" he asked her.

She shook her head; and uttering her words one by one, as if to give them greater weight, she said,—

"I beg your pardon, sir. I do not doubt you. But I cannot understand why you should offer me your kind protection."

Papa Ravinet affected a greater surprise than he really felt, and said, raising his hands to heaven,—

"Great God! she mistrusts my good will."

"Sir!"

"Pray what can you have to fear from me? I am an old man: you are almost a child. I come to help you. Is not that perfectly natural, and quite simple?"

She said nothing; and he remained a few moments buried in thought, as if trying to find out her motive for refusing his help. Suddenly he cried out, beating his forehead,—

"Ah, I have it. That woman Chevassat has talked to you about me, no doubt. Ah, the viper! I'll crush her one of these days! Come, let us be frank: what has she told you?"

He hoped she would say a word at least. He waited; but nothing came.

Then he broke forth, with a vehemence scarcely controlled, and in words very unexpected from a man like him,—

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"Well, I will tell you what the old thief has told you. She told you Papa Ravinet was a dangerous, ill-reputed man, who carried on in the dark all kind of suspicious trades. She told you the old scamp was a usurer, who knew no law, and kept no promise; whose only principle was profit; who dealt in every thing with everybody, selling to-day old iron in junk-shops, and to-morrow cashmere shawls to fashionable ladies; and who lent money on imaginary securities—the talent of men and the beauty of women. In fine, she told you that it was a piece of good-fortune for a woman to be under my protection, and you knew it was a disgrace."

He stopped, as if to give the poor girl time to form her judgment, and then went on more calmly,—

"Let us suppose there is such a Papa Ravinet as she has described. But there is another one, whom but few people know, who has been sorely tried by misfortune; and he is the one who now offers his aid to you."

There is no surer way to make people believe in any virtue we have, or wish to appear to have, than to accuse ourselves of bad qualities, or even vices, which we do not have. But, if the old man had calculated upon this policy, he failed signally. Henrietta remained as icy as ever, and said,—

"Believe me, sir, I am exceedingly obliged to you for all you have done for me, and for your effort to convince me."

The poor man looked disappointed.

"In fact, you reject my offers, because I do not explain them to you by any of the usual motives. But what can I tell you? Suppose I should say to you that I have a daughter who has secretly left me, so

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that I do not know what has become of her, and that her memory makes me anxious to serve you. May I not have said to myself, that perhaps she is struggling, just as you have done, with poverty; that she also has been abandoned by her lover?"

The poor girl turned deadly pale as he spoke thus, and interrupted him eagerly, raising herself on her pillows,—

"You are mistaken, sir. My position here may justify such suspicions, I know; but I have no lover."

He replied,—

"I believe you: I swear I believe you. But, if that is so, how did you get here? and how were you reduced to such extreme suffering?"

At last Papa Ravinet had touched the right chord. The poor girl was deeply moved; and the tears started in her eyes. She said in a low voice,—

"There are secrets which cannot be revealed."

"Not even when life and honor depend on them?"

"Yes."

"But"—

"Oh, pray do not insist!"

If Henrietta had known the old merchant, she would have read in his eyes the satisfaction which he felt. A moment before he had despaired of ever gaining her confidence: now he felt almost sure of success. The time seemed to him to have come to strike a decisive blow.

"I have tried my best to win your confidence, I confess; but it was solely in your own interest. If it had been otherwise, do you think I should have asked you these questions, instead of finding out every thing by simply tearing a piece of paper?"

The poor girl could not retain a cry of terror.

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"You mean my letters?"

"I have both."

"Ah! That is why the ladies who nursed me looked for them everywhere in vain."

Instead of any other answer, he drew them from his pocket, and laid them on the bed with an air of injured innocence. To all appearances, the envelopes had not been touched. Henrietta glanced at them, and then, holding out her hand to the old man, she said,—

"I thank you, sir!"

He did not stir; but he felt that this false evidence of honesty had helped him more than all his eloquence. He hastily added,—

"After all, I could not resist the temptation to read the directions, and to draw my own conclusions. Who is Count Ville-Handry? I suppose he is your father. And M. Maxime de Brévan? No doubt he is the young man who called to see you so often. Ah, if you would but trust me! If you but knew how a little experience of the world often helps us to overcome the greatest difficulties!"

He was evidently deeply moved.

"However, wait till you are perfectly well again before you come to any decision. Consider the matter carefully. You need not tell me any thing else but what is absolutely necessary for me to know in order to advise you."

"Yes, indeed! In that way I may"—

"Well, I'll wait, why, as long as you want me to wait,—two days, ten days."

"Very well."

"Only, I pray you, promise me solemnly that you will give up all idea of suicide."

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"I promise you solemnly I will."

Papa Ravinet's eyes shone with delight; and he exclaimed joyously,—

"Done! I'll come up again to-morrow; for, to tell the truth, I am tired to death, and must go and lie down."

But he told a fib; for he did not go back to his rooms. In spite of the wretched weather, he left the house; and, as soon as he was in the street, he hid himself in a dark corner, from which he could watch the front-door of the house. He remained there a long time, exposed to wind and rain, uttering now and then a low oath, and stamping with his feet to keep himself warm. At last, just as it struck eleven, a hack stopped at No. 23. A young man got out, rang the bell, and entered.

"He is Maxime de Brévan," murmured the old man. Then he added in a savage voice,—

"I knew he would come, the scoundrel! to see if the charcoal had done its work."

But the same moment the young man came out again, and jumped into the carriage, which quickly drove off.

"Aha!" laughed the merchant. "No chance for you, my fine fellow! You have lost your game, and you'll have to try your luck elsewhere; and this time I am on hand. I hold you fast; and, instead of one bill to pay, there will be two now."

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II.

GENERALLY it is in novels only that unknown people suddenly take it into their heads to tell their whole private history, and to confide to their neighbors even their most important and most jealously-guarded secrets. In real life things do not go quite so fast.

Long after the old merchant had left Henrietta, she lay pondering, and undecided as to what she should do on the next day. In the first place, she asked herself who this odd man could be, who had spoken of himself as a dangerous and suspicious person. Was he really what he appeared to be? The girl almost doubted it. Although wholly inexperienced, she still had been struck by certain astounding changes in Papa Ravinet. Thus, whenever he became animated, his carriage, his gestures, and his manners, contrasted with his country-fashioned costume, as if he had for the moment forgotten his lesson. At the same time his language, usually careless and incorrect, and full of slang terms belonging to his trade, became pure and almost elegant.

What was his business? Had he been a dealer in second-hand articles before he became a tenant in No. 23 Grange Street, three years ago? One might very easily have imagined that Papa Ravinet (was that his real name?) had before that been in a very different position. And why not? Is not Paris the haven in which all shipwrecked sailors of society seek a refuge? Does not Paris alone offer to all wretched and guilty people a hiding-place, where they can begin a new life, lost and unknown in the vast

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multitude? What discoveries might be made there? How many persons, once brilliant lights in the great world, and then, of a sudden, sought for in vain by friend and foe, might be found there again, disguised in strange costumes, and earning a livelihood in most curious ways! Why should not the old merchant be one of this class?

But, even if this were so, it would not have satisfactorily explained to Henrietta the eagerness of Papa Ravinet to serve her, nor his perseverance in offering her his advice. Was it merely from charity that he did all this? Alas! Christian charity is not often so pressing.

Did he know who Henrietta was? Had he at any period of her life come in contact with her? or had his interests ever been mixed up with hers? Was he anxious to make a return for some kindness shown to him? or did he count upon some reward in the future? Who could tell?

"Would it not be the height of imprudence to put myself in the power of this man?" thought the poor girl.

If, on the other hand, she rejected his offers, she fell back into that state of forlorn wretchedness, from which she had only been able to save herself by suicide.

This view was all the more urgent, as the poor child, like all persons who have been rescued from death only after having exhausted their sufferings, now began to cling to life with an almost desperate affection. It seemed as if the contact with death had wiped out at once all the memory of the past, and all the threats of the future.

"O Daniel!" she said to herself, trembling all over,

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—"O Daniel! my only friend upon earth, what would you suffer if you knew that you lost me forever by the very means you chose to secure my safety!"

To refuse the assistance offered her by Papa Ravinet would have required an amount of energy which she did not possess. The voice of reflection continually said to her,—

"The old man is your only hope."

It never occurred to her to conceal the truth from Papa Ravinet, or to deceive him by a fictitious story. She only thought how she could tell him the truth without telling him all; how she could confess enough to enable him to serve her, and yet not to betray a secret which she held more dear than her happiness, her reputation, and life itself.

Unfortunately, she was the victim of one of those intrigues which are formed and carried out within the narrow circle of a family,—intrigues of the most abominable character, which people suspect, and often even know perfectly well, and which yet remain unpunished, because they cannot be reached by the law.

Henrietta's father, Count Ville-Handry, was in 1845 one of the wealthiest land-owners of the province of Anjou. The good people near Rosiers and Saint Mathurin were fond of pointing out to strangers the massive towers of Ville-Handry, a magnificent castle half hid among noble old woods on the beautiful slopes of the bluffs which line the Loire.

"There," they said, "lives a true gentleman, a little too proud, perhaps, but, nevertheless, a true gentleman."

For contrary to the usual state of things in the country, where envy is apt to engender hatred, the

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count was quite popular, in spite of his title and his large fortune. He was at that time about forty years old, quite tall and good-looking, solemn and courteous, obliging, although reserved, and very good-natured as long as no one spoke in his presence of the church or the reigning family, the nobility or the clergy, of his hounds or the wines of his vineyards, or of various other subjects on which he had what he chose to consider his "own opinions."

As he spoke but rarely, and said little at the time, he said fewer foolish things than most people, and thus obtained the reputation of being clever and well-informed, of which he was very proud and very careful. He lived freely, almost profusely, and thus put aside every year but little more than about half his income. He had all his clothes made in Paris, was proud of his foot, and always wore gloves.

His house was kept handsomely; and his gardens cost him a good deal of money. He kept a pack of hounds, and six hunters. Finally, he kept half a dozen lazy sèrvants in the house, whose gorgeous liveries, with the family coat-of-arms, were a source of perpetual wonder at Saint Mathurin.

He would have been perfect, but for his passion for hunting.

As soon as the season opened, he was sure to be found, on foot or on horseback, crossing the stubble-fields, jumping over hedges, or floundering in the swamps. This he carried so far, that the ladies of the neighborhood, who had daughters, blamed him to his face for his imprudence, and scolded him for risking his precious health so recklessly.

This nobleman, forty years old, and enjoying all that heart could desire, was unmarried. And yet he

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had not lacked opportunities to remedy the evil. There was not a good mother for twenty miles around who did not covet this prize for her daughter,—thirty thousand dollars a year, and a great man.

He had only to appear at a ball in the provincial towns, and he was the hero. Mothers and daughters kept their sweetest smiles for him; and kind welcomes were offered on all sides. But all these manœuvres had been fruitless; he had escaped from all snares, and resisted the most cunning devices.

Why was he so much opposed to marriage? His friends found the explanation in a certain person, half housekeeper, half companion, who lived in the castle, and was very pretty and very designing. But there are malicious tongues everywhere.

The next year, however, an event occurred which was calculated to give some ground to these idle, gossiping tales. One fine morning in the month of July, 1847, this lady died suddenly of apoplexy. Six weeks later, a report began to spread that Count Ville-Handry was going to be married.

The report was well founded. The count did marry. The fact could not be doubted any longer, when the banns were read, and the announcement appeared in the official journal. And whom do you think he married? The daughter of a poor widow, the Baroness Rupert, who lived in great poverty at a place called Rosiers, having nothing but a small pension derived from her husband, who had been a colonel of artillery.

If she had, at least, been of good and ancient family; if she had been, at least, a native of the province!

But no. No one knew exactly who she was, or where she came from. Some people said the colonel had married her in Austria; others, in Sweden. Her

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husband, they added, had been made a baron after the fashion of others, who dubbed themselves such during the first empire, and had no right to call himself noble.

On the other hand, Pauline de Rupert, then twenty-three years old, was in the full bloom of youth, and marvellously beautiful. Moreover, she had, up to this time, been looked upon as a sensible, modest girl, very bright and very sweet withal; in fact, possessed of every quality and virtue that can make life happy, and add to the fame of a great house.

But now, not a cent, no dower, not even a *trousseau!*

Everybody was amazed; and a perfect storm of indignation arose in the neighborhood. Was it possible, was it natural, that a great nobleman like the count should end thus miserably, ridiculously? that he should marry a penniless girl, an adventuress,—he who had had the pick and choice of the richest and greatest ladies of the land?

Was Count Ville-Handry a fool? or was he only insane about Miss Rupert? Was she not perhaps, after all, a designing hypocrite, who had very quietly, in her retired home, woven the net in which the lion of Anjou was now held captive?

People would have been less astonished, if they had known, that, for years, a great intimacy had existed between the mother of the bride and the housekeeper at the castle. But, on the other hand, this fact might have led to very different surmises still.

However that might be, the count was not suffered long to remain in doubt as to the entire change of opinion in the neighborhood. He saw it as soon as he paid the usual visits in the town of Angers, and at the houses of the nobility near him. No more affec-

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tionate smiles, no tender welcomes, no little white hands stealthily seeking his. The doors that formerly seemed to fly open at his mere approach now turned but slowly on their hinges; some remained even closed, the owners being reported not at home, although the count knew perfectly well that they were in.

One very noble and very pious old lady, who gave the keynote to society, had said in the most decided manner,—

"For my part, I shall never receive at my house a damsel who used to give music-lessons to my nieces, even if she had caught and entrapped a Bourbon!"

The charge was true. Pauline, in order to provide her mother with some of the comforts which are almost indispensable to old people, had given lessons on the piano in the neighborhood. Her terms had been low enough: now they blamed her for the sacrifice. They would have blamed her for the noblest of virtues; for all the blame was laid upon her. When people met her, they looked away, so as not to have to bow to her. Even when she was leaning on the count's arm, there were persons who spoke very kindly to him, and did not say a word to his wife, as if they had not seen her, or she had not existed at all. This impertinence went so far, that at last Count Ville-Handry, one day, almost beside himself with anger, seized one of his neighbors by the collar of his coat, shook him violently, and shouted out to him,—

"Do you see the countess, my wife, sir? How shall I chastise you to cure you of your near-sightedness?"

Foreseeing a duel, the impertinent man made his excuses; and his experience put the rest of them on

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their guard. But their opinions remained unchanged: open war only changed into secret opposition, that was all.

Fate, however, always more kind than man, held a reward in store for Count Ville-Handry, which amply repaid him for his heroism in marrying a poor girl. An uncle of his wife's, a banker at Dresden, died, and left his "beloved niece Pauline" half a million dollars. This immensely wealthy man, who had never assisted his sister in her troubles, and who would have disinherited the daughter of a soldier of fortune, had been flattered by the idea of writing in his last will the name of his niece, the "high and mighty Countess Ville-Handry."

