His Lawful Wife

Or, Paul Aubrey's Secret

by Mathew Franklin Whittier

Preface

One might naturally assume that this serialized novel, “His Lawful Wife; Or, Paul Aubrey’s Secret,” was written by Francis Alexander Durivage, having been published several years after his death in the December 21, 1889 through March 22, 1890 “New York Weekly.” One would be mistaken. This entire novel, from beginning to end, is the work of an elusive literary genius named Mathew Franklin Whittier. Where he is currently known at all, it is as the supposedly ne’er-do-well younger brother of illustrious Quaker poet John Greenleaf Whittier. Mathew’s personal and professional history is far too complex to set forth in this introduction, as is the substantiating evidence which I painstakingly garnered over a 14-year period. What I will provide, here, is my *extrapolated scenario* for the relationship between Mathew and his audacious plagiarist, Francis Durivage. As I write this in July of 2023, I am aware that new discoveries might require certain alterations in the details of this scenario; but I am confident that, in the main, it is quite correct.

Mathew Franklin Whittier, a child prodigy, first began publishing at age 12, in 1825, in a prominent Boston literary newspaper called the “New-England Galaxy.” The editor of that newspaper, as well as of a daily called the “Courier,” was Joseph T. Buckingham, who also became Mathew’s mentor. Mathew ran away from Haverhill, Massachusetts in the spring of 1825, traveling between Boston and New York City. He returned home after some months; made shoes with his brother for a year or so; and then, at age 14, struck out on his own for good.

Mathew probably reached his full height of 6’2” quite early, and was able to pass for a more mature young man. As of 1828 he was living in Boston, and possibly working as a printer’s apprentice for the “Courier.” At the same time, he was part of a group of young authors who were regularly contributing to the Galaxy. Among these was Joseph Buckingham’s son Edwin, a little older than Mathew. Edwin was extremely jealous of Mathew—both for his talent, and for the attention Mathew received from his father. Edwin was friends with another young Bostonian, who was two years younger than Mathew, named Francis Durivage. Although both boys came from more privileged backgrounds, they didn’t have Mathew’s raw talent, energy, or originality. Together they made his life miserable, and even disparaged him with sarcastic parodies of his own works. After Edwin was given editorial control of the “Galaxy,” Mathew moved to New York City. By December of 1829 he was writing comic sketches and commentary for the New York “Constellation” under editor Asa Greene, whose “Berkshire American” in Pittsfield, Mass. Mathew had occasionally contributed to, earlier; and by mid-1830 he was also writing reviews and editorials for the New York “American” under editor Charles King. When Joseph Buckingham launched the monthly “New-England Magazine,” he gave Mathew the honor of writing the very first piece in the first edition, and Mathew continued submitting work to that publication. Edwin Buckingham died at sea a couple of years after this

magazine was launched. But Francis Durivage apparently did not forget his grudge—or his envy.

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magazine was launched. But Francis Durivage apparently did not forget his grudge—or his envy.

In his reviews for the "American," Mathew mentioned how useful a thing an historical encyclopedia could be. It so happened that by1833 or 1834, Francis Durivage—perhaps pretending to bury the hatchet—approached Mathew with an offer to hire him as a ghost writer. Mathew would contribute to Durivage's project, which was in fact an historical encyclopedia. Whether Mathew wrote it in its entirety, or merely completed assigned portions, is unknown, but the stamp of his personal style is undoubtedly in it. This working relationship was now established, and Mathew—who always believed that the heart of every person is redeemable, and was thus a target for those with a sociopathic personality—assumed that Durivage had outgrown his devious ways, as well as his venomous envy.

He was very badly mistaken, but Durivage was biding his time.

From 1843 until 1845, Mathew ghost wrote at least three novelettes for Durivage. Whereas in the early-to-mid 1830's Mathew's former editor on the "Constellation," Asa Greene, had helped him publish several books anonymously in New York City, Durivage wished to attach his name to his series. Inasmuch as they were all in the adventure and true crime genre, which Mathew may not have considered real literature in the first place, he agreed. However, being a true literary genius, he simply couldn't write trash—not even when he tried, by way of parody. These are excellent stories, and moreover, Mathew drew deeply from his own personal life as he was wont to do in all of his works. The titles were: "Angela; Or, Love and Guilt. A Tale of Boston and its Environs;" "Edith Vernon; Or, Crime and Retribution. A Tragic Story of New England, Founded Upon Fact;" and "Mike Martin; Or, The Last of the Highwaymen. A Romance of Reality." During this period, Mathew also ghost wrote at least two novels for New York author/publisher Charles Burdette; and, he published two on his own in 1841 and 1846. Very likely, all of these were intended to produce much-needed additional income. But again, because of his sheer level of talent, they were exceptional nonetheless. Mathew was first and foremost a philosopher; and despite the fact that these novels look like sheer entertainment on the surface, they explore serious philosophical issues—most especially, the psychology of criminal behavior. Mathew's persistent viewpoint on this issue was that the criminal mind results from a poor upbringing, and in particular from being spoiled; and, once again, that all had a human heart—as well as a conscience--and were capable of redemption.

"Mike Martin" was published in 1845. By 1847, it appears that Mathew was permitting Francis Durivage; and then, one of Durivage's associates, George Pickering Burnham; to choose anecdotal humorous sketches from his portfolio and to attach their names to these pieces. As I have extrapolated from a great many clues, the following scenario must have taken place.

Sometime in mid-1848, Durivage and Burnham made Mathew a proposition. Rather than Mathew feeding them selected stories from his portfolio, they would borrow it and make their own selections from it. Undoubtedly, Mathew assumed he would have the final say. Celebrating with a bottle of wine, in high good humor, Mathew was presented with a contract which he casually signed without reading it carefully. He did, however, make sure that they were not permitted to revise any of the pieces which he agreed to allow them to publish.

They left shaking hands, promising to send him a list of their choices—but Mathew would never see his portfolio, again. He had unwittingly signed away his rights to the entire lot—hundreds of unpublished stories, and even entire books, going back as far as the early 1830's.

Durivage and Burnham proceeded to publish these stories in a massive barrage—first in small local newspapers, and then, when they were satisfied that Mathew wasn't going to mount a legal defense, in the more prestigious "Flag of Our Union" in Boston, owned by Frederick Gleason, and in Gleason's flagship illustrated publication, "Gleason's Pictorial." To maximize their profits, they next published compilations—one shared, and two more separately. (Durivage even extended his, tricking the public by publishing the same book under a new title.) Having split the spoils down the middle, these criminals needed some ruse to explain how they could be publishing material in an identical (and unique) style. They decided to pretend that Burnham was Durivage's protégé; even though Durivage, himself, had a lackluster track record as a writer in Boston, while Burnham appears to have had no literary experience whatsoever.

After the swindle, Mathew's hands were tied—he could not legally challenge them, because he was neck-deep in undercover work for the abolitionist movement, with extensive ties to the Underground Railroad. For this reason, he didn't care come under public scrutiny. However, he came to the conclusion that "success is the best revenge." Accordingly, he wrote a novel to end all novels—something better than anything Durivage and Burnham had stolen from him, which he entitled "The Mistake of a Lifetime; Or, the Robber of the Rhine Valley." Procuring a young literary agent, Mathew sent him directly to Frederick Gleason. He would publish this book under the very noses of Durivage and Burnham, through their own publisher, without Gleason realizing who he was really dealing with. (That was just as well, because Mathew was a radical abolitionist affiliated with William Lloyd Garrison, while Gleason was conservative.) The agent played hardball with Gleason, finally obtaining a stupendous contract. Gleason would pay the unheard-of fee of $3,000 1850 dollars, plus royalties! The critics assumed that the agent, himself, was the fledgling author, being none other than "Waldo Howard"—Mathew's pseudonym for the book. Gleason published it in serial form, and then as a book. It seems to have done very well except for being ridiculed by the critics—not for the writing, but for the manner in which it was accepted for publication.

Mathew, of course, never dealt with Durivage or Burnham, again. But when Burnham published a book bragging about his own chicken-raising scam in 1855, entitled “The History of the Hen Fever,” Mathew exposed its premise in an anonymous review. Perhaps to get even, when Mathew published his likewise anonymous social reform novel portraying the evils of alcohol abuse and slavery, entitled “The Rag-Picker; Or, Bound and Free,” Burnham—who had inherited wealth—sought revenge. He literally purchased a Boston publisher named “Federhen and Company,” attached his name to it as “Burnham, Federhen and Company,” and began selling “The Rag-Picker”—listing himself as the author! His scam doesn’t seem to have worked very well, inasmuch as three years later, when the Boston Temperance Society publicly warned against appointing Burnham to oversee the State’s liquor supply, they were quite aware of Burnham’s chicken-raising book, but they seemingly knew nothing of his spurious claim to “The Rag-Picker.”

Burnham seems to have run out of his half of the spoils from Mathew’s portfolio before Durivage did, but both continued to publish the stolen material into the mid 1850’s, primarily in “Gleason’s Pictorial.” The last pieces were either unfinished, or so distasteful to Durivage, personally, that he preferred not to publish them. Durivage also appears to have tried his hand at story-writing himself, but his style was morally cold, emotionally flat and somewhat ponderous—very much the opposite of Mathew’s.

The stories which most strongly offended Durivage were probably those which depicted sociopathic characters, or which put Frenchmen in a bad light. It so happens that “His Lawful Wife” is the most extreme in both regards—it contains a brilliant, deeply insightful, true-to-life portrayal of an upper-class French sociopath. This must have unnerved Durivage to such an extent, that he never published it in his lifetime. It was perhaps found among his papers after his death in 1881, such that late in 1889, it showed up with his name on it in the “New York Weekly.”

There are a great many indicators for Mathew Franklin Whittier’s authorship of this novel, which are examined in somewhat more depth in my e-book, “Mathew Franklin Whittier in his own world.” Presenting them in this Preface, however, would naturally require that I cross-correspond them to Mathew’s own history, which is far too complex to enter into, here. Suffice it to say that, having studied Mathew’s life in great depth for nearly a decade and a half, I am absolutely certain this is his manuscript, and that Durivage had no part it in, whatsoever. If you want proof, I would suggest you compare it to “The Mistake of a Lifetime.”

Stephen Sakellarios, M.S.
Portland, Maine
July 1, 2023

CHAPTER I.

A WAIF FROM THE THAMES.

On a dark, threatening night in the month of June a little wherry bound for Richmond on the Thames, near London, made good headway against the powerful ebb tide which ran like a mill-race past the willowy banks. There would have been nothing noteworthy in the progress of the little craft had the tough ash oars been wielded by masculine hands. But the sole occupant of the boat was a girl hardly out of her teens, and it was an unusual hour for so fair a voyager to be abroad on the dark water, and an unusual achievement for a woman's strength and dexterity to contend so successfully with the imperious current.

But pretty Jessie Ringold, the daughter of old Jerry Ringold, who kept the Elm Tree Inn on the river bank near Richmond, was no novice. She had a perfect passion for the water, and as the exercise of rowing deepened the glow of her rosy cheeks and lips, and made her sloe-back eyes brighter, her father was not sorry that he had presented to her a boat, that she might indulge in her favorite sport.

On this particular occasion she had been on an errand of charity to old Goody Blake, a needy woman who resided near them. She was somewhat delayed on her return, and she had not proceeded far when the clouds indicated an approaching deluge. Realizing the need of haste, she bent to her work, but was presently startled by a sound distinctly audible even amidst the growling of the thunder and the plashing of the oars, for it was in a different key.

The noise was repeated as if to enforce conviction. It was the cry of a human being in distress.

"Help! help!" said the voice.

Whether it came from the river or the shore, she knew not, but it was in advance of her and swept down the stream on the wings of the wind.

What dark deed was being done off there in the darkness? The brave girl flung to the winds all thoughts of personal peril, and rowed on in the direction of the sound. She thought she heard a smothered groan —then she was sure she heard a shot fired, followed by a splash in the river.

All was now silence, save the moaning of the wind —silence and dense darkness, for the lightning had for the moment ceased to play. Oh! for one more blaze of Heaven's artillery? It came as if at her wish. A vivid, protracted, quivering glare, almost blinding in its intensity, lighted up shore and wave for miles. It was like an immense calcium light blazing on the landscape. She threw a piercing glance over her shoulder without resting her oars a moment.

There, in the stream, a few boats' length ahead was the dark form of a man floating and moving in feeble contortions—life and death perhaps contending in the final struggle.

In the momentary illumination Jessie measured the distance and location of the floating object, and in a few moments one of her oars came in contact with the object of her search.

Fortunately here the water was so shallow that the wherry nearly grounded. She rose, and planting the blade of her oar firmly in the mud, to steady the boat, she grasped the drowning man with both hands, and with the strength of desperation succeeded in getting him into the boat without capsizing it.

"Thanks, thanks!" gasped the stranger, in a voice scarcely audible from the weakness of the speaker.

"Don't try to talk," said Jessie. "Lie still. Leave everything to me."

She caught up her oars and pulled now with redoubled vigor. The rain came down in torrents, but she heeded it not. It was enough for her that the few lights still twinkling in Richmond grew brighter and larger every moment. The wherry fairly flew through the water, and in a very short time the keel grounded on the beach at the boat-house.

"Hullo!" said a deep bass voice. "There you are at last. I was just about starting down stream in the punt to look for you."

Old Jerry Ringold, with a huge umbrella over his head, and a lantern in his hand, seized the boat and drew it up on the beach without an effort. Jessie sprang lightly over the bow.

"Hullo!" said the old man, throwing the light of his lantern into the bottom of the boat. "What have we here? Are you turned resurrectionist, girl? Making a job for the coroner, eh?"

"He is not dead, is he?" exclaimed the young girl, peering anxiously at the man she had rescued from the Thames.

A slight stir in the dark wet mass and a low moan answered her.

It did not diminish her interest in the stranger to perceive that he was a young and very handsome man—this in spite of the pallor of his countenance and the ugly effect of the coagulated blood that clotted his black, curling hair.

In a hurried sentence she related the incidents of her adventure.

Old Ringold shook his head. "Do you know, girl," he said, "that it's ill-luck to save a man from drowning in the river? Never no good comes of it."

Notwithstanding this evil foreboding, the landlord of the Elm Tree Inn, who was a reformed pugilist, carefully and tenderly lifted the wounded man from the bottom of the boat, his trained muscles so seconding his good intentions that he did not even stagger under his burden, though the weight was by no means trifling.

In a few minutes thereafter, preceded by his daughter, he entered the sitting-room of the little hostelry over whose destinies he presided, deposited his charge on the sofa, and then directed a gaping Yorkshire lout, who stared at the spectacle with mouth and eyes wide open, to go down to the shore, secure the boat and oars, and then retire to his accustomed couch in the stable-loft, leaving his master to look after his guest and the house.

The object of the benevolent attentions of the landlord and his daughter had now fully recovered his consciousness, and thanked his charitable entertainers volubly enough. He spoke English fluently, but it was with a decided French accent.

"I'm blessed if he isn't a mounseer," said Jerry Ringold to his daughter, but in so loud a whisper that the stranger had no difficulty in overhearing him.

"You have guessed my nationality correctly, my friend, but I hope I shall be able to prove that a Frenchman may be as grateful for services rendered as one of your own countrymen—as for those of your charming daughter, for such I presume her to be, they can never be repaid."

"Whether my daughter is charming or not, is neither here nor there," replied old Jerry Ringold, bluntly. "She found you a drowning, and she fished you out of the river, as was her duty as a Christian woman. Well, here you are, at the Elm Tree Inn, which purwides good entertainment for man and beast, including Frenchmen. Jessie," he added, turning to his daughter, "make yourself scarce a moment, while I look at this mounseer's hurts, and see whether he needs a doctor."

The young girl retired, and Jerry proceeded to an examination for which his old professional experience had eminently qualified him. It was brief and satisfactory. There were bruises and a scalp wound on the person of the stranger, but none of his hurts were at all serious. Indeed, he stood more in need of a basin of water and a towel than of any surgical appliances, unless a bit of plaster for the wound in his head might be taken into account. It was not until after his ablutions and the arrangement of his dress had rendered him presentable, that the vanity of the handsome young stranger would permit him to allow Jerry Ringold to recall the beautiful young girl who had rescued him from a watery grave.

Her bright eyes and brighter smile betrayed her satisfaction at the restoration of their guest.

"Now," said Ringold, sitting down, and motioning his daughter to a chair, "tell us how this came about, mounseer."

"I am living in London," said the stranger, and had been taking a long walk in the environs, when I got astray and night overtook me. All at once I came upon the river, and decided to follow it down till I reached some public house where I could either stop for the night or get a conveyance to take me to the city. Suddenly two men sprang out from the bushes and attacked me. I was wholly unarmed, but made what resistance I could, I assure you; but they had bludgeons, and, as I afterward discovered, one of them had a pistol. Their object was robbery, but after they had secured my watch and purse, they beat me senseless, shot at me, and threw me into the river."

"I see—dead men tell no tales," said the landlord.

"The plunge into the river," continued the stranger, "partially restored my senses, but I was never much of a swimmer, and I should have been swept away to destruction by the swift tide, had not chance thrown your daughter in my way."

"Say Providence," said the landlord, gravely.

"As you please," replied the stranger, with a smile. "Chance or Providence—neither ever presented itself in a lovelier form," he added, bowing to the blushing girl.

Ringold's brow darkened.

"Look here, mounseer," said he, "we are plain English folks, and don't desire none of your high-flown speeches. The gal did her duty—no more, no less. It cost her a hard tussle, and she shows it. So, Jessie, my dear, you'll go to bed. You looked like a rose this morning, and now you're a lily-of-the-valley. Good-night, child."

Jessie took up her candle, nodded to the guest, and kissing her father on the forehead, glided away to her nest, happy as a bird.

"And now, mounseer, after a bit of supper, I'll show you to your room," said the landlord. "I think you'll be well enough to travel in the morning, and of course the Elm Tree Inn has no accommodations for such a fine gentleman as you are. You'll find your quarters narrow, but the beds are clean, at least, and I'll be bound you won't quarrel with my charges."

The stranger ate some cold beef and bread, and drank a mug of ale, after which Ringold showed him to his quarters, and bade him good night.

"Quite an adventure!" thought the stranger, as he undressed himself—"the robbery and rescue—the beautiful English miss—the old father, with his cropped head and air of a gladiator. Decidedly, it was my good star that took me to Richmond. But my time is brief; whatever I do must be done quickly. Then, adieu to liberty; Paris and a stern father await me. No matter, it's all the same."

Here he blew out the light, sprang into bed, and was sound asleep in less than five minutes. Youth and health had borne him triumphantly through his misadventure.

CHAPTER II.

THE DIAMOND EAR-RINGS.

The earliest rays of an unclouded sun, penetrating the white muslin curtains that draped his bedroom window, fell full on the face of the sleeping Frenchman and awakened him. He opened his eyes and gazed round him with the bewilderment that every one feels in a strange place. A moment's reflection, however, sufficed to restore his recollection of the events of the preceding evening. He sprang out of bed, and, parting the window curtains, looked out on the pleasant landscape. The storm of the preceding evening had cleared the atmosphere, and there was almost an American brightness in the lovely morning sky.

There was a bustle about the inn door. A couple of huge wagons with canvas tilts, each drawn by four powerful horses, had halted while the wagoners took a morning draught of ale and lighted their pipes. Three or four colliers from a barge that lay at the wharf were lounging on the bench at the door.

The Frenchman proceeded to dress himself, casting many a rueful glance at the stains on his garments, which all his labor was insufficient to remove. Still his examination of himself in the glass was not unsatisfactory.

"A little pale," he thought; "but that is interesting. Even this slight wound tells of peril encountered and survived, and gives an air of romance to my expression."

He rang the bell, and procured from the servant who answered his summons a supply of writing materials. Then he sat down and penned the following note, which we translate and transcribe:

"ELM TREE INN, RICHMOND.

"MR. PAUL AUBREY, Bridge Hotel, London:

"Last night I was robbed of my watch and money, thrown into the river, and saved from drowning by a miracle. Yet I escaped almost unhurt. I do you the justice to imagine, Mr. Paul, that you will be very sorry to learn of my escape. What a windfall my cash, clothes, and jewels would have been, had your master been a victim of an English footpad! However, fate has willed otherwise, and you must content yourself with robbing me by installments, instead of making one grand grab.

"Here are your orders. Directly on the receipt of this you will get the inclosed draft on my bankers for £200 cashed. Then you will pack up a good supply of clothes, together with my enameled watch and the pair of diamond ear-rings I bought for Victorine, the danseuse—I have another use for them. Pack the money, clothes, etc., in my leather valise, and send them to me by the carrier so that they will reach me this afternoon. Don't come yourself for three days, but then without fail. And remember, at your peril, that you are *now* in the service of

"VICTOR MARSAY."

The signature was underscored by three parallel dashes.

The writer knew perfectly well whom he was addressing—a Corsican by birth, though of French parents' a man wily as a fox, unscrupulous as a politician—a valet of the old school, trained in the ways of the corrupt *noblesse*, necessarily a confidant, willingly a tool a scamp by nature and profession. Mr. Paul Aubrey gloried in his reputation, and there is reason to fear that Mr. Victor Marsay, as he chooses to style himself, was not altogether unworthy of such a servant Indeed, he had grown up in a period of universal corruption, when there were in France only two classes, the oppressors and the oppressed—rich men and paupers—Dives and Lazarus—they who lived on the fat of the land, and they who fed on the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table.

Victor Marsay did not belong to the nobility, but to the financial class, and the money-lords bore themselves quite as proudly as the nobility. Nor were the gates of royalty barred against their approach. The sons of bankers shared the luxuries of the sons of dukes, and, like them, looked down on the people as mere hewers of wood and drawers of water.

A change had now taken place. The people were rising; the Bastile had fallen; the famished tiger had shown his fangs and claws; but still the aristocratic youth of France did not dream of the overwhelming eruption of that volcano on the surface of which they danced, drank, gambled, made love, and fought duels.

Victor Marsay had no one heart-throb in common with the people. He could not understand their wants, for he had never felt a want himself. How could he, over his roast partridge, venison, and champagne, be made to believe that men, women, and children were dying in Paris for the lack of a morsel of black bread? How could he know the value of a sou, who had had only to put his hand in his pocket to withdraw it full of golden louis? His mother had died young; his father had exercised little or no control over him, though he was a stern, hard man, with the capability of being tyrannical, and so he had grown up a selfish egotist.

All that had been required of him was to master the details of the banking business, and his quickness and intelligence had made this an easy task. He had never been much confined to the desk. His father possessed an ample fortune, and there seemed to exist no necessity for the young man to exert himself. So he came and went pretty much as he chose—rode, hunted, traveled, and enjoyed himself. Self was the idol of his worship. From the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same he thought of himself only, never of others.

When he had sealed his letter he took his hat, and inquiring his way to the post-office, deposited the missive himself, and then strolled leisurely back to the inn, where he ordered breakfast.

Old Jerry Ringold greeted him gruffly. The landlord of the Elm Tree Inn had a true Englishman's hatred for a Frenchman. He religiously believed that all Frenchmen passed their days in dancing, drinking sour wine, and eating frogs. Also that they were all treacherous as cats and cunning as foxes. He believed that no Frenchman could sail a ship or ride a horse. As the result of his creed, he despised and condemned the entire nation. So Mr. Victor Marsay did not receive the usual cordial greeting that awaits the guest in merry England.

"You're up to time, I see," he said, glancing at the young Frenchman, "after all your hammering and ducking last night."

"A little weak," replied Victor, smiling, "that's all. And how is my fair preserver this morning?" inquired the Frenchman, with an air of interest.

"If you mean my daughter," replied the landlord, "she's well enough. Never you trouble your head about her; she won't trouble herself about you. I'm glad to find you all right, mounseer. I suppose, after breakfast, you'll be jogging to London."

"What! in this plight?" said Marsay, glancing at his soiled dress. "By no means, my friend. Besides, I have no money."

"Don't let that trouble you," said the landlord, eagerly. "I'll trust you."

"I'm in no hurry to leave," replied the Frenchman, carelessly. "I never slept better in my life than I did last night, and I'm delighted with the scenery hereabouts. But I have sent for my clothes and for my servant. When they arrive, I'm off."

"There's your breakfast-bell," said the landlord, evidently glad to get rid of his guest.

A smart young girl, wearing a frilled cap and pink ribbons, waited on the table. The affability of the handsome young Frenchman quite won her heart, and she was disposed to enter into conversation with him after the familiar fashion of continental servants.

"Does Miss Jessie assist her father in keeping the inn?" he asked, carelessly, as he sipped his tea.

"Oh, no! indeed," replied the girl. "Master wouldn't let her touch her hand to a thing. She's

quite the lady. And she's had the very best of eddications. She can do embroidery, and play on the harpsichord, and draw pictures in injy ink, and talk French."

"Talk French?"

"Yes, indeed, I've heard her talking it with old ma'amselle."

"And who is old ma'amselle?"

"She is an old French lady that lives over yonder in that white cottage by the willows there you can see from the window. Quite the lady. They say's she's quality. Her manners is sich. Miss goes over there every afternoon to take lessons. I don't see the use of knowing French myself."

"Indeed! suppose a Frenchman, like myself, should say to you, as I say, *tu es tres jolie, mon enfant.*"

"I should so like to know what that means," cried the girl.

"There it is, now, if you knew French," continued Victor, as he rose from the table, "you would know that it was my opinion that you are a very pretty girl."

"Well, I vow!" cried the girl, to herself, turning as red as the ribbon in her cap. "The impertinence of them French gents beats everything to pieces. And such a queer lingo! How was it he said it? Something about *jolly!*"

"So!" thought Marsay, as he sat down on the bench at the inn door. "The landlord's daughter talks French, a mode of communication by which her old bull-dog of a father may be kept in the dark if we have to talk together in his presence. And miss is quite the lady, is she? The daughter of a roadside innkeeper a lady! Then, of course, the old crop-headed boar is a gentleman. Oh, these English!"

In the afternoon his trunk arrived with a note from Mr. Paul Aubrey. Mr. Aubrey ventured to present to monsieur his humble and respectful felicitations on his escape from the peril which had jeapordized his precious life. Mr. Paul Aubrey would have expressed his sentiments in person but for the absolute prohibition of monsieur. Mr. Paul Aubrey looked forward with impatience to the time when he should be permitted again to behold monsieur. He had accomplished his instructions to the letter, and trusted that his zeal and promptitude would spare him in future from such unkind insinuations as monsieur's dispatch contained. With prayers for monsieur's health and happiness, he remained, etc., etc.

Marsay tossed aside the note contemptuously and then arrayed himself from head to foot in one of the elegant suits his valet had sent him. Then he put a little case containing a pair of diamond ear-rings in his pocket, secured his money, and sallied forth for a walk.

Having ascertained from Emma, the girl who waited on him at table, the hour at which Jessie returned from her French lesson, he timed his movements so that he encountered her just as she was leaving the door of her instructress.

He accosted her in French, and she replied fluently in the same language. She was evidently pleased to meet him, and struck with the improvement which the change of dress made in his appearance. Her satisfaction, however, was not shared by a surly bull-dog that followed her, for he eyed the Frenchman in a very sinister way, and uttered a most inhospitable growl.

"Be quiet, Bill," said the girl, and the growl subsided into a dissatisfied whine.

Marsay now poured out his thanks for the service Jessie Ringold had rendered him, far more eloquently than he could have done in English, and his tones were so musical, his expression so winning, that the girl, unused to the society of gentlemen, yet refined by nature and acquired taste, listened to him with a strange fluttering of the heart.

To both of them the walk home seemed very short, and neither, perhaps, was particularly gratified to find old Jerry Ringold waiting on his door step, not looking particularly amiable.

"I ventured to escort your daughter home, my friend," said the Frenchman, "I thought in this secluded spot——"

"No apologies, and no thanks," interrupted the landlord, gruffly. "Bill was protection enough—wasn't you, Bill? Show your teeth to the gentleman."

The animal responded to his master's compliment by wagging his stump of a tail, and to his master's command by opening his jaws, and displaying a formidable set of fangs.

"Isn't that a lovely bull-dog, mounseer?" said the landlord, diverted from more unpleasant thoughts by admiration of his four-footed favorite. "Ah, sir, that is an animal that a man may well be proud of. He can pull down a bull as if he was a chicken. No fear of burglars when he's around. He wouldn't kill one outright, but he'd just lay him on the ground and watch him, unless, indeed, he was to try to get away, and then he'd pull his wind-pipe out'n him."

They had now entered the sitting-room.

"Mr. Ringold," said Marsay, producing the ear-rings which Aubrey had sent him, "I ask your permission to present mademoiselle with this slight token of my recognition of her services last night."

The landlord took the trinkets in his huge hand.

"Them are must have cost a heap of money, mounseer," he said.

"Whatever they are worth," replied Marsay, indifferently, "I am amply able to purchase such toys."

"What do you say, daughter? Do as you please about it," said Ringold, handing the jewels to Jessie.

The girl gazed on them with true feminine admiration, but said, "They are far too beautiful and costly for me."

Marsay told her in French that if they were ten times more beautiful, the brightness of her eyes made them appear like pebbles. It was a hint to her to answer him in the same language, but she spoke in her own tongue.

"I cannot receive so costly a present. It would look like taking pay for an impulsive action—a deed of duty."

"That's right, my girl," said her father, nodding his head, approvingly.

"You look at it in a false light," said Marsay, deeply offended. "I told you that the baubles were trifles to me, and as for the thought of recompensing you for your inestimable service, nothing of the kind entered my head. I merely thought that this token might remind you of the night when you saved a fellow-creature from a watery grave."

"As if I could ever forget it or him!" thought Jessie.

"But no matter," continued Marsay, "I have been misconstrued."

At this moment Emma, the waiting maid, entered for orders.

"Here, Emma," said the Frenchman, "you've been very attentive to me at table. I always give the servants something. Rid me of these trinkets."

And he handed the girl the ear-rings.

"Oh, my?" said the girl, delightedly, "I'm ever so much obliged to you, mounseer. They're real sparklers! Why, they must have cost you ten shillings!"

"Ten shillings, you fool!" growled Ringold. "Why, they're dimonds!"

"Dimonds!" almost shrieked the girl. "Why, I never seed no dimonds afore—I didn't know what they was."

"I can tell you," said the landlord, with a glance at Marsay, "they're the bait that Old Nick carries in his basket when he goes a fishing after women's souls."

CHAPTER III.

BEATING A RETREAT.

The pretty waiting-maid glanced uneasily at the giver of the diamonds, but as the handsome young Frenchman did not at all resemble the popular ideal of the fisher of souls, her momentary scruples vanished, and she hastened away to attach the brilliants to the lobes of her pretty little pink ears, and the consciousness of their possession prompted a hundred coquettish tossings of her giddy head, as she performed her office at the solitary supper-table of the wealthy guest that evening. But from him she attracted no more attention than if she had been the veriest boor that ever boggled at changing a plate or handing a cup of tea. He sat at his meal, as gloomy and morose as the traditional Englishman of the splenetic and suicidal month of November. He, a Parisian *elegant*, rebuffed by an innkeeper's daughter! He would humble her pride, and make her bitterly rue the hour in which she had offended him.

The next morning she passed him as he stood on the door-step. He saluted her coldly and silently. She looked surprised and hurt, and paused a moment as if she wished to say something, but checking herself went on her way, without speaking, and with a drooping air.

Marsay kept his room all the morning, reading newspapers, but in the afternoon he dressed himself elaborately, took his hat, and walked over to the white house by the willows, where he had met Jessie the day before. As she came out after her lesson, her face brightened up as she recognized the Frenchman and responded to his pleasant greeting, and she was too artless to conceal her gratification.

"I was so afraid," she said, "that I had seriously offended you by refusing your gift; but I assure you I meant no harm."

"You can make me forget that sad affair, Miss Ringold—make me happy indeed, if you will."

"In what way?" she asked.

"By accepting another token," Marsay hastened to say, slipping a diamond ring from his finger. "There was a mutual misunderstanding; your acceptance of the trifle will ratify a treaty of peace."

Jessie hesitated a moment, and then took the ring. If she but knew it, that splendid solitaire was worth a dozen pairs of ear-rings such as those she had rejected the day before. But the deed was done, and the jewel sparkled on her slender finger.

"How can I thank you for this?" she asked, gently.

"By saying nothing at all about it—only wearing it for my sake," was the reply.

They loitered together on the homeward path. A handsome couple—he in the prime of manhood where youth ended, she as lovely a specimen of the frank blooming English girl as could be found within the limits of the United Kingdom.

When they entered the little sitting-room, the sparkle of the diamond, as Jessie raised her hand to remove her hat, caught the eye of her father, but he made no remark, though his brow darkened. He held a newspaper in his hand, but did not seem to give it much attention. Bill, the bull-dog, having performed escort duty, now went out and sat down by his master's chair, eying the Frenchman as surlily as the landlord did. A less self-possessed man than Victor Marsay would have been checked by these demonstrations of distrust and hostility, yet he appeared completely at his ease.

He addressed the landlord's daughter in French, and they were soon engaged in animated conversation. He spoke of his traveling adventures, and though he described places with which Jessie was perfectly familiar through the medium of books, yet the brilliant Frenchman imparted a new charm to the same scenes by the vivacity and vitality of his narratives.

The girl seemed to be carried away from the humble sphere in which she had grown up, and to be actually led by the hand through the stately halls of the Tuileries and Fontainebleau, along the romantic borders of the Rhine or through the green valleys of Switzerland, with the snow-clad Alps pointing their white summits toward the azure sky.

In the midst of the scenery he painted, Marsay located many a thrilling personal adventure. He had fallen into a crevice in the midst of a sea of ice; he had fought with brigands in Italy; he had nearly perished in an eruption of Vesuvius. While disclaiming any merit, and mentioning perils dared and overcome as mere ordinary incidents of travel, he let his auditor infer that he was a hero, trusting to the logical deduction of her youthful romance.

All this was Greek to the old landlord, who hated the incomprehensible sounds of the language which his daughter listened to with parted lips, and changing color, and sparkling eyes. It was thus "the gentle lady wedded to the Moor" was wooed and won by her dusky adorer.

> "She thanked me,
> And bade me, if I had a friend that loved her,
> I should but teach him how to tell my story,
> And that would woo her. Upon this hint I spake—
> She loved me for the dangers I had passed."

Victor Marsay was too good a story-teller not to understand the art of leaving his hearer in suspense. He was in the midst of an adventure with robbers in Calabria, when he suddenly broke off, apologized for his tediousness, and said he would finish the narrative at some future time.

"What was he telling you?" asked Ringold, when Marsay had retired.

"Stories of his traveling adventures, papa," replied Jessie.

"Yes, and every third word a lie, I'll wager," said the old Englishman. "I hate that fellow—I hate his grins, and his shrugs, and the very sound of his voice. And he's been giving you a ring, I see. Let's look at it."

Jessie, hurt and vexed, extended her hand.

"A matter of eighty pounds wouldn't pay for a stone like that," growled Ringold. "You must give it back to him."

"That would hurt his feelings, father."

"Who cares for his feelings?" growled the Englishman. Then he added, in a softer tone, "Take care, my pretty Jessie. The fellow is only a trifler, like all his countrymen. He cares nothing for you. There can come no good of hearing his fine speeches and taking his fine gifts; and remember, that if any harm should come to you, my pretty pet, it would break your old father's heart."

Jessie threw her arms about the old man's neck and pressed a kiss upon his rugged cheek; but when she went up to her room, she pressed to her lips the ring that sparkled on her finger, and resolved that she would never part with it.

The next day Marsay dispatched a brief note to Paul Aubrey, commanding him to remain in London until further orders.

In the course of the day he contrived to meet Jessie, and to persuade her to take a long walk with him. When they returned to the inn, her flushed cheeks and excited manner convinced her father that something had occurred.

Sending his daughter to her chamber, he requested Marsay to follow him to a small room where he was accustomed to transact private business.

"Mr. Marsay," said he, when they were alone, "my daughter is a motherless girl. I'm a rough old fellow to have charge of a girl like that, but I've been a kind father, and know how to do my duty to her. She is not fit company for you, nor you for her, and the sooner you relieve this place of your presence the better for all concerned. You understand me?"

"Not quite," replied Marsay, "and it's very clear that you misunderstand me. In what have I excited your suspicions?"

"By hanging 'round my daughter, waylaying her, and jabbering to her in your cursed lingo, when the

king's English is good enough for any honest man who knows how to speak it."

"I surely meant no harm by my respectful attentions to a young lady to whom I am under the greatest of obligations, Mr. Ringold. If I have used my own language, it was because it was easier for me, and as Miss Ringold was studying French, I thought it might be of advantage to her. If you think I employed it for the purpose of concealment, you are very much mistaken. I will be perfectly frank with you. I sought an opportunity of speaking privately with Miss Ringold this afternoon, to tell her that I loved her and to ask her to share my fortune."

"And what do you mean by your fortune?" cried old Ringold. "Who knows anything about you? You have fine clothes, and jewels, and money; so has many a gambler and swindler one day who hasn't a penny the next; so has many a burglar after cracking a rich crib."

"I have given you my name, sir."

"Who knows if it is your true name?" asked Ringold, looking him full in the face, and he perceived, or imagined, that the Frenchman started at this question. "I have no opinion of a man," continued Ringold, getting warm and excited, "who, after only three days' acquaintance, offers to marry any girl."

"Sir, I am a gentleman," said Marsay.

"And my girl, although of humble origin," retorted Ringold, "according to my notions, is fit for a peer of the realm; according to yours, if you are a gentle man and not an adventurer, she is only fit to be your servant or your slave. You are yet to prove yourself a true and honorable man. Even if you could prove it, and even if you did marry her, you would weary of her and cast her adrift in less than six weeks. By my consent, my girl shall never marry a Frenchman. Now you have had *my* answer; what answer did *she* give you?"

"I CAN'T SHAKE HANDS WITH A MAN I'D KNOCK DOWN AND TRAMPLE ON IF HE CAME NEAR MY DOOR."

"She referred me to you."

"All right, then, Monsieur Marsay. After what has passed between us, if you are a gentleman, you won't think of remaining under the roof of even a public house where you're not wanted. You've made trouble enough here already. So to-morrow morning I shall expect you to leave."

"As I am a gentleman, sir," replied Marsay, "a fact which you absurdly doubt, I cannot think of remaining another night under your inhospitable roof, no, nor of eating another meal here. Make out your bill and I'll pay it on the spot, and if I can get a conveyance to London——"

Ringold sprang up and rang the stable-bell.

"Joe," he said, to the hostler who answered the ring, "put the brown cob to the dog-cart, and come round to the front door directly. You are to drive this gentleman and his luggage to London."

While the man was harnessing the horse, and while Marsay was packing his valise, Ringold sought his daughter and told her to make out the bill, for it would have taken him half an hour to make such a document legible.

"Is Mr. Marsay going to leave us?" she asked, greatly agitated.

"Ay, girl, as soon as the bill is ready."

Jessie's fingers trembled as she performed the task, and her agitation was not diminished by what her father said to her as she wrote.

"Harkee, girl, dismiss that fellow from your mind, d'ye hear? He's a knave and an impostor. When I charged him with going under a false name he changed color, brazen dog as he is."

"Oh, you judge him too harshly," she ventured to say.

"Curse him," cried the old man. "It was an evil hour when he set foot over my threshold. I wish his carcass had floated down to the sea. We have warmed a viper into life. But if he ever comes prowling round this house again——"

He left the implied menace incomplete, but his brow darkened, and his iron right hand clenched convulsively.

With a faint sigh Jessie gave her father the bill. It was not like her usual elegant penmanship. He caught up a pen and affixed to the receipt his own clumsy signature, emptied the sand-box on it, and strode heavily down stairs.

"I want one pound, ten, and six," he said, curtly, to Marsay.

"But surely that doesn't include the horse and cart?" said Marsay.

"It includes everything," said Ringold. "Stop, I had forgotten something."

He rushed back to his daughter's room.

"You came for the ring," she said, faintly.

Delicacy told her that after Marsay had been driven from the house, she could not retain it, even if its value had been nominal.

"You are a good girl," said Ringold, kissing her, and little dreaming of the agony the surrender of the love-token cost her.

The landlord re-entered the sitting-room.

"Here is your ring, sir," he said.

"I decline to take it," said Marsay.

"My daughter sends it back to you, she will not keep it," said the landlord, firmly.

After a moment's hesitation Marsay placed it on his finger.

"You are determined to drive me away in your debt," said he.

"Don't talk of debt," said Ringold. "We shall soon forget ever having seen you." And he thrust the amount of Marsay's bill into his pocket. "Even this money goes into the poor-box next Sunday," he added.

"At least you will shake hands at parting," said Marsay.

"No," replied Ringold, bluntly, almost savagely, "I've shaken hands with men that I was going to try to hammer out of time, in my old wicked days, but then we were fighting only for the honor of the ring. I can't shake hands with a man that I'd knock down and trample on if he ever came near my doors again."

