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ARTIST AND MODEL (THE DIVORCED PRINCESS).

BY
RENÉ DE PONT-JEST.

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ARTIST AND MODEL.

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PART I.

THE PRINCESS OLSDORF.

CHAPTER I.

LISE BARINEFF.

When, in 1860, with the permission of the czar, Prince Pierre Olsdorf married Mlle. Lise Barineff, the Russian aristocracy was rather scandalized by the *mésalliance*. Everybody was well aware that the new princess was born not only before the marriage of her mother, Mme. Froment, with the Count Barineff, but even some months before Mme. Froment appeared in St. Petersburg, where, at the Michael Theater, she was brilliantly successful both as a woman and as an artiste.

It was not forgotten that one evening, at the time when she was to appear on the stage, the French actress had sent word to the stage manager that she was ill. The piece to be played was changed in consequence, and next morning all St. Petersburg learned that its idol had taken a lord and master—a legitimate one this time—in the person of Count Barineff, a fast fellow, worn out with excess of every kind, but rich, of good family, and in favor at court.

After the marriage ceremony Count Barineff went abroad with his wife and her daughter, now his daughter too; and they were forgotten up to the time when the countess, really a widow now—for probably there had never been a M. Froment—returned to Russia to take possession of her late husband's property. His extravagance of all kinds had made some deep inroads into it, but enough was left for her to maintain a very honorable rank with.

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On her return to St. Petersburg, after an absence of ten years, the ex-leading lady of the Michael Theatre had encountered a goodly number of her former adorers; and as she was still beautiful, and her daughter—now fourteen years old—was growing to be very pretty, her drawing-room was soon a meeting-place for that elegant and frivolous world of people who trouble their heads

very little about the past of the mistress of a house where they are well received.

Whether it was that years of discretion had come to her, or that she cleverly concealed the truth, the Countess Barineff gave no chance to scandal. Her conduct—at any rate in appearance—was perfectly upright and respectable.

At her house there was always good music, thanks to the artistes of all nations whom she liked to invite, and received in charming fashion when they came. There was dancing too, now and then, and often brilliant talk about France and the literary movement there. In the drawing-room of the intelligent widow was sure to be heard the latest news of Parisian fashions, and the last issued novels of famous Paris publishing firms were always there. There was no prudery, and a slightly scandalous story might be told; but anything that was said or done was in the tone and manner of good society.

It may be imagined that this position, so cleverly gained by the adroit countess, had rekindled the flame of her former adorers. Close siege was laid to her; she was even asked to give a successor to her first husband—the Russian—but the most ardent declarations left her cold and unmoved.

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To her most intimate friend, General Podoi, who in the old days had wished to marry her, and was still deeply in love with her, she replied one day when he was pressing her to come to a decision:

"My dear general, I don't know whether I shall ever marry again. I doubt it. At any rate, I shall never commit this folly a second time until Lise herself is married. First of all, then, a husband must be found worthy of my daughter. You see, there is plenty of time yet. When I am about to become a grandmother, I shall be almost an old woman whom nobody will care for."

The countess might have added, but she did not, as much from prudence as politeness:

"And you, my good Podoi, will scarcely be of a figure to make a presentable husband then."

This determination of the countess had not discouraged the old soldier. He had rather taken it as a sort of future engagement, and had felt himself authorized in consequence to pose as an aspirant to her hand, as well as to make himself, so to speak, the protector, factotum, and steward of the Barineff household; and this, if it did not altogether drive off the other suitors, kept them, at any rate, at a tolerably respectful distance.

As the general was a man of honor, and held a high military appointment, the countess had tacitly accepted the platonic suzerainty, which was useful to her without being a serious danger for her reputation; and the good fellow Podoi for the moment demanded nothing more.

From the day of the above conversation, he began to pass before him in a mental review the young noblemen likely to make good husbands by the time fixed by his friend the countess. He had drawn up a very curious list, containing all the information necessary to form a judgment on the fortune, character, and future of his candidates. From this list he struck out one by one the names of such of them as disappeared in the vortex of the world, or who, according to him, had become unworthy to be presented to his protégée at the psychological moment.

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Lise Barineff received an excellent education, and grew into a charming young girl. Her mother did not let her be seen often. She occasionally appeared at table when the guests were numerous; more rarely still she was present at her mother's receptions. She only went into society at musical *soirées*, and always accompanied the countess in her drives and walks about the city.

In their landau or sledge, drawn by horses the choice of Podoi, mother and daughter looked quite distinguished. It was plain to everybody that the widow of Count Barineff was trying to marry her daughter well. The ambition was so natural and worthy of respect that no one thought of criticising it unfavorably. Still less were they disposed to make ill-natured reflections upon the doubtful descent of pretty Lise Barineff.

Three years passed thus before the young girl made her formal entry into society at a ball given by the officers of the Guards in Honor of the Grand Duke Constantine, and to celebrate his return from the Caucasus. This first appearance of Lise Barineff in the fashionable world was a complete triumph for her and her mother. We should add that it was a triumph too for General Podoi, on whose arm was Lise, whom he looked on almost as his own child.

The success was well deserved. Lise Barineff was in her eighteenth year. Fair, slender, and very distinguished-looking, she was remarkably beautiful too. The elegance of her figure, the perfect oval of her face, the curve of her lips, the classic shape of her brow—all were fitted to attract the aspirants whom the good fellow Podoi had dreamed about for her.

The most striking thing in the young girl from this day forward was the self-possession with which she received the homage paid to her. It was evident that her mother had trained her carefully for the admiration she was the object of, and that she was armed in advance against all surprises.

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It could be seen in the calmness she preserved under the flattering murmurs which her appearance excited. Without confusion she moved through these salons where she now set foot for the first time. Her beautiful, greenish eyes, with emerald-like reflections in their depths, were not lowered under the dazzling glitter of a world they had never before seen, but which,

doubtless, had been carefully painted for her in advance.

This indifference of hers was but an additional charm for those whom her beauty had at once enthralled. For a less enthusiastic spectator, it was a subject for curious study. A worthy child of the ex-actress of the Michael Theatre, was this *débutante* cleverly playing a rôle long learned and often repeated? Or was she really what she seemed to be?

Under this bosom already formed, chastely veiled with muslin, would not an ardent heart soon be beating? What ambitious or passionate thoughts were slumbering under those delicately penciled eyebrows, in color darker than her hair, and joined by an almost imperceptible down above the nose with its sensitive nostrils? How warm was the blood that circulated under this creamy skin, which was that of a brunette rather than a blonde? Taken back smoothly from the brow and temples, her luxuriant hair was rebellious where it was gathered at the nape of the neck, its golden wealth impatient of restraint. "Diana," murmured the admirers of Lise Barineff. "Merely Psyche awaiting Cupid," a skeptical physiologist would have replied.

Within less than a month from this first victoriously surmounted trial, the countess opened her house to suitors for her daughter's hand. They soon appeared in a crowd, for it was quickly known that Lise Barineff was not only a very beautiful girl, but also an excellent musician, well-cultivated, witty, and speaking with purity three or four languages.

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One of the suitors favored by General Podoi—suitors whose homage Lise had received with very natural satisfaction to her vanity, without appearing to distinguish any of them—was soon favorably marked by the countess. He was Prince Pierre Olsdorf, a rich landed proprietor of Courland, and, moreover, a charming man of scarcely thirty, without any post about the court.

When the prince, who seemed much captivated, solicited the hand of her daughter from the countess, Mme. Barineff at first consulted General Podoi. As the general, eager to see Lise married, had nothing but very flattering things to say of Prince Olsdorf, she whom the matter most interested was told of the choice that had been made for her.

Mlle. Barineff, who indeed, was expecting this communication, replied calmly that she was ready to accept the husband her mother chose for her, and the prince was then allowed to pay his court. After two or three weeks had passed the countess gave a definite consent, and with the consent of the future princess the marriage was fixed for two months later.

On the evening of the day when all had been settled thus, General Podoi, in quitting Mme. Barineff, kissed her hands tenderly, whispering, "I hope that very soon you will say 'Yes' a second time," a hope to which Lise's mother replied by a smile. The same evening the mail from Paris carried a letter written in these terms:

"MY OLD FRIEND,—I have long known too well how much you are interested in all that concerns my daughter and myself not to hasten in telling you that Lise is about to make a marriage as honorable as it is brilliant. In two months' time she will marry the Prince Pierre Olsdorf, an admirable young man who loves her passionately, and whom she likes very much.

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"Prince Olsdorf, who is tolerably wealthy, has no post at the court, so that he will be able to devote himself to his wife.

"I shall now be recompensed by the happiness of my daughter for the sacrifices, often painful, that I have made since her birth.

"I hope this news will give you real joy, and that your affection will approve the choice I have made.

"Write me a word or two soon to tell me that all is well, that your health is good, that you are pursuing the course of your success, and that you have not forgotten the exiles.

"Your most devoted friend,
"MADELEINE."

The letter was addressed to M. Armand, 42 Rue de l'Est, Paris. The Countess Barineff seemed to weigh all the words of the letter, and she signed it with her Christian name alone.

CHAPTER II.

A WINTER AT ST. PETERSBURG.

Pierre Olsdorf was perhaps, of all the candidates for her hand, the only one that the beautiful Lise Barineff had remarked, not that she found him in any way better than the other young men received by her mother, but simply because the countess, in accord with General Podoi, seized every occasion to sing the praises of this suitor, who was exactly the son-in-law that the ambition of the ex-comedienne had pictured.

In truth, Prince Olsdorf was not merely a titled husband; he had many other desirable qualities. In the first place, he had a large fortune. His grandfather had been a field-marshal under the

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Empress Anne, after serving her when she was only Princess of Courland. He had profited by the generosity of his sovereign to enlarge his estates and to construct on the right bank of the River Wandau the Château of Pampeln, which had the reputation of being one of the handsomest noblemen's residences in the country. The prince was an orphan too, which gave occasion to the Countess Barineff to hope that she might have some hand in the direction of her daughter's household.

Pierre Olsdorf was permitted then to pay his court, and Lise, although her heart remained unmoved, was touched as well by the discretion as by the gentleness of him who was to be her husband.

The prince was of a timid nature, at least as regarded women. Unlike the greater part of the young St. Petersburg nobles, he had not seen much "life." He was not a constant spectator at the Michael Theatre, nor a hanger-on of the ballet. When he quitted the Institute of Nobles, where he had been educated, instead of joining the corps of imperial pages, as most youths of good family did, he took up his residence with his uncle and tutor, Prince Alexis Olsdorf, at Pampeln, an old bachelor who was rather out of sorts with the court. There he indulged his inborn taste for horses and hunting. Only after the death of his relative he used to visit St. Petersburg occasionally, but he never made a long stay there, a free life in the open air seeming to him preferable to any other.

He owed his good health to this healthy mode of existence, for, born puny and sickly, he would not have been able to live through the feasts and pleasures in which he must have taken part if he had joined with the young fellows of his rank. Pampeln, on the other hand, had saved him from all excesses.

Though of medium height and delicate in look, he was really strong. Bodily exertions had made him indefatigable and of a calm courage full of audacity and coolness. Through his mode of life he had gained premature gravity and the firmness of a middle-aged man. Kind to his servants, he was worshiped by them, and the emancipated cultivators of his estates preserved toward him the respect and obedience of serfs for their lord. He neglected nothing that might conduce to their material well-being or their moral elevation. Unhealthy and cramped dwellings had disappeared from his vast estates, where he had established schools to which he insisted that all children should be sent. There they not only received primary, secular, and religious education, but were also taught French. Everybody, or nearly everybody, for ten leagues around the château spoke the French language.

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It is easy to believe, then, that the prince lived from choice in Courland, and it was precisely his liking for the active and honorable life he led there that made him think one day of taking a wife. The hospitality of the Olsdorfs was a tradition. He told his wish to General Podoi, who had been one of his father's friends, and the middle-aged lover of the Countess Barineff naturally thought at once of making Lise the mistress of Pampeln.

She was, he thought, just the wife for Peter the Silent, as he liked to call his young friend. Lise was serious, well-taught, and not given to frivolity, as most of the young girls of the Russian nobility were. He spoke of her to the prince, who came to St. Petersburg. After meeting the daughter of the Countess Barineff two or three times, being struck by her beauty and the look of distinction about her, he was soon convinced that he could make no better choice. He asked for her hand, and, as we have seen, he was accepted.

The aim of the ex-comedienne having been thus far attained, things followed their regular course. Though he held no post at the court, Prince Olsdorf, through deference and in accordance with tradition, asked for the approval of the emperor to his marriage. The consent was readily given, and Pierre hastened to hand over his mansion at St. Petersburg, deserted for so many years, to the upholsterers. At this time the countess won a second victory. Sure of her exquisite taste, the prince begged her to take the matter in hand, so that nothing was done in the house of the future bride and bridegroom except by her orders. Her satisfaction while she was thus engaged was troubled only by a letter that she received from Paris in reply to that which she had addressed to her old comrade, Dumesnil.

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Less reserved than his friend, the actor at the Odéon Theatre had written to her:

"MY DEAR MADELEINE,—I am very happy and very proud at Lise's marriage. I do not regret now the sacrifice I made, when you became the Countess Barineff, in allowing this dear child to be acknowledged by him who gave you his name. I wished above all things to secure the future of our daughter. Afterward, sacrificing my own future, I did not rejoin you in Russia, where, it may be, fortune and glory awaited me."

The old comedian continued his letter with a lamentation on the decadence of the theater, the want of taste in the public, and the isolation to which he was condemned. He concluded by charging his former mistress to kiss, for an old friend, her whom he might not kiss as a father.

The letter recalled to the Countess Barineff a crowd of disagreeable memories, and she rather regretted having written to Dumesnil, while she felt that it would have been difficult not to do so, for she had every reason to praise the conduct of this good fellow.

It was Dumesnil, in fact, who had guided the first steps of Madeleine Froment in her theatrical career, lifting her from the precarious and doubtful life to which the *abandon* of her relatives had

consigned her before she was twenty years old. Having made her a mother, he had no thought of deserting her. On the contrary, he was anxious to acknowledge his child, when an unhoped-for engagement at St. Petersburg was proposed to Madeleine, who left Paris with the promise to obtain an engagement for Dumesnil too at the Michael Theatre. We know what happened. Sought after, courted, she soon forgot her comrade of the Odéon. Dumesnil did not know of her marriage with Count Barineff until it was too late to make any attempt at hindering it.

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Mme. Froment touched adroitly the paternal fiber in Dumesnil's heart, and the good fellow, as we have seen, had let his child become the child of Count Barineff as much from affection as vanity. But all these deceptions had sharpened his temper. He had remained an actor through necessity rather than taste. Sad, discouraged, convinced that all was over in dramatic composition, and only feeling pleasures when the old stock pieces were in the bill, he played his parts in the dramas of the writers of the past with a strict regard for tradition.

However, notwithstanding the cloud that had formed in her azure sky, the Countess Barineff continued busying herself with the installation of the future couple. On the appointed day the mansion only lacked its master and mistress.

The two months' probation that Pierre Olsdorf had undergone had not lowered him in the estimation of his sweetheart. Certainly Lise did not feel her heart beat violently when the man whose name she was to bear kissed her hand, for this grave cavalier, with his slight fair mustache and half-closed blue eyes, was, perhaps, not the husband of whom she had caught glimpses in her dreams; but he would make a princess of her, and the Countess Barineff told her daughter that the happiest unions were often those which love had not preceded.

The ex-comedienne had made up her mind that the house of the young couple should become the liveliest place in the world. She would introduce her friends there; all the artistes that she loved to receive, all the foreigners who for years back had given her own house a deserved reputation for wit and elegance.

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The last unconscious hesitations of Lise vanished on seeing the marriage present that the prince offered to her a few days before the ceremony. There was a fortune in jewels and furs, which were marvels, too, of good taste. Nevertheless, she slept that evening with her accustomed calm, and her last nights of maidenhood were troubled by none of the dreams that haunt the purest on the eve of the most important act of life.

So, too, on the next day but one, when she set out for the Church of Isaac, where the ceremony was to take place, she was as fresh and bright-looking, in her dress of white moiré covered with wonderful lace that had belonged to her husband's mother.

Her entry into the basilica, leaning on the arm of General Podoi, was an undoubted triumph. The middle-aged lover of the countess would not, for anything in the world, have delegated his right to lead to the altar, as her "father of honor," her whom more and more he regarded as his daughter. Lise, to gain the chair with armorial bearings that awaited her, had to pass through a friendly crowd made up of all the nobility of St. Petersburg. The frogged and decorated uniforms, the fine dresses, the diamonds and their beautiful wearers, were a dazzling sight.

The prince offered his arm to one of the greatest ladies of the court, the Princess Iwacheff, who acted as "mother of honor" to him, but was not a relative, as the custom usually requires.

Then came the Countess Barineff. Gratified as her pride was, she still wore a calm and dignified air. She might have been by right of birth of the world into one of the first ranks of which her daughter was entering.

The emperor was represented by one of his *aides-de-camp*. The arch-priest himself officiated, and when the daughter of the actor Dumesnil had become a princess, she received with perfect good-breeding the compliments of those who defiled before her.

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A few hours later a princely dinner was served to more than a hundred guests at Pierre Olsdorf's mansion. Next day the Princess Lise entered on the noble life for which she had been so long under preparation.

The prince had intended to quit the city for Pampeln immediately after his marriage; but the season was far advanced, the winter was coming on rapidly, and the Countess Barineff pointed out that he ought not to deprive his young wife of the entertainments to which she would be invited in St. Petersburg, in order to shut her up in a château at a season of the year when it must necessarily be lonely.

Pierre, as much out of deference to his mother-in-law as from affection for Lise—of whom he seemed very fond—put off the departure for his estate until the following spring. His house—as the countess had promised herself it should—soon became one of the most brilliant in St. Petersburg.

The fact was not altogether pleasing to the prince. He had never cared much for the world, and he would rather have had his wife more for himself alone; but he gave way with a good grace, and balls and receptions succeeded each other at his house throughout the first six months of his marriage. The Princess Olsdorf had her box at the Michael Theatre and at the Italian opera; she was to be seen at all the court balls; no sledge was horsed like hers; the greatest ladies of the Russian nobility became her friends; she was famed in all the gossip of the day for her elegance, wit, and beauty.

As for the prince, he was always rather too grave. He was away only once during all this bustling six months, and that was in order to pay a short visit to Courland that he might see for himself that Pampeln would be worthy to receive its mistress in the spring.

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Pierre Olsdorf loved his wife; but with his serious character, and the temperament of a man born in northern latitudes, he knew nothing of trouble and fierce passions. It seemed, too, that it was well he was not otherwise, for Lise was still the woman General Podoi had described her as—gentle, amiable, free from inquietude and jealousy. Her husband was for her, above all, a friend. Neither her heart nor her passions seemed to require more from him. So that all was for the best, and the Countess Barineff, justly proud of her work, was feeling the satisfaction its contemplation gave her when one day the good fellow Podoi reminded her of the promise she had made to accept his name after her daughter's marriage.

"Do you, then, still think of making me your wife?" asked Lise's mother.

"More than ever," replied the general, in a feeling voice. "Come, now, have not I, too, worked for your daughter's happiness, and do not I deserve a reward? What is the only one I covet? Reflect, my dear Madeleine; I have loved you for fifteen years."

"True; and that has aged us both, eh?"

"You are still young and beautiful. As for me, you will give me back my youth."

The general had spoken those words with so dandified an air that the countess could not help smiling in offering him her hand.

"You give it me?" exclaimed Podoi, seizing the hand and covering it with kisses.

"I can not do otherwise," said Madeleine. "Will not people laugh at us a little, though? I shall soon be a grandmother."

"Well, well, we will begin by having grandchildren, that is all."

And the general straightened himself proudly, while the ex-actress tried to summon a faint blush at this freedom of speech in her old lover.

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Within a fortnight, very quietly, the marriage of the Countess Barineff and General Podoi was celebrated at the Church of Isaac. The general, in truth, seemed younger than he was by the fifteen years of his constancy and devotion.

The same day, by a strange coincidence, Dumesnil appeared anew in the character of Georges Dandin at the Odéon.

CHAPTER III.

AT PAMPELN.

Toward the end of May, after a most brilliant winter season, all the society of St. Petersburg made ready for its departure. The sledges were put away in the coach-houses, the theaters were closed, and very soon all that were not kept back by their duties or business began their flight.

Some went to Yalta, to be at the sea-side with the court, which goes every year for the summer to the Palace of Livadia; others to the Caucasus, to hunt the lynx and the bear. Many prepared to refill their places at Paris and the watering-places of north-eastern France, in the charming Russian colony which is so truly French in its elegance and tastes.

The moment, then, was come for the Prince Olsdorf, like other great landed proprietors, to visit his estates. He had given his orders at Pampeln some time back. Moreover, as we have said, he had been thither in person to see that all was ready for the reception, not only of his wife, but also of General Podoi, his wife, and the many guests invited to pass part of the summer in Courland.

Somewhat fatigued by balls and receptions, Lise Olsdorf was not less wishful than her husband to quit the city, so that on the appointed day she did not keep the post-chaise waiting that was to take them to Pampeln.

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At the time of which we are writing, in 1860, the railway that now joins St. Petersburg and Königsberg did not exist. The distance between the prince's town house and his country place at Pampeln was not less than a hundred leagues.

All the household he took with him to Courland where his valet, a faithful servant who, so to speak, had seen his master born; his cook, formerly the head cook at the French Embassy, and two women servants for the princess. One of them was a French woman. General Podoi had transferred her services to his daughter when Lise married, being assured thus of always knowing what might be passing in the young people's household when he himself would be away from it.

The servants followed their master and mistress in a big coach, which carried the necessary provisions as well, for no dependence was to be placed on the hotel accommodation in the towns

they had to pass through. In most of them the only thing that could be found was the "samovar," ready for the brewing of tea.

After a three days' journey the prince and his people reached the end of their journey.

It was dark when they arrived. All that the princess could make out of the château was its monumental appearance, but next day she had to confess that all that had been told her of Pampeln was short of the truth.

Built in the reign of the Empress Anne on a hill which overlooks the Wandau River, the residence of the Olsdorfs shows signs of the eclecticism which influenced Russian architecture in the eighteenth century. After having been Grecian in style, and then Italian, it did not take a truly national character until the time of the Czar Nicholas. Though, regarded as a building, the massive and heavy-looking château offered nothing remarkable to the view in its colossal dimensions, the Pampeln estate was, nevertheless, the most important in the neighborhood, from its extent, the richness of the soil, and the immensity of its forests.

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A true gentleman farmer, as his father had been before him, Prince Pierre overlooked everything himself, sometimes being on horseback at day-break to visit the most distant parts of his property. His care was not wholly for the improvement of the land; as we have said before, he was ever anxious for the well-being of his tenants.

The inside of the château was luxuriously and comfortably furnished.

The wood-work, in cedar, of the great banqueting halls, in the style of Henry II., had been carved by the most skilled Flemish workmen. The fencing-room, the large Gothic windows of which looked on to the park, contained a curious collection of arms of all periods, from the heavy, damasked weapons of the forefathers of the house to the modern musket; while the chapel, whose service was performed by a pope who lived at the château the year round, was a marvel of Byzantine art.

As for the suite of apartments of the princess, it was easy for her to think in entering it that she had not left St. Petersburg, so scrupulous had the prince been about the furnishing of it, and every petty detail.

Besides the principal bed and reception-rooms there were forty guest chambers. The stables could accommodate at least a hundred horses, and the kennels were filled by the handsomest packs of hounds in the country.

The servants' quarters were at the end of the great shady park full of old trees, where huntsmen, grooms, and all the servants, to the number of forty or fifty, who were not employed within the mansion, were lodged. Counting in the gamekeepers who looked after his ponds and woods, the master of Pampeln had thus at his orders quite a small army, disciplined, alert, and wholly devoted to him.

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The pride can easily be imagined that Lise Olsdorf felt when a few days after her arrival her husband conducted her over this splendid domain of which she was to be the queen, and wished to be the benefactress.

A week later her mother and General Podoi arrived. About a score of guests soon followed them, and the hunting season began in full earnest.

The princess had scarcely the time to become used to this stirring pleasure. Being *enceinte*, she was obliged to remain comparatively quiet, which she did very willingly.

From this time forth she was satisfied to go with the hunters in her carriage, as far as the state of the roads would permit. Then with her mother and some women friends she would return to the château, where in the evening she did the honors of the house with a grace and ease that charmed the guests.

Toward the end of August, Lise, to the great joy of her husband, was delivered of a son, whom they named Alexander. The happy event formed an excuse for a series of entertainments, which brought the season to a close in princely fashion.

September came, and everybody was making the best of their way back to St. Petersburg. The Olsdorf mansion was open again. The princess often stole away from the drawing-room to be with her son.

Lise Olsdorf made a good mother. For two years she was not a single day absent from her child. She had scruples even about trusting him for a few hours to strange hands, and she nursed him through all his infantile troubles.

This tender, complete, and devoted maternal love estranged her somewhat from her husband, and gave her a special distaste for the life he led at Pampeln. She went with the prince, of course, to Courland, but she was rarely to be seen with him on his hunting expeditions and excursions on the banks of the Livonian gulf. The result of this was the birth of a sort of coolness between the prince and his wife, which was sure to grow day by day. Mme. Podoi very quickly saw what was happening. She spoke to her daughter about it, but Lise only replied:

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"Why, mother, the prince is a very amiable man, but he is far from being the husband I dreamed of. He never in his life had a passion, and never will have, except for horses and dogs; I am sure

of it."

The princess spoke the words in so bitter a tone, and with such a gleam in her fine eyes, that the ex-actress, well versed in this sort of thing, felt a presentiment of some catastrophe in the future.

She was careful, however, to betray no sign of uneasiness. She smiled even, and, smiling, made up her mind to watch.

At the end of three years from the birth of her son, when her constant care for him had become less indispensable, the princess showed a disposition to return to worldly pleasures. At first she was seen at the Michael Theatre, then she began to hold receptions anew, opening her doors to the foreign artistes that her mother introduced to her; and, finally, her reappearance at the court balls was triumphantly welcomed. Then, when the season in the capital was over, she became, to the surprise and joy of the prince, the hardy amazon that she had been in the first months of their marriage.

It was like a new birth in Lise, attributable, one might suppose, to the development of her symmetrical and dazzling beauty, while her bearing betrayed a kind of new vigor, surprising to her friends, which seemed to welcome noise and movement. She was soon a constant attendant at all entertainments, and took her place at the head of fashionable women in the highest circles of Russian society.

Still, notwithstanding the active, frivolous, and trying life she was leading, the heart of the Princess Olsdorf was calm. Amid the crowd of adorers her high position and beauty had won for her, she remained an irreproachable wife, but a radical change had occurred in both her mind and disposition. Her comparative indifference for frivolous things was replaced by a sort of unhealthy curiosity. She now lent a ready ear to risky stories which formerly had been very distasteful to her. Her imagination, suddenly aroused, seemed to question the unknown, and be in search of emotions of which she was ignorant. In theatrical performances she preferred a love story to a comedy of modern life and manners. After having for long read nothing in French but the historical romances of the elder Alexander Dumas, she began to devour highly spiced novels, which she obtained from France by stealth; for in Russia then, as now, the government forbade the introduction into the country of many of the best-known and least moral novels of the day.

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In the earliest days of her marriage, as we have said, the princess would accompany her husband in his excursions, but only to please him. Now she was grown into a daring sportswoman, eager in the pursuit of the quarry, greedy of danger, and finding a sharp pleasure in encountering it. In these mad gallops, mounted on one of the small, fiery, and swift horses that are used in the country for hunting purposes, she was wonderfully handsome, her eyes glistening, her bosom heaving, her lips quivering. She seemed to try, by wearying her body, to keep her soul in repose.

These were the only moments in their married life in which there was a full community of ideas and sensations between Pierre Olsdorf and his wife; for when once the prince was on horseback and in pursuit of the game, he was no longer the cold and self-contained man he ordinarily was. He was like a soldier on the field of battle. For the time being he was on fire. The most spirited horses were controlled by his strong hand; no horn sounded so clear and loud as his. He was superbly cool and brave when he had a bear at bay. He seemed to be possessed with a love of courage when he attacked a wolf in its lair, and watched the beast being tossed piece by piece to the hounds.

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The day over, all this manly energy vanished. Sitting down to table in the evening at the château, when the guests saw Pierre in his black coat, his face calm, his eyelids drooping, it was hard to believe that this was the man whose impetuous daring would sometimes frighten his companions in the chase.

The strange glances which Lise cast furtively on her husband then might have been observed. Her face expressed surprise and contempt, and when the prince paid her a compliment, she would reply dryly or sarcastically, though she tried not to betray the state of her mind.

The fact was that the princess, who had never really loved the man whose name she bore, and, above all, had never felt any sensual attraction toward him, began to avoid him, instituting comparisons between him and the other men by whom she was surrounded.

The calm and respectful affection of Pierre was not enough for her. That was not the love which, as a consequence of the active life she led, her awakened senses gave her glimpses. She felt that the contact of two beings really in love with each other must be more troubling to both. By what right was she cheated of the deep emotions, the burning pleasures, that she had heard some of her women friends whispering about? Was not her beauty worthy of being passionately loved? Was not she desirable from every point of view? Where, then, was the excuse for this monotony in her life, this lake without a ripple on its surface, this heaven without a cloud? She thirsted unconsciously, as it were, for unknown storms, and the fact made her irritable and nervous.

This moral and physical excitement led the princess at first to try and rouse her husband. Supposing that she might succeed by making him jealous, she grew coquettish, whimsical, frivolous, much like many of the young women of the Russian aristocracy; but Pierre did not seem to even notice the change. Lise's strangest whims drew from him no reproach. But as, doubtless, he had not found in her his ideal of a woman, he saw less and less of her each day, giving himself up to his own pursuits. Then Lise, humiliated and offended, isolated too, began to look about her with disquieted curiosity.

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This happened in the middle of summer, when there were many guests at Pampeln, and certainly the princess had only to choose. None of them, however, brilliant as they were, pleased her so much that she distinguished him by particular favor.

They were what the young men were who had formed her court since her marriage—most of them military men, handsome cavaliers, elegant, brave, extravagant. They had all much the same good qualities and much the same bad. Their declarations offered no variety, they scarcely made her smile. Their attempts to win her heart were alike. The same madrigals were used, the same melodramatic protestations were spoken by all. There was nothing about them that was simple or natural, true or from the heart. Some of them loved or desired her ardently, no doubt; but such of them as dared to tell her so, all did it in the same way, with the tone of that frivolous world for which love is a pleasant episode of life, and not its end and aim.

Besides, each of these sighers and adorers was a friend of the prince, and Lise was revolted by the thought. She thought them vile to wish to abuse the confidence of the man whose hand they pressed with a thousand protestations of devotion.

This was the state of mind of the Countess Barineff's daughter when Count Barewski, a regular visitor at Pampeln, arrived at the château. He brought with him his wife and a young painter from Paris, M. Paul Meyrin, whom General Podoi had already presented to the Olsdorfs at one of their last receptions of the previous winter, on the eve, almost, of their departure for Courland, so that the prince scarcely remembered the young man's name.

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Paul Meyrin was none the less hospitably received, like all guests at the château. When he approached and saluted the princess, she recalled so vividly at the sight of him how the beauty of this young foreigner had struck her at St. Petersburg, that she was for the moment confused.

She recovered herself quickly, however, and offering her hand, after the English and Russian fashion, to the young man, she bade him welcome in a perfectly calm voice.

Still, while Count Barewski was telling Prince Olsdorf that M. Paul Meyrin was only an indifferent huntsman, though a skillful horseman, so that he was more often to be seen with his sketching materials than with a gun, Lise examined the new-comer with curious eyes, such as she had turned on nobody else as yet.

Above the middle height, broad-shouldered, and carrying himself with a slight swagger, the friend of Count Barewski was quite the romantic hero in appearance. His colorless face made his silky beard look the darker. He had fine eyes, and boldly marked eyebrows. On his full red lips the smile of youth played. His expression of face was gentle in the extreme, almost simple. Born in Bucharest, he was, in a word, one of the purest specimens of that handsome Latin race which crossing is making rarer and rarer.

As though he felt the young woman's eyes were fixed on him, Paul Meyrin turned abruptly toward her, and as their eyes met both of them felt a secret tremor.

Lise, surprised, bent to caress a dog lying at her feet, while Paul, certainly not analyzing or fully understanding what he felt, took leave of the prince for the moment, Pierre having said kindly, in reply to Count Barewski:

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"Monsieur Meyrin must make himself at home. At Pampeln every one lives in his own way. I shall console myself about his indifference to hunting by admiring the pictures he will be inspired to paint by his walks and musings."

No one remarked that the princess returned the artist's bow with downcast eyes.

We are not of those who believe in love at first sight, but we do believe that, in given cases, the attraction of two beings one for the other is, in a degree, a matter of fate; and that, from the first, each of them has a vague presentiment of possession in the future. The feeling is due to neither the heart nor the imagination.

It is a kind of magnetic attraction of the senses, a nervous shock such as sensitive natures feel in case of sudden emotion—say, at an unexpected chord in music, a too pungent odor, a glorious sunset, a glance into space from the top of a high precipice. There is surprise and a dazed feeling. They last but a second or two, and are like a dream. Then comes forgetfulness, until a new meeting or a memory, though only indirectly evoked, reawakens the undefined and unavowed feeling, and gives double vigor to the sensation originally felt.

Lise Olsdorf and Paul Meyrin unconsciously underwent this purely physiological experience.

That evening, when they were near each other again at dinner, there was an exchange of looks which troubled them. The artist, already rather spoiled by his successes with women, was quite ready to think that the princess looked on him with favorable eyes. Conceit thus operated with him. Up to now his conquests had not been of so high an order; he soon fancied that he was deeply in love with Lise Olsdorf. The simple truth was that he desired her, and that as much out of vanity as passion.