This unexpected piece of good-fortune ought to have delighted the young wife. She might now have had her vengeance on all her miserable slanderers, and enjoyed a boundless popularity. But far from it. She had never appeared more sad than on the day when the great news reached her.

For on that very day she for the first time cursed her marriage. A voice within her warned her that she ought never to have yielded to the entreaties and the orders of her mother. An excellent daughter, as she was to become the best of mothers, and the most faithful of wives, she had sacrificed herself. And now an accident made all her sacrifices useless, and punished her for having done her duty.

Ah, why had she not resisted, at least for the purpose of gaining time?

For when she was a girl she had dreamed of a very different future. Long before giving herself to the count, she had, of her own free will, given her heart to another. She had bestowed her first and warmest

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affections upon a young man who was only two or three years older than she,—Peter Champcey, the son of one of those marvellously rich farmers who live in the valley of the Loire.

He worshipped her. Unfortunately one obstacle had risen between them from the beginning,—Pauline's poverty. It could not be expected that those keen, thrifty peasants, Champcey's father and mother, would ever permit one of their sons—they had two—to commit the folly of making a love-match.

They had worked hard for their children. The oldest, Peter, was to be a lawyer; the other, Daniel, who wanted to become a sailor, was studying day and night to prepare for his examination. And the old couple were not a little proud of these "gentlemen," their sons. They told everybody who would listen, that, in return for the costly education they were giving them, they expected them to marry large fortunes.

Peter knew his parents so well, that he never mentioned Pauline to them.

"When I am of age," he said to himself, "it will be a different matter."

Alas! Why had not Pauline's mother waited at least till then?

Poor young girl! On the day on which she entered the castle of Ville-Handry, she had sworn she would bury this love of hers so deep in the innermost recesses of her heart, that it should never come up and trouble her thoughts. And she had kept her word.

But now it suddenly broke forth, more ardent, more powerful, than ever, till it well-nigh overcame her, and crushed her—sweetly and sadly, like the memory of lost days, and at the same time cruel and heart-rending, like bitter remorse.

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What had become of him? When he had heard that she was going to marry the count, he had written to her a letter full of despair, in which he overwhelmed her with irony and contempt. Later, whether he had forgotten her or not, he also had married; and the two lovers who had once hoped to pursue their way through life leaning one upon the other now went each their own way.

For long hours the poor young wife struggled in the solitude of her chamber against these ghosts of the past which crowded around her. But, if ever a guilty thought called up a blush on her brow, she quickly triumphed over it. Like a brave, loyal woman, she renewed her oath, and swore to devote herself entirely to her husband. He had rescued her from abject poverty, and bestowed upon her his fortune and his name; and she owed it to him in return to make him happy.

She needed all her courage, all her energy, to fulfil her vows; for the count's character lay fully open before her now, after two years of married life. She knew precisely how narrow his mind was, how empty his thoughts, and how cold his heart. She had long since found out that the brilliant man of the world, whom everybody considered so clever, was in reality an absolute nullity, incapable of any thought that was not suggested to him by others, and at the same time full of overweening self-esteem, and absurdly obstinate.

The worst, however, was, that the count was very near hating his wife. He had heard so many people say that she was not his equal, that he finally believed it himself. Besides, he blamed her for the prestige which he had lost.

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An ordinary woman would have shrunk from the difficult task which Pauline had assumed, and would have thought that nothing more could be expected of her than to keep sacred her marriage-vows. But the countess was not an ordinary woman. Full of resignation, she meant to do more than her duty.

Fortunately, a cradle standing by her bedside made the task somewhat easier. She had a daughter, her Henrietta; and upon that darling curly head she built a thousand castles in the air. From that moment she roused herself from the languor to which she had given way for nearly two years, and set to work to study the count with that amazing sagacity which a high stake is apt to give.

A remark accidentally made by her husband cast a new light upon her fate. One morning, when they had finished breakfast, he said,—

"Ah! Nancy was very fond of you. The day before she died, when she knew she was going, she made me promise her to marry you."

This Nancy was the count's former housekeeper.

After this awkward speech, the poor countess saw clearly enough what position that woman had really held at the castle. She understood how, modestly keeping in the background, and sheltering herself under the very humility of her position, she had been in truth the intellect, the energy, and the strong will, of her master. Her influence over him had, besides, been so powerful, that it had survived her, and that she had been obeyed even in the grave.

Although cruelly humiliated by this confession of her husband's, the countess had sufficient self-control not to blame him for his weakness. She said to herself,—

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"Well, be it so. For his happiness and for our peace, I will stoop to play the part Nancy played."

This was more easily said than done; for the count was not the man to be led openly, nor was he willing to listen to good advice, simply because it was good. Irritable, jealous, and despotic, like all weak men, he dreaded nothing so much as what he called an insult to his authority. He meant to be master everywhere, in every thing, and forever. He was so sensitive on this point, that his wife had only to show the shadow of a purpose of her own, and he went instantly to work to oppose and prohibit it.

"I am not a weather-cock!" was one of his favorite sayings.

Poor fellow! He did not know that those who turn to the opposite side of the wind, nevertheless turn, as well as those who go with the wind. The countess knew it; and this knowledge made her strong. After working for many months patiently and cautiously, she thought she had learnt the secret of managing him, and that henceforth she would be able to control his will whenever she was in earnest.

The opportunity to make the experiment came very soon. Although the great people of the neighborhood had generally come round and treated her quite fairly now, especially since she had become an heiress, the countess found her position unpleasant, and was anxious to leave the country. It recalled to her, besides, too many painful memories. There were certain roads and lanes which she could never pass without a pang at her heart. On the other hand, it was well known that the count had sworn he would end his life in the province. He hated large cities; and the

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mere idea of leaving his castle, where every thing was arranged to suit his habits, made him seriously angry.

People would not believe it, therefore, when the report first arose that he was going to leave Ville-Handry, that he had bought a town-house in Paris, and that he would shortly go there to establish himself permanently in the capital.

"It was much against the will of the countess," he said, full of delight at her disappointment. "She would not agree to it at all; but I am not a weather-cock. I insisted on having my way, and she yielded at last."

So that in the latter part of October, in 1851, the Count and the Countess Ville-Handry moved into their magnificent house in Varennes Street, a princely mansion, which, however, did not cost them more than a third of its actual value, as they happened to buy it at a time when real estate was very low.

But it had been comparatively child's play to bring the count to Paris: the real difficulty was to keep him there. Nothing was more likely than that, deprived of the active exercise and the fresh air he enjoyed in the country, he should miss his many occupations and duties, and either succumb to weariness, or seek refuge in dissipation. His wife foresaw this difficulty, and looked for an object that might give the count abundant employment and amusement.

Already before leaving home she had dropped into his mind the seed of that passion, which, in a man of fifty, can take the place of all others,—ambition. Thus he came to Paris with the secret desire and the hope of becoming a leader in politics, and making his mark in some great affair of state. The countess,

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however, aware of the dangers which beset a man who ventures upon such slippery ground, determined first to examine the condition of things so as to be able to warn him in time. Fortunately her fortune and her name were of great service to her in this enterprise. She managed to assemble at her house all the celebrities of the day. Her relations helped her; and soon her Wednesdays and Saturdays became famous in Paris. People exerted themselves to the utmost to obtain an invitation to her state dinners, or her smaller parties on Sundays. Her house in Varennes Street was looked upon as neutral ground, where political intrigues and party strife were alike tabooed. The countess spent a whole winter in making her observations.

The world, seeing her sit modestly by her fireside, thought she was wholly occupied with her pretty daughter, Henrietta, who was always playing or reading by her side. But she was all the time listening, and trying, with all her mental powers, to understand the great questions of the day. She studied characters; watched the passions of some, and discovered the cunning tricks of others, ever anxious to find out what enemies she would have to fear, and what allies to conciliate. Like one of those ill-taught professors who study in the morning what they mean to teach in the afternoon, she prepared herself for the lessons which she soon meant to give. Fortunately her apprenticeship was short, thanks to her superior intellect, her womanly cleverness, and rare talents which no one suspected.

She soon reaped the fruit of her labors.

The next winter the count, who had so far kept aloof from politics, came out with his opinions. He

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soon made his mark, aided by his fine appearance, his elegant manners, and imperturbable self-possession. He spoke in public, and made an impression by his good common-sense. He advised others, and they were struck by his sagacity. He had soon enthusiastic partisans, and, of course, as violent adversaries. His friends encouraged him to become the leader of his party; and he worked day and night to achieve that end.

"Unfortunately I have to pay for it at home," he said to his intimate friends; "for my wife is one of those timid women who cannot understand that men are made for the excitement of public life. I should be still in the province, if I had listened to her."

She enjoyed her work in quiet delight. The greater the success of her husband in the world, the prouder she became of her own usefulness to him. Her feelings were very much those of a dramatic poet who hears the applause given to the characters which he has created.

But there was this wonderful feature in her work,—that nobody suspected her; no one, not even her own child. She wanted Henrietta, as little as the world, to know what she was to her husband; and she taught her not only to love him as her father, but to respect and admire him as a man of eminence. Of course, the count was the very last man to suspect any thing. He might have been told all, and he would have believed nothing.

He fancied he had discovered himself the whole line of proceeding which his wife had so carefully traced out for him. In the full sincerity of his heart, he believed he had composed and written out the speeches which she drew up for him; and the articles

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for the newspapers, and the letters, which she dictated, appeared to him all to have sprung from his own fertile brains. He was even sometimes surprised at the want of good sense in his wife, and pointed out to her, quite ironically, that the steps from which she tried hardest to dissuade him were the most successful he took. But no irony could turn the countess from the path which she had traced out for herself; nor did she ever allow a word or even a smile to escape her, that might have betrayed her secret. When her husband became sarcastic, she bowed her head, and said nothing. But, the more he gloried in his utter nullity, the more she delighted in her work, and found ample compensation in the approval of her own conscience.

The count had been so exceedingly good as to take her when she was penniless: she owed him the historic name she bore and a large fortune; but, in return, she had given him, and without his being aware of it, a position of some eminence. She had made him happy in the only way in which a small and ordinary man could be made happy,—by gratifying his vanity.

Now she was no longer under obligations to him.

"Yes," she said to herself, "we are quits, fairly quits!"

Now also, she reproached herself no longer for the long hours during which her thoughts, escaping from the control of her will, had turned to the man of her early choice.

Poor fellow! She had been his evil star.

His life had been imbittered from the day on which he found himself forsaken by her whom he loved better than life itself. He had given up every thing.

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His parents had "hunted up" an heiress, as they called it, and he had married her dutifully. But the good old people had been unlucky. The bride, chosen among a thousand, had brought their son a fortune of a hundred thousand dollars; but she was a bad woman. And after eight years of wretched, intolerable married life, Peter Champcey had shot himself, unable to bear any longer his domestic misfortunes, and the infidelity of his wife.

He had, however, avoided committing this crime at Angers, where he held a high official position. He had gone to Rosiers, the house formerly occupied by Pauline's mother; and there, in a narrow lane, his body was found by some peasants coming home from market. The ball had so fearfully disfigured his face, that at first no one recognized him; and the accident made a terrible sensation.

The countess heard of it first through her husband. He could not understand, he said, how a man in good position, with a bright future before him, and a large income to support him, could thus kill himself.

"And to choose such a strange place for his suicide!" he added. "It is evident the man was insane."

But the countess did not hear this. She had fainted. She understood but too well why Peter had wished to die in that lane overshadowed by old elm-trees.

"I killed him," she thought, "I killed him!"

The blow was so sudden and so severe, that she came near dying. Fortunately her mother died nearly at the same time; and this misfortune helped to explain her utter prostration and deep grief.

Her mother had been gradually fading away, after having had all she desired, and living in real luxury during her last years. Her selfishness was so in-

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tense, that she never became aware of the cruelty with which she had sacrificed her daughter.

Sacrificed, however, she really had been; for never did woman suffer what the countess endured from the day on which her lover's suicide added bitter remorse to all her former grief. What would have become of her, if her child had not bound her to life! But she resolved to live: she felt that she was bound to live for Henrietta's sake.

Thus she struggled on quite alone, for she had not a soul in whom she could confide, when one afternoon, as she was going down stairs, a servant came to tell her that there was a young man in naval uniform below, who desired to have the honor of waiting upon her.

The servant handed her his card: she took it, and read,—

"DANIEL CHAMPCEY."

It was Daniel, Peter's brother. Pale as death, the countess turned as if to escape.

"What must I say?" asked the servant, rather surprised at the emotion shown by his mistress.

The poor woman felt as if she was going to faint.

"Show him up," she replied in a scarcely audible voice,—"show him up."

When she looked up again, there stood before her a young man, twenty-three or twenty-four years old, with a frank and open face, and clear, bright eyes, beaming with intelligence and energy.

The countess pointed at a chair near her: for she could not have uttered a word to save her daughter's life.

He could not help noticing her embarrassment; but

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he did not guess the cause. Peter had never mentioned Pauline's name in his father's house.

So he sat down, and explained why he came, showing neither embarrassment nor forwardness.

As soon as he had graduated at the Naval Academy, he had been made a midshipman on board "The Formidable," and there he was still. A younger man had recently been wrongly promoted over him; and he had asked for leave of absence to appeal to the secretary of the navy. He felt quite sure of the justice of his claims; but he also knew that strong recommendations never spoil a good cause. In fact, he hoped that Count Ville-Handry, of whose kindness and great influence he had heard much, would consent to indorse his claims.

Gradually, and while listening to him, the countess recovered her calmness.

"My husband will be happy to serve a countryman of his," she replied; "and he will tell you so himself, if you will be kind enough to wait for him, and stay to dinner."

Daniel did stay. At table he was placed by the side of Henrietta, who was then fifteen years old; and the countess, seeing these two young and handsome people side by side, was suddenly struck with an idea which seemed to her nothing less than inspiration from on high. Why might she not intrust the future happiness of her daughter to the brother of the poor man who had loved her so dearly? Thus she might make some amends for her own conduct, and show some respect to his memory.

"Yes," she said to herself that night, before falling asleep, "it must be so. Daniel shall be Henrietta's husband."

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Thus it came about, that, only a fortnight later, Count Ville-Handry said to one of his intimate friends, pointing out Daniel,—

"That young Champcey is a very remarkable young man: he has a great future before him. And one of these days, when he is a lieutenant, and a few years older, if it should so happen that he liked Henrietta, and asked me for my consent, I should not say no. The countess might think and say of it what she chooses, I am master."

After that time Daniel became, unfortunately, a constant visitor at the house in Varennes Street.

He had not only obtained ample satisfaction at headquarters, but, by the powerful influence of certain high personages, he had been temporarily assigned to duty in the bureau of the navy department, with the promise of a better position in active service hereafter.

Thus Daniel and Henrietta saw a great deal of each other, and, to all appearances, began to love each other.