"As you will," replied Marsay, haughtily, and he strode out of the inn without another word.

As he seated himself in the dog-cart, he cast up a glance at Jessie's lattice. It was pushed open by a slender hand, a pale and tearful face showed itself for a moment, and then a half-opened rosebud fell from the window.

Marsay caught it, pressed it to his lips, and then hid it in his breast.

"She loves me," he thought. "It was all her father's doings. With such a friend in the garrison I shall yet baffle the old scoundrel. Drive on, boy!" he called aloud to the hostler, and the dog-cart rattled away upon the London road.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FLIGHT.

"Ah!" said Joe, the hostler, as, an hour and a half afterward, he rattled up to the Elm Tree Inn, and jumped out of the dog-cart; "that mounseer is a real gentleman. Why, guv'nor, he guv'd I a guinea."

"You're back quick," growled the innkeeper, displeased at the simple fellow's praise of the man he hated.

"The cob's a good 'un to go, though he's a rum 'un to look at, guv'nor. I didn't take nobody's dust on the road."

"See you rub him dry before you give him a drop of water or an oat," said Ringold. "And now, tell me, where does this fellow live?"

"I don't know," replied the other.

"Don't know, you fool! and you've just driven him home!"

"I didn't drive him home, at least, not the whole way, guv'nor. When we come to Lambeth, he told I to pull up, and guv'd I a guinea—not for the 'ouse, but for myself, he said. And then he jumped out, and called a cab, and whatever he told the driver, I don't know, but he druv off like a flash of lightning."

"IT IS NOT YOUR LIFE, JESSIE, BUT MINE THAT IS IN PERIL.

"You ought to have followed him."

"I had no orders, guv'nor. He guv'd I a guinea."

"Yes, and you'd sell your soul for twenty shillings. Be off to the stable with your horse. If you've foundered him, I'll break every bone in your body!"

"The guv'nor be in a rare humor, to be sure," said the hostler to himself, as he retired to his quarters. "Howsomever, hard words break no bones. I wonder what he's got ag'in the Frenchman. Ah! he were a real gentleman—he guv'd I a guinea!"

"I was right about the villain," muttered the landlord. "The way he vanished in London confirms my suspicions. However, if he comes near the Elm Tree Inn again, Bill and I will take care of him—won't we, Bill?"

The animal, as if he understood the reference to himself, showed his white fangs and uttered a savage snarl.

That day and the next were dreary days to Jessie Ringold. In spite of her efforts to appear cheerful, she could not hide the depression of her spirits from her father, who was pained, but not surprised, to observe the change. That she had been fascinated by the attentions of the stranger he was well aware, but he was also convinced that it was only a passing infatuation, and that his prompt action had prevented serious results.

He was not versed, however, in the mysteries of the female heart. A plain, blunt man, there was not a particle of romance in his nature, and he was wholly unaware of the wild dreams and wishes that Jessie had conceived and nurtured in solitude, fostered by a course of exciting reading. He knew not that her heart, fitted for the charm of love, had kindled into a flame at the first spark, and that it was no transient passion that had taken possession of her whole being.

The means he had adopted to meet the emergency were crude and harsh. A woman only could have dealt with the crisis, and the only woman in whom poor Jessie confided was the very last person in the world to give her good advice.

This friend was old Miss Larmont, her French teacher, who lived in the white house by the willows. Miss Larmont was a tender-hearted, sentimental old soul, guileless as a child, and giddy as a girl, though nearly sixty years of age. Forty years before she had been betrothed to a young French guardsman, an utterly worthless fellow, who would have made her wretched had he married her; for he proposed doing so only because she then had a little fortune. One of his nation has said that "to assure the happiness of a man he requires two women, one whom he loves, and the other who loves him." Now Captain Beaumont was really in love with a very different person from poor plain Miss Larmont, who was that other who loved him—yea, worshiped the very ground trodden by his feet.

Fortunately, one evening a brother officer, whom he had falsely accused of cheating at cards, threw a wine-glass in Captain Beaumont's face, and that chivalrous gentleman having demanded satisfaction, received it in the shape of a very vigorous thrust which sent a sharp three-cornered rapier quite through and through his heart, thus demonstrating that he possessed an organ the existence of which those who knew him best had hitherto denied.

Miss Larmont went into hysterics and deep mourning, proposed joining the Carmelites, but became an unprofessed Sister of Charity, spent all her little money in alms-giving, and then emigrated to England, where she gained a scanty livelihood by teaching her language, by needlework, and by fancy painting.

The gentle spinster half suspected poor Jessie's secret, and sympathized deeply with her, the more so since she fancied she saw in Marsay a faint resemblance to her lost idol, the departed guardsman.

Two days elapsed, and Jessie Ringold, generally so punctual, missed her usual lessons. Early on the third day the postman left a letter at Miss Larmont's door.

This was an event, for she was not in the habit of receiving letters, and the address set her heart flut-

tering. She had to pause some moments before she mustered up courage to break the seal, and during that pause a strange fancy flitted through her poor old giddy head, a head that harbored a thousand fantastic chimeras.

It must be, she thought, that some gay cavalier had seen her and been smitten by her faded charms, and after pining in secret a reasonable time, had taken a pen and paper to confess his love. Poor old Miss Larmont! She was as young at heart as when she used to hang on the arm of the French guardsman and think herself the most charming of women, as he was assuredly the most adorable of men.

She sighed as she looked at the unopened letter—sighed with pity for the disappointment of the unknown aspirant when he should learn that her heart was buried in that little nook of Pere-la-Chaise where she used to hang wreathes of immortelles on a marble cross.

Finally she opened the letter, and out dropped another addressed in the same handwriting to Miss Jessie Ringold. This she slipped into her pocket, and then proceeded to read the one addressed to herself.

It was from Victor Marsay, who appealed to her feelings to excuse him for the liberty he had taken in addressing her. But he was her countryman, he was in love, and he had heard enough of her to know that he could confide in her without fear of betrayal. He was an honorable man, and had offered his heart and hand to Miss Ringold, who reciprocated his attachment. Her father had insulted and driven him away. He was in despair—nay, on the point of ending his days by his own hand. He would do so unless he could obtain a final interview with the lady of his love. Would Miss Larmont save the life of a countryman by giving the inclosed letter to Miss Ringold?

The poor old soul was terribly agitated when she read this letter, and was uncertain what she ought to do, when Jessie herself appeared, and throwing herself into the old lady's arms, told her that she was utterly wretched and wished that she were dead.

Thus Miss Larmont, as she looked at the matter, held two lives in her hands.

The image of the stern old father, justly indignant at the resumption of an intimacy which he had forbidden, vanished before the actual presence of the unhappy girl whom his harshness had driven to despair. She hesitated no longer.

"Dry your eyes, my precious," she said, kissing Jessie on the forehead. "There's balm in Gilead, and I thank Heaven that my poor old hand is privileged to dispense it."

Without another word she gave Jessie her lover's letter. It was torn open and its contents were devoured on the instant. It was very brief. It merely conveyed the intelligence that the writer would be at Miss Larmont's house that evening, and he implored the innkeeper's daughter to meet him if she valued his happiness or life.

"What shall I do?" she asked, handing the note to Miss Larmont.

How much depended on that answer! If the old lady had been worthy of the girl's confidence her appeal would have been the wisest thing in the world. It was in fact the most ill-judged. The romance of the situation had clouded what little judgment the poor old woman possessed. Alas! evil counsel as often proceeds from a weak head as from a bad heart. Folly is the handmaiden of vice.

"Come to me this evening, my precious," answered Miss Larmont. "I don't feel quite well just now, and I wish you would postpone your lesson till this evening. You can tell your father so."

"But are you really unwell, my dear Miss Larmont?" asked Jessie, guilelessly.

The old lady blushed a little.

"I am not exactly myself," she said, with some confusion. "You can tell your father I'd rather you came this evening."

How easily we catch at any pretext which tends to gratify our secret wishes. Jessie did not hesitate to plead the excuse furnished her by her well-meaning but most incapable confidante to obtain her father's consent to return to Miss Larmont's in the evening.

On his part he was so well pleased to see her return with bright eyes and a cheerful expression, that he would have granted her anything in reason. Now she had often visited Miss Larmont's home in the evening, sometimes remaining until a late hour, when she used to let herself in with a pass-key, and occasionally staying all night. That she was going thither to-night to meet the man he had just driven off he could not for an instant imagine.

"She has been confessing her folly to the old lady," he thought, "and the old girl has laughed her out of it. These women know how to coddle each other. This visit has done her a heap of good, and another will set her all right. If I wasn't such a numbskull I'd have got old ma'amselle in the first place to talk to her myself."

"Can you go?" he said, in reply to his daughter's request. "Of course you can. Only just take Bill with you."

So in the twilight, Jessie walked over to her friend's, accompanied by the dog. Old Jerry watched her from his door-step, and then turned into the house to attend to his customers.

The evening was far advanced when Miss Larmont and Jessie, who were sitting together in a little drawing-room, heard the deep growl of the dog outside, followed by a tap at the front-door of the cottage. Jessie hastened to open it and was folded in the arms of her lover. She brought him into the drawing-room and presented him to Miss Larmont, who, after a reasonable time, passed in conversation on indifferent topics, discreetly retired.

It was then that Marsay threw himself at Jessie's feet and poured out his protestations, his sorrows, and his supplications. His happiness, nay more, his life, he said, was in her hands. He renewed his offer of his heart and hand. He told her, with apparent frankness, that his father wished him to marry another and would never consent to their union; still, that, as an only son, if he were to present to him Jessie as his wife, he would be forgiven. Nothing, however, but a previous marriage would avail.

"JESSIE IS GONE!—ABDUCTED! IN THE HANDS OF A VILLAIN!"

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There was enough of truth in this statement to enable him to sustain it by the most persuasive eloquence. Love gave a fire to his words and a fascination to his pleadings that were nearly irresistible. And Jessie's father! His opposition to the match was wholly unreasonable. With as much delicacy as was consistent with the argument, Marsay urged that the son of a banker was certainly not unworthy, socially, of the daughter of an innkeeper. Had he been permitted to press his suit, he could easily have overcome the old man's objections; but that course was barred to him. Ringold had threatened him with violence if he ever dared approach him, and the innkeeper was not a man to recede from a position he had once assumed. Here again Marsay had truth to support him. However justifiable his motives were, the means employed by the innkeeper had been harsh in the extreme. Arriving finally at the conclusion of his plea, Victor urged instant flight and marriage—the means for both had been prepared.

But on the brink of this decisive step Jessie Ringold shrank back.

"Do not urge me," she said. "I cannot, I must not yield—though I love you, Victor, better than my life."

"It is not your life, Jessie, but mine that is in peril," answered Marsay, gloomily, as he rose to his feet.

"Be content, for the present, dear Victor, with the assurance of my love," pleaded the girl. "Let us wait for better times."

"My father's importunity admits of no delay," answered Marsay. "I can only silence him by telling him that I am married. This night unemployed separates us forever. But fear not, darling—I will never be untrue to you. If you do not accept me to-night for your husband I will never be another's. The hand that you reject will press no woman's hand again, but it will know how to do its master's will and end its master's woe."

"What terrible meaning is embodied in those words?" exclaimed Jessie, her heart contracting in almost the agony of death.

"No matter," answered Marsay, sadly. "One kiss, dearest, the last!"

"Oh, retract or explain your menace, Victor!" cried the weeping girl, clinging to her lover.

"If we part to-night," said Marsay, in his deepest tone, "we part forever. You will never hear of me again, but you will know that I am dead."

"Dead! and I your destroyer!" exclaimed the agonized girl. "Victor—dearest Victor—you know that I am yours—yours wholly. You are my love—my life—my fate! Take me then—dispose of my existence—but, oh! be kind to me, for you know that I am motherless."

"Kind to you, my precious one? You know that I am as wholly yours as you are mine. But hasten—every moment wasted here is fraught with danger."

"Let us wait for Miss Larmont," pleaded Jessie.

"She must not know of this," whispered Marsay. "Lean on me—this way."

He drew her from the house. The dog was by the door, but made no effort to follow them.

"Good-by, Bill," said Jessie, stooping down to pat the animal's head, but Marsay hurried her away.

Supporting, almost carrying her, he made his way through a shaded path to a spot where there was a waiting cab, into which he hurried her. He gave an order to the coachman, sprang into the vehicle, and they were driven off at speed toward London.

At the same moment a post-chaise was stationed in the rear of Miss Larmont's house. The driver was on the box, and by the door stood a man in a slouch hat and cloak, holding the arm of a vailed woman.

Just then a benighted laborer, making his way home from the ale-house, stumbled upon this mysterious group.

"Begar!" cried the man in the cloak, "dees ees most onlocky," and he hurried the female into the carriage. "What you doing here, sare?" he asked of the laborer.

"Going home," answered the man, with an oath. "What are *you* doing, mounseer?"

"Never mind," answered the Frenchman; "zat is my beezness. Here, I gives you money to shut your eyes and mouze, and never tell nobody what you see and hear."

"All right, mounseer," replied the man, catching the crown-piece that was flung to him.

The Frenchman told the driver to take the York road, jumped into the post-chaise, and it was driven rapidly off.

"What, I wonder, is old ma'amselle going off at this time of night for?" thought the man. "However, these French varmints are just simply unaccountable."

And he stumbled away homeward without giving a second thought to the matter.

CHAPTER V.

THE STRANGER'S VISIT.

Old Jerry Ringold was an early riser. The sun seldom surprised him in bed: and now, on the morning following the events described in the last chapter, as the red rays pierced the dim fog-wreaths rising from the river, they fell on the stalwart figure of the innkeeper as he sat on the bench outside his door, smoking the first of his many daily pipes.

It was not unusual for wagoners and boatmen to give him a call at that hour, but the visit of persons of higher rank at that time of day was a thing quite out of the usual course. He was, therefore, much surprised when two horsemen reined up before the Elm Tree Inn.

The foremost was a stately man of middle age, dressed in deep mourning, and riding a magnificent black horse. He dismounted and handed the reins to his follower, a groom in dark livery, riding a dark, square-built roadster.

The gentleman, after beckoning the landlord to follow him, entered the house, and, as if familiar with the place, led the way directly to the private sitting-room which has been before spoken of, where he threw himself into an arm-chair and motioned to the landlord to follow his example. He was the first to break a silence of a few moments, during which the innkeeper gazed steadily and wonderingly at his countenance.

"Look at me well, my good man, and see if you can recall my features," said the stranger.

Ringold shook his head.

"I've been trying to do so, sir, but I can't remember having ever seen your face before," he answered.

"No wonder," replied the stranger. "You and I have met but once in our lives, and that in the night, and a long while ago; and since then added years and accumulated sorrows must have changed me greatly. I see nothing of myself in the picture that was painted about the time of our meeting."

Ringold was lost in a sea of conjecture as to the identity of his guest.

"I will refresh your memory," resumed the stranger. "We met in this very room seventeen years ago—on the night of June 10, 1773."

"I remember!" cried the landlord. "My wife was then living."

"I gave an infant child—a girl—into your charge to bring up as your own, you having just lost a daughter, and deposited with you a sum of money sufficient to pay all expenses for a number of years——"

"Yes, sir, yes. It is all as you say. You gave us £3,400. The money is safe. I haven't touched a penny of it."

"Do you mean, then, that the child died?" cried the stranger, starting to his feet.

"No, no, Jessie is alive—a grown-up young woman, and beautiful and good as an angel," said the innkeeper. "My poor wife lies yonder in the church-yard. You don't mean to say that you've come to rob me of my Jessie—for Heaven knows I love her as if she were my own. And I won't give her up, d'ye see, till I know you have a legal claim on her."

"Be quiet, my friend," said the stranger. "I will make plain to you everything regarding my connection with that poor motherless girl—and you may rest assured that you shall not be separated unless voluntarily. But I must see the young lady, for I have an important communication to make to her."

It was evident that, though he spoke calmly, he was mastering some deep and perhaps painful emotion. That he was a man of rank and education, his dress, language, and manners showed. Ringold had been convinced of this at their first interview, seventeen years before, though he had then given no name or any clew to his social position.

At this moment a knock was heard at the door, for none of the household ventured to intrude on the landlord's privacy unannounced, and on being invited to enter, Joe, the hostler, came in exhibiting as much excitement as his stolid features were capable of expressing.

"Well, what is it?" asked Ringold, sharply.

"Oh, master, here's a go! a awful go!" cried the hostler. "A death in the family!"

"What do you mean?" cried the landlord.

"It's Bill, master. Sich a dawg as that were! I found him a-lying by the stable-door, not a minute since, with his eyes sot and his body all swolled up. Somebody has gone and p'isened him."

"A favorite bull-dog, sir," said Ringold to the strange gentleman.

At another time he would have been greatly excited at the intelligence.

"Ain't you going to hold a intwitch on the remains?" asked the hostler.

'Go back to the stable," said the landlord, sharply. "Sir," he added to his guest, "I'll send my daughter to you directly."

He went up stairs, and tapped at Jessie's door.

Receiving no answer, he entered the room. She was not there, and the little white bed with the muslin curtains was undisturbed. Then he remembered that Jessie had hinted at the possibility of her passing the night at Miss Larmont's. So he came down to the sitting-room for his hat, and asked his visitor to wait for a few minutes, as he had forgotten that his daughter was to pass the night with a neighbor.

Ringold was soon at Miss Larmont's door. The old lady, like himself, was always up with the lark, and he found her feeding her chickens and pigeons.

"I've come to fetch my daughter, ma'amselle," he said.

"Your daughter!" cried the old lady, in the greatest surprise and consternation. "Why, isn't she at home?"

A strange and sudden terror, a fearful premonition of evil, seized upon the strong man, and his knees shook under him.

"She left me last evening to pass the night with you," he said. "I saw her enter your door. It was at dusk."

"Yes—yes—she came here, certainly," replied the old lady, faint and fluttered. "I had a very pleasant visit from her. She said nothing of staying all night, though. Oh! Holy Virgin! protect her!" Shaking like an aspen, the old lady fell upon her knees and cast an expression of dread and anguish on the ashen face of Ringold. "Kill me!" she cried, "kill me, for I am not fit to live."

"What horrible mystery is this?" cried Ringold, seizing her by the arm and dragging her to her feet. "You are concealing something; holding something back I ought to know. Speak out, or I'll be the death of you!"

"It would be doing me a kindness to kill me," said poor Miss Larmont. "But let me get my breath—and I will tell you all."

She made a full confession of her weakness, of the letters, of the interview. She had left the lovers together, and when she returned to the sitting-room they were gone. But in her simplicity and purity she had suspected no harm, and concluded that Jessie had gone home escorted by Marsay, the darkness of the night requiring his protection and concealing his presence.

But now that Jessie was missing, she remembered hearing the sound of carriage-wheels in the lane behind her house at the time of her disappearance. At the time she attached no significance to it, now it bore a fearful import.

The news almost crazed Ringold.

Miss Larmont at the conclusion of her confession sank fainting to the ground, but he gave her no attention. He ran across the fields like a madman, and bursting into the room where he had left his guest, he cried out:

"Jessie is gone!—abducted!—in the hands of a villain!"

The stranger's features twitched with agony, as if a poniard was piercing his heart, yet he sprang to his feet and placed his hand on the landlord's mouth.

"Hush!" he said. "Do not create unnecessary scandal. If she were your own daughter you should not speak aloud of what has happened. It would be bad enough to compromise the reputation of an innkeeper's daughter; but the daughter of——"

He checked himself on the verge of a revelation.

Ringold uttered a deep groan.

"Whoever you are," he said, wildly, "if you are authorized to avenge the poor girl's wrongs, be merciful, and shoot me dead! I am the criminal! I never should have trusted her out of my sight."

The stranger demanded to know the meaning of these words.

In broken sentences, interrupted by sobs—for the old prize-fighter, in his grief and contrition, was like a child—Ringold related all the particulars of Marsay's stay at the inn, with which the reader is familiar.

At the conclusion of his story the stranger took him by the hand.

"You are an honest man," said he. "You have done your duty according to your lights; you have done far more than could have been expected of you. Had others not been cowardly and derelict, this would not have happened. My friend," he added, seriously, "it may have chanced to you, as to most in your sphere, to envy the great. But those only who live in palaces, and are subjected to the cruel exigencies of title and station, know that gilded misery may be as bitter and soul-rending as the misery of hovels. I, myself, have passed through the fiery furnace of affliction seven times heated. Rank and title, so far from alleviating, were the causes of my suffering. The exigencies of rank and title caused me to be a wanderer on the face of the earth—a dweller with Arabs in the desert—a voyager on distant seas. But enough of this. I had hoped my trials had ended; they are but beginning. Yet this affair, though a sad, may not be a shameful one. You say this man offered to marry her?"

"He so proposed."

"And you refused—because——"

"Because I had no right to give my consent to her marriage while there was a possibility of the appearance of some one who had a legal right to control her. But I'll go further than that, and say, if she'd been my own daughter, I wouldn't have let her marry a doubtful character, least of all a Frenchman."

The stranger reflected a moment, and then said:

"If the only objection to this man is a want of rank and fortune, I shall be the last person to complain. And he may prove a reputable man. If he can only establish a good character, all is well, though not, perhaps, for the best. I know the sins of human nature, yet I cannot think any man with the semblance of a gentleman could betray the woman who had saved his life."

This suggestion somewhat calmed Ringold.

"It may turn out better than I feared," he said.

"The first thing to be done is to get on the track of the fugitives," said the stranger. "If I could discover the course they took, I would follow them myself. I think you said that unhappy old person spoke of hearing a carriage?"

"Miss Larmont?" said Ringold. "Yes, sir."

"And that is all she knows?"

"All; and that amounts to nothing," answered Ringold.

He was here interrupted by one of the waiters, who told him that a man wanted to speak to him, "partikler."

Ringold went into the public room, and found a stolid-looking man, whom he recognized as one of the frequenters of the inn, a laborer, but not a steady one.

This man was the same who had come upon the post-chaise in the rear of Miss Larmont's house the night before.

He said that he was passing her house this morning, on his way to his work, when he found her lying in her garden in a "swound-like." He drew a bucket of water and bathed her face until she revived, when, from her wild and wailing talk, he gathered what had happened.

Now this man, stupid and boorish as he was, was devotedly attached to Jessie, for she had been very kind to his wife when she was lying ill, and he away at the ale-house neglecting his family.

The moment he heard of her being missing, he decided that it was not an elopement, but an abduction, especially since the chief actor was a Frenchman, whom he hated, like all Englishmen of the lower class. He had never seen Marsay, but he had heard of his attentions to Miss Ringold. Of course he made no doubt that the Frenchman who had given him a crown to bribe him to silence was Marsay, and that his vailed companion was the innkeeper's daughter. He remembered distinctly that the postilion was ordered to take the York road.

While listening to this man's statement, Ringold had entirely recovered his self-possession. He told the man that Marsay had proposed for Jessie, and had been ordered from the house because he was a Frenchman, a decision highly approved by his auditor, and he added that he had no doubt they were married by this time and would soon be back to ask his forgiveness, when, of course, he would make matters up, as it couldn't be helped. But he made the man promise that he would tell no living soul—not even his wife—what he had witnessed and what he knew. He ended by offering him a guinea.

"No, no, Mr. Ringold," said the man, "I don't want no pay for doing of my duty, me and mine is too much beholden to Miss Jessie already. As for the Frenchman's silver, I won't even spend it for ale. I'll give it to the first beggar I meet."

With repeated injunctions to silence and with many thanks, the innkeeper dismissed the informant, and hastened back to his guest to impart the tidings he had heard, adding, that he would follow the track of the fugitives immediately, leaving the inn to take care of itself.

"No, my friend," replied the gentleman. "Let that be my task. I am well acquainted with the road and the people on it. I am well mounted, I can procure fresh horses, and my servant is a keen and valuable assistant. Besides, if you were to pursue them it would give rise to scandal and notoriety which must be avoided at all hazards. On the theory of a proposed marriage, I think it unquestionable that they have gone to Scotland, where alliances are contracted with scarcely any formality. I have strong hopes of overtaking them before they cross the border, in which case I shall immediately return here with Jessie. Then, again, at any time they may return voluntarily and you must be here to receive them. Should I fail, I will give you immediate notice if I do not come myself, and you can then decide what other steps are to be taken. Meanwhile, keep this affair perfectly quiet, give out that your daughter has gone to visit some relative in the city, tell any plausible story, for the circumstances justify it, and appear perfectly unconcerned and easy."

"That will be a hard matter, sir," said Ringold, "but I'll try. One thing more before we part."

Going to his private room, he unlocked a small box, and, taking out a roll of bank-notes, he returned to his guest. He offered the money to the gentleman.

"What is this?" asked the latter.

"You'll find a matter of thirty-four hundred pounds," said the innkeeper. "Count the money, sir."

"What! when you have supported an orphan for seventeen years?"

"Hasn't she repaid me a thousand times over?" asked Ringold, bursting into tears. "Hasn't she made me proud and happy? Ah! you don't know the treasure and blessing she was, and I have lost her, thrown away, betrayed my trust! Take the money. Not a penny of it belongs to me."

"If I consent to receive this paltry sum," said the gentleman, finally taking the notes, "it will be only to invest it in your name; even then I shall feel myself your debtor. And now, farewell. Be sure, if you learn anything, to inform me of it by letter."

"But I don't know who to write to or where to direct," answered Ringold.

"Address the Earl of Strathallan, Strathallan Castle, Stirling, Scotland," replied the gentleman.

"What!" exclaimed Ringold. "Are you his grace, the Earl of Strathallan?"

"I am that unhappy man," replied the nobleman. "Better for me had I been born a shepherd on my native mountains."

He grasped the rough hand of the innkeeper, shook it warmly, then passed out of the house without another word, mounted his horse and rode off, sharply followed by his groom at a respectful distance.

"The Earl of Strathallan!" thought Ringold, as he watched his departure. "What could have brought him to my door. Shall I ever know the meaning of this mystery?"

CHAPTER VI.

GOING ASTRAY.

The Earl of Strathallan spared neither himself nor his horses, but pushed northward, closely followed by his groom.

It was not long before he learned tidings of the fugitives; at one inn they had obtained fresh horses, at another a hasty meal. Though, ordinarily, a runaway couple has the sympathies of the lower classes, which are almost invariably against the pursuers, yet this sympathy requires to be paid for to be effective. A liberal expenditure of money secures the retreat of a flying pair, and purchases absolute discretion, if not active aid, on the part of landlords and landladies, hostlers, and postboys. The fugitives in the present instance appeared to have been niggardly in the amount and number of their fees, and hence the Scottish nobleman had no difficulty in procuring ample information as to their movements. Moreover, his unstinted liberality secured for him superior horses when he found it necessary to remount.

At York he traced the couple to an obscure inn. They had not passed as man and wife, consequently the earl hoped to be able to separate them before the law united them and placed them beyond his reach. He accordingly pushed on with renewed vigor.

He was within three or four miles of Carlisle, however, before he came in sight of the post-chaise which he knew must contain the fugitives, from the minute description of the vehicle, horses, and postilion, given him by the landlord of the last inn at which he had halted.

As he urged his horse to his fleetest gallop, he expected that the horses of the post-chaise would be lashed to the top of their speed. To his great surprise, however, the postilion reined them in and finally brought them to a full stop, allowing him to come up with the chaise.

"You wish to speak to me?" said a man with a decided French accent, putting his head out of the window. The face was swarthy, the features pointed, the expression mean and cunning, not at all the countenance of Marsay, who had been described to him by Ringold as a very handsome man.

"Am I addressing Mr. Victor Marsay?" asked the earl.

"No, sir, that is not my name," replied the Frenchman, with an air of surprise. "My name is Dupont, at your service."

"But you have a lady with you?"

"Certainly, sir, my old mother. You can't have any business with her."

His female companion now lifted the vail from her face and disclosed the wrinkled features of an old woman.

"Where are you going in such hot haste?" inquired the earl, perfectly confounded by the disappointment he had met with.

"Suppose I ask you where you are going?" replied the so-called Mr. Dupont, very coolly.

"There is nothing suspicious about my movements," replied the earl, haughtily. "I am going to my home in Scotland—to Strathallan Castle."

"Then you are a Scotch milord," replied the Frenchman. "You will excuse my mistake sare, but when I first saw you spurring after me, I took you for a highwayman, and was getting my pistols ready."

"And I took you for a gentleman until I saw your face," replied the earl. "It was a mutual mistake."

"I am a stranger," said the Frenchman, "as you can guess by my accent, and yet I know that you have no right to stop me and question me as you have done. But I have no objection to tell you that I am going to Edinburgh on business—though my business is none of yours."

The Earl of Strathallan felt that he was in a false position. He had indeed no right to question, or authority to arrest this stranger, notwithstanding his conviction that he was implicated in the elopement of Jessie Ringold, and could give him valuable information, if he chose to do so. Unwilling, however, to abandon the field without one more effort, he said:

"I am afraid that you have not been very frank with me, sir. I think you could give me important intelligence respecting a certain Miss Ringold. If you can and will do so, I am both able and willing to reward you liberally. If I am right in my conjectures, you have an easy way of winning a large sum. If you will ride on with me to the County Hotel, Carlisle, I will deal with you liberally. I am the Earl of Strathallan."

Mr. Dupont hesitated. For a while his eyes brightened up and an unpleasant smile disclosed a double row of white fang-like teeth; but that expression faded away and he shook his head after a moment's reflection.

"I don't know what you mean, milord," he said. "I know no Miss Ringold, and I have no information to give. I'm an honest French tradesman, and I don't know why you have stopped me on a public thoroughfare."

"Pause—think before you throw away a fortune perhaps," urged the earl, who had not failed to observe the impression his offer had made at first.

But Mr. Dupont repeated impatiently that the earl was mistaken in his man, and that he had no information to impart.

Foiled and disheartened, Strathallan rode on to Carlisle, whence he immediately despatched a letter to Ringold, informing him of the result of his expedition.

So soon as the nobleman and his servant were out of sight, Mr. Paul Aubrey, for the Frenchman was no other than Marsay's Corsican servant, directed the postilion to turn round and drive back to the inn, from which he continued his way to London, first, however, crossing the country and taking a different road from that by which he had pursued his journey north.

The stratagem originating in his wily brain had been perfectly successful; it had baffled pursuit and afforded his master ample time to carry his own projects into effect. At the first convenient halting place he turned his accomplice adrift—a worthless old hag, who was amply rewarded by a guinea, a handsome traveling-dress and liquor enough to keep her in a state of semi-intoxication on the journey, for performing the easy task of keeping her vail down and her lips closed.

It was true that Aubrey's fidelity to his colors had been momentarily shaken by the earl's offer, yet he had refused it decidedly, because, in the first place, he was deeply implicated in Marsay's schemes, and in the second he resolved that his employer should indemnify him for any losses incurred by his adherence to Marsay's interests. Therefore Mr. Paul Aubrey, the professional scamp, jogged on to London, quite well satisfied with himself and his position, taking his time and indulging in every luxury which the wayside houses of entertainment afforded him.

We must now go back to the real fugitives, whom the earl had fancied himself pursuing for two days.

They were at first driven to an obscure quarter of London and entered a narrow street, where the cab which had brought them from Richmond halted at a house, the locality of which had been minutely described by Paul Aubrey before he had started for the north. Here Marsay descended, and knocking at the door, which was opened by a wrinkled old French woman, inquired for Father Ignatius.

He was immediately shown into a room, where there sat a man dressed in shabby black, with a dingy cravat round his neck, apparently occupied in lowering the contents of a green bottle charged with old Macon wine.

"Have I the honor of addressing the Reverend Father Ignatius?" inquired Marsay, with an ironical smile, as he lifted his hat with exaggerated ceremony.

"Yes, my son," replied the shabby man, "that is, if you are Monsieur Victor Marsay."

"That is my name, reverend sir," replied Marsay, with a sustained air of mock gravity. "My servant Paul has, of course, arranged matters with you."

"Assuredly, sir," replied the other, "and I am at your service."

"Are you quite sure that your reverence is sober?" asked Marsay.

"Partially so," replied the shabby Frenchman.

"And you know what you have to do?"

"Perfectly. Though an humble son of the church, I am not unmindful of its duties. Indeed I was, when you disturbed my holy meditations, engaged in running over the heads of a discourse which I am tomorrow to preach to some of my fellow-emigrants, fugitives like myself, from our common country, where the sons of Belial are rising in rebellion, and whence, I fear me, all faith, all that is sacred, will soon be banished."

"Please reserve your eloquence for the occasion you speak of," answered Marsay, "it is lost on me."

"I am sorry to perceive, my son, that you are one of the godless followers of Voltaire. Were I not pledged, I should hesitate to perform the ceremony."

"Only play your part as seriously before the lady as before me, and I shall find no fault with you," said Marsay. "Take your hat and come with me. You will give the coachman the proper directions?"

"Assuredly, my son."

They left the house together; the shabby Frenchman said a few words to the coachman, and then got into the cab with Marsay, who presented the Reverend Father Ignatius to his companion.

"Do not picture to yourself, lady," said the shabby man, "that you are going to a chapel adorned with all the pomp and luxury with which our church loves to deck her altars. Here in this strange land our faith is a scoff and a scorn, and a few poor fugitives gather together, not amid the splendors of modern Rome, but rather as men and women gathered together in the earlier days of the church, when the tombs of the dead and the lairs of wild beasts were shelters for the faithful."

"A splendid actor!" thought Marsay to himself. "How could Paul have discovered such a jewel in London?" But he whispered in the man's ear a French phrase equivalent to "Draw it mild."

The carriage halted a second time before another shabby house, and the party alighted. The so-called Father Ignatius led the way into a basement room, which he unlocked himself. The floor was bare, and the place held only a few wooden benches and settees. There was a crucifix on the wall, and a candle was burning before the image of a saint.

Here then, in an obscure room, in a filthy quarter of London, with no witnesses, the shabby man in black read the marriage ceremony and pronounced Victor Marsay and Jessie Ringold man and wife.

He then produced a dirty memorandum-book, an ink-horn, and a pen, and entered the date of the ceremony and the names of the parties, and requested their signatures. Afterward he scrawled out what purported to be a marriage certificate, signed it, and handed it to Jessie.

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The parties then left the house, and Marsay handed his bride into the carriage. He himself drew the shabby man a few paces aside.

"Bravo!" he cried, slapping him on his back. "You are a trump, old fellow! I thought at one time you were overdoing it, but you kept just within bounds. Here is your fee; you have richly earned it. That will keep you in beef, brandy, and tobacco for a year or two."

And he gave the man a well-filled purse.

"You have more than paid the humble servant of the church," replied the man, with undisturbed gravity. "May you meet with your reward!"

Marsay laughed and sprang into the carriage, which was driven through London without again stopping.

Two days afterward, Mr. and Mrs. Victor Marsay were registered at the Ship Hotel, Dover.

Marsay explained to his bride the necessity of keeping their marriage secret until he had communicated with his father, but she insisted on at least making a confidante of her father and imploring his forgiveness immediately. Happy as she was in the undoubted love of the man on whom she had bestowed her hand, still her cup of joy would be dashed with bitterness so long as her poor old father remained ignorant of her fate. Marsay agreed with her, and she flew to pen a brief letter to the innkeeper. It ran thus:

The parties then left the house, and Marsay handed his bride into the carriage. He himself drew the shabby man a few paces aside.

"Bravo!" he cried, slapping him on his back. "You are a trump, old fellow! I thought at one time you were overdoing it, but you kept just within bounds. Here is your fee; you have richly earned it. That will keep you in beef, brandy, and tobacco for a year or two."

And he gave the man a well-filled purse.

"You have more than paid the humble servant of the church," replied the man, with undisturbed gravity. "May you meet with your reward!"

Marsay laughed and sprang into the carriage, which was driven through London without again stopping.

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"Your father is inflexible," said Marsay.

Jessie sighed, but still hope was not extinguished in her breast. She went every day to the post-office, and every day came back disappointed. Marsay, in his conscious guilt, feared that she would dispatch a second letter, and consequently watched her narrowly. But he need have had no fear. He possessed her heart, knew all her thoughts, and she confided to him the simplest actions of her life.

"How she loves me!" thought Marsay. "If she discovered the truth, it would kill her."

Jerry Ringold waited with equal impatience and anxiety for an answer to his letter. It came not. When, day after day and week after week elapsed, and there were no more tidings of the loved one, he took a desperate resolution.

"I'm good for naught here," he thought. "I'm a lost man without Jessie. I must go and seek her. I daren't trust another. That Frenchman will be sure to abuse her after a little while—if she hasn't a natural protector."

So he wrote a line to the earl, telling him of his plan. Strathallan approved it, and offered him a large sum of money for his traveling expenses, but Ringold, proud as an earl himself, refused. Besides, he had laid up money, and after the sale of the lease, good-will, furniture, and appointments of the Elm Tree Inn, found himself in an independent position.

It was a hard matter for the old man, who had vegetated in nearly one spot all his life, to take leave of his servants, friends, and customers, and their rough expressions of good-will touched him to the heart. But then he thought of Jessie, and tore himself away.

He went down to London by boat, and without halting in the city engaged a seat in the Dover mail. At the first change of horses he got out to get a glass of ale. One of the outside passengers had alighted for the same purpose. Ringold looked sharply at him and recognized his late hostler.

"Why, Joe Maythorn!" said he. "Where are you going?"

"Where be *you* going?" responded Joe. "Tell me that, and I can answer you."

"I'm going to Paris," said Ringold.

"That's just where I'm going," answered Joe.

"What can you do there, boy?" asked Ringold.

"Why, I can help in a stable, or turn my hand to most anything," answered the hostler. "There must be a call for helpers there, for I take it they has 'osses. But did you ever know a Frenchman that could look after an 'oss?"

"What made you think of going to Paris, Joe?"

"Because I thought you were agoin there, master—I've a hye—I's Yorkshire."

"You're a fool, Joe."

"Call I what you like, master, but doan't'ee turn I adrift. Let me go wi' you, and I'll serve ye true and faithful; I doesn't want no wages. I'll brush yer clothes and boots—for a lad that can make a 'osse's coat shine like a new guinea bean't cast away on a yard or two o' broadcloth or a scrap of leather. I'll keep ye tidy, and if these Frenchmen want to come any games on ye, 'ecod! they'll have to handle two of us. Now, doan't'ee say nay, but take me along wi' you."

Ringold was much affected by the rough attachment of his humble follower. As the lion has his jackall, so has every great man his dependent and worshiper, and Ringold, landlord of the Elm Tree Inn, was the greatest man within the hostler's sphere of life; so that when this magnate of the river-side accepted the Yorkshire lad as his valet and traveling companion, the ex-hostler thought himself promoted to the seventh heaven.

They arrived in due time at Dover, and it was by the merest chance that, instead of stopping at the Ship Hotel, while waiting for a favorable wind and tide for the packet-boat to start on her voyage across the channel, they put up at the George and Dragoon.

There was Ringold eating his chop and drinking his ale within a stone's throw of the object of his search, and both were ignorant of each other's neighborhood. Such are the chances of this troubled life.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MASK LIFTED.

AFTER the lapse of a few days, Mr. Paul Aubrey rejoined his master.

Madame Marsay, though the kindest and least suspicious of human beings, disliked this man from the first moment her eyes rested upon his sinister countenance, and her face was such a mirror of her soul that the astute Corsican read in her expression the estimate she had intuitively formed of him. She shrank from him as from something unholy.

Women and children read characters at a glance, and their first impressions are generally infallible.

It was, therefore, with great regret that she discovered that her husband reposed implicit confidence in the man whose eyes sometimes sought the ground in feigned humility, and sometimes were fixed on the face of one he watched with impudent baseness. The two men had long conferences together, the subject of which she was not made acquainted with. Then Paul crossed the Channel, and was absent six days. When he returned he had another long and secret conference with his master, at the end of which the latter came to inform Jessie that it would be necessary for him to leave her at Dover for a few days, with his servant to attend to her wants, while he went to Paris to see his father; that he had wound up his business in England, and that henceforth they were to reside in France.

If Jessie had not been overwhelmed with grief at parting with her husband, if her eyes had not been blinded with tears, she would have noticed that Victor's leave-taking was somewhat cool. After he left her, he never once looked back to the place where she stood watching his embarkation on the lugger which was to take him across the straits. For her part she kept her eyes fixed on its lessening sails, and when her sight failed her, had recourse to a marine glass to follow the movements of the little craft.

Marsay had promised to write as soon as he reached Calais, but he did not do so, neither did he write from Paris for some days. At last there came a brief note from him, accompanying one to Aubrey, in which he requested her to join him immediately, under the care of Aubrey, who would escort her to her new home. Not a word about his father, nothing of their future prospects.

She thought this strange, but still her confidence was not impaired. She obeyed his directions as readily as she would have done had he ordered her to follow him to Siberia, for he was lord and master, not only of her person, but of her heart.

During her passage across the channel, Mr. Aubrey was very attentive to her, indeed, offensively so. Unasked he adjusted her cloak over her shoulders, and held the umbrella over her head when the mist changed to a cold drizzling rain, and he attempted a tone of familiarity and patronage which she felt obliged to rebuke by a studiously cold demeanor.