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Unfortunately, Paul had no idea how to set about paying his court to a "great lady." He had heard a friend maintain the paradox that the best means one can use with women is to treat them by contraries; scrupulous politeness, tender care, timid and romantic declarations, for women of the town, and exactly the opposite for women in good society. But if the latter way is successful, as

unhappily it too often is, thanks to the manners of to-day, Paul was not convinced that it was; besides which, he had no aptitude for the part of a coarse libertine, nor did he think that the princess was a woman to put up with a want of respect. Without any preconceived plan, then, he made up his mind to wait until a favorable occasion should offer itself.

As for Lise Olsdorf, without analyzing her own emotions, she felt herself so strongly drawn to the handsome stranger that, fearing to betray herself, she was during dinner less gracious to him than she ordinarily was to guests in general newly arrived at the château; nor could she without a tremor think of the approaching moment when, after the Russian custom, the mistress of the house, standing on the threshold of the dining-room, receives the homage of her guests, who, passing one by one before her, each kiss her hand, while her lips touch their forehead.

From modesty, or perhaps designedly, Paul Meyrin was among the last few. When Lise offered him her hand he pressed his lips to it in so long a kiss that she withdrew it sharply and fell back a step, without giving him the expected kiss in return.

Fearful that he had offended her, he raised his head quickly to ask the question by a look; but the princess had turned from him and was moving toward the rooms where the guests spent their evenings according to their varying fancies. Some liked music, others would rather talk. There was dancing, too; but most of the visitors were to be seen gathered round the play-tables. Though the prince was the declared enemy of gambling as an amusement, he would not deny his guests the pleasure.

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Throughout the evening, try as he might, Paul could not get near Lise; his eyes did not meet hers once. She retired early, and had slipped away before he had guessed that she was going.

The next day he hardly saw her, for she did not come down to dinner, the prince making her excuses to their friends on the plea of slight indisposition. After this day, however, Lise, as if she had schooled herself to calmness, again appeared gracious and smiling, with that care for the comfort of her guests that she always showed in fulfilling her duties as mistress of the household.

Still, calm and indifferent as she made herself appear before the artist, she doubtless distrusted her strength too much to risk a *tête-à-tête*, for Paul never found himself quite alone with her. When he greeted her at meeting, she had always to respond at that moment to some other greeting as well. She returned his bow hurriedly, with downcast eyes and an absent look; and if she met him by chance in passing through the fencing-room, in one of the vestibules, or at any other part of the house for the moment deserted, she quickened her step, though not too markedly, as he accompanied her, and, beginning to speak on different topics, she would continue to do so without giving him the chance to speak, until they had encountered some one else.

Paul Meyrin understood the tactics adopted by the mistress of Pampeln. He was vain enough to infer that she feared him, and in consequence grew more charmed with her, and the more decided to declare his love.

Things had gone on thus for a week, and the Roumanian had not yet found the chance he watched for, the more eagerly in proportion as he saw that the princess often seemed nervous, preoccupied, and fanciful, when one evening the prince announced to his guests an interesting hunting-party for the following day.

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A few minutes later Lise retired, bending on Paul a look which he caught but hesitated to give a meaning. Was it on her part a sort of haughty defiance? Or was it, on the contrary, a kind of encouragement? Did she mean, "You dare go no further, and you are prudent," or "Why dare not you? I am waiting!"

Whichever it was, the painter slept little that night, and rose at daylight. He supposed he must be one of the first of the guests stirring in the house, but when he reached the court-yard he found the princess there before him, on horseback, though it was only just seven o'clock.

Pierre Olsdorf and his usual companions were to start for the banks of the Wandau, there to hunt the stag; and Lise had determined to accompany her husband's friends as far as the Elva farm, three leagues distant from the château, and cultivated by one Soublaieff, an old retainer of the prince, whom he had brought from his estates in the Crimea and for whom he had a great affection.

At this early hour, under the oblique rays of the sun, the great court-yard of Pampeln was a charming sight for a painter. There was a noise, a movement, and a kaleidoscope of colors not easy to describe. Excited by the barking of the hounds, which the footmen held coupled in leashes, by the blasts on the horns of the huntsmen giving the signal for the start, and by the different orders that were being shouted one over the other, the horses, with erect ears and waving manes, pawed the ground impatiently under their riders, who all wore the correct hunting costume, which the prince had been one of the first to make fashionable in Russia—wide breeches, high boots, and a double-breasted tunic, caught in at the waist with a leathern belt, in which a Circassian dagger was stuck.

In front of the flight of steps leading up to the house were the carriages for General Podoi's wife and her friends. The horses were superb creatures which the drivers could scarcely control.

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The artist saw none of these things, however. His eyes were fixed on the princess, and could not quit her. In her riding-habit, a masterpiece of some great Parisian costumer, which showed the

symmetry of her form and the rich swell of her bust, Lise Olsdorf was wonderfully beautiful. Under the coquettish hat, made in the Louis XV. style, her clearly cut face had a brave and almost saucy look. Her little gloved hand held firmly and gracefully the reins of the splendid thorough-bred she was riding. Paul, in admiration, stopped short at a few paces' distance, forgetting even to salute her.

Not until the princess spoke did he recover himself.

"Are you not going to join us?" she asked in an amused tone. "What are you thinking?"

"Pardon me, madame, pardon me," said the painter, doffing his hat. "I was admiring."

He had not dared to say, "I was admiring you," but Lise Olsdorf understood.

"That is not a reply," she said, smiling. "See, yonder are two horses ready saddled. But perhaps you are not a rider, and I warn you that our animals are pretty spirited."

"I should not be one of my race or my country, madame, if I were not a horseman."

At a sign from him the groom holding the two horses brought them up and gave him one. Not using the stirrup, he leaped into the saddle.

"Bravo!" exclaimed the prince, coming up at that moment to ask his wife if he should give the order for a start. "Are you going with us?"

"Only as a companion on the road, prince," Paul replied, taking a whip—the *najayka*, as it is called—that one of the footmen handed to him.

The princess having replied to her husband that she was ready, the master of Pampeln gave a signal, the horns sounded, the dogs barked twice as loud as before, the riders gave the reins to their mounts, and the party set out. [Pg 33]

Five minutes later the whole troop was galloping along the road to Elva.

It was about twenty minutes from the start when, taking advantage of the fact that Pierre Olsdorf was in earnest conference with his *stremenoy*—as the Russians call the chief huntsman—Paul Meyrin drew near to the princess. As usual, she was encircled by a crowd of adorers, among whom was naturally found that good fellow Podoi, who, in spite of his age, was still a daring sportsman.

It seemed as if the old soldier had foretold the truth in assuring the Countess Barineff, to persuade her to accept his name, that in marrying him she would be restoring his youth to him. He had never been more smart.

"I must compliment you, monsieur," said Lise Olsdorf to the young painter when she saw him take up a position at some paces from her, after making his horse execute a curvet that was both clever and daring.

The fact is, Paul Meyrin, without belonging to any great school of horsemanship, rode as few men can ride. His horse, a hardy little mare of the country, full of fire, at first had tried all she could to unseat him, but soon finding that she was under her master, she had yielded, her mouth full of foam and her flanks quivering.

Paul, replying only by a bow to the young woman's compliment, joined the others who were cantering near her.

In rather more than another half hour they came to the Elva farm, where such as did not accompany the prince further were to rest a short time before returning to Pampeln.

Forewarned by a huntsman sent on in advance, the farmer Soublaieff was there with his people, but before any one else had approached the princess, the painter was by her side and offering his hand. [Pg 34]

A little surprised at his quick movement, Lise Olsdorf hesitated for a moment; but feeling that to refuse the aid of the young foreigner would be to confess, by implication, that she thought him dangerous, she swayed forward, and he lifted her to the ground so lightly and cleverly, and with such strength of arm, that the sensation was a pleasant one for her.

"Thanks, monsieur," she said, lifting the long skirt of her riding-habit over her arm. "Do you stay with us, then?"

"I am not a sportsman, Madame la Princess," he replied, "so that I ask permission to return with you to Pampeln."

"You know well that all our guests are perfectly free to do what best pleases themselves."

And Lise Olsdorf, who was unwilling to approve in any other form the artist's intention, left him, to respond affectionately to the salutation of a young girl barely sixteen years old who was advancing to meet her.

It was Vera, Soublaieff's daughter.

Like most women of Southern Russia, Vera was a decided brunette. From the purity of her features, the perfect oval of her face, and the smallness of her head, she might have been taken

to be of Grecian origin. Her large eyes, shaded by long, up-curved lashes, were unspeakably gentle: a virginal smile was constantly playing about her scarlet and slightly parted lips, revealing the pearly teeth. From the national head-gear that she wore two long braids of hair hung, reaching to below the waist, which was defined by her linen dress of various bright colors. Reared at the château until she was fifteen years old, Vera spoke French with a pure accent, had some knowledge of music, and, through her natural elegance of movement of bearing, was a charming child.

Her father, who loved her fondly, could not make up his mind to part with her to the princess, who had several times asked him to do so, wishing that Vera should be a sort of elder sister to her little son.

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Paul Meyrin was too much of an artist not to pay homage to Vera's beauty. The princess had kissed her tenderly. Thinking that it could not but please Lise Olsdorf, he said, approaching her:

"What a lovely young girl that is. I supposed that only women of your station in life could be so perfectly beautiful."

"You see that you were mistaken, monsieur," the princess replied, rather ungraciously. "Vera is, in fact, very pretty. She is just as good and as modest, and I love her very much."

Then, moving toward the group of hunters, who had not dismounted, she left the painter standing there, and asking himself uneasily if he had not a second time displeased the woman whom he was growing more infatuated about hour by hour.

A few minutes later the blasts on the horns were again heard, the hunters went off on their way toward the Wandau, and the princess, having remounted with the aid of one of the servants, gave the signal for a start to be made. She wished to be back at the château by breakfast-time.

Paul was the only male guest of the prince who had not joined the hunt, and he reckoned on the fact to afford the chance of an explanation between himself and Lise; but in the course of the hour that was spent on the return journey to Pampeln he could not get a moment alone with the princess. She never was away from the side of the carriages in which her mother and friends were.

Vexed and desperate, wondering whether it was that Lise Olsdorf dreaded him or that she was merely a coquette and laughing at him, Paul Meyrin determined to force her hand. Fortune was about to give him a chance of doing so sooner than he had dared to hope—that very day indeed.

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In the evening, about six o'clock, when the few guests remaining at the château were going to their rooms to dress for dinner, the artist saw the princess crossing the lawn and going toward one of the alleys of the park.

Within five minutes, having gone a roundabout way, Paul, as if he had come from the outskirts of the park, met the young woman face to face.

Lise was walking with lowered head, pushing aside idly with the end of her parasol the dead leaves blown from the oaks and cedars, whose great branches met overhead in a thick arch, which made the spot dim and mysterious.

At the sound of the painter's footsteps she raised her eyes.

"You?" she exclaimed, in an ironical voice. "So you are as good a runner as you are a horseman."

"I don't understand you," said Paul, bowing.

"Because you don't want to. A few moments ago, as I was coming down the steps from the house, I saw you at one of the windows of the fencing-room. You must have been very fleet, then, to be here as soon as I am, coming direct from the château, while you seem to be coming from the other side of the park."

Finding his stratagem exposed, Paul Meyrin could not but blush slightly. He quickly recovered his composure, and said frankly:

"Well then, yes, you are right, madame. Chance is not to be thanked for this meeting. For some days now I have been trying in vain to speak to you. You seemed to avoid me; and I have dared, therefore, to join you here and now."

After hesitating a moment or two, and seeming about to turn and retrace her steps, the daughter of the Countess Barineff, with an odd, resolute gesture, walked onward.

Paul walked beside her.

The last rays of the sun scarcely pierced the thick wall of verdure formed by the great trees of the avenue; the air was warm, charged with electricity, and heavy with the balsamic odors of the Norwegian pine-trees. From the woods could only be heard the rustle of a breeze, and the first timid notes, at long intervals, of the song-birds of the evening. Under these shades, in the perfumed air, a mysterious harmony reigned, a thrilling calm, of which nature alone has the secret.

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"What have you to say to me that is so interesting?" said the princess, after a momentary silence.

"I have a favor to ask of you."

"A favor? What?"

"That you will sit to me for a few hours."

Whether or not this was the proposal she had expected, the mistress of Pampeln trembled slightly.

As the princess did not reply, the painter added:

"You would not have me paint a masterpiece, then?"

The artist had spoken the words in so fervid and exalted a tone, that the princess, halting abruptly, and plunging as it were her eyes into Paul's, said, in a firm, vibrating voice:

"You love me, Monsieur Meyrin. That is what your request poorly hides."

"Madame."

"Let me speak. Neither of us is timid or fearful of calling things by their real name; neither of us is a coward, ready to fly before danger. You love me, or think you do; and you fancy that in the sittings you ask of me the chance would surely offer to speak to me of your love. But what if I do not love you?—if I look upon your protestations and declarations as outrages, and have you expelled from the house by my servants, what will you do, what will you say, what will become of you? Do you still hold by this masterpiece, which I say is a mere pretext?"

Lise Olsdorf, speaking thus, was superb in her energy. Paul looked at her with admiration. She had never seemed more beautiful or more desirable.

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"You do not answer," she went on. "So, then, I am not wrong."

"You are wrong, madame—wholly wrong. It is true that I love you madly, but my love is one of the feverish passions that have their birth in the hearts alone of artists who are adorers of the beautiful. I feel within me a medley of passions. You are not for the man who loves merely the woman desired; you are also for the painter, the model he has dreamed of—the marvel of grace and beauty that will inspire him. You are not simply the woman who says 'Love;' you are the ideal as well that says 'Glory.' If it were otherwise, should I have had the courage to follow you, should I dare to speak as I am speaking, to take your hand and tell you that with my soul, with my senses, with my imagination—I love you—I love you?"

Paul had seized her hands and was covering them with kisses.

Then there happened a strange and fatal thing between the two beings drawn one to the other by every passion. After tearing away her hands from his grasp, Lise Olsdorf, falling back a pace, grew deathly pale and staggered. Her eyes gleamed, her lips were parted, a guttural cry, passionate and almost savage, broke from them, and she fell into the arms of Paul, who had sprung forward to support her.

With a savage movement he crushed her in his arms, gluing his lips to hers.

Under the gloomy shades of the great alleys of Pampeln was no longer an irreproachable wife, or a Princess Olsdorf proud of her name. There was only a yielding woman conquered by desires until then unsatiated.

The other was the conqueror. The beast killed the soul.

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CHAPTER IV. GENERAL PODOI.

If I were a writer of the naturalistic school—that is, if I were without care for modesty or the choice of words—I should need here to summon physiology to my aid to paint in all its brutality the love that the Princess Olsdorf and Paul Meyrin felt for each other; and the lines that I should devote to this study, and the scenes that it would involve, would give their distinctive note to the book. They would probably make it successful, thanks to the unhealthy curiosity by which even the freshest readers are tainted nowadays, for we live in a strange age, when cynicism reigns alike in letters, art, business, and politics. Cynicism is indeed the only sovereign that our pseudo-republic is willing to accept.

In truth, license has never been so unbridled; never has mediocrity gone so far, impudence mounted so high, or indifferent work, dramatic and literary, had so much success, if cleverly launched. Our country, formerly known for its gallantry and good taste, has become the kingdom of what is common and vulgar.

This new state of things is due to many causes—the *abandon* of religion, the scandalous rapidity with which fortunes have been won, the eager desire to enjoy everything, and also—it is needless that one should dare to say it—the invasion of those numberless Southerners who have carried everything with a high hand, and brought with them into the society they have gained a footing in, the vanity, the extravagance, and the boastfulness inherent in their natures. A Gasçon or a Provençal may, of course, be an upright, worthy, and intelligent man, a devoted friend—I have

known many with these qualities, but too often they are lacking. One might suppose they were incompatible with the terrible accent of these men, their epileptic gestures, their rage for loud talking, for calling people by their names, and for talking of their own affairs to everybody. And if the Southerner is a Jew, too, the case is worse than ever, for then no place or reward is safe from his greed.

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To put against the few men of wit, the occasional writers of the first order, the two or three poets that the South has given us, what noisy, insolent, troublesome *parvenus* Paris owes to it! It would seem that everything is these people's, of right. They slip in everywhere, shamelessly, jostling one another, greedy of place and honor rather than avaricious. Such of them as are not poets or musicians are hair-dressers, or croupiers at gambling-tables, or statesmen.

This calamitous invasion has come upon us chiefly from the right bank of the Garonne, and the sea-coast; for further inland, toward the mountainous country, these Southerners are of another kind—almost a different race. First they have a less marked accent, and, second, some indisputable qualities are theirs.

One class of these new-comers are of no particular country. They come from everywhere—from South America as well as from the banks of the Nile; from the Gulf of Mexico as well as from the far East; and the sore that eats into our very marrow is owing to the enthusiastic welcome Paris gives to their high-sounding names and suspicious fortunes. Lacking all the good points of the Southerners, whose faults usually spring from exuberant vigor and fancifulness, these foreigners take Paris for a kind of modern Capua. They are the dealers in commonplace, the readers of obscene works, the originators of every debauchery.

The result is seen in voice and gesture, in a freedom of bearing and a frivolity which, in great part, are the cause of our social fall, and, as a consequence, of the success achieved by erotic books, written in a language scarcely intelligible, and by unhealthy volumes which, stinking at one and the same time of the sewer and of opopanax, might have been printed at Lesbos.

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Now, as I have no ambition to write one of these books, I will only say what is needful to make myself understood of the passion which had brought Lise Olsdorf and Paul Meyrin together. What I wish to sketch is the moral depths into which a woman quickly sinks when, yielding to her animal desires alone, she throws herself blindly and recklessly into the arms of a man who is of neither her world, race, nor education.

Love, in the pure acceptation of the word, even when it is not legitimate, must occasion an exchange of lofty sentiments, sacrifices, and devotion between those who feel it for one another. It outlives all trials; in the pride of its abnegation it will provoke them on occasion. Passion, on the contrary, when the soul is a stranger to it, is made up of egotism and material gratifications.

In such a case, in the hands of a man who knows he is more desired than loved, the woman is no longer an adorable companion in life who encourages and consoles, a faithful friend whose joy doubles our joys. She becomes an instrument of pleasure, whose jealous owner would have not only all her moments of *abandon*, but all her smiles and her most trifling thoughts. She must live for him alone, please him only, be beautiful before him alone. Destroying the aspirations of the woman who has thus rashly given herself up to him, her master soon makes of her a slave, whose heart, stifled by its surroundings, ere long ceases to beat. And when the day of satiety and *abandon* comes, there remains of the ideal creature of God nothing but a worthless woman, soiled in her own eyes, and fated thenceforward to lead a life of weariness and disgust.

But Lise Olsdorf, abandoning herself to the fierce passion that had seized upon her, could not imagine that perhaps such a future loomed before her. The many hunting excursions of the prince left her practically at full liberty, for when the male guests of Pampeln were away hunting, there remained at the château scarcely any one but middle-aged, placid people, who retired early, and who, for that matter, on account of the very reputation of the princess, did not dream of spying upon her.

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Moreover, there was an excellent excuse for the lovers being for hours at a time together. The day after that which had settled their fate, the painter had begun the portrait of the mistress of Pampeln, and everybody—Pierre Olsdorf more than any one else—was interested in this work, which promised to be noteworthy.

Under the empire of his passion for her, Paul Meyrin had at first wished to paint the princess as Diana the Huntress, her hair in a Grecian knot, her shoulders bare, her bust scarcely veiled; but, on seeing a sketch of the future picture, Lise Olsdorf was alarmed. It seemed to her that everything in it betrayed at once the painter's love for her, and she begged him not to go on with the work. Paul consented, but on condition that his model, re-enacting for him the shamelessness of the Italian princess for Canova, would let him some day secretly, for themselves alone, reproduce on canvas the splendor of all her beauty. And Lise, having promised in a passionate embrace, Paul Meyrin, going from one extreme to the other, painted her in a riding-habit, severely chaste.

Within a fortnight the portrait was nearly finished, and the prince, who naturally suspected nothing of his conjugal misfortunes, thanked Paul Meyrin, and authorized him to take the portrait to Paris for hanging in the next exhibition.

At each hour passed with Paul, the princess's love increased. It was in some sort purified by the admiration she felt for the artist at his work.

While the sittings lasted, at liberty to see him for a long time every day, she loved him better and less wantonly; but, wishful as the painter was to linger with his work, prudence obliged him at last to admit that he had finished, and consequently to put an end to the daily interviews in private. Then Lise's passion retook its first fierce form.

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Deprived of the interviews in the course of which, satisfied and glutted, she could gather a store of calmness for the rest of the day, she became jealous, troubled, rash. Soon she was so little mistress of herself that General Podoi's wife, helped by her own experience in like affairs, guessed at a part, at least, of what was going on.

Alarmed—not in her virtue, but in her affection, which was wholly of pride—for her daughter, as to the consequences that might follow upon such an intrigue, the ex-Countess Barineff watched the princess more closely. It was soon impossible to have any doubt of her relations with the handsome foreigner, for one evening her mother caught them almost in each other's arms in the great alley of Pampeln, which had been the scene of the declaration of their love.

The general's wife was, as we have said, a woman of energy. The next morning, before breakfast, wasting no time in beating about the bush, she appeared in Paul Meyrin's room, without having her visit announced beforehand.

Astonished, to begin with, by her appearance, the artist was very soon still more so by her speech, for without preamble or oratorical devices she said:

"Monsieur, I come to ask you to bid adieu to the other guests this very day, and to leave Pampeln. You will write to the prince, who is away and will not be back before night, that you have had letters from Paris summoning you to return at once."

"I do not understand you, madame," stammered the young man.

"You had better, however, without forcing me to explain further. I introduced you to Prince Oldsdorf, and I am therefore in some degree answerable for your behavior under his roof. This responsibility is already too great, and I desire not to be any longer under it."

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"But, madame, were the prince to believe the excuse I should make, following your advice, for my sudden leave-taking, there are others who perhaps would be less credulous."

"That is no concern of mine. You may tell them what you like. The best way would be to say nothing—to anybody; but you must go. Give me your promise."

"Must?"

"You know well that I have the right—that it is my duty—to speak thus."

"And if I refuse to obey?"

"If you refuse, in ten minutes' time two of General Podoi's friends will wait on you with a challenge—discreet friends who will find reasons for a duel that will compromise nobody but myself. The shame of fighting with an old man will be yours, and then you can not stay here."

That good fellow Podoi had little idea that the woman who bore his name was at that moment disposing of his life so calmly. Still, she knew that there was no need to consult her husband in any event, and that in a delicate case of the kind she would find him, as he always was, ready to obey any wish of hers.

Much embarrassed, and knowing not how to get himself out of this downright trap, Paul Meyrin was silent. He was sure that he had to do with a woman that would not give way.

"Come, now," the ex-Countess Barineff went on, dryly, "will you or will you not go?"

"I will go," replied the painter, bowing.

"This evening?"

"You will surely grant me a respite of twenty-four hours. I promise I will start to-morrow morning."

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"No, you must go to-day, before the prince returns. There are horses and a carriage at your disposal to take you to Mittau. You will do well to go thence straight to Paris. If your stay in Russia were heard of here, after your sudden departure from Pampeln, it might give rise to questions. I want to avoid that."

The tone she had spoken these words in did not suffer Paul to hesitate.

"Very well, then, madame," he said, "I will leave this evening."

"Without seeing—you know whom?" said Lise's mother.

"No; I won't promise that! If I did not pay my respects to all whom they are due to before I quit the château, in the first place I should be set down as a boor, and besides, your end would not be granted, for everybody would try to find out the cause of such singular conduct."

"You pretend not to understand me. I will speak more plainly, much as it costs me to do so. You shall not see the princess again in private."

"I can promise you one thing alone, that I will not provoke an explanation between Madame la Princess and myself. You must admit that if she honors me by demanding one I could not refuse her it."

"She will not try to see you."

"She may do so."

"I hope otherwise."

"In that case, madame, we are agreed. All shall be done as you wish. I will write now to the prince explaining my departure."

Content with having got this promise, she left him and went at once to her daughter's room.

The princess was at her toilet when her mother came into the room.

"Send away the maid," she said; "I have something to say to you."

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Rather surprised, Lise Olsdorf obeyed. Then turning to her mother, she asked, with a smile:

"What have you to tell me that is so mysterious?"

"I have just requested Monsieur Paul Meyrin to leave Pampeln to-day," replied the ex-Countess Barineff.

The princess understood all, and anger flushed her face with blood; but not losing self-command, she replied calmly:

"Why do you tell *me* this? I presume you have the prince's authority for taking such a step in respect to one of his guests."

"I have consulted nobody. Monsieur Meyrin's longer stay here might at any hour be the occasion for a scandalous scene. My duty was to do what I have done."

"Has this young man bowed to your orders without protesting or defending himself?"

"He is going away this evening."

"Very good. I will see him directly."

"It would be far better to rather avoid any interview with him."

"Why, pray? I wish to know what means you have employed to obtain from Monsieur Paul Meyrin so ready and blind a submission."

"What does that matter to you?"

"It matters this, that if Monsieur Meyrin is the man I take him for, he will not leave before having heard me."

"You must be responsible then for what may happen."

"Why, what will happen?"

"You will see."

"Come, mother, don't let us talk in enigmas. What are you imagining? By what right do you interfere in what concerns me alone?"

"What I imagine, or rather what I am certain of, I will not say, out of respect to you. My interference is a fulfillment of my duty. After rearing you with a view to create for you a future according to my ambition, after having made a princess of you, I will not suffer you to ruin everything on account of a ridiculous caprice."

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Lise Olsdorf could not master a thrill of anger and pain. The glitter in her great eyes told her mother that she had overshot the mark. A ridiculous caprice, this ungovernable passion that had thrown her into Paul Meyrin's arms!

She recovered herself somewhat, however, and replied bitterly:

"Yes, that is true. You have made a princess of me, and, as you say—to satisfy your ambition. You would have acted more wisely if you had made me a happy woman. You forced me to marry a man who did not love me, and whom I did not and could not love. Is it my fault if the blood of an artiste runs in my veins?"

"Well—of an artiste?" said Mme. Podoi, haughtily.

"Bah! As if these tastes and these aspirations were not derived from yourself!"

The ex-comédienne at these words started indignantly.

The past that she had long since forgotten and wished never to recall, her daughter reminded her of. How came she to know so much? Did she not know still more?

Possessed by this thought, she said, more gently:

"It is no question of tastes or aspirations but of your honor and that of the prince, and you repay poorly my care for your peace of mind in trying to offend me. It would be better, I think, for both of us not to prolong the interview. I have spoken to you and to Monsieur Paul Meyrin, as it was my duty to speak. His going will seem quite natural when he has excused it as I have advised him to do. He will write to the prince, as I have suggested, and at least any scandal will be avoided. The day will come when you will thank me."

Lise's only reply to these last words was an ironical smile. As soon as her mother was gone, she quickly finished her toilet and went down to the dining-room, where most of the guests were already gathered.

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Paul Meyrin entered the room a few moments later. He was so pale and so evidently preoccupied that several persons asked him if he were not unwell.

"No," he replied, "but I have had bad news from Paris, and must leave Pampeln to-day."

At that moment the princess signed to him to come to her, and when he had done so she said, in a low, rapid voice:

"I know what has passed between my mother and you. I will wait for you in my room after luncheon."

Mme. Podoi, who had only come into the room leaning on the general's arm at that moment, did not notice what was going on. Besides, she had made up her mind not to interfere between her daughter and the painter, to avoid an outburst. M. Paul Meyrin was going away; that was the main thing in her eyes.

They sat down to table, but Lise Oldsorf soon excused herself from keeping her guests company any longer. An hour later, while the visitors to Pampeln were making for their rooms or strolling over the park, Paul, going by a roundabout way familiar to him through the principal rooms of the château, stole into the princess's private apartments.

She was there impatiently and feverishly awaiting him.

"You don't love me any longer, then," she cried, springing to him, "as you have submitted so easily to my mother's orders."

"Your mother has not told you, has she, what she threatened me with if I did not go?" he asked, reassuring his mistress with a thousand kisses.

"No, but I believe she would do anything to gain her end."

"She told me simply that if I did not leave Pampeln to-day, her husband would challenge me to a duel."

"Impossible."

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"That is the fact, and the thing has been cunningly thought out, for it is certain that if I were to fight the general I could not remain here afterward."

"But she would have to supply my step-father with some reason for a challenge."

"Oh, your mother is clever enough to find a reason."

"And he would obey her blindly, at the risk of being run through the body. He is simpleton enough for that. I know the influence his wife has over him."

"You see, I must needs go—not for my own sake, but for yours."

The princess grew somber and fierce. Reclining on a couch, she fixed her flashing eyes on her lover kneeling before her.

"So be it then," she said, after a moment of silence, winding her arms about Paul's neck. "So be it—go; but soon to meet again. It is my mother herself who will be to blame for it."

"Why, what do you mean?" asked the painter, pressing Lise to his heart.

"I mean that before winter is upon us I shall be in Paris. She sends you away, does she—she separates us? Well, I will go to you."

The artist gave a cry of joy; and mad, intoxicated, careless of danger, they forgot all else but their love and their dreams of the future.

That evening Paul Meyrin left Pampeln, after writing to the prince in the sense agreed on with Mme. Podoi. At the same time he made his excuses for being unable to await the prince's return, thank him in person for his hospitality, and take formal leave of him.

It was the middle of September, and the stay in Courland, according to the ordinary custom, would last until the early part of October. Lise had mapped out her course, and was so completely master of herself that her mother soon came to think that she had exaggerated the danger, and that her daughter had almost forgotten Paul Meyrin.

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Two months later she saw her mistake, when the prince himself told her in St. Petersburg that his wife was going to Paris for medical advice as to the state of her health, about which she was

uneasy.

At this quite unlooked-for news the general's wife had almost betrayed the anger and indignation she felt. Happily she restrained herself, and hurried to her daughter.

She found her preparing for the departure. At the first glance to the trunks that the maids were packing, she could see the absence was meant to be a long one.

"So," she said, after leading her daughter to another room, "you are going to Paris? Why did you say nothing to me of this journey?"

"I do not start until to-morrow. I was coming to say good-bye this evening."

"And this journey is taken on account of your health?"

"Undoubtedly."

"You can imagine that I don't believe that?"

"Then it would be useless to question me, as, if what you suppose be true, I can not, and ought not, to confess it to you."

What the princess could not and would not tell her mother was that she was *enceinte* by Paul Meyrin, and that this, more even than her love for him, compelled her to leave her husband at once.

"Do you imagine that your husband will always be ignorant of what is going on?" said Mme. Podoi, after a moment's silence.

"I don't know what you mean," said Lise, shrugging her shoulders.

"Suppose I were to warn the prince?"

"Warn him? About what? It is either too late or too soon. If it is too late, nothing shall hinder me pursuing my aims; and, thanks to you, there will be a scandalous rupture between Pierre and me. If, on the contrary, it is too soon, you will do a bad action for the sake of doing it, for the prince has perfect confidence in me. He would not believe you, and I should start on my journey all the same. Come, mother, I advise you not to mix yourself up with my affair. I am married—that is, I have to render account of my conduct to my husband alone. When the day to do so shall come—if unhappily it should come ever—I shall know how to defend myself; I won't ask for your help. If you are willing you need say and stick to but one thing—that I am very far from well, and that as Doctor Psaroff, clever as he is, can do nothing for me, I am going to Paris to take the advice of more eminent men."

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"Does the doctor believe you are unwell?"

"Can not women always be as ill as they wish to be, in spite of the keenest-sighted doctors?"

"Lise, there will be a bad ending to all this!"

"Fools alone make bad endings. Besides, I trust in Providence."

The dry, cutting, cynical tone of the princess in meeting each of her mother's objections left no room for insistence. Lise Olsdorf could be wounded on one point alone—her maternal love; but Mme. Podoi had omitted to speak of her son, whom she must leave in Russia. What she dreaded was that her daughter would lose the high position she had won for her. Her pride being touched, to begin with, she had not given a thought to the only weapon which she could have used with effect.

"Then, adieu," said she, rising; and without so much as kissing her daughter, she left the room.

The princess did not try to keep her, but went back to her packing.

She had made up her mind to take no servant with her, not even a lady's-maid, because to do so would be to risk exposure some day or other as to her condition.

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To the affectionate concern of the prince as to her loneliness she replied that it seemed to her far better to engage a maid and a footman when once she was at her journey's end, for the few weeks she meant to remain in France, than to be troubled by servants that were strange to Paris and its manners and could therefore be only useless.

The prince gave way, and next morning his wife set out for Paris.

Forty-eight hours after, Paul Meyrin had a telegram from Konigsberg, which he had been eagerly awaiting, to announce the coming of his mistress to Paris.

CHAPTER V. PRINCESS AND MODEL.

Of course the Princess Olsdorf was not unknown to Paul Meyrin's relatives. On his return from

Russia, being questioned by his family on the incidents of his journey, the painter was forced to speak of the Oldsdrfs and the hospitality he had enjoyed at Pampeln. He must needs show them the portrait of the princess, too, as it was to be shown at the coming exhibition.

We must therefore introduce the Meyrin family to our readers, amid whom some of the chief scenes of the story will happen.

Some ten years before the time of which we are speaking, the family had left Bucharest to come and live in Paris. Frantz Meyrin, Paul's elder brother, had some skill as a violinist. He was a member of an orchestra imported into Austria and Germany, where the concerts they gave were much appreciated. The Roumanian artiste had accepted the offer of the Barnum who exhibited his and his companions' talents in this country, and that with the sole idea of settling wheresoever he saw a chance of making his fortune, or at any rate of establishing himself well. After playing in most of the chief towns of Europe, he came to Paris, where the success he won determined him to stay. When he came to depend upon himself alone, the struggle at first was a hard one, but Frantz was energetic and laborious. Things soon improved. Before a year had passed he had pupils enough to make him easy about the future.