"O God!" thought the countess, "why are they not a few years older?"

The poor lady had for some months been troubled by dismal presentiments. She felt as if she would not live long; and she trembled at the idea of leaving her child without any other protector but the count.

If Henrietta had at least known the truth, and, instead of admiring her father as a man of superior ability, learned to mistrust his judgment! A hundred times the countess was on the point of revealing her secret. Alas! her great delicacy always kept her from doing so.

One night, as she returned from a great ball, she

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suddenly was seized with vertigo. She did not think much of it, but sent for a cup of tea.

When it came, she was standing before the fireplace, undoing her hair; but, instead of taking it, she suddenly raised her hand to her throat, uttered a hoarse sound, and fell back.

They raised her up. In an instant the whole house was alive. They sent for the doctors. All was in vain.

The Countess Ville-Handry had died from disease of the heart.

III.

HENRIETTA, roused by the noise all over the house, the voices in the passages, and the steps on the staircase, and suspecting that some accident had happened, had rushed at once into her mother's room.

There she had heard the doctors utter the fatal words,—

"All is over!"

There were five or six of them in the room; and one of them, his eyes swollen from sleeplessness, and overcome with fatigue, had drawn the count into a corner, and, pressing his hands, repeated over and over again,—

"Courage, my dear sir, courage!"

He, overcome, with downcast eye, and cold perspiration on his pallid brow, did not understand him; for he continued to stammer incessantly,—

"It is nothing, I hope. Did you not say it was nothing?"

There are misfortunes so terrible, so overwhelming

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in their suddenness, that the stunned mind refuses to believe them, and denies their genuineness in spite of their actual presence.

How could any one imagine or comprehend that the countess, who but a moment ago was standing there full of life, in perfect health, and the whole vigor of her years, apparently perfectly happy, smiling, and beloved by all,—how could one conceive that she had all at once ceased to exist?

They had laid her on her bed in her ball costume,—a blue satin dress trimmed with lace. The flowers were still in her hair; and the blow had come with such suddenness, that, even in death, she retained the appearance of life; she was still warm, her skin transparent, and her limbs supple. Even her eyes, still wide open, retained their expression, and betrayed the last sensation that had filled her heart,—terror. It looked as if she had had at that last moment a revelation of the future which her too great cautiousness had prepared for her daughter.

"My mother is not dead; oh, no! she cannot be dead!" exclaimed Henrietta. And she went from one doctor to the other, urging them, beseeching them, to find some means—

What were they doing there, looking so blank, instead of acting? Were they not going to restore her,—they whose business it was to cure people, and who surely had saved a number of people? They turned away from her, distressed by her terrible grief, expressing their inability to help by a gesture; and then the poor girl went back to the bed, and, bending over her mother, watched with a painfully-bewildered air for her return to life. It seemed to her as if she felt that noble heart still beat under her hand, and as

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if those lips, sealed forever by death, must speak again to re-assure her.

They attempted to take her away from that heart-rending sight; they begged her to go to her room; but she insisted upon staying. They tried to remove her by force; but she clung to the bed, and vowed that they should tear her to pieces sooner than make her leave her mother.

At last, however, the truth broke upon her. She sank down upon her knees by the side of the bed, hiding her face in the drapery, and repeating with fierce sobs,—

"My mother, my darling mother!"

It was nearly morning, and the pale dawn was stealing into the room, when at last some sisters of charity came, who had been sent for; and then a couple of priests; a little later (it was towards the end of January) one of the count's friends appeared, who undertook all those sickening preparations which our civilization demands in such cases. On the next day the funeral took place.

More than two hundred persons called to condole with the count, twenty-five or thirty ladies came and kissed Henrietta, calling her their poor dear child.

Then horses were heard in the court-yard, coachmen quarrelling; orders were given; and at last the hearse rolled away solemnly—and that was all.

Henrietta wept and prayed in her chamber.

Late in the day, the count and Henrietta sat down at table alone for the first time in their lives; but they did not eat a morsel. How could they do it, seeing before them the empty seat, once occupied by her who was the life of the whole house, and now never to be filled again?

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And thus, for a long time, their meals were a steady reminder of their loss. During the day they were seen wandering about the house, without any apparent purpose, as if looking or hoping for something to happen.

But there was another true and warm heart, far from that house, which had been sorely wounded by the death of the countess. Daniel had loved her like a mother; and in his heart a mysterious voice warned him, that, in losing her, he had well-nigh lost Henrietta.

He had called several times at the house of mourning; but it was only a fortnight later that he was admitted. When Henrietta saw him, she felt sorry she had not let him come in before. He had apparently suffered as much as she: he looked pale; and his eyes were red.

They remained for some time seated opposite each other, without saying a word, but deeply moved, and feeling instinctively that their common grief bound them more firmly than ever to each other.

The count, in the meantime, walked up and down in the large room. He was so much changed, that one might have failed to recognize him. There was a strange want of steadiness in his movements: he looked almost like a paralytic, whose crutches had suddenly broken down. Was he conscious of the immense loss which he had suffered? His vanity was too great to render that very probable.

"I shall master my grief as soon as I go back to work," he said.

He ought not to have done it; but he resumed his duties as a politician at a time when they had become unusually difficult, and when great things were ex-

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pected of him. Two or three absurd, ridiculous, in fact unpardonable blunders, ruined him forever. He lost his reputation as a statesman, and with it his influence.

As yet, however, his reputation remained uninjured. No one suspected the truth. They attributed the sudden failure of his faculties to the great sorrow that had befallen him in the death of his wife.

"Who would have thought that he had loved her so deeply?" they asked one another.

Henrietta was as much misled as the others, and perhaps even more. Her respect and her admiration, so far from being diminished, only increased day by day. She loved him all the more dearly as she watched the apparent effect of his incurable grief.

He was really deeply grieved, but only by his fall. How had it come about? He tortured his mind in vain: he could not find a plausible explanation, and said over and over again,—

"It is perfectly inexplicable."

He talked of regular plots, of a coalition of his enemies, of the black ingratitude of men, and their fickleness. At first he had thought of going back to the country. But gradually, as day followed day, and weeks grew into months, his wounded vanity began to heal: he forgot his misfortunes, and adopted new habits of life.

He was a great deal at his club now, rode much on horseback, went to the theatres, and dined with his friends. Henrietta was delighted: for she had at one time begun to be seriously concerned for her father's health. But she was not a little amazed when she saw him lay aside his mourning, and exchange his simple costumes, suitable to his age, for the eccentric

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fashions of the day, wearing brilliant waistcoats and fancy-colored trousers.

Some days later matters grew worse.

One morning Count Ville-Handry, who was quite gray, appeared at breakfast with jet black beard and hair. Henrietta could not restrain an expression of amazement. But he smiled, and said with considerable embarrassment,—

"My servant is making an experiment: he thinks this goes better with my complexion, and makes me look younger."

Evidently something strange had occurred in the count's life. But what was it?

Henrietta, although ignorant of the world, and at that time innocence personified, was, nevertheless, a woman, and hence had the keen instinct of her sex, which is better than all experience. She reflected, and she thought she could guess what had happened.

After hesitating for three days, the poor girl, saddened rather than frightened, confided her troubles to Daniel. But she had only spoken a few words when he interrupted her, and, blushing deeply, said,—

"Do not trouble yourself about that, Miss Henrietta; and, whatever your father may do, do not mind it."

That advice was more easily given than followed; for the count's ways became daily more extraordinary. He had gradually drifted away from his old friends and his wife's friends, and seemed to prefer to their high-bred society the company of very curious people of all kinds. A number of young men came in the forenoon on horseback, and in the most unceremonious costumes. They came in smoking their cigars, and asked at once for liquors

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and absinthe. In the afternoon, another set of men made their appearance,—vulgar and arrogant people, with huge whiskers and enormous watch-chains, who gesticulated vehemently, and were on most excellent terms with the servants. They were closeted with the count; and their discussions were so loud, they could be heard all over the house.

What were the grave discussions that made so much noise? The count undertook to enlighten his daughter. He told her, that, having been ill-treated in politics, he intended to devote himself henceforth to grand enterprises, and hoped confidently to realize an enormous fortune, while, at the same time, rendering great service to certain branches of industry.

A fortune? Why should he want money? What with his own estate, and what with his wife's fortune, he had already an income of a hundred thousand dollars. Was that not quite enough for a man of sixty-five and for a young girl who did not spend a thousand a year on her toilet?

Henrietta asked him timidly, for she was afraid of hurting her father's feelings, why he wanted more money.

He laughed heartily, tapped her cheek playfully, and said,—

"Ah, you would like to rule your papa, would you?"

Then he added more seriously,—

"Am I so old, my little lady, that I ought to go into retirement? Have you, also, gone over to my enemies?"

"Oh, dear papa!"

"Well, my child, then you ought to know that a man such as I am cannot condemn himself to inac-

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tivity, unless he wants to die. I do not want any more money: what I want is an outlet for my energy and my talents."

This was so sensible a reply, that both Henrietta and Daniel felt quite re-assured.

Both had been taught by the countess to look upon her husband as a man of genius: hence they felt sure that he had only to undertake a thing, and he was sure to succeed. Besides, Daniel hoped that such grave matters of business would keep the count from playing the fashionable young man.

But it seemed as if nothing could turn him from this folly: he became daily younger and faster. He wore the most eccentric hats on one ear. He ordered his coats to be made in the very last fashion; and never went out without a camellia or a rosebud in his buttonhole. He no longer contented himself with dyeing his hair, but actually began to rouge, and used such strong perfumes, that one might have followed his track through the streets by the odors he diffused around him.

At times he would sit for hours in an arm-chair, his eyes fixed on the ceiling, his brow knit, and his thoughts apparently bent upon some grave question. If he was spoken to, he started like a criminal caught in the act. He who formerly prided himself on his magnificent appetite (he saw in it a resemblance to Louis XIV.) now hardly ate any thing. On the other hand, he was forever complaining of oppression in the chest, and of palpitation of the heart.

His daughter repeatedly found him with tears in his eyes,—big tears, which passed through his dyed beard, and fell like drops of ink on his white shirt-front. Then, again, these attacks of melancholy would

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be followed by sudden outbursts of joy. He would rub his hands till they pained him; he would sing and almost dance with delight.

Now and then a *commissionaire* (it was always the same man) came and brought him a letter. The count tore it from his hands, threw him a gold-piece, and went to shut himself up in his study.

"Poor papa!" said Henrietta to Daniel. "There are moments when I tremble for his mind."

At last, one evening after dinner, when he had drunk more than usually, perhaps in order to gain courage, he drew his daughter on his knee, and said in his softest voice,—

"Confess, my dear child, that in your innermost heart you have more than once called me a very bad father. I dare say you blame me for leaving you so constantly alone here in this large house, where you must die from sheer weariness."

Such a charge would have been but too well founded. Henrietta was left more completely to herself than the daughter of a workman, whose business keeps him from home all day long. The workman, however, takes his child out, at least on Sundays.

"I am never weary, papa," replied Henrietta.

"Really? Why, how do you occupy yourself?"

"Oh! in the first place I attend to the housekeeping, and try my best to make home pleasant to you. Then I embroider, I sew, I study. In the afternoon my music-teacher comes, and my English master. At night I read."

The count smiled; but it was a forced smile.

"Never mind!" he broke in; "such a lonely life cannot go on. A girl of your age stands in need of some one to advise her, to pet her,—an affectionate

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and devoted friend. That is why I have been thinking of giving you another mother."

Henrietta drew back her arm, which she had wound round her father's neck; and, rising suddenly, she said,—

"You think of marrying again?"

He turned his head aside, hesitated a moment, and then replied,—

"Yes."

At first the poor girl could not utter a word, so great were her stupor, her indignation, her bitter grief; then she made an effort, and said in a pained voice,—

"Do you really tell me so, papa? What! you would bring another wife to this house, which is still alive with the voice of her whom we have lost? You would make her sit down in the chair in which she used to sit, and let her rest her feet on the cushion which she embroidered? Perhaps you would even want me to call her mamma? Oh, dear papa! surely you do not think of such profanation!"

The count's trouble was pitiful to behold. And yet, if Henrietta had been less excited, she would have read in his eye that his mind was made up.

"What I mean to do is done in your behalf, my dear child," he stammered out at last. "I am old; I may die; we have no near relations: what would become of you without a friend?"

She blushed crimson; but she said timidly,—

"But, papa, there is M. Daniel Champcey."

"Well?"

The count's eyes shone with delight as he saw that she was falling into the pit he had dug for her. The poor girl went on,—

"I thought—I had hoped—poor mamma had told

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me—in fact, since you had allowed M. Daniel to come here"—

"You thought I intended to make him my son-in-law?"

She made no answer.

"That was in fact the idea your mother had. She had certainly very odd notions, against which I had to use the whole strength of my firm will. A sailor is a sorry kind of husband, my dear child: a word from his minister may part him for years from his wife."

Henrietta remained silent. She began to understand the nature of the bargain which her father proposed to her, and it made her indignant. He thought he had said enough for this time, and left her with these words,—

"Consider, my child: for my part, I will also think of it."

What should she do? There were a hundred ways; but which to choose? Finding herself alone, she took a pen, and for the first time in her life she wrote to Daniel:—

"I must speak to you *instantly*. Pray come.

"HENRIETTA."

She gave the letter to a servant, ordering him to carry it at once to its address; and then she waited in a state of feverish anxiety, counting the minutes.

Daniel Champcey had, in a house not far from the university, three rooms, the windows of which looked out upon the gardens of an adjoining mansion, where the flowers bloomed brilliantly, and the birds sang joyously. There he spent almost all the time which was not required by his official duties. A walk in

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company with his friend, Maxime de Brévan; a visit to the theatre, when a particularly fine piece was to be given; and two or three calls a week at Count Ville-Handry's house,—these were his sole and certainly very harmless amusements.

"A genuine old maid, that sailor is," said the *concierge* of the house.

The truth is, that, if Daniel's natural refinement had not kept him from contact with what Parisians call "pleasure," his ardent love for Henrietta would have prevented his falling into bad company. A pure, noble love, such as his, based upon perfect confidence in her to whom it is given, is quite sufficient to fill up a life; for it makes the present delightful, and paints the distant horizon of the future in all the bright colors of the rainbow.

But, the more he loved Henrietta, the more he felt bound to be worthy of her, and to deserve her affections. He was not ambitious. He had chosen a profession which he loved. He had a considerable fortune of his own, and was thus, by his private income and his pay as an officer, secured against want. What more could he desire? Nothing for himself.

But Henrietta belonged to a great house; she was the daughter of a man who had filled a high position; she was immensely rich; and, even if he had married her only with her own fortune, she would have brought him ten times as much as he had. Daniel did not want Henrietta, on the blessed day when she should become his own, to have any thing to wish for or to regret. Hence he worked incessantly, indefatigably, waking up every morning anew with the determination to make himself one of those names which weigh more than the oldest parchments, and

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to win one of those positions which make a wife as proud as she is fond of her husband. Fortunately, the times were favorable to his ambition. The French navy was in a state of transformation; but the marine was as yet unreformed, waiting, apparently, for the hand of a man of genius.