At Calais they took the diligence for Paris, and on the wearisome journey she escaped the officiousness of the valet, for he rode on the outside of the coach.

She was glad enough when the ponderous vehicle passed the barrier and rolled over the then rugged pavement of Paris. Her eyes beheld for the first time the city of her dreams, and she recognized objects that description and art had rendered familiar to her, the towers of Notre Dame, the airy steeple of La Sainte Chapelle, the enormous front of the City Hall, the Tuileries and the Louvre. But it was not the sight of these that set her heart bounding, it was the expectation of meeting her beloved husband.

When she alighted in the court-yard of the great hotel where the diligence landed her passengers, her eyes scanned the assembled throng of porters, soldiers, civil officials, and idlers of both sexes in search of her husband. He was not among them; he should have been the first to greet her in the great, strange city.

As she stood bewildered, gazing about her, Paul Aubrey presented himself, and said that he had received a message from his master who had been detained on business, but directed him to take her to her home, The conveyance, a public cabriolet, was in waiting. With her heart overburdened with vague forebodings she seated herself, while the valet took his place beside the driver. She was so weary and listless that she took no notice of the streets through which they passed, nor of the buildings and people, though she was a little surprised to find that they were leaving the city and driving into the environs.

In the course of half an hour they were passing through a village of uninteresting appearance, but enlivened by the beauty of many little gardens filled with roses. It seemed as if no other flowers were cultivated in the place. The carriage stopped at a little rose-embowered cottage, at the garden-gate of which a tidily dressed old lady wearing a Norman cap, stood ready to receive her. Aubrey jumped down from the box.

"This lady, Madame Juliette," said he, "is Madame Marsay."

The old lady was very pleasant, and ushered Jessie into a pretty sitting-room, and welcomed her to her new home at Fontenay-aux-Roses, but still this was not the reception that she looked for. She was weary and dispirited; the journey, the anxiety, and disappointment had made her really ill.

Aubrey announced that he was going back to Paris in the cabriolet, and asked if she had any message for his master.

"Only tell him to come as soon as possible," she said.

She was sinking with illness, and weariness of mind and body, but though her housekeeper induced her to partake of some refreshments, she could not persuade her to retire to her bedroom. She reclined on a sofa covered with shawls, and said she would keep awake until Marsay came.

Dozing at intervals, awaking with a start from unpleasant dreams, her first night at Fontenay-aux-Roses passed wearily and sadly enough.

The next morning brought Marsay, and his presence revived her. It seemed as if they had been separated for years, and that in recovering him she had recovered all.

Marsay was much shocked at her appearance; but she promised to recover her bloom and spirits for his sake. Was his father reconciled? This question she pressed very earnestly.

Marsay's reply was not encouraging. His father's views for his settlement in life were such, he said, that a premature disclosure of his marriage would alienate him forever. He had secured, however, from the old gentleman a respite from immediate persecution, and would seize the first opportune occasion to reveal his *secret*. In the meantime the utmost caution was of vital importance. Marsay could only visit Fontenay-aux-Roses by stealth, and disguised. The time would soon come, however, he hoped, when he could relieve his Jessie of the embarrassing and equivocal position in which she was placed. In the meantime, as she was unknown, there was no reason for her moping at home in concealment. It was his wish that she should visit the city and see all its objects of interest. Madame Juliette would accompany her, or if she thought she required the protection of the male sex, he would at any time send Aubrey to escort her; if she would drop him a line addressed to a certain cafe which he indicated. But Jessie said she required no other companion than Madame Juliette.

He finally took his departure, promising his little Jessie not to leave her lonely long, but to fly to her as often as he could. He said something about the romance of their secret union, but it failed to meet with any response.

The more Jessie reflected on her situation, the more uneasy she became. Her married life had commenced ominously by a midnight flight from home; her father had evidently cast her off, and the father of her husband had not yet been apprised of the marriage. She was not living with her husband, who could only see her by stealth.

Alone, without friends, in a strange city and country, she seemed leading a life of *guilt*. When would this wretched state of things cease? Still she resolved to make an effort to bear up, and to hope that all would end well.

The very day after her meeting with Marsay, she visited Pa is with her housekeeper, hoping, but vainly, that she should meet Victor.

Weeks and months passed away in this strange manner of living. Victor's visits became more and more infrequent, and his manner less demonstrative. When she urged him to make a confession to his father, his constant answer was that at present it was impossible, that he himself was pressed by a thousand cares, that public affairs were getting worse and worse, threatening individual interests with ruin, that his own position was imperiled, and that if she had any regard for him she would not add her importunities to his burthens. This always silenced her for the time.

Meanwhile Ringold, everywhere accompanied by Joe Maythorn, was searching Paris through and through for the lost Jessie. The strange pair of Englishmen were seen in the galleries and gardens, on the boulevards, in the by streets. The old man had picked up a little French—indeed, he had come to understand it very well; but his uncouth pronunciation of the words he had acquired rendered it very difficult for the most painstaking of his listeners to comprehend him. He asked everybody he encountered if he knew a man named Victor Marsay—soldiers, police officers, brokers, idlers. He wandered about, staring everybody in the face, scrutinizing, peering at women. He rarely received an uncivil answer. Once in a while a person whom he buttonholed would reply, impatiently:

"Sir, I know no Monsieur Marsay; I have told you so frequently."

Whereupon, the old gladiator would say, very humbly, "Pardong, mongseer," and trudge away on his hopeless quest, flanked by his faithful henchman Joe.

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The Yorkshireman's reverence for his master increased daily.

"That ar' old cove is a stunner," he would say to himself. "To think of him at his age masterin' a forring langwitch, a pickin' of it up by rotation, by heart, without books, and able to converse with them so fluintly! When he calls for bread and wine, which I keeps a forgettin' the names of myself, the way he raps out *pang* and *vang* hastonishes the very *garsongs* themselves, as the poor benighted fools calls waiters, which is a much more simpler and intelligibler word."

They lived across the Seine, in the Latin quarter, in very humble lodgings. Some of the students who were bitten with an Anglo-mania induced the old man to give them some lessons in sparring, but relinquished it in a very few days, after measuring their lengths on the floor, declaring that *le boxe* was a very ungentlemanly mode of conflict.

A year had passed away, when one morning Jessie was awakened from her dreams and hopes by a shock that came upon her as suddenly and unexpectedly as lightning from a cloudless sky.

She was passing before the church of St. Roch, accompanied by her faithful attendant, Madame Juliette, when they were brought to a stand-still by a crowd of idlers of both sexes waiting to see a bridal party come out of the building.

The procession soon issued forth, and its members entered the carriages in waiting.

Jessie's attention was arrested by the bride, a tall and stately lady in the richest attire. She could not see the face of the bridegroom till the moment he entered the carriage, and then, in the broad face of day, she recognized beyond a doubt—*her own husband, Victor Marsay!*

With a wild cry that came from a breaking heart, she sprang forward, but her strength and senses failed her at once, and she would have fallen on the pavement, but for the aid of Madame Juliette.

When she fully recovered from the shock she found herself in a carriage driving to Fontenay-aux-Roses. She grasped the arm of Madame Juliette, convulsively.

"Tell me," she said, "for I have been so worried of late that I hardly dare to trust my senses. *Did you see him?*"

"See whom?" asked the housekeeper, in well-feigned surprise.

"The bridegroom—Mr. Marsay!" she gasped out.

Now, Madame Juliette had seen and recognized the traitor—recognized him beyond a doubt—but as Jessie lay fainting in her arms, she had determined on the course to be pursued. She never hesitated to tell a falsehood when she thought the motive justified it. She was resolved to deceive her mistress in spite of the evidence of her own senses, as long as deception was possible. The truth would be manifested soon enough; but a respite was of vital importance. Therefore, she gave to her honest countenance an expression of the most profound astonishment, and replied:

"What are you dreaming of, my dear young lady? You think so much of your husband that you see him everywhere."

"I tell you, Madame Juliette," said the girl, with feverish volubility, "that as the bridegroom turned to enter the carriage I saw the face of Victor Marsay!"

"And I tell you, my dear young lady, that I watched the couple from the moment they left the door of the church, and the bridegroom was no more like Mr. Marsay than he was like Paul Aubrey. He had the same colored eyes and hair, to be sure, but he was a much shorter and older man. I couldn't think what was the matter with you when you screamed out and frightened me nearly to death.

Jessie passed her hand across her forehead, as if to clear her brain, and then bent a piercing and scrutinizing glance on the face of her attendant. Madame Juliette bore the examination bravely. Had she been a comedienne of the French theater she could not have performed her part any better. Her expression was frank and smiling, and her air a little puzzled, too.

"Was it only that fancy that upset you?" she said. "I thought you had a fit. Don't forget to tell Mr. Marsay of it, when he comes to-morrow, and he'll have a hearty laugh over it—that is, if he finds you looking well—otherwise it will alarm him."

Jessie questioned her attendant over and again, but it was only to make assurance doubly sure and finally to be convinced that her fancy had played her a strange trick.

The unparalleled presence of mind and coolness of her humble friend saved her perhaps, for a time at least, from madness and despair. Once or twice the fancy troubled her dreams that night, and she cried out in her sleep and woke, but the housekeeper who passed the night with her, soothed and tranquillized her.

Marsay came early the next morning. Madame Juliette met him at the door with a flashing eye.

"You are a villain!" she said.

"Stand aside, woman!" he answered, haughtily; "it is not for you to call me to account."

Uncontrollable indignation had prompted the housekeeper's exclamation. It was intended for Marsay's ear alone, but Jessie had overheard it and the reply; so that when Marsay, assuming an air of impatient love, was rushing to embrace her, she paralyzed him by a look and transfixed him to the spot.

Then he flung himself at her feet, and said, with an air of contrition:

"Jessie, forgive me—I was coming to confess all!"

"It is false!" she said. "You were coming to continue the deception, if possible. Yet let me hear what you have to say—let me know what you are and what you have made me."

"Jessie," he said, "my fate was fixed long before I saw you. To save my father from ruin, I had consented to marry a woman I did not love. He gave me a brief respite which I employed in travel. I saw you and loved you. I could not give you up. Love and despair counseled me to take the steps that followed. A false priest and a mock marriage united us. All the sin is mine. Yet is it a sin in the eyes of Heaven? Before that high tribunal, I am as much yours as if our union had been legal. Let, then, our relations continue until death relieves me of the fetters which the law and a father's imperious necessity imposed upon me yesterday. I will continue to cherish and support you. This home is yours; if you desire a more brilliant one, you have but to say so and your wish shall be gratified."

He had expected either an outburst of reproach or a wail of despair. To his surprise, the injured woman listened to him with perfect calmness, though her face was as white as the marble mantel-piece on which she leaned, and when she answered him her voice was entirely unbroken.

But who can measure the agony she suffered, and the effort it cost her to control herself and vail the convulsions of her breaking heart?

"I thank you," she said. "I believe every word you say. I have always done so, but this time I know that I am justified in my faith. I understand your position perfectly; for her money you have married a woman you do not love, you have bestowed your heart on a poor girl, and you propose to live with both, supporting two establishments on your wife's money. You deceived me, but you propose to make me a partner of your guilt now that my eyes are opened, and to lead a life of dishonor, your wife's purse defraying your expenses. I state your proposal in a plain business way—I think you said you were a banker—and if I have misrepresented you, you will have the goodness to correct me."

"You are right, Jessie," said Marsay, making an effort to smile, "but you have such a strange way of expressing it."

"It is usual, I believe," said Jessie, "where a bargain is under discussion, to give the receiver of a proposition a little time to consider it."

"Dear Jessie," said Marsay, advancing.

"Keep back, sir," said she, in the same cold tone, "and return here to-morrow for your answer."

Marsay endeavored to prolong the interview, but in vain; she would hear no more and insisted on his leaving her immediately.

When she heard the garden-gate close behind him, the tension of her nerves gave way; the unnatural force that had borne her through the dreadful meeting failed her, and with a wild cry she threw up her arms, and fell prostrate on her face.

Madame Juliette flew to her assistance, and exerting all her strength carried her up to bed in her arms, and employed all the resources of her humble skill to restore and console her. But her position admitted of no consolation. It was only, however, when the unfortunate girl had become comparatively calm, and insisted on being left alone, that Madame Juliette ceased her efforts and retired.

Early on the next day Marsay presented himself.

"Is your mistress awake?" he asked.

"You can see for yourself," was the curt reply.

Marsay ascended the stairs and entered Jessie's bedroom. It was empty, but on a table lay a scrap of paper. It contained only these words:

"Victor, you have destroyed me and I am lost to you forever."

He thrust the paper in his breast, and descended the stairs with trembling limbs. In the hall he met Madame Juliette in her walking-dress.

"She is gone!" he exclaimed, frantically.

"Did you expect an honest woman to remain a day longer in this house?" was the reply.

"Whither has she gone?" he asked.

"I do not know," replied the old lady, sternly. "But if I were you I should drag the Seine for her."

"Woman, do you want to torture me?" cried Marsay.

"Yes," replied Madame Juliette, "it would give me delight to see you writhing in the tortures of the condemned. Heaven placed one of its angels in your way, and you broke her precious heart."

"Begone!" cried Marsay, in fury. "I will not be insulted by my own servant in my own house."

"I was going, Mr. Marsay," replied the woman, contemptuously.

"Yet stay—here are your wages."

"I want none of your money," said Madame Juliette. "I would not touch a sou from your polluted hands. I shake the dust of your house from my feet, and I pray that Heaven may give you your deserts for the betrayal of that poor innocent."

She was gone, leaving the betrayer alone in the desolate house, and the guilty man felt as if his guardian angel had deserted him and left him to the custody of fiends.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FATAL LEAP.

About a fortnight after this, at the close of day, a woman whose figure was completely concealed by a large shawl worn over a traveling-dress, her face being also hidden by a thick vail, alighted from a public coach at the door of the Elm Tree Inn and was shown into a room, where she requested to see the landlord.

A middle-aged man waited on the lady immediately. The traveler repeated that she wished to see the landlord.

"I am the landlord, madam, at your service," said the man, civilly. "My name is Graves."

"Graves!" said the lady. "I thought—at least I expected to see——"

"Mr. Ringold, ma'am, did you not?"

"Yes," said the lady. "When I was in the habit of stopping here formerly, I think a person by that name kept the inn."

"He did, ma'am; but I bought him out more than a year ago."

The lady paused for a minute, and then said, with as indifferent an air as she could assume:

"You probably can tell me where this Mr. Ringold lives now?"

"I cannot, madam," replied Graves. "He went away from here as soon as I took possession, and told no one where he was going. It caused a great deal of talk, for it was quite a sort of mysterious disappearance like. Perhaps you may have heard that just before he gave up business, his daughter disappeared very mysteriously, and folks hereabout think the old man went in search of her."

As the landlord lingered, the vailed female said:

"I suppose you can give me a room here to-night?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am," replied the landlord, with alacrity, "and you would like supper, I suppose?"

"A little toast and tea."

"It will be served directly, ma'am," and the landlord bustled away to fill the order.

When she was entirely alone, the vailed woman leaned her head upon her hands and gave way to her emotion. It was poor Jessie Ringold who had come back to throw herself at her father's feet, to tell him the story of her wrongs, and then—die! Now he was gone—and the house that had sheltered her was filled with strangers. Blow upon blow had fallen upon her, and it seemed that this last must prove fatal.

Yet she bore up with an energy that surprised even herself. And there was a necessity for energy, for not for the world would she have betrayed her secret in her former home; death first, she thought.

Therefore she mastered her emotion, and when a waiting-maid brought in her supper, after first satisfying herself that the girl was a stranger, she laid aside her bonnet and vail, and forced herself to partake of the food which was set before her. After supper, pleading fatigue, she requested to be shown to her chamber.

It was her own old room—the little room where she had been so happy and contented till the dark shadow of the stranger fell on her life and blighted it forever. The vines she had trained and watered still clustered round the lattice; some of her own drawings yet hung on the wall. Every object was familiar and the same, yet how changed were the eyes, dim with weeping, with which she surveyed them.

She fell on her trembling knees by the bedside, and hid her head in the pillow, which she bedewed with her tears. It seemed as if life were ebbing away from her.

"But I must not die here," she cried, suddenly starting up. "I am not fit to die in the home I have rendered desolate. My bones must not bleach in English soil. Alas! I have brought down ruin not only on myself, but on my poor old father. Where—where, on the face of the wide world, is that good old man, who never looked on me but with eyes of kindness, never spoke to me but with a gentle voice? Help me, Heaven! or I shall go mad!"

She flung herself upon the bed, and prayed for strength and calmness.

Poor Jessie passed a night of cruel trial, but she had some intervals of repose.

She rose in the morning early, dressed herself, went down stairs, saw the landlord and paid her bill. By a great effort she assumed an indifferent tone, complimented Mr. Graves on the neatness of his housekeeping, and left without having excited any suspicion.

How often in this life do we labor unconsciously to defeat our own interests! How often is the apparent success of our favorite schemes a virtual defeat!

Had Jessie but made herself known, she would have learned that an advertisement inviting her to communicate with the attorneys of the Earl of Strathallan had several times appeared in more than one of the leading English newspapers; that there were parties anxiously looking for her, and apparently desirous of becoming her friends.

But she, and for good reasons, too, preferred to shroud herself in the vail of mystery and leave Richmond as she came. She had walked beside the narrow line that separates safety and ruin, and she knew not that a single step across it would have saved her.

She came and went like a specter. Weary and

broken-hearted, she returned to France, and was once more lost in the multifold life of Paris—a drop of life swallowed up in that surging ocean of existence.

She sought very humble and cheap lodgings in one of the meanest quarters of Paris; for the future was dark to her, the times getting harder and harder, and she had nothing to live upon but the sale of some jewels of her own, for she had retained none of Marsay's presents and none of Marsay's money. They were all abandoned at Fontenay-aux-Roses.

There was every necessity for a struggle, for another life was soon to be added to hers. Poor, alone, unfriended, broken-hearted, betrayed, a lost waif on the sea of life, she became a mother. A little wailing cry smote upon her ear, a little soft face was laid upon her breast.

There is a joy inseparable from maternity that sheds a ray of light, even if transitory, into the saddest mother's heart. There is something of the brightness of heaven in the advent of an infant.

It is scarcely possible to imagine a situation more distressing than poor Jessie's, and yet there were days and nights when she was almost happy, and when she began to think a calm future possible. It might be possible to rear her little child to manhood—it might be possible to live for his sake. Providence might yet reunite her and her father; and surely he would forgive her when he knew her story—knew that she and her babe were sinless, though abandoned.

Alas! these visions were deceptive. It is true that she recovered her health, and with it calmness and resignation. But by degrees her carefully hoarded resources wasted away. Then she sought employment—needlework and embroidery. But the supply was greater than the demand. Paris was in the midst of revolution, and people were dying of starvation in the streets. Her scanty earnings were insufficient to provide food for herself and child.

Then her reason gave way, and the terrible idea of suicide presented itself, was banished, then welcomed back, and finally hugged to her broken heart as a friend in need.

It needed but a pan of charcoal and she and her babe would fall asleep and wake in a better world.

But when the hour for executing the terrible project came, though she shrank not from seeking death herself, she could not doom the innocent being to whom she had given life. One way of saving him, at least, dawned on her poor distracted brain, for misery had maddened her at last.

She dressed the little child in his best attire—a clean white dress. Then, though its cries all but killed her, she pricked with a needle a cross and the letter R. upon its right arm near the shoulder, and rubbing ink into the punctures rendered the brand indelible. She wrote on a slip of paper: "He is the child of misery and sorrow, but not of a mother's guilt," and pinned it to his dress, and hung round his neck a miniature likeness of herself. Then taking the infant in her arms, and wrapping her head and shoulders in a tattered shawl, she stole swiftly down stairs and out into the dark streets.

Her rapid steps carried her to the door of the Foundling Hospital, that repository of so many guilty and so many sorrowful secrets. An unhappy woman who preceded her showed by her action what Jessie was to do. There was an aperture in a tower with a receptacle large enough to hold a child. The cradle, if so it might be termed, was attached to a wooden pillar that revolved upon its axis. The weight of a child rang a warning bell, the pillar revolved, the infant was lost to the mother.

Thus it was that Jessie's boy was lost to her—lost to her and intrusted to the care of strangers.

With wild, tearless eyes, in which the light of reason no longer shone, she turned from the scene of sacrifice and fled—half walking, half running. It was a miracle that she was not crushed by passing vehicles, for she saw none of them, avoided none.

Yet a momentary gleam of intelligence returned to her when the strong grasp of a man was laid upon her. The light of a street lamp fell full upon his face. With a cry of horror and aversion she recognized Paul Aubrey.

"I was looking for you, Madame Marsay," he said. "You must come with me."

Hurling him away from her with a force that only madness could have imparted, she fled from him with the speed of a deer. He sprang forward in pursuit, but she gained on him every minute. Her course was directed to one of the bridges that spanned the Seine. He saw her from a distance, for they were now far apart. She rushed upon the bridge, and gaining the center, sprang upon the parapet, and then plunged headlong from the giddy height.

As Paul Aubrey pressed forward with redoubled speed he was confronted by a police officer.

"Where are you running to at this time of night, my fine fellow?" asked the official.

"I was trying to overtake a woman bent on committing suicide," answered Aubrey, breathlessly. "She has thrown herself into the river from the bridge."

"This way then," said the officer, and he ran down a flight of stone steps leading to the water.

Hailing a boatman, he commanded him to take them into his boat and pull for the central arch of the bridge.

When they reached the spot indicated by Aubrey, nothing was seen to disturb the wrinkled surface of the black water that stole away silently under the dark arch, flecked here and there with wavering streaks of light reflected from the city lamps. They waited in hopes that something living would rise to the surface; but nothing came to break the dark monotony.

Then they rowed with the current, crossing the narrow stream from side to side; but the black vail waved beneath them like a floating pall, and gave no sign of life.

"If you haven't brought me on a fool's errand," said the officer, "you had better watch the morgue for a few days. The Seine can't keep a secret long, for all it looks so mysterious to-night. It brings suicides to light—ay, and murders too," he added, with emphasis.

He gave orders to the boatman to set them on shore. They landed, and Aubrey, thanking him, was about leaving, when the officer ordered him to go with him before the commissary of police. That functionary made him disclose his name and business and make a deposition of the facts. This Aubrey did, concealing, however, his knowledge of the identity of the suicide; who, he said, was a stranger to him. Aubrey was a ready liar, and always stuck to his stories. Supposing the body should be found, he had no mind to be called upon to identify it, and explain all he knew about his victim.

He was dismissed, and went home gloomy and agitated. Hardened as he was in the ways of sin, the fatal despair of poor Jessie shocked and saddened him. He had aided his master in deceiving her, and on him rested a weighty share of the "deep damnation of her taking off." But apart from the common feelings of humanity there was a reason why he did not wish her dead—why her life was more valuable to him than her destruction.

Ever since her disappearance from Fontenay-aux-Roses he had been seeking for her, not on his master's account, but on his own. His meeting with her that night had filled him with joy—her leap from the bridge had thrown him into the depths of despair.

Why? We cannot now reveal it, for it is Paul Aubrey's secret.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MEETING AT THE PALAIS ROYAL AND WHAT FOLLOWED.

The next day, a bright, warm, summer day, there was a large collection of people in the gardens of the Palai Royal. But they had not come together, as in

more peaceful times, to sip coffee and sweetened water, to chat in groups under the trees, to watch the sparkling water of the fountain and the sports of the children. There were no children to be seen—no ladies elegantly dressed and chatting gayly with their attendant cavaliers. On the contrary, it was an assembly of men, or if there were some few women among them, it was only their dress, not their faces, that showed their sex—fierce viragoes from the fish-markets, with hard, masculine faces, and muscular arms that they brandished aloft to give emphasis to the utterances of their harsh voices.

There were not many of the higher classes, but they had taken care to dress themselves plainly and to wear enormous tri-colored cockades in their hats. Nowhere were visible the white colors of the Bourbons. There were French guardsmen who sympathized with the people, but not a uniform of the Royal, German, or Swiss regiments. The majority, however, were neither French gentlemen nor French soldiers, but the terrible men of the faubourgs, fierce wretches in rags, their ferocious faces begrimed with dirt, hollowed by hunger or flushed with wine.

Suddenly from the midst of this stern multitude, a young man sprang up on a table, and waving his hat to secure silence and attention, exclaimed:

"Fellow citizens. I have great news. The king and queen, flying from the city to join the enemies of France, have been arrested at Varennes and brought back to Paris. Long live France!"

Thundering acclamations greeted the speaker and he sprang down, and was lost in the crowd.

But as he was seeking an outlet from the garden he was seized by the collar, and a voice exclaimed, in English:

"Villain! what have you done with my daughter?" and Victor Marsay was confronted by Jerry Ringold.

The betrayer and the avenger had met, face to face, at last. For a moment the former was paralyzed, but he instantly rallied, and replied, in French:

"I do not know you, sir."

"But I know you, Mr. Victor Marsay," replied Ringold, in French, shaking his captive roughly.

"The mad Englishman!" cried several of the bystanders, for Ringold was known as such to many of the frequenters of the garden.

"My friends," said Victor, "you know me. You can tell this person whether he is mistaken or not."

"No, no; there is no Victor Marsay," cried several rough men, interfering. "You are crazy, old man. Let go your hold."

And indeed the behavior of the old Englishman seemed to justify the belief of his insanity.

Speechless with rage, he foamed at the mouth, and struck at those who had succeeded in wrenching loose his grasp from Victor's collar. Sweeping a clear space around him, he aimed a terrible blow at the object of his hatred, which, had it not been warded off by one of the men of the faubourgs, would have stretched him lifeless at his feet, and then and there fatally avenged the wrongs of Jessie Ringold.

Failing in his object, the old man was knocked down and trampled on, while Victor, taking advantage of the confusion, effected his escape, first flinging a handful of gold pieces among the men who had been foremost in his rescue. As it was, Ringold very nearly lost his life, and perhaps would have been killed outright, had not Joe Maythorn, who had some time before that been separated from his master, come to his aid, striking out right and left till he conquered a passage to the fallen man. Even he might have failed had not the roughs been diverted by their eagerness to gather up the gold Victor had scattered among them.

Immediately afterward there rose a cry, "To the Tuileries!" and the gardens were deserted in a moment.

Joe Maythorn got his master on his feet, led him to the fountain, washed the blood from his face, and assisted him into the street, where he hired a carriage to take them to their lodging.

On the way, Ringold, who seemed to have been seriously injured about the head, kept muttering in an almost unintelligible voice, "To have found him and lost him! To have found him and lost him!" Then he would lapse into insensibility again.

Joe got him to bed and sent for a surgeon, who pronounced his injuries very grave.

Meanwhile the cause of the old man's troubles had reached the vast gloomy house where he dwelt.

He had spoken truly when he disclaimed the name of Victor Marsay.

It will be remembered that the letter dispatched by the Frenchman from the Elm Tree Inn to his servant in London had closed with this significant and suggestive line, "And remember, at your peril, that you are now in the service of Victor Marsay."

That name was then an assumed one, but the person who assumed it was the same man, who, under his true name of Gaspar Roland, son of Gilbert Roland, banker, was married the year before in the Church of St. Roch, to Louise, only daughter and child of the Count de Launay, a wealthy heiress. We should have said the ex-count, because all titles of nobility were abolished in France in the year 1790. The reign of equality and fraternity had been inaugurated, and the French people henceforth addressed each other as *citoyen* and *citoyenne* (citizen and citizeness).

How came it about that the Count de Launay, a member of one of the oldest and most aristocratic families of France consented to bestow his daughter's hand and millions on the plebeian son of a banker? Simply because the Count de Launay was possessed of more foresight than the vast majority of the nobles of his day. All saw the gathering storm of revolution, for it was the fruit of years of discontent, but the nobility, who threw themselves into it, expected to arrest it within fixed bounds as King Canute thought he could stay the tides of the ocean. But the Count de Launay knew that the fury of revolutions is never stayed except by their own exhaustion. He knew that his title would soon become not a shield to protect, but a spear to pierce him, and that his wealth would only precipitate his ruin.

The banker Gilbert Roland was known to be a man of consummate financial ability and of extraordinary political tact, well knowing how to take advantage of every turn of the tide, and held back by no conscientious scruples from changing with the changing current. That he was embarrassed in his circumstances was attributable to no lack of capacity, but only to the insufficiency of his capital to second the daring enterprises which his mind conceived.

Gilbert Roland had a son Gaspar, who seemed to have inherited all his father's capacity—a little wild, perhaps, but he would become steady in time. De Launay had an account with Roland, though he was not his only banker, and had not withdrawn his money, even when sinister rumors affected the banker's credit on the Bourse. The fact of the count's continued confidence tided Roland over more than one delicate crisis.

It was in the midst of one of these crises that the nobleman waited on the banker. The latter was very nervous, for he was anticipating a call for the count's funds. To his relief and astonishment he was soon informed that the count had come to propose an alliance of their families.

"In more tranquil times," said the count, with all the pride of his race, "I should as soon have thought of killing my daughter as giving her to an untitled husband But the noblesse and the financier must shake hands now. I need hardly ask if you accept, on behalf of your son, my daughter's hand, and the care of her fortune."

The banker was overjoyed. It was not at the prospect of an alliance with nobility, for his keen foresight, like the Count de Launay's, showed him that a title would soon be not an empty honor but a

positive danger—he thought only of the present and prospective wealth it would secure. He accepted with eagerness.

The marriage was accordingly agreed upon, for thus were marriages arranged in France, then, as now, parents choosing partners for their children and then announcing the fact to them, their consent following as a matter of course, and the betrothal being a pure formality. Even the revolution, which swept away so many abuses, did not end this custom.

Roland had merely to say to his son: "I have arranged your marriage."

"With how much?" Gaspar asked; and his father first informed him of the amount of the bride's dowry and expectations, and lastly of her name.

De Launay, however, as he had anticipated, for good reasons, did not meet with so ready an acquiescence from his daughter.

She said in a low voice:

"You know, sir, that I have only a dead heart to bestow."

He was obliged to argue his case and to employ the weight of his parental authority, and then even to accord the time—six weeks—she demanded for reflection.

It was that six weeks of respite that Gaspar passed in England—fatally for Jessie Ringold.

At the expiration of that time Louise de Launay would have negatived her father's proposal, but that he lay dangerously ill upon his bed, and she feared the effect of a refusal. Yet she insisted on withholding her answer till she had seen Gaspar Roland.

"Sir," said she when he came at her summons, and cutting short his complimentary address, "you have done me the honor to seek my hand. If I were free, I should decline it, and I tell you frankly why. A true woman can bestow her love but once; mine has been so bestowed and its object is in the grave. I am dead to the world and its joys. Do you, after this avowal, persist in your suit?"

Gaspar was greatly embarrassed, but he could not forego the wealth that glittered before him and had seemed almost within his grasp.

He answered that in these troubled times, when no one knew what a day might bring forth, she required a protector. If she bestowed her hand on him his arm should shelter her from every evil, that he would respect her grief and wait until time had assuaged it, hoping one day to win her love.

Then the beautiful but cold woman took him by the hand and led him to her father's bedside, and told the old count that she yielded to his wishes. De Launay urged the immediate celebration of the marriage, for he felt he was sinking fast, and it was accordingly consummated in a few days. He lived to witness it, but died in a fortnight afterward.

The dowry he gave with his daughter was 500,000 livres; the remainder of his fortune, a million livres, was secured to her exclusively and intangibly.

Thus Gaspar Roland, the Victor Marsay of the earlier part of our narrative, came into possession of a loveless bride and a large fortune. By agreement with his father this sum was immediately invested in the banking business, Gaspar assuming the duties of an active partner. A joyless home, an accusing conscience, made business a relief to him, and all the energies of his mind were devoted to the custody and increase of his fortune.

There were days that tasked the utmost energies of a banker, and Gilbert Roland, whose health was failing, saw with delight the infusion of young blood into the firm. Soon he relinquished almost the entire control of the house to his son, whose conduct justified his confidence.

Roland did not neglect politics, but determined to ride on the top wave of the revolution. He was a member of several political clubs of extreme opinions, and came to be regarded as a true friend of the people. So liberal was he in giving away money and food that the public believed he lived and labored for them alone, not dreaming of the extent of his profits, of the usurious interest he exacted for his loans, never suspecting that he despised the people he flattered, that he anticipated the ultimate ruin of their cause, and was prepared to renounce them when the tide turned. Making for himself friends among the people, he was also enabled to establish relations with the noblesse through his marriage with the count's daughter. So much by way of explanation.

When he returned home after the scene at the Palais Royal, he sent for Paul Aubrey and informed him of his meeting with Ringold, describing his person and that of his attendant Maythorn, and commanding him to use his utmost efforts to discover where they lived.

Aubrey listened to him in gloomy silence, merely bowing his head in reply.

"What are you thinking of?" asked his master, sharply.

"I was thinking," said the valet, "that if this Ringold had known what I knew when he met you this morning, he would have killed you without a word."

"What do you mean, sir?" asked Roland, sternly.

"I mean that his daughter is dead!" replied Aubrey.

"Dead!" echoed Roland, smiting his forehead with his clenched hand. "Then I am her murderer!"

"Hush!" cried Aubrey, in alarm. "Your wife might overhear you. "Let this knowledge die with us two. I helped to destroy her."

"As Heaven is merciful," said the stricken man, "I would have given half my fortune to have saved her."

"And her life was precious to me, too," said Aubrey, half to himself.

Then, at the command of his master, he related all the particulars of the tragedy.

Roland listened, with teeth set, and staring eyes, clinging convulsively to the arms of his chair, like a man undergoing a terrible surgical operation. At the close of the narrative he motioned Aubrey to leave him, but his lips refused to utter the command.

Then and there his punishment commenced. It is certain that a sin like his is never committed with impunity, the retribution exists for every criminal like him. It may be invisible, as physical pain is invisible; the world may not see the rack, and the instruments of torture, but the culprit feels them. Gaspar Roland had wrecked the heart and life of the woman who had saved him from death; and the image of the poor drowned girl, rising to confront him in his splendid solitude, already half avenged her wrongs.

CHAPTER X.

THE ENCOUNTER.

The life of Gaspar Roland was a perpetual punishment. His days were full of care from the perplexities of his business, occasioned by the stormy progress of the revolution, that moved on from one convulsion and one excess to another. The time came when the storm was at its height, when his legitimate profits were threatened, and ruin seemed imminent.

It is true that his financial genius rose with the emergency, but it was displayed at the expense of his honor. He accepted enormous bribes for aiding in the escape of royalists from France. He purchased of needy and terror-stricken nobles jewels of inestimable value for a quarter of their worth, and substituted the gains of a usurer for the earnings of a banker. But these transactions gave him no peace. He was compelled to hide his treasures like a miser, and to assume an appearance of distress. He dreaded discovery, plunder, and ruin; for what might not be expected of a people who had put to death their king and their queen, and drenched their scaffolds with the blood of the innocent?

Each day's business bequeathed a legacy of care to the next. Then came with night the horrible specter of his victim, pale and menacing, to haunt his dreams. His imagination acquired such a morbid intensity that he sometimes thought he saw the cold phantom in broad daylight. And ever before him the figure of the avenger projected its black shadow in his path. The necessity, too, of hiding his

guilty terrors aggravated their poignancy, for the coldness of his wife had developed into aversion, and she treated him almost like a stranger, and he had no confidant.

The fear of vengeance was tangible and real. There was no safety for him while Ringold lived.

A son was born to him, but it gave him only a momentary joy. It did not bring the parents nearer to each other.

In time, however, his fears for his personal safety gave way to a feeling of security, for Aubrey, after having searched the city, and having enlisted the police in his quest, had failed to discover any traces of Ringold and his companion, and the banker had a strong belief that the Englishman had left France.

They were still, however, in the city; but the injuries of Ringold were so severe that he was unable to stir abroad for months. It was only by very slow degrees that he recovered his health and strength. Maythorn rarely left his master's bedside, and when he went out used great precautions, pursuant to a plan which the two men had agreed upon. He had succeeded, however, in acquiring an important piece of information, and that was that the man who had addressed the people in the garden of the Palais Royal, and whom they had known as Victor Marsay, was no other than the banker, Gaspar Roland.

Long after Ringold recovered his health he continued to live in hiding. His reasons were obvious. It was evident that Gaspar Roland was the idol of the French mob, and the French mob now ruled supreme. That mob had rescued him from the avenger's hands, and would doubtless protect him again if he were publicly assailed. Roland had been forewarned, and was, consequently, forearmed, and was, of course, prepared to procure the Englishman's arrest as soon as he should show himself. Secrecy was therefore necessary to success. The old man could afford to wait, provided that delay would make his vengeance sure.

Besides, he knew not the extent of Roland's guilt, though he guessed something of it; knew not where the lost girl was, and it was only from Roland's lips that he could learn.

Joe Maythorn seconded all his master's plans. His love for the old man had quickened and developed his slow intellect. Joe was no fool; his doltishness of manner vailed a vast amount of Yorkshire shrewdness, and now that his faculties were concentrated on one point, they became wonderfully sharpened.

As it was essential that he should acquire some knowledge of French, the ex-hostler set himself to work under the tuition of the ex-innkeeper—certainly a pursuit of knowledge under difficulties.

The above explanation shows how Mr. Paul Aubrey came to fail in his search for the Englishman, and why Gaspar Roland, finally laying aside his fears, ventured abroad once more at all hours of the night and day, when business or politics required it.

The banker had now a world of care upon his shoulders, for his father had been dead some months.

One night a stormy meeting of his club detained him till a very late hour, and as the place of meeting was not far from his residence, he had not ordered his carriage. Moreover, as a matter of policy, he preferred to go and return on foot. The retention of a carriage was beginning to be regarded as a proof of aristocracy, and the suspicion of aristocracy was a death-warrant.

His way home took him through a lonely street rarely visited by the patrol, and badly lighted. As he entered it he noticed, not without alarm, that it was totally deserted. He had gone half way through, and was within a few steps of an open and well lighted square, when two powerful men rushed upon him from the shadow of an archway, seized him and enveloped his head in a cloak before he could utter a cry.

Blindfolded and gagged, he was dragged along by his captors, whither he knew not, but he heard a door opened, and knew that he was forced down a flight of stone steps.

After being taken along a subterranean passageway, as he judged from its dampness, the prisoner was hauled into a room, the door of which he heard closed and locked. Then the cloak was removed, and he saw himself confronted by Jerry Ringold, holding a pistol to his head. Joe Maythorn stood beside him, but the latter was apparently unarmed, as the banker himself was. He had neglected his usual precaution of arming himself before he went abroad.

Gaspar Roland was no coward, but the position in which he found himself might well have chilled the blood of a braver man.

In a lonely underground room at midnight, unarmed, in the hands of two powerful men, one of them known to be his deadly enemy with weapons in his grasp, his fate was sealed. Even if he called for help there was no one to hear his cry and answer it.

"You are fairly trapped at last!" said Ringold, speaking with strange calmness, while a gleam of triumph brightened his gray eyes. "You are completely in my power, for if you open your lips to cry out I'll shoot you like a dog!"

There was a faint ground for hope in this speech. At least, instant murder was not the purpose of his captor.

"What do you want of me?" asked the banker, recovering something of his self-possession.

"In the first place, to have a little talk with you," said Ringold. "Make him sit down," he added to Maythorn.

Joe had his hand upon Roland's collar, and leading him to a stool which was placed beside a deal-table, on which stood a single lamp, crushed him down upon the seat.

Ringold seated himself opposite to him, still holding his pistol in his hand.

"Now," said he, sternly, "I demand the truth of you. Where is my daughter?"

"I do not know," murmured the banker, trembling.

"You lie!" replied the old man, aiming his pistol at the banker's head. "Your manner shows that you are lying. Now, you are completely in my power, but, villain though I believe you to be, I am going to give you one chance for life. Speak the truth and you shall have the benefit of it; try to deceive me and you die with the lie in your throat!"

"I will tell the truth," said the banker, catching at the vague promise as a drowning man catches at a straw. "Jessie Ringold fled from Richmond with me."

"Go on," said the old man, sternly.

"She consented to go with me because I promised her marriage."

"Did you marry her?" asked the old man.

The banker faltered. Again the pistol was leveled at his head, and the cold gray eye of his enemy looked steadily along the barrel.

"The marriage ceremony was performed in London."

"By whom?"

"By a pretended priest."

"Go on."

"Your daughter believed herself my wedded wife. I brought her to France, and took her to Fontenay-aux Roses."

The muscles of Ringold's face twitched convulsively.

"And you lived with her there?" he said.

"I lived with her there," faltered the banker.

"And you could see and know that angel—know that she trusted you, and had placed her honor and life in your keeping, and yet not repair your wrongs by a legal marriage!"

"I could not. I was—I was forced to marry another."

"And she still thinks herself your wife?"

The banker's head dropped upon his breast.