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Then he sent for those of his family that he had left behind in Roumania—his old mother; his wife, Barbe; his daughter, Nadeje, a child of five; and his young brother Paul, who had just turned fifteen.

The little girl was clever, and she was to be trained as a musician, and Paul, who also showed aptitude, was to be a painter.

At first they all lived together in the Rue Nollet, at Batignolles; afterward, Frantz's success as a teacher and an executant having made its mark, they were able to take more comfortable rooms in the Rue de Douai.

Six or eight years later Nadeje was entered as a pupil at the Conservatoire, and Paul, under the tuition of Bouguereau, exhibited at the Salon a portrait of a child which won an honorable mention and made him known.

Paul had grown up into a handsome young fellow, well built and strong. With his dark complexion, fine black eyes, and silky beard in its first growth, it was easy to guess that he would be successful among the women. But under this outward show of strength the young painter had a character lacking in energy and originality. Lazy and effeminate, he was entirely under the rule of his mother, and above all, of his sister-in-law, Mme. Frantz Meyrin. She was the autocrat of the household. She governed them all, her husband—a good fellow, who was untiring in his work as a teacher and player—as well as Paul, whose rare and feeble attempts at self-emancipation she repressed. The violinist's wife was proud and weak about her daughter alone, in favor of whose future everything had to give way.

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Through a psychological phenomenon which, becoming commoner from day to day, is a mark of our practical epoch, all in this family of artistes, for Mme. Meyrin herself was an excellent musician—was tradesman-like and prosaic—manners, dispositions, tastes, aspirations. Success was only success with them when it brought in plenty of money. It mattered nothing to Mme. Meyrin whether her husband had executed a piece of music in a masterly manner, or Paul had drawn with skill a child's head. How much had been paid for them? That was the only question, as well too, unhappily, for Frantz and his brother as for the mistress of the household.

While devoting themselves to their work at the time of doing it, the musician and the painter did not linger long in these regions of high art after they had laid aside the one his violin, the other his brush. They did not work without taste, but they worked in the most prosaic acceptance of the word, hastening in a sense to finish the task that the material wants of life put upon them.

Their mode of life had its natural results in the matter of friendships and acquaintances. Though justice was done to his talents and modesty and tact, Frantz got no higher than being a paid musician at the houses where he played. As much from economy as through her indifference to society, Mme. Meyrin held few receptions. She gave in the course of a winter three or four musical matinées, to show off her husband's pupils, and especially her daughter.

As for the friends of the family, they numbered a dozen at most—some countrymen of theirs, a few musicians, Armand Dumesnil, an old actor at the Odéon, and a young woman, Mme. Daubrel, the heroine of a very painful story.

Married when quite young to a man in a large way of business as an export agent, an honest fellow, Marthe Daubrel, who was of a romantic turn of mind and was often left alone by her husband, had listened to the madrigals of a third-class writer. Thanks to her romantic imagination and her inexperience, she had yielded to him, was about to become a mother, and had confessed everything to her husband, who, instead of taking a violent revenge, appealed to the law, a judicial separation being decreed on his petition. He returned her dowry to his adulterous wife, and emigrated, taking with him the son she had borne to him before her fall.

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Within three months' time Mme. Daubrel was delivered of a daughter, who lived but a few weeks. Her illusions dispelled, she broke off all intercourse with her seducer, returned to her mother, and, gentle and resigned, speaking of her husband only with the greatest respect, determined to expiate the past by conduct irreproachable at all points. She lived isolated, and saw scarcely anybody but the Meyrins. She had been one of the first pupils of Mme. Frantz when she, on first

coming to Paris, had to give lessons on the pianoforte to increase the resources of the family. With an indulgence one would scarcely have looked for in her, Mme. Meyrin excused, pitied the poor woman, and liked her very much.

As for Paul, his natural idleness, his want of backbone, the surroundings he lived amid, all had a bad influence on his talents. It was to be feared that he would never rise to higher work than that which had at first occupied him; that he would remain a painter, in a pleasing fashion, of women and children, and faithful to his blue and pink colors.

However, he made headway, and chiefly in the Russian colony.

Orders followed upon orders, and he began to be paid very fairly, to the joy of Mme. Meyrin, who was his self-appointed steward and cashier. Indeed, when five-and-twenty Paul was not thoroughly out of leading-strings. He had his studio on the Boulevard de Clichy, at a short distance from the Rue de Douai, but he still lived with his family. His sister-in-law would not have suffered any other arrangement, for his removal would have deprived the Meyrin household of a notable part of its income. Mme. Frantz seemed to think that no change would ever come.

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The rule he was under, from which he dared make no effort to free himself, determined Paul to lend an ear to the propositions to Count Barewski one fine day. He had painted a full-length portrait of the Countess Barewski which was not without merit, and her husband had persuaded him that if he would accompany him to St. Petersburg he would be received by the Russian aristocracy after a fashion that would result in a rich harvest.

The painter lost no time in telling his family of the plan. At first his sister-in-law Barbe had declared against it, but when Paul had explained what he hoped would be the outcome in money of his journey she consented to his going. Thereupon Paul had set off to Russia in company with Count Barewski.

In an earlier chapter we have seen what a flattering reception the young artist had at the hands of a goodly number of the Russian nobility, and notably on the part of Prince Olsdorf; and we know what were the consequences, for the honor of Lise Barineff's husband, of the hospitality which he so graciously offered to Paul Meyrin in Courland.

Let us anticipate by some days the arrival of the Princess Olsdorf in Paris, where Paul, in spite of her promise to him, had not looked to see her so soon.

From the day after their separation the lovers had written to each other regularly, but they could not say by post all that they thought. Made acquainted by his mistress of the customs and practices of the Russian Government, the painter knew that all letters, going or coming, were stopped and read at the frontier by clerks whose discretion was more than doubtful. They had both been forced, therefore, to write with great care, and apt as their love made them to read between the lines of their guardedly affectionate letters, the correspondence instead of calming had given a sharper edge to their passion.

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Two or three times the princess, it is true, had used the good offices of one or other of her women friends to intrust them with letters in which she could give herself rein, but Paul had found no way of answering in the like strain; and Lise worse off than her lover, had often tormented herself with the question whether she was still passionately loved.

It is certain she would have doubted it somewhat could she have known in all its details the life the artist led at Paris. In fact, though he adored the princess, Paul had nevertheless taken up the course of his old life; nor did he think himself unfaithful to his love in renewing on his return the intrigues he had had at the time of his departure for Russia.

Amid the former sweethearts of the young man was one who had played a more important part than the others. She was one Sarah Lamber, very pretty, a ballet-girl at the theaters of burlesque, and a well-known model in the studios. After posing for Paul five or six times she had taken a great fancy to him, and the painter had made her his mistress, supposing that it would be with her as it had been with others who had gone before her; that is, that he would rid himself of her easily when it pleased him so to do.

He was mistaken. Sarah, a handsome bohemian, like so many others of her class in Paris, in spite of the change which has come about of late in the manners of the shady world—Sarah cared little about having everything she might take a fancy to. What she did want, and for the first time perhaps, was to be loved as she herself loved. Thanks to the want of grit in Paul's character she had gained such an ascendancy over him that he had to steal away unknown to her when he left Paris.

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He wrote to her from St. Petersburg to explain the reasons for his journey, and as he did not foresee that he was about to be the hero of the adventure with which our readers have been made acquainted, he had not failed to promise Sarah that he would always love her and would return soon.

The young woman had made up her mind to bear his absence, but she had forgotten him so little that within twenty-four hours of his return to Paris she was in his arms. The artist tried to resist her; but to have repulsed Sarah he would have had to say that he loved another. He did not dare. Besides, he was young, ardent; and the model was a superb creature, full of fire, reminding him, though a brunette, of the Princess Olsdorf. He kept silence, yielded; and their old relations were begun anew.

From time to time—for instance, when a letter from Lise reached him—Paul felt some remorse; but he dared not break off with Sarah now; besides which, he did not think the princess would ever be able to keep her promise of rejoining him in France.

This was the state of things when he got the telegram which told him that in two days she would be in Paris.

At the news the painter lost his head for the moment. No doubt Lise's coming, reawakening all his desires, gave him very great joy, but he asked himself with terror what he was to do with Sarah. The princess would be sure to wish to see his studio, she would make long stays there, and as it would be practically impossible for him to shut out the model altogether, the two women would before long be face to face. It was easy to foresee what would happen then. Lise was not the woman to give way; he knew by experience how little she cared about compromising herself; on the other hand, Sarah was not a girl to complacently make room for a rival, especially when she saw that the struggle would be against a woman of fashion.

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Paul was so troubled at the anticipation of this conflict that he could think of nothing else to do than to tell the facts to his brother. It was like consulting a blind man on a question of colors. Frantz knew nothing of the A B C of passion, and consequently could not see that difficulties of the kind submitted to him were real. He could find only a single remedy for the evil. It was a simpleton's. The artist must forbid the princess to come to his studio, on the plea that she would be exposed to meet there too often people not of her world. Meanwhile Paul would have leisure to break off gently with Sarah.

Charmed with the idea, and himself imagining none better, Frantz's brother adopted the plan, and on the following day, scarcely at all uneasy in his mind, he met the princess at the Great Northern Station.

We know that Lise Olsdorf had traveled alone, bringing with her no servants, not even a lady's-maid. She wanted to be free from the moment of her departure. On seeing Paul she sprung into his arms without care for the onlookers, or for her countrymen who had come by the same train.

Greatly moved, the painter almost carried her to the carriage he had waiting, and for some moments, forgetful of everything, they remained pressed against each other, exchanging only broken words and warm caresses.

However, they must needs return to reality and look after the luggage. Paul wished to go alone to claim it, but the young woman would not leave him for a moment, and there they were presently, both of them, mixed up with the other travelers. So they passed half an hour, not impatient, because they were with one another. At last the princess's trunks were delivered to them and put upon an omnibus, Paul giving the address of the Baden Hotel to the driver. Lise Olsdorf had telegraphed thither for rooms.

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Twenty minutes later they were at table, and the great Russian lady was telling her lover how she had won her husband's consent that she should leave St. Petersburg. When she ended by telling him that she was about to become a mother, and that she wished to bring into the world while near him this child, whose father he was, there was a renewal of fervid tenderness between them.

They determined what their mode of life should be thenceforward, beginning with the next day. Every evening they would dine together, and when they did not remain at the hotel they would go to the theater.

Lise Olsdorf knew nothing of Paris but what she had heard from her countrymen. She was eager to see it, leaning on Paul's arm. Then she would keep him company in his studio, for he must work and grow famous. And, then, he had to paint this portrait of her which she had refused to pose for at St. Petersburg, and the idea made her thrill voluptuously.

What had seemed impossible to her in Russia was quite simple in France. At Paris was not she his alone and entirely? What did she care now for the world! What had she to fear? Who could say whether she would ever return to the banks of the Neva! He must introduce her, too, to his family. She wanted to be loved by all whom Paul loved. Oh, trust her to charm the ladies of his family. She knew how to win a mother's heart, she said, with an air of profound conviction; it was through her children. Now she would only give his little niece a week to be desperately in love with her.

Paul, who had listened to these plans with as much pride as joy, had not the courage to protest against the long visits the princess meant to pay him; so that next day, when she came to him in the Boulevard Clichy at the hour she had appointed, he was all the time in a state of alarm. He had, indeed, told Sarah that he expected some strangers, and that he would be glad if she would not come as usual, but, all the same, he dreaded the curiosity of the young girl, who, perhaps, would not guess how compromising her presence there might be.

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However, Sarah did not come this day, and the princess, untroubled by an appearance that would assuredly have aroused her suspicions, could examine at her ease the studio which the painter had spent pains in adorning. Unhappily, the artistic things it contained were not many. Here and there were a few indifferent pictures, presents from friends, some sketches, some plaster casts, and, in the middle of the room, on an easel with dark-colored drapery, the portrait of the mistress of Pampeln.

It was what Lise Olsdorf's eyes first fell on. Full of gratitude and love she sunk into her lover's arms, saying, passionately:

"You were waiting, were you not, to paint the other?"

"The other" was the portrait that the painter had sketched at the château, and the princess had not dared to let him finish.

What most struck the artist's mistress, however, was the want of elegance in the studio.

She took, as it were, a detailed note of what was lacking, and next day Paul saw delivered at his rooms a superb selection of fanciful Japanese silks.

They were accompanied by a note in these words only:

"The Princess Olsdorf to her painter in ordinary."

For a moment or two the young painter thought of refusing this present, but he was afraid of rebuffing Lise too cruelly. As it was early and he did not expect her before the afternoon, he sent for a neighboring upholsterer and set to work with him.

In less than an hour the studio was transformed. The walls, distempered in a dull gray, were hidden under brilliant hangings, artistically draped; a thick carpet covered and made more level the rough wooden floor, while the large sofa had assumed quite an Oriental look, with its ample drapery of many-colored cashmere. [Pg 62]

Paul was quite vain of his work, and was eying it proudly, scarcely thinking of the sources of his riches, when the door opened suddenly and admitted Sarah, whom he had forgotten altogether.

"The deuce!" she exclaimed, stopping on the threshold of the studio, "how grand we are here. One might be at Carolus's. Have you become a millionaire in this last twenty-four hours? Was it to give me this surprise that you forbade me to come? That was very nice of you."

The young girl had flung her arms about Paul's neck, and he, though he did not repulse her, could find nothing to say. But he had grown so red and was so plainly ill at ease that the model added, quickly:

"I seem to be in the way."

"No," stammered the artist, "how can you be so foolish?—but—"

"But what? Come, speak out. Ah! this portrait. Whose is it?"

Up to this time the portrait had lain at Frantz Meyrin's. Out of prudence Paul had left it there. He had brought it to the studio only the day before.

"It is the Princess Olsdorf," he said, "a great Russian lady whose husband was most kind to me in St. Petersburg."

"You never told me about it. Why? Where was this picture?"

"In Russia. It came yesterday, that I might have time to work at it before the exhibition."

"She is a pretty woman."

"Yes; not bad."

"No doubt it was with the price of this portrait that you bought all these fine things."

"I painted five or six pictures over there, which I was well paid for." [Pg 63]

At this moment he heard the wheels of a carriage stopping before the house.

Going to the window he saw it was the princess's carriage.

Returning quickly to the young girl, who was looking with a frown, as if feeling a jealous presentiment, at the portrait of the stranger, he said to her:

"My little Sarah, if you are a dear, good little thing, you will go now. Here are visitors, and they had better not see so pretty a girl as you here."

"Why so?" replied the model, coldly. "Do Carolus and Henner send me away when visitors come?"

"I am not sending you away. I only ask you simply—"

It was too late.

There was a knock at the door, and, without waiting for an answer, the person came in.

It was the Princess Olsdorf.

At first she did not see Sarah, and was on the point of running to Paul, but, catching sight of this young girl, whose great black eyes were fixed on her with a strange look, Lise at once felt instinctively that she was in presence of a rival.

A complete change came over her face. The mistress was lost in the great lady as she said in a patronizing and ironical tone of voice.

"A thousand pardons, Monsieur Meyrin. I thought you were alone."

"Why, madame," the artist stammered, scarcely knowing what he said, and wishing himself buried a hundred feet deep in the ground, "it is much the same thing as if I were. Mademoiselle is not a stranger. She is a charming model, whom women of the best society often find in my studio, and in those of my most eminent brother artists."

"Mademoiselle is indeed a very beautiful person, well fitted to give inspiration to a painter," said the princess, with a smile, which stung Sarah so deeply that she said, quickly, in a hot tone: [Pg 64]

"Monsieur Meyrin might have added that his friends as well as himself show regard for me."

Paul saw that things would soon be in a mess if he did not do something to regulate them; but being little used to this sort of encounters, he would certainly have made some new blunder, when the princess, no doubt taking pity on him, said, going toward the door:

"My dear sir, I would not hinder you in your work. You are having a sitting probably; I will go. I shall see you this evening. You have not forgotten that we dine together and go to the opera afterward."

"Madame," said Paul, with a movement to hinder her going.

"No, no; it will be better so. This evening."

Without another look she went out quickly.

A few moments later the sound of the carriage wheels proved that she had driven off.

"Why could not you hold your tongue?" said the painter to Sarah. "In another moment you would have told the Princess Olsdorf that you are my mistress."

"So I ought to have done," the young girl said, angrily, "since you are her lover."

"Her lover—you are mad."

"If I am mad, I am not so blind nor such a fool as you think. I would bet it is this fine lady that has given you all these things. That is becoming, isn't it?"

"You don't know what you are talking about. If you are going to make these scenes with me you had better not come here any more."

"That is it—you are turning me off. Come, swear that you are not the lover of this woman."

Her eyes glittering, her voice threatening, she had seized the painter's hands. [Pg 65]

"You worry me," he said, pulling them away roughly.

"So I have guessed right," exclaimed the model. "Well, I will have my revenge on her and on you, too. Ah, women of good society take our lovers from us; they buy them. We shall see. This princess has a husband somewhere or other."

"You are mistaken; she is a widow."

"You lie. In your letters you often mentioned Prince Olsdorf. No doubt he is in Russia while his wife deceives him here; the idiot."

"Come, what can you do, when all is said? I can surely live as I like. After all, I am free."

"Why did you take up with me again on your return? You ought to have told me the truth."

"I had nothing to tell you. It was you who came back. I did not go to seek you."

"And what about your letters from Russia, in which you said you loved me still?"

Not knowing how to make an end of the scene, Paul became brutal.

"See now, Sarah, we have had enough of this," he said. "We loved one another; we don't love one another any longer. It happens every day. Instead of getting angry, let us remain good friends. We could not always have gone on as we were doing, could we? Besides—I should have had to tell you very soon—I am going to marry."

"You marry!" said Sarah, shrugging her shoulders, and not believing this fresh lie. "You marry! The princess, perhaps. You are a scoundrel. By heavens, your fine lady shall hear more of me. Good-bye."

And flinging open the door of the studio, the young girl rushed out.

"Ouf!" sighed the artist, flinging himself on the sofa. "That is over; so much the better." [Pg 66]

He sprung up again with a frown, and muttered:

"But the other one! What shall I tell her this evening? Bah, I shall find some way of calming her."

The princess herself was to save her lover the trouble of finding this way, for when he joined her at dinner and was very embarrassed, fearing some reproach, she said, tenderly:

"One word only, dear, about the meeting I had in your studio this morning. Swear that this girl is

nothing to you—that you will never receive or see her again; it is all I require of you."

"I swear it," said the painter, glad to get off so cheaply.

"Don't you feel," continued the young woman, "as I do, that there must not be the shadow of a cloud between us, not the faintest suspicion? Your past does not concern me; but your present is mine—wholly mine, is not it?"

"Wholly," repeated he, drawing her to his heart.

Two hours later the artist, having the princess on his arm, was mounting the grand staircase at the opera and taking his seat in their box.

Sarah had plainly not wasted the afternoon, for at once twenty opera-glasses were leveled at them; the name of the great Russian lady was whispered from stall to stall; and next day two or three of the morning papers recorded in their notices of the theaters that among the leaders of fashion present at the opera on the previous evening had been noticed the beautiful Princess Olsdorf, accompanied by her painter in ordinary, Paul Meyrin.

But these notices, between the lines of which it was so easy to read, did not trouble the noble stranger an instant. Determined to make no concession to public opinion, infatuated by her passion, she began with him she loved the life apart that she had dreamed of.

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Meanwhile, having full confidence in her, Prince Olsdorf, who had gone back to Pampeln, was hunting the wolf and the boar, stopping occasionally at Elva, the home of his tenant Soublaieff, the father of the pretty Vera.

CHAPTER VI.

PARIS AND ST. PETERSBURG.

The first care of the princess was to leave the Baden Hotel where she dreaded not being free to live according to her fantasy. She had found very comfortable furnished rooms in the Rue Lafitte, a few yards from the boulevard where she had taken up her residence after hiring the necessary servants, a cook, a lady's-maid, and a steward.

She next hired from one of the livery places in the Champs Elysées a well-appointed and well-horsed carriage, together with coachman and footman; and, having done this, she said to Paul one morning:

"Now, dear, that my life is arranged as I wished it to be, you must present me to your family. They already know me by name, so that it will be quite simple."

"Certainly," said the painter, who also thought this wish of his mistress a very natural one.

"Mesdames Meyrin must not know what I am toward you."

"My brother rather suspects the truth."

"Your brother? Well, what does it matter? When shall the introduction take place?"

"The best way, I think, would be for me to bring Frantz and present him to you."

"Yes. Well on what day? Ah, there is a good chance for us to make acquaintance. The Countess Waranzoff will be giving almost immediately a musical matinée for the benefit of the wounded in the last campaign in the Caucasus. I will see her this evening, and ask her to send for your brother to help her."

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"Excellent. That will put you at once into my sister-in-law's good books."

On the next day but one, in fact, after having received and accepted the proposition of the Countess Waranzoff, Frantz came with his wife to thank Lise Olsdorf, whose greeting of them was so gracious that they returned home charmed with the great Russian lady.

Two days later the adroit princess returned the visit, and, as she had promised Paul, she won his sister-in-law's heart completely by paying her a thousand compliments about Nadeje. A few days afterward she took the child in her carriage to the Bois and brought her back home loaded with toys and having a pretty gold necklet about her throat. Then she invited the Meyrins to dinner, took them to her box at the opera, and a week had not passed before the conquest of the family was made.

An excellent pianist, Lise Olsdorf begged Frantz to come and play with her twice a week, and she presented him in the Russian colony, where concerts were often given at which the executants were paid on a high scale.

All this flattered the Meyrins, and was profitable to them besides. Therefore Mme. Frantz was careful not to seek to know more than she was told of the relations between the princess and her brother-in-law. Lise Olsdorf's end was gained.

In acting thus the daughter of the Countess Barineff only yielded to the feeling which moves most

devoted and truly loving women to become intimate with the family of the man dear to them. It seems to them that in not remaining strangers to the ordinary life of their lover, or his business, or his work, they are something better and more than his mistress. It is a sort of consecration or rehabilitation for them. They feel less degraded, less alone, and armed so to speak, with a right.

Their affection grows the more inasmuch as they can thus, as legitimate companions, share the sorrows and joys of the man who esteems them so far as not to make of them mere instruments of pleasure. They become in a sensemorganatic wives, lacking only the name, and often not deserving less respect than if they had it.

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It soon came to pass that not a week went by without the princess receiving the Meyrins or being invited by them. She always came with hands full, seizing the slightest occasions, saints' days or anniversaries, to make presents to all the members of the family.

As for Paul, she saw him every day: to begin with, in his studio, where she posed for the picture in which she was painted half naked, as Diana the huntress—a picture which promised to be one of the artist's best, though the sittings were often suddenly interrupted and put off to the following day.

In the evening the two lovers dined together and went to the theater, leaving it arm in arm, without caring for the opinion of the public, which the writers of gossip for the newspapers had left in no doubt on the nature of their relations. It was a nine days' wonder, and then, as happens with these things at Paris, no more was said about it.

Still, notwithstanding all the indiscretions she was guilty of, the Princess Olsdorf was received as usual in the exclusive Russian set and the best Parisian drawing-rooms, where so plenary an indulgence reigns in matters of morality. This lasted a part of the winter, up to the time when it was no longer possible for her to hide the state she was in.

She was then obliged to give up going into society, and as a consequence she was more and more at the Meyrins', where she had made the acquaintance of the charming Mme. Daubrel, whose whole life Paul had told her.

Mme. Daubrel did not doubt that between the princess and the painter there was a closer tie than the Mmes. Meyrin affected to suppose; but as she recalled the time when she, too, an adulterous wife, had had so much to dread, she felt a deep sympathy for the noble foreigner, who, in return, showed her sincere affection.

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It was this affection, as well as the lonely life that her state forced her to live, that led Lise Olsdorf to tell all to the young woman, who replied, after hearing the tale:

"Alas, I have not the right to blame you. My past forbids me; but may God spare you the punishment I have suffered for my fault. A judicial separation has branded me—that was only just; but, more than that, I shall never see my son again, and I am abandoned by the man who made me forget my duty. As for that, I should have left him, for, living with him, I learned too late how worthy my husband was of my love. If I had not had my mother to devote myself to, I should have killed myself or gone into a convent."

"Ah, you did not love as I love," Lise said, interrupting her, "you were not loved as I am. I know your story. Your seducer was a dreamer, as it were—a man without genius or future. You fell through inexperience, curiosity of the soul, rather than through love. You were little more than a child. I was a woman when I gave myself to Paul. My heart and my senses awaited him in the solitude, in the blank that my husband made about me—a cold, austere, and passionless man, who had never been able to understand or love me."

"But the future—the future!"

"It will be what circumstances may make it; like yours, perhaps, save for the abandon of the man I love. I shall make a great artist of Paul. He will owe everything to me—his reputation, his genius, his success."

"One day or other your husband will require you to return to Russia. You will be forced then to separate from Monsieur Meyrin."

"No, never!"

"What reason will you give for prolonging your stay in Paris?"

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"I don't know. I shall say the doctors dread the effect of the Russian climate on my health. The prince will believe me. Meantime he will be hunting, and will trouble himself very little about me. When I have been confined we shall see."

Mme. Daubrel dared not add, "And your child—do you not think of him?" She knew that that was the only vulnerable point of the princess, who, in spite of her mad love for Paul, never spoke of her son except with tenderness, tears filling her eyes. When the passion infusing all her being let her think of anything else, she could not pardon herself for leaving him.

In consequence of this interchange of confidences, the friendship between Lise Olsdorf and Mme. Marthe Daubrel became closer, day by day, and very soon the princess—an adulterous wife—happy in her sin, had as her most devoted friend this little woman of the people, parted from her husband and repentant.

The tender, loving heart of Marthe had found a very feeble echo in Mme. Meyrin's, a woman of cold and reserved temperament; while the affection of her mother, who had not pardoned her for the past, could not satisfy all her longings. She therefore conceived the liveliest affection for this stranger, whose situation one day might be so like her own. Mme. Daubrel would have done anything to turn aside the danger that threatened Lise Olsdorf. She would even have declared herself the mother of the expected babe, but that before she could make this proposition to her, the princess had determined on a course from which there was no turning.

After hesitating long on what her conduct toward the prince should be, after deliberating with herself whether or not she should conceal her state from him, Lise Olsdorf felt that if she hid it she would be drawn into a chain of lies and condemned to a life as dangerous as it would be difficult. She therefore wrote to her husband shortly after her arrival in Paris to tell him that she was *enceinte*.

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The prince, whose confidence in her was absolute, replied that he was happy at the event, and that, as she was in France, it would be best that she should remain there until after her confinement. Besides, in each of his succeeding letters, while affectionately recommending the greatest prudence, he had added that he would not fail to come to Paris for her accouchement.

This promise was a thunder-bolt for Lise Olsdorf, and from that moment she had made up her mind to lie on the point, for if the prince were with her she could not stir out-of-doors, it would be a separation from her lover, and that she would not suffer at any cost. She therefore wrote to her husband that she did not expect to be confined before the end of April, whereas she was almost certain that she would be again a mother some weeks earlier.

Meanwhile, as she could not decently show herself in public with Paul Meyrin in the state she was in, the princess went out scarcely at all, except on her visits to her lover's family, whose mother and sister-in-law always gave her a warm welcome. Of course the Mmes. Meyrin understood everything, but they pretended to see nothing out of the common in what was happening. The Princess Olsdorf, a married woman, had come to Paris to be confined; what could be more natural? If they had allowed it to be supposed that they knew anything more they would have had to break with this charming and generous woman. Both hypocrisy and interest closed their eyes. They were blind.

As for Paul he never missed a day in going to see the princess, and he was full of cares and attention for her but sometimes he shortened his visits. If, through her state of health, Lise Olsdorf had become less passionate and more tender; if her love was, so to speak, purified in the maternity that absorbed it, Paul's, who had not the same reason to change, grew colder, incapable as he was of ideal tenderness and immaterial satisfaction. For her lover Lise Olsdorf ceased temporarily to be the lascivious, unsatiated, delirious mistress; for the artiste she was no longer the Diana whose sculptural form he had reproduced.

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She was a suffering woman in a difficult situation, in the throes of an event which might occasion both of them grave annoyance. The painter paid little heed to the child about to be born, the sense of paternity being wholly wanting in him. He would not of course disown it and would no doubt love it, but he awaited it without impatience, very uneasy about what would result from all this, and preoccupied at the near arrival of Prince Olsdorf, in whose presence he was not at all eager to find himself. Thenceforward he looked about for something to distract his thoughts; he visited his brother artists more than ever, and one day fate brought him face to face in one of their studios with Sarah Lamber whom he had not seen since their rupture.

Nonplused for the moment, the artist wanted then to carry off the thing easily. With a smile, offering his hand, he said:

"Pon my word, Sarah, here is a bit of luck I was not looking for."

And as the model had fallen back a step, he added:

"Bah! We are angry then, are we? How silly you are!"

"Very likely," said Sarah; "but I have a good memory. You shall have a proof of it one of these days, sooner than you think for. If you fancy I have given up the thought of revenging myself on you and your princess Olsdorf—you see I remember her name—you are wrong. It seems she is going to make a father of you, this princess. My compliments to you—and to her husband."

Happily the friend at whose place the scene began interrupted the young woman at this point, for Paul Meyrin was at a loss what to say, being troubled on Lise's account that her story should be so well known to everybody and therefore in danger of being indiscreetly spoken of. He cut short the visit to his friend and returned home much concerned. He knew that Sarah was a girl likely to keep her word. Besides he could not hide from himself that his intrigue with the Princess Olsdorf was now common property. It was a wonder that her husband had not been told of it long ago.

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As it might easily chance that the prince hastening his journey, might appear suddenly any day, Paul Meyrin began to long for Lise's confinement. It did not take place for six weeks. At last, toward the end of March, as she had reckoned, attended by the eminent Dr. de Soyre, and affectionately cared for by Mme. Daubrel, the princess was delivered of a little girl whose birth was registered next day at the Russian legation, in the name of Catherine Tekla, legitimate daughter of the Prince and Princess Olsdorf.

Then, twenty-four hours later, Lise telegraphed to her husband to inform him of the event which

she said had happened sooner than she had expected. She added that her confinement had been so easy that she hoped to be about again in a few days. Happy as she would be to see him, it was useless for him to make the long journey from St. Petersburg to Paris, as she meant to return to Russia in a few weeks, when her health permitted.

Notwithstanding this interested advice that she gave to the prince, and the hope she had that it would be followed, Lise was not quite easy until she had received a reply from her husband in full conformity with her wishes.

Pierre congratulated his wife on her happy delivery, told her to take every precaution, sent his fond love to her and the little stranger, and agreed to her proposal. He would not come to Paris, but would await her in Courland, where all would be ready for her return at the end of a month.

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"Oh, at the end of a month, we shall see," she said to Paul, after reading the letter to him. "Tekla's health will hinder the journey and our return to Pampeln will be put off until summer. I say 'our' return, for you will come to me there very soon, will you not? If not, I will not go."

And winding her arms about her lover's neck the newly made mother drew him toward her almost fiercely, as if the passion, laid to rest for some months by her motherhood, had again suddenly possessed her.

Freed from all fear in regard to the prince, Paul returned the embrace warmly, and from this time forward he was so full of care for her, he seemed to love the child so much, that the princess had never been so thoroughly happy.

The Meyrins, of course, had been among the first to congratulate the young mother. The day when Lise Olsdorf gathered them all at her table to celebrate her churcing, each member of the family found under his or her plate a princely present. After dinner the baby was brought in in a cradle trimmed with lace and roses. Before dessert was over Paul's paternity could no longer be a matter of doubt for any one present, the princess had been so demonstrative with the man she loved.

However, the Meyrin ladies kept their countenances. They would not see anything amiss; and Frantz's wife, by way of a sort of hypocritical protestation intended to safeguard her middle-class virtue, was very nearly proposing the health of Prince Olsdorf. Her husband, ashamed of this comedy, had only just time to stop her.

These merrymakers would not have been so joyous nor so much at their ease, if they could have foreseen what was to happen a few days later at the château of Pampeln.

Although he had reckoned on the return of his wife at the end of April, Prince Olsdorf was not very much surprised when she wrote to him that the baby's health forced her to put off the journey for at least a fortnight. He replied that she was right to be prudent and must think first of all of the infant, adding that he would await her in Courland, which would shorten the journey for her by almost one half. He asked her to warn him by telegraph of her departure from Paris, so that he could go to meet her with carriages at Mittau.

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All these letters were in a tone so unusual with her husband, that is, so full of tenderness, that the princess was in a sense alarmed at it; and she was always careful not to show them to Paul Meyrin, whose jealousy would certainly have been roused. She wrote to the prince that she would be starting soon, at the same time promising herself that she would put off the journey to the very last moment under any pretense whatever.

Meanwhile Pierre Olsdorf had returned to Pampeln, and was overlooking the equipping of the house for the season, when he received from St. Petersburg, with other letters, a big envelope which had been addressed to him at his town house.

Having carelessly opened the envelope he was rather surprised to see its contents. They were a series of articles, for the most part reviews of theatrical performances, cut from newspapers and pasted on good sized sheets of paper, in which the names of Princess Lise and Paul Meyrin's appeared in each paragraph.

The prince was puzzled for a moment, then a flush overspread his face, and snatching up a note which accompanied the inclosures, he read these infamous words:

"The articles do not tell everything to the husband of the Princess Olsdorf. Otherwise they would inform him that his wife lives publicly with Paul Meyrin, as is known to all Paris, and that the baby she has just had is her lover's."