And why might not he be that man? Supported by his love, he saw nothing impossible in that thought, and fancied he could overcome all obstacles.

"Do you see that d—— little fellow, there, with his quiet ways?" said Admiral Penhoel to his young officers. "Well, look at him: he'll checkmate you all."

Daniel was busy in his study, finishing a paper for the minister, when the count's servant came and brought him Henrietta's letter. He knew that something extraordinary must have happened to induce Henrietta, with her usual reserve, to take such a step, and, above all, to write to him in such brief but urgent terms.

"Has any thing happened at the house?" he asked the servant.

"No, sir, not that I know."

"The count is not sick?"

"No, sir."

"And Miss Henrietta?"

"My mistress is perfectly well."

Daniel breathed more freely.

"Tell Miss Henrietta I am coming at once; and make haste, or I shall be there before you."

As soon as the servant had left, Daniel dressed, and a moment later he was out of the house. As he walked rapidly up the street in which the count lived, he thought,—

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"I have no doubt taken the alarm too soon: perhaps she has only some commission for me."

But he was beset with dark presentiments, and had to tell himself that that was not likely to be the case. He felt worse than ever, when, upon being shown into the drawing-room, he saw Henrietta sitting by the fire, deadly pale, with her eyes all red and inflamed from weeping.

"What is the matter with you?" he cried, without waiting for the door to be closed behind him. "What has happened?"

"Something terrible, M. Daniel."

"Tell me, pray, what. You frighten me."

"My father is going to marry again."

At first Daniel was amazed. Then, recalling at once the gradual transformation of the count, he said,—

"Oh, oh, oh! That explains every thing."

But Henrietta interrupted him; and, making a great effort, she repeated to him in a half-stifled voice almost literally her conversation with her father. When she had ended, Daniel said,—

"You have guessed right, Miss Henrietta. Your father evidently does propose to you a bargain."

"Ah! but that is horrible."

"He wanted you to understand, that, if you would consent to his marriage, he would consent"—

Shocked at what he was going to add, he stopped; but Henrietta said boldly,—

"To ours, you mean,—to ours? Yes, so I understood it; and that was my reason for sending for you to advise me."

Poor fellow! She was asking him to seal his fate.

"I think you ought to consent," he stammered out.

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She rose, trembling with indignation, and replied,—"Never, never!"

Daniel was overcome by this sudden shock. Never. He saw all his hopes dashed in an instant, his life's happiness destroyed forever, Henrietta lost to him. But the very imminence of the danger restored to him his energy. He mastered his grief, and said in an almost calm voice,—

"I beseech you, let me explain to you why I advised you so. Believe me, your father does not want your consent at all. You cannot do without his consent; but he can marry without asking you for yours. There is no law which authorizes children to oppose the follies of their parents. What your father wants is your silent approval, the certainty that his new wife will be kindly received. If you refuse, he will go on, nevertheless, and not mind your objections."

"Oh!"

"I am, unfortunately, but too sure of that. If he spoke to you of his plans, you may be sure he had made up his mind. Your resistance will lead only to our separation. He might possibly forgive you; but she— Don't you think she would avail herself to the utmost of her influence over him? Who can foresee to what extremities she might be led by her hatred against you? And she must be a dangerous woman, Henrietta, a woman who is capable of any thing."

"Why?"

He hesitated for a moment, not daring to speak out fully what he thought; and at last he said slowly, as if weighing his words,—

"Because, because this marriage cannot be any thing else but a barefaced speculation. Your father is immensely rich: she wants his fortune."

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Daniel's reasoning was so sensible, and he pleaded his cause with such eagerness, that Henrietta's resolution was evidently shaken.

"You want me to yield?" she asked.

"I beseech you to do it."

She shook her head sadly, and said in a tone of utter dejection,—

"Very well. It shall be done as you wish it. I shall not object to this profanation. But you may be sure, my weakness will do us no good."

It struck ten. She rose, offered her hand to Daniel, and said,—

"I will see you to-morrow evening. By that time I shall know, and I will tell you, the name of the woman whom father is going to marry; for I shall ask him who she is."

She was spared that trouble. Next morning, the first words of the count were,—

"Well, have you thought it over?"

She looked at him till he felt compelled to turn his head away; and then she replied in a tone of resignation,—

"Father, you are master here. I should not tell you the truth, if I said I was not going to suffer cruelly at the idea of a stranger coming here to— But I shall receive her with all due respect."

Ah! The count was not prepared for such a speedy consent.

"Do not speak of respect," he said. "Tell me that you will be tender, affectionate, and kind. Ah, if you knew her, Henrietta! She is an angel."

"What is her age?"

"Twenty-five."

The count read in his daughter's face that she

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thought his new wife much too young for him; and therefore he added, quickly,—

"Your mother was two years younger when I married her."

That was so; but he forgot that that was twenty years ago.

"However," he added, "you will see her: I shall ask her to let me present you to her. She is a foreigner, of excellent family, very rich, marvellously clever and beautiful; and her name is Sarah Brandon."

That evening, when Henrietta told Daniel the name of her future mother-in-law, he started with an air of utter despair, and said,—

"Great God! If Maxime de Brévan is not mistaken, that is worse than any thing we could possibly anticipate."

IV.

When Henrietta saw how the young officer was overcome by the mere mention of that name, Sarah Brandon, she felt the blood turn to ice in her veins. She knew perfectly well that a man like Daniel was not likely to be so utterly overwhelmed unless there was something fearful, unheard of, in the matter.

"Do you know the woman, Daniel?"

But he, regretting his want of self-possession, was already thinking how he could make amends for his imprudence.

"I swear to you," he began.

"Oh, don't swear! I see you know who she is."

"I know nothing about her."

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"But"—

"It is true I have heard people talk of her once, a long time ago."

"Whom?"

"One of my friends, Maxime de Brévan, a fine, noble fellow."

"What sort of a woman is she?"

"Ah, me! that I cannot tell you. Maxime happened to mention her just in passing; and I never thought that one of these days I should— If I seemed to be so very much surprised just now, it was because I remembered, all of a sudden, a very ugly story in which Maxime said she had been involved, and then"—

He was ridiculous in his inability to tell a fib: so, when he found that he was talking nonsense, he turned his head away to avoid Henrietta's eyes. She interrupted him, and said reproachfully,—

"Do you really think I am not strong enough to hear the truth?"

At first he did not reply. Overcome by the strange position in which he found himself, he looked for a way to escape, and found none. At last he said,—

"Miss Henrietta, you must give me time before I tell you any more. I know nothing positive; and I dare say I am unnecessarily alarmed. I will tell you all as soon as I am better informed."

"When will that be?"

"To-night, if I can find Maxime de Brévan at home, as I hope I shall do: if I miss him, you must wait till to-morrow."

"And if your suspicions turn out to be well founded; if what you fear, and hide from me now, is really so,—what must I do then?"

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Without a moment's hesitation, he rose and said in a solemn voice,—

"I am not going to tell you again how I love you, Henrietta; I am not going to tell you that to lose you would be death to me, and that in our family we do not value life very highly: you know that, don't you? But, in spite of all that, if my fears should be well founded, as I apprehend they are, I should not hesitate to say to you, whatever might be the consequences, Henrietta, and even if we should have to part forever, we must try our utmost, we must employ all possible means in our power, to prevent a marriage between Count Ville-Handry and Sarah Brandon."

In spite of all her sufferings, Henrietta felt her heart bounding with unspeakable happiness and joy. Ah! he deserved to be loved,—this man whom her heart had freely chosen among them all,—this man who gave her such an overwhelming proof of his love. She offered him her hand; and, with her eyes beaming with enthusiasm and tenderness, she said,—

"And I, I swear by the sacred memory of my mother, that whatever may happen, and whatever force they may choose to employ, I shall never belong to any one but to you."

Daniel had seized her hand, and held it for some time pressed to his lips. At last, when his rapture gave way to calmer thoughts, he said,—

"I must leave you at once, Henrietta, if I want to catch Maxime."

As he left, his head was in a whirl, his thoughts in a maze. His life and his happiness were at stake; and a single word would decide his fate in spite of all he could do.

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A cab was passing: he hailed it, jumped in, and cried to the driver,—

"Go quick, I say! You shall have five francs: No. 61 Rue Laffitte!"

That was the house where Maxime de Brévan lived.

He was a man of thirty or thirty-five years, remarkably well made, light-haired, wearing a full beard, with a bright eye, and pleasing face. Mixing on intimate terms with the men who make up what is called high life, and with whom pleasure is the only occupation, he was very popular with them all. They said he was a man that could always be relied upon, at all times ready to render you a service when it was in his power, a pleasant companion, and an excellent second whenever a friend had to fight a duel.

In fine, neither slander nor calumny had ever attacked his reputation. And yet, far from following the advice of the philosopher, who tells us to keep our life from the eye of the public, Maxime de Brévan seemed to take pains to let everybody into his secrets. He was so anxious to tell everybody where he had been, and what he had been doing, that you might have imagined he was always preparing to prove an *alibi*.

Thus he told the whole world that the Brévans came originally from the province of Maine, and that he was the last, the sole representative, of that old family. Not that he prided himself particularly on his ancestors: he acknowledged frankly that there was very little left of their ancient splendor; in fact, nothing but a bare support. But he never said what this "support" amounted to: his most intimate friends could not tell whether he had one thousand or ten thousand a year. So much only was certain, that, to

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his great honor and glory, he had solved the great problem of preserving his independence and his dignity while associating, a comparatively poor man, with the richest young men of Paris.

His rooms were simple and unpretending; and he kept but a single servant: his carriage he hired by the month.

How had Maxime de Brévan become Daniel's friend? In the simplest possible way. They had been introduced to each other at a great ball by a common friend of theirs, a lieutenant in the navy. About one o'clock in the morning they had gone home together; and as the moon was shining brightly, the weather was mild, and the walking excellent, they had loitered about the Place de la Concorde while smoking their cigars.

Had Maxime really felt such warm sympathy for his friend? Perhaps so. At all events, Daniel had been irresistibly attracted by the peculiar ways of Maxime, and especially by the cool stoicism with which he spoke of his genteel poverty. Then they had met again, and finally became intimate.

Brévan was just dressing for the opera when Daniel entered his room. He uttered a cry of delight when he saw him, as he always did.

"What!" he said, "the hermit student from the other side of the river in this worldly region, and at this hour? What good wind blows you over here?"

Then, suddenly noticing Daniel's terrified appearance, he added,—

"But what am I talking about? You look frightened out of your wits. What's the matter?"

"A great misfortune, I fear," replied Daniel.

"How so? What is it?"

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"And I want you to help me."

"Don't you know that I am at your service?"

Daniel certainly thought so.

"I thank you in advance, my dear Maxime; but I do not wish to give you too much trouble. I have a long story to tell you, and you are just going out"—

But Brévan interrupted him, shaking his head kindly, and saying,—

"I was only going out for want of something better to do, upon my word! So sit down, and tell me all."

Daniel had been so overcome by terror, and the fear that he might possibly lose Henrietta, that he had run to his friend without considering what he was going to tell him. Now, when the moment came to speak, he was silent. The thought had just occurred to him, that Count Ville-Handry's secret was not his own, and that he was in duty bound not to betray it, if possible, even if he could have absolutely relied upon his friend's discretion.

He did not reply, therefore, but walked up and down the room, seeking in vain some plausible excuse, and suffering perfect agony. This continued so long, that Maxime, who had of late heard much of diseases of the brain, asked himself if Daniel could possibly have lost his mind.

No; for suddenly his friend stopped before him, and said in a short, sharp tone,—

"First of all, Maxime, swear that you will never, under any circumstances, say to any human being a word of what I am going to tell you."

Thoroughly mystified, Brévan raised his hand, and said,—

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"I pledge my word of honor."

This promise seemed to re-assure Daniel; and, when he thought he had recovered sufficient control over himself, he said,—

"Some months ago, my dear friend, I heard you telling somebody a horrible story concerning a certain Mrs. Sarah Brandon"—

"Miss, if you please, not Mrs."

"Well, it does not matter. You know her?"

"Certainly. Everybody knows her."

Daniel did not notice the extreme self-conceit with which these words were uttered.

"All right, then. Now, Maxime, I conjure you, by our friendship, tell me frankly what you think of her. What kind of a woman is this Miss Brandon?"

His features, as well as his voice, betrayed such extreme excitement, that Brévan was almost stunned. At last he said,—

"But, my dear fellow, you ask me that in a manner"—

"I must know the truth, I tell you. It is of the utmost importance to me."

Brévan, struck by a sudden thought, touched his forehead, and exclaimed,—

"Oh, I see! You are in love with Sarah!"

Daniel would never have thought of such a subterfuge in order to avoid mentioning the name of Count Ville-Handry; but, seeing it thus offered to him, he determined to profit by the opportunity.

"Well, yes, suppose it is so," he said with a sigh.

Maxime raised his hands to heaven, and said in a tone of painful conviction,—

"In that case you are right. You ought to inquire; for you may be close upon a terrible misfortune."

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"Ah, is she really so formidable?'

Maxime shrugged his shoulders, as if he were impatient at being called upon to prove a well-known fact, and said,—

"I should think so."

There seemed to be no reason why Daniel should persist in his questions after that. Those words ought to have been explanation enough. Nevertheless he said in a subdued voice,—

"Pray explain, Maxime! Don't you know, that, as I lead a very quiet life, I know nothing?"

Brévan, looking more serious than he had ever done, rose and replied, leaning against the mantlepiece,—

"What would you have me tell you? It is only fools who call out to lovers to beware; and to warn a man who will not be warned, is useless. Are you really in love with Miss Sarah, or are you not? If you are, nothing that I could say would change your mind. Suppose I were to tell you that this Sarah is a wretched creature, an infamous forger, who has already the death of three poor devils on her conscience, who loved her as you do? Suppose I told you worse things than these, and could prove them? Do you know what would happen? You would press my hand with effusion. You would overwhelm me with thanks, tears in your eye. You would vow, in the candor of your heart, that you are forever cured, and, when you leave me"—

"Well?"

"You would rush to your beloved, tell her all I said, and beseech her to clear herself of all these charges."

"I beg your pardon: I am not one of those men who"—

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But Brévan was getting more and more excited. He interrupted his friend, and said,—

"Nonsense! You are a man like all other men. Passion does not reason, does not calculate; and that is the secret of its strength. As long as we have a spark of common-sense left, we are not really in love. That is so, I tell you; and no will, no amount of energy, can do any thing with it. There are people who tell you soberly that they have been in love without losing their senses, and reproach you for not keeping cool. Bosh! Those people remind me of still champagne blaming sparkling champagne for popping off the cork. And now, my dear fellow, have the kindness to accept this cigar, and let us take a walk."