"Answer!" thundered the old man.

"She discovered my perfidy at last," said the banker, "and left me immediately."

"Thank God! I knew it!" cried Jerry Ringold. "That was like my Jessie. But where is she now?"

"I have not seen her from that day to this," answered the banker, trembling in every limb.

"You are dodging the question!" cried Ringold, fiercely. "I did not ask if you had seen her, but I asked you where she was. You are holding something back."

"Kill me!" cried the banker—kill me, but let me die without answering your question."

"Die, then!" exclaimed Ringold, once more leveling the pistol.

But the banker's courage gave way when he looked into the black muzzle of the weapon, and he shrieked:

"Spare me! I will speak. Driven to despair, she threw herself into the Seine, and perished."

A sharp cry of agony rang through the narrow room. Then Ringold sprang to his feet, like a lion roused by the hunter's spear. His pistol was in hand, his finger on the trigger, and he waved the weapon up and down, as if choosing the spot to plant his shot in.

But suddenly the barrel of the pistol drooped.

"No, no!" he muttered to himself; "I can't commit a murder even to put a murderer out of the way—the murderer of my poor Jessie! I said I would give him one chance for his life, and I'll keep my word. Here!" he exclaimed, to Roland. "Take this," he said, producing another pistol, "and defend yourself, your life against mine. Choose your distance, and halt when you have reached it."

"What! save my life by another murder!" thought Roland. The scruple, however, was only a passing thought. "It is my life or his," was his second thought, and he seized the proffered weapon, fell back a few paces, and raised it.

"Fire!" shouted Ringold.

The flash of the two pistols was followed by two reports coming together, and ringing through the low-vaulted room like a crash of thunder. As the dense smoke lifted, Ringold fell heavily into the arms of Maythorn, while Roland stood firmly on his feet.

The banker was amazed at the result, but it restored all his hope and energy. He rushed to the door and turned the key. His foot was already on the corridor, when the wounded man called out:

"Leave me, Maythorn, and secure him—don't let him escape!"

Maythorn sprang at Roland, but the banker turned and dealt a stunning blow at his assailant, who staggered back, reeled, and saved himself from falling by catching at the table.

Ringold sprang to his feet, though the blood was flowing from a fractured shoulder, and made for his enemy.

But at this moment an unexpected relief appeared. A member of the Committee of Safety, who was passing through the street, escorted by half a dozen pikemen, had heard the shots and cries, and seen the smoke issuing from the basement windows of the house. He darted down the steps, pushed open the hall door, and led his men into the room where the struggle had taken place. He at once recognized the banker, and accosted him.

"What is this, Citizen Roland?" he asked.

Roland might have rid himself of his enemy by a single word, but he shrank from the idea of adding another crime to the weight that already rested on his soul. Provided that his own safety was secured, he was willing to spare the father of his victim. He drew the committeeman to one side.

"A duel," said he. "I had a private dispute with this hot-headed Englishman, and we agreed to settle it by a resort to arms. I have wounded him badly; but we had formerly amicable relations, and when in England I laid myself under great obligations to him."

"Then you do not wish me to arrest him, Citizen Roland? Do you vouch for it that he is not an enemy of the republic?"

"No more than I am," answered Roland. "He cares nothing for politics. Yet I have my reasons for wishing him out of the country."

"You propose, then, to procure a decree of banishment against him?"

"I propose to make no noise whatever about the matter. I propose a quiet arrangement. I wish this man and his comrade sent to Havre, and there put on board a smuggling-craft bound to the coast of England."

The republican functionary looked doubtful. Roland put a purse of gold in his hand.

"This is an earnest of what I will do," said the banker, "when you bring me word that my wishes have been fulfilled to the letter."

"Make your mind easy, Citizen Roland," answered the republican. "I know you, and I would do much more than you ask to oblige you."

"Then I leave the matter entirely in your hands," said the banker.

"You can do so safely," replied the other.

The banker fraternized with the pikemen, taking care to leave a gold piece in every hand that he shook. Then, while Maythorn was busy in attending to his master's wound, he quickly slipped away and gained his home.

Ten days afterward he learned that that very night Ringold and Maythorn had been dispatched from Paris in the care of a secret agent of the revolutionary committee. They were carried to Havre, and put on board a smuggling craft which the agent hunted up, for at that time there was no lawful intercourse between England and France, and they were warned that if they ever returned, the guillotine awaited them.

Not until authoritatively assured that the broken-hearted old man he had wronged and his associate were fairly out of his way, did Gaspar Roland, the banker, whose life had been so miraculously saved, draw a free breath.

CHAPTER XI.

RISEN FROM THE DEAD.

GASPAR ROLAND, though unhappy in his domestic relations, and tortured by remorse, was fortunate in business. His extraordinary shrewdness and capacity tided him through the storm of revolution, every phase of which he foresaw and prepared for.

When Robespierre and his faction fell, the Reign of Terror ceased, and order was restored, then only was the wealth of the great Paris banker admitted and acknowledged. When the luxury of former days revived, his equipages were the most brilliant, his furniture the most superb, his balls and dinners the most magnificent.

At his sumptuous entertainments, the ex-Countess de Launay presided like a queen, and the public intercourse of man and wife was so affectionate and cordial that their conjugal happiness became a proverb.

But when the guests had departed and the lights were one by one extinguished, they exchanged no word with each other. They had separate apartments and took their meals apart. Madame Roland had her own carriages, horses, and servants, and went and came unchallenged and unquestioned by her husband.

It was the custom of Madame Roland to drive out in her carriage every fine day. On one of these occasions, as her equipage was proceeding at a walk through the Champs-Elysees, she was gazing listlessly on the passers-by and the groups of children playing under the trees. All at once she uttered an exclamation, fell back in her seat, and pressed her hands to her face, a prey to a violent emotion that shook her frame in every limb.

"His very image!" she cried to herself. "Yet it cannot be! I have dwelt on his face till I see it everywhere; sleeping and waking it haunts me."

But she bent forward and gazed from the carriage earnestly and intently at the object which had arrested her attention. As the carriage moved slowly on, her eyes turned backward as if fascinated, and every moment her agitation increased.

"Can the grave give up its dead?" she muttered. "Oh! I am growing mad!"

What was it that had thus in an instant overthrown the cold impassibility of the banker's beautiful wife?

In the face and figure of a man in an undress infantry uniform, seated on a bench in a motionless attitude, she recognized, or thought she recognized, one whom she certainly never expected again to meet in this world.

This person was still young, though traces of hardship and suffering were visible in his bronzed and worn features, and in his dark, mournful eyes. He was strikingly handsome, and his figure was so gracefully and strongly molded, there was such an air of distinction about him, in spite of his unpretending attire, that the most indifferent idler who passed him did not fail to give him more than a transitory glance. On his part, the stranger seemed perfectly unconscious of the observation he attracted, but sat with his eyes cast down, abstractedly tracing figures in the gravel with the end of his walking-stick.

After the carriage had passed on some distance, the lady ordered the coachman to turn and to walk his horses in the direction of the city. Then she changed her seat and again scrutinized the stranger.

"At least, the resemblance is wonderful," she said to herself.

She called to her coachman to stop. The footman sprang down and opened the carriage-door.

"What are madam's commands?" he asked.

This footman, Antoine, was a man of middle age, had been brought up in the service of the late Count de Launay, and was devoted body and soul to the count's daughter. Madame Roland felt that she could trust him with her life.

"Antoine," she said, "did you notice that man we just passed, seated at the foot of the statue of the Hunting Diana?"

"Yes, madam."

"I desire to find out his name and where he lives."

"Yes, madam."

"Watch him and follow him, as if you were a spy of the police, and be careful that he does not observe your movements. Do not lose sight of him an instant."

"Rely upon me, madam."

Antoine closed the door, and told the coachman to drive on.

Madame Roland reached home a prey to the most violent agitation, which came near culminating in a nervous crisis.

Meanwhile Antoine, keeping his mission in view, bought a newspaper and sat down on a bench, pretending to read but never losing sight of the stranger. The latter passed nearly an hour without stirring, then he rose, looked about him with the bewildered air of a man just waking up, and then directed his steps to the river, walking slowly and listlessly, looking neither to the right nor left, and never turning his head. Antoine might have followed close at his heels with impunity, but though the man he watched would never have been aware of it, the valet, of course, was anxious to conceal his espionage from the police officers and from the promenaders.

The stranger followed the quays in a westernly direction, then turned to the right and crossed the river. Entering a restaurant of humble appearance, he called for a cup of coffee and a roll of bread. Antoine imitated his example. When the stranger had nearly finished his meal, the valet arose and preceded him into the street; but he stopped at a print-shop window and was apparently intent on scanning the latest political caricatures, when the stranger passed him. Antoine followed him again. When near the Luxembourg palace, the stranger turned into a by-street, the Rue de Conde, disappeared under the archway of a tall, somber-looking house, stopped at the porter's lodge, got his key, and went up stairs.

Antoine was close behind him, and taking out a letter as a pretext, said to the porter:

"That was Monsieur Armand, who just passed you, was it not?"

"No, monsieur; that was Captain Alphonse de Ferrand."

"Why," exclaimed Antoine, "isn't this No. 21 Rue de Conde?"

"No, monsieur, this is No. 20," replied the concierge.

"Pardon," said the valet, touching his hat. "I have mistaken the house."

He then hurried home, where he reported to his mistress the result of his mission.

Madame Roland had had time to recover her self-possession and betrayed no signs of emotion.

"Very well," said she, writing down the address in her memorandum-book. "Captain Alphonse de Ferrand, No. 20 Rue de Conde. That is all, Antoine. You may go."

"It was a dream then!" she said to herself. "One of the many dreams that mock me. Yet," she added, after a pause, "I cannot rest till I have seen this person face to face."

She then sat down and wrote the following note:

"To Captain A. de Ferrand:

"Sir—A person from whom you may hear of something to your advantage is desirous of having an interview with you, and solicits the honor of a visit. If you will be at home this evening at nine o'clock, your correspondent will send you a guide.

"A Friend."

Then she sent for Antoine, and having addressed the note, directed him to deliver it, and to be sure that it reached the hands of the captain.

Antoine hastened away and soon reached the house No. 20 Rue de Conde.

"Well, what now!" inquired the porter, recognizing the valet, who had so lately called.

"Is Captain de Ferrand in?" asked Antoine.

"A short time ago you were asking for somebody else," said the porter, eying the emissary suspiciously.

"My friend," said Antoine, placing the note and a five-franc piece in the porter's hands, "can you place that note immediately in Captain de Ferrand's hands?"

"Without a doubt," replied the porter, and the valet went away satisfied of the efficacy of the means he had adopted to secure a punctual delivery.

"A perfumed note! a lady's handwriting!" said the porter. "Here's some mystery—however, its none of my business."

Antoine again presented himself at the porter's lodge at nine o'clock on the evening of the same day. Though he was no longer in livery, the porter immediately recognized the donor of the five-franc piece.

"Is Captain de Ferrand at home?" asked the valet.

"Yes," replied the porter, promptly. "Room No. 13, third story."

Antoine found the door, and knocked and was admitted. In the occupant of the room he recognized the man he had been directed to watch and follow in the morning. He was seated reading, but threw aside his book, looked sharply at his visitor, and said curtly:

"Your business."

"Captain, you received a note this afternoon?"

"I did; were you the bearer of it?"

"I was, sir."

"Then take it back to her who sent it—some *intrigante*, I suppose—she is mistaken in her man," and he tossed the note to the lackey.

"Sir," replied Antoine, the blood mounting to his cheeks, "do I look like the servant of an *intrigante?* My mistress is a lady."

"Her name?"

"Did she not sign the note?"

"No; you can see for yourself."

"Then, sir, if my mistress did not sign the note, she had a good reason for not doing so, which she will doubtless explain herself. She is an honorable lady. I shall have the honor of conducting monsieur to her presence."

The captain scrutinized the man very closely. Apparently the examination was satisfactory, for he said, briefly:

"I will go with you."

Still it was clear that the captain was not wholly without suspicion, for he took down from a nail on which they hung a pair of pistols, and satisfied himself that they were in excellent order.

Securing the weapons about his person, he rose, took his hat, and told the valet to lead the way.

At the corner of the street a coupe was waiting, into which they entered, and the carriage drove off. It took several turnings, and the captain was at a loss as to his whereabouts. Noticing that the windows were of ground-glass he sought to open one of them, but they were fast.

"I presume you remarked," he said, coldly, to his companion, "that I am armed. If any harm is designed me, it will cost two lives."

"Your suspicions are entirely groundless, captain," replied the valet, "and here we are."

The carriage stopped. Antoine sprang out and assisted the captain to alight. He found himself in a vast court-yard surrounded by high buildings. The valet entered a side-door, led the captain up a narrow staircase to the second story, turned aside into a corridor, then traversed several apartments, and finally ushered the guest into an elegant boudoir, lighted by a single lamp which stood on the richly carved white marble mantel-piece.

Here he motioned the visitor to a seat, and, bowing low, retired, leaving De Ferrand with a lady who sat in the shade, while the full light of the lamp fell upon the captain's face.

"I believe I have the honor of receiving Captain Alphonse de Ferrand," said the lady, with a voice which she vainly struggled to render firm.

"That is my name, madam," replied the captain. "Whom have I the honor of addressing, and what are your commands?"

The lady made no immediate reply, but her attitude, bending forward toward him, showed that she was scrutinizing his features intently.

At last she rose, and advancing to the center of the room, said, half to herself:

"I am bewildered still—still in doubt."

Then going to the mantel-piece, she lifted the alabaster shade from the lamp, and allowing it to fall on her features, cried:

"You ask who I am—look at me and answer for yourself!"

With a wild cry the stranger sprang to his feet, extended his arms, and exclaimed:

"Louise de Launay!"

"Yes," she replied, "I am, or rather was, Louise de Launay, as surely as you are, or were, Eugene Lamar."

"My own Louise!" he cried, springing forward to embrace her.

But the lady waved him back, and sinking into a chair, covered her face with her hands, and sobbed as if her heart were breaking.

"Not your Louise!" she said at last. "Louise de Launay is dead—dead to you—dead to herself—Louise de Launay is no more—you see before you Louise Roland, wife of the banker, Gaspar Roland."

"It was what I feared," said the young man, grasping the mantle-piece to sustain himself. "How could I hope otherwise? You believed me dead—yet I did think Louise de Launay would have been faithful to the memory of Eugene Lamar."

"I believed," said Madame Roland, "that the grave had closed over you, and my heart lay buried with you. Your death was officially reported. Though forbidden to wear black, I mourned you in my heart, as sincerely as ever widow mourned her loved and lost. It was only in obedience to the dying command of my father that I gave to another my hand—I had no heart to give."

"But you are happy, Louise?"

"Yes, happy, of course," said Madame Roland, bitterly. "I am very rich, and very much admired. The fortune my father left me has been more than quintrupled. You see the luxury by which I am surrounded. My husband is a handsome man—popular, honored. You perceive that I must be happy!"

"You have every reason to be so, and to forget that the shadow of Eugene Lamar ever crossed your path. Let it be so. Let it be so—Eugene Lamar, the daring plebeian, the son of the count's steward, who dared to raise his eyes to the noble countess, the child of his father's master, is blotted from existence. In his place there stands Alphonse de Ferrand, soldier of fortune, with only his sword for a friend, and no hope in the future but to die for France. Yet sometimes this soldier of fortune looks back to happier days; strange pictures of delight float dream-like over the mirror of his memory. He sees another self—a daring, hopeful boy kneeling at the feet of a blushing girl—his bliss intensified by the mystery that shrouded their innocent loves; he sees the barriers of rank effaced, he hears the words of promise that issued from the lips of his adored—her vow that she would be true to him in life, and true to him in death. And she—she lives, and loves him no longer!"

"Hold!" cried Madame Roland, who had listened to him with a beating heart. "Were they the last words I uttered—were they to cost me my life—were they to insure my shame and dishonor, I would say, Eugene, I love you still!"

"You love me still, Louise?" cried Eugene, the light of other days flashing in his eyes. "Then happiness is yet in store for us. Fly—fly this hateful luxury that surrounds you—fly, as we proposed to do when the existing obstacle was a father, as it is now a husband. True, I have nothing to offer you but a soldier's fate and fare, a soldir's tent for shelter, a soldier's cloak by the bivouac fire at night, with the whistling of the wind or the bullets of the enemy's pickets for a lullaby; but you were brave once, Louise, and have not lost your courage."

"*Nor my honor*, Eugene," replied the lady, and the solemnity of her manner arrested the fierce outpourings of his passion. "I am a wedded wife, though only a wife in name, as completely sundered from my husband as if we were legally divorced. I am a mother, too, as well as wife—a mother also in name alone, with no maternal feelings, for I cannot love the child of the man I was forced to wed. But I can do nothing to blight the future of that unfortunate child. Nor can I forget that I am the daughter of a noble race. I can bear the burden of sorrow, but not of sin. At the voice of duty, the voice of passion must be mute."

"You are a noble woman, Louise," said Lamar; "and I implore you to forgive the wild words I uttered."

"I do forgive you, Eugene," she said, extending her hand, which he kissed reverentially, bending on one knee, as if he were doing honor to a queen. "My own confession of the love I still bear to one whom I believed dead prompted your proposal of flight. Let us forget that it was uttered, heard, or even dreamed of. Let us be friends—no more nor less. And now be seated, my friend of other days, and tell me how it is that you, whom I mourned as lost to earth, are risen from the dead?"

CHAPTER XII.

THE STORY OF EUGENE LAMAR.

We hasten to present, in a succinct form, not only the substance of what Lamar now told the countess, but some precedent circumstances, which, as being known to both of them, he did not recapitulate in his narrative.

It will be remembered that when the Count de Launay submitted to his daughter Gaspar Roland's proposal of marriage, she replied to him, "You know, sir, that I have only a dead heart to bestow."

The conversation we have just related has thrown a light on the meaning of this declaration.

We must now retrograde to a point of time previous to the date of the commencement of our story, which began with the year 1790.

At the time to which we refer, Eugene Lamar, son of Count de Launay's steward, a young man of great personal attraction and talent, well educated, and pursuing a course of studies to fit himself for the medical profession, was frequently brought in casual contact with the beautiful daughter of the nobleman. She was at that time an enthusiastic and impulsive girl. Motherless, and an only child, she was left, in a great measure, untrammeled and unchecked, but made, on the whole, a good use of the liberty accorded her. Having access to a library supplied with all the modern works, she had not confined herself exclusively to the perusal of romances which inflamed her imagination, but had grappled with philosophy, and become imbued with the ideas of those great men whose vehement protest against the existing order of things, and whose Utopian views of the future, prepared the way for that storm which toppled over the fabric of French society, convulsed all Europe to its center, and finally drenched the Continent in blood from the Seine to the Borysthenes. "Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity" had become her motto long before the words were thundered in Paris by the revolutionary pikemen.

Therefore, when she first read in the eyes of young Lamar the language of love which he dared not translate into words, she felt no revulsion of wounded pride, but rather a longing for the time when courage would unseal his lips, and enable her to unlock the secret of her heart by a similar avowal.

What the issue of that love might be, she did not ask. Ardent hearts live in the present, not the future.

The time for confession came. Eugene "told his love," and knew that he was beloved in turn. They engaged in secret correspondence and met in secret, but an unfaithful waiting-maid, who had been employed as a messenger, at length betrayed them.

One morning the Count de Launay entered his daughter's room with a very grave air, and, taking a seat, produced a small package of letters.

"Mademoiselle de Launay," he said, sternly, "please look over those letters, and see whether they are *all* you have written to the steward's son."

This was the first announcement of the discovery of her secret, and she sat trembling and convulsed, like a criminal before a judge who has just pronounced his sentence of death. Only the pride and courage of her race supported her under the horrible pangs that tortured her soul.

Pale as death, she took the packet of letters—those letters written only for the eye of love, which had just been scanned by the eye of hate. She ran over them mechanically, and then answered:

"They are all."

"Are you certain?"

Louise bowed her head affirmatively.

"Do you swear it?" asked the count.

"No," replied Louise, raising her head proudly.

"Why?" demanded her father.

"Because the word of a De Launay is as sacred as an oath."

The count was satisfied. He gathered up the letters that lay on the dressing table, approached the fire-place, threw them into the flames, and watched them till the last spark had disappeared from the ashes to which they were reduced.

"Thus perishes a record of dishonor!" he said.

"Not of dishonor," she replied. "Our love is pure and holy."

"You mean to say *was* pure and holy," retorted the count. "It is a thing of the past. Now, Mademoiselle de Launay, I request you to produce the letters you have received from—from *him*—the base-born vassal!"

The pride of Louise de Launay gave way; tears started from her eyes as she clasped her hands and said, imploringly:

"Leave me some consolation."

But the count was pitiless; his daughter's appeal only sent the blood of indignation to his cheek and brow.

"Am I to be obeyed?" he demanded, sternly.

But Louise replied not; she sat motionless in mute despair.

Her jewel-case stood on the dressing-table, with the key in the lock. Thinking that might be the depository of the correspondence, he drew it toward him, opened it, and found his surmise correct. He took out a package of letters tied together by a narrow pink ribbon.

"I surrender them, father," cried the afflicted girl; "but, oh! do not—do not read them, I implore you."

"Are they so disgraceful, then?"

The noble girl again raised her head proudly.

"They are such as I might read without a blush before the shrine of the Virgin," she said, indignantly. "But," she added, casting down her eyes, "they were intended for my eye alone."

"Are these all the letters you have received from the same source?"

"All."

Count de Launay took the packet as he had done the other, and burned it to ashes. Then he rose, and said:

"Daughter, you are young and inexperienced. Though your conduct has wounded me to the heart, yet I forgive you." And he thought himself magnanimous in the declaration. "Forget as soon as possible the only event that has brought trouble between us. You have had a wild dream, that is all. You are less culpable than he. But he will never trouble you again. You will never meet in this world."

"Have you killed him?" she gasped.

The count smiled disdainfully.

"You are a female Don Quixote de la Mancha," he said. "The reading of romances has turned your head. The De Launays do not assassinate—they suppress."

With this ambiguous phrase, he left her.

It was evident that from his lips she should never learn the fate of one who was dearer to her than her life. Yet her anxiety for his safety had the salutary effect of diverting her mind from the contemplation of her ruined hopes.

One chance for information remained. De Launay could not have been so cruel as to keep the steward in ignorance of his son's fate, and the steward, even though pledged to secrecy, would yield to her importunities. She rang the bell and desired the servant to send the steward to her immediately.

In a few moments a stern-faced old man, a perfect stranger, presented himself.

Mademoiselle de Launay gazed on him with suspicion.

"I desired to see my father's steward, sir—Monsieur Lamar."

"I have the honor to inform your ladyship that Monsieur Lamar is no longer in the service of the Count de Launay. He has been dismissed, and your humble servant, Pierre Durand, has had the honor of being appointed to the vacant place. What are your commands?"

"Tell me where I can find Monsieur Lamar."

"I cannot inform your ladyship."

"Then I have no commands for you, sir."

No one in the household knew, or, if knowing, was willing to communicate, the present residence of the elder Lamar.

It was only after the lapse of many days, and by the merest chance, that Mademoiselle de Launay encountered the object of her search in one of the public squares of the city. Even then she would have passed without recognizing him, had he not called her by name in a feeble voice.

A few days' suffering had accomplished the work of years upon his aged frame. His cheeks were deeply furrowed, the corners of his mouth drawn down, his eyes sunken in their orbits, his hands trembled as if with paralysis.

She sat down on the bench beside him, drawing down her vail so as to escape recognition from any chance spy of her father, and then asked, in a low, tremulous voice:

"Where is Eugene?"

The old man cast a terrified glance round him, and then answered, in a scarcely audible tone:

"I promised to keep it a secret; but no matter—the worst they can do is to send me where he is, and then I may perchance again see his face before I close my eyes forever."

"Where is he?" repeated Louise.

The old man put his trembling lips close to the ear of the young countess, and whispered:

"In the Bastile!"

"In that terrible prison!" cried Louise. "What crime has he committed to justify so awful a fate? By what warrant is he deprived of his liberty?"

"By a *lettre de cachet*."

"A *lettre de cachet?*"

"Yes, a secret warrant of imprisonment, which consigns a man without a cause alleged, without proof of guilt, without specification of charges, without being confronted by judge or accuser, without being allowed the aid of counsel or witness, to perhaps a life-long sequestration. There are men in the Bastile this day who went in full of life and youth and vigor, and who are now as old and gray as I am, and as guiltless as yourself."

"I know what *lettres de cachet* are," replied Louise, "but I thought they were no longer used."

"They will be used and abused," replied the old man, kindling with indignation, "till the day when the people rise in their might and scatter that fabric of tyranny from turret to foundation-stone. And the day is at hand. I may not live to see it, for my hours are numbered, but it will come as surely as the sun will rise and set to-morrow. Since I have been expelled from the count's service, I have mixed with the people; I have witnessed their sufferings, heard their threats, and become acquainted with their plans. The first shout of that giant—the People—when he bursts his bonds, will be 'Down with the Bastile!'"

"Then we must both wait and pray for that time, which may be years in coming."

"It will not be long delayed," replied the ex-steward, with a mysterious smile.

Thus, a faint, a very faint spark of hope was kindled in the bosom of De Launay's daughter. She asked the old man if he needed assistance.

"No, mademoiselle," replied old Lamar. "Whatever may be your father's faults, he is a generous master. I am in independent circumstances."

"You will permit me at least to visit you from time to time, and see to your comforts."

The old man's face brightened up.

"You would bring sunshine with you," he answered.

He told her where he lived, in the Faubourg St. Antoine, and they parted.

After this Louise de Launay made frequent, stealthy visits to the old steward. But, alas! he was sinking day by day. She saw that his end was approaching, and the knowledge urged her to a desperate step.

She sought her father.

"Father," she said, "your old and faithful steward is dying."

"Well," said the count, coldly.

"If you know where his son is, you will perform the act of a Christian in informing him of the fact, and permitting him to close his father's dying eyes."

The count made no reply, but his face assumed a fierce and cruel expression, and he went away without a word of comment.

Then Louise de Launay knew that her appeal had failed, and she hastened back to the bedside of the dying man.

He smiled faintly on seeing her, and tried to raise himself.

"I shall never see Eugene again in this world," he said, with an angelic look of resignation, "but we shall meet in a better world never to part. But you will see him again—I feel sure—the days of tyranny, in France, are nearly over. Tell him that I thought of him to the last, and bear to him his father's blessing—and this legacy."

He fumbled beneath his pillow and produced a small morocco case.

"I have invested all my little fortune in jewels," he said, "and I know only you to intrust it to. Give them to Eugene, with my blessing. And may the blessing of an old man rest upon you, my child, and may Heaven reward you for your kindness and love to me and my poor boy!"

These were the last words he spoke. The young countess bent over him, kissed his forehead, and closed his dying eyes.

As she drove home, she reproached herself, because, notwithstanding the dreadful scene she had just passed through, she could not help dwelling with pleasure on the confidence with which the dying steward had spoken of her reunion with her lover.

She went directly to her father, and said:

"Sir, I have just come from the death-bed of a faithful servant of our house. Will you give orders for a funeral fitting his fidelity and worth, or must I perform the task myself?"

The Count de Launay knew that she spoke of the old steward, though she had not mentioned his name.

Something in the expression of his countenance indicated a feeling of remorse and sorrow, but he made no comments on the announcement, except to ask where the body lay.

On receiving the required information he said that he would see that his old steward was buried in a manner befitting the position he had so long occupied, and Louise was satisfied that he would redeem his pledge.

CHAPTER XIII.

A SECRET OF THE BASTILE

WHEN the Count de Launay was informed of what in his eyes was the unpardonable sin of Eugene Lamar, his indignation did not betray itself in any outburst of fury—that was not in his nature; but it was only the deeper and more terrible from its suppression. His first step was to send for the offender.

Eugene attempted no denial, but boldly avowed his passion for the young countess. He saw now that it was hopeless, and his very despair made him brave. In a moment of surprise, however, he surrendered the letters of Louise, the count pledging himself that they should be delivered into his daughter's hands.

During this brief interview the count betrayed no passion and employed very few words, but his stern reticence was ominous enough. He contented himself with dismissing young Lamar, warning him not to attempt a renewal of the forbidden intercourse. Eugene was rash enough to refuse making any promise of the kind.

He was so overwhelmed with grief and despair when he reached his lodgings that he was incapable of deciding on any course of action, and deferred the serious consideration of his position until the next day.

Instant action, however, could alone have saved him. That very night he was arrested in his bed by a secret agent of the police, who had gained entrance to his room by a master-key.

The young man asked by what authority he was arrested.

"*De par le roi!*" (By the king's command.)

"Where are you taking me?"

"You will find that out for yourself," was the gruff reply. "Dress yourself, and pack up clothes and necessaries enough to last you for a long time."

Resistance being useless, Eugene complied with the commands of the official, made no unnecessary delay in dressing himself and packing his valise, and went down to the street, where the secret agent of the police pushed him into a coach, followed himself, closed the door, and the carriage was driven off at a rapid pace. It took the line of the boulevards, and in a few minutes came to a halt.

Eugene heard the challenge of a sentry and the reply, and glancing through the window of the coach, beheld a gloomy mass of round towers with fortified battlements, and huge connecting curtains of stone, which, with a sinking heart, he recognized as the infamous Bastile. He heard the clanking of chains and the grating of iron wheels, as the drawbridge was lowered and the portcullis raised.

The coach moved forward again, and stopped in the court-yard of the prison fortress. The carriage door was opened, the agent took him by the arm, aided him to alight, and carried him into a small room on the ground floor of the towers. Here the agent addressed a few words in so low a tone as to be unintelligible to the prisoner, to a middle-aged man of grave and rather benevolent countenance, who bowed, signed a paper which the official handed to him, and bade him good-night. Eugene was left alone with the middle-aged man, who soon announced himself as Sebastien, the jailer, and with one or two turnkeys and assistants.

The jailer, after making a note in a huge brazen-clasped volume that lay open on his table, took up a lamp and a bunch of keys, and nodding to the prisoner, said, affably:

"Now, then, Number Twenty, follow me."

Eugene Lamar had ceased to be a man; he was only a numeral, expressing a certain value in the aggregated sum of misery that swelled the registers of the Bastile.

After ascending two or three staircases and traversing several corridors, the jailer showed him into a narrow cell, containing an iron bedstead, a wooden table, and two stools. There was one grated window, through which the unfortunate prisoner beheld a crenelated tower, rearing its huge dark mass in the air and shutting out all but a very small portion of the star-studded sky.

"Rather better quarters than many of my guests occupy," said Sebastien. "I hope you will find it to your liking."

"Where is my valise?" asked the prisoner. "It contains only clothes, a few books, paper and writing materials."

"It is in the office," answered the jailer. "If there is nothing contraband in it, you shall have it early in the morning."

We shall not dwell on the horrors of that first night's imprisonment, nor on the many days of dull, rayless despair that followed. The sufferings of Eugene must be left to the imagination of the reader. Guiltless of crime, yet deprived of liberty! Can a fate more cruel be conceived?

After passing, as time rolled on, through the inevitable phases of fury and despair that brought him to the verge of insanity, Eugene attained the calmness of resignation to the inevitable. If this were not the result of protracted incarceration, every prison would become a mad-house. The few books he brought with him, including the Book of books, the sacred Scriptures, were a priceless blessing. When his own stock was exhausted, Sebastien supplied him from his own literary stores, the legacy of prisoners of distinction, who had been fortunate enough to be released from his charge after a temporary detention. All these volumes were read with avidity, and their contents indelibly imprinted on his memory. There is no place for study like a prisoner's cell.

The jailer was very kind to him, and particularly so after an incident we are about to relate.

One night Eugene was awakened at midnight by a sudden light glaring in his face. He started up, and saw Sebastien standing over him, with a lamp in his hand.

"Why am I disturbed of my rest in this way?" asked the prisoner, angrily.

The jailer was greatly agitated.

"Dress yourself quickly and follow me," he said.

A wild hope prompted Eugene to spring from his bed and hurry on his clothes. The jailer had compassionated his sufferings, and was about to liberate him. But the extravagant expectation was immediately dispelled, when Sebastien said:

Make no noise, and promise me to make no attempt to escape."

With a sinking heart Eugence gave the required pledge, and followed the jailer, who conducted him to his own private apartments. The motive of the jailer's visit was this—his youngest child, Marietta, a pretty little creature four years old, was very sick; the surgeon of the prison was absent, and knowing that Lamar had studied medicine, Sebastien sought his services. The child was breathing hoarsely and with difficulty. The moment Eugene heard the sound he knew that the little thing was suffering from a severe attack of croup, and that he had been summoned not a moment too soon. Instant action was imperative. From the jailer's medicine-chest he selected a powerful emetic, and administered it. The action was instantaneous—the child was saved; but he did not leave its bedside till it was smiling and prattling as if nothing had occurred. The father and mother were profuse in their expressions of gratitude, and it was with infinite pain that the good-hearted jailer saw himself compelled at last to carry the prisoner back to his cell and turn the key on him.

But from that day his attentions to Lamar were unremitting. Instead of employing a turnkey to wait on him, he always found time to perform that office himself. He supplied his table with delicacies, and he procured for him all the journals of the day. It was from one of these that the unfortunate prisoner learned of the death and burial of his father. For a long time after that sad intelligence he was plunged in the deepest melancholy.

After a while, however, his energies revived, and the star of every prisoner—the hope of escape—dawned upon his soul.

By mounting on a narrow ledge he was able to stretch his neck between the bars of the window, to look down upon the platform at the base of the tower, and note what was going on there. Little enough of life he beheld, but that little served to divert him. The posting of sentries, the rounds of the reliefs, were magnified into events by his isolation. It was a long time, however, before he connected what he saw with any plan of escape, but at last a possibility flashed upon his mind.

He ascertained that every night a patrol passed at the foot of the tower. The sentinel advanced to meet it at an angle of the wall which concealed the party from the view of Lamar's window. They remained thus concealed from his sight and his window, he, of course, being equally hidden from them, for the space of five minutes, neither more nor less. If then, during that brief space of time, he could reach the platform, he could throw himself over the parapet, swim the moat, and stand a fair chance of effecting his escape, darkness favoring his flight. All must be done, however, in the exact space of five minutes, for at the expiration of that time the sentry returned to his post beneath the window.

To accomplish this escape two things were absolutely necessary—a file to saw the window-bars and a coil of rope.

A substitute for the first was soon secured.

Among the favors shown to the prisoner by Sebastien, were his occasional invitations to dine with the jailer and his family, when he would escort Lamar to his cell. During one of these visits, Lamar, unseen,

picked up an old table-knife of excellent steel, with a gapped edge, which he found lying in a corner of the jailer's room.

Having possessed himself of this, he began his work on the window-bars, making slow progress, it is true, but still advancing.

For the rope, he relied upon twisting fragments of his bedclothes together, but to escape detection it was necessary to employ stratagem.

His bed was made up daily by a turnkey. Once, when Sebastien was present, and this was after the work of filing the bars had been nearly completed, and they were ready to come away at a wrench, the prisoner complained of the manner in which his bed was made up.

The turnkey growled out that he did his work as well as he knew how.

"If you want to learn, I'll show you how," said Lamar, and in a few moments he arranged the bed in a manner that would have done credit to the most dextrous chambermaid.

"If the gentleman can suit himself so much better than I can suit him," said the turnkey, "perhaps he'd better take the job off my hands entirely."

"With all my heart," said Lamar.

"Very well, then," replied the menial; "in future I'll let the gentleman's bed alone."

Now, as the bedclothes were only changed once a week, and had only been renewed that day, Lamar had secured all the time he wanted to fabricate his rope. Besides, he had so completely won the confidence of his jailer, and was apparently so resigned to await his delivery in the legitimate way, that he had long since ceased to be subjected to any especial surveillance. For instance, his window-bars were now never examined.

All things, indeed, seemed to favor his project, and one dark night found him all ready for his undertaking.

But just at the moment he was about to approach the window and remove the bars (he had previously attached his knotted line, made up of shreds and patches, yet strong enough to bear his weight), a noise within his cell caused him to start back, in the belief that he had been detected.

Looking in the quarter from which the noise proceeded, he saw by the light of the lamp which he was now permitted to burn until nine o'clock in the evening, that a huge stone had been displaced and rolled into his cell, disclosing a yawning aperture.

Through this aperture a man crawled, dragging himself along, and slowly regaining his feet, looked in a bewildered way around him. It was a fellow-prisoner!

"Where am I?" he asked.

"In Number Twenty," answered Lamar. "And who are you?"

"The occupant of Number Nineteen," replied the stranger, "a cell where I have pined for fifteen years. I am Captain Alphonse de Ferrand, an officer in the Sardinian service. For months—ever since I obtained possession of this instrument," and he exhibited an old knife worn to a slender strip of iron, "I have labored on that wall, thinking it separated me from a corridor. Now all my hopes are blighted."

His head dropped for a few minutes on his breast, while Lamar looked at him with a mournful expression of pity, and then raising it, he looked sadly around him. All at once he espied the knotted line attached to the bar.

"So!" he said, with a painful smile. "You were getting ready to escape!"

"Yes," said Lamar. "But you will not betray me?"

"Betray you!" repeated the captain, scornfully. "Am I not a soldier and a fellow-prisoner?"

Then Lamar minutely explained to him his plan, and enlarged on its chances of success. The captain listened attentively, and then said:

"Then we can both escape?"

"No," replied Lamar, and he felt sorry to say it. "It will take me nearly all of five minutes to get down from this giddy height. The sentry would return before you were half-way down, and then both would be lost."

Instantly the captain sprang at his throat with the ferocity of a wild beast, and grasping his collar, drew back his knife preparatery to a fatal blow; but just as suddenly he released his hold, flung away the knife, sat down on a stool, and hiding his face in his hands, cried like a child.

"Forgive me! forgive me!" he said, in broken accents. "Misery has made me mad! But if you knew all. For fifteen years I have been a prisoner. But the window of my cell gave me a glimpse of the boulevard, and every day my poor old mother came, and we could see each other and converse by signs. Day by day, however, she has been growing feebler, and the last time she came, some days since, she made signs that she was very, very ill—ill, perhaps, unto death. My despair and agony have led me to the verge of crime."

Not a word was lost on Lamar. He thought of his own father dying, and he absent from his bedside, and he made a heroic resolve. At that moment the great clock of the tower struck nine.

"Captain de Ferrand!" he cried. "Farewell—there is not a moment to lose."

"You are going then?" said the captain.

"No—I leave the chance to you."

And Lamar wrenched away the bars.

"I cannot accept the sacrifice," said the captain.

"Then I remain," replied Lamar, resolutely. "Hark! the guard is passing—it has passed. Now is your time. Farewell!"

And dropping the line outside, he almost forced the captain out of the window.

"Farewell!" said the captain. "Heaven will reward you!"

And he disappeared.

Just afterward, the door of the cell opened, Sebastien entered and Lamar hastened to meet him. The jailer instantly detected the absence of the bars from the window.

"What!" he said, reproachfully. "Are you attempting to escape?"

"I was," replied Lamar, "but I am now resigned to my fate."

And he hurriedly related all that had just transpired in the cell.

At that moment a cry was heard from the foot of the tower, instantly followed by the crash of a dozen muskets.

"Who was it?" cried a voice from below.

"It was Number Twenty," answered another voice.

"Is he dead?"

"As Cæsar," was the answer.

"Unhappy man!" said the jailer, "and I was bringing him an order of release."

"Is it possible!" cried Lamar, aghast at this fatality.

Suddenly the jailer grasped him by the arm.

"Eugene Lamar," he said, "you gave life to my child—I will give you liberty."

"I do not understand you," said Lamar, bewildered.

"Not understand me!" cried the jailer. "You heard what they were saying on the platform. Number Twenty is dead—killed in an attempt to escape. It is from the window of cell Number Twenty that the cord is floating. You are now Number Nineteen, and I have the order for your release in my hands. Help me to replace this stone and then follow me."

Willing hands soon replaced the stone it had cost the unfortunate prisoner so much time and labor to dislodge.

Then Eugene Lamar followed the jailer down to his office, and was passed through the gate across the drawbridge and set at liberty, and Sebastien entered on the record, under the proper date:

"Number Twenty killed in an attempt to escape.

"Number Nineteen discharged on an order of release."

And the body of Number Nineteen was hastily committed to the earth as the body of Number Twenty.

Eugene Lamar made his way to the frontier and escaped into Prussia, but he did not leave Paris until

he had ascertained that the mother of the unfortunate man whose name he had assumed, had died a few days before her son, leaving no relative in France.

Destitute of resources, Lamar had enlisted in the Prussian army in which he had risen to the rank of captain. He had now thrown up his commission and come to Paris to enter the French service, and to learn the fate of his adored Louise. He had only arrived the very day before Madame Roland discovered and sent for him.

Such was the narrative to which the banker's wife listened with profound attention.

At its conclusion she placed in the hands of her former lover the casket of jewels committed to her care by his dying father.