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"Oh, the wretches!" exclaimed the unhappy man, "I will kill them."

And, wishing to know all, he ran his eye through each of the paragraphs that repeated his dishonor.

Then, his eyes filling with tears, he buried his face in his hands and reflected.

In a few minutes he grew calmer. Determined not to take counsel either of his anger or of his just indignation, he made for the shady woods of the park, where he paced up and down for a part of the night.

Next morning, when he tenderly kissed his son Alexander at his waking, nothing could have been read on his face. His resolution was irrevocably taken.

He ordered his horse to be saddled, and he rode over to Elva.

Soublaieff, who was in the farm-yard when his master rode into it, ran forward to hold his horse, and Pierre Olsdorf dismounted.

"I am glad to find you here," said he to the farmer, "I was afraid you might be away somewhere in the fields. I have something serious to say to you. How is your daughter?"

"Well, prince," replied Soublaieff. "She and I are at your orders. What is the matter? Forgive my presumption, but you seem troubled and preoccupied."

"I am. You shall know the cause afterward. Meanwhile I am come to ask a favor of you."

"A favor from me! A master so good as you are asks it of a servant who would give the last drop of his blood to him? Speak, prince, speak!"

"Will you trust Vera to me?"

"Trust Vera to you?"

"To take her to Paris."

The farmer grew pale. The tenderness of a father struggled within him against blind devotion for his master. In the past he had besought the prince not to take from him his daughter to place her at the château. And now it was a question not of a separation of a few leagues but of a journey to France. He hesitated.

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"Come, make up your mind to it," Pierre Olsdorf went on. "I want Vera; she alone, with your good will, can do me a great service."

"A great service? Are you going to join the princess?"

"Yes, I am going to her in Paris, and I must come to her with a pure, intelligent, and beautiful young girl such as your daughter is. Ah! Soublaieff, I am very unhappy."

The sad smile with which the prince spoke the words troubled the old servitor still more, but at the sight of the pained look in the face of the generous master to whom he owed everything, his hesitation vanished, and he replied:

"Take Vera, prince; but suffer me to remind you that she is my idolized child, and that the former serf trusts his honor to the honor of the Olsdorfs."

"I will remember. Send for your daughter."

Vera came quickly at her father's first call, and as was her custom, bent to kiss the prince's hand, but he drew her toward him and pressed a chaste kiss on her forehead.

In a few words Soublaieff told his daughter of the agreement with the prince. Vera, blushing with pleasure, bowed low and said, in a subdued voice:

"I am ready to obey you, father."

Mingled with her surprise—perhaps without she herself knowing it—was the curiosity natural in a daughter of Eve. She was grieved to leave her father; but to travel, to see Paris! It had been one of her dreams.

"I thank you both," said Pierre Olsdorf after a moment of silence. "Soublaieff, you are no longer a devoted servant, but a friend to me. As for you, sweet Vera, I shall never forget the sacrifice she makes in leaving her family to go with me for awhile."

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Then offering his hand to the farmer, who pressed it respectfully in his, he added:

"Bring Vera to-morrow morning to Pampeln; we will start at once for Mittau, and take the night train thence to Paris. Again I thank you. Adieu till to-morrow."

The prince, who had spoken the last words as he stood on the threshold of the door, sprung upon his horse and rode off in the direction of the château.

Next day, before ten o'clock, Soublaieff was at Pampeln with his daughter. At noon the young Russian girl and Pierre Olsdorf got into a post-chaise, on the box-seat being Yvan, his old and faithful body-servant; and Soublaieff, with tearful eyes, saw them drive off, as he murmured:

"Perhaps I was wrong to yield, but he seemed so unhappy. What is the mystery? God preserve my child."

CHAPTER VII. AT THE OPERA COMIQUE.

Two days later Pierre Olsdorf arrived in Paris, at a quarter past seven in the evening, by the Cologne express. He had traveled without a break. By eight o'clock he was at the Grand Hotel,

and in ten minutes' time, Yvan, his body-servant, was on his way to the Rue Lafitte with a letter which he was to deliver in person to the princess, if she were at home, or to leave with a servant to be taken at once to his mistress, if it were known where she was passing the evening. The prince did not wish his letter to be read by a lady's-maid before it reached its address.

At the Rue Lafitte, Yvan was told that the princess had just gone to the Opera Comique, and a promise was made that a footman should go to the theater immediately with the letter.

The man, indeed, started at once, and the prince's servant, on his way back to the boulevard, saw him turn down the Rue Marivaux. [Pg 80]

A stock-piece was being played this evening. The princess was seated at the front of the box, while Paul Meyrin, who was her companion, sat behind her. As usual she was listening attentively to the music when the door of the box opened. Rather surprised, for she was expecting nobody, at least until between the acts, the young woman turned round and took from the hat, held salver-wise, of her footman the letter he offered to her.

"I beg pardon, madame, but a stranger who delivered this letter said that it must be given to Madame the Princess at once."

"Is there any answer?" asked Lise Olsdorf, visibly growing paler, for she had recognized her husband's writing on the envelope.

"The bearer went away without saying anything," the footman replied.

"Very well. You can go."

The door of the box was closed again. Frowning, the princess, who did not want to open the letter before the end of the act, seemed to guess what threatened her within the envelope.

"What is the matter?" asked Paul Meyrin, uneasy at her silence.

"The letter is from the prince," replied Lise Olsdorf.

"Well, is that very extraordinary?"

"It has not come by post. See, there is no stamp on it. A commissioner must have brought it to the house, so that my husband is in Paris. He has left St. Petersburg without warning. I am lost!"

Paul Meyrin had grown very pale.

He had sometimes said to himself that the prince at last would be surprised at his wife's long stay in Paris, and that in casting about a bit he would easily find out that it was not merely care for her health which kept her away from Russia. But like an irresolute man who dares not look danger in the face, the artist would not dwell in fancy on the possible consequences of his amour with a married woman, and now that the upshot was near he trembled. [Pg 81]

"Read it, any way," he said, in a changed voice.

The curtain had just fallen on the first act of the "Pré aux Clercs." The princess rose from her chair, and supposing that Paul's fear was for her alone, she pressed his hand; then, with quick fingers, she opened the letter. It contained only these few lines:

"MADAME,—Made acquainted with the true reason for your long stay in Paris, I am come hither not to force you to return to your husband's roof, but to insist upon the only possible ending, according to my view, of the situation that you have made. Desiring, therefore, to see you as soon as possible, I will call upon you at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning.

"Do not fear either a scene or reproaches. You will not have to treat with the outraged husband, but merely with a father who would not that his son should have either a compromised mother, or a dishonored name.

"PRINCE PIERRE OLSDORF."

After reading this letter several times, which was full of threats the more serious the less they were defined, the princess handed it to Paul Meyrin.

He ran through it rapidly, and, not less alarmed than his mistress, said:

"What will you do?"

"I don't know."

"Shall you see the prince?"

"How can I do otherwise?"

"Shall we go back home?"

"No. People saw the letter handed to me. Our going would seem strange, and my return home would surprise my servants too much to not set them thinking. We will sit out the 'Pré aux Clercs.' When it is over we will decide what is best to be done." [Pg 82]

Taking again the attentive attitude that she always assumed at the theater, the princess seated at

the front of the box seemed to forget the terrible news she had just received.

At the thought of the struggle she was about to engage in, at the idea of the dangers that threatened her, on the eve of the conjugal drama of which she was the heroine, the actress's nature that she inherited from her mother and from her true father awoke in her, counseling revolt and strategy. She might have feared violence; but as the prince wrote that she had nothing of the sort to face, she cared little for the rest, provided always that she was not to be separated from her lover; as she was prepared for everything but this sacrifice, her calmness had suddenly returned.

Paul Meyrin was less at his ease. He thought more of the next day than his mistress seemed to do. Would the prince force his wife to retire to some convent far from Paris, not in France? From him, the lover, the husband would surely demand satisfaction for the stain upon his honor. The painter, without being a coward, was no duelist. He scarcely knew how to hold a sword, and with a pistol he could not hit the target more than once in ten shots. In a word, he loved Lise as much as his egotism suffered him to love. She was a mistress that flattered his pride and cost him nothing. We might even say that she was, on the contrary, profitable to him, since, as we have seen, she heaped presents on the whole Meyrin family and let slip no chance of offering Paul a trinket or some costly knickknack.

And this baby a few months old whom the prince would not shelter! Paul foresaw with alarm, for the paternal sentiment scarcely existed in him, that it would fall to his care, and he did not hide from himself that his mother, Mme. Meyrin, would refuse downright to take charge of it. Foreseeing disputes without end, a thousand domestic worries, he forgot completely in thinking only of himself what the princess might have to dread and suffer.

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It was in this frame of mind that the painter sat out the last two acts of Hérold's masterpiece, and when, accompanying Lise home, he found himself again in the little room in the Rue Lafitte, where, in the course of the past few months, he had spent so many long and happy hours, he was seized by a deep sadness.

Lise Oldsorf, who had left him alone while her maid took off her things, soon returned, wearing a long dressing-gown of blue velvet, but even when she knelt before the artist, laying her head on his knees, Paul scarcely roused himself.

The princess was the first to break silence.

"Come," she said, "we must not let ourselves be beaten like this. There is one thing: whatever happens, nothing shall separate us. Anything may come but that."

"Is it so?" exclaimed Paul, tenderly.

"Yes, I swear it. The prince may threaten as he likes. He shall not part me from you."

Lise spoke the words with the savage passion that she felt for her lover. At the moment she was a living proof of the physiological phenomenon which too often makes of the most distinguished woman the servile courtesan of a man whose birth, education, and sentiments would seem to part him from her.

Reassured by this sensual fervor, and feeling that his mistress was still his body and soul, Paul took her on to his knees, and as he thanked her with a thousand caresses, she went on, thrilling in his arms:

"After all, what can the prince do? We are not in Russia; I am not the daughter of one of his serfs. I have my own fortune which he, a nobleman, dare not touch. And I love you—I love you. Is it my fault? Is not it rather his fault? Look! I would rather he should know everything. I am tired of mysteries and lying. What has now happened was fated. It is better so, for now I shall be yours only and always."

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Lise Oldsorf was intoxicated by her own words. She was superb in her unsatiated passion. Winding her bare arms about her lover, she was Venus herself. Her long hair floated over her marble shoulders; she was Mary Magdalene before her repentance.

"But who has betrayed us?" asked Paul Meyrin, suddenly, drawing himself gently, after a long silence, from the ardent embrace of the young woman. "Who can have given the prince such exact particulars?"

"Why, everybody," replied the princess with a smile which seemed to mean that the fact could not have been otherwise; "first of all the newspapers. This long time they have coupled your name and mine in their notices of first nights. And then, no doubt, there are some dear friends jealous of our happiness. What does it matter who it was?"

"But our daughter; we are forgetting the dear little thing. What will become of her?"

"The prince will believe that Tekla is his daughter. There will be no question about her between him and me."

"If he should doubt it?"

"It is impossible he should. At any rate, we shall see. Meanwhile say nothing of what is happening to your mother, your sister, or anybody. It will be time enough to tell them when we know ourselves what the result is. As soon as the prince has left me, I will send for you. Come at once.

And now, good-bye until to-morrow. It will be our last farewell, this; I hope it will be our last."

Then having sealed the amorous words with a last kiss, she left him at the door of her room.

Within it, she went to bed, far more to think of the man she loved than of the meeting with her husband with which she was threatened.

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CHAPTER VIII.

THE REVENGE OF AN HONORABLE MAN.

Next morning at eleven o'clock, with military punctuality, Pierre Olsdorf was at his wife's home.

She awaited him in the little room where on the previous night she had tried to put some courage into Paul Meyrin.

Lise Olsdorf was calm in appearance, so that her husband could not read in her face the terror which the unlooked-for arrival of her legal judge had caused her. Her paleness could scarcely be seen under the rice powder; her large eyes were only faintly ringed with blue through sleeplessness.

At the entrance of the prince, Lise rose from the couch she was seated on, and bowed without speaking.

The nobleman whose name she had stained looked at her fixedly for some moments, then, signing to her to be seated again, he sunk into a chair opposite to her and said in firm, grave tones:

"Madame, although to do so does not seem quite indispensable, for I find you far calmer than you ought to be, I wish to confirm what I wrote to you last night. I do not come to reproach you, though you have spoiled my life; I do not come to make a scene, though the Russian law, like the French, gives me every right over you—even to kill you if I found you in the act of adultery—which it would not have been difficult for me to do, as you must know. That act of justice, according to the law, would be merely a pardonable crime. But have no fear. If for a moment, when the news of your misconduct came upon me yonder like a thunder-bolt, I thought of punishing you, it was because the memory of the past aroused my anger. Now, my heart and mind have grown calm again, I come to insist upon the only means of putting an end to the scandal of the life you are living."

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At these words, and not before, the princess raised her eyes. Up to then she had hidden her face in her hands, so as not to show the humiliation that her husband's tone made her feel.

Pierre Olsdorf went on:

"I am so sure of your submission that I will not attempt to point out the dangers you would run if you opposed my will in the least degree. After having Monsieur Paul Meyrin for your lover in Russia, you came to him here in Paris because you were *enceinte* by him."

At these words, so plain and precise, Lise Olsdorf could not master a movement of real affright. She perhaps would have attempted a denial, but the prince stopped her with a severe look and said:

"Don't try to deceive me. It would be an infamy added to a fault already so great. I speak as I do because I have not the shadow of a doubt; if I had it would be a frightful torture. I have compared one thing with another, I have grouped together facts which at the time seemed to me to have no importance, last summer at Pampeln, in my château so hospitably open. Besides, the little esteem that I yet feel for you would not let me suppose for a moment that, while bearing in your womb a legitimate child, you would leave the father of this child, in a state when the vilest creature has some shame, to give yourself to a lover."

Deeply affected, the adulterous wife again lowered her head.

The prince continued:

"The daughter you were delivered of recently, and for whom you have claimed my legitimate son, Alexander, as a brother, bears my name legally. I can not deprive her of it except at the cost of a scandalous inquiry, the result of which, moreover, would be an obstacle to the end I have in view, as it would be a judicial confirmation of your adultery. I shall not set that inquiry on foot, and the child will keep the name it has unconsciously stolen. I make the sacrifice for the honor of my house. But you shall not continue to call yourself the Princess Olsdorf. You will petition the Holy Synod for a divorce from me."

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The princess was so amazed that she could scarcely murmur:

"From you?"

"Yes, from me," repeated the Russian nobleman. "Ah, that surprises you; you don't understand me, because you are not sufficiently versed in our laws of divorce. If I petitioned for a divorce from you it would be granted at the first inquiry; but then you would be dishonored, and some of the shame would fall upon my son. When he is older he would blush for you. I would not have

that. Besides, no doubt you are ignorant of the fact that the person against whom the decree of divorce is gained may not marry again. You would therefore be condemned to live as Monsieur Paul Meyrin's concubine, should this man remain faithful to you, and your last born child would have no name, as one of the consequences of the decree against you would be a disavowal of my paternity. If I am the accused before the Holy Synod, however, I shall be condemned to celibacy, while you will continue in the eyes of the world as an honest woman under the name of Madame Meyrin."

At these two words "Madame Meyrin," the daughter of the Countess Barineff was seized with a vague fear. Amid her astonishment she made a rapid comparison of her past and the future that her husband forced upon her. Paul Meyrin was no longer the lover whose mastery over her was sensual, the man whom she as a woman loved carnally; he was already the husband and lord, such as one sees always, save at the hour when passion makes one blind.

Without analyzing the feeling which had awakened in her so suddenly, Lise was afraid. Not to betray herself she had need of all her pride and strength of will; but the prince had no doubt guessed what was passing in her mind, for he continued, in a cutting and ironical voice:

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"There is nothing to hinder your marriage with Monsieur Paul Meyrin, as he belongs to a country whose laws authorize divorce. You will be good enough, then, to inform him of my will, and when the principal point is agreed on, I will point out the course you are to follow to put me in the wrong and introduce your petition to the Holy Synod. As for your personal fortune, the day after the decree of divorce is pronounced my lawyer will send you all the title-deeds; you will become absolute mistress of it. I will abstain from giving you any advice with regard to the steps you should take to secure your future. When I married you I gave you my town house in St. Petersburg. It will remain your property, but as I forbid you to ever set foot in Russia you will do well to sell it. I believe I have said all that is needful at present. I only have to await your answer to my ultimatum. But remember this oath that I make before leaving you: if for any reason whatever Monsieur Paul Meyrin does not marry you, I will kill him. Adieu, madame. May God pardon you."

Speaking these words, the prince rose, bowed to his wife, and went out without looking at her again.

The princess rose mechanically, and then fell back into her seat.

She had expected anything on the part of the outraged husband, but not this strange solution that he had insisted on with the calmness of an operator searching a wound with his scalpel.

Nearly out of her mind, she rang and ordered her footman to go and ask M. Paul Meyrin to come to her at once.

Awaiting her lover, Lise Olsdorf took a rapid glance at the past, recalling with terror the road she had covered so rapidly within the last year. She saw again her youth, her court of adorers at St. Petersburg, her princely marriage, and the entertainments of which she had been the queen at Pampeln. She thought of her mother, whose ambitious edifices were going to come down crashing about her, and who would not be sparing of reproaches; and suddenly, too, thinking of her son whom she would never see again, she was about, perhaps, to exclaim, "No, never!" when Paul Meyrin came into the room hurriedly, without being announced.

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The painter was pale, uneasy, and much agitated. His manly beauty only showed the more brilliantly. The princess was struck by it, and, suddenly reconquered by the sensual charm which mastered her, she sprung toward him.

Paul received her in his arms, bore her in them as if she had been a child, laid her on the couch, and, kneeling beside her, questioned her with his eyes.

"It is over," she said, after enjoying for a moment the intoxication of the contact with him, which took from her all energy. "Everything is over between the prince and me. He himself wishes it. I shall be your wife."

"My wife!" exclaimed Paul, with a movement of surprise.

"Yes, your wife. The prince and I are to be divorced, and I shall marry you. On this condition alone we shall not be separated. My husband has acted, too, like an honorable man. He gives me back my fortune, and leaves me the house at St. Petersburg, his wedding present. How happy we shall be! To live with you, never to leave you again! To love you freely, openly, in the face of the whole world—and always, always!"

The unhappy and bewitched woman would not look back on the past. In the artist's arms she forgot all—the memories that she had summoned a few minutes earlier, the high social rank she was about to quit, her mother, even her son.

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Paul was calmer. This future, which he had by no means foreseen, the responsibility he was about to take upon himself, the new part he was called upon to play, all frightened him a little. Not that he did not love the woman who had given herself to him; but to marry, to become the head of a household, from a lover to change to a husband, the father of a family, it was a serious matter, deserving to be reflected on.

"Why don't you speak to me?" said the princess, vaguely uneasy and looking into the painter's

eyes. "Are not you happy?"

"Can you think otherwise?" said Paul; "but you must understand my surprise. You will confess I had little reason to expect what has happened. I feared your husband might use violence to you, and I was so sure of a challenge from him that I have spoken to a couple of friends."

"As your seconds! In a duel!" cried Lise Olsdorf, throwing her arms around the young man's neck. "Oh, if I had dreamed the prince had such an idea he should not have left this room alive."

"Dear, foolish child!" said Paul Meyrin, returning the passionate embrace. "But, while awaiting the divorce, what will you do? How shall we live? Will not the prince make you leave Paris?"

"No, I believe not."

"Did he speak to you of Tekla?"

"He knows the child is not his, and I did not try to deceive him."

"Perhaps he will want to take it from us."

The Princess Olsdorf sat up suddenly. She grew very pale.

The fact is the adulterous wife was an excellent mother. Two years before, when her son was attacked by a contagious sickness, she had nursed him with a devotion which had been the admiration of everybody, and she adored doubly Paul Meyrin's child.

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"Take away my daughter—separate me from her!" she cried. "Oh, no, it is impossible; the prince has not the thought. He can not disown her, for the consequence of a disavowal would be a petition for divorce from me. He will leave me Tekla. What could he do with her? He can not love her. We are both mad to think of it."

The painter tried his best to calm Lise. They agreed to await the course of events and act accordingly, keeping secret from everybody what was going on.

Paul Meyrin, indeed, was not at all anxious to acquaint his relatives with the new turn that his amour with the princess had taken, for he foresaw the opposition that his mother and sister, and especially his sister, would offer to the marriage. Although he had never said anything outright to the two women upon the subject, he had every reason to believe that they knew the true state of his relations with Lise Olsdorf, and that they were well aware of his being the father of little Tekla. If the Meyrins received at their house Paul's acknowledged mistress, it was because their vanity was flattered and their interest lay in making her welcome. Under the pretense that she adored artists, and had the right to act in Paris as she would have done in Russia, she heaped presents on all the Meyrins, big and little. Her love, then, cost them nothing; on the contrary. As formerly, the painter lived with the family and shared its expenses, giving, too, himself generously, for he reflected that he had no calls upon him and was making plenty of money.

With the Meyrins, and certainly as regarded Frantz, there was indeed no cynical and shameless speculation; but the feeling was there, though they were unconscious of it. The marriage of the artist to anybody would necessarily occasion so radical a change in their style of living that the idea of it had always been thrust into the background by those whose thorough interest it was to have him under their guidance.

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Paul, without saying all these things to himself, was conscious of them. He was much concerned about what was to happen in the near future as he made his way back to the Rue de Douai.

After the painter had left her the princess wrote to her husband to say she was ready to obey him in all particulars.

CHAPTER IX.

IN FLAGRANTE DELICTO.

During the three days that she was traveling on the railway in a compartment near that of Prince Olsdorf, the pretty Vera Soublaieff had been in one long dream. She was going to Paris, which she had so often heard spoken of and so enthusiastically by her countrymen, to meet again the Princess Lise, who had always been so kind to her, and to live a less monotonous life than at Alba. The day after her arrival, already recovered from the fatigue of traveling, she awoke joyously, and, like a bird that the sun attracts, ran to the window of her room.

The apartments the Russian nobleman occupied at the Grand Hotel looked on to the boulevard. Although it was barely ten o'clock the sight it offered to Vera almost dazzled her. She had been for a long time under the charm when the body-servant of her master came to announce, in almost a ceremonious tone, that the prince was waiting luncheon for her.

"Waiting for me?" said the young girl. "I don't understand you, my good Yvan."

"I am only bringing the prince's message. The table is laid for two, and no visitor is expected."

After standing in astonishment for a moment, Vera dressed quickly and went to the husband of

He was looking through the newspapers, perhaps to distract his thoughts from the interview he had just had with his wife, perhaps, too, to hide his face. One of the sub-managers was standing at the door of the room, waiting for the order to serve the meal.

At the entrance of his traveling companion, Pierre Olsdorf rose, went forward to meet her, and said gallantly, offering his hand:

"Good-morning, dear child. How have you slept?"

Thinking she must have misunderstood what she had heard, the farmer's daughter looked round the room in surprise. There was nobody there but herself and the manager, who still stood motionless. It was she, after all, that the prince was speaking to.

Bending forward over the hand that was offered to her, Vera wished to press her lips to it, but Pierre Olsdorf, drawing her gently toward him, kissed her forehead, and said, pointing to the table laid for two:

"Has the journey made you lose your appetite?"

He drew her arm affectionately under his to lead her to the table, where she fell into, rather than seated herself on, the chair Yvan offered her.

Vera Soublaieff had never been more beautiful in her national costume. Emotion had given a more brilliant color to her face; her scarlet lips wore a childish smile full of charm, and her big eyes, with their long black lashes, seemed to question with simple trouble all that surrounded her.

She well remembered that the prince had always been gentle and kind to her, as he was to all his servants, but she had never sat at his table, and he had never paid her such attentions as these.

Was not all this a continuance of her dream? Was she really awake yet?

The nobleman recalled his beautiful guest to the reality by begging her to partake of each of the dishes that the manager offered her; but Vera, who blushed at being waited on, scarcely eat anything at all. She was forced to admit the evidence of her senses; it was really she, the daughter of Soublaieff, who was there, opposite her lord and master.

The thought of the princess then came suddenly to her mind. She wondered why she had not yet seen her, why the prince had not taken her to his wife, and why she was not with her husband.

An instinctive fear seized upon her. She rose suddenly, and clasping her hands, her eyes filling with tears, said, in a supplicating voice:

"Pierre Alexandrowich, what have I done that you should ridicule me so? What is your will with me, your servant?"

The young girl had spoken in Russian, adding, as is the custom, to the first name of the prince the first name of his father. Pierre Olsdorf, in his turn, was for the moment taken by surprise.

He told the manager to leave the room, sent away Yvan with a gesture, and going to Vera, said in a tender voice:

"What is the matter, child? Why are you so agitated? How could you think that I wished to ridicule you?"

He had led her to a sofa, on which she sunk, trembling.

The prince went on, seating himself beside her:

"You are the daughter of an old retainer, for whom I have a great esteem and affection. That in itself should reassure you. When I told your father I wished to bring you to Paris, he did not ask me for what object. He knew, and he knows, that you have nothing to fear while you are with me; that your honor is guarded by mine. I need your devoted, complete, and blind aid. I must not tell you why; young as you are, you will understand these things only too soon. It will be for me then to thank you and prove my gratitude. Until then do not question me; be surprised at nothing, no matter what I may require of you, or how strange and inexplicable the scenes may seem to be in which you will take part. I have chosen you to help me in accomplishing the end I aim at because you are young, beautiful, intelligent, and worthy of respect."

Her fine eyes, still tearful, fixed on her master's, Vera listened and scarcely understood the meaning of his words; but her calmness had returned. She was no longer frightened, and when the prince asked if he could count upon her obedience she took his hand and kissed it, replying:

"Your servant is your property. Do with her as you please."

At this moment there was a tap at the door, and Yvan entered with a letter for his master which a commissionaire had brought.

In it the princess told her husband that she was awaiting his instructions and was ready to follow them.

"Dear child," said Pierre Olsdorf to Vera as soon as they were again alone together, "the moment

for action has come sooner than I looked for it. To-morrow we shall leave this hotel. Meanwhile dry your eyes and go for a drive with Yvan to see Paris, that you were so happy in the thought of visiting."

The prince pressed the young girl's hands gently, and left her still somewhat moved, but no longer alarmed. Fear had yielded to curiosity.

Pierre Olsdorf and Vera met again in the evening at dinner, and the meal was almost a merry one. Yvan had driven his countrywoman to the Champs Elysées, the Bois de Boulogne, and the Jardin d'Acclimation; and the daughter of Soublaieff, who had only seen St. Petersburg and the great park at Pampeln, was so astonished at what she beheld that, encouraged by the approving smile of her master, she told him with enthusiasm about all she had seen. At the end of the evening when she had retired to rest, she slipped into the large bed with a sort of indefinable pleasure after linking the name of the prince with that of God in her prayers.

Next day Pierre and Soublaieff's daughter were able to move into some charming rooms in the Rue Auber, in consequence of the sudden departure for St. Petersburg of the Countess Panine. She was charmed to be able to let Prince Olsdorf have her furnished rooms, leaving him, too, her cook and her maid, who, on account of her health, could not go with her mistress to Russia. In this way, within twenty-four hours, the prince had his house on a comfortable footing.

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Thenceforward began for Vera a life she had never dreamed of, surprise following surprise. Every morning in waking her, Julie, the lady's maid, brought her flowers from the prince, and almost every day there was some present or other offered by himself—a jewel, or fan, or one of those costly gewgaws, which are so thoroughly identified with Parisian luxury.

Moreover, Soublaieff's daughter must abandon herself to the dress-makers, who took possession of her, acting under orders; and the surprises for her grew more frequent and complete as she saw herself, a child of the people, clothed ordinarily, in holland or wool, a fine lady robed in silk and velvet. Obedient, as she had promised to be, she made no difficulties; she murmured her thanks and was passive. But one evening, when, being dressed—the prince had told her they were going out together—she saw herself covered with diamonds, in a long gown of white satin terminating in a train, her luxuriant dark hair twisted up above the neck instead of hanging in thick plaits, she scarcely knew herself.

However, with the singular faculty of adaptation that all women have, Vera was neither awkward nor strange in a part so new for her; she played it with simplicity and admirably. Up to now she had been adorably pretty; the transformation made her strikingly beautiful.

When she was seen at the opera this evening a murmur of admiration ran through the house. Everybody's eyes turned to her, but she was almost unconscious of them, being wholly given up to the brilliant scene on the stage, which was the first thing of the kind she had seen. Seated behind her, Pierre seemed to delight in her triumph, and on his arm the young girl descended the grand staircase, passing through the crowd amid a flattering murmur.

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Next morning all the papers spoke of the new and resplendent star that had shone out in the Parisian sky. They did not know her name, but they gave the prince's, adding significantly that the princess was not with her husband.

Pierre Olsdorf had gained the end he had in view in showing himself at the theater with Soublaieff's daughter. In the eyes of the scandal-mongers the prince was simply taking his revenge. He retorted upon his wife and Paul Meyrin by parading one of the most ravishing mistresses imaginable.

However, amid the luxury that surrounded her, in the whirl of this new life which still occasioned her some little fear, there was one thing that Vera could not understand, and that was the strange bearing of the prince toward her. Complete as her ignorance was of life and its passions, his conduct struck her more and more, putting into her mind thoughts which troubled her and her virginity of soul.

Before the servants, or when they were together in public exposed to the curious looks of everybody, Pierre Olsdorf was eager in attentions, tender, and happy; while as soon as he was alone with her, though still affectionate and kind, he grew serious and almost cold.

Vera could not understand these sudden changes. She had never said to herself that her master might love her, and indeed his love would have frightened her, although she was full of affection for him and ready for any sacrifice. The conduct of the prince was most strange of an evening when they came in from a stroll on the boulevards.

Her chamber was separated from his by a bath-room alone. From the one chamber access could be had to the other. When the time came, Julie undressed her young mistress, put her to bed, and then went to tell the prince, waiting in a sitting-room hard by, that madame had retired.

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Prince Olsdorf appeared almost immediately, closed the door softly behind him, walked gently through the room as if afraid of disturbing the young girl, wished good-night to Vera by a friendly gesture, not going near her ever, and so went into his own room.

Vera whose heart beat more quickly as the prince passed through her room, would soon fall asleep, but her slumber was sometimes troubled by strange thrills, indefinite thoughts, and modest fears.

For nearly a month this had gone on. The prince had had a final interview with his wife to arrange everything in conformity with his design, when one evening, he having taken the farmer's beautiful daughter to the Vaudeville Theatre, it was past midnight when they got back home.

Pierre Olsdorf had never been more affectionate and attentive. They walked back from the theater. When he offered his arm to the young girl as they started for the Rue Auber, going by the boulevard and the Place de l'Opera, she had to summon all her strength to master the beating of her heart, which threatened to betray her by its violent throbs.

Vera could no longer hide the truth from herself. She loved, with a timid and chaste but deep love, the man who for some weeks had shared her life. She did not ask of herself now what he wished to do with her. She cared little. She saw him every day, almost every hour, and she had but one fear—that she might awaken from this delicious dream.

As for the prince, he seemed uneasy, preoccupied, and impatient.

When they had got back to the house, Vera, as usual, went to her room, whither Julie followed her. In a few minutes she was in bed, feverish and thrilling, for Pierre, before she left him, had kissed her with a sort of passionate tenderness which had troubled her deeply. At the long, close touch of his lips on her forehead the sweet virginal eyes had closed, and she had nearly fainted.

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Scarcely a quarter of an hour had passed, when the door of her room opened.

It was the prince. As usual, no doubt, he would walk through the room to his own, and Vera was smiling already in reply to the "good-night" that he always waved to her as he walked by, when the husband of Lise Barineff, instead of going on his way, approached the bed and seated himself on the chair near it, on which, in womanly disorder, warm and fragrant, was heaped the silken dressing-gown which the young girl had just thrown off.

Vera, greatly surprised, half raised herself, adorably beautiful in this movement of chaste trust; and, in reply to the questioning look in her large eyes, Pierre Olsdorf said, taking her hand:

"Do not fear, dear child; listen to me."

"Oh, I am not afraid," she said, with innocent trust, leaving her little trembling hand in the prince's.

Pierre, more moved than he was willing to seem, went on:

"The moment has come for you to give me a great proof of your devotion. In a few moments something will happen here which will seem inexplicable to you—an event in which you will play the chief part. What I desire of you is that you will be surprised at nothing, that you will obey me blindly, and not be afraid whatever may happen."

"I don't understand you," murmured the young girl, "but I promise to do all you wish me to do."

Vera's hand was as cold as ice; all the blood had rushed to her heart.

A bell ringing violently and suddenly made her tremble.

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The prince had risen from his seat and was listening, but he did not move away.

Yvan, who had not gone to bed, had answered the bell, for the footsteps of several people were heard in the antechamber, where the unexpected visitors were parleying with the servant.

"Remember what I have just told you," Pierre said, rapidly, to Soublaieff's daughter.

And, quickly taking off his coat, he sat on the side of the bed, and leaned toward Vera as if to kiss her.

At that moment the door of the bed-chamber was opened abruptly, and the poor child, who had stifled a cry of surprise at the prince's action, instinctively threw her bare arms about his neck, as if to protect him or to beg for his help and protection.

Pierre Olsdorf drew himself gently from the embrace and turned round.

He was before three strangers, one of whom, plainly the chief actor in this singular scene, said to him, politely uncovering:

"Monsieur, you are Prince Pierre Olsdorf?"

"That is my name," the Russian nobleman replied at once, with the greatest calmness.

"I am the commissary of police of this district, delegated by the Juge d'Instruction Leroy to prove against you an act of adultery, by virtue of Article 1307 of the Code Civile. The law directs me to summon hither Madame la Princess, at whose petition process has been issued."