Was that really so as Brévan said? Was it true that real love destroys in us the faculty of reasoning, and of distinguishing truth from falsehood? Did he really not love Henrietta truly, because he was on the point of giving her up for the sake of doing his duty?

Oh, no, no! Brévan had been speaking of another kind of love,—a love neither pure nor chaste. He spoke of those passions which suddenly strike us down like lightning; which confound our senses, and mislead our judgment; which destroy every thing, as fire does, and leave nothing behind but disaster and disgrace and remorse.

But all the more painful became Daniel's thoughts as he remembered that Count Ville-Handry was overcome by one of these terrible passions for a worthless creature. He could not accept Maxime's offer.

"One word, I pray you," he said. "Suppose I lose my free will, and surrender absolutely: what will become of me?"

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Brévan looked at him with an air of pity, and said,—

"Not much will happen to you; only"—

And then he added with almost sternness, mixed with bitter sarcasm,—

"You ask me for your horoscope? Be it so. Have you a large fortune?"

"About fifty thousand dollars."

"Well, in six months they will be gone; in a year you will be overwhelmed with debts, and at your wits' end; in less than a year and a half, you will have become a forger."

"Maxime!"

"Ah! You asked me to tell you the truth. Then, as to your social position. Now it is excellent: you have been promoted as rapidly as merit could claim, everybody says. You will be an admiral one of these days. But in six months you will be nothing at all; you will have resigned your commission, or you will have been dismissed."

"Allow me"—

"No. You are an honest man, the most honorable man I know: after six months' acquaintance with Sarah Brandon, you will have lost your self-respect so completely, that you will have become a drunkard. There is your picture. 'It's not flattered,' you will say. But you wanted to have it. And now let us go."

This time he was determined; and Daniel saw that he would not obtain another word from him, unless he changed his tactics. He held him back, therefore, a moment; and, as he opened the door, he said,—

"Maxime, you must pardon me a very innocent deception, which was suggested by your own words. It is not I who am in love with Miss Sarah Brandon."

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Brévan was so much surprised, he could not stir.

"Who is it, then?" he asked.

"One of my friends."

"What name?"

"I wish you would render the service I ask of you doubly valuable by not asking me that question,—at least, not to-day."

Daniel spoke with such an accent of truth, that not a shadow of doubt remained on Maxime's mind. It was not Daniel who had fallen in love with Sarah Brandon. Brévan did not doubt that for a moment. But he could not conceal his trouble, and his disappointment even, as he exclaimed,—

"Well done, Daniel! Tell me that your ingenuous people cannot deceive anybody!"

However, he said nothing more about it; and, while Daniel was pouring out his excuses, he quietly went back to the fire, and sat down. After a moment's silence, he began again,—

"Let us assume, then, that it is one of your friends who is bewitched?"

"Yes."

"And the matter is — serious?"

"Alas! He talks of marrying that woman."

Maxime shrugged his shoulders contemptuously, and said,—

"As to that, console yourself. Sarah will never consent."

"So far from that, she herself has made the suggestion."

This time, Maxime raised his head suddenly, and looked stupefied.

"Then your friend must be very rich."

"He is immensely rich."

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"He bears a great name, and holds a high position?"

"His name is one of the oldest and noblest in the province of Anjou."

"And he is a very old man?"

"He is sixty-five."

Brévan struck the marble slab of the mantlepiece with his fist so that it shook, and exclaimed,—

"Ah, she told me she would succeed!"

And then he added in a very low tone of voice, as if speaking to himself with an indescribable accent of mingled admiration and hatred,—

"What a woman! Oh, what a woman!"

Daniel, who was himself greatly excited, and far too busy with his own thoughts to observe what was going on, did not notice the excitement of his friend: he continued quietly,—

"Now you will understand my great curiosity. In order to prevent the scandal of such a marriage, my friend's family would do every thing in the world. But how can you attack a woman of whose antecedents and mode of life nothing is known?"

"Yes, I understand," said Brévan,—"I understand."

His features betrayed that he was making a great mental effort. He remained for some time absorbed in his thoughts; and at last he said, as if coming to a decision,—

"No, I do not see any way to prevent this marriage; none at all."

"Still, from what you told me"—

"What!"

"About the cupidity of this woman."

"Well?"

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"If she were offered a large sum, some eighty or a hundred thousand dollars?"

Maxime laughed out aloud; but there was not the true ring in his laughter.

"You might offer her two hundred thousand, and she would laugh at you. Do you think she would be fool enough to content herself with a fraction of a fortune, if she can have the whole, with a great name and a high position into the bargain?"

Daniel opened his lips to present another suggestion; but Maxime, laying aside his usual half-dreamy, mocking manner, said, as if roused by a matter of great personal interest,—

"You do not understand me, my dear friend. Miss Brandon is not one of those vulgar hawks, who, in broad daylight, seize upon a poor pigeon, pluck it alive, and cast it aside, still living, and bleeding all over."

"Then, Maxime, she must be"—

"Well, I tell you you misapprehend her. Miss Brandon"—

He stopped suddenly, and looking at Daniel with a glance with which a judge examines the features of a criminal, he added in an almost threatening voice,—

"By telling you what little I know about her, Daniel, I give you the highest proof of confidence which one man can give to another. I love you too dearly to exact your promise to be discreet. If you ever mention my name in connection with this affair, if you ever let any one suspect that you learned what I am going to tell you from me, you will dishonor yourself."

Daniel, deeply moved, seized his friend's hand, and, pressing it most affectionately, said,—

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"Ah, you know Daniel Champcey is to be relied upon."

Maxime knew it; for he continued,—

"Miss Sarah Brandon is one of those female cosmopolitan adventurers, whom steam brings nowadays to us from all the four quarters of the world. Like so many others, she, also, has come to Paris to spread her net, and catch her birds. But she is made of finer stuff than most of them, and more clever. Her ambition soars higher; and she possesses a real genius for intrigues. She means to have a fortune, and is willing to pay any price for it; but she is also desirous to be respected in the world.

"I should not be surprised if anybody told me Miss Sarah was born within ten miles of Paris; but she calls herself an American. The fact is, she speaks English like an Englishwoman, and knows a great deal more of America than you know of Paris. I have heard her tell the story of her family to a large and attentive audience; but I do not say that I believed it.

"According to her own account, M. Brandon, her father, a thoroughbred Yankee, was a man of great enterprise and energy, who was ten times rich, and as often wretchedly poor again in his life, but died leaving several millions. This Brandon, she says, was a banker and broker in New York when the civil war broke out. He entered the army, and in less than six months, thanks to his marvellous energy, he rose to be a general. When peace came, he was without occupation, and did not know what on earth to do with himself. Fortunately, his good star led him into a region where large tracts of land happened to be for sale. He bought them for a few thousand dollars,

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and soon after discovered on his purchase the most productive oil-wells in all America. He was just about to be another Peabody when a fearful accident suddenly ended his life: he was burnt in an enormous fire that destroyed one of his establishments.

"As to her mother, Miss Sarah says she lost her when she was quite young, in a most romantic, though horrible manner"—

"What!" broke in Daniel, "has nobody taken the trouble to ascertain if all these statements are true?"

"I am sure I do not know. This much is certain, that sometimes curious facts leak out. For instance, I have fallen in with Americans who have known a broker Brandon, a Gen. Brandon, a Petroleum Brandon."

"He may have borrowed the name."

"Certainly, especially when the original man is said to have died in America. However, Miss Brandon has been living now for five years in Paris. She came here accompanied by a Mrs. Brian, a relative of hers, who is the dryest, boniest person you can imagine, but at the same time the slyest woman I have ever seen. She also brought with her a kind of protector, a Mr. Thomas Elgin, also a relation of hers, a most extraordinary man, stiff like a poker, but evidently a dangerous man, who never opens his mouth except when he eats. He is a famous hand at small-swords, however, and snuffs his candle, nine times out of ten, at a distance of thirty yards. This Mr. Thomas Elgin, whom the world calls familiarly Sir Thom, and Mrs. Brian, always stay with Miss Sarah.

"When she first arrived, Miss Sarah established herself in a house near the Champs Elysées, which she furnished most sumptuously. Sir Thom, who is a

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jockey of the first water, had discovered a pair of gray horses for her which made a sensation at the Bois de Boulogne, and drew everybody's attention to their fair owner. Heaven knows how she had managed to get a number of letters of introduction. But certainly two or three of the most influential members of the American colony here received her at their houses. After that, all was made easy. Gradually she crept into society; and now she is welcome almost everywhere, and visits, not only at the best houses, but even in certain families which have a reputation of being quite exclusive.

"In fine, if she has enemies, she has also fanatic partisans. If some people say she is a wretch, others—and they are by no means the least clever—tell you that she is an angel, only wanting wings to fly away from this wicked world. They talk of her as of a poor little orphan-girl, whom people slander atrociously because they envy her youth, her beauty, her splendor."

"Ah, is she so rich?"

"Miss Brandon spends at least twenty thousand dollars a year."

"And no one inquires where they come from?"

"From her sainted father's petroleum-wells, my dear fellow. Petroleum explains everything."

Brévan seemed to feel a kind of savage delight in seeing Daniel's despair, and in explaining to him most minutely how solidly, and how skilfully Miss Sarah Brandon's position in the world had been established. Had he any expectation to prevent a struggle with her by exaggerating her strength? Or rather, knowing Daniel as he did,—far better, unfortunately, than he

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was known by him,—was he trying to irritate him more and more against this formidable adversary?

At all events, he continued in that icy tone which gives to sarcasm its greatest bitterness,—

"Besides, my dear Daniel, if you are ever introduced at Miss Brandon's,—and I pray you will believe me, people are not so easily introduced there,—you will be dumfounded at first by the tone that prevails in that house. The air is filled with a perfume of hypocrisy which would rejoice the stiffest of Quakers. Cant rules supreme there, putting a lock to the mouth, and a check to the eyes."

Daniel began evidently to be utterly bewildered.

"But how, how can you reconcile that," he said, "with the thoroughly worldly life of Miss Brandon?"

"Oh, very easily, my dear fellow! and there you see the sublime policy of the three rogues. To the outer world, Miss Brandon is all levity, indiscretion, coquettishness, and even worse. She drives herself, shortens her petticoats, and cuts down her dress-bodies atrociously. She says she has a right to do as she pleases, according to the code of laws which govern American young ladies. But at home she bows to the taste and the wishes of her relative, Mrs. Brian, who displays all the extreme prudishness of the austerest Puritan. Then she has that stiff, tall Sir Thom ever at her side, who never jokes. Oh! they understand each other perfectly; the parts are carefully distributed, and"—

Daniel showed that he was utterly discouraged.

"There is no way, then, of getting hold of this woman?" he asked.

"I think not."

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"But that adventure of which you spoke some time ago?"

"Which? That with poor Kergrist?"

"How do I know which? It was a fearful story: that is all I remember. What did I, at that time, care for Miss Brandon? Now, to be sure"—

Brévan shook his head, and said,—

"Now, you think that story might become a weapon in your hands? No, Daniel. Still it is not a very long one; and I can now tell it to you more in detail than I could before.

"About fifteen months ago, there arrived in Paris a nice young man called Charles de Kergrist. He had lost as yet none of his illusions, being barely twenty-five years old, and having something like a hundred thousand dollars of his own. He saw Miss Brandon, and instantly 'took fire.' He fell desperately in love with her. What his relations were with her, no one can tell positively,—I mean with sufficient evidence to carry conviction to others,—for the young man was a model of discretion. But what became only too well known was the fact, that, about eight months later, the people living near Miss Brandon's house saw one morning, when the shutters were opened, a corpse dangling at a distance of a few feet above the ground from the iron fastenings of the lady's window. Upon inspection, the dead man proved to be that unlucky Kergrist. In the pocket of his overcoat a letter was found, in which he declared that he committed suicide because an unreturned affection had made life unbearable to him. Now, this letter—mark the fact—was open; that is to say, it had been sealed, and the seal was broken."

"By whom?"

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"Let me finish. The accident, as you may imagine, made a tremendous noise. The family took it up. An inquest was held; and it was found that the hundred thousand dollars which Kergrist had brought with him had utterly disappeared."

"And Miss Brandon's reputation was not ruined?"

Maxime replied with a bitter, ironical smile,—

"You know very well that she was not. On the contrary, the hanging was turned by her partisans into an occasion for praising her marvellous virtuousness. 'If she had been weak,' they said, 'Kergrist would not have hanged himself. Besides,' they added, 'how can a girl, be she ever so pure and innocent, prevent her lovers from hanging themselves at her windows? As to the money,' they said, 'it had been lost at the gaming-table.' Kergrist was reported to have been seen at Baden-Baden and at Homburg: no doubt he played."

"And the world was content with such an explanation?"

"Yes: why not? To be sure, some sceptical persons told the whole story very differently. According to their account, Miss Sarah had been the mistress of M. de Kergrist, and, seeing him utterly ruined, had sent him off one fine morning. They stated, that, the evening before the accident, he had come to the house at the usual hour, and, finding it closed, had begged, and even wept, and finally threatened to kill himself; that, thereupon, he had really killed himself; (poor fool that he was!) that Miss Brandon, concealed behind the blinds, had watched all his preparations for the fearful act; that she had seen him fasten the rope to the outside hinges of her window, put the noose around his neck, and then swing off into eternity;

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that she had watched him closely during his agony, and stood there till the last convulsions had passed away."

"Horrible!" whispered Daniel,—"too horrible!"

But Maxime seized him by the arm, and pressing it so as almost to hurt him, said in a low, hoarse voice,—

"That is not the worst yet. As soon as she saw that Kergrist was surely dead, she slipped down stairs like a cat, opened the house-door noiselessly, and, gliding stealthily along the wall till she reached the body, she actually searched the still quivering corpse to assure herself that there was nothing in the pockets that could possibly compromise her. Finding the last letter of Kergrist, she took it away with her, broke the seal, and read it; and, having found that her name was not mentioned in it, she had the amazing audacity to return to the body, and to put the letter back where she had found it. Then only she breathed freely. She had gotten rid of a man whom she feared. She went to bed, and slept soundly."

Daniel had become livid.

"That woman is a monster!" he exclaimed.

Brévan said nothing. His eyes shone with intense hatred: his lips were quivering with indignation. He no longer thought of discretion, of caution. He forgot himself, and gave himself up to his feelings.

"But I have not done yet, Daniel," he said, after a pause. "There is another crime on record, of older date. The first appearance of Miss Brandon in Paris society. You ought to know that also.