"And now, my friend," she said, "the hour of parting has arrived. When we can meet as friends, we may again behold each other; now it would but add to our mutual sufferings. Farewell! but remember that you leave one who prays for you, and whose best wishes are devoted to your happiness."

"We may meet again under happier circumstances," said the captain, sadly, "but I fear the worst. My place is under the colors of France, and you may next hear of me as fallen on the field of battle."

He took the hand of Madame Roland, kissed it respectfully, and then tore himself away, leaving her utterly overwhelmed by the tale of wrong and sorrow to which she had listened.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PORTRAIT-PAINTER AND HIS PATRONESS.

Passing over a space of many years, we resume our narrative at the commencement of the winter of 1812.

In the third story of a large house, No. 10 Rue Rougemont, which runs north from the Boulevard Poissoniere, was a door on which was a small sign—black letters on a white ground. The inscription was:

"M. VICTOR, PORTRAIT-PAINTER."

The porter of the house had consented to display a similar sign on the door of his lodge, in which, by the way, hung a portrait of that functionary, a striking and well-colored head. When people asked for Mr. Victor, the porter always, in addition to the required information, would point to that picture as a specimen of his lodger's handiwork.

But there were not many people who inquired for Mr. Victor.

Let us take a look at him as he sits, in an old dressing-gown, before his easel. A very handsome young man, about twenty, medium height, hazel eyes, dark hair, straight nose, small mouth, pointed beard, mustache. This is the police officer's inventory, not that Mr. Victor was an object of suspicion to the police, but the French guardians of the public safety have a description of every resident within the city limits—at least they did in 1812.

Shall we describe his room? It is unnecessary; all artists' studios are alike. There is the same litter and confusion—the same jumble of coats, torsos, unfinished pictures, canvases, oils, and brushes—the same accumulation of dust, which must not be disturbed by the housewife, because it would settle on the fresh paint of works in progress, but which, though untouched by the broom, rises in eddies at the footfall of every visitor, and does its full amount of damage after all.

Mr. Victor is engaged in painting a "Venus Rising from the Sea," a fine work, which nobody will buy. He paints portraits for a living, but his soul is not interested in the mechanical work, and he relieves himself, in his hours of leisure, by producing fancy pieces. One day, he hopes, his genius will be appreciated. At present he but earns a meager livelihood, for his sitters are few, and neither rich nor generous. Still he works on loyally and hopefully.

Victor succeeded old Mr. Victor Laland, a worthy man, who had adopted him, taught him his art, and, dying, left him all he had to bestow—his blessing, and his tools of trade.

The young painter never knew who his parents were. He was a foundling, cast upon the public charity the very night that poor lost Jessie threw herself into the river. There was no clew to his origin except the miniature of a very beautiful woman, supposed to be his mother, suspended to the child's neck. Attached to his dress was a slip of paper, on which was written, with a trembling hand, "He is the child of misery and sorrow, but not of a mother's guilt." Our readers know who penned this line, and that the abandoned child was the son of Jessie Ringold and Gaspar Roland.

The little waif passed through the period of infancy successfully, and developed into a beautiful and healthy boy. At a very early age his talent for drawing manifested itself, and pointed out his proper profession. Some of his juvenile essays fell in the way of Victor Laland, a widower, who had lost his only son, a lad of about the age of the foundling. He saw the boy, fancied he detected in his frank and handsome face a resemblance to the little one that lay buried in Pere la Chaise, and offered to adopt and educate him, an offer which was immediately accepted.

The boy proved affectionate and grateful, and the artist soon learned to love him as a son.

"You will make a painter, Victor," he said, "and it will be my pride and joy to teach you all I know. But our profession is a precarious one. Some of us make fortunes; most of us die poor. You must have two strings to your bow."

So, while the good man did not neglect the artistic education of his charge, he took care that he should become a proficient in penmanship, arithmetic, and accounts.

"If you find yourself starving as a painter," he said, "you can turn book-keeper; between the two, you will manage to live."

Victor—for the old man gave the boy his first name—learned with avidity all his good friend desired him to study, and became expert at figures, but he begrudged secretly every hour that kept him away from his beloved crayons and colors.

"I would rather die a poor artist," he said, "than live a rich banker."

Were it not for this self-sacrificing enthusiasm, what would become of art?

One of his earliest efforts was an enlarged copy, in oil, of the miniature that he wore about his neck—the likeness of his unknown mother. Poor Jessie lived again upon the canvas in all the flush of her youthful charms, in all the angelic purity of her expression. The work was executed in a fit of inspiration, and long afterward the artist justly regarded it as his most successful production. He had many offers to sell it, but, though sometimes sorely pressed by want, he would never part with it. He prized it as a devotee does the favorite image of a patron saint, and he assigned to it a mysterious influence in his destiny, all the more potent for being vague and undefined.

The first overwhelming grief of Victor was the loss of his patron. No son ever mourned a father more sincerely. The good man was laid beside his wife and little one in the cemetery of Pere la Chaise, and thither Victor often went to meditate upon his virtues, and to decorate his cross with floral tributes of affection.

The artist was seated one day before his unfinished Venus, when a knock was heard at his door, and he sprang to open it.

The visitor proved to be a lady, a tall and graceful figure, wearing a thick vail over her face.

"Are you busy?" she asked.

The voice was musical enough, but the tone was masculine and peremptory.

"I am always busy," answered the artist; "but I am entirely at your service."

"Let me see what you are about."

She pushed him aside and walked up to the easel.

"Hum!" she said. "You can paint, young man. That is a good drawing, and there is fine color in it. But your Venus isn't to my taste, she hasn't muscle enough."

"You prefer Rubens' Venuses, then," said the artist, smiling.

"No, I don't; they're too fat, not at all my style. Look here, young man, can you paint animals?"

"I have made some studies of them," said the artist, modestly.

"Can you paint a tigress?"

"A difficult subject."

"That's no answer. Can you paint a tigress?"

"Yes," said Victor.

"Then paint *me!*" said the stranger, and she threw herself into the sitter's chair, dropped the shawl that concealed her bare arms, and threw aside her vail. "Take a good look at me," she said, laughing.

Victor surveyed this singular personage keenly and professionally. She was superbly beautiful, queenly in stature, her limbs beautifully formed, her fair skin showing a rich color in the cheeks and lips, her eyes large and luminous; her hair, of an auburn hue, thick and falling in waving tresses over her shoulders.

Her arms, while exceedingly graceful, yet indicated great muscular strength. Something in her figure reminded him of the antique Hunting Diana.

She sustained the artist's examination with perfect self-possession.

"I need not ask what you think of me," she said, "for your countenance is very expressive and I can read human faces, though bipeds are not as interesting as quadrupeds. You think me rather a fine animal. I am, I know it. Now do you recognize me?"

"I have never had the honor of seeing you before, madam."

"That's strange, for two reasons. In the first place, I'm a fellow-lodger, and have often passed you on the stairs; and in the second place, I'm a public character."

"I am still in the dark."

"I'll enlighten you then, and tell you all you need know about me. Profession, wild-beast tamer; private name, Claudine Picard; professional title, the 'Amazon'; popular title, La Tigresse; place of exhibition, the menagerie, Boulevard St. Martin. Have you a tiger's head among your sketches?"

Victor selected one from a portfolio and placed it in her hand.

She glanced at it a moment and then threw it away disdainfully.

"Bah!" she said. "Alongside my pet Nero, my royal Bengal, this fellow would look like a pussy cat. You must see Nero, see him when I have kept him short of one ration and enter his cage. There's no humbug about my exhibitions. My tiger isn't dosed and drugged. He's as big as a buffalo, and savage; well, seeing is believing. When the fire flashes from his eyes, and he curls up his lips and shows his fangs and puts out his claws, he's perfectly lovely."

As she spoke a lurid flame shot from her eyes, a cruel smile curled her lips, displaying her white teeth, her neck was bent, her hands expanded and contracted, the muscles of her arms grew tense, and Victor, startled, saw how appropriately she had been nicknamed the Tigress. All at once she threw herself back in her chair and laughed heartily and good-naturedly.

"Confess that I scared you half out of your wits," she said. "What milksops you men are. Not one of Napoleon's grenadiers dare do once what I do every day of my life. What is facing a Prussian or Austrian to confronting the fury of my royal Bengal tiger?"

"And do you like your profession?" asked the artist.

"I adore it! I wouldn't change it, to wear a coronet. And don't think I'm a single woman from necessity, young gentleman. I've had scores of offers, and but one answer to all of them."

"And what is that?"

"When a suitor, old or young, handsome or homely, asks me for my hand, I tell him the way to my heart is through my tiger's cage. Spend fifteen minutes with Nero and I'll marry you. Not one of them ever came back a second time. No man shall be my master who cannot master Nero."

"And what is the secret of his obedience to you?" asked the painter, strangely interested in the revelations of this singular creature.

"Fear," she replied. "Fear on his part, fearlessness on mine. The villain fears, loves, and hates me. At times he would rend me limb from limb, only he knows by sad experience that when he is ugly I lash him like a dog! But I am wasting your time and mine," she added, consulting an elegant little watch that hung at her waist. "The proprietor of the menagerie wants my portrait, and will pay liberally for it. I want to be painted with my arm thrown round the neck of my favorite. If you will go and see me perform to-night, you will get some idea of both animals in action, so as to impart life and spirit to your picture. There is a ticket of admission. I will give you a sitting to-morrow. At what hour shall I come?"

"Will eleven o'clock suit you?"

"Perfectly. We will say eleven, then. I will be punctual. Good-by, child."

She dropped her vail, drew her cloak round her shoulders, and departed, leaving a singular impression on the artist.

That night he witnessed her terrific performance at the menagerie, and made a spirited sketch of the tiger, the animal proving quite as fierce and beautiful as she had described.

The next day the Amazon sat in costume—a short Roman tunic; and at one sitting Victor drew and dead-colored a portrait which promised to be his very best.

CHAPTER XV.

FIFTEEN MINUTES WITH A TIGER.

A few days afterward, as La Tigresse was sitting in her own room in the house No 20 Rue Rougemont, a visitor was announced on important business.

When ushered in he proved to be a stranger to La Tigresse. He was a tall, well-formed man, with dark eyes, regular features, thick curling black hair, and bushy beard.

"Rather a fine animal for a man," thought the tigress. She said, in the blunt masculine way she affected:

"Well, sir, your business?"

The stranger paused before he replied, and gazed on the speaker with looks of undisguised admiration. Then he said:

"My name is Ivan Boriloff."

"A Russian name?"

"I am a Russian. Have you never seen me before?"

"Never, to my knowledge. Where should I have seen you?" replied La Tigresse, disdainfully.

At the menagerie; I have not missed one of your performances."

"My good man," said La Tigresse, "of the thousands that come to the menagerie I never see a single face. If I were to take my eyes off my tiger for one moment, I should not be sitting here in this comfortable arm-chair, I assure you. But you haven't yet explained the *important business* which brings you here."

"Mademoiselle," said the Russian, "I never loved woman till I saw you. From the moment I first beheld you I have been madly, desperately in love with you. I know it is a hopeless passion, but I should have died could I not have made my way to you."

La Tigresse laughed heartily at the serious face of the man.

"I have deeply offended you," he said, humbly.

"Oh, not at all—not at all," replied La Tigresse, in a perfectly unconcerned tone. "I was only just thinking what a pitiful figure a love-sick swain cuts. You men are all the same, from a peer to a peasant.

Now, I am fond of animals—some animals—but I never took a fancy to sheep."

"You are making sport of me," said the Russian, reproachfully.

"Don't begrudge me a little fun, my good fellow," said La Tigresse, cavalierly. "But if you are in earnest, it is quite another matter. Is your declaration serious?"

"Perfectly serious," replied the Russian.

"Then it is, indeed, important business, as you announced. It must be entered on my record. Oh, don't be vexed—you will find yourself enrolled in a goodly company—military men, civilians, one or two titled adorers, etc., etc."

As she spoke, she had opened a red narrow memorandum-book and was penciling an entry.

"Ivan Boriloff, you said."

"Yes, madam."

"Age?"

"Twenty-five."

"Profession or trade?"

"Cabinet-maker."

"A very good business," said the Amazon. "I have a few politicians on my list—I class them with the cabinet-makers. Journeyman or master?"

"Master," replied the Russian. "But I owe you an explanation. I was born a serf on the estate of Count Alexis Orloff, near Borodino, Russia."

"Count Alexis Orloff!" cried the Amazon, "why, as I live, he is on the list of my admirers."

"That is his son, madam, who is now in Paris."

"Your master, then?"

"No, madam, my master is, or rather was, the old count. But I have been nominally free for years, and am daily expecting my manumission papers, which he has promised to me. But it is useless, madam, to prolong this interview. I see that I have been a madman. You have rejected nobles, how can you cast your eyes on Ivan Boriloff, the peasant-born? Yet, perhaps, the others only sought to make a companion of you, while I would make you my wife."

The Amazon was greatly amused at the absurdity of this man's proposal, yet she could not help being flattered at his infatuation, so that it was with a mixture of jest and earnest that she said:

"Don't be discouraged, Ivan, you have just as good a chance of winning my favor as any man. All the suitors on my list have abandoned me because they rejected my terms."

"I know what the conditions are," said Ivan. "Your hand is the price of courage; to win it a man must enter the tiger's cage alone, as you do."

"And you are willing to do it?" asked La Tigresse, with an incredulous smile.

"I am," replied the Russian, firmly.

"Why, man alive! it would be certain death! A professional beast-tamer would hardly escape. Nero would surely kill you."

"No matter; I should die for you. Without you, life is worthless."

La Tigresse gazed at him long and earnestly, and then said, giving him her hand:

"Come back to-morrow at the same hour."

Ivan kissed her hand as reverently as he would have done that of the empress, bowed low and took his departure.

The next day he kept his appointment.

"I hope," said La Tigresse, "that you came to tell me that you have repented of yesterday's folly."

"On the contrary, I come to repeat my proposal. Your word is plighted, and you cannot recede from it. I will go into the tiger's cage—if I die, there is an end of it; but if I live, the most brave and beautiful woman in existence ——"

"Will marry the bravest man," said La Tigresse, completing the sentence.

For the first time in her life a man had interested her—had even touched her heart. Others had offered to sacrifice money for her love—here was one who was willing to stake his life.

And lest it appear incredible that a woman would permit a man thus to peril his life, in our own days, let it be remembered that a couple of centuries earlier a noble lady had allowed her lover to descend into a lion's den to recover her glove, which she had dropped among the wild beasts simply to test his devotion and courage. Perhaps that writer was correct who said "the boasted civilization of the nineteenth century is more apparent than real; it is but a varnish and exists only on the surface of the social body. In studying the interior we find the same savage instincts as in the early ages, called the ages of barbarism."

Claudine, nicknamed La Tigresse, brought up among wild beasts, had a wild code of her own and traits of cruelty that made her akin to the untamed denizens of the forests and the deserts.

It was accordingly settled that on a certain night, "a celebrated Russian beast-tamer," for so the manager announced and believed Ivan to be, would enter the cage of the Amazon's Bengal tiger. Only Victor, beside the Amazon, knew Boriloff's secret. The Russian was sometimes allowed to be present while the painter worked on the picture, and the young artist endeavored to persuade him to abandon his desperate enterprise. All his arguments were wasted, however. Ivan was convinced that he could escape with his life and win the prize he coveted. He had had many a desperate encounter with wild bears in his native forests, and escaped without a scratch.

As the time for the trial drew near, the Amazon became dreadfully nervous, and no longer deserved to be called La Tigresse. Love had softened her heart, and a hundred times she was on the point of placing her hand in Ivan's, and telling him that she surrendered without subjecting him to the cruel ordeal. Then her pride interposed, the cruel part of her nature asserted itself, and she decided that the agreement must be carried out to the letter. Besides, the manager had made the announcement, and Ivan's honor and manhood were committed to the task.

The night came, and an overflowing house prepared to greet the new aspirant for public favor. His appearance in the style of Roman dress that the Amazon was accustomed to wear was the signal for tumultuous applause. He bowed, opened the door of the cage, and entered it fearlessly.

The tiger was lying down in the back part, with his huge head between his monster forepaws, his blinking eyes nearly closed. Ivan stamped his foot and ordered him to sit up.

At the word of command, the immense brute sullenly and doggedly raised himself to a sitting position, and opening his eyes, gaxed fiercely and fixedly at the stranger who had dared to disturb his repose.

The man returned his gaze with one fiercer and more intent, till the brute was forced to look away and manifest signs of uneasiness and subjection. But he again looked at the Russian, opened his jaws, writhed his tail, and seemed striving to shake off the fascination that enthralled him and work himself into a fury.

At that moment Ivan, advancing, put his hand into the creature's mouth, and the tiger instantly closed his ponderous jaws upon the member and held the man a prisoner. Boriloff endured the pain and maintained his presence of mind. Drawing back his left hand, he dealt the tiger a terrible blow in the muzzle, which caused him to unlock his jaws, and then withdrew his hand unhurt.

As if for the purpose of terrifying his assailant, the tiger now uttered a succession of hoarse cries, deeper, and louder, and more menacing than had ever before been heard from his throat. They were more like the mutterings of thunder than the growls of a beast.

But the Russian was no more daunted by the brute's voice than he had been discountenanced by the glare of his eyes. He kicked the savage animal into a standing position, and then bending forward his head and looking him full in the eye, advanced upon him, the tiger backing away, until the man and beast had thus made three times the circuit of the cage. Then the Russian compelled the creature to lie down on his back, stood upon him, laid himself down on him, played with his huge paws, and showed himself completely the master of the savage brute.

Hitherto the audience had looked on in breathless silence, anticipating from the angry movements of the animal a fatal issue to the painful and thrilling scene. There were soldiers among the audience who had confronted death at Arcola, Lodi, and Austerlitz with an undaunted front, but were now as pale as the women who were fainting about them, and who scarcely dared to breathe. But when this agonizing suspension and dread were ended by the complete triumph of the beast-tamer, there went up a universal shout of applause that shook the floor, the walls, and the roof of the building.

His heart swelling with pride and gratitude, Ivan, the Russian, turned to the audience and bowed his acknowledgments. But a sudden silence on their part, a universal expression of terror on their faces, warned him of an awful catastrophe.

Too late he sought to fix his magnetic glance on the tiger. The ferocious beast reared up on his hind legs, and then, with a savage snarl, descended on his victim; and all the spectators could see was a rolling mass of form and color, the striped hide of the beast, the white limbs of the man, his torn tunic, and the flashing fangs of the monarch of the Indian jungles.

Then rose a human voice from the din in the cage—not a cry for help, but a shout of rage as fierce and vindictive as that which came from the deep throat of the tiger. Then a white arm waved through the chaos, and there was the dazzling flash of steel.

The spectators poured out of their seats and crowded toward the cage. High above the din rose the piercing cry of a woman's voice, and the Amazon, hurling down all who opposed her passage, came through the throng with the bounds of a wild beast, and forcing her way to the front, shrieked out:

"He is killed, and I am his murderess!"

But Ivan Boriloff rose to his feet, clenching a dagger in his hand, a smile of triumph on his lips.

"You are covered with blood," cried the Amazon.

"It is the tiger's," answered Boriloff, and he pointed with his dagger to the fallen brute.

The beautiful savage lay on his side motionless, while the blood from a dozen mortal stabs, dealt with the rapidity of lightning, crimsoned the white fur of his throat and massive chest.

Then again rose a tremendous acclaim from the audience, as the Russian stepped out of the cage.

"Messieurs and mesdames," said Ivan, "I thank you for the favor with which you have welcomed the first appearance of an amateur in the cage of a wild beast—for such it was in fact. Yet I did not do what I have done to secure your applause, but to win a wife; and I have the honor to announce the approaching marriage of your favorite performer and of your humble servant, Ivan Boriloff."

The applause was renewed at this announcement. But now a new actor appeared upon the scene—a richly dressed gentleman who pushed his way through the crowd to the speaker.

"The gentleman forgets," said the new-comer, in a tone of bitter sarcasm, "and the lady perhaps is unconscious, that he is a Russian serf and cannot contract a marriage without his master's consent. I forbid the bans."

"You have no right to do so, Count Alexis Orloff," replied the Russian, steadily. "I am answerable only to your father, and he has granted me liberty of action pending the completion of my manumission papers, which he promised to send to me."

"Has he done so?" asked the young count, sneeringly.

"Not yet," replied Ivan.

"Precisely," replied the count. "In the meantime, I am looking after my father's property in Paris, under a power of attorney. You are his chattel, and I claim possession of you."

With this he laid his hand upon the serf's collar.

But Ivan raised his right arm, and with the same hand that had just laid the tiger low, dealt the count a blow on the face that laid him prostrate at his feet, covered with blood.

A tremendous cheer went up from the spectators. The police dared not interfere, but contented themselves with assisting the stricken nobleman to his feet and stanching the blood that flowed from his ghastly countenance.

The victor retired with the beautiful Amazon hanging on his arm. It was the last night that either of them appeared in the arena.

They were married a few days afterward. Victor completed the portrait, sent it to its destination, and was liberally paid.

The strange couple retired from the public view, and if we meet them hereafter it will be in a different scene.

Count Orloff, about the same time, left Paris, ashamed to display in public the traces of the serf's assault, but swearing to wreak a bloody vengeance on the man who had marked him for life.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SHADOW ON THE WALL.

Victor's portrait of La Tigresse, exhibited for a few days at a shop window, gave him a temporary prestige and brought him a few orders; but the times were hard, and promised to be harder, and the painter's reputation had not yet reached those circles where money for luxuries is always at command. Chance, however, threw in his way an undreamed of prospect of success.

Late one evening he found himself the sole occupant of a little *cafe* in his quarter, to which he had resorted for a frugal supper at the end of a hard day's toil carried on into the night, for it was his custom, when daylight failed him, to draw by lamplight.

As he sat apart, two men entered and took a seat near him, one of them a tall and slender young man, the other short and corpulent; both, however, were muffled in cloaks, and, contrary to custom, had merely touched their slouch-hats on entering, without removing them. They called for coffee, and, after drinking it, engaged in earnest conversation in a low tone.

Victor had no inclination to play the eavesdropper, and if he had, his curiosity, for a time at least, would have been baffled, for both the strangers spoke in whispers.

At last the shorter individual of the two, becoming earnest, raised his tone so that Victor occasionally caught a few words, such as "Russia," "the Niemen," "St. Petersburg," "Moscow." The speaker became more excited as he proceeded, and enforced his words by animated gestures.

The painter noticed that his hands were as small and beautiful as a woman's. At last the orator, as the room was very warm, pushed his hat back from his forehead, and let the cloak fall partly from his shoulders.

Then it was, with a feeling of awe, that the artist recognized in the stranger the Emperor Napoleon.

He knew that the emperor, like the Caliph Haroun Alraschid, was fond of rambling incognito at night, to hear with his own ears the sentiments of the people, to acquaint himself personally with their wants, and sometimes to act as their benefactor in disguise. Throughout his life, this wonderful man, a greater actor than his friend Talma, showed himself fond of dramatic situations. Even at the time when plots against his life were rife, it was with the utmost difficulty that his Minister of Police could extort from him the promise to give up his nocturnal adventures; and this promise was often violated, though he knew not that the police were aware of his rashness, and always surrounded his steps by secret and disguised agents. The police were not fatalists, if Napoleon himself was.

The youthful companion of the emperor, after listening to what he said in respectful silence, replied to him at length, and while he spoke, Napoleon, fixing his eyes upon him, sat motionless in his chair. A lamp placed on his right threw upon the wall of the room the outline of his faultlessly classical profile. The painter looked at the shadow, and yielded

to an irresistible temptation. Holding a sheet of paper against the wall so that the emperor's shadow fell on it, he traced the beautiful profile with a lightning-like rapidity of touch.

He had just completed his stealthy work, when the shadow vanished, and a voice at his ear said:

"Let me see it."

It was Napoleon, but he had again shrouded himself in his cloak and hat.

"Is it like?" he asked. "A man never sees his own features in that position."

Before the artist had time to answer, the emperor showed the sketch to his youthful companion, and repeated his question.

"It is yourself, sire," was the answer.

"Sire!" repeated the emperor, angrily. "You have forgotten yourself, Salvinski. You have betrayed me!"

"Your majesty will pardon me," said the artist, "but it was this profile which betrayed you."

"Yes, yes," said the emperor, laughing; "I believe I am a pretty notorious character. Well, sir," he added, fixing his eyes on the young man, "who are you?"

"A painter, sire."

"Ay, but your name?"

"Victor."

"Victor who? Victor is only a baptismal name."

"I have no other, sire. I never knew my parents."

"So you are a painter, then. Prove it. Where are your productions?"

"Here are a few of them," said the artist, and he showed some heads that hung on the walls.

The emperor took up the lamp and went rapidly from one to the other, bestowing a passing glance on each.

"Not bad," he said, setting down the lamp. "Do you prosper?"

"Indifferently, sire."

"Yet it seems to me that you deserve success. What you want is a patron—eh?"

"Yes, sire; if some great man were to commission me to paint his head, my fortune would be made. If your majesty——"

But he stopped short, overwhelmed at the audacity of what he was on the verge of saying.

"If I were to commission you to paint my portrait, you would become rich and famous," said the emperor, calmly. "But, my friend, my head belongs to David; he would never forgive me if I allowed another to attempt it. Yet," he added, kindly, "I will do for you what will perhaps serve you as well. Can you paint children?"

"I am very fond of them, sire, and have made a special study of children's heads."

"Then," said Napoleon, "you shall paint the King of Rome."

"The King of Rome!" cried the artist, wild with delight. "Ah, sire, your goodness overwhelms me."

"I shall be a very exacting critic," said the emperor. "How long a time will you want?"

"A month, sire."

"And how long after its completion can it be transported to a long distance?"

"Two weeks, sire."

"Then you will go to work immediately. Captain Salvinski here will take your number and call on you to-morrow."

The emperor took from his pocket a gold snuff-box set with brilliants, and handed it to the artist.

"My young friend," said he, "there is a souvenir for you. The medallion on the cover is said to be an excellent likeness of the Corsican Ogre, as *Messieurs les Anglais* flatteringly call me. Come, Salvinski."

And without waiting to receive the artist's thanks, the Man of Destiny retired, leaning on the arm of the young officer.

Victor sought his humble apartments, wild with delight; he did not close his eyes till morning.

At an early hour of the following forenoon, the Rue de Rougemont was thrown into commotion by the arrival of one of the imperial carriages, which drew up before the entrance of No. 10.

A young officer, wearing the rich uniform of the Polish cavalry, alighted and went up stairs. It was Captain Stanislaus Salvinski, Napoleon's companion in his nocturnal ramble of the preceding evening, who came to escort the painter to the palace of the Tuileries. He was followed by a servant wearing the imperial livery, who was commissioned to receive and transport all the materials the painter required for his work.

Salvinski was a bright, fair-haired young man, gay and frank in manner, and the painter felt at home with him immediately.

The young men were soon seated in the carriage, chatting familiarly, while the vehicle rolled down the boulevard and drove into the court-yard of the palace. They alighted at a door opening on a private staircase in one of the pavilions. Here they were received by a civilian in a court dress, who had evidently been on the look-out for them, and were led up one flight, then through a series of apartments, stopping finally at a gilded door.

The door was opened cautiously, and a lady appeared, who placed her finger on her lips, enjoining silence. The young man followed the lady on tiptoe into a room of moderate dimensions, where, in a cradle, which was a marvel of art, and which had cost almost a fortune, a lovely infant lay asleep, its little round cheek gently indenting a lace pillow, its little hands, half open, resting on a snowy robe in the most graceful position. It was the King of Rome."

So charmed was the artist with this exquisite living picture that he took out his sketch-book and pencil and transferred its outlines to paper. He was so completely absorbed in his work, that he did not notice the silent entrance of two more personages. Yet one of them was the sovereign of France, all but master of the world; the other, Josephine's successor, the Empress Maria Louisa.

When at last he was made aware of their presence, he saluted them with confusion and embarrassment.

"Don't be alarmed, my young friend," said the emperor, smiling. "From this little room, this little nest of my pretty young eaglet, etiquette is banished. Make yourself at home as if you were in a bourgeois family, for here are only a father and mother and their little child. Let me see your sketch."

The emperor looked at it, nodded approvingly, and handed it to the empress.

"Do you propose to paint the king with his eyes shut?" he asked.

"As he lies now," whispered the artist, "he presents the ideal of innocence and peace. It is thus, with the permission of your majesties, that I would depict him."

"Innocence! peace!" said Napoleon, as he gazed on his child with moistened eyes. "I approve of the idea. Go to work, then, my friend, and do your best."

The artist bowed, and their majesties retired. As soon as his easel and materials arrived Victor commenced his work, and before the royal child awoke had made good progress.

Daily, at the same hour, he repaired to the palace and labored at his easel. At rare intervals, when his duties permitted, Napoleon came to inspect the progress of the picture, and to chat with the artist. At these times, and in that peaceful atmosphere, the emperor and warrior were lost in the father. He left behind him all his cares of state and projects of ambition.

Yet at that moment he was engaged in planning the most stupendous enterprise of his life—that fatal enterprise which has crowded the pages of French history with horrors—the invasion of Russia.

Long before the picture was completed the campaign had commenced, and Napoleon was leading his gigantic host against the Czar.

Salvinski remained behind, much against his will, for he had hoped to be among the first to draw his sword against the enemy and oppressor of Poland.

At last, after the frontier had been crossed, and when the French Army was pressing after the flying foe, Salvinski received orders to join the emperor, to bring with him the portrait of the King of Rome, and

to allow the artist to accompany him, if he was minded so to do.

"Victor," said the captain, "if you wish to see war in its grimmest aspect and on the most tremendous scale, you will be my companion."

Between the two young men a warm attachment had sprung up, and Victor, unwilling to be separated from his friend, and excited by the prospect of participating in the grandest event of the century, eagerly accepted the invitation.

Bearing dispatches from the empress and the ministers, and having charge of the picture, Salvinski was of course empowered to command all the assistance he required on the road to facilitate his rapid progress—horses, vehicles, men, and money.

Their journey was accordingly rapid until they reached Wilna. Beyond that, as they followed in the track of the French Army, across a wasted country, wasted by both French and Russians, as they met hordes of stragglers, wounded men going to the rear on foot, broken cannon and tumbrels, dead horses, both of them were seized with dread; both began to fear for the result of the gigantic campaign which the mad ambition of Napoleon had prompted him to undertake. Nothing of this hideous loss and ruin was known at Paris. Napoleon had deceived his people, his ministers, his empress, perhaps himself.

Full of forebodings, the young Polish officer and his companion pushed on as rapidly as possible through a country strewn with the horrid wreck of battle.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE EVE OF BATTLE.

IT was on the 6th day of September, 1812, that Salvinski and Victor reached the headquarters of the French Army, which, 120,000 men strong, was in position opposite the Russian Army of equal numbers, the latter occupying a strong, entrenched position near the village of Borodino, covered by the river Maskwa, which ran through a gorge defended by precipitous and rocky banks.

Kutusoff, the Russian commander, obeying the voice of his nation, had decided here to give battle to the invader of the sacred soil of Russia. The minds of his men had been inflamed to the highest fury of passion and fanaticism by proclamations of their emperor and the preachings of their priests. The Czar described his great antagonist as "a Moloch, who, with treachery in his heart, loyalty on his lips, was striving to blot out Russia from the face of the earth," while the priests proclaimed him, "the enemy of God and man, who came to pollute their altars, to plunder their palaces and shrines, to slay their children and dishonor their women," and the object of their denunciations could almost hear, wafted over the northern breeze, the universal shout that rose from the Muscovite ranks, "Death to the invader!"

Napoleon, on his part, was not silent. The eloquence that had nerved the men of the Pyramids and Austerlitz to perform superhuman deeds, was again invoked to fire his troops on the eve of another great battle. On this occasion his address was grave and weighty like the time itself, closing with these memorable words:

"Soldiers, here is the battle which you have so ardently desired. Victory will now depend upon yourselves; it is necessary to us, it will give us abundance, good winter quarters, and a speedy return to our homes. Behave as you did at Austerlitz, at Friedland, at Witepsk, and Smolensko, and afford to the remotest posterity occasion to cite your conduct on that day. Let it be said of you, 'He was in the great battle under the walls of Moscow.'"

It was while the air was rent with shouts of "Long live the emperor!" called forth by this address, that the carriage containing Salvinski and Victor were driven through the ranks of the Old Guard to the imperial tent, and the young men were ushered into the presence of Napoleon.

He had, as he himself said, played the emperor long enough, he was now the general of the army. The future will never call up his figure clothed in the tinseled robes of state, but in the gray coat and cocked hat in which he sat on his true throne—the saddle of his Arabian—and directed the thunderbolts of battle.

He had just dismounted from his horse, and was seated on a low camp-stool. Near him stood the Prince of Eckmuhl, and Joachim Murat, King of Naples, a right-royal figure, with a piercing eye, long, waving hair, dressed in splendid hussar uniform, the furred dolman that hung from his shoulder blazing with embroidery, and the hilt of his gold-sheathed saber glittering with gems of price. In the midst of this awful campaign Murat was always dressed as for a holiday parade. Luxury of apparel was as necessary to him as the air he breathed and the food he ate. Yet in the presence of Napoleon no eye rested for more than a moment on his magnificent brother-in-law.

Napoleon greeted Salvinski cordially, but instantly demanded his dispatches. The officer handed him a sealed packet, which he tore open, and the contents of which he eagerly devoured. As he proceeded with the perusal his brow darkened and his lips became compressed. Once he muttered to himself, yet audibly enough;

"This, too, on the eve of battle! Discontent and distress in Paris; bad news from Spain; disquieting intelligence from Prussia."

Suddenly he crumpled the papers in his hand and threw them aside, while his face lighted up, and he cried:

"Everything depends on the battle of to-morrow, and I shall win it. In a week I shall date my bulletins from the Kremlin. The cowardly curs that have begun to bark at my heels will grovel in the dust and lick my feet again. Alexander has staked all on the issue of to-morrow, and he will lose all. In ten days he will sue for peace, and thenceforth be my ally or my vassal. The empress is well and the King of Rome. Ha! my young friend," he added, noticing the painter for the first time, "are you there? You are welcome to my camp. And you have brought the picture?"

"Yes, sire."

The emperor immediately gave orders to have the box containing the picture brought into his tent and opened, and he watched the process with the utmost impatience. When the cover had been loosened, he tore it off with his own hands, took out the painting, placed it in a favorable light, and stood before it with his hands crossed behind his back in an attitude of silent contemplation.

At last he turned to the painter, who was tremblingly expecting his verdict, and Victor saw traces of tears in his eyes.

"My young friend," said he, "you have done well—admirably! I am more than satisfied. The empress writes me that you have been paid for your work. But money is no compensation. When I get back to Paris I will do something for you. But the road to Paris is through Moscow. You will have to remain with the army. Salvinski, who is attached to one of my staff, will make you as comfortable as possible. You will see to it, Salvinski. You must send him to the rear till the battle is over."

"Pardon, sire," replied the artist, "But I should prefer to share the dangers of my friend Salvinski."

"Then your wish shall be gratified," said the emperor. "We shall have one more orderly officer. Salvinski, see that he has a horse and arms."

With a graceful wave of the hand, he dismissed the two young men, every moment of his time being precious. Salvinski procured a uniform like his own, but without any insignia of rank, and an active horse in better condition than most of the army horses, which had suffered terribly from the scarcity of forage, and so, within half an hour, the young painter of the Rue Rougemont found himself transformed into a dashing Polish lancer.

When they returned to the vicinity of the imperial tent, they found it surrounded by a multitude of soldiers without arms. They were the grenadiers of the Imperial Guard, to whom the emperor was exhibiting the picture of the King of Rome. It was a strange spectacle, the fair face of the innocent child lighted up by a Russian sky, gazed on by a host of bearded warriors, grouped in the face of a hostile army preparing the engines of death for the wholesale murder of the morrow. The emperor himself felt the incongruity, and said, between a sigh and a smile:

"Take the child away; he is too young for a scene of war."

As the picture was being removed, the band of the Imperial Guard, which was stationed in front of the tent, struck up, not the frenzy-inspiring "Marsellaise," but the strains of the favorite air of the empire, "Where can we happier be than in the bosom of our family?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

BORODINO.

At a bivouac-fire, within sight of the imperial tent, Salvinski and Victor, wrapped in their cloaks, lay down upon the bare ground when night spread her mantle over the two armies. The young Pole, who was an old campaigner, and who was jaded by the fatigues of his journey, dropped instantly asleep, but the novelty of the situation banished slumber from the painter's eyes. After vain efforts at repose, he sat up and looked round. The lights of the French camp shone, at intervals, over a space of miles, yet all was silence, broken only now and then by the stamping and neighing of the horses of the cavalry of the Imperial Guard picketed in the rear of the headquarters' staff. In the distance, a semicircle of lights defined the amphitheater occupied by the Russian host.

This vast peaceful field, thought Victor, would in a few hours be the theater of maddening uproar and uncontrollable fury; thousands around him were sleeping their last sleep on earth. He glanced at the sentries, whose dark figures were defined against the curtain of bivouac-fires as they paced to and fro. To-morrow night many of these men would be stark corpses, or torn by shot and shell out of all semblance of humanity. Why, he asked, should the magnitude of slaughter absolve it from crime? A man assaults another in the street and kills him. You are shocked and indignant, and say that he deserves death. But if the slayer pleads that he had no feeling against the murdered man, and only did the bidding of another, your detestation of the criminal is intensified. You only look at the fact—a man has killed his fellow-man. It is murder. A hundred thousand men kill thirty thousand, with whom they have no personal quarrel, and it is glory. The churches ring with *Te Deums* in honor of the victory, and lovely women bestow their sweetest smiles on the victors, and grasp the hands that are reddened with fraternal blood.

What said the greatest captain of the age, he who was sleeping in yonder tent? "War is the trade of barbarians."

Victor's conscience justified two kinds of war—the war of a people to secure liberty; the war of a people to repel foreign invasion. And, why, he asked himself, in a kind of terror, are the Russians now in arms? For what but to crush the invaders of their sacred soil? To save their altars and their homes from the polluting footstep of a foreign foe? Did Napoleon march into Russia to strike the fetters from the bondman? No; but to decide whether the Colossus of the North or the Colossus of the West should give laws to Europe. Not all his admiration for the great captain of the age, not all his gratitude for personal kindness and favor could shake the conviction he had arrived at.

As these thoughts were passing through his mind, the great man whose motives he was arraigning showed himself at the opening of his tent. He, too, was sleepless. Anxiety and physical suffering kept him awake. The light of a bivouac-fire fell full upon his face, and Victor saw that it was haggard and hollow.

The night was chill and threatening, and the emperor had thrown a furred cloak about his shoulders. In his hand he held a field-telescope. He came out into the open air and advanced rapidly. An old grenadier who was seated on the ground looked up as he came near him, and the emperor halted and familiarly accosted him.

"What are you awake for, old owl?" he said.

"What are you out of your bed for, sire?" replied the man, bluntly, for he was one of the "old grumblers" of the Guard, who always spoke his mind, fearless of king or kaiser.

"I want to make sure that Kutusoff hasn't stolen away under cover of the night," replied the emperor, good-naturedly, and he swept the enemy's lines with his field-glass.

"Well, you see he hasn't," answered the grenadier. "With the naked eye you see the sentries moving about the fires. It is no rear-guard, but the whole army that you have before you. There'll be music and dancing to-morrow."

"You are right, old fellow," replied the emperor. "We have them at last."

And he shut up his field-glass and retired to his tent.

Long before dawn Napoleon and his staff were in the saddle, occupying a position which commanded a view of the enemy's entrenchments, with the three terrible redoubts they deemed impregnable. Salvinski and Victor mounted and accompanied the headquarter's staff.

The French emperor waited impatiently for the dawn of day. At last the eastern horizon brightened; slowly its gray changed to a golden hue, and then the broad disk of the sun mounted upward without a cloud to mar its brilliancy.

"It is the sun of Austerlitz! I hail the omen," were the emperor's words.

All traces of anxiety and agitation had vanished from his face. He had recovered his genius and self-possession in the face of peril, as was his wont.

His keen eye surveyed the long line of his artillery, his favorite arm, and perceiving that it was out of range, he issued orders to advance the guns nearer the enemy. The earth shook under the trampling of thousands of men and horses and the ponderous engines of death were wheeled into a new position, unlimbered and leveled at the foe.

During this maneuver the enemy maintained a grim and sullen silence; not a flash nor a report issued from the black throats of their batteries.

All at once, on the far left, the silence was broken by the thunder of French guns, and the crackling of musketry. A French infantry regiment, one of Prince Eugene's, now stormed the village of Borodino and swept the bridge of its defenders. Here the soldiers would not obey the order to halt, but maddened with the smell of powder, and possessed of that demoniac rage which has been called the "French fury," they rushed up the opposite height only to encounter a withering fire in front and flank. A brigadier general who had vainly sought to moderate their frenzy, fell from his saddle, mortally wounded, and not a man of the spartan band would have escaped, but for the valor of the Ninety-second which came up at a run, enveloped the few warriors in their sheltering ranks, and fell back in their supporting column in good order.