Lise Barineff, who was waiting in the next room, came forward, accompanied by the commissary of police's secretary.

The princess was pale and trembling. She looked as if she would faint.

"Madame," said the police agent, "is this gentleman your husband?"

"Yes," stammered the guilty wife, raising her eyes.

"Very good, madame; you may retire."

It was none too soon. Lise Olsdorf could hardly stand, though she was leaning against the side of the door-way. She had stifled a cry of surprise.

She had recognized Vera Soublaiieff in the young girl lying in the bed of this room, and she felt a jealous pang at her heart, while her pride was cruelly humiliated at the same time.

So it was the daughter of one of his farmers whom Pierre Olsdorf had chosen to play the part of his mistress in this domestic drama. Before Vera, who knew her, and whose humble homage she had so often received, she must bow the head! Ah, it was too much; and she had been a stupid simpleton up to now in regarding her husband's conduct as chivalrous. He was but a man like other men; he had eagerly snatched at the chance to gratify a caprice no doubt of long standing. Who could say? Perhaps she had been first deceived.

She had, of course, heard and read in the newspapers that Prince Olsdorf was openly to be seen in Paris with an adorable young girl; but, forced to go out very rarely by reason of the stir that her divorce made and the victim's part that she had to play, she had never met the two lovers. As for Paul Meyrin, it can easily be surmised that he was careful not to show himself where he might be face to face with the man whose wife, by his order, he was to marry.

Lise Barineff, therefore, had no reason to expect to surprise Vera Soublaiieff in her husband's arms; and the sight of this young girl, who had so often stooped to kiss her hand, was well fitted, in the actual circumstances of the scene, to make her forget her own fault and to rouse all her pride.

These thoughts made her raise her head, and very likely she would have smiled scornfully upon Vera, but that a look from Pierre Olsdorf reminded her of the shame of her situation and commanded her retreat.

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She obeyed.

"My only further duty, prince," the commissary of police then continued, "is to draw up my report witnessing as against you the presence of a concubine in the conjugal dwelling, to make the search prescribed by the law, and to expel your accomplice from this room."

Vera, whom astonishment and fear had up to now made silent, could not keep back a cry of indignation at this threat. Her innocence could not now hinder her from understanding the truth. She the mistress of Prince Olsdorf!

With an affectionate gesture he reassured her and enjoined silence, and the unhappy girl, blushing deeply, fell upon the bed hiding in the pillows her face bathed in tears.

Pierre Olsdorf replied to the commissary of police that he would submit to all that was needful to be done.

After casting a glance around the room where this scene had passed, the commissary passed into the adjoining room to dictate to his secretary the report in which it was stated that in a bed-chamber of his house, Prince Olsdorf had been found with a young girl who had lived with him for more than a month and, that being questioned, the prince had not denied the allegation of adultery made against him.

An intelligent and well-known officer, the commissary felt that no search was necessary. Instinctively, perhaps, he suspected that he was not witnessing an ordinary conjugal drama, and he was willing to confine himself to doing what was strictly needful.

His report having been revised, read over to the prince, and countersigned by the two witnesses, the functionary took his leave without returning to the bed-chamber, where Vera taking literally the threat that had been made about her, had risen and dressed hurriedly without asking herself what was to become of her or where she would find shelter.

When Pierre Olsdorf, returning to the young girl, found her half dressed, sobbing, and nearly distracted with shame, he suddenly felt the wrong that he had done this unconscious maiden; he understood how cruel and blamable his conduct toward her had been.

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The fact was that his actions had grown one out of the other by a chain of fatal logic. He could not bear—he, the irreproachable husband up to now—to pass for the lover of the first girl he could find, easy as it would have been to put his hand on one in Paris to play the part he would have had to offer her in this singular adventure. If he could have made up his mind to the association with so vile an accomplice, perhaps no one would have believed in his guilt, or would have found it very excusable. He wished, on the contrary, to appear doubly culpable, and had taken upon himself the responsibility of an act doubly blameworthy, legally and morally, for he could be accused not only of adultery but of the seduction and abduction of a young girl over whom he had, in some sort, authority, and whose innocence and beauty would be cause enough for his passion and forgetfulness of duty.

Now the prince thought no more of all these reasons for his course of action; he saw only the despair of this child, dishonored though pure, and, deeply sorrowing, struck too, perhaps, for the first time by her adorable beauty, he sprung toward her, drew her into his arms, and, pressing

her feverishly to his heart, said tenderly:

"Vera, calm yourself and think no more of going away. I will very soon explain everything; but will you ever pardon me?"

Soublaieff's daughter let her head sink on the prince's shoulder, murmuring:

"Are you not the master: am not I the slave?"

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CHAPTER X. THE INQUIRY.

While following with absolute obedience the instructions of her husband, the Princess Olsdorf still felt so deeply humiliated by the vileness of the part she had to play that now and again she had thoughts of rebelling. But she knew the character of the prince, she knew that nothing would shake his purpose, and above all she remembered the terrible calmness with which he had said: "If for any reason whatever Monsieur Paul Meyrin does not marry you, I will kill him."

Feeling, then, that she must go forward to the end marked out for her, she had bowed the head and sought forgetfulness in the arms of her lover, whom the most ordinary conventionalities bade her to meet only in secret. Her passion had gained from this unusual mystery a sort of acuteness which gave it an unreal strength, under which she hid from herself the uneasiness she felt. However, she was anxious that an end should be made; she feared what might happen, believing it impossible that there should not be new troubles in store.

She well knew, too, that there were yet many trials to encounter before the decree of divorce would be won.

As for Paul, who still seemed passionately enamored of her, he left his family in ignorance of what was going on, putting off to the last moment the announcement of his approaching marriage.

Meanwhile things followed their legal course, and one morning the princess received from a delegate of the Russian Consistory a summons to appear before him.

To simplify matters, it is needful here to sketch the process to be followed in Russia upon the presentation of a petition for divorce.

As civil marriages are not recognized in the empire of the czars, the ecclesiastical authorities are charged with the trial of cases of divorce, pronouncing or refusing a decree. The authority is made up of two jurisdictions, the Consistory and the Holy Synod. The Consistory is a kind of preliminary tribunal, or rather a court of inquiry and investigation. The Holy Synod is a permanent grand council, invested with every authority in religious matters throughout the schismatical Greek Church of the Russian Empire. The Holy Synod is made up of metropolitans, archbishops, a procurator-general and secretaries. Its seat is at St. Petersburg, whence it governs the affairs spiritual of the empire and the financial business of the Church. It has authority over all prelates and consistories. It exercises a censure over religious books and pamphlets, and enjoys a very wide-reaching power in civil matters, notably in all matrimonial cases. The head procurator who governs it represents the emperor, but it is an error to believe that the Holy Synod obeys the orders of the czar. The autocrat of all the Russias is not, as is often said, at one and the same time emperor and pope in his vast kingdom. He, as well as his people, is subject in religious matters to the ecclesiastical authority of the Holy Synod.

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The injured party must address his or her complaint to the Consistory. This first tribunal examines the facts, and if it finds in them *primâ facie* a case for divorce, it tries first of all to reconcile the petitioner and respondent, summoning them before it, and seeking to persuade the one to pardon and the other to return to the path of duty.

Not until it has failed in this attempt at reconciliation does the Consistory inform the Holy Synod of the petition that has been made to it, and it is only after a long and careful examination that the higher court will pronounce the decree of divorce, inflicting upon the guilty one at the same time a religious penance and celibacy.

The penance may be a stay of several months in a convent, but the condemned one can easily escape from the enforced retirement by the payment of a sum of money. As for the decree of celibacy, the emperor alone, on the recommendation of the Holy Synod, can abrogate it; but if authority is sometimes given to a divorced husband to marry again, the grace is always withheld from a guilty wife. A woman can marry a second time only in case of the decree having been pronounced against her first husband, or when the separation has been without stain upon the honor of the husband or wife; for instance, in case of incompatibility of temper, or of certain infirmities duly provided for by the civil code.

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Formerly, it is true, matters of the kind were managed among the Russians with greater simplicity. The husband and wife who longed for a separation went out of their house holding a piece of linen or other thin stuff, each of them having an end of it. So they went to the nearest public square and pulled till the piece of stuff parted. Then they went each their way: they were

divorced.

Unhappily for the Princess Olsdorf this was no longer the practice; the summons of the delegate of the Consistory recalled the fact to her. She knew that she would again be brought face to face with her husband, to accuse him of having been unfaithful to her; and, though the lesson had been taught her, and mortifying as was the memory she had of the encounter with the beautiful Vera Soublaieff in the Rue Auber, still, it is not hard to suppose, she dreaded not being able to support her petition with due firmness.

The arch-priest of the Russian Church in Paris was at this period the Pope Joseph Wasilieff, an old man full of wit and kindness. Husband and wife must appear before him. After receiving the plaint of the Princess Olsdorf, the Consistory of St. Petersburg had sent a commission of inquiry to the venerable priest of the Rue Daru.

On the day and at the hour indicated Lise Olsdorf attended at Pope Wasilieff's. The prince had been there a few minutes. On entering the room where the priest awaited her, the guilty wife saw her husband; she hesitated and fell back a pace, but a look from Pierre Olsdorf made her understand that, not shrinking or pausing, she must play her part to its last line. [Pg 107]

"Madame la Princess," said the venerable Joseph Wasilieff, "I am charged by the Consistory to question you on the facts you have reported to it, and I must also, in conformity with the law as well as in pursuance of my duty as a minister, ask you if you persist in your petition. Before you reply to me, let me urge how generous it would be on your part to forget the outrage you have suffered. Pardon it—for the honor of the name you still bear, for the sake of your children's future. You would know how to win again your husband's heart and you would avoid a great scandal."

Pale and trembling Lise Olsdorf found not a word to say. Leaning back in the deep chair in which she was seated she remained there silent and with downcast eyes.

"As for you, prince," the pope went on, "you can not hide from yourself the gravity of the sin you have been guilty of. The sin is doubly to be condemned in that your accomplice in it was a young girl over whom you had the authority of a master, and whom you carried off from her father to give her in your house the position that your legitimate wife alone has the right to fill. I am convinced that if you would but express the regret that you should feel for your past conduct, Madame la Princess would pardon you."

"Forgive me, holy father," said Pierre Olsdorf with great deference but in a firm tone, "if I can not follow you in the way of conciliation that you are so good as to point out to madame and me. Things have come to such a pass that we can not either of us retrace our steps. It would be best, I think, to shorten this scene, which is equally painful to both of us. What you reproach me with imposes upon me an obligation which my honor, and of it I am the only judge, will not allow me to shrink from." [Pg 108]

Pope Wasilieff did not think he ought to insist further. Perhaps he knew more of the facts than the princess imagined. He said, then, addressing her:

"It only remains for me, madame, to put to you this question: Do you persist in your petition?"

"I persist, holy father," replied Lise Olsdorf, in a stifled voice.

"Then you may retire. With deep sorrow I shall inform the Consistory at St. Petersburg of the defeat of my attempts to reconcile the prince and you."

The princess rose and walked out of the room, lowering her veil. Soon afterward she reached her home, at the moment that her husband arrived at the house in the Rue Auber, where the daughter of his farmer Soublaieff still was.

The pretty Vera was greatly changed. Since the night when she played a part so completely unforeseen by her, everything had tended to add to her uneasiness—the events that succeeded this evening and were not without mystery for her, and also the bearing of the prince toward her.

It will be remembered that, on returning to the bed-chamber where the commissary of police had appeared to bear witness against him as having been found *in flagrante delicto*, the prince had asked for Vera's forgiveness, and that she, letting her head sink upon his shoulder, replied: "Are not you the master; am not I the slave?"

This was more than an act of submission to his will on the part of the young girl; it was an avowal of the passion that had seized on her wholly, and against which she did not try to struggle—out of the deep love to which her very innocence delivered her without defense. [Pg 109]

Chaste as her abandon was to the feeling, the prince was deeply moved by it. He remembered that a few minutes earlier, when the knocking came at the door of the bedroom, and she feared some danger for him, Vera had wound her arms about his neck.

He had gently drawn himself from the embrace and had done his best to calm the poor child by telling her there was nothing to fear. Then, calling her maid, he had begged her to go to bed again.

As usual, Vera obeyed his wish, but it was easy to guess what a wretched night she had passed.

The prince went to his room, and there, thinking over what had happened, he soon grew very

discontented with himself, though he had gained the end he had aimed at. But had he been right in choosing as his accomplice this maiden who was now irretrievably compromised, and in whose heart he could not doubt that he had awakened a feeling which he was forbidden to return? What answer could he make to Soublaieff, her father, who had trusted to the honor of his master, when he asked for an account of the honor and happiness of his daughter? Had not he done everything to persuade Vera of his love for her, and was not it his duty now to undeceive her? But what would she think of him then?

Must he tell her that she had been nothing but a tool in his hands, to be broken and cast aside when she was of no further use? He felt he could not tell her this. But if he were silent, if he left Vera to her illusions, her love would grow with each day, and inevitably the time would come when he must yield to this love or speak out. Pierre Olsdorf was too honorable a man to think of making this young girl his mistress, and as, at the same time, he was full of tenderness for, and gratitude toward her, he dreaded the infliction of a cruel wound in telling her the truth.

Moreover, his pride as a nobleman revolted from the thought of taking as a confidante of his dishonor the daughter of one of his tenants. And then, how could he tell her what had passed between him and the princess? In what words could he explain to an innocent girl the outrage he had been the victim of? Was there not, too, some danger for the success of his plan in acquainting Vera with the part he had made her play? Would not she refuse indignantly to continue her rôle, and would not she, in the course of the inquiry that was to be held, betray by her bearing, if not in words, the real situation in which she had been placed?

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Troubled by all these doubts, Pierre Olsdorf cast himself on his bed to seek a few hours' rest. He had come to no decision by the next morning, when his valet came to say that breakfast was served.

Not knowing what he should say or do, he went to the breakfast-room, where Vera awaited him. Seeing her white and trembling, in his remorse he thought only of comforting her with tender words.

"Dear child," he said, pressing her little hands in his, "will you give me a fresh proof of your devotion?"

Vera's only reply was a smile, which told the prince, better than any words could have done, how completely he might count on her.

Pierre continued:

"This fresh proof that I require of you is not to question me on the events of last night, to be calm, not to doubt me, and to have full confidence in the future. The mysterious trial that my selfishness has condemned you to must last some weeks longer. During this time we shall not be separated; we shall still live the life in common that we have lived since our arrival in Paris; you will still be my dear, my tenderly loved daughter. Do you consent to this?"

"I will do all that you wish," said the young girl, lifting her eyes to his. "I will ask no questions; I will wait. But, my father—"

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Pierre Olsdorf could not but tremble slightly. He went on quickly:

"I will tell Soublaieff what it is needful for him to know, that he may continue to love and respect you as you deserve. In the future every one will respect and love you as I do; I will not fail in my duty to you. Meanwhile, I want you to go out, to amuse yourself, and be as happy as possible."

"I shall be happy, for am not I to stay with you?"

And, as if ashamed of these words, drawing herself from the arms of the prince, who was holding her to his heart, Vera ran to her room to give herself up wholly, in solitude, to the great joy that had taken possession of her.

Henceforward, in accordance with Pierre Olsdorf's will, she continued her drives to the Bois, through which she passed swiftly, shrinking back in the carriage, an object of curiosity for the idlers of Paris, who sought vainly to discover whence came this beautiful foreigner who was so indifferent about the sensation she created. Sometimes she went to the theater with the prince; and these hours were the best of her rather lonely life, for Pierre's tenderness for her then was more real and apparent than ever.

All this, however, was not enough for Vera, whose heart, though she herself was only vaguely conscious of the truth, desired more. Often her eyes would fill with tears, and her smile had lost something of its old-time frankness. Her affection, too, for the prince had grown uneasy and nervous. When he did not lunch or dine at home she eat scarcely anything; and at night, if he were late in coming in, she could not sleep until she had heard him return and had received his affectionate "Good-night," waved to her with his hand as he passed through her room into his own. Since the night of the judicial inquisition, however, Pierre had never gone near Vera's bed. Indeed, he seemed to pass more rapidly through the room than he did formerly.

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These successive and constant emotions, the unconscious and irrational aspirations that she felt, all had an injurious effect upon the young girl's health. If the prince, seeing her every day, did not notice the change in her looks, the moral and physical sufferings of Vera were none the less real. She took no interest now either in her drives or the theaters. She would lie for hours at a time on

a sofa, scarcely thinking, and not daring to question her own heart.

In such a state of prostration Pierre Olsdorf found her on his return from the house of the arch-priest Wasilieff.

Noticing for the first time how changed she was, he was so troubled by the fact that he understood at once what his own feelings were. He had not lived two months with this adorable and devoted child for nothing; he loved her.

At first the knowledge of the feeling frightened him, and he hesitated to go to Vera. But the young girl's great eyes were raised to his with such softness in their depths, they expressed such pain, that Pierre, charmed, went to her gently, and kneeling by the couch on which she was half lying, he said, in a troubled voice:

"Soon, Vera, there will be no Princess Olsdorf. Now I can tell you that, with my son, you are what I love most in the world."

The daughter of the serf Soublaieff did not reply by a single word; but she raised herself suddenly, and the blood rushed so violently to her heart that she fell, half dead, in the arms that the prince held out to receive her.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MEYRINS.

Things were passing at the home of the Meyrins less worthily and less poetically than in the Rue Auber.

Faithful to the advice of his mistress, Paul had been careful to say nothing of his brother and sister-in-law of the serious events of which he was the hero. Neither Frantz Meyrin, however, nor his wife was ignorant of his amours, but they affected, by one of those middle-class hypocrisies that are so common, to suppose that the ties between the artist and the princess were perfectly moral. Their vanity was flattered at receiving the great Russian lady. If they had acknowledged that they knew the truth they would have been obliged to confess they were playing a degraded part, or to break with the noble foreigner, who was so generous to each of them, and so charming.

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For Lise Olsdorf, since her coming to Paris, had used every means to win the Meyrins. She had played on all their weaknesses, good and bad; pride, interest, and maternal love. If the Meyrins received a few friends or gave a musical matinée, she was always there as an intimate friend of the family, helping Barbe, as it were, to do the honors of the house, and one may be sure the Meyrins spoke often enough of "their friend, the princess." Moreover, she let slip no chance of making presents to them all round. Now it would be a piece of jewelry for the violinist, as a mark of her gratitude for the pleasure she had enjoyed in hearing him play such or such a piece; now a dress for Mme. Meyrin, a silver trinket, or a piece of lace for her saint's day, the beginning of the new year, her birthday, or the anniversary of her marriage; while Nadeje received all the finery that could delight the heart of a coquettish young girl.

In exchange for some very paltry pictures by Paul she had adorned his studio with arms, hangings, and costly objects of all sorts. When Frantz gave a concert the princess undertook to dispose of tickets among her Russian friends in the city, and whether they took them or not it is certain the Meyrins pocketed the price of them. So that they all worshiped Lise Olsdorf, and had arrived at the singular state of mind, though without acknowledging it, of being proud that Paul had for his mistress a fine lady whom they had made their friend. They did not say to themselves that each of her presents was, in a manner, the price of their complaisance; and they made a great to-do with the little Tekla, whose real father they well knew, when the princess sent the baby by its nurse to the Rue de Douai.

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This was the footing the Meyrins were on with Lise when the prince, coming suddenly to Paris and taking the tone we have seen, forced his wife not to see her lover except in secret, and to restrict her visits to the artist's family.

Mme. Meyrin very soon wondered why she did not see the princess as often as usual; but when her brother-in-law told her that the prince was in Paris she understood Lise's reserve, and was careful not to question Paul, whose explanation might have been of a sort to alarm her modesty as a mother. She was satisfied to tell the young painter each day to give her kind regards, and her husband's and daughter's, to the princess, whose departure for Russia she now began to fear.

Things might have gone on thus for a long time, for Paul, though well posted by the princess in what was occurring, kept silence; when one morning, toward the end of breakfast, which the family took together, Frantz read in the St. Petersburg correspondence of the "Figaro" the news of the coming divorce between the Prince and Princess Olsdorf. The real cause of the separation had been kept so secret that the correspondent of the journal stated, without comment, that a decree would be pronounced against the prince, following upon a petition to the Holy Synod by his wife, involving very grave charges.

"Well, here is a pretty thing!" the violinist could not help exclaiming. "Just listen."

And as his young daughter had a moment ago left the room with her grandmother, he read again, aloud this time, the paragraph in question. Then, speaking to his brother, he added: "Well, the princess is a good one. She is to petition for a divorce! What has the husband been up to? Don't you know anything of the facts?" [Pg 115]

"Yes, I know a good deal; all, indeed," Paul replied, embarrassed.

"Then why did you not tell us?" Mme. Meyrin asked, in a prim tone.

"Simply because the princess asked me not to say anything until the thing was done with."

"Does her husband know nothing at all about her?"

"Most likely."

"And he lets his wife get a divorce against him like that? I have heard you say yourself that he was a charming man, and had no vices. There is something behind this. You know something more than you say."

"At any rate, what I do know I may not tell."

"But, after all, what does she want with a divorce? What reason could she give? Is she not as free as a woman need wish to be? Will she be any freer when she hasn't a husband? Frantz, your brother must have told you something of all this."

"Not a word," said the worthy Frantz. "Five minutes ago I knew no more about it than you did. The deuce! The princess no doubt has got a divorce because she is more and more infatuated with this fine fellow here."

"My dear," said Mme. Meyrin, shocked.

"Oh, we need not be so particular between ourselves. I dare say you know well enough what is what in the matter. Very likely she wants to marry Paul."

"Marry Paul!" exclaimed the musician's wife, furious because her husband spoke of the thing in laughing at it.

The painter, ill at ease during the discussion, rose from the table, and was making off.

But there was no escaping Mme. Meyrin in this way.

"Come, don't run away like that," she said, catching her brother-in-law by the arm. "You know very well that all this is of the greatest interest to us. If the princess is getting a divorce that she may marry you, you must have agreed to marry her." [Pg 116]

"It is no use asking me questions," said the young man, freeing himself.

"So you are going to marry your mistress, are you?"

Frantz's wife was so vexed at not having been consulted that she lost her usual self-command.

"My mistress?" repeated the painter. "You are deucedly outspoken. Well, what if I do marry the Princess Lise, what harm would there be in it?"

"What harm? Do you hear him, Frantz? What harm! Do you suppose that your mother and your brother would ever let you make such a marriage? A divorced woman!"

"If she were not divorced I could not marry her."

"So much the better."

"What! You who are so strait-laced would rather that she should remain my—my— What you say—than that she should become my wife?"

Seeing that the change of ground was not in her favor, Mme. Meyrin did not know what to answer. Frantz, a good sort of fellow, caring most of all for peace and quietness, did not wish to carry the discussion further. With a look he advised his brother to remain cool.

"Well, for that matter, let us wait; there is no harm done yet." He ended by saying like a coward, "When the princess is divorced, we shall see."

So saying, he left the room abruptly, and his sister-in-law in her astonishment.

Husband and wife kept silence for some moments; then Barbe said to her partner, who had prudently buried himself again in his paper:

"You make very little of this, do you? You may be sure your mother will look at it very differently." [Pg 117]

"My dear," Frantz ventured to say, "the case is a delicate one. Here is a woman who has been visiting us for nearly a year back, from whom we have accepted all sorts of favors, and whom we knew very well to be my brother's mistress. Would you now shut the door in her face simply because she thinks of becoming his wife, as we suppose? That seems rather difficult to do."

"But think of Paul marrying a woman older than himself, accustomed to live in luxury, and already the mother of two children."

"One of which is his whom she wants to make her husband."

"It may be so; and it may not. There is no certainty."

"Oh Barbe, Barbe! I can't see anything so dreadful for my brother in all this. The princess is older than he, but by a few months only; and she certainly won't be dependent on him. I have heard him say that she has a good private fortune. Besides, her mother, still alive, is rich."

The worthy fellow emphasized these particulars, for he knew that what angered his wife more than the marriage of her brother-in-law was the change that it would cause in the household.

Paul gone, the income of the family would be greatly reduced. As a husband and the father of a family, the painter would necessarily cease to be the prospective rich uncle that they had hoped for Nadeje. And lastly, the princess herself when once she was Paul's wife would probably not be so open-handed with the Meyrins as she had been in the past.

As, without daring to acknowledge them, these were the thoughts that had moved the artist's sister-in-law, she blushed at finding them so well guessed by her husband.

She said no more for the moment, but as soon as her mother-in-law came in she told her all that had passed, and Frantz's mother, who worshiped her younger son, though rather egotistically, at once agreed with her daughter-in-law that Paul ought not to marry. [Pg 118]

Meanwhile the inquiry before the Holy Synod was going on, the prince was still living at Paris with Vera whom he loved deeply, though he had not yet told her so; and Lise Olsdorf, more infatuated than ever, was eager for the marriage with her lover, who had not been able to hide from her the opposition the idea met with in his family.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DIVORCE.

Money being in Russia, as elsewhere, a powerful aid, and Pierre Olsdorf not sparing it, matters moved forward with great speed. In less than a month the Holy Synod had closed its inquiry, and one morning the prince received intimation of the judgment pronounced in favor of his wife and condemning him to two months' claustral retirement in a convent at Moscow. The judgment, however, left the children of the marriage under his care.

We know, as well, that according to the Russian law celibacy is a consequence of divorce in the case of the guilty husband or wife. Pierre Olsdorf, therefore, might not marry again without the authority of the czar; and it was his duty to go at once to St. Petersburg, and submit to the will of the Holy Synod.

That evening he told Vera that at last he was free, and a smile of ineffable joy played about her lips; but when he added that they must go back to Russia, the poor child's happiness changed to despair. In St. Petersburg or at Pampeln she would not live with Pierre, who was now all in all to her, though her tenderness was and had been chaste.

This man, young, healthy, full of ardor, such as he had never felt before, had had the courage not to possess himself of this young maiden who awaited only the moment to yield herself to him. He loved and knew himself beloved; but faithful to the oath that he had sworn to himself he had mastered his passions. His oath was that Vera should return pure to her father. After suffering himself to be condemned by the law as an adulterer to gain his end, he would not be one in reality, as much because his pride dictated the sacrifice to its end, without recompense or compensation, as for the satisfaction of his own conscience. [Pg 119]

The struggle had been a painful and terrible one for him. Very often in passing through Vera's room to his own he had avoided her glance so that he might not see in her eyes the fever that was burning within her; and he would bid her "good-night" by gesture, so that the trembling of his voice might not betray him.

How many times in the silence of the night he had listened at the door, softly half opened by him, of the young girl, to hear her gentle breathing, her sighs, and to aspire with delight the fragrance which floated from the couch of the adorable young sleeper.

But he had resisted his passions, and was justly proud of conquering them.

The combat had been less painful for Vera. Spared, by her ignorance and chastity, those desires of the flesh that burn like a brand, her love for Pierre, when she believed herself loved in return, was a long sweet dream, full of charming ecstasies and voluptuous tremors. She suspected that from this intimacy, from their exchange of tendernesses, the abandoning of herself at the fateful hour would follow; but she did not even blush at the thought. Full of confidence in the future, she awaited the great unknown, forgetful of all—her father, Russia, the past, and living in a sort of rapture that grew upon her more and more.

And it was at the time when she was in this frame of mind that Pierre Olsdorf came to tell her of their near return to St. Petersburg; that was, of the compulsory return to her former life, under the eyes of her family, perhaps far from the prince whom she would no longer see every day, [Pg 120]

almost every hour. At the words, the unhappy girl felt herself on the edge of an abyss, a terrible vertigo seized her upon looking into its depths, her face grew deathly pale, her eyes closed. If Pierre had not caught her in his arms she would have fallen like a stone to the ground.

The kisses of the prince, delighted and alarmed as he was at one and the same time, soon recalled the farmer's daughter to consciousness. His lips spoke such sweet words, laid to her lips, that they gave her full courage again, she trusted him so entirely; and the next day at the hour fixed by her master, she was ready to set out.

It was agreed that she should go alone with Yvan, at half past seven, to the Great Northern Railway Station, where the prince had reserved two compartments in the train, and that he would join them there.

While Pierre Oldsorf was making ready for his departure, Lise Barineff was hastening the preparations for her marriage with Paul. Knowing that the Russian law authorized her to marry, if she thought well, the very day after the decree of divorce, and being aware of the ill will of the Meyrins, she would scarcely suffer her lover to be a moment from her side; first because her love for him grew in proportion as obstacles were opposed to it, and next because she feared that Paul, whose feeble and wavering nature she knew, might escape her, yielding to the pressure brought to bear upon him by his family.

She had not hidden from the painter the oath the prince had sworn, to kill him if he did not become her husband; nor had she failed to tell him of the good position, monetarily, that her divorce left her in. Not only had the prince returned her dowry, eight thousand pounds, but he had left her his mansion in St. Petersburg, worth twelve thousand more. She could count on an income, therefore, of from eight hundred to a thousand pounds a year. She thought, as Paul did, that here was a fact that would plead in her favor with the Meyrins. When she was informed, at the same time as he who had been her husband, of the decision of the Holy Synod, she began to hope that the family in the Rue de Douai would come to have a better feeling toward her.

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The artist himself thought so. Moreover, humiliated at being treated as a mere boy by his mother and sister-in-law, he had quite made up his mind to do without a consent that he would have to win, if indeed he were ever to get it, by too long a struggle; and he had given them to understand that he would not wait until the day of his marriage to leave them and set up housekeeping for himself. After dinner one evening, therefore, he told his mother very plainly that the Princess Oldsorf being divorced, he was going to marry her as speedily as possible.

At this news, though it was expected, the storm that had been gathering for several weeks in the Meyrin family burst forth violently. Mme. Frantz had repressed her feelings too long not to take a full revenge now.

Mme. Meyrin, who was completely under the domination of her daughter-in-law, only said to her son:

"I will never consent to your marrying a divorced woman, who is older than you and belongs to neither your rank nor your class."

Mme. Frantz hastened to add:

"Not to mention that she is the mother of two children, and accustomed to an idle and luxurious life that would not fit in with ours. Do you imagine that with eight hundred a year she can keep up an establishment, when she is used to scattering her money about as she does?"

"Then I am good for nothing, I suppose?" Paul retorted. "Good years and bad, I make not less than eight hundred, and I hope to make more. I shall bring to the support of the household as much as my wife."

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The artist could not have used a more unwelcome argument to his sister-in-law. Barbe had the best reason to know what her brother-in-law's resources were, as she had made herself his cashier. It was exactly this money that he threw into the common stock that she regretted, though she would not acknowledge as much. It was therefore a bad move to let her understand that she would not have it to count on in future. Beside herself with rage, she went on coarsely:

"Very likely; but that won't alter the fact that your fine princess is a compromised woman. Do you suppose we don't know of her goings-on with you? She sha'n't set foot in here, that is certain."

"Ah, bah!" exclaimed Paul, provoked. "You will not receive her when she is my wife; but you received her—her and her presents—when she was my mistress. Very well, so be it. We shall each keep to ourselves, that is all."

"Paul!" said Mme. Meyrin, the mother, in a beseeching tone, frightened at the anger of her son, whom she had never seen other than gentle and submissive.

"Well, well, mother," said the painter, in a very different tone, "it is my sister-in-law that irritates me. One would think she was my guardian. Besides, I won't have the woman I love insulted—the woman, who, for my sake, has lost the high position that she had in the world."

"Oh, for your sake," sneered Mme. Frantz.

This was too much for the artist.

"Look here," he exclaimed, "you will never be anything better than a backbiter and selfish. What

maddens you is my shaking myself free from you. You don't care for the morality of the thing, but for your pocket. You thought I should make a good fortune-leaving uncle. I love my niece, I know; but I love Tekla, my dear little baby daughter, better. I shall marry Lise whether you like it or not. As for you, mother, you know my affection for you. It won't change, you may be sure, because I am not living with you. From this night I shall live here no longer. I will give you timely notice of my marriage, and I hope, in spite of my sweet sister-in-law, that you will be present at it."

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Leaving then his mother and Mme. Frantz, who had not looked for such determination in him, Paul hurried to the ex-Princess Olsdorf to tell her what had passed.

Chance had prepared for him in the Rue Lafitte an unexpected and fateful meeting.

The door had been opened for him, and, without asking any question of the footman, he was passing through the anteroom to the room where he expected to find Lise, when the servant stopped him, saying:

"Pardon me, monsieur, but Madame la Princess is with her mother."

"Her mother!" exclaimed Paul, in surprise.

He remembered suddenly that he too, as well as Lise, had ignored rather too much the woman whose son-in-law he was to be.

Left by her daughter in complete ignorance of the conjugal drama in which Lise was the heroine, Mme. Podoi had only heard of the divorce at St. Petersburg as everybody else had, through the talk that the scandal gave rise to. The news had come upon her like a clap of thunder. It was the destruction of her dream of ambition, the realization of which she had striven for so ardently; and, though she knew that the decree of divorce had been pronounced against Prince Olsdorf, she suspected a mystery and wished to fathom it.

Not saying a word to anybody of her intended journey, she had left St. Petersburg, and suddenly appeared before her daughter in Paris.

She had been there but a short time when Paul called. There had been a violent scene between the two women.

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Attacked unexpectedly, and feeling a sort of pride in hiding nothing, Lise had told her mother everything—her love for the painter, the prince's ultimatum, what had happened since, and lastly, her intention to marry again at once.

The general's wife, having listened frowningly to her daughter's story, broke out at this latter part, exclaiming:

"You are mad. Whether you have deceived your husband, concerns, perhaps, yourself alone; but that you should become Madame Meyrin after having been the Princess Olsdorf! No, that you never shall! What! have I lived for twenty years with this one object before me, that you should be a great lady, and am I to see you turned into a miserable little artist's wife? Never! Monsieur Meyrin is a scoundrel. He loved you through vanity, and would now marry you through interest. I will speak to him plainly, depend upon me."