"One evening, about four years ago, the president of the Mutual Discount Society came into the cashier's room to tell him, that, on the following day, the board of directors would examine his books. The cashier,

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an unfortunate man by the name of Malgat, replied that every thing was ready; but, the moment the president had turned his back, he took a sheet of paper, and wrote something like this:—

"'Forgive me. I have been an honest man forty years long: now a fatal passion has made me mad. I have drawn money from the bank which was intrusted to my care; and, in order to screen my defalcations, I have forged several notes. I cannot conceal my crime any longer. The first defalcation is only six months old. The whole amount is about four hundred thousand francs. I cannot bear the disgrace which I have incurred: in an hour I shall have ceased to live.'

"Malgat put this letter in a prominent place on his desk, and then rushed out, without a cent in his pocket, to throw himself into the canal. But when he reached the bank, and saw the foul, black water, he was frightened. For hours and hours he walked up and down, asking God in his madness for courage. He never found that courage.

"But what was he to do? He could not flee, having no money; and where should he hide? He could not return to his bank; for there, by this time, his crime must have become known. In his despair he ran as far as the Champs Elysées, and late in the night he knocked at the door of Miss Brandon's house.

"They did not know yet what had happened, and he was admitted. Then, in his wild despair, he told them all, begging them to give him a couple of hundreds only of the four hundred thousand which he had stolen in order to give them to Miss Brandon,—a hundred only, to enable him to escape to Belgium.

"They refused. And when he begged and prayed.

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falling on his knees before Miss Sarah, Sir Thom seized him by the shoulders, and turned him out of the house."

Maxime, overcome by his intense excitement, fell into an easy-chair, and remained there for a considerable time, his eyes fixed, his brow darkened, repenting himself, no doubt, of his candor, his wrath, and his forgetfulness of all he owed to himself and to others.

But, when he rose again, his rare strength of will enabled him to assume his usual phlegmatic manner; and he continued in a mocking tone,—

"I see in your face, Daniel, that you think the story is monstrous, improbable, almost impossible. Nevertheless, four years ago, it was believed all over Paris, and set off by a number of hideous details which I will spare you. If you care to look at the papers of that year, you will find it everywhere. But four years are four centuries in Paris. To say nothing of the many similar stories that have happened since."

Daniel said nothing, he only bowed his head sadly. He felt a kind of painful emotion, such as he had never before experienced in his life.

"It is not so much the story itself," he said at last, "that overcomes me so completely. What I cannot comprehend is, how this woman could refuse the man whose accomplice she had been the small pittance he required in order to evade justice, and to escape to Belgium."

"Nevertheless, that was so," repeated M. de Brévan; and then he added emphatically, "at least, they say so."

Daniel did not notice this attempt to become more cautious again. He continued pensively,—

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"Is it not very improbable that Miss Brandon should not have been afraid to exasperate the unfortunate man, and to drive him to desperate measures? In his furious rage, he might have left the house, rushed to a police-officer, and confessed to him every thing, laying the evidence he had in his hands before a magistrate, and"—

"You say," replied Brévan, interrupting him with a dry, sardonic laugh, "precisely what all the advocates of the fair American said at that time. But I tell you, that her peculiarity is exactly the daring with which she ventures upon the most dangerous steps. She does not pretend to avoid difficulties: she crushes them. Her prudence consists in carrying imprudence to the farthest limits."

"But"—

"You ought to credit her, besides, with sufficient astuteness and experience to know that she had taken the most careful precautions, having destroyed every evidence of her own complicity, and feeling quite safe in that direction. Moreover, she had studied Malgat's character, as she studied afterwards Kergrist's. She was quite sure that neither of them would accuse her, even at the moment of death. And yet, in the case of this Mutual Discount Society, her calculations did not prove absolutely correct."

"How so?"

"It became known that she had received Malgat two or three times secretly, for he did not openly enter her house; and the penny papers had it, that 'the fair stranger was no stranger to small peculations.' Public opinion was veering around, when it was reported that she had been summoned to appear before a magistrate. That, however, was fortunate for her: she came

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out from the trial whiter and purer than Alpine snow."

"Oh!"

"And so perfectly cleared, that, when the whole matter was brought up in court, she was not even summoned as a witness."

Daniel started up, and exclaimed,—

"What! Malgat had the sublime self-abnegation to undergo the agonies of a trial, and the infamy of a condemnation, without allowing a word to escape?"

"No. For the simple reason that Malgat was sentenced *in contumaciam* to ten years in the penitentiary."

"And what has become of the poor wretch?"

"Who knows? They say he killed himself. Two months later, a half decomposed body was found in the forest of Saint Germain, which people declared to be Malgat. However"—

He had become livid, in his turn; but he continued in an almost inaudible voice, as if to meet Daniel's objections before they were expressed,—

"However, somebody who used to be intimate with Malgat has assured me that he met him one day in Dronot Street, before the great auction-mart. The man said he recognized him, although he seemed to be most artistically disguised. This is what has set me athinking more than once, that, if people were not mistaken, a day might, after all, yet come, when Miss Sarah would have a terrible bill to settle with her implacable creditor."

He passed his hand across his brow as if to drive away such uncomfortable thoughts, and then said with a forced laugh,—

"Now, my dear fellow, I have come to the end of

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my budget. The details were all given me by Miss Sarah's friends as well as by her enemies. Some you may read of in the papers; but most I know from my own long and patient observation. And, if you ask me what interest I could have in knowing such a woman, I will tell you frankly, that you see before you one of her victims; for my dear Daniel, I have to confess it, I also have been in love with her; and how! But I was too small a personage, and too poor a devil, to be worth a serious thought of Miss Brandon. As soon as she felt sure that her abominable tricks had set my head on fire, and that I had become an idiot, a madman, a stupid fool—on that very day she laughed in my face. Ah! I tell you, she played with me as if I had been a child, and then she sent me off as if I had been a lackey. And now I hate her mortally, as I loved her almost criminally. Therefore, if I can help you, in secret, without becoming known, you may count upon me."

Why should Daniel have doubted the truthfulness of his friend's statements? Had he not himself, and quite voluntarily, confessed his own folly, his own love, anticipating all questions, and making a clean breast of the whole matter?

Not a doubt, therefore, arose in Daniel's mind. On the contrary, he thanked God for having sent him such an ally, such a friend, who had lived long enough amid all these intrigues of Parisian high life to know all its secret springs, and to guide him safely. He took Maxime's hand in his own, and said with deep feeling,—

"Now, my friend, we are bound to each other for life."

Brévan seemed deeply touched: he raised his hand

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as if to wipe a tear from his eyes. But he was not a man to give way to tender feelings. He said,—

"But how about your friend? How can we prevent his marrying Miss Sarah? Does any way occur to you? No? Ah! you see, it will be hard work."

He seemed to meditate deeply for a few moments; then uttering his words slowly and emphatically, as if to lend them their full weight, and impress them forcibly on Daniel's mind, he resumed,—

"We must attack Miss Brandon herself, if we want to master the situation. If we could once know who she really is, all would be safe. Fortunately there is no difficulty in Paris in finding spies, if you have money enough."

As the clock on the mantlepiece struck half-past ten, he started and stopped. He jumped up as if suddenly inspired by a bright idea, and said hurriedly,—

"But now I think of it, Daniel, you do not know Miss Brandon: you have never even seen her!"

"No, indeed!"

"Well, that's a pity. We must know our enemies: how else can we even smile at them? I want you to see Miss Sarah."

"But who will point her out to me? where? when?"

"I will do it to-night, at the opera. I bet she will be there!"

Daniel was in evening costume, having called upon Henrietta, and then he was all ready.

"Very well," he said, "I am willing."

Without losing a moment, they went out, and reached the theatre just as the curtain rose on the fourth act of Don Giovanni. They were, fortunately, able to secure two orchestra-chairs. The stage was gorgeous; but what did they care for the singer on

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the boards, or the divine music of Mozart? Brévan took his opera-glasses out, and rapidly surveying the house, he had soon found what he was looking for. He touched Daniel with his elbow, and, handing him the glasses, whispered in his ear,—

"Look there, in the third box from the stage: look, there she is!"

V.

Daniel looked up. In the box which Maxime had pointed out to him he saw a girl of such rare and dazzling beauty, that he could hardly retain a cry of admiration. She was leaning forward, resting on the velvet cushion of her box, in order to hear better.

Her hair, perfectly overwhelming in its richness, was so carelessly arranged, that no one could doubt it was all her own: it was almost golden, but with such a bright sheen, that at every motion sparks seemed to start from its dark masses. Her large, soft eyes were overshadowed by long lashes; and as she now opened them wide, and now half closed them again, they changed from the darkest to the lightest blue.

Her lips smiled in all the freshness and innocence of merry youth, displaying now and then two rows of teeth, matchless in their beauty and regularity.

"Can that be," said Daniel to himself, "the wretched creature whose portrait Maxime has just given me?"

A little behind her, and half-hid in the shade of the box, appeared a large bony head, adorned with an absurd bunch of feathers. Her eyes flashed indignation; and her narrow lips seemed to say perpetually, "Shocking!" That was Mrs. Brian.

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Still farther back, barely discernible after long examination, arose a tall, stiff figure, a bald, shining head, two dark, deep-sunk eyes, a hooked nose, and a pair of immense streaming whiskers. That was the Hon. Thomas Elgin, commonly known as Sir Thom.

As Daniel was persistently examining the box, with the smiling girl, the stern old woman, and the placid old man in the background, he felt doubts of all kinds creeping into his mind.

Might not Maxime be mistaken? Did he not merely repeat the atrocious slanders of the envious world?

These thoughts troubled Daniel; and he would have mentioned his doubts to Maxime: but his neighbors were enthusiasts about music, and, as soon as he bent over to whisper into his friend's ear, they growled, and, if he ventured to utter a word, they forced him to be silent. At last the curtain fell. Many left the house; others simply rose to look around; but Maxime and Daniel remained in their seats. Their whole attention was concentrated upon Miss Brandon's box, when they saw the door open, and a gentleman enter, who, at the distance at which they sat, looked like a very young man. His complexion was brilliantly fair, his beard jet black, and his curly hair most carefully arranged. He had his opera-hat under his arm, a camellia in his button-hole; and his light-yellow kid gloves were so tight, that it looked as if they must inevitably burst the instant he used his hands.

"Count Ville-Handry!" said Daniel to himself.

Somebody touched his shoulder slightly; and, as he turned round, he found it was Maxime, who said with friendly irony,—

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"Your old friend, is it not? The happy lover of Miss Brandon?"

"Yes, it is so. I have to confess it."

He was just in the act of explaining the reasons for his silence, when M. de Brévan interrupted him, saying,—

"Just look, Daniel; just look!"

The count had taken a seat in the front part of the box, by Miss Brandon's side, and was talking to her with studied affectation, bending over her, gesticulating violently, and laughing till he showed every one of the long yellow teeth which were left him. He was evidently on exhibition, and desired to be seen by everybody. Suddenly, however, after Miss Brandon had said a few words to him, he rose, and went out.

The bell behind the scenes was ringing, and the curtain was about to rise again.

"Let us go," said Daniel to M. de Brévan: "I am suffering."

He was really suffering, mortified by the ridiculous scene which Henrietta's father was playing. But he entertained no longer any doubts: he had clearly seen how the adventuress was spurring on the old man, and fanning his feeble flame.

"Ah! it will be hard work to rescue the count from the wiles of this witch," said Maxime.

Having left the house, they were just turning into the narrow street which leads to the boulevards, when they saw a tall man, wrapped up in a huge cloak, coming towards them, and behind him a servant with a whole armful of magnificent roses. It was Count Ville-Handry. Coming suddenly face to face upon

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Daniel, he seemed at first very much embarrassed; then, recovering himself, he said,—

"Why, is this you? Where on earth do you come from?"

"From the theatre."

"And you run away before the fifth act? That is a crime against the majesty of Mozart. Come, go back with me, and I promise you a pleasant surprise."

Brévan came up close to Daniel, and whispered to him,—

"Go: here is the opportunity I was wishing for."

Then he lifted his hat and went his way. Daniel, taken rather by surprise, accompanied the count till he saw him stop near a huge landau, open in spite of the cold weather, but guarded by three servants in gorgeous livery. When they saw the count, they all three uncovered respectfully; but he, without taking any notice of them, turned to the porter who had the flowers, and said,—

"Scatter all these roses in this carriage."

The man hesitated. He was the servant of a famous florist, and had often seen people pay forty or fifty dollars for such bouquets. He thought the joke was carried too far. However, the count insisted. The roses were piled up in the bottom of the carriage; and, when he had done, he received a handsome fee for his trouble.

Then the count returned to the opera-house, Daniel following him, filled with amazement. Evidently love had made the count young again, and now gave wings to his steps. He ran up the steps of the great porch of the opera-house, and in a few moments he was once more in Miss Brandon's box. At once he took Daniel

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HE WAS TALKING TO HER WITH STUDIED AFFECTATION, GESTICULATING VIOLENTLY, AND LAUGHING TILL HE SHOWED EVERY ONE OF THE LONG YELLOW TEETH WHICH WERE LEFT HIM

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by the hand; and, drawing him into the box close to the lady, he said to the young girl,—

"Permit me to present to you M. Daniel Champcey, one of our most distinguished naval officers."

Daniel bowed, first to her, and then solemnly to Mrs. Brian, and long, stiff Sir Thom.

"I need not tell you, my dear count," said Miss Sarah, "that your friends are always welcome here."

Then, turning to Daniel, she added,—

"Besides, I have long since known you."

"Me?"

"Yes, sir. And I even know that you are one of the most frequent visitors at Count Ville-Handry's house."

She looked at Daniel with a kind of malicious simplicity, and then added,

"I do not mean to say that the count would not be wrong if he attributed your frequent visits exclusively to his own merits. I have heard something of a certain young lady"—

"Sarah," here broke in Mrs. Brian, "what you say there is highly improper." This reproof, so far from checking Miss Sarah's merriment, only seemed to increase it. Without losing sight of Daniel, she turned to her aunt, and said,—

"Since the count is not opposed to this gentleman's paying his attentions to his daughter, I think I may safely speak of them. It would be such an extraordinary thing, if any thing should happen to interfere with his hopes!"

Daniel, who had blushed all over, suddenly became deadly pale. After all that he had been told, these words sounded to him, in spite of the loud laugh that

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accompanied them, like a warning and a threat. But he was not allowed the time to reflect. The piece was coming to an end. Miss Brandon was drawing a fur cloak over her shoulders, and left on the count's arm; while he had to escort Mrs. Brian, being closely followed by tall, stiff Sir Thom. The landau was at the door. The servants had let down the steps; and Miss Sarah was just getting in. Suddenly, as her foot touched the bottom of the carriage, she drew back, and cried out,—

"What is that? What is in there?"

The count came forward, looking visibly embarrassed.

"You are fond of roses," he said, "and I have ordered a few."

With these words he took up some of the leaves, and showed them to her. But immediately Miss Brandon's terror was changed into wrath.