Victor's unaccustomed eyes saw nothing but chaos in the scene before him. Volumes of smoke now poured along the plain, cloven here and there by the blaze of the Russian and French batteries, while the solid earth shook with the thunder of guns, the tramp of marching columns, the scream of shells, and the

whirring sound of the ponderous missiles of death vomited by the artillery. Now and then a French battery thundered down the hills, the horses at a full jump, and the guns bounding and swinging over the obstacles of the ground. Soldiers carrying stretchers, bearing groaning and shattered comrades, staggered out of the valley of death. The horses of the staff, old campaigners, knowing full well the meaning of the horrid uproar, crowded together, their knees trembling under them. Now and then some young horse would plunge and rear, and his rider would have to take him out of the imperial circle and reduce him to quiet by the spur and bit.

Napoleon beckoned to Salvinski, who instantly spurred to his side.

"Captain Salvinski," he said, "go to Marshal Davorist, and tell him that the time has come."

The Pole instantly wheeled his horse, and, accompanied by Victor, rode off at full speed, and was soon in the presence of the marshal.

Louis Nicolas Davorist, Duke of Auerstaedt, Prince of Eckmuhl, marshal and peer of France, was only forty-two years old, but he was already a soldier of renown, distinguished alike for personal prowess and military science. His eye kindled when he heard the emperor's message, for he had been waiting, like a grayhound in the leash, for permission to dash upon the foe.

He instantly hurled two divisions supported by thirty pieces of cannon, against the first Russian redoubt. Victor and Salvinski accompanied the storming party. The column rushed on without firing a musket-shot; only at intervals their cannon thundered a reply to the storm of the enemy's bullets.

At first the heart of the artist-volunteer struggled in his breast, like a bird seeking to escape, when he heard, close at hand, the crash of the guns and saw men falling round him like withered leaves before an autumn wind. But when he beheld the kindling faces of his countrymen, the glow of chivalric courage that lighted their eyes, saw the gaps in their ranks instantly closed up, he caught the stern enthusiasm and breathed the atmosphere of fire with delight.

But the storm of flame from the redoubt was like the gush of lava from Vesuvius. The head of the French column withered away under the hurricane of lead and iron. Compans, leading his division, fell, and his men were rushing back in wild confusion, when Rapp took his place, was wounded, and even a third general was stricken down. Davorist, too, was hit, but he kept his saddle.

"Go to the emperor," he said to Victor, "tell him what you have seen, and that we need the Guard."

Victor started with the message at full gallop, having frequently to leap his horse over some wounded and writhing wretch that lay upon the plain.

"Well, sir," said the emperor, as he reined in his horse and saluted. "How goes the battle?"

"Compans is killed, sir—Rapp wounded—the Prince of Eckmuhl hurt, and he says the Guard is needed."

"He will not have the Guard," said the emperor, addressing himself to Murat. "This battle can be won without it. Go to Ney," he said to Victor, "and tell him to attack the enemy with his whole command."

It was the first time the young painter had seen Michel Ney, Duke of Elchingen, "the bravest of the brave," and now he had but a momentary glimpse of his resolute face and muscular figure, as he placed himself at the head of his column of ten thousand men and swept across the plain to the assistance of Davorist. The storming columns were soon enveloped in smoke as they engaged the enemy with fire and cold steel, dashed into their entrenchments and carried their redoubts, but with a desperate loss. Murat swept across the plain to complete the victory, but the enemy rallied, threw his whole force into the combat, and the fortune of the day was undecided.

For ten hours the awful strife raged over the field of death, over the heights, and through the village of Borodino. The Russians exhibited the greatest tenacity and valor. At one time the main body of their cavalry and infantry was exposed to the concentrated fire of eighty pieces of French artillery, and though mowed down at every discharge, pressed forward against their inevitable death.

The main redoubt was the scene of awful carnage. Many a hero perished in its bloody area—none more sincerely mourned than Count Caulaincourt, who had left a newly wedded bride, to join the emperor. Her miniature lay on his heart when he mounted the parapet, and a musket-ball went crashing through his brain. There he died and there was buried.

The sun was setting as the din of battle ceased, and the lifting war clouds displayed the French eagles crowning the standard-staffs upon the hard-won ramparts.

The enemy were retreating, but not hurriedly; sullenly and in good order they took up their line of march, well knowing that the conquerors were too much exhausted to pursue them.

Victor and Salvinski had been separated during this day of carnage, but when they met at nightfall, unharmed, they threw themselves into each other's arms and embraced like brothers.

"Well, Victor, what do you think of war?" asked the Pole.

"What I have always thought of it," answered the painter. "It is horrible! But we shall have many a thrilling tale to tell when we get back to Paris."

"If we get back to Paris," said Salvinski, with a sad smile.

"But we shall soon be in Moscow."

"Perhaps."

"And then the Emperor Alexander will sue for peace."

"Never, while a foreign foot presses the soil of Russia," answered Salvinski. "And the weapons he wields against us are the army, the people, and the elements. Do you know what a Russian winter is?"

"No."

"I do."

The emperor and his staff were now in the saddle, for Napoleon prepared, as usual, to survey the field of battle.

It was a field of horror. Not one of the victors could exult in a triumph which had cost the death or mutilation of forty-three generals and thirty-thousand soldiers. What if the Russian loss had been heavier? Their army was still not annihilated, and for the fifty thousand that had fallen, a host of avengers would spring from the soil.

The night set in windy, cold, and rainy; and the red, flickering lights of the torches of the escort made the writhing forms of the wounded and the heaps of dead men and horses look horribly ghastly and unnatural.

A large number of soldiers, detailed for hospital service, were busy in collecting the wounded, of whom there were twenty thousand French to be cared for, and the means of transportation were insufficient. Many of the wounded Russians were doomed to certain death, because their wants would be last attended to.

As Napoleon rode a little in advance of his staff, his horse suddenly started. The emperor brought him up with a stroke of the spur, and looked for the cause of his alarm.

A gigantic, bearded figure, with red eyes in which the fire of insanity seemed blazing, stood full in front of him. This man wore the Russian uniform. His left leg had been broken and horribly mangled by a cannon-shot, but he had made splints of broken musket stocks and bound them round the limb with bloody rags. A musket, the butt held under his arm, served him for a crutch. He was fully six feet in height. He recognized Napoleon, and addressed him in French.

"Long live the emperor!" said the mutilated wretch. "Why don't your soldiers shout that cry as you ride through their ranks? Does the Russian welcome to Borodino sit too heavy on their stomachs? Go farther and you shall find a warmer welcome. March on, Great Conqueror! Your army is self-supporting, for if you will look round you, you will see your own soldiers rummaging the haversacks of their dead comrades for a little moldy bread and rotten meat. You shiver with the cold already, where a Russian

bares his breast to the autumn air. Wait till the winter sets in—ha! ha!—the Russian winter—when your hands will freeze to your gun-barrels, and your nails will drop from your fingers and toes. But take an old soldier's advice—hurry on to Moscow; there you will be warm enough—warm enough!"

A grenadier of the Guard leveled his musket at the scoffer's head, but the emperor commanded him to lower his weapon, and the poor mutilated wretch hobbled away across the field, every jar and stumble inflicting excruciating agony, and exhorting a screech of pain from the sufferer.

Silent and sad, the emperor completed his view of the field of battle, and then as he rode slowly back to his tent, said, in a low tone to the King of Naples:

"A few more such victories will end the Grand Army."

CHAPTER XIX.

A NIGHT IN MOSCOW.

The French Army and their Russian foes were making a record at once ghastly and heroic.

Between the field of Borodino and the gates of Moscow, the holy city of the sons of Rurik, lay a space of seventy miles, three days' march in peaceful times, a longer and wearier journey to the invaders, for they followed a foe, not flying hurriedly, but sullenly falling back, often halting at bay and hurling messengers of death into the columns of their pursuers.

With decimated ranks, ill fed, their uniforms worn and battle-stained, their horses gaunt and weak, incumbered by a mass of camp-followers, shivering in the cold, autumnal rains, the French host struggled forward.

The country through which they passed was a waste, for the retiring Russians burned their villages, destroyed their harvests, and broke down the bridges all along the line of their retreat.

At last, on the 14th of September, the French emperor drew rein upon the brow of a hill which commanded a view of the hard-won goal.

Before him, covering a vast extent of ground, lay the famous city—a city like no other in the world—strange, splendid, grotesque; a mass of fortresses and palaces; a wild blending of the orient and occident; a wonderful assemblage of towers, minarets, domes, and spires; a gorgeous maze of golden gleams and prismatic colors; the realization of a dream, a miracle accomplished.

"This, then, is the city of the Czars!" cried Napoleon. Then he muttered, half inaudibly, "It was high time!"

The vanguard of the French, as they approached the city, shouted, "Moscow! Moscow!" and the cry, repeated from rank to rank, was echoed by the rear-guard of the host, and eighty thousand bearded lips gave forth the magic syllables.

Would the Russians abandon the prize without another blow for the palace of their Czars and the shrines of their saints—for the wealth of their nobles and their merchants and the dwellings of their serfs? This was a momentous question.

Cautiously the columns of the Viceroy of Italy and Prince Poniatowski advanced on the left, while Murat's cavalry approached on the right.

Suddenly a flag of truce appeared, and was conducted to the emperor. The Russian general, Miloradovitch, demanded that his retreat should be unmolested, threatening, in case of refusal, to set fire to the city, which was still occupied by Russian troops. An armistice was readily granted, and within two hours the Russian rear-guard left Moscow.

Then the French emperor expected a deputation of civic officials to appear, bearing him the keys of the surrendered city; but none came.

At last he sent Salvinski and Victor to Murat, ordering him to ride into the city and make a reconnoissance. The two young men were permitted to join the staff of the King of Naples, and gladly availed themselves of the privilege.

To the astonishment of all, they found the streets utterly deserted, save by a few wild, haggard wretches, who fled like specters as they advanced. Some of the troopers dismounted and knocked at the doors of houses. The empty corridors echoed the sounds, but no human being responded. Moscow was like a city whose people had been swept off by the plague. After riding several miles, Murat countermarched and retraced his steps, and Salvini and Victor were sent back to the emperor, with the intelligence that Moscow was deserted.

Napoleon refused to enter it, and witness the scene of silence and desolation, but made his headquarters at a house in the suburbs. He, however, permitted his troops to enter and seek quarters; but he commanded Marshal Mortier, whom he appointed Governor of Moscow, to protect property, and prevent pillage, whether from friend or foe.

Mortier, however, found it a very difficult matter to carry out these instructions, and the first night of the occupation was a scene of great confusion and disorder.

Among the stragglers in search of quarters was our old acquaintance, Ivan Boriloff. The Russian, who, since his marriage, had renounced his allegiance to his native country, had been persuaded to accompany the army as a guide, while his wife, allured by the thirst of adventure and of profit, took part in the campaign as a vivandiere.

Friend Ivan had retained some of his national habits, and was not averse to a glass of vodky when it came within his reach. Unfortunately, on the night of the occupation, he took more than a single glass of vodky, which was the reason why he lost his way in a city with which he was thoroughly acquainted.

It was pitch-dark, for, it will be remembered, not a street-lamp was lighted, and he was in utter despair, and had just made up his mind to lie down in some hall-way and pass the night as comfortably as he could, when he was accosted in Russian by a fellow-countryman.

"Friend," said the stranger, "you and I seem to have been forgotten by our army."

"Yes," answered Ivan; "and as I don't belong to Moscow, I don't know where to lay my head."

"We must keep out of the way of the French," said the stranger.

"Ay, ay, the murdering thieves!" replied Ivan, thinking it policy to deny his associations.

"I'll give you a comfortable bed, brother," said the stranger. "Here, take my arm; you don't seem very steady on your feet."

"I'm very tired, comrade," answered Ivan, though his unsteadiness was as much attributable to vodky as to exhaustion.

The stranger led him to a street that skirted the city wall, and stopping at the door of a large house, unlocked it, drew Ivan into a dark corridor, and then locked the door behind him.

He next led the way to a large and lofty room, in the center of which stood a narrow oaken table, the apartment being lighted by a single lamp.

"If you'll wait here, friend," said the Russian, "I'll send the master of the house to you."

Ivan sat down, rested his head on his hands, with his elbows on the table, and fell into a doze.

All at once he was awakened by a rough grasp, and found himself in the hands of a dozen Cossacks. Sobered by the danger, he sprang to his feet and felled a couple of his assailants by powerful blows, but before he could have a chance to use his pistols, he was overpowered, disarmed, and bound.

"You shall answer for this outrage, dogs!" shouted Ivan.

"Answer to whom, Ivan Boriloff?" said a voice, which sent a shudder through his frame, and raising his eyes, the captive beheld the face of Count Alexis Orloff.

"Look at me, traitor! renegade! dog!" said the count. "Look in my scarred face and read your sentence. I learned through a spy that you were in the French Army. I strayed behind our troops at the risk of my life to meet you face to face, for vengeance is very sweet, Ivan Boriloff."

"I protest against your authority," said Ivan, "and I appeal to the count, your father."

"You appeal to the dead," was the reply. "The count is no more. I am his heir and the possessor of all his goods and chattels. But of all the treasures that he left me, houses, lands, horses, gold, jewels, and plate, I swear by the cross of Ivan the Great, that the body of Ivan Boriloff, the serf, is the most precious in my eyes."

He seated himsalf in an oaken arm-chair, and looked into the face of his prisoner with an expression of fiendish cruelty and hate.

The unfortunate serf lost all hope, but in his desperation he yelled aloud in a voice that might have been heard a mile:

"Help, Frenchmen! help! they are murdering a comrade! Help! help!"

"Shall I silence him," asked a gigantic Cossack.

"No," replied the count, disdainfully. "There are no French in this remote quarter of the city, and moreover, the tired dogs are gorging themselves with food. Let the brute yell till he is hoarse."

Again and again the serf rent the air with his cries for help, but help came not.

Count Orloff made a sign, and the Cossacks stripped the victim from head to foot. The count placed a silver whistle to his lips and sounded a call. It was answered by the appearance of a ferocious looking fellow, stripped to the waist, and carrying in his hand that awful instrument of punishment—the knout. The lash, a triangular thong of leather, an inch wide at the broadest, but tapering to a point, was twelve feet in length, and set in a short wooden handle.

At the sight of this horrible and fatal implement the prisoner was so terror-stricken, that his knees gave way, and had not the Cossacks supported him, he would have fallen to the ground. He had faced a wild tiger, it is true, but a Russian executioner is fiercer and more pitiless.

"Have you room enough here to swing it, Vasili?" asked the count.

"It works better in the open air," answered the brute he addressed; "but I can manage it. How shall I lay it on, master? You know I can break his spine and kill him at the first blow.

"Kill him at the first blow, you dolt?" cried the count. "What enjoyment should I have in that? No—spare his life till I have gloated on his tortures. Lay on the lash edgewise, do you hear? And cut his flesh and muscles into strips."

At a signal from the count, the Cossacks stretched Ivan face downward on the table, and bound his limbs securely with thongs to its oaken legs.

The gigantic executioner waved the handle of the knout and the lash hissed like a serpent through the air; then it descended and a yell burst from the victim as it scored his shoulders like a knife.

But no second blow was struck, for at that instant the door of the hall was thrown open and a party of French soldiers dashed in. A dismounted carbineer, not waiting for orders, raised his weapon to his shoulder and fired.

The shot struck the executioner full in the breast, and he fell crashing to the floor, a dead man. Orloff and the Cossacks discharged their pistols at the enemy, and favored by the smoke and confusion, retreated through a door opposite to that by which the rescuers had entered.

A dozen knives in friendly hands soon liberated Ivan, and some of the soldiers hurried on his clothes. The poor fellow gazed about him like one in a dream. Then he recognized among the friendly group his old acquaintance, Victor, the painter, and grasping his hand, he pressed it to his heart and his lips, and poured out his thanks."

"Ivan," said the artist, "your escape is Providential. What it was that led my steps to this remote quarter, I cannot tell, but I seemed to be guided hither by an invisible hand. I thought I heard a cry for help—it was repeated and I was certain, and even thought I recognized your voice. To enter the house alone would have been madness. I had to retrace my steps, when, fortunately, I soon came on a group of straggling soldiers. We forced the outer door-lock with a bayonet, and rushed on noiselessly and swiftly."

"To save me from dying by the knout!" said Ivan. "Frenchmen! I have never wavered in my duty to you, but this deed has made me yours body and soul."

While this was going on, some of the soldiers had pursued the fugitives. All at once a report like that of thunder shook the house to the foundation, and portions of the ceiling came crashing down on their heads. The lamp went out, and they were in total darkness.

"Fly!" cried Ivan Boriloff. "Follow the sound of my voice—I will keep shouting. They have mined the house, and another explosion will bring it down about our heads."

Huddling together and groping after their guide, who was fortunate in finding his way, they got out into the street. It was full time, for they were just able to find the shelter of an archway, when a second and more violent explosion took place, completely shattering the house they had just left, and filling the air with fragments of timber and stone. Their comrades had of course perished.

"Lead the way to the Kremlin, Ivan," said Victor. "I must see Marshal Mortier as soon as possible."

CHAPTER XX.

RUIN AND RETREAT.

Near the Kremlin the regiment to which our friend, La Tigresse, had attached herself as vivandiere, was quartered, and into her hands Victor had the pleasure of surrendering his faithful guide, Ivan Boriloff. When the latter had recounted his adventure, and how Victor had saved him from a cruel death, the vivandiere, in the expansion of her heart, threw her arms about the young painter and gave him a hug which would have done no discredit to a Russian bear or a Bengal tigress, and kissed him on both cheeks before she released him.

"You have saved this good-for-nothing," said she, smiling through her tears, "from something he dreads almost as much as a knout—a curtain-lecture; for one of my curtain-lectures is something to be remembered. Let me catch you loafing again without me," she added, addressing her husband. "And now, come along, and get your supper."

Victor hastened away, and sought an interview with Marshall Mortier, Duke of Treviso, within the walls of the Kremlin. The duke had dispatched his most urgent business, and was preparing to retire for the night, and the young man with great difficulty procured access to him.

In a very few words he told his story. The marshal listened to him attentively, and when he had finished, said to the members of his military family, who were grouped near him:

"Gentlemen, this is a complete confirmation of the reports that have reached us. We are here on the surface of a volcano. The fires that have here and there broken out have been attributed to chance; but in this case there was deliberate design. The emperor must instantly be informed of this. It may make him change his design of entering Moscow."

And drawing a sheet of paper toward him, he hastily wrote a dispatch, which he gave to Victor.

"You must deliver this ot once," he said.

At the same time he handed to the young man a pass to carry him past the guards.

At headquarters Victor saw Davoust, who, after making some difficulties, brought him before Napoleon, to whom he delivered his dispatch.

The emperor raised his eyebrows disdainfully as he ran over the few lines that Mortier had written.

"I do not believe it," he said, casting the paper

aside. "And you, sir—tell me, in a few words, what happened to you.

Victor related his adventure, but the emperor affected to treat it very lightly.

"It was no design," he said. "The place was one of their magazines. It was fired by some accident. It is absurd to think the Russians mad enough to destroy their holy city. It would be sacrilege. The very serfs would avenge it. Mortier means well, but he has lost his head. To-morrow, Davoust, I shall date my dispatches from the Kremlin."

He was evidently nervous and irritated. Victor took his leave, and sought the quarters of Salvinski.

The young men held a long conference before they went to sleep.

"Depend upon it, Victor," said the Pole, "Mortier is right, and the emperor wrong. These people make war like the ancient Scythians. The game is up; Napoleon is foiled, and the grand army ruined."

With these words, he rolled himself up in his cloak and went to sleep, and Victor, utterly exhausted, followed his example.

On the morrow Napoleon made his entry into the city, and established himself in the Kremlin, where his first act was to send a letter to the Emperor Alexander, proposing terms of peace, and assuring the Czar of his esteem. To all unfavorable reports that reached him he turned, or seemed to turn, a deaf ear, and at the end of a long day's work, retired to his rest.

He awoke to see Moscow in flames. His room was as light as day, and he rushed to the window to behold the grandest and most terrible spectacle ever offered to human eyes. The vast sweep of the horizon was curtained with crimson flames and rolling draperies of smoke, in the midst of which soared upward spires, and minarets, and domes. Sometimes one of these lofty spires would suddenly sink into the fiery gulf below, and its disappearance be followed by a volcanic explosion. For the city was mined in every direction, and every moment a crash like that of thunder showed that the twenty thousand incendiaries whom Kostopchin had let loose on a mission of destruction were doing their task well. Close at hand, irregular musket-shots were heard; it was the French soldiers wreaking their vengeance on miscreants they had caught, torch in hand. These wretches, liberated prisoners, met death with a smile. They had been spared the knout to ply the torch, and the bullet of the Frenchman was more merciful than the lash of the Russian.

But though he was gazing on the ruin of his hopes, the imperial spectator could not help appreciating the magnitude of the sacrifice. It is on record that he said:

"What a tremendous spectacle! It is their own work! So many palaces! What extraordinary resolution! What men! These are indeed Scythians!"

Personally he was safe, for there was yet a broad space between the focus of the conflagration and the Kremlin. Within the immense area of the latter there were no powder magazines, as a careful survey had shown. Still the wind was high and changeful, and more than once showers of fire descended on the palace of the Czars.

Murat, the viceroy of Italy, and the Prince of Neufchatel hastened to the emperor and implored him on their knees to fly. He was immovable. The fires of death should never drive him from the Kremlin.

All at once from the court-yard where the Old Guard were bivouacking, came the cry, "The Kremlin is on fire!" and a lurid light, brighter and nearer than any that had yet reddened the sky, lit up the faces of the emperor and his attendants.

The incendiary in the case was detected and dragged into the emperor's presence. He wore the uniform of a private in the Russian police.

"Did you apply the torch?" asked the emperor.

"I did," replied the Russian, who happened to speak French.

"Why?"

"Because I was ordered to do so?"

"By whom?"

"By the chief of the police."

"You see, sire," said Mortier. "The conflagration is an official act."

"What shall we do with him, sire?" asked the grenadier who had the incendiary in charge.

"What you will," replied Napoleon, coldly.

The grenadier dragged the wretch from the imperial presence, and a moment afterward a volley of musketry beneath the window announced his fate.

Then at last Napoleon decided to abandon the Kremlin. Salvinski and Victor attached themselves to the imperial group, resolved to share the fate of the emperor.

Napoleon had lingered too long, and it was through an ocean of fire, through constant explosions of mines, among falling walls and fiery ruins that he made his way on foot. The heat was intense; the glare of the flames blinding; the air inhaled suffocating. Each one of the party expected his last hour had arrived. Yet, in the midst of these horrors, the face of the emperor was calm.

Suddenly the Russian guide who accompanied him hesitated. The changes effected by the conflagration had thrown doubt upon his mind, and he confessed that he was uncertain what course to pursue.

All at once arose a cry of "Save the emperor!" and a handful of soldiers, led by Davoust, still suffering from a wound, rushed out from a side street, and, surrounding the imperial party, hurried them to a place of safety. Soon after they passed through one of the city gates, and there halted until horses were brought, when the emperor rode forward to the castle of Petrowski, three miles distant on the road to St. Petersburg.

But we must not forget that this is not a history, but a record of the romantic fortunes of individuals. With historical events and characters, we have only to deal in their connection with the personages of our story.

Hence, we do not pause to narrate how the conflagration, witnessed by our friends, Salvinski and Victor, from the new imperial headquarters, raged for days, until it had ingulfed churches, palaces, bazaars, even hospitals filled with wounded, sparing only a portion of the Kremlin, and some of the less opulent portions of the city. Nor need we tell how the troops plundered and rifled the abandoned houses and stores; what wealth of gold and jewels, what splendid furs and dresses, what plate and pictures fell to their share as booty—the wealth of a nation's capital into the hands of a few thousand men. There were soldiers wrapped in robes of sables that princesses would have coveted, who, their pockets full of gold, would have given all for a full and wholesome meal, such as three or four francs used to buy them at Paris.

The extent of the ruin that befell Moscow is depicted in half a dozen lines by the Russian Karamzin:

"Palaces and temples, monuments and miracles of luxury, the remains of past ages, and those which had been the creation of yesterday; the tombs of ancestors, and the nursery-cradles of the present generation, were indiscriminately destroyed. Nothing was left of Moscow save the remembrance of its former grandeur."

It was in the suite of the emperor that our two young friends returned to the scene of desolation, when Napoleon again made his headquarters in the half-ruined kingdom.

They were with the emperor, and with the wrecks of the main column of the grand army, when he turned his back on the desolated city of the Czars and his face toward Paris.

Thirty miles away on that disastrous retreat they heard that thunder-sound, like the awful voice of an earthquake, which announced that Mortier, left behind at Moscow, had obeyed his orders. That explosion assured the emperor that the Kremlin had

ceased to exist. The heroic marshal, with a rear-guard of eight thousand men "rather a rabble than an organized body," had fought with the returning Russians for four days, had gloriously covered the retreat of the grand army, and then, firing a train connected with one hundred and eighty-three thousand pounds of powder barreled up in the palace of the Czars, had blown it to atoms together with a horde of savage Cossacks, who had rushed in to plunder and whose torn limbs darkened the air, as the fragments of the Kremlin flew skyward in a sheet of flame and smoke.

CHAPTER XXI.

A CHARGE OF COSSACKS.

All the horrors of war were accumulated in the retreat from Moscow. Death in a thousand ghastly forms met the invaders at every step, and at every hour of the night and day. The line of march was a perpetual battle with nature and man. From the black pine forests of the frozen North came hordes of armed men, treading their own soil, with snow and ice for dread auxiliaries. Tens of thousands of homeless serfs swelled the ranks of the Muscovite army, and added their clubs and axes to the more formidable muskets and cannon of the regular troops of the Czar. Clouds of Cossacks hovered on the flanks and in the rear of the retreating columns, harassing them continually, retiring, advancing, attacking by turns, like innumerable packs of wolves. Woe to the straggler who fell out of the ranks! A thrust from a Cossack lance was his instant passport to another world.

In one of their furious charges they all but captured Napoleon himself.

The great emperor had still more than a hundred thousand men around his eagles when he turned his back upon Moscow, but there was nearly half that number of stragglers and camp-followers, men, women and even children to cumber his retreat. As he advanced he saw men, horses, guns melting away in storm and in battle day by day. The cold alone was as fatal as the bullets of the enemy.

Utter annihilation would have been the fate of that host but for the miraculous endurance and heroic valor of Michael Ney, the commander of the rear-guard. It was the good fortune of our friend Victor to be much with the marshal. Salvinski had been sent forward with the vanguard and Victor was left alone behind. His energy, endurance, and courage commended him to the favor of Ney, whose hardships he shared without complaining.

The line of march followed up by the rear-guard was traced by lines of corpses frozen stiff, by broken-down tumbrils and carts, by abandoned cannon and by dead horses—or rather by the skeletons of horses, for no sooner did one of these animals sink on the frozen snow than a dozen men would fall upon the creature, and tear the flesh from his limbs while it was yet quivering with life. They left slender pickings for the Russian wolf and vulture. If a man fell his doom was sealed. No comrade stretched forth a hand to raise him to his feet. No wagoner could receive him, for the constantly increasing number of wounded soldiers and the constantly decreasing number of vehicles, rendered aid impossible.

The army had left Moscow incumbered by a vast quantity of spoil. Of what use now were the costly vessels of gold and silver, the pictures, the statuettes, the vases, the caskets of price? They lay scattered on the fields of ice to the right and left, abandoned and kicked aside by the starving, bleeding, and freezing soldiery who had seized them.

At the close of a dull and severely cold day, during which not a ray of sunshine had penetrated the leaden clouds, Victor was riding beside the marshal in the rear of a battalion that struggled forward, stumbling over the dreary snow and ice-fields. It was the third rear-guard that Ney had commanded. Its predecessors had been utterly destroyed, and with infinite exertions he had gathered this fresh handful of men. They were of all arms—grenadiers, rifles, dismounted cuirassiers and artillerists. Among them there were more officers than privates. There were colonels on foot who had lost every man of their regiments, and were now doing duty as corporals and sergeants. Three field-pieces were dragged along by teams of skeleton horses, and Ney had still thirty or forty rounds of ammunition with his feeble battery. Scarcely a word was spoken, for the men kept their mouths closely muffled breathing through their beards and mustaches which were covered with ice.

The air was full of visible particles of ice, and now and then a bird fell from the sky stiff and frozen. From the red eyes of the soldiers, half blinded by the glare of snow and smoke of bivouacs, tears of blood issued and froze upon their cheeks. Victor's vision was impaired from the same causes.

He had been dismounted and mounted several times during the retreat. In a late skirmish with the Cossacks he had captured the horse he was now riding, but the creature, tough and wiry as he was, was weakened by insufficiency of food. The marshal's horse was scarcely in better plight.

As they were plodding silently along, Victor's horse shied at a dark object that lay in his path. As the rider glanced at it, it stirred, and a feeble voice cried:

"Help, gentlemen, for the love of heaven."

Victor glanced inquiringly at the marshal. A tear stood in Ney's eye, but he shook his head and pointed to the retiring column.

"Duty to all," he said, mournfully, "compels us to be cruel to one."

"But I cannot leave this man to perish," said Victor, reining up his horse.

"You cannot save him," said the marshal, "his minutes are numbered."

"No—no," said the sufferer, who had caught the words, "I have yet life and latent strength in me. But I am freezing fast to this bed of ice. I haven't tasted a morsel for twenty-four hours. Give me a drink and a bit of food and I can push on."

"I cannot wait, Victor," said the marshal, "and for you to delay is death."

With these words he rode sternly forward.

But Victor threw himself from his horse, raised the head of the wayfarer and gave him a few drops from his flask, and a bit of bread from his haversack.

"May Heaven reward you!" said the man. "I cannot. Three days ago I was rich. I had made money as a sutler, and carried off plenty of booty from Moscow; but now I am as bare as when I came into the world."

"Do you think," asked Victor, with some hesitation, "that you could keep up if I were to take you behind me on my horse?"

"That I could," said the sutler, struggling to his feet. "The love of life is so strong within me—and perhaps I should be able to walk to-morrow."

Victor then placed the man on the crupper of his saddle, mounted before him, and following the track of the marshal through the snow, finally overtook the rear of the battalion.

It was now nightfall, and they had reached a clump of trees, where Ney decided to establish his bivouac. Some of the soldiers immediately went to work to pitch what few wretched tents remained, and to improvise shelter by stacking muskets and spreading blankets over them. Others gathered dry wood for fuel to cook their rations of horseflesh, and to keep from freezing.

Often at night, as soon as roaring fires were kindled, freezing wretches, frenzied by their sufferings from cold, threw themselves into the blaze, and were dragged out by their comrades, suffocated. This night, no such tragic incident occurred.

Victor busied himself to make the man he had rescued as comfortable as possible, and had the satisfaction of seeing him completely revived and eating his scanty supper with a relish. He sat down beside him and asked him his name.

"Paul Aubrey," replied the sufferer. "Cursed be the day when the greed of gold lured me into this horrible country."

He was silent for a few moments, gazing at the

dismounted cuirassiers and artillerists. Among them there were more officers than privates. There were colonels on foot who had lost every man of their regiments, and were now doing duty as corporals and sergeants. Three field-pieces were dragged along by teams of skeleton horses, and Ney had still thirty or forty rounds of ammunition with his feeble battery. Scarcely a word was spoken, for the men kept their mouths closely muffled breathing through their beards and mustaches which were covered with ice.

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"Paul Aubrey," replied the sufferer. "Cursed be the day when the greed of gold lured me into this horrible country."

He was silent for a few moments, gazing at the fire moodily, and then he looked up at the face of his preserver.

"It is strange," he said, "but your features seem familiar to me. At least let me know to whom I am indebted for my life."

"My name is Victor," said the painter.

"Victor!" repeated Aubrey. "Taken in connection with your face, that is indeed a strange coincidence. What family do you belong to?"

"I have no family," replied Victor, sadly. "I am a foundling."

"You have no clew to your parents——"

"One only; the miniature of a lady supposed to be my mother was found suspended round my neck."

"And that picture?"

"I have never parted with it."

"Will you let me look at it?"

"Willingly."

Victor drew forth the miniature and placed it in Aubrey's hands. The man had no sooner looked at it than he cried:

"It is she—herself! just as she looked in her happiest hours. Take it back; I cannot bear the sight of that face!" and he covered his face with his hands.

After a moment he resumed:

"Thank Heaven; I can now repay my debt in part, and partially atone for some of my past misdeeds. I can disclose the secret of your parentage. Listen."

As Victor bent forward in intense excitement, the rapid roll of a drum was heard, and then the stentorian voice of the marshal, shouting:

"To arms! the enemy!"

A fierce and determined attack by the Cossacks, led by Platoff, the renowned cavalry leader, was valiantly met by Ney and his comparatively few followers.

Twice the Cossacks were repulsed; but a third attack was successful. The French were mercilessly mown down by grape and canister; and the survivors, utterly outnumbered, fled. Some of them, overtaken by the victorious Cossacks, were taken prisoners and carried off.

Among the prisoners was Paul Aubrey.

When all was lost, and not till then, Marshal Ney, who had fired the last shot, seized Victor by the arm, and dashing into the woods on foot, effected his escape, a few of his followers being equally fortunate.

We will not pause to recount the numerous obstacles which beset the French on their retreat, or describe the disasters attending the passage of the army across the Berezina; these are historical facts having but little connection with our story, and do not need recapitulation here. We will merely state that it was the good fortune of Salvinski and Victor to be permitted to accompany the emperor when the latter had decided finally that the safety of France required his presence in Paris.

It was on the 19th of December that the remnant of Napoleon's army entered the French capital, and Victor immediately hastened to his old studio, No. 10 Rue Rougemont.

Everything was in its place, everything looked as if he had left it the day before, and he asked himself if all that had happened within the past few months had not been a horrible dream.

Then he looked in the glass at his blistered, hollow, and powder-stained face, blood-shot eyes, and ragged Polish uniform, and smiled sadly at the change which he beheld.

As he reviewed the train of trials and horrors through which he had passed, his interview with Aubrey presented itself vividly. The man who alone could tell him the secret of his birth had been hurried away before disclosing it, and all hope of recovering the clew was lost; for even if he survived exposure to the Russian climate, it was certain that he would be sent to Siberia, and there die a captive in the mines.

"It seems to be my destiny," thought Victor, "to die without name or family."

CHAPTER XXII.

DOMESTIC TROUBLES—THE SEPARATION.

It is now time to return to that gloomy and unhappy household where Gaspar Roland and his wife led divided lives, married but not mated, covered by the same roof, but utterly estranged from each other in heart. Though many years had elapsed since last we met them, their relations had remained unchanged.

But if happiness was a stranger to his hearth, fortune continued to smile upon the banker, and to fill his coffers to overflowing. It seemed as if he possessed the art of coining the public calamities into gold. Every political change, every national disaster, contributed to the success of his speculations. But success brought no joy to his darkened heart and home.

His son had grown up to manhood, fair to look upon, radiant with all his mother's beauty; but it was the beauty of the fallen arch-angel. His heart was as dark as his face was fair. In the perversion of his nature he seemed to love vice for the sake of vice, even where it did not minister to his personal enjoyment. He was a living thorn in his father's side, a profligate, and spendthrift, and he seemed to take a sinister delight in humiliating and disgracing his father. The whole city rang with the story of his misdeeds, and every day added a new scandal to the long list of his offenses.

With all their laxity of morals, the French people have ever visited intemperance with the severest reprehension. Other sins are venial; that is unpardonable. To be seen publicly intoxicated is a brand even upon the most notorious. Now, young Gabriel Roland not only drank deeply, but gloried in publicly exhibiting himself when under the influence of spirituous liquors.

Remonstrance proved of no avail. If the banker stopped the young man's allowance—he laughed at the impotent check, for he could always obtain credit, even if his mother's purse were not open to him at all times.

When he was a child, Louise Roland had exhibited no affection for her offspring, but as he grew up, the image of herself, her feelings changed. Disappointed in love, estranged from her husband, her affections craved some object on which to concentrate, and on what could they more naturally center than on her own son? His very waywardness and recklessness drew her nearer to him, for she asked herself if they did not spring in a great measure from her own culpable neglect. The boy had been left in the hands of hirelings when he should have received a mother's care and guidance. In proportion as his father grew cold and stern, so did her heart warm to him.

In time he obtained a complete mastery over her, and used her as an instrument of his will. If she remonstrated with him for some culpable act, a caress silenced her, and she dared deny him nothing, for fear of losing his love—the love of the only being in which she could now indulge without a crime.

One morning the banker sent for his son. After a long delay the young man presented himself, attired in a superb dressing-gown, a Greek smoking cap on his head, and the tube of a long Turkish pipe in his mouth. Though his eyes were blood-shot and his face pale and haggard, its marvellous beauty triumphed over these drawbacks, and almost justified the insolent pride with which he threw himself into an arm-chair and crossed his shapely limbs.

"I believe, sir," he said, superciliously, "that tobacco smoke is not offensive to you?"

"You know that I detest it," replied the banker.

"Indeed!" rejoined the young man, continuing to smoke tranquilly. "I regret to hear you say that, because for my part I can't talk without a pipe in my mouth. However, it will have the effect of abridging our interview, and if it prove to be unpleasant, as I infer it will be from your manner, sir, that will be better for both of us."

"You came home last night intoxicated again, in spite of my warning," said the banker, seriously.

"I admit it," said the young man, tranquilly.

"This cool impudence does not serve your turn. Your conduct is disgraceful."

"Granted."

"And I have a right to tell you so."

"I beg your pardon, my dear sir—I dispute your right to lecture me. I am of age."

"Have you not squandered tens of thousands of my money?" asked the banker.

"Not a sou," replied the young man. "Ah, my dear sir, I am not ignorant of our family history. I am not ignorant that my dear mother supplied the capital on which you have grown rich. It is to her, and not to you, that I am indebted."

"Unnatural boy!" said the banker, indignantly. "But if you are under no pecuniary obligations to me, still you owe a respect to the roof that shelters you."

"I have the most profound respect for this rather cumbrous pile of architecture, I assure you."

"You disgrace it daily. But I feel that remonstrance with you is indeed vain. I have borne with you longer than duty constrained me to do, and I sent for you to tell you that a repetition of last night's offense will force me to expel you and to disown you."

"Then, in spite of my conciliatory efforts, I am to understand that there is war between us, sir."

"Call it what you will, sir," said the banker, sternly; "if you offend again, our relations cease."

"They have not been so very agreeable," muttered the young man, as he bowed slightly and retired to his own room.

After this insight into his character, it is almost needless to say that the young man's next offense occurred the next night. He again came home intoxicated, fell across the door-step, and was taken up to bed by two of the servants.

The next day the banker sent for him. Grief and indignation struggled for the mastery, and it was a long time before Roland could say:

"Leave my house instantly!"

The young man received the order without changing a muscle.

"You will allow me some little time for preparation, sir?"

"Not a moment. Your personal effects can follow you."

"But to turn a fellow into the streets so suddenly! I don't know where the duse to go."

"With your boasted resources you can be at no loss," said the banker. "I have but one word to say—begone!"

"And supposing I refuse?" said the young man.

"Then I shall send for a police-sergeant."

"Hum! that would make a jolly excitement. I'm not so sure, though, that the thing is desirable. I'd better go, perhaps, but under protest. Remember, sir," he added, with a mocking air, "that you have turned me out of doors, and that I have no home to go to."

"You have your mother's home," said Madame Roland, suddenly presenting herself.

"I am the master of my house, madam," said the banker, "and I will not harbor this profligate longer."

"No one denies your right to select your own inmates, Monsieur Roland," answered the lady, calmly. "I am speaking of my house in the Rue de la Chaussee d'Antin, over which I have full and absolute control. For a long time I have been contemplating retiring thither. This morning's proceeding has confirmed my resolution. My son shall no longer live under your roof; that is your decision. Very well, sir, I shall no longer live under yours; that is mine."

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CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DAWN OF LOVE—JESSIE'S PORTRAIT.

Meanwhile Victor struggled along, contending with the trials of an artist's career. Hard times, such as these experienced by France in 1813 and 1814, first affect the arts of luxury. Victor's sitters were few and far between, and the dealers made him no returns for the pictures he had consigned to them for sale.

He might have obtained relief by application to the emperor, but he had an artist's pride, and he scorned to sue for royal favors. He kept hoping that the emperor might send for him and give him a commission, but Napoleon had forgotten the very existence of the artist, engaged as he was in a supreme struggle for the maintenance of his crown and dynasty. He was in the field, fighting the myriad enemies which the disaster of 1812 had raised up in arms to confront him, and against whom he struggled heroically, but in vain. France, weakened by the drain of incessant wars, with a treasury depleted, with boyish conscripts in the ranks thinned by the fall of veteran soldiers, could not resist the weight of the consolidated European States. The star of empire set in blood; Napoleon resigned the crown at Fontainebleau, retiring to Elba, the allies entered the capital of France, and once more the Bourbon lilies floated from the pinnacles of Paris.