Lise tried vainly to calm her mother.

"He knows you are rich," she went on, "and that after my death you will be richer. That is his sort of love. If you were poor he would not dream of making you his wife. I swear that neither of you need expect anything from me. Is it possible that after my training of you, you can be in love with this showy fellow, a dauber of no name or talent? Ah! you are your father's own daughter."

"What do you mean?" said Lise, quickly, in great surprise.

"Nothing, nothing," said Mme. Podoi, biting her lips.

She had almost forgotten in her anger that for everybody, and above all for Lise herself, her daughter was the daughter of Count Barineff.

She went on a moment afterward:

"Have you thought nothing of your children who will be taken from you?"

"The prince will not dream of taking Tekla from me. He knows she is not his child."

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"But your son Alexander? What will he be to you when you are called Madame Meyrin? You don't suppose Pierre will ever let you see him or speak to him? What will they tell him when he asks where his mother is? If he is sick who will care for him?"

Lise Barineff turned very pale. As we have said, she had always been a good mother. Her head drooped; she answered nothing. It was plain that she suffered.

"Is your marriage fixed?"

"Yes," said the young woman. "In the first place, I love Monsieur Paul Meyrin."

"A fine reason!"

"Besides, if he does not marry me—of course, you can't have known this—the prince will kill him."

"And a good thing, too."

"Oh, mother, mother!"

"Do you suppose I can easily fall in with this ridiculous change in your life? If my pride could bear it, would not my motherly love take the alarm! Think of the society you have lived in, and compare it with that which you will have to live in."

"Monsieur Meyrin is a great artist, and artists, in France, as elsewhere, are received by everybody."

"To make a Madame Meyrin of a Princess Olsdorf! It is shameful. Any way, I warn you everything is at an end between us. Adieu. I will never see you again, until you can tell me that you have made up your mind to remain Lise Barineff."

As she suddenly opened the door of the room Mme. Podoi found herself face to face with Paul Meyrin, whom she recognized at once.

"So it is you, Mr. Painter," she said in a haughty voice. "My sincere compliments. I have paid dearly for my patronage of you in Russia. After betraying the prince who honored you by his hospitality, you carry off his wife and part a mother and her child. It is as an honorable man would have acted—exactly. To pay some debts a man must risk his life. You prefer marrying. Well, it is your business and my daughter's. Before a year has passed she will sing a different song."

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Paul, hat in hand, let the flood sweep over him.

The young woman, who had followed her mother, put an end to the scene by drawing her future husband into the room.

The general's wife looked at them for a moment with angry eyes, muttering, "The idiots!" and disappeared.

"Forgive me," said Lise to Paul, winding her arms about his neck.

"Forgive you?" said Paul, laughing. "Why, I've been hearing worse than that at home. They are all densely stupid. I beg your pardon for saying so. If I do not love you as much as I do they would make me adore you."

He crushed her in his arms, covering her eyes and lips with kisses.

A sudden ring was heard at the bell, and almost immediately the footman brought a letter to his mistress which a commissionaire had brought from the Great Northern Railway Station.

The letter was from the prince.

After reading the first few lines, Lise cried out and fell back on the sofa.

"Madame," wrote Pierre Olsdorf to the woman who was once his wife, "the decree of divorce having left me guardian of my children—I am taking away Tekla. When you receive this letter we shall be on our way to Russia, which is closed against you by my order."

The outraged husband avenged himself on the mother. At least, in her despair, so Lise Barineff interpreted his action.

The prince concluded thus:

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"Remember your undertaking to marry again as soon as possible, if you wish that I should not return to Paris and keep the oath I have sworn. In due time, when the law permits, you must become Madame Meyrin."

The painter picked up the letter which had fallen from the hand of the ex-Princess Olsdorf. He stood before her with head lowered, without daring to address a word of consolation to her.

This day, for the first time, they parted without a word, without the exchange of a kiss.

CHAPTER XIII. THE LAST OF A PRINCESS.

The days that followed the carrying off of her daughter by Pierre Olsdorf were a terrible trial to Lise Barineff. Her heart had bled, as her mother reminded her, that the divorce would rear an impassable barrier between her and her son, but being prepared, so to speak, in advance for this separation, she had sought a refuge from the sorrow it caused her in her tenderness for her last-born infant. And this doubly adored child had been taken from her now. Who would give to this babe of a few months old the care that was the duty of its mother? Its mother would not now watch its growth, or tend on it if it were sick; a stranger would dry its tears, win its smiles, and have its love.

She fully understood the fatal logic by which the prince's conduct had been dictated in taking

away Tekla. In the eyes of the law he was her father; if he had left the child to its mother it would have been a disavowal of his paternity, and consequently the casting upon her, the adulterous wife, the sin that he had taken upon himself in order that the decree of divorce might be pronounced against him. She was forced, therefore, to acknowledge that if he had cruelly used his power, Pierre Olsdorf had, in doing so, only been faithful to the line of conduct he had adopted; and she suffered the more in being able to accuse only herself.

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For the first time the unhappy woman regretted the past, and felt remorse. For many days nothing could console her. She was insensible even to Paul's caresses, and he himself was much affected by the loss of their daughter; but little by little their love gained through this trial an elevation that hitherto it had been lacking in. They loved less coarsely, because they wept together.

There is nothing that transforms a deep passion as a deep sorrow does. Passion tried in the fire quits in part the senses to penetrate to the heart, till then scarcely touched. Suffering undergone together often makes lasting the frail bond between two beings whom their desires alone have drawn one to the other.

Lise and Paul experienced this psychological truth. They spoke less of their love, but it was deeper. The isolation that circumstances imposed upon them drew them more together; and it made them feel, too, that they must hasten their marriage.

They were no longer two lovers desirous of freedom to live in each other's arms; they were two wanderers from the path wishing to gain the right to hold up their heads, two outcasts longing for the joys of the domestic hearth.

Unhappily they had reason to fear an enforced delay of several months, as, the Code Napoleon having been adopted in Roumania, Paul was compelled to obtain his mother's consent. If he had written to her for it, Mme. Meyrin, although she adored her son, would not have replied, goaded to resistance by her daughter-in-law.

The painter, however, had an ally in the house—his brother Frantz; but that good fellow was himself under the domination of his wife, and any timid remarks that he ventured on were fruitless.

Paul determined then to have recourse to extreme measures, that is, to the "respectful summon" prescribed by law. However, wishing, out of deference, to forewarn his mother, he wrote to her as follows:

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"DEAR MOTHER,—I have a duty to fulfill, touching my honor, and you oppose me because you are ill-advised. If you listened only to your love for me you would long since have consented to my marriage with a woman whom you already love and who, whatever happens, will never be aught but the most affectionate and devoted of daughters to you. In face of your opposition and what my honor imposes upon me, I have no other course but to seek from the law what you deny me. I am deeply pained to have to do this, but my determination is unchangeable.

"Once more then, my dear good mother, consult, I say, your own heart alone, and do not force me to take so painful a step.

"Your loving and respectful son,
"PAUL."

Much touched at reading this letter, which had reached her in the absence of her daughter-in-law, Mme. Meyrin hurried to her son. Since the rupture with his family he had been living at his studio.

Paul opened the door to her.

"So, my son, you would leave me?" said the poor woman, sinking on to the sofa to which he had led her. "Between your old mother and a stranger you do not hesitate; your choice is at once made. Ah, I could curse the day you went to Russia. If I were to consent to your marriage, how could I live afterward with your sister-in-law? She would never forgive me my weakness."

"You shall come and live with us," said Paul, kneeling beside her. "Be sure that Lise and I will love you dearly."

"I could not, my son. Habits are not changed when one is my age. And, then, my love for Frantz is as great as my love for you. If I left him I should be ungrateful, for these ten years he has made my life a pleasant and happy one. You see, we are in a coil. Do you love this woman so much, then?"

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"Yes, mother, I love her sincerely; I love her more now than I did before. Besides, it is my duty, having ruined her life, not to abandon her, alone as she is, without her children. You know that the prince has taken from her her little daughter—her daughter and mine."

"God is punishing you both."

Feeling that she had really lost her hold on her son, Mme. Meyrin began to cry.

Paul, unable to bear up against his mother's tears, sprung to his feet, and after looking at her for some moments, said, with a calmness and determination foreign to his nature:

"Well, so be it, mother. We will speak no more of this marriage. I will not appeal to the law; I will wait for your consent to my marriage with Lise. But I will start for St. Petersburg to-morrow."

"For St. Petersburg? What to do?"

"To put myself at the disposal of Prince Olsdorf."

"At the disposal of Prince Olsdorf?"

"The last words of the prince to his wife were these: 'If Monsieur Paul Meyrin does not marry you, I will kill him.' I will not have it that a Russian shall be able to say a Roumanian is, in my person, a coward."

"My son, my son!" cried Mme. Meyrin, seizing him in her arms. "You will fight? It is my refusal that would send you to brave this man? Give me ink and a pen. I will sign my consent. Tell me—tell me quick what I am to write. A duel! And I, your mother—"

The good creature, interrupting her words with kisses, dragged her son to a table in one of the corners of the studio. She was eager to sign the consent at once.

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The artist yielded to her wish and dictated the few lines necessary.

"There, are you satisfied, bad boy?" said Mme. Meyrin, after writing and signing with a trembling hand. "You will talk no more of going away, will you? A duel!"

"Dear mother," replied Paul, his eyes filled with tears of gratitude as he kissed her. "I will stay in Paris, and owe you more than ever."

"And now I will go and get my scolding over—yonder."

She pressed her son again to her heart and returned to the Rue de Douai, where, to have it over and done with, she told all to her daughter-in-law, who had just come in.

"You are a free agent," said Mme. Frantz, in a tart voice, "but this woman shall not put foot in my house."

Thinking it prudent to enter into no dispute and so avoid a scene, Mme. Meyrin returned to her room.

Immediately after his mother had left him, Paul ran to tell Lise Barineff that the last obstacle to their union was done away with.

"At last, thank God!" replied the young woman. "If you had been forced to appeal to the law, I think it would have brought us bad luck. Then, too, people would have begun talking about us again. They have done so already more than enough, not only in St. Petersburg, which I have just had some letters from, but also in Paris. The newspapers are taking it up now. Have you seen this morning's 'Figaro?'"

"No. What does it say?"

"It announces our coming marriage. And see in what terms."

The painter took the journal that Lise offered him and read in the "Echos":

"All Paris must have noticed at the last Salon a very beautiful portrait of a woman, a picture which won a medal for its painter, Monsieur Paul Meyrin. The artist had excellent opportunities for studying his charming model, as he was often seen hiding himself at the back of her box at the opera or the Opera Comique. It was a case, no doubt, of budding love, as the great Russian lady, none other than the ex-Princess Olsdorf, will very soon be known as simply Madame Meyrin.

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"The young painter made the acquaintance of the princess at St. Petersburg. But what rather surprises the fashionable world of Russia is that the divorce has been pronounced against the prince who, it is said, is a charming man, distinguished, and with the reputation, moreover, of having been a model husband. There is some piquant, domestic mystery under the surface which it is not for us to seek after. We will content ourselves by applauding this marriage, for it wins back for us a countrywoman of our own, or pretty nearly so. The ex-princess is, in fact, the daughter of that beautiful Madame Froment who, after winning much applause at the Odéon in classical pieces with Dumesnil, was engaged in St. Petersburg at the Michael Theatre, which she left only to become the Countess Barineff."

"Where has the 'Figaro' got all its information?" asked Paul, having read the paragraphs.

"From some good soul in St. Petersburg, no doubt," said the young woman, in whose mind the name of her mother's former friend did not seem to suggest any thought.

The painter made a shrewd guess that Sarah Lamber was no stranger to this tittle-tattle; but, careful not to recall the unpleasant memory of her, he said, affecting indifference:

"There is nothing offensive in the article."

"No; but it will provoke my mother more and more against us. Nothing is so disagreeable to her as to be reminded that she was once an actress."

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"I confess I did not know it."

"She fancies always that nobody knows anything about it. I am not so proud. All I ask of the future is your eternal love."

Lise Barineff could not foresee what effect the coupling of her name with that of Dumesnil was to have upon the vain countess.

Certainly the author of the article knew more about the affair than he cared to tell.

To make an end of the matter, Paul held out his hands to his future wife, and they fixed forthwith the date of the marriage for a fortnight later.

All that was needful then to be done was for the artist to find suitable rooms, which he did at 112 Rue d'Assas, one of them being fit for a studio, and to furnish them.

In the intervening fortnight Paul saw his mother and his brother several times, but not once his sister-in-law. Though Mme. Meyrin and Frantz had promised to be present at the marriage, Barbe was firm; she would stay at home.

Lise and Paul felt that the ceremony ought to be as quiet a one as possible. For that matter the chapel where it was to take place would scarcely have allowed it to be otherwise. It was a place of primitive simplicity and would not have held fifty people.

Few of our readers know, even by name, this little chapel of the Greek Church, which stands on the left bank of the Seine, in the Rue Racine, on the second floor.

In a set of very common rooms, the residence of the Patriarch of Constantinople, one had been turned into a chapel. Where the bed used to stand, an altar had been reared, with its Byzantine ornaments polished and shining for the occasion.

When the bride and bridegroom arrived the priest was awaiting them, and, being in mourning, he wore a great black veil, which gave him almost a lugubrious look. The walls were covered with a grayish paper, and hung sparsely with tawdry religious pictures in gold frames. The room had a wretched look, which struck Lise. This was very different from the splendor her mother had made a show of in the Church of Isaac at St. Petersburg. [Pg 134]

In spite of herself she could not but recall that day. Representatives of the oldest Russian families, nearly all of them connected by blood or marriage one with the other, were present to do honor to Prince Olsdorf. The arch-priest who officiated wore the richest of his sacerdotal ornaments; the air was heavy with perfumes; from amid women of the highest title and most exclusive fashion in St. Petersburg, her mother smiled on her proudly. Now the scene was a furnished room, the priest, a priest of low grade, wrapped in black. There were a score or so of onlookers, acquaintances of her husband, artists, curious or indifferent, as the case might be, all of them, except Mme. Meyrin, the mother, Frantz, and the good and gentle Mme. Daubrel, who, bent in prayer over her chair, sent up to Heaven sincere supplications for the happiness of her friend, as she herself, too, cast a sad look backward upon the past.

The daughter of the Countess Barineff had noticed among the spectators a stout man, perhaps sixty years old, whom she had often seen at the Meyrins', and who now kept his eyes fixed on her, while his attitude, his smile, and his muttered asides, indicated strange emotion as well as inexpressible vanity. By reason of his clean-shaven face, his pale complexion, the way in which he held his hat, resting it on his left hip and rounding his arm, his right hand thrust into the depths of his double-breasted and carefully buttoned coat, in the style of the portraits of the first Napoleon, he was unmistakably an actor.

It was none other than the old Dumesnil, one of the most faithful interpreters of stock rôles at the Odéon, a very good sort of fellow at bottom, but rather ludicrous from his habit of always fancying himself on the stage, the buskins on his legs, the toga hanging from his shoulders. Lise had given him an affectionate smile. [Pg 135]

In less than half an hour all was over, and the bride and bridegroom, having shaken hands with the witnesses of the marriage, got into their carriage and were driven to their apartments in the Rue d'Assas, while Dumesnil, who had looked after them with tearful eyes, walked away muttering a verse which his memory of classical rôles supplied him with, or which was an indifferent impromptu for the occasion:

"A tout ce qui séduit, préférant le bonheur,
Elle a quitté pour lui palais, gloire et splendeur."

The following day the ex-Princess Olsdorf began a calm, prosaic, middle-class life. She wished to think she was quite ready to accept it, without revolt or regrets. She told herself that Paul, in compensating her for all she had abandoned, would make her forget it. She refused to think of the past, longing only to become a mother for the third time, to satisfy the heart-hunger that the absence of her children had roused in her.

That nothing might recall the past to her, and perhaps also because her pride made her dread their ironical smiles, she discharged her former servants, being satisfied for the time, until she could organize her household, with a cook and a lady's-maid, engaged in haste and almost without inquiry.

The first evening of her new life, tired out by the events of the day, and waiting for Paul, who was putting things straight in his studio, Lise sunk into a chair, and, in spite of herself, her mind turned to the past, now left so far behind.

In her waking dream she smiled sadly on Alexander and Tekla; she saw again the château of Pampeln and its shady park, her companions in the chase, urged on by the horns of the huntsmen, her drosky drawn at lightning speed by its three horses flecked with foam; and, standing at the door of the banqueting hall, with its elaborate wood carvings, she saw the butler, clothed in strictly correct black, appearing to announce in his sonorous voice, "Madame la Princess is served," when, suddenly startled from her thoughts by the entrance of her maid, she came back to the reality indeed as the girl said:

"Madame, the soup is on the table."

With a slight involuntary shiver, the ex-Princess Olsdorf could not, however, help smiling; and as her husband appeared at this moment, she rose quickly and hurried toward him, saying in an almost passionate voice, a sort of echo of the feelings called to aid in completely burying the past:

"Come, love, your arm for Madame Paul Meyrin."

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PART II.

MADAME PAUL MEYRIN.

CHAPTER I.

VERA SOUBLAIEFF.

Vera's journey back to Pampeln was in no respect, it may well be imagined, like the journey she had made to France. Three months ago, when her first grief at leaving her father and giving up the daily round of her life, so sweet and placid, amid people who adored her, had passed, an eager curiosity had seized upon her. Notwithstanding her purity and ignorance of life, she felt, like a true daughter of Eve, the pleasure of being carried off to Paris and of living a life so different from that which she had hitherto known.

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With the delight of a woman in such surroundings, she nestled in a corner of the well-cushioned and padded compartment in which the prince had placed her; and there, alone with her thoughts, under the physical charm of the rapid course of the train, which frightened her too, a little, had she fallen asleep as the night wore on, not much regretting her virginal bed at the Elva farm.

Next day, when Pierre Olsdorf, beginning with the part he intended to play toward the daughter of Soublaieff, came to ask her how she had passed the night, Vera was a good deal surprised for the moment; and her master had to insist before he could make her take her place at table beside him at the refreshment-room at Konigsberg; but, ascribing the honor that was done her to the necessities of the journey, she felt some little innocent vanity about it, and nothing more.

So it was all the way, and the pretty young Russian girl, thanks to her simplicity, arrived in Paris ready to be surprised at all the events that were to follow each other day by day, awakening only her imagination, until the moment came when her heart was moved so deeply.

How far behind were these things now! So far that she sometimes wondered if she had not merely dreamed them.

And then she would close her eyes, trying to dream still. She went over again the most trifling events of her stay in Paris—her surprise when Yvan summoned her to the luncheon-table of the prince; her emotions day by day as her master, growing kinder and more attentive with each succeeding one, had made their lives almost one; until that hour, the thought of which still made her shiver, when fate had cast her into his arms.

Though the daughter of the farmer of Elva had come a virgin from that embrace, the momentary abandoning of herself to it had made of her a woman; it had taught her that she loved, and had raised in her an ardent desire to be beloved.

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What would be the end of this passion? She scarcely dared think of that. Understanding now the part she had played, she asked herself, trembling at the thought, if the prince would not look upon her as the blind instrument he had used, and whether, when they were once again in Pampeln, she would not be parted from him forever.

The dread of it caused her bitter grief; and yet, when she put the idea aside as impossible, she then feared to think of what would inevitably happen if it were, on the contrary, Pierre Olsdorf's will to keep her by his side. Assuredly her father knew of the divorce and the change in the life of his master. The decree was an event which the whole nobility of St. Petersburg must have discussed, making every possible conjecture to explain how it had come about that the decree was against the prince and not against his wife, whose sin everybody knew. Why, then, had

Pierre Olsdorf chosen to seem guilty—guilty instead of her—if he did not love her? Vera could not guess the reason, in her ignorance of the law and the consequences that had followed upon the action of the man to whom her whole heart was given.

All these reflections troubled strangely the poor girl, whom the bearing of her master did not calm, for as they drew nearer the end of their journey Pierre seemed more and more preoccupied and silent. At each important station he did indeed come to assure himself that Vera wanted for nothing in the reserved compartment that she was in, together with a nurse and the little Tekla; but he seemed to avoid being alone with her, and Soublaieff's daughter had looked vainly into his eyes for the reason. Plainly the prince was warding off an explanation. What would become of her? How dared she appear again before her father, so jealous of his honor? Was not death itself better than the agony and the reproaches she was threatened with? [Pg 139]

Again and again during the last night of the journey the unhappy girl thought of throwing herself from the carriage. But death! And if she were indeed loved? Then her tears fell, and she gave herself to God's care.

In this frame of mind Vera left the train at Mittau, where the prince's carriages, telegraphed for from Paris, were in waiting for the travelers, to take them to Pampeln.

At first the young girl hoped that Pierre would ask her to go with him in the drosky, which would hold but two persons; but he put her in the landau, where the nurse and baby already were, and after speaking a few commonplace words in the way of excuses for putting her to so much fatigue, he sprang into the lighter carriage beside Yvan.

The luggage was to follow in an omnibus, with the servants who had come to meet their master.

This fresh disappointment for Vera had scarcely been mastered when, after a three hours' drive, she caught sight of the heavy-looking front of Pampeln, and soon the wheels of the landau were grinding through the sand of the court-yard and stopping before the flight of steps leading down from the main entrance.

Quite given up to her gloomy thoughts, the farmer's daughter stepped from the carriage. She was surprised to find her hand in that of the prince, who, drawing her a little way aside at the foot of the marble staircase, said in a troubled voice:

"Pardon me, dear child, for the silence I have kept since we left Paris, but I have determined that there ought to be no explanation between us until after I have seen your father. I have sent word to him to expect me at Elva, where I am going to seek him. In a couple of hours I shall be here again. Until then trust me. Soon, I hope, you will have ceased to be displeased with me, and will doubt no more either my gratitude or my affection." [Pg 140]

Vera replied only with a look from her great limpid eyes raised to his. Pierre Olsdorf pressed both her hands in his, and sprang into the drosky, to which fresh horses had been harnessed.

The young girl followed him with her eyes until he disappeared from sight at the end of the great avenue; then she slowly mounted the stairs, and passing through the fencing-room, gained the chapel, where she knelt in devotion on the stone floor, murmuring:

"If my father rejects me, what shall I do? Oh, God! have pity on me!"

Vera was still in prayers as the lord of Pampeln reached Elva.

"Is my daughter ill, prince?" exclaimed Soublaieff, meeting his master at the outer fence of the farm.

"No; do not be uneasy, Alexei; Vera is well," replied Pierre Olsdorf, alighting; "but her presence was needed at the château. That is the only reason why she has not come with me. To-night, even, you can embrace her; and to-morrow, if you wish it, she shall come back to you. I have much to say to you."

Struck by the grave look on the prince's face, as well as by the sad tones of his voice, the farmer followed him without daring to question him anew.

In the large lower room of the farm-house, wherein on hunting days he was wont to assemble his friends, the master of Pampeln seated himself, and signed to Soublaieff to take a place opposite to him after closing the doors.

His heart filled with sad forebodings, the former serf obeyed.

"Alexei," said Prince Olsdorf, after a few moments' silence, "you must listen without interrupting me, and without being troubled unreasonably at the tale of the scenes that have passed in Paris in which your daughter has played an important part, and which I will relate to you, hiding nothing. I should say, first of all, that Vera returns to you as worthy of your respect and of the affection of all as she was before she left you. I give you my word of honor on that." [Pg 141]

"I believe you, prince; I believe you," replied Soublaieff, in a low voice.

"You know," said the former husband of Lise Barineff, "that the Holy Synod has pronounced a divorce against me on the petition of the woman who bore my name."

"Against you?"

"Yes, against me. Ah! that surprises you? Even here, then, my misfortune was known. Well, well! Yes, against me. I wished that it should be so, though all the wrong was on the side of the princess; but if it had been otherwise, that is, if the divorce had been pronounced in my favor, she would have been dishonored, and her dishonor would have been reflected upon me and upon my son, Alexander. I would not permit that. The name of Olsdorf must remain stainless. To gain my end I had to affect a sin that left me without defense. Your daughter was my accomplice."

"My daughter!" cried Soublaieff, springing to his feet.

"I prayed that you would listen to me calmly. I swear to you again, on the honor of my race, that Vera is still the spotless maiden that you trusted to me."

Alexei sunk back into his chair again, his eyes filling with tears.

Pierre Olsdorf went on:

"Without understanding the part she was playing, your daughter obeyed me with such devotion and simplicity that the official appointed to gather proofs of the act of adultery I was guilty of was deceived, as was the princess herself, who accompanied him, as the law requires. Thanks to Vera, I succeeded completely. I made no attempt to defend myself, and your daughter was not questioned at all. The divorce was pronounced against me, but I was left with the guardianship of my children: I say of my children, for the princess had been delivered of a daughter, whom I could not disown without accusing of adultery the woman whom I wished to leave worthy, in the eyes of the world, of respect; and Lise Olsdorf, by my order, will become the wife of the man with whom she deceived me. The child who bears my name necessarily I have brought back with me, and have given her to the care of Vera. That is why your daughter is at Pampeln; terrified as she is at the thought that, wrongly informed of what has happened far from here, you may believe her guilty, and take from her your love."

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"My darling Vera," cried Soublaieff. "Oh! let her come now, at once, to Elva. I will never let her know what I have suffered by her absence and at your story. I knew nothing of what you have just told me, and I believe you as I would an angel from heaven. But if I, her father, do not doubt her purity, will others, knowing all that has happened in that accursed Paris, believe that Vera Soublaieff has been a virtuous girl throughout? What will become of her? What man who has a care for his honor would take her now for his wife? Ah! Pierre Alexandrowich, though you respected her innocence, you have ruined my daughter none the less."

Pierre Olsdorf's head was lowered. He understood the sorrow of the father whose daughter's name was forever compromised.

"Yes," he replied, however; "yes, Alexei, I am deeply guilty, I confess. But do not fear. No one will dare to suspect Vera when I swear, on the Holy Evangelists, that she is pure. And I will make her so rich that she will find a husband worthy of her."

The prince said these words with so great an effort, and so pained a smile, that Soublaieff trembled. His mind at rest on the fate of his daughter, he saw now only the sufferings of the master who had humiliated himself before him. He was far from imagining that Pierre Olsdorf was in love with Vera, still less did he suppose that she loved him. Such an idea could never have entered his mind. He thought only of the misfortune that had fallen upon the house of Olsdorf, so widely respected. The sin committed by the princess, whom everybody at Pampeln loved, was inexplicable to him, and he pitied, to the bottom of his heart, this great nobleman so shamefully betrayed by the woman he had raised to his side. It seemed, as if, in a sense, he felt the shame of it, as an old dependent of the family. His emotion was so great that he did not even think of thanking the prince for his promise to secure Vera's future.

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Pierre Olsdorf was the first to speak again.

"Now," he said, "I need to make one more appeal to the devotion of your daughter. After a short journey to St. Petersburg I shall leave Russia—Europe indeed—for a long time. Where shall I go? I do not know—but far, far from here. Alexander and this little girl must have a sister near them, since they have no mother, and the law forbids me to replace the woman who has proved herself unworthy. I wish to ask Vera to be in the stead an elder sister to these two little deserted ones. She will need then to live at the château, where I shall give orders that she shall be obeyed as I myself. Before I go I will make provision for the future of all of them, in case that anything should happen to me."

"Why leave us, prince?" said Soublaieff, "why go from us?"

"I must, Alexei. Time alone can close the wound I have received. Later on, who knows but that I may forget? Can I count on you and on Vera?"

"My devotion to you, Pierre Alexandrowich, is as deep as my daughter's; and you know what proof she has given of hers. What you order will be done."

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"Then all is well. Come with me to the château to embrace your daughter. To-morrow I will give you my instructions, for I must go away by nightfall. Your hand, Soublaieff. Thank you."

The farmer took respectfully the hand that Pierre Olsdorf offered him and pressed it to his lips. Five minutes afterward they had mounted the drosky to drive to Pampeln.

In less than half an hour they were there. Soublaieff, who had followed his master into the

fencing-room, saw Vera coming out of the chapel.

Seeing her father, whom she did not expect, the young girl stopped suddenly, stifling a cry of fear, but when he came forward to her, smiling, and with opened arms, she sprung to his breast, crying:

"Father, dear, dear father."

"Vera, my darling Vera," said Alexei again and again, covering her forehead with kisses, "the prince has told me all. I have no reproaches for you. God will reward your devotion. We will part no more. You shall be as happy as you deserve to be."

At these words Soublaieff's daughter turned her eyes to the prince, who stood by during this scene, and she was so struck by the look of pain on his face that drawing herself from her father's arms she ran to him.

But Pierre Olsdorf, alarmed at Vera's movement, gave her no time to speak.

"Calm yourself, dear child," he said, quickly, as much by his look as his voice, as he took her hands in his, "your father knows the great service you have done me, and I have told him how much I count on you for still. You shall know to-morrow what I speak of. Meanwhile, be at home here in the château, where you will live henceforward; your father has given his consent. I leave you with him. To-morrow I shall see you again."

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Not waiting until she could answer, he walked rapidly away, after pressing her hands affectionately in his.

"Poor prince," said Soublaieff going to his daughter, "how unhappy he is. Who would have guessed what was going to happen? And now he means to leave Pampeln, which is so full of sad memories for him."

"Leave Pampeln," cried Vera, not able to command herself, "leave us? Where will he go to?"

"I don't know, but very far away, so he has told me. What is the matter with you?"

The unhappy girl had grown ghastly pale. She could scarcely stand.

"Nothing, nothing," she said, making a great effort not to betray herself further. "It is the fatigue of the journey, no doubt. Let me go to bed now, father. I shall see you to-morrow, shall I not?"

"Yes, dear Vera, to-morrow. I have promised the prince to come and take his instructions to-morrow. I shall go back to Elva now. Do you have a good night's rest, and you will be as strong and brave when you wake as if you had not traveled four hundred leagues."

And Soublaieff, having kissed his daughter tenderly, retired.

Night was falling. The great portraits of the ancestors of the Olsdorfs that hung on the walls of the room; the suits of armor which stood as if they covered still the men who had worn them of old; the fantastic shadows which the last rays of daylight lengthened, streaming through the colored glass of the Gothic window-frames; the mournful silence that reigned around her, all filled Vera with so sudden a fear that she fled in terror to the rooms which Yvan had told her were to be hers.

They were in the right wing of the château, near to those that Pierre's son and his governess, Mme. Bernard, a worthy woman quite wrapped up in the child intrusted to her care, occupied. It was the suite which was usually reserved for the prince's more intimate friends. Very elegantly furnished, it consisted of a dressing-room, a bath-room, and a small sitting-room.

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As soon as she got there, Vera burst into tears and sobs.

So all was over; the prince deserted her, careless of the love he had won, love which either he did not see or perhaps despised; he was going away, leaving her to her memories and her despair. She had been nothing but a tool in his hands, of which he rid himself pitilessly. Her dream was all a lie; he did not love her. What did she care for the comfort he wished to leave her in? Was not her future life quite ruined? Why, then, should she stay at Pampeln? No, she would not. With her father only could she hope for forgetfulness. She would keep none of the rich dresses and jewels that he had given her. They would but recall to her hours of bliss and hope which she would no longer have the right to remember. She would go back to Elva as she had come from it, poor and simple, not to-morrow but then, that night, without seeing the man who thought of her no more. She would walk the road from Pampeln to Elva, all alone, as she used to do when she was a little girl and knew only by sight, because they stopped at the farm on hunting days, elegant carriages such as she had been driven about Paris in. The darkness would not frighten her. What misfortune could happen to her greater than that she was now suffering? And the poor child, her eyes filled with tears, her hair falling about her shoulders, her hands trembling, turned over the things in her trunks to find, among the silks and laces, the linen gown and national head-dress which she had worn three months before journeying to France. But each of the things she touched painfully revived the memory of the past. This necklet of pearls was the prince's first gift; these diamonds were in her ears that evening at the opera when her appearance there for the first time had caused such surprise. This white silk dress she had worn at the Italian opera when Patti sung; in this furred mantle Pierre Olsdorf had wrapped her as they were leaving the theater. These fans, these bracelets, she remembered with what sweet words they had been

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given to her. On each thing she could have put a date, so close in accord were her memory and her heart.

A long sigh, a sigh of love and despair, escaped from her lips, and a blush rose to her face. She saw the dressing-gown of blue, trimmed with lace, that she had taken off on that terrible night, in which was but one moment of bliss, when, half naked, she had clung about the neck of the prince to defend him or to seek his protection as the door of her room was flung open. Could she ever forget that moment? Pierre had not understood how she adored him. Yet had not she betrayed it plainly, in her eyes, at the moment of that mad embrace?

"Oh, no," she sobbed, ready to fall to the ground, conquered by all these emotions, "no, he will never love me."

"Never more than at this moment, Vera," a voice said suddenly that made her tremble.

She sunk into the arms of Pierre Olsdorf who, without being heard by her, had entered the room and had been watching her for some moments.

"Is it you?" murmured SoublaiEFF's daughter, closing her eyes as if, fancying this was a new dream, she wished to lengthen it.

The prince carried rather than led her to a large sofa at one side of the room. He laid her down on it, and kneeling beside her, said:

"Why do you doubt me? Vera, I have the sincerest and tenderest affection for you. I will never forget what you have done for me nor the trouble I have brought into your life. I am responsible for your future, and I swear to you it shall be happy."

"You speak of happiness for me, Pierre Alexandrowich, and you are leaving me," sobbed the young girl, with a despairing look in her eyes brimming over with tears. "Why do you go? Why do you leave me alone?"