"You certainly are bent upon making me angry," she said. "You want people to say everywhere that I make you commit all kinds of follies. What a glorious thing to waste fifty dollars on flowers, when one has I know not how many millions!"

Then, seeing by the light of the street-lamp that the count's face showed deep disappointment, she said in a tone to make him lose the little reason that was left him,—

"You would have been more welcome if you had brought me a cent's worth of violets."

In the mean time Mrs. Brian had taken her seat by Miss Brandon's side; Sir Thom had gotten in; and it was now the count's turn. At the moment when the servant was closing the door, Miss Sarah bent forward toward Daniel, and said,—

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"I hope I shall have the pleasure of soon seeing you again. Our dear count will give you my address, and tell you my reception-days. I must tell you that we American girls dote upon naval officers, and that I"—

The remainder was lost in the noise of the wheels. The carriage which took Miss Brandon and Count Ville-Handry away was already at some distance, before Daniel could recover from his amazement, his utter consternation.

All these strange events, coming upon him one by one, in the course of a few hours, and breaking suddenly in upon so calm and quiet a life, overwhelmed him to such a degree, that he was not quite sure whether he was dreaming or awake.

Alas! he was not dreaming. This Miss Sarah Brandon, who had just passed away from him like a glorious vision from on high, was only too real; and there, on the muddy pavement, a handful of rose-leaves bore witness of the power of her charms, and the folly of her aged lover.

"Ah, we are lost!" exclaimed Daniel, in so loud a voice, that some of the passers-by stopped, expecting one of those street-dramas which read so strikingly in the local columns of our papers. They were disappointed, however. Noticing that he attracted attention, Daniel shrugged his shoulders, and quickly walked off towards the boulevards.

He had promised Henrietta to be sure to tell her that very evening, if possible, what he had found out; but it was too late now: midnight was striking.

"I'll go to-morrow," he said to himself.

Whilst lounging leisurely down the boulevards, still brilliantly lighted up, and crowded with people, he

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strained all his faculties for the purpose of examining his situation coolly and calmly. At first he had imagined he should only have to do with one of those common *intriguantes* who want to secure themselves a quiet old age, and clumsily spread their nets to catch an old or a young man; and who can always easily be gotten rid of by paying them a more or less considerable sum of money, provided the police does not get hold of them. In such a case he would have had some hope.

But here he saw himself suddenly confronted by one of those formidable adventuresses in high life, who either save appearances altogether, or, at worst, are only compromised far enough to give additional zest and an air of mystery to their relations. How could he hope to compete with such a woman? and with what weapons could he attack her? How should he reach her? and how attack her?

Was it not pure folly to think even of making her give up the magnificent fortune which she seemed already to have in her hands, Heaven knows by what means? She evidently looked upon it as her own already, and enjoyed its charms in anticipation.

"Great God!" said Daniel, "send me some inspiration."

But no inspiration came; and in vain did he torture his mind: he was unable to think.

When he reached home, he went to bed as usual; but the consciousness of his misfortunes kept him awake. At nine o'clock in the morning, having never closed his eyes, and feeling utterly overcome by sleeplessness and fatigue, he was just about to get up, when some one knocked at his door. He rose hastily,

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put on his clothes, and went to open the door. It was M. de Brévan, who came to hear all about his new acquaintance of last night, and whose first word was,—

"Well?"

"Alas!" replied Daniel, "I think the wisest plan would be to give it up."

"Upon my word, you are in great haste to surrender."

"And what would you do in my place, eh? That woman has beauty enough to drive any one mad; and the count is a lost man."

And, before Maxime had time to reply, Daniel told him simply and frankly all about his love for Miss Ville-Handry, the hopes he had been encouraged to cherish, and the dangers that threatened his happiness in life.

"For I can no longer deceive myself, Maxime," he concluded with a tone of utter despair. "I foresee, I know, what is going to happen. Henrietta will obstinately, and at any risk, do every thing in the world to prevent her father's marriage with Miss Brandon: she will struggle to the bitter end. Ought I, or ought I not, to help her? Certainly. Can we succeed? No! But we shall have a mortal enemy in Miss Brandon; and, on the morning after her wedding, her first thought will be how to avenge herself, and how to separate Henrietta and myself forever."

Little as Brévan was generally given to show his feelings, he was evidently deeply touched by his friend's despair.

"In short, my dear fellow, you have reached the point at which we no longer know what to do. All the more reason, then, that you should listen to the

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calm advice of a friend. You must have yourself presented at Miss Brandon's house."

"She has invited me."

"Well, then, do not hesitate, but go there."

"What for?"

"Not for much. You will pay some compliments to Miss Sarah; you will be all attention to Mrs. Brian; and you will try to win over the Hon. Thomas Elgin. Finally, and above all, you will be all ears and all eyes."

"I am sorry to say I do not understand you yet."

"What? Don't you see that the position of these daring adventurers, however secure it may appear, may, after all, hang on a single thread? and that nothing is wanting in order to cut that thread but an opportunity? And when you may expect, at any moment, any thing and every thing, what is to be done but to wait and watch?"

Daniel did not seem to be convinced. He added,—

"Miss Sarah will talk to me about her marriage."

"Certainly she will."

"What can I say?"

"Nothing,—neither yes nor no,—but smile, or run away: at all events, you gain time."

He was interrupted by Daniel's servant, who came in, holding a card in his hand, and said,—

"Sir, there is a gentleman down stairs in a carriage, who wants to know if he would interrupt you if he came up to see you."

"What is the gentleman's name?"

"Count Ville-Handry. Here is his card."

"Be quick!" said Daniel, "run down and ask him, would he please come up."

M. de Brévan had started up, and was standing,

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with his hat on, near the door. As the servant left, he said,—

"I am running away."

"Why?"

"Because the count must not find me here. You would be compelled to introduce me to him; he might remember my name; and, if he were to tell Miss Sarah that I am your friend, all would be lost."

Thereupon he turned to go; but at the same moment the outer door was opened, and he said,—

"There is the count! I am caught."

But Daniel opened promptly the door to his bedroom, pushed him in, and shut the door. It was high time: the same moment the count entered.

VI.

THE count must have risen early that day. Although it was not yet ten o'clock, he was already brilliant, rouged, dyed, and frizzed. Of course all these results had not been the work of an hour. As he entered, he drew a long breath, and said,—

"Ah! You live pretty high up, my dear Daniel."

Poor fellow! He forgot that he was playing the young man. But he recalled himself at once, and added, full of vivacity,—

"Not that I complain of it; oh, no! A few stories to climb—what is that to me?"

At the same time he stretched out his leg, and caressed his calf, as if to exhibit its vigor and its suppleness. In the meantime, Daniel, full of respect for his future father-in-law, had drawn forward his eas-

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iest arm-chair. The count took it, and in an airy manner, which contrasted ill with his evident embarrassment, he said,—

"I am sure, my dear Daniel, you must be very much surprised and puzzled to see me here; are you not?"

"I confess, sir, I am. If you wished to speak to me, you had only to drop me a line, and I should have waited upon you at once."

"I am sure you would! But that is not necessary. In fact, I have nothing to say to you. I should not have come to see you, if I had not missed an appointment. I was to meet one of my fellow-members of the assembly, and he did not come to the place where we were to meet. On my return home, I happened to pass your house; and I said to myself, 'Why not go up and see my sailor friend? I might ask him what he thinks of a certain young lady to whom he had, last night, the honor of being presented.'"

Now or never was the favorable moment for following Maxime's advice; hence Daniel, instead of replying, simply smiled as pleasantly as he could.

But that did not satisfy the count: so he repeated the question more directly, and said,—

"Come, tell us frankly, what do you think of Miss Brandon?"

"She is one of the greatest beauties I have ever seen in my life."

Count Ville-Handry's eyes beamed with delight and with pride as he heard these words. He exclaimed,—

"Say she is the greatest beauty, the most marvellous and transcendent beauty, you ever saw. And that, M. Daniel Champcey, is her smallest attraction. When she opens her lips, the charms of her mind

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make you instantly forget the spell of her beauty. And, when you learn to know her, you forget both her beauty and her mind, and remember only her admirable ingenuousness, her *naïve* freshness, and all the treasures of her chaste and pure soul."

This excessive, almost idiotic admiration, this implicit, absurd faith in his beloved, gave the painted face of the count a strange, almost ecstatic expression. He said to himself, but loud enough to be heard,—

"And to think that chance alone has led me to meet this angel!"

A sudden start, involuntary on the part of Daniel, seemed to disturb him; for he resumed his speech, laying great stress upon his words,—

"Yes, chance alone; and I can prove it to you."

He settled down in his chair like a man who is going to speak for some length of time; and, in that emphatic manner which so well expressed the high opinion he had of himself, he continued,—

"You know, my friend, how deeply I was affected by the death of the Countess Ville-Handry. It is true she was not exactly the companion a statesman of my rank would have chosen. Her whole capacity rarely rose beyond the effort to distinguish a ball-dress from a dinner-dress. But she was a good woman, attentive, discreet, and devoted to me; an excellent manager, economical, and yet always sure to do honor to the high reputation of my house."

Thus, in all sincerity, the count spoke of her who had literally made him, and who, for sixteen long years, had galvanized his empty head.

"In short," he continued, "the loss of my wife so completely upset me, that I lost all taste for the occupations which had so far been dear to me; and I set

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about to find distractions elsewhere. Soon after I had gotten into the habit of going frequently to my club, I fell in with M. Thomas Elgin, and, although we never became intimate, we always exchanged a friendly greeting, and occasionally a cigar.

"Sir Thom, as they call him, is an excellent horseman, you know, and used to ride out every morning at an early hour; and as the physicians had recommended to me horseback exercise, and as I like it, because I excel in riding, as in every thing else, we often met in the Bois de Boulogne. We wished each other good-day; and sometimes we galloped a little while side by side. I am rather reserved; but Sir Thom is even more so, and thus it did not seem that our acquaintance was ever to ripen into any thing better, till an accident brought us together.

"One morning we were returning slowly from a long ride, when Sir Thom's mare, a foolish brute, suddenly shied, and jumped so high, that he was thrown. I jumped down instantly to help him up again; but he could not rise. You know nothing ordinarily hurts these Americans. But it seems, as we found out afterwards, that he had sprained an ankle, and dislocated a knee. There was no one near the place; and I began to be seriously embarrassed, when fortunately two soldiers appeared. I called to them, and sent one on my horse to the nearest hack-stand to bring a carriage. As soon as it came, we raised the invalid, and put him in as well as we could: I got on the box to show the man the way to Sir Thom's house. When we arrived there, I rang the bell, and told the servants to come down to their master. They got him, with some difficulty, out of the hack; and

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there they were, carrying him painfully up the stairs, and he groaning feebly, for he suffered terribly.

"I was going up before them; and, as I reached the second story, a door suddenly opened, and a young girl was standing right before me.

"She was evidently dressing, when the noise which we made startled her, and she came running out. She had only taken time to throw a loose wrapper around her shoulders; and her dishevelled hair streamed out from under a kind of coquettish morning-cap.

"When she saw her kinsman in the arms of the servants, she imagined he was dangerously wounded, perhaps even— She turned as pale as death, and, uttering a loud cry, she tottered.

"She would have fallen down the steps, head foremost, if I had not caught her in my arms. She had fainted. And there I held her, leaning on my shoulder, so close that I became aware of the warmth of her lovely body, and actually felt her heart beat against mine. Her cap had become unfastened; and her hair fell in golden floods all over me, and down to the floor. But all this lasted only a few seconds.

"When she recovered, and found herself in the arms of a man, she rose with an air of extreme distress, and, slipping away, disappeared in her room."

At the mere description of this scene, the count turned pale under his rouge; and his voice forsook him. Nor did he in any way attempt to conceal his emotion.

"I am a poor old fellow," he said; "and between you and me, my dear Daniel, I will tell you that the women—well—the women have not been—exactly

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cruel to me. In fact, I thought I had outlived all the emotions which they can possibly give us.

"Well, I was mistaken. Never in my life, I assure you, have I felt such a deep sensation as when Miss Brandon was lying in my arms."

While saying this, he had pulled out his handkerchief, saturated with a strong perfume, and was wiping his forehead, though very gently, and with infinite precautions, so as not to spoil the artistic work of his valet.

"You will know Miss Brandon," he went on, "I hope soon. Once having seen her, one wants to see her again. I was lucky enough to have a pretext for coming again; and the very next day I was at her door, inquiring after M. Thomas Elgin. They showed me into the room of that excellent gentleman, where I found him stretched out on an invalid's chair, with his legs all bandaged up. By his side sat a venerable lady, to whom he presented me, and who was no other than Mrs. Brian.

"They received me very kindly, although with some little reserve under all their politeness; but I staid and staid in vain beyond the proper time: Miss Sarah did not appear.

"Nor did I see her upon subsequent occasions, when I repeated my visits, until at last I came to the conclusion that she avoided me purposely.

"Upon my word, I believed it. But one day Sir Thom, who was improving very rapidly, expressed a desire to walk out a few steps in the Champs Elysées. I offered him my arm; he accepted it; and, when we came back, he asked me if I would be kind enough to take pot-luck with him."

However important these communications were for

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Daniel, he was for some time already listening but very inattentively to the count's recital; for he had heard a strange, faint noise, which he could not by any means explain to himself. At last, looking all around, he discovered the cause.

The door to his bedroom, which he was sure he had closed himself, was now standing partly open. No doubt M. de Brévan, weary of his confinement and excited by curiosity, had chosen this way to see and to listen. Of all this, however, Count Ville-Handry saw nothing, and suspected nothing.

"Thus," he continued, "I was at last to see Miss Sarah again. Upon my word, I was less excited, I think, the day I made my first speech. But you know I have some power over myself; and I had recovered my calmness, when Sir Thom confessed to me that he would have invited me long since, but for the fear of offending his young relative, who had declared she would never meet me again. I was grieved, and asked how I had offended her. And then Sir Thom, with that marvellous composure which never leaves him, said, 'It is not you she blames, but herself, on account of that ridiculous scene the other day.'

"Do you hear, Daniel, he called that adorable scene which I have just described to you, ridiculous! It is only Americans who can commit such absurdities.

"I have since found out that they had almost to force Miss Brandon to receive me; but she had tact enough not to let me see it, when I was formally presented to her, just before going to dinner. It is true, she blushed deeply; but she took my hand with the utmost cordiality, and cut me short when I was trying to pay her some compliment, saying,—

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"'You are Thom's friend: I am sure we shall be friends also.'

"Ah, Daniel! you admired Miss Brandon at the theatre; but you ought to see her at her house. Abroad she sacrifices herself in order to pay proper regard to the world; but at home she can venture to be herself.

"We soon became friends, as she had foretold, so soon, in fact, that I was quite surprised when I found her addressing me like an old acquaintance. I soon discovered how that came about.