Struggling bravely against adverse fortune, Victor turned his hand to anything which would bring a little money. He even painted signs, and gave lessons in drawing and painting.

Among his pupils was a young lady, the daughter of a merchant. Hortense Favart was a charming girl, accomplished, modest, and refined, the idol of her father, who was a widower. She was the image of her mother, a German lady, who had bequeathed to her the waving brown tresses, the deep blue eyes, and pure complexion of the daughters of the Rhine. She inherited, too, her mother's nature, her trustfulness, her tenderness, truth, and dreamy romance. In her, German sentiment and French wit were happily blended, and lent their elements to complete an assemblage of attractions rarely found in one person. She was a dangerous pupil for a young artist.

Victor promised to be on his guard and not yield to a fascination which would prove fatal to his peace, for he felt that between a poor artist and the daughter of a rich merchant there was an impassable gulf. Yet when he made this resolution there was already a spell on him.

Day by day he became more and more interested in the charming girl confided to his charge. When he presented himself at the door of the drawing-room, he was obliged to pause and wait till the beatings of his heart subsided and he could conjure up an air of indifference wherewith to meet her.

Was she calm and indifferent? Although he professed to hope so, still it gave him a pang to think that she neither divined his attachment nor reciprocated it. Sometimes he fancied that she received him with a feeling warmer than that of mere kindness, yet her reception of every one was so gentle and cordial that the idea of her discriminating in his favor was soon dismissed.

"My profession is no insuperable obstacle," thought Victor. "But the fact that I am unknown and poor is fatal. If I could win reputation and money; if my picture of the King of Rome had not been destroyed in the retreat from Russia. The star of Napoleon is set, and his portraits are banished from the public view, but the fair face of the Emperor of Austria's grandson would have won admiration.

The Exhibition of Fine Arts was approaching, and he had no masterpiece to send. Yes! there was one. His mother's portrait. Hitherto he had shrunk from displaying it in public, reserving it for his own secret contemplation, but now he had a sacred object in view; he wished to win laurels to ennoble him in the eyes of one he loved purely and devotedly. Accordingly he framed it richly and sent it to the exhibition.

No one knew whether the picture was ideal or a transcript from life; there was no indication in the catalogue, only the words:

"Head in Oils, by Victor, No 10 Rue Rougemont."

It found a few critics and some admirers. The mass of visitors passed it by, but the cultivated few lingered before it as if spell-bound, and came back again and again, fascinated by the sweet face and by a certain mysterious indefinable charm that radiated from the canvas.

One day, a man whose hair had turned gray, though his erect figure exhibited no traces of the hand of age, was listlessly strolling through the galleries of the Exposition.

He was followed at a respectful distance, but narrowly watched, by a young man fashionably dressed.

The young man said to himself:

"What can he be doing here? I never knew he affected a particular love for the fine arts. However, as I have given myself the mission to watch all his comings and goings, I must have an eye on him."

The gray-haired man was Gaspar Roland; the spy upon his actions, his discarded son, Gabriel.

Gaspar Roland's eyes wandered over the walls without seeming to be arrested by any single picture. At last he entered the room where Victor's work was hanging. There happened to be no one present, except young Roland, who paused at the entrance and availed himself of the curtain that draped the doorway to conceal himself from observation.

Over the pictures in this room the banker's glance roved as coldly as it had done over those of the galleries he had just traversed, until it rested on Jessie's portrait. Then he gave a sudden start, and a cry he struggled in vain to repress burst from his lips. Terrified, he looked round to see if any one had witnessed his emotion. But he thought himself alone. Then he passed his hands over his eyes, as if to brush away some mocking vision.

But there the picture hung—a fixed reality.

He came near to it, and touched it. Then he started back and gazed at it fixedly, with wild and terrified eyes.

"It is herself!" he said. "It was thus she looked in her brief days of happiness and confiding love, before my treachery drove her to despair. It is thus I wished her image to present itself; but it is not thus she visits me in dreams. No; she comes at night with dim and hollow eyes and ghastly cheeks, and long hair trailing and wet with the waves of the river and the dews of death. Where, when, and by whom was this portait taken?—for it is no fancy sketch, no accidental resemblance."

He consulted the catalogue, and ascertained the artist's name and address. Then he hurried out of the exhibition building, and dismissing his carriage, got into a public cabriolet and ordered the coachman to drive him to No. 10 Rue Rougemont.

If it had not been broad daylight, Gabriel Roland would have followed his father. As it was, he had to content himself with what he had observed.

On his way to the painter's the banker had time to dismiss all traces of emotion from his countenance, and to assume an air of tranquil self-possession.

He found the artist at home, and met with a polite reception. There were certain features, or rather a certain expression of the young man's face, which recalled the lost one as they had done to Paul Aubrey in the wilds of Russia.

"Monsieur Victor," said the banker, "I have just been to the Exhibition of Fine Arts. You have a picture there."

Victor bowed.

"I admire it greatly."

Victor again bowed.

"And," continued the banker, "I am prepared to purchase it on your own terms."

"I am exceedingly flattered, sir," replied the artist, "but the picture is not for sale. You are surprised, sir, that a poor young man should decline so generous an offer, but you will not be when you learn its history. That portrait is undoubtedly the face of my mother."

Roland came near betraying his emotion by a sudden start. He managed, however, to listen with apparent calmness while Victor told him his simple story—how he had been received at the foundling hospital, with the miniature attached to his person, the letter "R" marked on his arm, and a single line indicating a case of wrong and betrayal.

The banker asked permission to see the writing referred to, excusing himself by the deep interest which the narrative had excited.

Victor placed the little scroll in his hands—the scrap of paper which contained the last words poor Jessie ever wrote: "He is the child of misery and sorrow, but not of a mother's guilt."

Under the pretense of obtaining more light, the banker went to the window and turned his back on Victor to hide his emotion, for in view of that handwriting he could not conceal the workings of his face, the expression of torture it elicited.

It was, indeed, her handwriting, and he could no longer doubt that he stood in the presence of her son and his.

His first impulse was to throw himself at the young man's feet, confess the truth, and implore him to forgive the wrong he had done his mother, and then to invite him to share his fortune and his love.

Then he shrank from the confession of his crime, doubting how it would be received. Another doubt beset the wretched man.

This boy had grown up without paternal or maternal care, and might be as unworthy of good fortune as his other son. Appearances were in his favor, certainly, but the man of the world knew how little credit they deserved.

His second impulse, therefore, was to make a trial of the young man's worth, and to defer to a later date the disclosure of their relationship.

The hard school of trial through which the banker had passed had given him the force to control himself and conceal his emotions.

"I have another proposition to make to you, sir," he said, after returning the written paper to the painter. "I have so strong a desire to obtain a duplicate, at least, of your exhibition picture, that I wish you to attempt another enlarged copy of the miniature in your possession."

"I tell you frankly, sir," replied Victor, "that I do not think I should succeed as well."

"No matter; you can but try."

"I will do my best, sir."

"Who knows but that the picture may lead ultimately to the discovery of your mother's name and story?" suggested the banker, though this idea filled his own bosom with alarm.

"Perhaps, sir."

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Little did he dream of the tie that united them. Little did he dream that if the banker's heart, with its terrible secrets, had been bared to his view, he would never have crossed his threshold; and that, though the blood of Roland coursed in his veins, he would have shrunk away in horror from his contact.

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The evil genius he served had stamped on the Corsican's face an expression of wickedness which served as a warning to all who approached him. But it was very different with Clement Marville, Gabriel's spy in Roland's household.

Clement had a most apostolic face—soft white hair, mild blue eyes, a serene smile, a pleasant voice, and gentle manner. Yet this old man was thoroughly servile and corrupt. A confidential servant, intrusted with much of the care of the banker's son, he had, without scruple, hidden his faults when he was a boy, and ministered to his vices as he grew to manhood, receiving large wages from the father, and heavy bribes from the son. This old wretch fattened on his nefarious practices. He lent money at usurious interest, and speculated successfully on the Bourse, risking little, because he operated on the knowledge he obtained from his master's papers.

There was yet a certain reserve in his rascality. He would not steal outright, but he made no scruple of opening his master's letters to learn financial secrets, and he was as adroit in sealing and resealing a missive as any government spy of the post-office department.

From this man, whom he feed liberally, Gabriel, who met him in secret, learned everything that went on in his father's household. He learned how Victor had been taken into favor, made an inmate of the house, dined with his father, and daily grew in the good graces of the banker.

He knew that Victor was the painter of the picture which had so excited the banker when he first beheld it in the exhibition, and his sudden favor indicated some mystery which he longed to fathom, hoping and believing that it involved some disgraceful affair, and might in some way contribute to give him a hold over his father, or at least annoy and trouble him—how, he could not yet tell; but, as he had made up his mind to avenge his expulsion, he grasped at any straw.

The young man's misconduct had arisen from pure perversity, not from weakness. He did not fall into error; he deliberately sought it and embraced it. He often sinned, not for the pleasure of the misdoing, but for the purpose of shocking and irritating his family and the world. He had the most perfect self-control, when he chose to exercise it. Thus, after the separation between his father and mother had taken place, his conduct for a long time was most exemplary. He kept regular hours, he accompanied his mother everywhere, even to church, took regular exercise, and avoided the wine-cup. This behavior made his mother as happy as she could be under existing circumstances; yet he did not act thus to secure his mother's approbation, but to place his father in the wrong before the world—to show that he himself had been discarded just on the eve of a radical reformation.

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He felt himself at last on the high-road to fortune. At length, he thought, art would support him; his talent was recognized; he had passed the rubicon which separates the land of famine from the land of promise. He no longer need hesitate to ask her he loved to share his fate. He could bring her present support and prospective opulence.

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The young girl blushed so deeply, and smiled so sweetly, as she received him, that the painter could no longer fear he was indifferent to her. Hortense had unconsciously betrayed the secret of her heart.

The discovery gave the young man such courage that he fell at her feet and poured out his love in a torrent of words, incoherent at first, but rising at last to the height of genuine persuasive eloquence.

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"Sir," said he, boldly and frankly, "I love your daughter, and I have come here to ask you for her hand."

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"I have seen and heard enough of you, sir; for I did not engage you as a teacher for my child without making minute and careful inquiries, to be certain that you have not sought this alliance from mercenary motives. You have fallen in love with each other like two thoughtless children, as I did when I I was of your age. Your mother and I, Hortense, were poor when we married, but we were all the happier for our struggles with the world. I had hoped to give you a fairer start in life, but Providence has willed it otherwise. Monsieur Victor, you see before you a ruined, but not a dishonored man. To-morrow my failure will be public. I have struggled hard to keep my head above water, but the times have proved too hard for me. One man might have saved me—the banker, Gaspar Roland."

Victor started at hearing that name mentioned in this connection. The merchant went on:

"I had had dealings with him in former days, and he knew my probity. I laid before him a full and faithful statement of my affairs, and I showed him that a hundred thousand francs would tide me over my distresses. But I had no security to offer him beyond my honor and my commercial ability. He heard me patiently, but coldly. He said that if I were a score of years younger he would assist me, but that, in times like these, and in circumstances like mine, it required the energy of youth to rise out of the wreck that had involved my fortunes; that he had safe investments for his capital, and that, in short, he could do nothing for me. I staggered from his door a ruined man. All is lost except honor. I have seen every one of my creditors, and all are satisfied with the settlement I propose. But I surrender all, and Hortense and I are beggars now."

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"To be married!" echoed Roland, in surprise, "and to whom?"

"To Mademoiselle Hortense Favart."

"Favart, the daughter of the merchant Favart?"

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"I do not see that the marriage of a poor young man to the daughter of a bankrupt is a subject of congratulation. Of course, you will have to support the old man."

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At a late hour of the night Gabriel Roland and Clement Marville were closeted together in the sitting-room of the former. Gabriel had dismissed his valet, and had locked the door communicating with the body of the house, so that they were perfectly secure from intrusion.

"State the grounds of your belief that this young dauber has a claim upon my father," said the banker's son.

ever, as I have given myself the mission to watch all his comings and goings, I must have an eye on him."

The gray-haired man was Gaspar Roland; the spy upon his actions, his discarded son, Gabriel.

Gaspar Roland's eyes wandered over the walls without seeming to be arrested by any single picture. At last he entered the room where Victor's work was hanging. There happened to be no one present, except young Roland, who paused at the entrance and availed himself of the curtain that draped the doorway to conceal himself from observation.

Over the pictures in this room the banker's glance roved as coldly as it had done over those of the galleries he had just traversed, until it rested on Jessie's portrait. Then he gave a sudden start, and a cry he struggled in vain to repress burst from his lips. Terrified, he looked round to see if any one had witnessed his emotion. But he thought himself alone. Then he passed his hands over his eyes, as if to brush away some mocking vision.

But there the picture hung—a fixed reality.

He came near to it, and touched it. Then he started back and gazed at it fixedly, with wild and terrified eyes.

"It is herself!" he said. "It was thus she looked in her brief days of happiness and confiding love, before my treachery drove her to despair. It is thus I wished her image to present itself; but it is not thus she visits me in dreams. No; she comes at night with dim and hollow eyes and ghastly cheeks, and long hair trailing and wet with the waves of the river and the dews of death. Where, when, and by

whom was this portait taken?—for it is no fancy sketch, no accidental resemblance."

He consulted the catalogue, and ascertained the artist's name and address. Then he hurried out of the exhibition building, and dismissing his carriage, got into a public cabriolet and ordered the coachman to drive him to No. 10 Rue Rougemont.

If it had not been broad daylight, Gabriel Roland would have followed his father. As it was, he had to content himself with what he had observed.

On his way to the painter's the banker had time to dismiss all traces of emotion from his countenance, and to assume an air of tranquil self-possession.

He found the artist at home, and met with a polite reception. There were certain features, or rather a certain expression of the young man's face, which recalled the lost one as they had done to Paul Aubrey in the wilds of Russia.

"Monsieur Victor," said the banker, "I have just been to the Exhibition of Fine Arts. You have a picture there."

Victor bowed.

"I admire it greatly."

Victor again bowed.

"And," continued the banker, "I am prepared to purchase it on your own terms."

"I am exceedingly flattered, sir," replied the artist, "but the picture is not for sale. You are surprised, sir, that a poor young man should decline so generous an offer, but you will not be when you learn its history. That portrait is undoubtedly the face of my mother."

Roland came near betraying his emotion by a sudden start. He managed, however, to listen with apparent calmness while Victor told him his simple story—how he had been received at the foundling hospital, with the miniature attached to his person, the letter "R" marked on his arm, and a single line indicating a case of wrong and betrayal.

The banker asked permission to see the writing referred to, excusing himself by the deep interest which the narrative had excited.

Victor placed the little scroll in his hands—the scrap of paper which contained the last words poor Jessie ever wrote: "He is the child of misery and sorrow, but not of a mother's guilt."

Under the pretense of obtaining more light, the banker went to the window and turned his back on Victor to hide his emotion, for in view of that handwriting he could not conceal the workings of his face, the expression of torture it elicited.

It was, indeed, her handwriting, and he could no longer doubt that he stood in the presence of her son and his.

His first impulse was to throw himself at the young man's feet, confess the truth, and implore him to forgive the wrong he had done his mother, and then to invite him to share his fortune and his love.

Then he shrank from the confession of his crime, doubting how it would be received. Another doubt beset the wretched man.

This boy had grown up without paternal or maternal care, and might be as unworthy of good fortune as his other son. Appearances were in his favor, certainly, but the man of the world knew how little credit they deserved.

His second impulse, therefore, was to make a trial of the young man's worth, and to defer to a later date the disclosure of their relationship.

The hard school of trial through which the banker had passed had given him the force to control himself and conceal his emotions.

"I have another proposition to make to you, sir," he said, after returning the written paper to the painter. "I have so strong a desire to obtain a duplicate, at least, of your exhibition picture, that I wish you to attempt another enlarged copy of the miniature in your possession."

"I tell you frankly, sir," replied Victor, "that I do not think I should succeed as well."

"No matter; you can but try."

"I will do my best, sir."

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"You, yourself, sir," said Clement, "were a witness of the emotion betrayed by your father when he saw that portrait of a woman in the exhibition."

"Yes, he was utterly overwhelmed at the sight of it."

"Very well, sir. Immediately afterward he brings the painter of that picture home, and the first task assigned to this painter is a reproduction of that same portrait which now hangs in my master's chamber."

"That is strange."

"There is something more strange about it. I have often surprised Mr. Roland contemplating that picture with tears in his eyes. More than that, sir. I am a keen observer of faces, and I have noticed in the painter—rather, however, in the expression than in the form of the features—a resemblance to that picture. Yet there are times when this young man looks more like your father than he does like the painted head."

"Mere fancy!"

"No, sir; there is a resemblance between them. But let that pass as conjecture; here is proof, or something very near it. A few nights since Mr. Roland, who had been quite ill for a few days, took to his bed in a feverish state. He was so unwell that he ordered me to pass the night in his room. About midnight he started up in a state of delirium. He fixed his blood-shot eyes on the picture, and stretching forth his hands toward it, cried: 'My poor, ruined love—do not look on me with such reproachful eyes. See the tortures that I suffer, and forgive me. I am struggling to atone for the wrong, as far as in me lies—I am striving to be a father to our child. He at least shall not be deserted and disowned.' Then he fell back and went to sleep again; but he tossed and muttered till dawn. The next day he was better, and the threatened fever was averted."

"I see it all!" cried Gabriel, striking the table with his clenched hand. "This fellow—this love-child, with no loyal claims upon his bounty, is to usurp the place from which I, his legitimate offspring, have been banished."

"Everything looks like it," said the wily Clement. "Even the servants have learned to fawn and cringe before him, as if this interloper was already proclaimed their young master."

"I had resolved to ruin him before I knew what you have told me," said Gabriel, while a gleam of deadly hatred lighted up his eyes. "Now the execution of my project shall be swift. Tell me something of his habits."

"They are regular," said Clement. "He passes all his evenings at home."

"Where does he pass his time there?"

"In your father's library."

"Is the old man with him?"

"Sometimes."

"Which retires first to bed?"

"Generally your father. This Mr. Victor, the interloper, is fond of sitting up late reading."

"How much baggage did he bring with him?"

"A curious question, sir; but I have observed everything. He brought a valise, and a moderate-sized trunk. He keeps his clothes in the valise, and the trunk, which is pushed under his bed, is strapped and does not seem to be often disturbed."

"Very well—these are important points," said Gabriel. "Is the small safe still standing in the library?"

"It is, sir."

"Does my father use it much?"

"I see him occasionally deposit in it packages of money—gold and bank-notes."

"Does he always remove the key?"

Clement started.

"Always," he answered.

"You never saw it left in the lock?"

"Never, sir."

Gabriel laid his hand upon the old man's arm, and fixing his keen eyes upon his face, said:

"We must have that key or a duplicate."

"Mr. Gabriel Roland," said Marville, "I will not be a partner to a robbery, not if you were to offer me two-thirds of the plunder."

"You are a fool, Clement," said the young man, "nobody thinks of robbery, and nobody thinks of

tempting your immaculate virtue. If age had not dulled your faculties, you would already have half suspected my purpose. I repeat, that we must have that safe key or a duplicate."

Then you must make up your mind to do without it. That key is never out of your father's possession—no, not even for a moment."

"Very well, then; we must risk something to obtain a duplicate. You know the number of the safe?"

"Yes, sir."

"And the manufacturer?"

"Yes, sir."

"Does he know you?"

"Yes, sir; I have often seen him inspecting the office safes."

"This man knows that you possess the entire confidence of my father?"

"Oh, yes, sir; he has more than once given me safe keys to supply the place of broken and twisted ones."

"Then you think that if you were to go to him and say that Mr. Roland had mislaid the key of his library safe—such a number—and wanted a duplicate, that he would give you one without hesitation?"

"I am certain of it, sir."

"You do not think he would require a written order from Mr. Roland?"

"I think not."

"However, if he should, that could be easily arranged. I could give you an order—my handwriting cannot be distinguished from my father's. That part of the business, then, is settled. You are to get the key."

"I have not yet consented to be your agent, Mr. Roland."

Gabriel Roland unlocked a drawer, took out two rouleaux of gold and laid them before the old man.

"Will you do me the favor to accept this trifle, on account, my good friend?" he said.

Old Clement's eyes brightened; he stretched out his hand and possessed himself of the golden treasure; then, with a sort of smothered groan, he said:

"After I have got the safe key—what next?"

"I knew you would listen to reason, when it had a metallic ring," said the tempter, with a grim smile. "Very well; you get the safe key—that is one step. Your next will be to find a key that will open the painter's trunk; there will be no trouble about that, with an ordinary lock. Then, with the two keys in your possession, you will have the tools to begin work with. The rest is very simple. Watching your opportunity, you will open the library safe, take out a package of money and place it in the painter's trunk. Then you will go to my father, tell him that you had suspected this adventurer, had watched him, and saw him with your own eyes open the safe, take a package out of it, and retire to his room. What will be the result? If I was discarded for dissipation, will not he be cast off for robbery—robbery, the greatest of sins in the eyes of a banker, aggravated in this case by ingratitude?"

"But," said Marville, "if there is a judicial examination—these men of the law probe everything—the testimony of the safe-maker will implicate me and expose the whole conspiracy."

"Fool! there will be no *expose*. My father will recover his money, expel the thief, and there an end of it. Do you think, under the existing relationship between the supposed criminal and himself, he would prosecute the matter further? You know better. It only requires a little caution in the transfer of this money from the safe to the trunk, and you must be a sad bungler if you can't manage that adroitly."

Clement shook his head.

"Such a job ought to pay well."

"I shall have my revenge," said Gabriel, "and you will have twenty-five thousand francs."

"Twenty-five thousand francs!"

"Not a cent less."

"Mr. Gabriel Roland," said Marville, "I accept the job."

"Set about it immediately, Mephistopheles," said the banker's son. "The moment it is consummated, the money shall be yours."

Inspired by the magnitude of the bribe, the wicked old servant left his depraved and heartless young employer, fully resolved on consummating the ruin of one who had never injured him, in look, word, or deed.

CHAPTER XXV.—(CONTINUED.)

AT the earliest opportunity Marville ascertained that one of his keys would unlock the painter's trunk. Of the manufacturer he obtained a key to the library safe, without being required to bring a written order, he was so well known and trusted.

One evening, early, during the absence of both the banker and the painter, the wretch removed a roll of bank-notes and a morocco case containing a diamond cross, from the safe to Victor's trunk.

It seemed as if fortune favored the villainous plans of the conspirators. The very night that the transfer had been effected, Victor was seated in the library reading alone, the banker having retired at an early hour.

Old Clement entered with a glass of table-wine and water on a tray, Victor sometimes taking a little refreshment before he retired for the night.

"Can I do anything for you, sir?" asked the old man, meekly.

"Nothing, thank you," said the young man. "Go to bed. I'm engaged in a very interesting book, and sha'n't retire yet awhile. But I'll look out for the lights. Good-night."

"Good-night, monsieur."

Victor was so deeply interested in his reading that it was nearly morning before he shut up his book, extinguished the lights, and went to his room.

Clement Marville had not retired. He stole into the empty library, struck a light, and examined the goblet on the tray.

"He has drunk it!" he said, exultingly. "A powerful narcotic. He will sleep soundly till late in the morning, and then my young master will have a merry awakening. Already I hear the clink of my five-and-twenty thousand francs."

And so the old reprobate stole off up stairs toward Victor's room.

The next morning the banker, as was his custom, repaired to his library to read the morning papers and glance at his correspondence before going to his counting-room. As soon as he was seated, Marville used to bring him a cup of strong coffee and a roll, and take his orders for various commissions to be executed during the day.

Marville was pale from want of sleep and anxiety, but this was all the better for the part he was preparing to play. He was screwing up his courage to make a beginning, when chance a second time favored the development of the infernal scheme concocted by Gabriel Roland.

One of the banker's letters contained a conveyance of real estate transmitted by his correspondent at Orleans. After glancing at it, he rose, went to his safe and unlocked it to put away the paper. All at once he uttered an exclamation:

"Marville!" said he, "I have been robbed!"

"Robbed!" exclaimed the old man, with well-feigned astonishment.

"Ay, robbed!" repeated the banker. "A roll of thirty bank-notes, of one thousand francs each, and a diamond cross, which I placed here the day before yesterday, are gone."

He looked keenly at Marville, as if his suspicions rested on him.

"Speak!" he said, fiercely. "What is the meaning of this? You are in and out of this room by night and day; what do you know; what do you suspect about this robbery?"

"There is another person, sir, who has access to this room at all hours—who was here last night till nearly morning," replied the wily servant.

"The painter! You do not mean that you suspect *him?*" cried the banker, angrily.

"I do not *suspect* him," replied Marville.

"If not him, then whom *do* you suspect?"

"I do not *suspect* him—but I *know* him to be the robber," answered the old man, firmly.

The banker staggered back as if he was shot, uttered a low groan, sank into a chair, and covered his face with his hands.

Suddenly he uncovered his face and looked at the old man inquiringly, almost piteously.

"You do not *know* what you assert," he said. "It is a random conjecture."

"I charge him with the robbery," said Marville. "I saw him unlock the safe and take your property. I will swear to it."

Again the banker uttered a deep groan, and writhed in his seat as if suffering excruciating torture. It was a long time before he could speak intelligibly. Then he said:

"Speak! Tell me all you know. Make no reservation."

"I had my suspicions of the young man," said the old servant, speaking very slowly and deliberately. "from the first day he darkened these doors. I thought he was an unprincipled adventurer who had imposed on your generosity and good-nature. He came here shabby and professing great poverty. In a few days he appears with fine clothes and trinkets, like a nobleman. I was not aware that you had paid him any money, sir."

"Not a sou; he never asked me for money," groaned the banker. "I, too, noticed the change you speak of, and remember he said his resources were inexhaustible."

"Very well, sir. In devotion to your interests, I resolved to watch him. Perhaps it was mean to play the spy——"

"Go on, go on," said the banker. "You did right."

"My suspicions," continued the servant, "were aroused by his sitting up in this room night after night, after all the household was in bed."

"Go on."

"Last night, long after you had retired, sir, he was still up. I lingered about, but he seemed very anxious to get me off to bed. He was pale and very much excited, but he pretended to be deeply engaged in his book, though I noticed that he never turned a leaf. Well, sir, I pretended to retire, but I watched at the door, looked through the keyhole, and saw him go to the safe, open it, and take out two packages, which he placed in the breast-pocket of his coat. I waited and waited till nearly morning, and when he put out the lights, I concealed myself. He went to his room without a candle, and I followed him in my stocking feet. When he reached his room he lighted a lamp, kneeled down, pulled his trunk out from under the bed, unstrapped and unlocked it, put away the stolen packages, strapped and locked his trunk again, undressed, blew out his light, and got into bed."

"You should have awakened me at once. He has escaped with his plunder."

"No, sir," answered the servant. "Hear me out, if you please. After waiting a while till I made sure he was asleep, I softly turned the handle of his door. He had neglected to lock it, and it opened. Then I took out the key silently, and locked the door on the outside. There is the key, sir. The thief is a prisoner."

The banker shrunk as the cold key touched his hand as if it had been red-hot irom. Here was the proof of Victor's crime within his grasp.

"Marville," said he, struggling with his emotions, and speaking with difficulty, "you are a true and faithful servant. You have done well, and I—I thank you. You have laid me under the deepest obligations. You have served me well in speaking out; but you can serve me better in keeping silence. Say not one word of this to any living soul."

"I will be silent, if you wish it, sir."

The banker took out a handful of gold pieces and offered them to Marville, but the old man drew back.

"No, no, sir," said he. "I didn't play the spy for money, and I don't want pay for simply doing my duty."

"Marville," said the banker. "I insist on your taking this money. I am not used to having my gifts thrust back on me."

"If you look at it in that light, sir, I suppose I must take it," said the aged hypocrite, pocketing the gold with seeming reluctance, but with heartfelt delight.

"And now, Marville, leave me," said the banker; "and remember my injunctions—not one word of this for your life."

Clement Marville bowed himself out of his patron's presence, leaving him a prey to agonizing feelings. Victor a thief! Anything but that he would have forgiven. It was a long time before he could nerve himself to confront the unfortunate young man. At last, summoning up all his resolution, he hastened up stairs, unlocked the door, and entered Victor's chamber.

The young man still slumbered under the effects of the powerful narcotic the treacherous servant had administered, but it was no tranquil slumber; he tossed and muttered, and his disturbed features seemed, in the banker's eyes, to express guilt and fear of detection.

He was obliged to shake the sleeper roughly before he could awaken him. The young man opened his eyes, and, at sight of the banker, expressed astonishment, which was construed as fear.

"Dress yourself as quickly as possible," said Roland.

Victor hurried on his clothes, and then drew a chair opposite his visitor's.

"Victor," said the banker, "something alarming has happened. I have been robbed!"

"Robbed, sir!" cried the painter. "When—how?"

"Here, in my own house. The safe in my library has been opened and a considerable amount of money and jewelry taken out of it."

"Do you suspect any one, sir?"

"Yes, Marville."

"Marville, your old trusted servant, sir, who has grown rich on your bounty? It is incredible."

"Oh! gratitude goes but a little way in this world," said the banker, bitterly. "Those for whom you have done the most or those for whom you propose doing your best often turn on you like serpents warmed at the hearth-stone. Marville protests his innocence, demands investigation, and courts a search. Why, he asked, should he, the old family servant, be suspected, and you, a new-comer, escape undoubted?"

"I, sir, *I!*" cried Victor.

"Oh!" said the banker, "we must pardon an old man fighting for his honor and liberty. As a pure formality I consented to search your room. I thought you would submit without compelling me to obtain legal authority."

"Mr. Roland, search my person, search my baggage, do it instantly, clear me of all suspicion."

"It is a pure formality," said the banker. "But I trust you recognize its importance."

"I do, indeed, sir," replied Victor.

He opened his valise first and submitted its contents to Roland's investigation, Nothing was found there; with equal alacrity he drew forth, unstrapped, and unlocked his trunk.

With a trembling hand the banker lifted the lid and there beheld the two packages he was searching for. He uttered a deep groan as he made the discovery, while a cry of surprise and horror burst from Victor's lips.

"Victor," said the banker at last, "is this all you have taken from me?"

"All!" cried the painter, indignantly. "Do you suppose me capable of taking anything? Do you imagine for a moment that I—stole your packages?"

"Victor! Victor!" exclaimed the banker, but more in sorrow than in anger. "In the face of this evidence, can you deny your guilt?"

"In the face of Heaven I deny it," cried the young man.

"So young and so hardened!" moaned the banker. "What explanation can you give to account for your possession of these packages.

"None, sir. I am bewildered and overwhelmed. That it is the work of a secret enemy is clear; but what enemy have I made—could I have made—so inveterate as to compass my ruin?"

"None, of course," said the banker.

"But there is crime somewhere," cried the artist, "and I demand a judicial investigation."

"If this came before the courts, you would go to the galleys," said the banker. "But fear not. I have no desire to punish you. You are young, you are poor, you have a long life before you. Terrible, degrading, as is this deed, yet I am ready to forgive you, on one condition, that you will confess your guilt."

"Not for the universe," replied Victor. "Nothing could tempt me to touch the merest trifle belonging to another. Even were I what you suppose me to be—a thief! I could not have robbed you—my benefactor, for there is an honor even among thieves which prevents their plundering those who have protected them. In the face of this frightful evidence, I reassert my innocence."

"Victor," said the banker, "from the first moment I saw you I was prepossessed in your favor. As an inmate of my home, you grew upon my affections, until I came to love you—as a son. It was my purpose to put you above the trials and temptations of poverty. You knew nothing of my intentions, you were poor, you wished to marry, you yielded to temptation, you knew that this sum of money, a fortune to you, but a trifle to me, would make you independent, and in an evil moment you yielded to temptation. Admit this, confess it freely, and I shall believe this was your first offense, and that you may still be worthy of my confidence, of my love. The deed shall be forgiven and forgotten, and shall never more be alluded to."

"Sir," said Victor, "I implore you to believe I am incapable of the act you think I have committed. I am wholly innocent."

"Are these your last words?"

"I can say nothing more—nothing less."

Hitherto the banker's face had expressed poignant sorrow; now it grew dark, cold, and austere.

"Then," he said, deliberately, "there is an end of everything between us. I require you to leave my house instantly."

"It shall be done, sir," replied Victor. "For all your kindness to a poor unfriended young man, I shall be forever grateful. For your belief in my guilt, I forgive you, and may Heaven forgive you, is my prayer. I dare not ask you to take my hand, sir, you think it polluted by theft."

He turned tearfully toward the door.

"Stay," said the banker, coldly. "Part of this money is legitimately yours."

And he counted out five one thousand bank-notes and offered them to the young man, who pushed them aside indignantly.

"Keep your money, sir," he said. "I cannot touch it. The day will come when you will do me justice, for I fully believe that Heaven will not permit the shadow of crime forever to rest on the fair fame of an innocent person."

These were his last words, as he rushed from the presence of the banker, stunned by this unexpected blow of fortune.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE PRISONER'S RETURN.—A STRANGE STATEMENT.

The crash which Favart the merchant had announced to his intended son-in-law had come, and he was a ruined but not dishonored man. All his assets had been placed in the hands of his creditors, who had given him a full discharge, and had even contributed a sum of money sufficient to place the bankrupt and his daughter above the reach of immediate want. They gave up their house without a murmur, and established themselves in humble lodgings.

Thither Victor repaired immediately after the terrible scene at the banker's. As soon as they saw him, both father and daughter perceived by his ashen face that some dreadful calamity had overtaken him. Both urged him to tell them at once what had happened.

"Mr. Favart," said he, as soon as he could command his agitation, "when you granted me your daughter's hand, you believed me an honest man, did you not?"

"Assuredly," replied Favart, surprised at the question.

"Believe it still, sir; and you, Hortense, still believe that I am worthy of you."

"Nothing, dear Victor, can shake my confidence," she said, sharing fully her father's surprise at the language of her lover.

"Well, then, I am honest," said Victor, "but I am charged with an infamous crime."

"You charged with an infamous crime!" cried Hortense. "This is a cruel jest."

"It is downright, deadly earnest," replied Victor, wildly. "Not publicly charged—mark you, my friends—but privately charged against me by one man."

"He is an infamous villain, then!" cried Hortense.

"I appeal to you, Mr. Favart, a man of business and man of the world," said Victor, "to say whether you should not hold that man guilty in whose trunk you found a large sum of money which you had just lost."

"It would be conclusive evidence of guilt, my friend," replied Favart, "but what has that to do with your case?"

"It *is* my case," cried Victor. "Gaspar Roland, the banker, found a sum of money and a valuable piece of jewelry which he had missed concealed in my trunk this morning."

"Then Gaspar Roland placed it there himself," said Favart. "That man is capable of anything."

"You wrong him, sir," said Victor, "he is as innocent as I am—and I swear before high Heaven, that I am innocent."

"Do not swear it," said Hortense, placing her hand in his. "For if you swore that you were guilty, we should not believe you so."

"And do you, too, believe my innocence, sir?" asked the painter.

"I am as sure of your honesty as of my own," replied the merchant.

Victor burst into tears.

"There are, then, noble spirits in this world," he faltered, "to whom the accents of truth carry conviction in the teeth of evidence that would insure condemnation in a court of justice. Thanks—thanks! these words, this generous trust, will enable me to bear the heavy burden that Providence has imposed on me. I had thought, dearest," he added, "to have called you mine in a few days, but now I release you from your promise; the man you marry must be free from suspicion even. So long as one man lives who

thinks me a criminal, I cannot make you a sharer of my fate."

"Victor," said Hortense, "you are but dearer to me for this new trial and sorrow."

The young man pressed her hand to his heart and then to his lips, and covered it with kisses.

"I will not—I must not—I cannot claim the fulfillment of your pledge, dearest," he said, "till this mystery be fathomed, and the true criminal exposed. I had thought to write you a letter, telling you what happened and bidding you adieu forever. But I thought I would see you face to face. Thanks, thanks for your confiding trust—believe me, your poor Victor is worthy of it—believe, too, that he will compel his accuser to retract the charge, and come back to you with the only stain that ever rested on his name removed."

He tore himself away, and hurried to his rooms, No. 10, Rue Rougemont. Here he locked himself in, determined to pass the day in solitary reflection on his altered circumstances.

Thus, about noon, when he heard three feeble taps at his door, he made no answer. The knocks, however, were repeated at intervals, until, losing all patience, he flung the door open, and bade the visitor enter.

The persistent disturber of his privacy appeared to be a man of about fifty years of age, and his attire showed him to be in destitute circumstances. His face was wan and hollow; his beard long, grizzled, and matted. He wore a greasy cloth cap, a long, faded brown overcoat, so patched that the original material had almost disappeared, while his stockings showed through more than one rent in his dilapidated shoes. He walked lame, and aided his steps by resting on a knotted stick with the bark on.

"Did you wish to see *me?*" asked the painter, in surprise.

"If you are Monsieur Victor, the portrait painter."

"That is my name, sir. Take a seat; you appear weary and lame."

It then occurred to the young man that his visitor might be a model, and certainly there was a tempting picturesqueness in his figure and garb. But Victor was not in a frame of mind for work just then.

The strange visitor sat down, and looked long and earnestly at the young artist before he said:

"Do you remember me?"

"I certainly cannot recall your face, sir."

"Yet we met scarcely three years ago," was the reply of the stranger.

"Three years ago?" said the painter. "I was in the wilds of Russia then."

"And I, too," said the stranger. "Do you remember saving a man's life in Russia?"

"Certainly. Can it be that you are——"

"Paul Aubrey? The same. You remember the fight, and the charge of Cossacks who made me a prisoner. Well, sir, I was carried into the interior, and ordered with a chain-gang to Siberia, to work in the mines. However, I did not go quite so far. I managed to escape, was saved from starvation by some kindly peasants, and, after a thousand adventures, after halting here and there to hide or to get work, I have finally made my way on foot to Paris, across Russia and all Europe. More than once I was delayed by sickness, and thought I never should see home again. But I had hope, will, and a mission to perform, and they carried me through."

"I pity you profoundly for the hardships you have suffered," said Victor.

"Many of the grand army fared far worse," replied Aubrey; "and I thank Heaven for my trials, for they have changed me from what I was, a bold, bad man, to an humble and repentant sinner, who only prays that his life may be spared till he has atoned for some of the evil deeds of his early days. I have never forgotten you, sir, and my first visit was to your door, to crave for shelter and food."

"You are hungry, then?" said Victor.

"Starving. I have not eaten anything for four-and-twenty hours."

Victor immediately dispatched a messenger to a neighboring restaurant, with orders for a plentiful supply of bread, meat, and coffee. When the provisions appeared, Paul Aubrey drew his chair up to the table and began eating, with the appetite of a wolf.

"I can't talk, sir, for the present," he said. "You see I am otherwise engaged; but I can listen. I told you, in Russia, that I knew something of your history. I am anxious to know everything that has happened since we parted, and if you will be good enough to tell me, I assure you you will not regret your confidence, and it may turn out to your advantage."

After a moment's hesitation, Victor related the various incidents in his career since his return from Russia. When he mentioned his first meeting with the banker, his guest interrupted him.

"I know Gaspar Roland well. I was for many years his confidential servant."

Victor then told him how anxious the banker was to procure the picture of his mother.

"And," said he, "I painted him one like that which hangs over the mantel-piece, and he valued it so much that he hung it in his bedroom."

Aubrey raised his eyes to the picture.

"It is very like!" he said to himself.

Victor then went on to tell how the banker had received him into his house. Here Aubrey interrupted him:

"Did he give you any reason for his interest in the picture and in yourself?" he asked.

"He thought the face an interesting one, and he wished to encourage my talent."

"So! he did not own the poor boy!" thought Aubrey. He added aloud:

"Well, sir, you have found a good patron in Mr. Roland; he is very wealthy, and liberal when he takes a fancy."

"We have parted company forever," said the young artist.

Paul Aubrey looked up in surprise.

After a pause, Victor resumed:

"Promise me that what I am about to tell you shall be kept secret until I give you liberty to speak."

After receiving the required pledge, he related the circumstance of the money and cross being found in his trunk, and the disastrous consequences of the discovery.

Aubrey received the young man's confidence in silence, but after a while he asked:

"Pray tell me, sir, if Mr. Roland has still in his employ a man named Clement Marville? He was my successor."

"Yes," said Victor; "and he appears to be worthy of the confidence reposed in him."

"I know the man," said Aubrey, with singular emphasis; "know him thoroughly."

"What do you know about him?" asked Victor, eagerly.

"No matter; tell me one thing more, Mr. Victor. Am I changed, think you, within a few years, beyond recognition?"