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Never was woman more beautiful, more desirable, more intoxicating than Vera in her sorrow and her chaste *abandon*. The dusky flood of her hair sweeping about her, her scarlet lips parted as if they begged for a kiss, the subtle fragrance of youth and maidenhood that innocently offered itself—all this intoxicated Pierre Olsdorf. He had seized in his the cold hands of the young girl, and, his head swimming, he felt himself drawn irresistibly to her. But a last gleam of reason arrested him; and rising he exclaimed:

"Oh, no, no; it would be an act of cowardice unworthy of me."

Vera, amazed, half raised herself, and her face showed such pain that the prince, going to her quickly again, said hurriedly, mastering his heart and his passions by a strong effort:

"Listen to me, my child, my darling, my beloved, and do not take from me by your despair the courage I need. Yes, I love you, and yet I must go from you. I must; it is my duty; that you may still be worthy of respect and that I may still be an honorable man. I will not have it thought that what happened in Paris happened only that I might be happy through you. I will not give power to any one to accuse you of having been my willing accomplice. How long shall I be away? God alone knows. Perhaps I shall not have the strength to prolong our separation; but part we must, for your sake and for mine. While I am far away and thinking of you you will be a mother to my son and to that little creature who bears my name, and whom, though I can not love, I can not abandon. You will be mistress at Pampeln; and later, when time, if it has not cured, at least will have cicatrized the horrible wound that I have received, I will return, and I shall have forgotten nothing. Adieu."

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Without waiting for Vera to answer him, Vera, who understood nothing but that he was going to leave her, Prince Olsdorf seized her in his arms, pressed his lips in a long kiss to hers quivering with sobs, and, snatching himself from this intoxicating embrace, he let her sink, fainting, on the sofa.

When SoublaiEFF's daughter again opened her eyes, she was alone.

Next morning, at day-break, after kissing his son, and having had long interviews with his steward, Beschef, and the farmer of Elva, to whom he gave a letter for his daughter, the prince left Pampeln for St. Petersburg, where he had to submit to the will of the Holy Synod.

He had not had the courage to see Vera again. He took with him only his faithful Yvan, to have near him some one on whom he could rely should death strike him when far from home.

A fortnight later Pierre Olsdorf took ship at Brindisi for Egypt, to begin the long exile to which he had condemned himself.

CHAPTER II. THE STUDIO IN THE RUE D'ASSAS.

While Prince Olsdorf had gone from the sight of all who loved him, and Vera SoublaiEFF, in

despair, but obedient, was devoting herself at Pampeln to the two poor little forsaken ones intrusted to her care, Mme. Paul Meyrin found forgetfulness of the past in the love of the man she had chosen. The memory of her children, parted from her forever, sometimes wrung her heart; and when her mother chose, from time to time, to send her any news of them, her eyes would fill with tears.

We may be sure, knowing her character, that Mme. Podoi never failed to fill her letters to her daughter with reproaches and insulting comparisons. As if to humiliate and awaken feelings of jealousy in her, she never mentioned Vera except in the most flattering terms.

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"This young girl is irreproachable," she wrote to her five or six months after her marriage; "at Pampeln everybody loves and respects and obeys her. No one dares raise the least doubt of her virtue, of the purity of her relations with the prince during her stay in Paris. She is absolute mistress at the château, where your name in a very short time will not be remembered. Your son Alexander himself will forget it, and will know only that of the woman who has become his real mother. As for Tekla, she will probably never speak it.

"I know what is going on in Courland from that excellent Madame Bernard, your son's governess. The prince authorized her to keep me informed about the health of the children. You may imagine I shall not ever go again to Pampeln. I do not want to have to blush for you.

"It is reported in St. Petersburg that Pierre Olsdorf is in Japan; but he only writes to Vera Soublaieff. She is the only person who knows for certain where he is.

"This is what your folly has brought my dream of ambition to. May God grant that no worse misfortunes are in store for you."

When poor Lise had received one of these letters, in which her mother was thus pitiless, she kept it from her husband, for he might have forbidden the correspondence, but she would hurry to Mme. Daubrel, who wept and did her best to console her. Then she would return to the Rue d'Assas, and a kiss from Paul would bring her calmness. The love of the ex-Princess Olsdorf for the man whose name she now bore was unchanged; she was still passionately attached to this man, to whom she had yielded so completely from the first hour.

Nor had Paul Meyrin changed; he was still the lover he had been. Lise was his adored, intoxicating, and extravagant mistress yet. Proud of the beauty and the distinguished air of his wife, he took her everywhere, and received many friends—painters, literary men, artists of all kinds, all enthusiastic about this noble stranger who, to marry one of their class, had given up without regret the title of princess and so high a social position.

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Lise, on her part, had neglected nothing that could win the affection of this impressionable world, of which now she formed a part.

At first visitors came with a feeling of distrust, perhaps, too, in a critical spirit, for they wondered how this great Russian lady would bear herself toward them, habituated as she was to homage of every kind, and ready, perhaps, to think that they must be only too happy to be received by her; but in the case of each of them a few moments' conversation with Mme. Meyrin was enough to make them think her perfectly charming. She was simple, sweet, and anxious for the comfort of all of them.

Excellent musician as she was, other musicians found in her a nature able to understand them, and an executant of the first class for the interpretation of their works. The painters soon cited her as an able judge, and a critic both fair-dealing and kindly. As such she was looked upon by the literary men, some of whom got into the habit of putting their ideas before her, and asking for advice. It was not long before the studio in the Rue d'Assas became a meeting-place of much renown. The ex-Princess Olsdorf was happy and proud in doing the honors there.

This was the life she had pictured to herself with the man she loved, who, thanks to her, was now becoming well known as an artist. In the day-time, while Paul worked at some picture, the idea of which she had inspired, Lise would sit not far from him at her embroidery, reading or music, until the hour when the usual visitors to the studio gathered round her to tell her the chit-chat of the Parisian day. In the evening, if they had nobody to dinner, they would go to the theater; or they would go out arm in arm for a short walk—only a little way, that they might the sooner be at home and alone together again.

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Full of good taste and used to luxurious surroundings from her childhood upward, Mme. Meyrin, having engaged suitable servants, well trained in their work, had arranged the house in charming style. Everything in it bespoke the presence of an elegant, intelligent woman, with a care for the comfort of those about her. She charged herself with the personal care of the flowers that were always to be seen in the studio; and Paul was delighted with this room, which flattered his sense of the beautiful and the voluptuous in a way that he had not dreamed of before.

The young couple, in a word, were quite happy. All they lacked was intercourse with their family, for Mme. Frantz nursed her wrath against her brother-in-law and his wife. She never saw them, and it was in secret alone, to avoid bickerings, that Mme. Meyrin, the mother, could steal away sometimes to go and embrace her son.

The respectful and affectionate reception she met with from Lise quite charmed the good old lady, who puzzled her brain to find a means of bringing her children together. As yet she had failed.

The exiles of the Rue d'Assas were not without stout champions in the Rue de Douai. First and foremost there was Mme. Daubrel. She took every chance to sing the praises of Lise, with whom, as we have seen, she was more intimate than ever, though she was not a guest at any of the dinners or "At Homes." Mme. Paul Meyrin had tried in vain to persuade Marthe to occasionally meet her other friends. She refused once for all.

"My dear Lise," she said one day, when her friend returned to the subject, "you know how I am placed. Not wishing to give the shadow of a pretext for malicious chatter, I am forced to deny myself the pleasure of seeing you when you have visitors. You are merry here, you laugh and are happy. My heart sympathizes with your joys, but they are forbidden me. After my misfortune, I said: 'Having been guilty of a sin, I swear, now going back to my mother's roof, to expiate the past by an exemplary life. In America, far from me, I have a son, whom God will, perhaps, let me see again some day; and I wish to become worthy of him.' For five years I have had no friends but the Meyrins; I have never been inside a theater, nor made a new friend in that time, except you. Your affection is so sweet to me, and gives me such delight, that sometimes I reproach myself about it as a happiness which I ought not to indulge in. Don't press me, then, I beg of you. Besides, I think I love you more and better when we are alone."

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The answer of Marthe had touched and at the same time painfully moved Mme. Paul Meyrin in reminding her that she too had children in another land, who bore a name not hers, whom she was forever parted from, and whom even the death of the father would not give back to her, whom she might not nurse if they were sick, and whose hands would not close her eyes as they stood weeping by her pillow at the hour of eternal parting.

The unhappy mother could then almost have cursed the divorce that had estranged her from those she loved; but she had been careful not to return with Mme. Daubrel to this subject, which was so full of pain for both of them.

Happily at about this time Lise found that she was about to again become a mother. It was a supreme consolation to her. Her husband seemed not less delighted, and the fact made her regret still more that the efforts were vain of Marthe and all who helped her steadily to bring about a reconciliation with Mme. Frantz.

The good-hearted Mme. Daubrel was not left to plead alone in the Rue de Douai Paul's cause and his wife's. There was also Mme. Meyrin, the mother, who would have liked to kiss her son every day, and who felt herself drawn by ties of affection to his wife. Then little Nadeje, who remembered well the caresses and presents of the Princess Olsdorf, asked in her simplicity how it was that she did not see this beautiful lady any more now that they were aunt and niece. Lastly, there was a third person, whom our readers have caught only a glimpse of at present, the actor Dumesnil.

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The old player had known the Meyrins intimately for a long time. For several years he had given lessons in elocution to the young girls whom Mme. Frantz taught singing; and in the artistic matinées in the Rue de Douai he was occasionally engaged to recite a speech from the classical dramas, which the good-natured audience, as commonly happens at such gatherings, would warmly applaud. These were the most successful appearances now of the former lover of Mme. Podoi, as the tragic drama was all but banished from the Odéon.

This was the friendship with the Meyrins which had warranted Dumesnil's presence at Lise's marriage.

Informed, as we have seen, by Mme. Podoi herself, when she was still the Countess Barineff, of her daughter's marriage with Prince Olsdorf, the good-hearted actor had heard nothing more of Lise while she remained in Russia; he was barely told, and almost as a favor, of the birth of her son Alexander, though he was his grandson; but when she came to Paris he learned the fact from the newspapers, which had had so much to say about her; and we may be sure that when he knew the Meyrins were visited by her he took the earliest chance to meet her there, his daughter, whom he had not seen for twenty years.

In the Rue de Douai, Dumesnil was at first scarcely remarked by the young woman; but, while quite discreet in regard to the relationship between them, he was able in the end to interest her in himself, and it was not long before Lise began to really like, as if he were one of the family into which she was about to enter, this old man who, though a little ridiculous at times perhaps, was gentle, polite, well-bred, and of good manners, and had been one of her mother's earliest associates on the stage. For one day the Princess Olsdorf, who at the Meyrins' wished to have her title and rank forgotten, had asked Dumesnil if he was not at the Odéon at the time when Mme. Froment was playing there, and the good man had replied, trying not to betray his emotion:

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"Yes, Madame la Princess, I knew Madame Madeleine Froment, an actress as clever as she was distinguished. For two years we played together in classical pieces, and at that time, if you will forgive me for preserving the memory of it, I often kissed you and gave you a ride on my knee. I can assure you you were the prettiest and most adorable little thing ever seen."

At this detail of her baby-life Lise smiled, and held out her hand to Dumesnil; she did not ask him, however, who was M. Froment. Instinctively, or through modesty, she thought it prudent to make no inquiry into the past, though, indeed, she was very far from suspecting the truth. Nevertheless, from this time forth a sincere friendship sprung up between the princess and the old actor.

We can easily understand the interest with which Madeleine Froment's former lover had followed the stages of Lise's divorce, the joy he had felt in seeing her become Paul Meyrin's wife—it seemed as if in marrying the artist his daughter were brought nearer to himself—and his efforts to put an end to the misunderstanding between Madame Frantz and her sister-in-law.

He did his utmost in company with Madame Daubrel to bring about a peace between the two households. He felt there was nothing for it but that the two young women must become friends. Then he would have no reason to make a mystery of his visits to the Rue d'Assas, and he would thus have the chance to see oftener still the woman to whom his paternal heart yearned. He, so long left to himself, would be almost a family man, meeting, as he would almost every day, after this separation of years, the daughter whom the ambition of her mother had snatched from him.

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Laid siege to in this manner, Mme. Frantz had to yield in the end. Her husband let her know that the rupture was not only painful to him, but prejudicial to their pocket, the ex-Princess Olsdorf having still many acquaintances in the Russian colony, where concerts and charity fêtes were constantly being given, in which she might hinder him having any hand.

Conquered by this argument, Mme. Meyrin's eldest daughter-in-law made up her mind to pay a visit to the Rue d'Assas. For that matter, she was not loath to judge for herself how far what she had heard was true of the elegant upholstering and arrangement of her brother-in-law's house.

Lise's condition supplied Barbe with a plausible excuse for calling upon her, though she had received with mortification the news of her being again about to become a mother, for she had hoped that her sister-in-law would bear no more children. One day, then, when she had been forewarned by Mme. Daubrel, Mme. Paul Meyrin was visited by Mme. Frantz and her husband.

The interview was as cordial and frank as possible, at any rate on the part of Frantz and Lise. The latter was sincerely pleased at this renewal of the friendship, and, there and then, it was agreed that the past should be forgotten, that they should see each other regularly twice a week, alternately at each house, and that Nadeje should come as often as possible to the Rue d'Assas. The aunt promised to find amusement for the dear child, and to walk with her in the Luxembourg Gardens.

All this being settled, Mme. Paul Meyrin was anxious to do the honors of the house to her sister-in-law, who was forced to admit the richness and good taste of the upholstering and decorations that had been done under Lise's directions.

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When the musician's wife went into the studio it was better still; she was dazzled for a moment by the splendor of the hangings and the marvels of art that adorned it. Lise, understanding that for an artist the studio is his favorite room, had let nothing be wanting, so that her husband's might please him wholly. Before selling the mansion in St. Petersburg she had had the artistic furniture removed to Paris, the old furniture of the time of Henry II., exquisite in form, the arms from the Caucasus, the Persian carpets, everything, in short, that could serve for the Rue d'Assas; and as a consequence Paul's studio was known as one of the handsomest and most interesting in Paris.

However, after admiring everything, Barbe left the place with envy gnawing at her heart. Replying to Frantz, who, walking toward the Seine with her, frankly showed his pleasure at seeing his brother so well lodged, all she could find to say was:

"Yes, it is all very fine; but what a sum of money thrown away. Paul can't keep on at this pace with his wife's eight hundred a year and what he makes himself by selling a picture now and again."

To avoid a discussion which he saw would lead to no good, M. Meyrin did not answer. His wife said no more, but she was stricken, and readier than before to hate this stranger who surpassed her thus at every turn.

It was worse still when, three or four days afterward, she came with her husband and daughter to dine in the Rue d'Assas. Not for the sake of show, but simply because she loved beautiful things and had them, Lise's table was covered with the magnificent plate which had remained her property after the divorce and had been brought from Russia. The dinner was exquisite, but Mme. Frantz ate scarcely anything. In vain Lise was more charming than ever she had been toward Nadeje. The violinist's wife chose to leave early. She pleaded indisposition, and all the way home she kept on saying to her husband:

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"If your sister-in-law imagines we can give her such dinners, she is mistaken. Unless she wished to make little of us, she is mad, and Paul is not much saner. But I hope, at any rate, that we shall never want for anything, whereas your brother, especially if his wife bears him a child every twelve months, having little now, will soon be head over ears in debt, living in such style."

"Oh, deuce take it, you look too much on the black side of things," said Frantz, with some show of firmness. "How can you suppose that Lise wanted to make little of us? It is absurd. I think she is a most charming woman. You don't like her, that is what is the matter. Give her what sort of a dinner you please. I am sure she will see nothing in it but kindly hospitality."

To put an end to the subject, for he did not mean to yield the point, the musician stopped at the Opera House, under pretense of having something to say to one of the artistes in reference to a concert, and let his wife go home alone, which did not help to soothe her.

A few days later, when it was her turn to receive Mme. Paul Meyrin, Barbe made an affectation of the severest simplicity, a fact which Lise did not so much as notice, happy as she was to again set foot in the house which had been the scene of her early love.

When in a tart voice her sister-in-law said:

"We can not make such a show here as you do. My silver is only nickel-plated."

Lise replied, with her frank, good-natured smile:

"What does it matter? Perhaps we shall have a much pleasanter dinner here than you had with me. All I want is your affection. I have it again, and that is sufficient."

And taking Nadeje on her knee she slipped about her neck, kissing her, a beautiful necklet of pearls which she herself had worn as a child; and the young girl thanked her for it with a thousand kisses and exclamations of joy.

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At this moment M. Armand Dumesnil was announced.

Knowing that Mme. Paul Meyrin was to dine this evening with her sister-in-law, the old comedian had got an invitation. Lise, who had learned from Mme. Daubrel with what warmth he had always pleaded her cause in the Rue de Douai, offered him her hand affectionately, over which the actor bent, murmuring:

"La place m'est heureuse à vous y rencontre."

For this honest Dumesnil had the pleasant habit of sprinkling his conversation with poetical excerpts. He was well versed in the classical drama, and sometimes, perhaps, rather abused his power. He never appeared as a guest among other visitors at the Meyrins' without saying, like Louis XI.: "I have seated myself at the table of one of my subjects." If he played at cards he waited impatiently for his adversary to ask him for a heart, and would reply, "I wear not my heart on my sleeve for daws to peck at—hem!"

The habit was quite a serious thing with him. He indulged it, posing theatrically, even at his own home and before his own servant, old Potais, formerly prompter at the Odéon, who, his memory too being stuffed with passages from the classic tragedies, replied to his master with alexandrine for alexandrine, tirade for tirade. The effect was too ludicrous to be described.

Notwithstanding this bit of absurdity, Dumesnil, as we have seen, was an honest fellow. He was quite moved as he took his seat near Mme. Paul Meyrin, his daughter, his little Lise, as he kept on repeating to himself, in bending on her covert and tender glances.

No one present suspected his paternity, any more than Lise herself did. The old comedian was at once happy and proud of the secret he alone held, which made the young woman dearer to him than ever. It was as if he foreboded that the day would come when she would need his protection.

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CHAPTER III. MOTHERHOOD.

The relations now established between her sister-in-law and herself seemed at first to fill the cup of Lise's happiness, for since her marriage she had suffered much from the estrangement of Frantz and his wife, partly through wounded vanity, but chiefly on account of her affection for her husband.

She could only see in the attitude taken in the Rue de Douai a lasting censure on her union, and knowing the plasticity of Paul's character she feared that in time he would be affected by it, so that she rejoiced at having dissipated the cloud. She was truly happy when she saw the whole family return to her. Mme. Frantz's remarks, often ironical though they were, did not trouble her a moment in her joy.

She was the first to laugh about them with Mme. Daubrel and Dumesnil. A day rarely passed without the latter calling on her. Lise always received him in very friendly fashion, and let no chance escape of expressing her gratitude for the warmth he had shown in taking her part. Notwithstanding the absurdities of the good man, she feeling a great friendship for him, did not disguise it; and one day when she renewed her assurance of it, offering him her hand, Dumesnil was so touched that he could not find, to thank her with, a single one of the alexandrines with which his memory was usually so richly loaded.

After responding respectfully to the pressure of her hand and stammering out a few words, he was obliged to turn away on pretense of looking at a new painting of Paul's. He had need to dry his eyes, which had filled with tears at the affectionate welcome of his daughter, who was now won back to him.

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It would be impossible to tell the pride the old actor felt in seeing Lise reign over this gathering of artists and literary men, most of them celebrities in the world whose meeting-place was her drawing-room or rather Paul's studio. He listened in admiration of her as she gave her opinion on the last new book, the play of the previous evening, or a lately exhibited picture. And when she

took her seat at the piano to play the most striking passages in an opera just published, how her masterly execution ravished him!

"What a great artiste she would have been," he would say to himself at such moments, "if her fool of a mother had not made a princess of her. Ah, blood will show itself. She is my true daughter."

He had forgiven her the betrayal of her first husband, and thought she was right in marrying Paul Meyrin. His fatherly love reproached his young friend for not being oftener on his knees before this adorable creature who had been willing to descend to his level. It was pretty certain that at the least neglect of Lise, that good fellow Dumesnil would grow ferocious.

The painter, in fact, seemed to think his happiness the most natural thing in the world. He had grown used to it too quickly, never showed any surprise at it, and of all those whom his wife charmed, he was the least ready to recognize her many good qualities. Not that he did not appreciate them; but perhaps a little jealousy was mingled with the satisfaction of his pride in her; and he could have wished that his regular visitors would occupy themselves rather less with the mistress of the house, so that they might admire his work somewhat more.

One day at the house of an artist friend, where some people were whom he did not know, he heard one of them ask the host:

"Do you go to Madame Paul Meyrin's? They say she is a woman of rare ability and very distinguished."

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It had ruffled him a little. So it was not to his house people came, but to his wife's. His sister-in-law, to whom he was ill-advised enough to repeat what had been said, did not miss the chance to say an ill-natured thing.

"My poor Paul, you only have your deserts. You must be very inexperienced if you think that a man can marry a fine lady, a princess, and still be first in his own house. Ah, you haven't seen the end of your humiliations and troubles yet."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, since you ask me, that your wife is far too elegant for her present position. I suppose she thinks she is still in her palace at St. Petersburg. In your studio she bears herself like a queen, surrounded by adorers, from among whom, you may be sure, one day or other some lovers will arise. You are but an extra serf in her eyes, my poor boy."

"You are out of your mind, Barbe. You have never forgiven Lise."

"Well, well. We shall see, we shall see."

Having thrown this first dart, Mme. Frantz went no further; but Paul returned home that day wondering that he had not noticed until then that he held a secondary place in the household, and thinking that it would become him to have a reform in the matter. However, he did not think for a moment of speaking to Lise on the subject. In the first place, he would not have known how to make a beginning; and when, as he entered the studio, his young wife drew him toward her by one of the passionate glances that she always had for him, the artist, a man governed by his sensations from moment to moment, quickly forgot the slight wound to his vanity that his sister-in-law's words had made him feel.

For that matter, the time would have been badly chosen to think of changes in their life, for Lise herself came to the point in regard to the state of her health. In fact, she was now within two months of her confinement; and she was so happy at the thought that she was about to become the mother of a child which this time would not be taken from her that she wished to take precautions such as previously, in like circumstances, she had not dreamed of.

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When she was *enceinte* with Tekla she had hidden the fact up to the last moment from coquetry; but whom should she now put herself to inconvenience for? Was not she sure of the love of her husband? Had not she the right to be proud of the motherhood which would fill the sorrowful blank made by fate around her? She would not forget her absent children, their place was always in her heart. But she would love this sweet child with the love she bore to all three.

She was unwilling, therefore, to commit any imprudence, and once again in her nature the mistress made way for the mother. She began by staying away from the theater, then little by little her "At Homes" grew rarer and were given for fewer hours, until the day came when she put aside all that did not directly affect the event she awaited. She saw scarcely anybody but the Meyrins, Mme. Daubrel, and Dumesnil, which pleased Paul extremely. It looked as if he were delighted not to see his wife so surrounded as she had been since their marriage, and as he still passed nearly all his time beside her, as he had done then, Lise, certain that her husband loved her more every day, was as happy as a woman could be.

In two months' time Mme. Meyrin was delivered of a daughter, to whom the name of Marie was given. Paul, at his sister-in-law's suggestion, advised his wife to suckle it herself.

Lise had never thought of doing so, the practice being so entirely foreign to the custom of the world she had always lived in, but she welcomed the proposal with joy, to please her husband for one thing, and also because it seemed to her that her child, suckled by herself, would belong to her the more.

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She gave no thought to the slavery, so to speak, of every moment to which she would condemn herself, nor to the sacrifices of every sort that the part of a mother so completely accepted would entail upon her.

The truth is that Paul eagerly fastened upon the chance to take the first step, without discussion and without seeming to act with an object, toward those reforms which his sister-in-law was always talking about when she was alone with him, awakening his jealousy and reminding him of the thrifty principles of which an example had been kept before his eyes from his infancy.

"When a woman becomes a mother," she said over and over again to him, "she should bid farewell to coquetry and the homage which always has an ulterior aim, of those who pay court to her. Lise is a great deal too much of a fine lady, with her loosely knotted hair, her elegant gowns, her low-cut bodices, her silken hose, and her profuse jewelry, which she wears at every opportunity. Who does not know whence and from whom these things come? They were all very well for the Princess Olsdorf. Why should she always be reminding people that there was a time when she was not Madame Paul Meyrin? A divorced woman is obliged to be more reserved than other women; men, with their usual vanity, being ever ready to believe that, as she has made one slip, she may make another. Besides, you live in a style out of accord with your income. All these dinner-parties and 'At Homes' will ruin you. You will have other children besides this one, and that means money to rear them. You must be economical, and as your wife has never been used to that, it is for you to keep an eye on the expenditure of the house, if you don't want to be without money one of these days."

This ill-meant though specious reasoning could not but bear fruit in a mind as ordinary and prosaic as Paul's was. His passion for Lise had only temporarily roused in him the instincts of a true artist. There was always in him a substratum of the commonplace, from which he could free himself at no time, save when his passions or his vanity got the upper hand. As for jealousy, the pretext alone of it was used to hold him, for he had the absolute confidence in his wife of which she was worthy in every respect.

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Thus matters were in the Rue d'Assas, without anything seeming really changed, when, three or four months after her confinement, Lise spoke to her husband about inviting a few of their friends. Her surprise was great at this reply from Paul:

"What is the good of it? Let us live rather more for one another. Is it not enough to invite our own family, Madame Daubrel and Dumesnil? In their case you will have no need to go to expense over your dress, as you have to at the receptions in my studio."

Mme. Meyrin at first thought she had misunderstood him, either in the words spoken or their sense. The surprise she felt was so plainly to be seen in her eyes that the painter, taking her in his arms, added:

"Besides, you see, I am jealous. I should like now to have you a little more to myself. Oh, I don't want our door to be closed altogether, but only that it should not be opened so widely as it was last year."

He had spoken the first sentences with such an accent of truth that the poor woman, hearing in them, as it were, an echo of her most enchanting days, pressed against her husband with a voluptuous thrill. With him and her child by her she cared little for anything else.

Paul, however, soon grew more exacting, and his wife could not but be a little offended at hearing him each day advise some fresh reform, now about her dress, or even her hair, now as to the household expenses. But, blind through her love, she obeyed. She put away the most elegant of the dresses that she used formerly to wear, and at the same time, like a tradesman's good little wife, she began to look after the servants more closely.

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The painter was not to stop here, however. One evening Lise had given an "At Home" to some friends—artists and literary men they were—who expressed surprise that, having so long ago recovered from her confinement, she had not resumed her receptions in the old style. When they were gone Paul said:

"I doubt whether it is quite the thing to have all these people here so long as you are suckling Marie. You are obliged to dress, for one thing, and that must be tiresome for you. Then again, the baby may want you suddenly, and, you know, respectable as the part of a nurse is, it still makes people smile a little, and may lead to pleasantries such as I would not wish to have spoken about you."

This time Mme. Meyrin did not take pains to hide her surprise; indeed, she expressed it with such frankness that her husband, inspired to the brutality by remembering one of his sister-in-law's remarks, said:

"Deuce take it, my dear, you are not a princess now, and the sort of people we know are less indulgent than the great folk of St. Petersburg. I don't want to have people laughing at me."

It was the first time for two years—since the day, indeed, when she had given herself so freely to him—that Lise had heard from his lips a word that could wound her. On the contrary, up to this time it had always seemed to be his determination to make no reference to the past. The young woman was deeply hurt, but, making a great effort, she replied with a smile, after a momentary silence:

"You are perhaps right, Paul. It is a very simple matter. Until Marie is weaned I will see only our most intimate friends. Are you satisfied? You will always love me, will you not? Our baby will be a year old, too, in a few weeks' time now, so that we can very soon take up our old life again. Would not you wish to, as I do?"

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As she spoke Lise had put her arms around her husband's neck. Her bright eyes and the soft pressure of her arms questioned him more than her voice did.

"Why, of course, little woman," the painter replied, giving her quite a fatherly kiss, and gently freeing himself from her clasp. "Meanwhile, Miss Marie is the queen we must all bow before. Even I must come after her. And so good-night."

So saying, he went to the little room next his studio, where he had chosen to sleep since his wife's confinement, on the pretense that the baby, whose cradle was near its mother's bed throughout the night, hindered him sleeping.

Left alone, Mme. Meyrin felt a pain at her heart. She had a foreboding of evil. Her husband's love for her had undergone a change. Affrighted at this thought, she rose and thought of hurrying after him, but at that moment the child awoke, and the mother, suddenly reminded of the most sacred of duties, ran to it, took it in her arms, and, her tears falling, began to soothe and rock it.

The unhappy truth was that, less gratified in his vanity, jealous, so to speak, of Lise's love for her infant, and restricted in his passion, Paul, during the past few months, had grown little by little more indifferent about the woman who was no longer for him the mistress he had desired ardently, rather than tenderly loved. She was no longer the creature of radiant beauty and sculptural symmetry, seductively attractive, and of ardent passions. She was the mother devoted to a thousand little cares and continual obligations, which the egotism of her husband hindered him from understanding; and sometimes her health would fail.

The motherhood, which should have made her companionship the more dear, was an annoyance and an obstacle for a man of his animal instincts. He did not see his daughter's smiles; he heard only her cries, and they irritated and troubled him at his work. Without admitting it to himself, he had come to the pass of regarding Lise's intellectual qualities as a drawback. Her learning, the distinction and elegance of her manners, which formerly had flattered his vanity so much at her receptions of his friends, now humiliated his vulgar nature, and seemed to him both useless and absurd. He often left home in consequence to seek elsewhere the life from which he had been absent only temporarily, in a kind of exile, a sort of flight into higher regions for which he was not born. There was at all times a trait of character native to him which the intoxication of passion had been able to master, while leaving him incapable of understanding what concerns the soul.

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Mme. Meyrin had the instinct rather than the feeling of a change in the man she loved as she had always loved him; but in finding that he at times returned to her with the passionate transports of former times she lost her fears, and even blamed herself for ever having felt them.

So they went on for some months. Then, soon, after these momentary revivals of passion, Paul grew more and more of a grumbler—more and more ready to criticise and find fault in trifling things. Lise feared, then, that her happiness was threatened—above all, when his absence became habitual.

On pretense of helping to paint, in company with two brother artists, in a studio of the Boulevard Monceau, a panorama, he said he was forced to give up the greater part of his time to his work. Lise believed him; but for her the days were endless, notwithstanding that she had her baby. As when, of an evening, she asked Paul how the work was getting on, he made scarcely any answer, she soon gave over asking him, and accepted this painful loneliness, though her pride began to revolt, while jealousy gnawed at her heart.

However, too proud to complain, Mme. Meyrin addressed no reproach to her husband; and when Mme. Frantz, who visited her at long intervals, complimented her on the simplicity of her dress and the quiet style of her house, she had strength enough to betray nothing of her humiliation. She tried to hide the truth even from Mme. Daubrel and Dumesnil, but they loved her too much to be blind to it long. Lise, when one day she was affectionately questioned, had to tell them all.

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For some months Marthe had seen quite well what was going on. Nevertheless, she did her best to reassure her friend, saying that she had exaggerated the truth; most likely Paul was anxious about the artistic enterprise he was engaged in, and on account of it alone these changes appeared in his character and his mode of life.

Dumesnil, who had often been surprised at meeting Paul so seldom in his studio, backed up all that Marthe said, and, wanting to allay the young woman's fears at any cost, he said, laughing at and scolding her too a little:

"Come, come, my dear child, you must not be raising specters and falling into despair so quickly. How could you think for a moment that Paul is forgetting or deceiving you? Don't believe it. He is young; he must have fresh air and exercise. Besides

"Il est bon qu'un mari nous cache quelque chose,
Qu'il soit quelquefois libre et ne s'abaisse pas
A nous rendre toujours compte de tous ses pas."

(A husband should have something to conceal from us. He should have his liberty at times, and not stoop to render account of every step he takes.)

"I am not the wife of Polyeucte, and I don't love Sévère," said Lise, with a sad smile at this quotation by the old actor; "and I fear it is not God that my husband prefers to me. But perhaps you are both right; no doubt I take fright without cause. Come, let us speak no more of it. You won't forsake me, will you? I don't know what would become of me if you did."

Mme. Daubrel's reply to her friend took the form of a tender embrace, and Dumesnil's a kiss upon the two hands that Mme. Meyrin offered him.

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Alas! the evil was worse than Marthe and the old comedian had feared; for a few days afterward, while Paul was away from home, Lise received the following letter:

"If you want to know how your husband employs his time, all you have to do is to make inquiries at 37 Boulevard Clichy, his new studio, where the handsome Sarah Lamber, your former rival, passes all her time."

At reading these terrible lines, Mme. Meyrin turned deathly pale. She uttered no cry and shed no tear, but, quickly regaining her self-command she, with strange energy, put on her bonnet, slipped over her dressing-gown a furred mantle, went into the studio and took a revolver which she knew was loaded, and calling the first cab she saw on leaving the house, she told the driver to take her to the address she had just received.

In her trembling hands, which she had not taken the time to glove, she crumpled the accursed letter, read and reread it; she went over it letter by letter, as if to gather the more anger and indignation from it.

If Prince Olsdorf had seen the infamous letter he would have recognized the vulgar scrawl of the handwriting. It was plainly from the hand that, three years before, had addressed to him at St. Petersburg a letter forwarding clippings from some newspapers to tell him of his dishonor.

CHAPTER IV. SARAH'S REVENGE.

In view of the customary indiscretion of the world into which Paul had made his re-entry some months before, under conditions that would have been so hard to explain, the wonder was that his wife had not been told of his conduct sooner. In fact, among the brother artists whom Lise's husband met every day, were several of the visitors to the Rue d'Assas. All had kept silence—some out of indulgence for escapades such as they had often been guilty of themselves, and others out of respect for the wife deceived in so cowardly a manner.