"Our young girls here in France, my dear Daniel, are charming, no doubt, but generally ill taught, frivolous, and caring for nothing but balls, novels, or dress. The Americans are very different. Their serious minds are occupied with the same subjects which fill their parents' minds,—with politics, industry, discussions in the assembly, discoveries in science, &c. A man like myself, known abroad and at home during a long political career of some distinction, could not be a stranger to Miss Brandon. My earnestness in defending those causes which I considered just had often filled her with enthusiasm. Deeply moved by my speeches, which she was in the habit of reading, she had often thought of the speaker. I think I can hear her now say with that beautiful voice of hers, which has the clear ring of pure crystal,—

"'Oh, yes! I knew you, count; I knew you long ago. And there was many a day when I wished I were a friend of yours, so that I might say to you, "Well done, sir! what you are doing is grand, is noble!"'

"And that was true; for she remembered a number of passages from my speeches, even from such as

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I had forgotten myself; and she always quoted them literally. At times, I was amazed at some peculiarly bold thoughts which she uttered; and, when I complimented her upon them, she broke out in loud laughter, and said,—

"'Why, count, these are your own ideas: I got them from you. You said so on such and such an occasion.'

"And when I looked at night, after my return, into my papers, to ascertain the fact, I found almost always that Miss Brandon had been right. Need I tell you after that, that I soon became an almost daily visitor at the house in Circus Street? Surely you take it for granted.

"But what I must tell you is, that I found there the most perfect happiness, and the purest that I have ever known upon earth. I was filled with respect and with admiration, when I looked at their rigid morality, united with the heartiest cheerfulness. There I enjoyed my happiest hours, between Mrs. Brian, the Puritan lady, so strict for herself, so indulgent for others; and Thomas Elgin, the noblest and best of men, who conceals under an appearance of icy coldness the warmest and kindest of hearts."

What was Count Ville-Handry aiming at? or had he no aim at all?

Had he come merely to confide to Daniel the amazing romance of his love? Or did he simply yield to the natural desire of all lovers, to pour out the exuberance of their feelings, and to talk of their love, even when they know that their indiscretion may be fatal to their success?

Daniel put these questions to himself; but the count did not leave him time to reflect, and to answer them.

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After a short pause, he seemed to rouse himself, and said, suddenly changing his tone,—

"I guess what you think, my dear Daniel. You say to yourself, 'Count Ville-Handry was in love.' Well, I assure you you are mistaken."

Daniel started from his chair; and, overcome by amazement, he exclaimed,—

"Can it be possible?"

Exactly so: I give you my word of honor. The feelings which attracted me toward Miss Brandon were the same that bound me to my daughter. But as I am a shrewd observer, and have some knowledge of the human heart, I could not help being struck by a change in Miss Brandon's face, and especially in her manner. After having treated me with the greatest freedom and familiarity, she had suddenly become reserved, and almost cold. It was evident to me that she was embarrassed in my presence. Our constant intercourse, so far from reassuring her, seemed to frighten her. You may guess how I interpreted this change, my dear Daniel.

"But, as I have never been a conceited man, I thought I might be mistaken. I devoted myself, therefore, to more careful observation; and I soon became aware, that, if I loved Miss Brandon only with the affection of a father, I had succeeded in inspiring her with a more tender sentiment."

In any other person, this senile self-conceit would have appeared intensely absurd to Daniel: in his Henrietta's father, it pained him deeply. The count actually noticed his downcast look, and, misinterpreting it, asked him,—

"Could you doubt what I say?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

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"Very well, then. I can assure you, at all events, that this discovery troubled me not a little. I was so surprised by it, that for three days I could neither think of it coolly, nor decide on what I ought to do. Still it was necessary I should make up my mind. I did not for a moment think of abusing the confidence of this innocent child; and yet I knew, I felt it, she was absolutely in my power. But no! It would have been infamous in me to repay the hospitality of excellent Mrs. Brian, and the kindness of noble M. Elgin, with such ingratitude. On the other hand, must I necessarily deny myself my pleasant visits at the house in Circus Street, and break with friends who were so dear to me? I thought of that, also; but I had not the courage to do so."

He hesitated for a moment, trying to read in Daniel's eyes his real opinion. After a while, he said very gravely,—

"It was then only, that the idea of marrying her occurred to me."

Daniel had been expecting the fatal word: thus, however heavy the blow was, it found him prepared. He remained immovable.

This indifference seemed to surprise the count; for he uttered an expression of discontent, and curtly repeated,—

"Yes, I thought of marrying her. You will say, 'That was a serious matter.' I know that only too well; and therefore I did not decide the question in a hurry, but weighed the reasons for and against very carefully. I am not one of those weak men, you know, I am sure, who can easily be hoodwinked, and who fancy they alone possess the secret of perennial youth. No, no, I know myself, and am fully aware,

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better than anybody else, that I am approaching maturer years.

"This was, in fact, the first objection that arose in my mind. But then I answered it triumphantly by the fact that age is not a matter to be decided by the certificate of baptism, but that we are just as old as we appear to be. Now, thanks to an exceptionally sober and peaceful life, of which forty years were spent in the country, to an iron constitution, and to the extreme care I have always taken of my health, I possess a—what shall I say?—a vigor which many young men might envy, who can hardly drag one foot after the other."

He rose as he said this, threw out his chest, straightened his back, and stretched out his well-shaped leg. Then, when he thought Daniel had sufficiently admired him, he continued,—

"Now, what of Miss Brandon? You think, perhaps, she is still in her teens? Far from that! She is at least twenty-five, my dear friend; and, for a woman, twenty-five years are—ah, ah!"

He smiled ironically, as if to say that to him a woman of twenty-five appeared an old, a very old woman. Then he went on,—

"Besides, I know how serious her disposition is, and her eminent good sense. You may rely upon me, when I tell you I have studied her. A thousand trifles, of no weight in appearance, and unnoticed by herself in all probability, have told me that she abhors very young men. She has learnt to appreciate the value of young husbands of thirty, who are all fire and flame in the honeymoon, and who, six months later, wearied with pure and tranquil happiness, seek their delights elsewhere. It is not only of late that I

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have found out how truly she values what is, after all, most desirable in this world,—a great name worthily borne by a true man, and a reputation that would shed new radiance upon her. How often have I heard her say to Mrs. Brian, 'Above all, aunt, I want to be proud of my husband; I want to see everybody's eye sparkle with admiration and envy as soon as I mention his name, which will have become mine also; I want people to whisper around me, "Ah, how happy she is to be loved by such a man!"'"

He shook his head gravely, and said in a solemn tone,—

"I examined myself, Daniel, and found that I answered all of Miss Brandon's expectations; and the result of my meditations was, that I would be a madman to allow such happiness to escape me, and that I was bound to risk every thing. I made up my mind, therefore, firmly, and went to M. Elgin in order to make him aware of my intentions. I cannot describe to you the amazement of that worthy gentleman.

"'You are joking,' he said at first, 'and that pains me deeply.'

"But, when he saw that I had never in my life spoken more seriously, he, who is usually so phlegmatic, became perfectly furious. As if I would have come to him, if, by some impossible accident, I should have been unhappy in my choice! But I fell from the clouds when he told me outright that he meant to do all he could do to prevent such a match. Nor would he give up his purpose, say what I could; and I had to use all my skill to make him change his mind. At last, after more than two hours' discussion, all that I could obtain from him was the promise that he would remain neutral, and that he would

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leave to Mrs. Brian the responsibility of refusing or accepting my offer."

He laughed, this good Count Ville-Handry, he laughed heartily, no doubt recalling his discussion with Sir Thom, and his triumphant skill.

"So," he resumed, "I went to Mrs. Brian. Ah! she did not mince matters. At the first word, she called me—God forgive her!—an old fool, and plainly told me that I must never show myself again in Circus Street.

"I insisted; but in vain. She would not even listen to me, the old Puritan; and, when I became pressing, she dropped me a solemn courtesy, and left me alone in the room, looking foolish enough, I am sure.

"For the time, I had nothing to do but to go away. I did so, hoping that her interview with her niece might induce her to change her mind. Not at all. The next morning, when I called at the house, the servants said Sir Thom was out, and Mrs. Brian and Miss Brandon had just left for Fontainebleau. The day after, the same result; and for a whole week the doors remained closed.

"I was becoming restless, when a *commissionaire*, one morning, brought me a letter. It was Miss Brandon who wrote. She asked me to be that very day, at four o'clock, in the Bois de Boulogne, near the waterfalls; that she would ride out in the afternoon with Sir Thom; that she would escape from him, and meet me.

"As a matter of course, I was punctual; and it was well I was so, for, a few minutes after I got there, I saw her—or rather I felt her—coming towards me, riding at full speed. When she reached me, she

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stopped suddenly, and, jumping from her horse, said to me,—

"'They watch me so jealously, that I could not write to you till to-day. I am deeply wounded by this want of confidence, and I do not think I can endure it any longer. Here I am, carry me off, let us go!'

"Never, O Daniel! never have I seen her look more marvellously beautiful than she looked at that moment. She was flushed with excitement and the rapid ride; her eyes shone with courage and passion; her lips trembled; and then she said again,—

"'I know I am ruining myself; and you yourself—you will probably despise me. But never mind! Let us be gone!'"

He paused, overcome with excitement; but, soon recovering, he continued,—

"To hear a beautiful woman tell you that! Ah, Daniel! that is an experience which alone is worth a man's whole life. And yet I had the courage, mad as I felt I was becoming, to speak to her words of calm reason. Yes, I had the sublime courage, and the almost fabulous control over myself, to conjure her to return to her house.

"She began to weep, and accused me of indifference.

"But I had discovered a way out of the difficulty, and said to her,—

"'Sarah, go home. Write to me what you have just told me, and I am sure I shall compel your friends to grant me your hand.'

"This she did.

"And what I had foreseen came to pass. In the face of such evidence of what they called our mad-

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ness, Sir Thom and Mrs. Brian dared not oppose our plans any longer. After some little hesitations, and imposing certain honorable conditions, they said to Sarah and myself,—

"'You will have it so. Go, then, and get married.'"

This is what Count Ville-Handry called chance, a "blessed chance," as he said, utterly unmindful of the whole chain of circumstances which he himself related. From the accident that had befallen M. Elgin, and the fainting-fit of Miss Brandon, to the meeting in the Bois de Boulogne and the proposed runaway-match, all seemed to him perfectly natural and simple, —even the sudden enthusiasm of a young, frivolous woman for his political opinions, and the learning by heart of his speeches.

Daniel was amazed. That a man like the count should be so perfectly blind to the intrigue that was going on around him, seemed to him incomprehensible. The count, however, was not so blind, that he should not have at least suspected the nature of Daniel's feelings.

"What are you thinking of?" he asked. "Come, let us hear your opinion. Tell us frankly that you suspect Miss Brandon, and accuse her of trying to catch me in her snares, or, at least, of having selfish views."

"I do not say so," stammered Daniel.

"No, but you think so; and that is worse. Well, come: I think I can convince you of your mistake. What do you think Miss Brandon would gain by marrying me? A fortune, you say. I have only one word in reply; but that is sufficient: Miss Brandon is richer than I am."

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How, and at what price, Miss Brandon had managed to possess herself of such a fortune, Daniel knew but too well from Maxime's account: hence he could not suppress a nervous shudder, which the count noticed, and which irritated him.

"Yes, richer than I am," he repeated. "The oil-wells which she has inherited from her father bring her in, bad years and good years, from thirty to forty thousand dollars a year, and that in spite of their being sadly mismanaged. If they were well managed, they would produce, three, four, or five times as much, or even more. Sir Thom has proved to me that they are an almost inexhaustible mine of wealth. If petroleum was not fabulously profitable, how would you account for the oil-fever with which these cool, calculating Americans have suddenly been seized, and which has made more millionaires than the gold-fever in California and the Territories? Ah! there is something to be made there yet, and something grand, if one could dispose of a large capital."

He became excited, and forgot himself; but he soon checked himself. He had evidently been on the point of letting a secret leak out. After a few moments, he continued more calmly,—

"But enough of that. I trust your suspicions are removed. Next you may tell me that Miss Brandon takes me because she can do no better. Mistaken again, my friend. At this very moment she is called upon to choose between me and a much younger man than I am, whose fortune, moreover, is larger than mine,—Mr. Wilkie Gordon."

How did it come about that Count Ville-Handry seemed to appeal to Daniel, and to plead his cause before him? Daniel did not even think of asking him-

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self that question: his mind was in a state of utter confusion. Still, as the count insisted on having his opinion, as he urged him, and repeatedly asked, "Well, do you see any other objection?" he forgot at last his friend's prudent warning, and said in a troubled voice,—

"No doubt, count, you know Miss Brandon's family?"

"Certainly! Do you think I would buy a cat in a bag? Her excellent father was a model of honesty."

"And—her previous life?"

The count started from his chair, and, casting a savage glance at Daniel, said,—

"Oh, oh! I see one of those rascally slanderers, who have tried to tarnish the honor of the noblest and chastest of all women, has already been at work here, anticipating my communication to you, and repeating those infamous calumnies. You must give me the name of the scoundrel."

Unconsciously, almost, Daniel turned towards the door, behind which M. de Brévan was listening. Perhaps he expected him to come forth; but Maxime did not stir.

"Sarah's previous life!" continued the count. "I know every hour of it; and I can answer for it as for my own. The darling! Before consenting to be mine, she insisted upon my knowing every thing, yes, every thing, without reserve or boastfulness; and I know what she has suffered. Did they not actually say she had been the accomplice of a wretched thief, a cashier of some bank, who had become a defaulter? Did they not say that she had driven a foolish young man, a gambler, to commit suicide; and that she had watched, unmoved, the tortures of his agony? Ah! you have

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only to look at Miss Brandon to know that these vile stories are wretched inventions of malicious enemies and rivals. And look here, Daniel; you may believe me: whenever you see people calumniate a man or a woman, you may rest assured that that man or woman has, somehow or other, wounded or humiliated some vulgar person, some mean, envious fool, who cannot endure his or her superiority in point of fortune, rank, or beauty and talent."

He had actually recovered his youthful energy in thus defending his beloved. His eye brightened up; his voice became strong, and his gestures animated.

"But no more of that painful topic," he said: "let us talk seriously."

He rose, and leaning on the mantlepiece, so as to face Daniel, he said,—

"I told you, my dear Daniel, that Sir Thom and Mrs. Brian insisted upon certain conditions before they consented to our marriage. One is, that Miss Brandon is to be received by my relations as she deserves to be, not only respectfully, but affectionately, even tenderly. As to relations, there is not any. I have some remote cousins, who, having nothing to expect from me when I die, do not trouble themselves any more about me than I trouble myself about them. But I have a daughter; and there is the danger. I know she is distressed at the idea of my marrying again. She cannot bear the mere idea that another woman is to take the place of her mother, to bear her name, and to rule in my house."

Daniel began at last to know what he had to understand by that unsuccessful appointment which had procured him the pleasure of a visit from Count Ville-Handry.

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