"I never should have known you," answered Victor, "and yet my professional study of faces and my cultivated memory have made me keener than a police detective. But why do you ask?"

"That is my secret. Suppose, Mr. Victor, that I preserve an incognito for a few days, at least. Suppose you call me George Varanne. You will know in time my purpose; it is to serve you and not myself."

"Very well," replied the painter; "you shall be known here as George Varanne."

"Here?"

"Yes, until you can find something to do; until you are hearty and strong again, I will take care of you. There is a little room adjoining this which I will place at your disposal; and I have some decent clothes which I think will fit you. You can assist me in various ways, if you have any delicacy about accepting this aid."

"I can assist you in more ways than you imagine," replied Aubrey, with a singular smile. "And I assure you that you will not find me ungrateful."

"You can repay me at once," said Victor. "When we first met, you intimated that you were acquainted with my history."

"I know something about it," answered Aubrey, evasively, "but I beg you will not press me upon that subject immediately. What you have told me this morning has set a certain task before me, which I must fulfill before making a communication of what I know. But I will write it out, seal it up, and place it in your hands, to be opened by you only in case something happens to me; in a word, in case I should die suddenly. Can you be content to wait when I tell you it is for your interest to do so?"

Victor reluctantly assented, and with this agreement Aubrey, under the name of George Varanne, was installed in the painter's service. A change of clothing gave him a respectable appearance, while the emaciation of his face and the retention of his beard defied recognition on the part of even those who had known him intimately before the Russian campaign.

He proved very helpful in the artist's studio. Ground colors, primed compasses, laid in backgrounds, and arranged draperies with a dexterity quite surprising.

But he was destined to be of yet greater service. In a few days after Victor's rupture with the banker, the cruel trials he had undergone threw him into a fever which confined him to his bed, and then Aubrey proved a most careful and kind nurse, watching by the sufferer's bedside night and day, and administering the prescriptions of the physician with scrupulous punctuality.

For several days the painter was delirious, and knew not that Hortense was a daily visitor to his couch; that she shared Aubrey's watching, and only vanished when reason again dawned on the patient.

The medical attendant was a Doctor Martin, a young man who occupied a room in the same house, and gave the most unremitting attention to the sufferer.

One night, while Victor was sleeping soundly from the effects of a draught the doctor had administered, Martin, seated by the fire-place, gazed long and fixedly at the picture which hung over it.

"A beautiful face, Mr. Varanne," he said to Aubrey.

"You may well say so, sir," answered Aubrey, who never looked on it without emotion.

"It is not an ideal head?" asked the physician.

"No, sir; a portrait," replied Aubrey.

"Yes, and a fine likeness," said the doctor. "I had no time to examine it till to-night. When I first glanced at it, I had a vague impression that I had seen the original somewhere. Now I am convinced of it. I have indeed met the lady; no two such faces can possibly exist."

"Is it possible?" cried Aubrey, in surprise, "that you can remember faces so long? It must have been twenty-four years since you saw that lady, and you must have been very young then."

It was now the doctor's turn to be surprised.

"What makes you think it must have been twenty-four years since I saw the lady?" he asked.

"Because she died in 1791," answered Aubrey.

"Why, I saw her within a few months," said the doctor.

"Within a few months!" cried Aubrey. "Impossible."

"It is a fact, sir. She looks older than the picture, yet her beauty has been wonderfully preserved. Alas! it has lost its expression, though. There is more life in that canvas than in the poor lady's marble face."

Aubrey could hardly speak from agitation.

"My dear sir," said he, "pray tell me where you saw the lady whom you fancy to be the original of that portrait."

"Whom I fancy to be the original!" exclaimed the doctor, angrily; "whom I *know* to be the original—whom I will prove to you to be the original—for I will take you to see her."

"Where is she?" asked Aubrey.

"*In the mad-house at Charenton!*" said the doctor. "But why do you take such an interest in her?"

"Because—because," faltered Aubrey, "if your senses have not deceived you—if Heaven has been more merciful than man—if the grave can, indeed, give up its dead—she is Victor's mother. But not a word of this to him when he recovers—not till the proper time comes. So soon as he is convalescent, you will take me to Charenton."

"Without fail," replied the doctor.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE AVENGER.—A STARTLING REVELATION.

One day, shortly after the conversation last recorded, the arrival of a very distinguished personage at Maurice's Hotel was chronicled in Paris. The stranger was no other than Colonel the Earl of Strathallan. He had commanded a regiment of cavalry under Lord Fitzroy Somerset, and had greatly distinguished himself and been severely wounded in the awful encounter where the British horse cut Kellerman's cuirassiers to pieces on the decisive field of Waterloo.

As soon as he had partially recovered from his wounds he hastened to Paris, which was then full of English, Germans, and Russians, most of whom came to enjoy the pleasures of a capital from which they had been long shut out, and which they had now opened by their victorious arms. But it was no holiday visit with the Earl of Strathallan, as will be seen shortly.

He was accompanied by a confidential valet, and by an old man of very striking appearance more than eighty years of age, with snow-white hair, yet still erect, a giant in stature—an athlete in ruins. But the ruins were still imposing. This old man was no other than Jerry Ringold, the former landlord of the Elm Tree Inn. It was observed that this old man, though rude in speech and manner, was treated with great deference by the Scottish nobleman. He occupied a room next to his own, and dined at the same private table.

The first thing the earl did, after resting briefly from the fatigues of his journey, was to order a carriage and drive to the house of the great Parisian banker, Gaspar Roland, after business hours, when he knew that he should find him at home.

He sent up his card and was immediately admitted.

It will be remembered that after Jessie's abduction from Richmond, the earl pursued the supposed fugitives on the northern road and overtook Aubrey near Carlisle. Aubrey, on his rejoining his master after that affair, had related how cleverly he had led the pursuers astray, but, after his usual fashion of never telling the whole truth, always keeping something in reserve, he had concealed the name of the person who overtook him. Consequently Roland was not surprised or startled when he saw the card, but concluded that the earl, whom he knew by reputation, had come to open a bank account with him.

He therefore received him calmly and politely. His visitor was equally calm and polite, but very grave.

"Sir," said the earl, "I have ventured to trespass on your time on a matter of private business—business of a very delicate character. The fact of my having not a single friend in Paris must be my

apology. Your reputation for honor, probity, and intelligence must also share the blame for the trouble I am giving you. You must pay the penalty of an unblemished name."

"You are too good, my lord," answered the banker, bowing. "I can assure your grace that I shall only be too happy to serve you in any way you can point out."

"But I am afraid, sir, that I have chosen an inopportune time for my visit."

"By no means, my lord," replied the banker. "All my business for the day is closed."

"You have always lived in Paris, I think," said the earl.

"I was born here—I have never been absent from the city for more than a few months at a time."

The earl resumed:

"You are aware that we English have been shut out from Paris for years—excepting during the brief interval between Napoleon's abdication and his return from Elba. I should then have come to your city on the business which now brings me, but I was confined to my bed by severe illness. When I recovered—the usurper—I beg your pardon, I may be wounding your political susceptibilities——"

"By no means," said the banker. "I am a loyal subject of his majesty Louis XVIII."

"Very well, then. When I recovered, as I was saying, the usurper was again upon his throne in Paris—still the deadly enemy of England—and Europe was springing to arms once more, to crush this common disturber of the peace. I raised a body of volunteer cavalry, and the prince regent conferred a colonel's commission upon me. At Waterloo I was severely wounded, and compelled again to postpone my visit to Paris. I am well enough now to accomplish my mission. Now, sir, with this preliminary explanation, I proceed. Somewhere about forty-five years since a young Scottish nobleman contracted a secret alliance with a young girl of unblemished fame but humble birth. In our country such contracts are easily—too easily—made a source of great trouble and wrong, as I think. The wife died after giving birth to an infant child. It was very important for the interests of the father to keep the existence of that child secret during the life-time of his mother. He was distracted with grief at the loss of his wife, and I, as the most intimate friend the unfortunate pair had in the world, was compelled to make all the arrangements and act as if I were the principal. I placed the girl in honest hands, and she grew up ignorant of her birth. At last the time arrived—the year 1791—when death removed all obstacles in the way of declaring the orphan of high birth and lineage, of raising her from the humble rank she occupied to the sphere she was entitled to occupy and adorn. Thus far I have told you a history of sorrow; I must now begin a history of crime."

"Of crime?" said the banker.

"Ay, of foul, deliberate crime," said the earl. "I myself had been a rover, traveling all over the world, when I learned of the death of the lady whose life had prevented the restoration of the orphan girl to her rights. I hastened to the people in whose charge I had left her, and there learned that she had been abducted by a villain."

"By a villain?" echoed the banker.

"Yes, sir, by a villain who pretended to love her—pretended to marry her—for she was pure as an angel; who carried her to Paris, and abandoned her there and married another."

The banker's face had now grown deadly pale. It was the story of his own guilt that he was compelled to listen to, and the avenger sat before him. Still

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"By a villain?" echoed the banker.

"Yes, sir, by a villain who pretended to love her—pretended to marry her—for she was pure as an angel; who carried her to Paris, and abandoned her there and married another."

The banker's face had now grown deadly pale. It was the story of his own guilt that he was compelled to listen to, and the avenger sat before him. Still he had a faint hope. He had committed his crime under a false name; perhaps that might save him yet. He nerved himself to say:

"Have you discovered the criminal, my lord?"

"Yes," replied the earl, sternly—and the glance of his eagle eye made the culprit quail; "yes, for the villain confessed his guilt to the man who had been a father to the poor orphan. No matter what name he assumed—*his real name was Gaspar Roland!* Yes, infamous villain! You were the betrayer and the murderer of that unfortunate girl. I know not what punishment the law might award you, and I care not—for I am your judge and your executioner, and I have come to Paris for the purpose of killing you!"

The banker sprang to his feet and rushed to the bell-rope. But the earl was equally quick, and in-

terposing, forced him to resume his seat.

"Miserable wretch!" he said; "do you suppose that I, a nobleman and soldier, mean to murder you? Let that crime rest on your head alone. You shall have a chance for your wretched life and the choice of weapons."

"If I refuse the meeting?" said the banker, who was beginning to gain a little self-possession.

"Then I will proclaim your guilt and infamy to the world, and the very beggars will hoot at you in the street; for though the betrayal of women is too common with your countrymen, for a man to destroy the woman who saved his life is a crime abhorrent and unparalleled. If you refuse to meet me in fair fight, I will first publicly proclaim you a coward, and then I will lash you like a hound the whole length of the boulevards in broad daylight."

"Enough!" said the banker, his manhood at last asserting itself in spite of his consciousness of guilt. "Whenever you send your seconds I shall be ready."

"And mark this," said the earl. "Though you have the advantage of comparative youth—though I am weak from recent wounds—yet justice is on my side, and *I shall kill you*!"

When Strathallan drove away from the banker's house he was not aware that his carriage was followed by a public cab which kept close behind him.

As he alighted at Maurice's, a man with a long beard, plainly but respectably dressed, stepped out of the cab and, removing his hat, saluted the earl respectfully.

"Will your lordship grant me a brief interview?" he asked. Then seeing the earl hesitated, he came nearer, and added, in a low tone, "It is on the business which took you to Roland, the banker."

"Follow me," said the earl, and led the way up stairs into his private room.

"Now, sir," he said, when they were seated, "your business?"

"Your lordship found the banker at home?" asked the stranger.

"I did."

"Very well, then, I can tell you what passed. You challenged him to mortal combat?"

"Who are you?" asked the earl, angrily and haughtily, "and how is it that you dare interfere in my affairs, and spy upon my actions? Where were you concealed that you knew what passed?"

"I was waiting in the cab at the door all the time that you were closeted with the banker, and I know what passed—because only one thing could pass between the Earl of Strathallan and Gasper Roland, alias Victor Marsay."

"Very well, then, since you know so much, I admit that I have challenged him, that we shall meet tomorrow morning, and that I shall kill him."

"Your lordship will do no such thing," said the stranger.

"How, fellow?" cried the earl, haughtily. "What do you mean?"

"Your lordship proposes to slay him to avenge the death of Jessie Ringold?"

"I do, so help me Heaven!"

"But your lordship will not take his life, because *Jessie Ringold is alive*!"

"Alive!" exclaimed the earl. "This is an incredible story. It cannot be. Years ago the villain confessed to Ringold that she was dead."

"He believed it then, he derived his information from me, who saw her throw herself into the Seine—me, his accomplice, Paul Aubrey."

"His accomplice!" cried the earl, shrinking away from the speaker with indignant horror. "Then there are two criminals to punish."

"If you desire to crush a repentant man," said Aubrey, "I will make no resistance. But if you desire to see the unfortunate lady, living, and her son, a noble young man, you will spare me to unravel an intricate web of deception, wrong, and crime."

"You spoke of a son, said the earl, breathlessly.

"My benefactor, sir," answered Aubrey.

"And is he with his mother?"

"Alas, no! nor is he aware of her existence, for the time has not yet come for the revelation."

"If I forgive you for the part you have played in this cruel business," said the earl, it is only on condition that you bring me immediately to this most unfortunate lady."

"If your lordship takes a deep interest in her fate," said Aubrey, gravely, "you must prepare for very sad intelligence. She is alive, indeed, and physically well, but she is an inmate of the Insane Asylum at Charenton."

The earl covered his face with his hands, and his manhood was unable to suppress a convulsion of sobs and tears.

Aubrey turned aside his face until this paroxysm had passed and then resumed:

"There is in the minds of the physicians a feeble hope of her recovery. It seems that she was rescued from the river just as she was about sinking for the last time, by a farmer, who was returning home in his cart after having delivered a load of produce in the city. It was in the days of revolution, when everything was turbulence and chaos, and the workings of the municipal machinery was interrupted. Hence, instead of reporting the occurrence to the authorities, this man took the unfortunate lady to his home. Her life was saved, but her reason had fled. She was accordingly taken to the hospital at Charenton, where for some days she was a raving maniac. I believed her lost, as I had seen her throw herself from the bridge, and assisted in the search for the body. Yet even I, at times, had my doubts whether her attempt at self-destruction had been successful, from the fact that her body was never discovered and exposed at the morgue, and you know that there are nets set in the river to intercept all drowned bodies. Still, as I say, this happened in revolutionary times, and I thought it possible that the body might have been discovered and sold for dissection to the surgeons. Well, sir, the unfortunate patient recovered her bodily health and became quiet and tractable. She spoke so seldom that she became known as the 'Silent Lady.' Once she was heard to moan, 'My child!' On this hint a large doll was given her, and this has been the poor creature's plaything and solace for the long years of her imbecile and rayless life. She has spent all those long years in fondling the lifeless toy and making beautiful dresses for it. If any one speaks to her she places her finger over her lips, and says 'Hush! my baby's asleep—don't wake him!' It is a sad sight to the most indifferent stranger. Judge what it must have been to me who shared the guilt of her betrayal!"

Then Aubrey went on to give an account of Victor and of the manner in which he, Aubrey, had discovered the secret of his birth.

"I have now, my lord, told you all I know," he said, in conclusion, "excepting one thing; I have made one reservation; it is my secret, but I will divulge it so soon as I have obtained certain evidence for which I am waiting."

"You have sinned deeply," said the earl, "and as the friend of that unfortunate lady and her parents, I can only look on you with horror; but you seem to have repented, and to be proving your sincerity by deeds, therefore I, for my part, forgive you. It is for you to make your peace with Heaven. As for your principal——"

"At least defer a settlement with him till I have made further developments."

"Be it so, then. I will keep him in suspense. Let that be a portion of his punishment."

Aubrey told how the fact that Jessie still lived became known to him.

"You must at once take me to see this Dr. Martin," said he.

"With all my heart," said Aubrey. "Please remember, my lord, that I now go by the name of George Varenne."

The earl ordered a carriage and drove with Aubrey to No. 10 Rue Rougemont, where they found the doctor at home.

After introducing the earl, Aubrey left them together, stating that he had an important engagement which must be attended to without fail.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

TWO OLD FRIENDS.

On the morning of that day Clement Marville had received the following note:

"An old friend and comrade of Monsieur Clement Marville, returning to Paris after a protracted absence, hopes to have the pleasure of seeing him this evening to have a chat about old times, and also to communicate matters which may prove greatly to the pecuniary advantage of M. Marville. The writer does not sign his name, as he wishes to surprise his old friend, but if Monsieur Marville will be ready at nine o'clock in the evening, the writer will send his servant and carriage to fetch him to the rendezvous."

The old man was greatly mystified by this anonymous correspondence, and was half disposed to treat it as a hoax, but when, at eight o'clock, a smart one-horse coupe, driven by a servant in livery, drove up to the banker's, and a fellow-servant told him he was wanted, he took his hat with great alacrity, and ran down stairs as fast as the infirmities of age permitted him.

The liveried coachman handed him into the coupe, closed the door, mounted the box, and put his horse in motion. The carriage was driven in an easterly direction for a while, and then made several turnings, which bewildered the occupant.

Marville tried to discover his bearings, but the windows were of ground-glass, and he found it impossible to open them. He called to the coachman, but the rattle of the wheels, probably, prevented the latter from hearing his questions.

At last the coupe came to a halt. Marville alighted under an arch-way, and a man who opened the coach door took him into a house and up to the second story and ushered him into a neatly furnished room, where sat a respectably dressed man, particularly distinguished by a long, gray beard.

This man rose to his feet and advanced to Marville, who looked at him suspiciously. The man held out his hand and said:

"Welcome, Clement—welcome, old friend. Don't you know me?"

The old man took the proffered hand coldly, and shook his head.

"I can't recall you to mind, sir."

"No—they tell me I'm changed—but you'll remember me by and by. Sit down and make yourself comfortable. Well, how are you prospering? How do you like Mr. Roland's service?"

"My situation is very pleasant, sir."

"And profitable?"

"Why, yes. Mr. Roland is very liberal."

"I told you you would find him so, when I got you the place."

"Paul Aubrey!" exclaimed Marville. "My best friend! I never should have known you—you are shockingly changed."

"A campaign in Russia, and a journey on foot from the confines of Siberia to Paris, does the work of a quarter of a century. No wonder that my best friend doesn't know me. But you look so fair and blooming, in spite of your years, that the world must have used you well. They say you have grown rich."

"I am comfortable—and you?"

"I am hard up—but yet in a fair way to retrieve my fortunes."

"Yet you sent a handsome coupe and a servant in livery for me."

"Ah! they were furnished to me by a nobleman who will do well by me if I succeed in my present undertaking."

"But your room is well furnished?"

"I only occupy it for this evening by the kindness of the landlord, an old *pal* of ours, Clement. It is the only decent room in the house."

"And what house is it?"

"Many years ago, friend Clement, before you and I had made up our minds to lead honest lives, this house was called the 'Black Den.'"

"Old Simon Bernard's flash-ken?"

"The very same. Look here!" and Paul opened a closet door. "The man who steps or is thrust upon the floor of this closet falls twenty fathoms into a hole from which no cry of his can reach human ear. In twenty-four hours afterward the rats will reduce him to a polished skeleton. You have heard of this trap in other days, friend Clement, have you not?"

"Yes; but you cannot say I ever used it."

"My dear fellow, I don't even insinuate such a thing. You were always on the *make*—like myself. It wasn't for murder, but for burglary, that you were sent to Toulon—you, Marc Ferrier—and for that reason I sympathized with you when you escaped, and brought you here till the hue-and-cry was over, and you emerged into daylight under your present name. Confess that you are under some obligations to me."

"I never denied it," said Marville. "And I suppose you sent for me because you want money."

"I do not want a franc."

"Very well, then, what do you want?"

"I don't want money, but the truth out of you," said Aubrey. "And I brought you here, because here I can talk to you without fear of interruption. Nobody will interrupt us here; and if they do, I am ready, as you see."

He took a pair of pistols from his pocket as he spoke, cocked them, and laid them before him on the table within reach of his hand.

Marville grew very uneasy. He did not like Aubrey's present tone, he did not like his looks, and, above all, the pistols displeased him.

"You can answer all my questions freely here," continued Aubrey. "There are no eavesdroppers, and I am master of the situation. The people of the house are devoted to me; so make yourself perfectly easy and at home, and collect your thoughts. In the first place, you will tell me what especial grudge you have against Monsieur Victor, the painter of No. 10 Rue Rougemont."

"I have none whatever," answered Marville.

"Then who employed you to ruin him?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"I beg you will be very careful in your answers, for your own sake," said Aubrey. "Remember that your accomplice may have betrayed you."

"I had no accomplice in the affair."

"In what affair?" asked Aubrey, with a smile. "Are you not betraying yourself? Your old skill in evading justice seems to have deserted you. You see what a figure you would cut in a court of justice!"

Clement Marville bit his lip.

"Now, remember that I know you, Clement Marville, or rather Marc Ferrier—know you of old, and have a hold on you, dating far back, while you have none whatever upon me."

"Would you *'peach'* on an old *pal*?" asked Marville.

"Not unless an old *pal* should try to hoodwink me, and then I would send him to the galleys, if I could, without a scruple. Now, then—there was a robbery at the banker's?"

"How do you know?"

"No matter; I know it. There was a robbery at the banker's, and either you or Victor did it. I know that Victor is innocent."

"The money was found in his trunk"

"You put it there."

"You say that I did."

"You had no end of your own to serve—who was your employer?"

"I won't admit anything. I won't be questioned so."

"As you please, my aged friend. If you prefer a judicial examination, so be it."

"I do not prefer a judicial examination; but if it is

had, it won't ruin me, but it will ruin Victor. The proof against him is positive."

"I did not refer to a judicial examination into the affair of the robbery, my aged friend, but into the old business—the escape from Toulon. You have the 'T. F.', the galley brand, upon your shoulder. I can swear to your identity, and bring others to do so, and will do it, unless you make a clean confession. Now, who was your employer?"

"Gabriel Roland."

"Of course. And what did he give you for doing the job?"

"He promised me twenty-five thousand francs; but the scoundrel has only paid me half as yet."

"'Spoken words vanish; written words remain,'" said Aubrey, quoting a very old adage. "Here are pens, ink, and paper. Oblige me by writing out a brief statement of this business, and signing it with your name—your present name; we won't revive Marc Ferrier, unless you compel me in self-defense to resuscitate that rather disreputable personage."

"I won't sign away my liberty; I won't sign my sentence to the galleys," said the old man, sullenly.

"You misunderstand the matter, my venerable, but very obtuse friend. It is your *not* signing this declaration that will send you to the galleys."

Thus menaced, the wretched old man wrote out his confession of the nefarious transaction in which he had been the agent, and signed it.

Paul Aubrey read it carefully, and then said:

"This confession is not to be used in a court of justice, but before powerful private parties who are determined to vindicate the reputation of Monsieur Victor. Still, there is one thing wanting, and that is, some proof to substantiate your statement. You are a tricky fellow, Clement, and though I swear it should cost your liberty to play me false, still you might say that this confession was written under duress, and deny its truth—do you see?"

"Well, then," said Clement, "to show that I have not been playing with you, I will mention one fact. I went to the manufacturer, and by the use of Mr. Roland's name, obtained the key with which I opened the safe."

"We will go to the man's place of business at once, then."

"His shop will be closed," said Marville; "but I will give you the address, and the date of the day I called on him."

"That is all I want," answered Aubrey. "And now, unless you wish to make a longer stay in the old flash-ken, I'll set you down at Mr. Roland's."

Clement Marville was only too glad to escape from a further examination, and left the house with his old friend.

The same coupe that brought the reluctant witness was waiting; the old man was soon set down at the banker's, and then Paul Aubrey drove to No. 10 Rue Rougemont, and dismissed the carriage.

CHAPTER XXIX.

CURSES COME HOME.

Paul Aubrey had left the Earl of Strathallan with the young physician, Dr. Martin, at his residence, No. 10 Rue Rougemont.

Their conference, turning wholly on the condition of poor Jessie, the unfortunate inmate of the asylum at Charenton, was long and serious.

"I was informed by Varanne," said the earl, "that you had some hopes of her restoration to reason."

"Yes," said the doctor, "I have made mental alienation a special study, and to this case I have given particular attention from the moment I learned that the lady was the mother of my friend Victor. It is the eye of the insane patient—that light-house of the soul—from which we gather our first impressions of the mental condition. Now, it seems to me that the dawn of intelligence is beginning to address us in mute eloquence from the beautiful eyes of this unhappy lady. She has passed through several phases of mental malady, and for a long time has been suffering from a torpidity rather than a paralysis of the intellectual faculties. There are other important indications of returning reason. For instance, it has been observed by her attendants that her interest in the doll, which for years has absorbed her attention, has been gradually growing weaker; and the other day she quietly placed it, with its wardrobe, which has been accumulating for years, outside of her room, as if she had no further use for it. Then she has intervals of gentle weeping, and for years before she had not shed a tear. All these are hopeful signs of a mind gradually emerging, like a star, from the night-clouds of insanity. It is evident to me that a crisis is at hand, a crisis which must be met with the utmost skill to avert a fatal issue."

"And how would you propose to meet it, sir? Would it be dangerous to remove the patient from her present home to a private residence?"

"Not only not dangerous, but it ought to be done," replied the doctor. "If she were to recover her senses and find herself in a mad-house the worst consequences might be anticipated. If she were under your charge, my lord, I might try the experiment I have thought of."

"And what is that?"

"I have sometimes seen the healthy operations of the mind restored by the patient beholding old familiar scenes—the home of childhood—being led back, as it were, to the threshold of life, and so beginning the world anew."

"Suppose, then, this lady were taken back to the home of her infancy?"

"I should hardly venture that. After so long a seclusion I should be afraid of the fatigues and excitements of the journey."

"Then your scheme falls to the ground?"

"No, my lord; I have thought of a substitute. Instead of taking her home, let us confront her with a scenic representation of her childhood haunts."

"I catch the idea," answered Strathallan.

"I should suggest," said Dr. Martin, "that Victor be employed to make sketches of some of the scenes in which you tell me the lady's early life was passed. If we succeed, the part he will have played in his mother's restoration will be a permanent pleasure to him. You know we have kept him in ignorance of her existence. We thus spare him the pain of witnessing her present condition, and prepare for him the possible pleasure of first meeting her when reason is reasserting its sway. It is quite as well, therefore, that the young man should be out of the way while we are maturing and carrying out our plans."

"Sir," said the earl, grasping his hand, "I approve your plans entirely, and appreciate the delicacy and thoughtfulness of your friendship for Mr. Victor. If you please, we will now visit his studio."

The doctor readily led the way to the room of his recovered patient.

If the Earl of Strathallan had not been a complete master of himself, his impulses would have betrayed the emotion he felt on seeing for the first time the child of one in whom he took so deep an interest. As it was, his manner was far warmer than his wont in making the acquaintance of strangers.

"My friend," said the doctor, "not feeling it my duty to dose you any more, I was about to prescribe a few weeks' travel for you, and to suggest a trip to London."

"But I must go to work," said the artist. "I cannot afford to remain idle."

"Then," said Strathallan, "I think I can reconcile both your views and the doctor's. You paint landscapes, I think, as well as heads?"

"Oh, yes, my lord."

"Very well, then—you shall go to England and paint some views of the Thames for me. An old man whom I will send with you as a guide will point out the localities I wish depicted. I should like the work done as rapidly as is consistent with accuracy. They are for a special purpose, and artistic beauty and effect are less desirable than a most minute delineation of every feature in the scenes reproduced. Their fidelity must be mirror-like. Can you be prepared to start to-morrow?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Very well then—to-morrow I will bring with me old Mr. Ringold, who is to be your companion, first giving him full instructions."

He was as good as his word on the following day, and the artist started with the old man on his mission.

Then the earl took Dr. Martin in his carriage and drove to Charenton.

His first sight of Jessie, our long-lost Jessie, still youthful-looking and beautiful, nearly overwhelmed him, for she proved to be the image of her mother, whom the earl well and fondly remembered.

The physician of the hospital, after a consultation with Dr. Martin, fully indorsed the views of the latter, and consented to the removal of the patient, who on that day appeared perfectly calm and tranquil.

Jessie was therefore placed in the carriage with her new friends. She said nothing, but displayed no agitation or excitement, obeying all directions given her resignedly or mechanically.

Before the earl left, he placed in the hands of the hospital physician a draft on his banker for so large an amount, for the benefit of the institution, as to overwhelm the recipient with surprise and pleasure.

They reached Paris without accident, and alighted at Maurice's Hotel. The carriage door was opened by the earl's valet, who was no other than Joe Maythorn, promoted from the stable to the drawing-room, polished into gentility by a long course of training, and looking, in his smart livery, like the model of an English serving-man, as, indeed, he had proved himself.

He instantly recognized the lady, and was startled out of his propriety into the single exclamation:

"Good 'evings!"

His master imposed silence by a gesture, and the lady was conducted to her room, and a quiet, experienced nurse was selected to wait on her, never leaving her by day or night.

While this was going on, the indefatigable Paul Aubrey was closeted with the banker, to whom he had revealed himself. Of course the object of his visit was to vindicate the reputation of Victor.

At first the banker refused to hear his name mentioned, but he had no sooner glanced at Marville's statement, which Aubrey laid before him, than he rang his bell violently.

"Send Marville to me instantly," he said, when a servant answered the summons.

While the man was gone, the banker sat staring at the paper which he held before him with a trembling hand.

The door opened, and with the stealthy cat-like tread which marked all his movements, the hoary accomplice of Gabriel Roland entered the room. A glance at the convulsed face of his master and the presence of Aubrey informed him that his villainy had been exposed. But the graduate of the galleys of Toulon was too hardened to be shaken by such a circumstance as this.

"Is that your handwriting and signature?" asked the banker, thrusting the confession in his face.

"It is, sir."

"Is the confession true and voluntary?"

Marville glanced at Aubrey, and then replied:

"It is."

"Infamous villain!" cried the banker. "I wish I could send you to the galleys. What were your motives? Yet you have confessed them—you sought to ruin a noble young man for filthy lucre—but you were only the agent of a villain yet more infamous. Compared with his guilt, yours is venial. But you darken my doors no longer—I dismiss you on the spot."

"Sir," said the old man, imperturbably, "I regret to leave you, for you have been generous and faithful to me. On my part, I have discharged my duties to the best of my ability—even in this matter I thought I was serving you in ridding you of a harpy who would have preyed upon your substance."

"Not a word against that unfortunate and much-injured young man!" cried the banker, "or I shall forget your years and strike you to my feet and trample on you."

"But for the manner in which I am dismissed," said Marville, "sent away in disgrace, I should be grateful at being relieved from further service, for I am an old man, sir, and need repair. Farewell, sir; I treasure up no malice for your treatment of an old and faithful, though perhaps mistaken, servant, and shall ever pray Heaven——"

"Silence!" cried the banker, stamping his foot, "a sacred name is defiled and polluted by your lips. Begone!"

"One moment, sir, here is the duplicate key of the safe," and Marville laid the little slip of steel before the banker. "You have missed nothing else, sir, since that remarkable day of the robbery?"

"Nothing—begone!"

"Mr. Aubrey," said the old man, "you will bear witness to this declaration of my late master. I am glad that I leave with a stainless reputation. May Heaven grant you, Mr. Roland, all the happiness you deserve; and you, too, my old *friend* Aubrey."

There was just the slightest tone of irony in the last sentence, but the old man bowed very low, and gently retired, closing the door softly behind him.

"My poor Victor!" groaned the banker. "Where is he now?"

"He has gone to England, sir."

"But I will see him again—I will repair, as far as in me lies, all my wrongs. As for the wretch—the tempter of yonder old man—as for Gabriel, may the curses of Heaven light upon his head! May he die a cruel death, and fill a dishonored grave!"

"Stay," said Aubrey. "Remember that curses come home. Remember that vengeance belongs to a Higher Power. Ask if you are guiltless, you who invoke the malediction of Heaven on your own son!"

But his words were thrown away on the banker, who continued to pour forth anathemas so fearful, that Aubrey refused to listen to them and fled, closing his ears, as from an accursed presence.

As the banker was still striding up and down his room, uttering words no one would wish to hear repeated, a servant entered and placed a note in his hand. It was almost illegible, but he made out the words:

"Come to my house instantly. LOUISE ROLAND."

Wondering at this unexpected summons, which could only have been sent to him for the most important reasons, the banker caught up his hat, ran down to the street, and, springing into the first carriage he found, was driven to the Chaussee d' Antin.

There was some confusion in his wife's household, but he was shown up instantly into her drawing-room. He found her alone, but looking so wild and horror-stricken that he was appalled as he gazed on her white face and staring eyeballs.

"Gaspar Roland!" she said, "only one thing could have prompted me to send for you."

"What is it? speak!"

"I cannot speak," she gasped, "but behold!"

She seized him by one hand, drew him forward to the heavy curtains of an archway that led into an inner room, and tore aside the drapery.

"Behold!" she said, in a voice that curdled his blood in his veins.

There, on a sofa, lay the lifeless form of his son. His coat had been removed, and his open shirt displayed a small wound in the breast. Lying dead! a sword thrust through the heart received that morning in a duel. The father's curses had come home. With a wild cry that rang through the house, the banker rushed forward, staggered and fell upon his face.

CHAPTER XXX.

TRIALS ENDED—THE SECRET REVEALED.

In a room of Maurice's Hotel, darkened by dropping the heavy draperies before the windows, Jessie Ringold was sitting quietly, with Dr. Martin beside her, holding her hand in his. She was looking with some slight manifestation of curiosity at a large

green curtain suspended at the farther end of the apartment. Slowly this curtain parted in the center and disclosed a very large painting representing the banks of the Thames, near Richmond. It was dimly lighted up; but gradually a stronger light was thrown on the scene till at last every feature of the landscape was broadly illuminated.

Dr. Martin watched the face of his patient narrowly as the picture gradually developed before her. Her eyes brightened, but not with a wild light; her lips parted, her breath came quicker, her bosom heaved, and her pulse throbbed faster. She bent her head forward and gazed intently at the scene.

Then the picture began to move, for it was a panoramic representation, and farther glimpses of the river with boats upon its surface came in view, while an unseen instrument played, softly at first, and then louder, a Scottish melody. As this well-known air was heard, the lady raised her hand to her ear, nodded her head in time to the music, and her lips moved.

She looked puzzled, and then her eyes brightened, and in a soft, low voice she sang, tremblingly, a verse of a remembered song:

"Oh! merry rows the bonny boat
Just parted from the shore,
While to the fisher's chorus note
Soft moves the dripping oar."

Memory was returning.

The scene moved on, and now, when a perfect representation of the Elm Tree Inn with all its surroundings came in view, the picture was made stationary. The lady rose to her feet, tears starting from her eyes, and she stretched forth her hands imploringly.

Then, in front of the picture, Joe Maythorn, in the very dress he had worn a quarter of a century before, came hurrying in.

Jessie's lips moved—and the doctor heard her say softly and wonderingly to herself, "Joe!"

But the last trial was to come.

Jerry Ringold, who had put on his old landlord's dress, and rejuvenated himself as much as possible, now showed himself before the door of the inn.

With a wild cry Jessie rushed forward, and exclaiming "My father!" fell at his feet.

The old man raised her tenderly and clasped her in his arms.

"My own darling!" said he.

"I have been away a long time," she murmured, "and dreadful things have happened. I have been sick—I'll tell you all—but not now—not now. I am too tired."

She clung to him sobbing, but smiling, through her tears, and then her head drooped upon his strong arm, her eyes closed and she fell asleep.

"It is the effect of medicine I have given her," whispered the doctor. "Take her to her room and place her in bed, but be sure that you are beside her when she wakes."

The old man nodded, and he and Joe carried off the patient to her room.

And now other persons who had been concealed witnesses of this scene came forward—the Earl of Strathallan, Victor, Paul Aubrey, and Gaspar Roland; the last wheeled forward in a chair on castors, for he had been stricken by palsy when he fell beside the body of his dead son, and was now a helpless invalid. Ringold and Maythorn, having left Jessie asleep, joined the group.

The Earl of Strathallan was the first to speak. He rushed forward and grasped the hand of the doctor.

"May Heaven reward you, my best friend! You have restored reason to MY DAUGHTER!"

"Your daughter!" cried Ringold.

"Yes—my daughter!" said the earl. "It was I who married her mother in secret, who dared not acknowledge my child during the life-time of my haughty mother, who came back to claim her and found her lost to me!"

"What does this mean?" cried the banker.

"It means, wretched man," said the earl, "that you have brought misery and worse than death on the heiress of Strathallan. But the hand of Heaven has weighed heavily on you. I know not why you are here to-day."

"I brought him here, my lord," replied Aubrey, "for a purpose of my own."

Victor had listened to this conversation in speechless amazement.

He now sprang forward and threw himself into the earl's arms.

"My noble boy!" said the earl. "I will be a father to you, since yonder man cannot acknowledge you as a son without confessing to the world his guilt and your misfortune."

"Victor," faltered the banker. "If I could move these palsied limbs, I would throw myself at your feet and implore your pardon—yours and my poor Jessie's."

"Hold!" said Aubrey, advancing. "It is time for me to speak out—for the accomplice of that unfortunate man to reveal his long-kept secret. Jessie Ringold is *the lawful wife* of Gaspar Roland, and Victor is his lawful son and heir. The man who married them in London was no false priest, as Mr. Roland imagined him to be. Father Ignatius is alive, is here, officiates at Notre Dame, and stands ready to prove what I assert. But give me no credit for this. I deceived my master in order to get him into my power and extort money from him by threatening to disclose my secret. The supposed death of the unfortunate lady rendered my plans abortive, and I was not aware that she had a child till I met him in Russia."

"Victor!" said the banker, imploringly, "will you not speak to me? Will you not say that you forgive me? It is a man almost dying who addresses you, for I feel that my hours are numbered. Yet I shall live—I will live—long enough to acknowledge you and proclaim my marriage, though it should send my name down to posterity branded with infamy."

Victor approached him and took his palsied hand.

"I forgive you, father," he said, gently. "You have suffered greatly, and you are sincerely repentant."

"Yes, I have suffered," said the banker. "No one knows how much. From the moment of the commission of my crime my life has been a long misery. Worldly success never brought a moment's real joy; it was only a gilding of the implements of torture."

Dr. Martin beckone. to Ringold.

"It is time to see my patient," he said. "If she awakes rational, we have nothing more to fear; it will only remain to break to her gently the news we have to impart."

The unfortunate lady did awake in the full possession of her faculties. She recalled the past, but of course her long life at Charenton made a blank in her reminiscences. She remembered leaving her child at the foundling hospital and rushing to the river for relief—nothing beyond.

Ringold gradually broke to her the fact of Victor's existence, first suggesting it as a possibility, and then as a certainty. As she bore it well, the other events in the chain of her destiny were gradually developed, and she knew at last that she had a son, father, and husband alive.

Of course when she met them she was deeply agitated, but the crisis passed away without again dethroning her reason.

But while she freely pardoned the author of her woes, the stricken wreck of a man, who, repentant and broken-hearted, implored and received her forgiveness, she had only angelic pity to bestow on him; the whole warmth of her love was reserved for her father and her son, and the charming daughter-in-law, Hortense Favart, to whom Victor was soon after united.

The banker lived only long enough to acknowledge the true Madame Roland and her offspring, and to receive the forgiveness of the woman who had long borne his name in society.

Victor, his bride, his mother, and the earl, together with Monsieur Favart, went to Scotland, their future residence, there to enjoy a tranquil happiness after the many sorrows and trials of their preceding career.

Joe Maythorn, quitting the service of the earl, opened a public-house, of which old Jerry Ringold was an inmate for the few remaining years of his life. It was within a short walk of Strathallan Castle, to which he made a daily visit, always receiving a warm welcome from the family.

Within a year of the death of the banker, the count's daughter, who had resumed her maiden name, Louise de Launay, was united to her early lover, Alphonse de Ferrard, now risen to be a distinguished general in the French service. He still retained the name which had been accidentally assumed, and for no unworthy purpose, as it was associated with a glorious career of arms. In spite of the trials both had undergone, they were still comparatively young—she a magnificent woman, and he a type of noble manhood. They enjoyed together many years of unalloyed happiness.

Our old friends, Ivan Boriloff and his Amazonian wife, were among the few fortunate survivors of the Russian campaign, and with their escape from the ruin of the Grand Army closed the adventurous portion of their career. In 1813 they set up a restaurant in Paris, and occupied the rest of their lives in feeding the hungry at remunerative prices.

Captain Salvinski, Victor's comrade in the Russian campaign, died in the French service, in which he had attained the rank of colonel of light cavalry.

Paul Aubrey, who played so conspicuous a part in the events of our story, redeemed the sins of his early life by the closing years of it. Enjoying a handsome annuity from the generosity of the Earl of Strathallan, he spent but a small portion on himself, and devoted the remainder to charitable purposes. When he found his end approaching, he went to Ajaccio, and there died in the land of his birth and was buried in the soil of Corsica. If he had sinned deeply, he had made all the atonement in his power, and died forgiven by those whom he had aided to afflict.

(THE END.)