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Had it been otherwise, Mme. Meyrin, on the alert from the first, would doubtless have revolted, and would not, by yielding point after point, have encouraged her husband in, as it were, a disposition which some day would make him look upon unfaithfulness as his right.

In that case perhaps she would easily have regained possession of the fugitive, who had only the courage of the weak; that kind of energy in evil-doing which consists in not daring to acknowledge a fault, through cowardice, and in fear of deserved reproaches, or through vanity, from fear of being humbled: just as if, between two lovers, the guilty one did not rise the higher for imploring pardon.

Lise would have pardoned, for if at the time when Paul began to forget his duty the news of his inconstancy had surprised her in her easy security and full happiness, so, too, it would have done in the full tide of love; and her heart would have pleaded the cause of the unfaithful one. The wound might have been the more painful, but the loving woman would have been nerved by the shock to struggle and win back her rights.

Now it was not so. The neglected wife suffered as much in her pride as her love. To see the calmness she was able to command after a single moment of despair, it seemed that she was thinking more of avenging the outrage than of bewailing the betrayal.

He had lied to her—so devoted, and frank, and loyal. He preferred a girl of the town to the woman who had so freely and completely abandoned herself to him. And this had been going on for months—for months she, the daughter of the Countess Barineff, the ex-Princess Olsdorf, the former queen of Pampeln, the great lady whom the most brilliant noblemen had paid court to—she had been an object of scorn or pity for her husband's boon companions.

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This husband, too, his lips still warm with another woman's kisses, had returned to her, seeking her legitimate kisses, and telling her that he loved her. At these thoughts her soul trembled with horror and her body shuddered with disgust.

She had no fixed purpose in going to the Boulevard Clichy either as to what she should do or what she should say. The one purpose in her mind was not to be for a day longer the plaything of a man for whose sake she had sacrificed everything.

From time to time amid these thoughts there rose another, through one of the changes frequent

in lofty souls which are slow to believe in evil. What if she had been duped—if this letter were a lie, a calumny? Then, through her tears—tears of love and indignation at one and the same time—she read again the vile lines, and would no longer doubt.

This shameful letter, without a name to it, spoke the truth only too well.

Two or three weeks after this wife's confinement, at the time when he was timidly beginning to initiate some of the reforms advised by his sister-in-law, Paul Meyrin, whose brother artists came to see him less often than formerly, took to visiting their studios. When he was not under the influence of Mme. Frantz's ideas he was ill at ease at home, embarrassed, and ashamed of himself. The gentle obedience Lise showed to his slightest wishes, the pains she took to be nothing more than a middle-class mother of a family, the simplicity of her dress—all caused him a vague remorse; while his vanity, though he did not acknowledge it to himself, made him regret something of the past. As, however, as much through weakness as pride, he dared not recall what he had said, he absented himself from home. [Pg 173]

At first it was strange to him to find himself again within the surroundings he had left three years before. He returned to them with the hesitation and surprise that a traveler feels when after a long absence he sees again places the language of which is no longer familiar to him, and the customs have been forgotten. He very soon found the old pleasure in the gossip, the freedom, and the movement of these studios, recalling to him, as they did, a merry and careless time.

Every day he met some former comrade, models he had employed, women who had posed before him. Some of them, indeed, had been his mistresses. He was received everywhere with open arms and heart. Old times were talked over, a jest was made of everybody and everything, time was killed by working a little. At these times Paul Meyrin forgot, for hours together, that he was a husband and a father. He quickly grew enamored again of the easy life he had lived before he went to Russia.

However, after these trespasses, the painter was none the less exact in returning home; indeed, after a day when he had been most forgetful of his home he was commonly so affectionate and attentive to Lise, as though he felt the need of excusing himself to himself, that she had not the shadow of a suspicion.

If things had gone no further, Paul's escapades would have been nothing more than venial sins; but he soon launched out into greater depths. He happened to meet Sarah Lamber one afternoon at the studio of one of his painter friends, Robert Aubrey. She was posing, half nude, for a Phryne, which the tenant of the studio intended sending in to the next exhibition.

Paul Meyrin had not seen the young woman again until now since the day when, breaking off abruptly with her, he had sacrificed her for the sake of the Princess Olsdorf, on the arrival of the latter in Paris. [Pg 174]

We know how Sarah Lamber took her revenge by sending to Prince Pierre the denunciation, supported by a score of newspaper clippings, which had come as a surprise on him at Pampeln, where he was, nothing doubting his wife. But this hateful action had turned to the confusion of Paul's former mistress, since it had ended, instead of in the bloody drama that, perhaps, in her anger she had hoped for, with the divorce of the princess and her marriage with her lover—that is, in the happiness of both of them; or, at least, so she must suppose.

After this piece of deceit Sarah, enraged at her own non-success, was careful not to boast of what she had done, or ever to speak of Paul Meyrin, except to congratulate herself on having nothing more in common with such a man—an artist without talent, mind, or future, and good for nothing better than to be the husband of a repudiated woman; and she had avoided going into public places, such as the theaters, where she would have been likely to see him.

Nevertheless, no matter what indifference she affected when mention was made in her presence of the household in the Rue d'Assas and its charming "At Homes," she never forgot her old lover, for she had really loved him; and when she heard in the studios she posed in that the painter was often visiting several of his artist friends, her dream was to meet him again. With what end in view? She did not define it. Perhaps it was simply to pick a quarrel with him, and to make him think, by some violent outburst, that she had always been laughing at him and his fancy for her; and perhaps it was to try, if the chance offered, to set a trap for him, in which he would let himself be taken as of old.

Sarah, therefore, was not really surprised to see Paul walk into Robert Aubrey's studio; but for all that she made a gesture of offended modesty, wrapping her shoulders in the light and transparent drapery which had covered her only to the hips, and exclaiming: [Pg 175]

"So, so, people are to come in here as if it were a market-hall. Very well, then, I have done. I won't pose before strangers."

And jumping down from the model's table, she ran behind the screen where her things were, for, as is well known, a woman who poses, nude as she may stand while the painter is at his work, and, perhaps, before ten or a dozen artists at a time, will neither undress nor dress before any of them.

Paul Meyrin stood on the threshold of the room, struck with surprise first at this unexpected meeting and the young woman's exclamation, and then at her beauty, which had never seemed more dazzling to him.

After this momentary hesitation, natural enough in the circumstances, he approached the master of the house, who laughingly accepted his apologies, while two other brother artists, Gaston Briel and Raoul Martel, whom he offered his hand to in turn, jested aloud on the flight of the model *ad salices*.

Sarah, from her hiding-place, replied to them in a sharp and biting tone, which caused Paul strange emotion.

A few minutes later she appeared completely dressed, and said to M. Meyrin, going up to him:

"My good sir, when you are coming here just send Robert word, and I will go somewhere else."

"Bah!" said Paul, affecting not to take her words seriously, "is that the way with us, my dear Sarah? I really thought you had more sense. Have you still a grudge against me?"

"Oh, why should I have a grudge against you, pray?" said the model, twisting up her hair with a movement full of grace, which showed the fine proportions of a bust that Lise's husband had not forgotten. "Thank goodness the past has been dead and buried this long while. It is just because I don't want to be reminded too much of days of misery that I am not anxious to fall across you. So it seems you are growing tired of family life and brats. The deuce! A honey-moon does not last forever, especially when one has used up the first week of it in advance. Besides, you see, princesses are much the same as other women. As soon as you marry them they begin to be a weight upon your shoulders, until they transfer it to your forehead. Raoul, are you coming? As for you, Robert, you will let me know in advance when you are going to have troublesome visitors. If not, you can get a fine lady to pose until you finish your Phryne, supposing you can find one handsome enough to serve as a model."

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Having caught hold of Martel's arm, whom this little scene amused as much as it did his friends, though he was just now the favored lover, Sarah dragged him off, having made a formal bow to the husband of the ex-Princess Olsdorf as she got to the door.

Paul returned the bow with a similar one, and exclaimed, turning to his brother artists:

"There is a reception for you. The deuce! Our friend Sarah nurses malice."

"Or love still," retorted Robert Aubrey, leaving his easel. "If you had dropped her for another girl of the same sort, she would have forgotten and forgiven you long ago; but you gave her up to get married—to a princess, too; and, better still, an adorable and beautiful woman."

"How satisfied she must be at this moment with the little scene just over," said Gaston Briel, in his turn. "Guessing she would meet you some day, she had her course ready marked out. She is a splendid girl, is Sarah, but a little mad-headed. Besides, it is highly probable that she may be in love with you still."

"I could swear it," said Robert. "Girls of her sort who no longer care for a man are always good souls with their former lovers; they are ready to offer their hand, and are the first to laugh at their old passion. I conclude from this, my dear fellow, that Sarah adores you still. One of these days we shall have the door of your studio shut in our faces by her."

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"Of my studio," replied Paul, laughing. "That would be pretty difficult. You know it is one of my suite of rooms."

As he was less easy in this discussion than he wished to seem, the painter adroitly turned the conversation, and they began talking of other things.

In the evening Paul returned home, his mind, or rather his senses, full of the thought of Sarah. Three months afterward, events proved that Robert Aubrey had not been mistaken. After several stormy, angry, or ironical meetings, after a thousand sharp things had been said on either side, Paul and Sarah had opened their arms to each other, and their passion had riveted them together anew.

In enjoying again with his former mistress the voluptuous intoxications that had been lacking so long, the artist had also taken again to the freedom of bearing, the vulgar ease of manner, the gross flashes which, native to him, were things unknown in the Rue d'Assas. He found the change charming, new, and exciting. His old tastes had returned to him. He was tired of the elegance, the distinction, and the intellectual qualities of his wife. It was the old, old story of satiation with good things.

Paul Meyrin's renewed relations with Sarah were restricted for a time to meetings at his friends' houses and appointments at her place; but soon she begged the painter to take a studio in addition to and apart from his home. He yielded to her wish, delighted at being able to live again, though it were but intermittently, the life of the past.

He became the tenant of a studio on the Boulevard Clichy, which he furnished very elegantly, thanks to the good taste he had learned from Lise, and by dismantling somewhat his rooms in the Rue d'Assas, under pretense of offering a picture or a work of art to a charity sale, or a handsome weapon to some comrade. Then he invented the story of the work on a panorama, as suggested by his mistress, so that he might not have the trouble of imagining a new lie every day to account for his absence.

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Matters being thus arranged, Paul Meyrin, who could not pass all his afternoons in the arms or at

the knees of Sarah, began work on a picture the subject of which was Cleopatra awaiting Marc Antony.

At the end of two months, in spite of the interruptions that the model was the cause of the painter making, the picture was well advanced and promised to be one of the best by a man whose brush his passions plainly often guided. His love for Sarah did not hinder him from sometimes returning to his wife, by way of contrast. The wretched man, lost to all moral reserve, liked to think at such moments that he was a successful lover.

But Sarah, jealous and envious too, before long suspected these legitimate infidelities. Her hate of Mme. Meyrin grew, and, caring only to work mischief between man and wife, one morning she sent to the Rue d'Assas the unsigned letter which was certain to effect her purpose.

After this infamous and cowardly action she went gayly to the studio where, like the female Machiavelli she was, she seemed tenderer than ever. She desired that that night, when his wife would denounce his infidelity, Paul should be still under the charm of her, his mistress's ardent caresses.

Meanwhile she was posing as Cleopatra, whom the painter represented nude, reclining on a lion's skin, and braiding pearls in her raven hair. Sarah was in these circumstances a marvelously beautiful creature, made without a fault. Her rosy flesh had here and there the gleam of pale amber. Her splendid arms, raised above the head, gave her breast the firmness of marble; a lascivious smile parted her sensual lips; her great eyes, the eyelids slightly darkened, glittered with a look full of luxurious promise.

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The painter, in admiration, often lowered his brush to gaze at the model; then would apply himself feverishly to the work.

Suddenly Sarah started up, exclaiming:

"Paul, your wife."

The door of the studio had opened; Mme. Meyrin stood on the threshold.

The artist, turning to her, grew livid.

Without casting a look on her husband, Lise walked to the sofa on which the model's things were tossed in a heap, pushed them with her foot toward the owner and said, with a scornful gesture:

"Dress and go."

"Madame," replied Sarah, in a rebellious tone, covering herself as well as she could with some of the gilded drapery of the couch of the Queen of Egypt, "this is not your house."

"Monsieur Meyrin's house is the house, too, of his legitimate wife, who drives forth from it his mistress. Go, I tell you, or I will kill you."

She drew from her bosom the revolver she had laid hands on in her husband's studio, and took aim at the young girl, who flung herself back, uttering a scream of fear. Mme. Meyrin's calmness was terrifying.

Recovering himself, Paul, in affright, rushed to her to put an end to the horrible scene. Lise would not let him speak a word.

"Monsieur," she said, pointing the pistol at him, "an article in the French Code excuses, it seems, the murder by the husband of an adulterous wife found in her sin; perhaps it would excuse equally, in a similar case, the murder of the husband by his wife. I forbid you to speak a word to me before this creature has gone."

The painter was not a coward; but he stopped suddenly. Lise's face bespoke implacable determination. She seemed the incarnation of that unconquered Slavonic race to which he thought she owed her descent.

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"This creature," retorted Sarah, who had taken advantage of the moment of respite that Mme. Meyrin had allowed, and had caught up her clothes in her bare arms, "this creature! You took away her lover and made him yours. She took your husband. We are quits."

With a spring firing this Parthian shot, she disappeared through a masked door that led into a room adjoining the studio.

At this merciless outrage Mme. Meyrin sunk into a chair, hiding in her hands the flush of shame that had surged to her face. She, the Countess of Barineff, the ex-Princess Olsdorf, had come to the pass of bandying taunts with a painter's model! To this point had her love brought her for a man of a lower social condition than her own. She recalled, too, the miserable part she had had to play in the Rue Auber when she had had to be a witness against her innocent husband of his alleged adultery, and the tears of humiliation that had streamed from her eyes.

Suddenly she shuddered and sprung up as if at the touch of some unclean thing.

Her husband, kneeling at her feet, had said, as he tried to take her hands:

"Why did you come? Forgive me, Lise."

"Oh, leave me," she cried, repulsing him in horror. "I despise more than I hate you. This year and more you have been lying to me. God is punishing me cruelly for the love I felt for you. You were here hour after hour while, watching over our child, my thoughts were yours alone and wholly. The happiness I tried to give you was insufficient; you must have other tenderesses than mine. With me inspiration failed you; another woman's kisses could restore it."

As she spoke in a quick, broken voice, Lise was pacing up and down the studio. Her excitement grew with every word. Her open mantle allowed a glimpse of the slight costume under which her heart was beating as if it would break. [Pg 181]

Thus she came before the picture which represented the daughter of the Ptolemies under the form and features of Sarah; and she exclaimed as much in grief as in wounded pride:

"I, too, once posed nude before you. My love urged me to that shamefulness. Well, then, Monsieur Paul Meyrin, do you need only girls of her sort as models? Am not I beautiful enough to serve your purpose? Come, take your brush; go on with your work."

Flinging away her furred mantle, tearing open with trembling hands her silken dressing-gown, loosening with a movement of the head her luxuriant hair which fell in a golden flood over her shoulders, Lise Barineff sprung toward the couch that Sarah Lamber had occupied a few minutes ago.

Then, when she had reached it, she added, superb and quivering, fixing with her steely look the husband who stood dumb, motionless and overcome:

"Well! I am waiting."

But the unhappy woman was at the end of her strength, for, suddenly, with a cry of agony she bent backward and fell senseless to the ground.

Paul rushed toward her, took her in his arms, and through a feeling of delicacy surprising enough in him, carried her to a sofa instead of laying her on the couch used by the model.

In a few minutes Mme. Meyrin regained her senses and, recalling what had just passed, she seemed to have quite regained her calmness. She knotted up her hair, wrapped herself in her mantle, and said to her husband, who was hanging eagerly about her and wished to oppose her going:

"I need no help from you. It was a momentary, bodily weakness. It is enough for me to have come here, without staying. I shall not forget the depths I have lowered myself to through you. In the Rue d'Assas you will never again find a wife, but the mother alone of your daughter. Farewell or not, as it pleases you." [Pg 182]

And with a commanding gesture, forbidding him to accompany her, she went from the room.

CHAPTER V. DIVORCE—SEPARATION.

For Mme. Paul Meyrin the days that followed this horrible scene in the Boulevard Clichy were very wretched.

Returning home in an indescribable state of sorrow and abasement, wounded in her pride as much as in her love, blushing at not having withstood with greater dignity the blow that had struck her, she refused to see anybody, even Mme. Daubrel and Dumesnil.

That evening when these faithful friends called, they were told that the mistress of the house was unwell and was lying down. She would not have them read the trace of suffering in her face; nor did she wish to sadden, by the tale of her sorrows, these two devoted hearts, resolved as she was to be silent and to drink to the dregs the cup of bitterness to which she had set her lips.

The next morning when Paul, refusing to take any denial, made his way almost by force into her bedroom, Lise took her child in her arms as if to make of it against her husband an impassable barrier, so that he should understand that the betrayed wife took refuge wholly in her maternal love. In vain he tried, piling lie upon lie, to excuse his fault; in vain he supplicated; he could not win a word from her. Her only reply was ironical smiles and the devouring of her daughter with kisses.

Humiliated at the check, for perhaps he had in his vanity imagined that at a word from him his wife would forget everything, the painter went away enraged. A few hours later he was with Sarah, who said: [Pg 183]

"You are a poor sort of thing. Do you suppose I was afraid? If I ran away it was for your sake alone, because I did not want to be the cause of a scene which would have fetched out all the neighbors. But, you know, we can't have any more of that sort of thing. You must be good enough to make your choice between your wife and me. If you don't there is an end of my posing for you. I don't want to have a bullet through my head one of these fine days. Don't expect me any more at the Boulevard Clichy."

As, in spite of all the efforts of her lover to make her change her mind, the young girl was firm, Paul Meyrin was forced to go back to his studio in the Rue d'Assas; but only to pass an occasional hour there. He could not settle down to work tempted as he was at one moment to go and implore his wife's pardon, at another to rush off to Sarah Lamber and tell her he was ready to live with her.

Too weak to make up his mind to a course, bad or good, unless he was helped to the decision by circumstances, the painter's life was idle and feverish. He went and came among his brother artists, who had speedily got to know of his adventure, thanks to the silly vanity of the model, eager to tell everywhere that a woman of fashion had wished to kill her. The story in less than twenty-four hours was the scandal of the day among the artists. Soon the little halfpenny boulevard papers spoke of it, and Dumesnil heard of it one evening in the greenroom at the Odéon.

That excellent man was not surprised by the news, for Paul's frequent absences had disquieted him, but he was greatly pained by the news, and next day went to Lise's. This time he was admitted.

Pale and with dark circles round her eyes, she was lying on a couch. Mme. Daubrel who, knowing nothing of the truth, supposed she was simply ill was with her and had just been telling her, with tears of joy and a trembling voice, that her own husband, touched by her repentance, was intending to pardon her; that almost by every post he sent from New York to Mme. Percier, her mother, news of her son, and that perhaps very soon she would see him again. [Pg 184]

Mme. Meyrin, whose heart was so cruelly crushed, congratulated her friend, happy in her hopes, and thought sorrowfully that it would never be permitted to her to embrace her children; but when she saw Dumesnil with a troubled look on his face she dismissed her sad thoughts, and, to reassure him, said, smiling:

"Dear friend, nothing serious is amiss with me. In a day or two I shall be quite well again."

"You are the bravest of women," the comedian replied, bowing to Mme. Daubrel and taking the seat Lise had offered him; "they who do you an injury are vile wretches."

"An injury! Why, what do you mean?"

Marthe, no more than Lise seized his thought.

Dumesnil saw by her surprise that she knew nothing, and concluding that Mme. Meyrin wished her friend to be kept in ignorance, he went on quickly, not picking his words very carefully:

"I express myself badly. I meant that only vile wretches would not wish you all the happiness you deserve."

Lise was too intelligent not to guess, from the embarrassment of the old man, that he knew what had happened between her husband and herself. With a glance she thanked him for his discretion, and some minutes later, when Marthe was gone, she hastened to say:

"I don't know what you have heard, but anything you can have been told is less than the truth. Monsieur Meyrin has betrayed me so vilely that I will not forgive him. My love for him is dead. As long as he pleases we will live under the same roof, but as strangers to one another. A woman of my stamp can forget neither a humiliation nor an outrage. Don't speak to me of him, I beg you. There are only you and Marthe left to love me." [Pg 185]

Too much moved to speak a word, Dumesnil pressed a respectful and tender kiss on the feverish hand that the poor betrayed woman stretched out to him.

"And soon, too," she went on, "I shall have only you and my daughter, for in a few months, perhaps in a few weeks, Madame Daubrel will leave France to go to her husband in America."

"Her husband! Why, I thought they were separated by a decree?"

"It is so; and moreover, the separation was pronounced against her; but for eight years she has so bravely expiated her fault that Monsieur Daubrel is disposed to forgive all. Marthe has told me a fact I did not know, that the separation lasts only as long as the man and wife wish. It is revocable at their choice, and is annulled by the simple fact of their voluntary reunion, without the intervention of a judge or the accomplishment of any formality."

"That seems but right," said Dumesnil.

"Yes," said Mme. Meyrin, bitterly, "a deceived husband has the right, if he pardons his wife, to open his house to her again, to give back his children to her. He needs not to authorize her to bear his name anew, since she has not ceased to bear it. By a single kiss all is wiped out. In the case of a divorce, on the contrary, the one woman in the world that the outraged husband can not take to his arms is she that has betrayed him. His union with her would be illegal, irregular; the children he might have by her would be bastards. Ah, my friend, how unhappy am I, and what a punishment mine is."

Lise had buried her face in her hands and was weeping.

The old artist dared not try to console her, and had no thought of defending Paul, who had made no real attempt at reconciliation with his wife, though a week had passed since the drama of the [Pg 186]

Boulevard de Clichy.

M. Meyrin, it is true, breakfasted and dined pretty regularly at home, but Lise and he did not exchange a dozen words while they were at table, and after the meal, if the painter took his wife's hand, it was lifeless and cold in his.

And yet if Paul had had a true, spontaneous, and heartfelt impulse, Lise, strong as she believed she was and wished to seem, would perhaps not have resisted, for she had had for her husband one of those passions that find excuses for the loved one from the very fact that they are not based on admiration, esteem, and an exaltation of the soul, that is to say, those lofty sentiments which when they disappear carry with them all affection and leave room for duty alone.

It is not thus with passions born of desire. The attraction which has roused them can, in contempt of all dignity, rearouse them suddenly, the nerves being exclusively concerned in their manifestation. The heart, in its mercifulness and goodness, can pardon while mindful of the betrayal; the flesh has no nobility of pride; in yielding anew it forgets.

But Paul Meyrin knew nothing of these things. The coldness of his wife humbled his foolish pride, and, thinking that he had done enough to win her back if she desired to return, he dared make no further effort through fear of a repulse. Very infatuated with Sarah, too, by reason of the resistance that she offered, he grew used, little by little, to return to the Rue d'Assas less regularly; and as he was ignorant of the delicacy and the attentions which win pardon for so many errors in a well-bred man, he soon ceased to mention if he was going out before breakfast or did not intend to return for dinner. This was so often the case that in less than a month after the miserable event that we have related, Mme. Meyrin was for many a long hour alone with her child, her door being closed to all but Mme. Daubrel, to whom in the end she had told all, and Dumesnil, whose affection for her grew with every day. [Pg 187]

Lise heard no mention made of her husband's family. Mme. Meyrin, the mother, blamed severely her son's conduct, and dared not come to see her daughter-in-law. As for Mme. Frantz, whose envious feelings had been the origin of all the evil, she rejoiced in secret over the sufferings of this foreign fine lady who had carried off her brother-in-law from her profitable guardianship.

This isolation had a logical and fatal result, due to the temperament of the deserted wife. An excellent mother naturally, Lise began now to worship her children with a sort of nervous, unquiet, morbid passion, which was not appeased by the care she wrapped her daughter in, or the caresses she lavished on her.

It was as if she wished to avenge herself for having, for three years, divided her heart. More than ever, from this time forward, she thought of the absent ones. She spoke constantly of Alexander and Tekla, wept over their absence, and hungered to see them, were it but for an hour or a moment. These adored ones were the one subject of her talk with Marthe and Dumesnil. In his innocent weakness for poetical citations the honest comedian compared her with Andromache and Niobe.

Added to this, the poor woman received from her mother a letter which increased her humiliation. Having learned at Ems, from the French newspapers, the adventure of the Boulevard Clichy, Mme. Podoi hastened to write to her daughter in the sharpest terms. Her letter ended with these words:

"It is true you have the resource of a second divorce. Only, whom will you marry? God alone knows how low you may descend."

Proving beyond a doubt to Mme. Meyrin that the heart of her mother, pitiless in her wounded pride, was still shut against her, this harsh letter caused her deep sorrow; but she only replied to express all the regret she felt at not having had news of her children such as her mother was wont to send when, from time to time, she wrote. [Pg 188]

Then, accepting with resignation the situation that events had made for her, she occupied herself solely with her beloved little daughter, driving away every thought that was not of those who alone remained dear to her. She saw her husband by chance alone, when it suited him to take his place at table. She spoke no word of reproach to him, and even took no interest in what became of him in his long absences. As she had said to Dumesnil, her love for Paul was dead. The spark from which the flame would have sprung again under the lightest breath of tenderness had died out forever in her.

Alas! the poor lonely one was soon to be stricken in this other love which alone now stirred her soul. Like wolves, misfortunes come in troops. One morning she received from St. Petersburg another letter from her mother which drew a cry of agony from her. Mme. Podoi mentioned baldly that, having had a telegram from Vera Soublaieff that the Prince Alexander was dangerously ill, she was starting for Pampeln with Dr. Psaroff.

Without the loss of a moment Lise dispatched to the daughter of the farmer of Elva a telegram imploring her to send at once, by the same means, news of her son, and this being done, she passed the whole day in unspeakable agony. Toward five o'clock she received Vera's answer, which drove her nearly mad.

"The doctor, who arrived last night with Madame Podoi, refuses to pronounce an opinion, but we hope that God will hear our prayers, and that our care will save your son. I will send a telegram every day."

Mme. Meyrin sunk into a chair, repeating amid her sobs:

"My son, my child!"

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Suddenly she rose, ran to her writing-desk, and in a trembling hand wrote:

"Paul, my son is dying. I am going to try and save him."

Having written these words, she rang the bell and told the servant who answered it to put the note in M. Meyrin's room. She had not seen him that day, and knew he was not to be home to dinner; she had heard him say overnight that he was going to the Amiens exhibition.

At this moment Mme. Daubrel entered.

"God has sent you, Marthe. Look, read."

She gave her Mme. Podoi's letter and Vera's telegram.

"My poor friend," said Mme. Daubrel. "What will you do?"

"I shall go to Pampeln."

"To Pampeln—you?"

"Yes, I. The prince is away, and I wish to save my son. I feel that I shall save him."

"But your husband?"

"I have no husband; I have only my children. While I am away you will watch over my daughter, will you not? I beg it of you."

"I promise—I swear it. She shall be my daughter."

Marthe had not the courage to combat her friend's resolution. In her motherly love, so much tried, she understood her too well.

"Then," said Mme. Meyrin, "help me. I shall not be long. There is not a moment to lose. The train for Berlin leaves at eight o'clock. I must catch it."

In less than half an hour, after thrusting into a valise what things were absolutely necessary and sending a telegram to her mother announcing her coming, Lise was ready.

"Adieu," she said to Mme. Daubrel, giving into her arms her little daughter, whom she covered with kisses and tears. "Adieu. Pray for my son."

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A few minutes later, alone, without a servant, her veil lowered as if she were a fugitive, the ex-Princess Olsdorf got into a cab, and told the driver to take her to the Great Northern Railway Station.

CHAPTER VI.

LISE AND VERA.

On returning next day from Amiens, whither he had really been, and not finding his wife in the Rue d'Assas, but merely this brief note, or rather line: "Paul, my son is dying; I am going to save him," M. Meyrin was amazed, and supposed that Lise had invented the story as a cover for her flight from the house. As if a mother would dare to tell this lie.

Vera Soublaieff's telegram, which Mme. Meyrin had not taken with her, proved at once that he was wrong. Yet for awhile he was uncertain whether or not to approve the journey. The thought occurred to him suddenly that Prince Olsdorf might be at Pampeln. He felt himself growing jealous of this man, whose worth he knew, and who, he was aware, had been deeply in love with the woman who bore his name.

Moreover, in this château, once hers, Mme. Meyrin would feel all the memories of her former high position. She could not fail to compare it with the humdrum life she led at Paris. The painter was humiliated in advance by the comparison.

Unwilling to see that it was only to nurse her son that the poor mother was gone, pricking himself on to blame her, and feeling offended at not having been at least consulted, he soon brought himself to think there was no excuse for her.

"Has she not another child with a claim on all her care?" he said to himself. "By what right does she go away like this?"

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The husband thought not of his sins, of the liberty his abandonment of her had left his wife, of the sacred rights of maternal love. He took counsel only with his pride, which had just received a rough blow. He could not hide from himself that he no longer counted for anything with the woman who had loved him so well.

In his heart he had not given up the hope that Lise would return to his arms one day, more

passionate and more submissive than even, when he himself, tired of his mistresses, should make a real attempt to win his pardon. Seeing her resigned, as she had seemed to be since the scene of the Boulevard Clichy, he had come to the belief, in his stupid vanity as a "beauty-man," that some evening, if he said but a word, if he made but a sign, it would suffice to rouse again in the senses of his wife the mad love of former days. But now there was no room left for doubt; all was indeed over between them. He fell into a jealous rage and deep humiliation, which made him exclaim suddenly:

"Well, so be it. But if so, I too am free."

In this frame of mind, and acting mechanically rather than from solicitude, he went into Mme. Meyrin's room to see his daughter. As he entered the bedroom, Mme. Daubrel, faithful to her promise, was with the child.

"Ah! pardon me; I did not know you were here," said Paul, coldly, to the young woman. "Marie is fortunate to have you, as her mother has abandoned her."

"You can not think that Lise would abandon her little girl," said Marthe. "Frightened by the news she received of her son—"

"Her son!" the painter broke in. "What if Marie were to fall sick while her mother was away?"

"God will not suffer that. Besides, am not I here?"

"Then you approve of Madame Meyrin's going?"

"I should have acted as she has done."

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"Ah! no doubt. To leave one's husband, to desert one's home, would appear natural enough to you, too."

At this insulting allusion to her past, Mme. Daubrel repressed an indignant exclamation and replied gently:

"It is bad of you, Monsieur Meyrin, to say that, as you well know. I can find no excuse for the woman who forgets her duty as a wife."

"Yes, you are right. I beg your pardon," said Paul, ashamed of having let his temper master him. "You see, things have come to a miserable pass. I don't blame Lise for loving her son; but she has not reflected on what the consequences may be of her going. In the first place, she ought to have had my permission to make the journey; and, then, what will people think of me when they know that my wife has gone back to her first husband?"

It was plain that vanity was the prime factor in M. Meyrin's nature.

"Her first husband is not in Russia," replied Marthe. "It is not known even in what country he is at this moment."

"He may return to Pampeln any day on account of his son's illness."

"It is not at all likely."

"It might happen, and then I should play a pretty part here, while Lise— No; I will never forgive her."

"Would you have had her leave her child to die?"

"Her child is here. Marie is her child; she has no other, since Prince Olsdorf has taken Tekla from her. Ah! how I hate that man! May God never bring me face to face with him! In deserting her home, Madame Meyrin has left me free. I shall use my liberty, I swear. She may come back when she likes. Perhaps, then, I shall be far away."

"And your daughter?"

"My daughter? You will be in the place of a mother to her until her mother, who ought never to have left her, returns."

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"Oh, Monsieur Meyrin! Come, kiss her."

She had lifted up the little girl, who was smiling at her father.

Paul just touched the child with his lips, and went away hurriedly, as if afraid of yielding to Mme. Daubrel's prayers.

At about this time, exhausted by a two days' agonizing journey, Mme. Meyrin was taking her seat at Mittau in the carriage that her mother had sent to meet her at this station on the line from Berlin to St. Petersburg.

The driver, an old servant at the château, whom she recognized and hastened to question, had no better news of her son. The young Prince Alexander was still in danger.

The eight leagues from Mittau to Pampeln seemed endless to the poor woman. Her burning eyes fixed on the horses galloping along the road, she prayed God that she might not be too late. At last, within three hours' time, she saw the imposing mass of the château; and soon, covered with foam, dripping with sweat, quivering, the horses were pulled up before the main entrance.

Lise sprung out, and cried to her mother, who awaited her at the top of the flight of marble steps:

"My son—how is he?"

"He is still very ill," replied the general's wife, whom her daughter had not even thought of embracing. "Come. He is in his old room."

Mme. Meyrin heard no more. She ran across the great vestibule and up the staircase leading to the first floor of the right wing of the building, and thence, not noticing the servants, who looked at her in astonishment and bowed respectfully as she passed, she hurried to the room which she herself had had arranged in the olden time for the heir to the name of Olsdorf.

As she entered the room Dr. Psaroff, leaning over the child, was watching with anxious looks the convulsions he was struggling in. [Pg 194]

"My son," murmured Lise, falling on her knees beside the bed, "my son!"

The doctor made a sign to her not to trouble him and to be calm. The crisis was serious; it was needful that he should study its every phase.

The sick child, with convulsed limbs and eyelids of a bluish black, tried to lift his hands to his head, where he felt intolerable pains. His low groans were mingled with incoherent words.

Vera, whom Mme. Meyrin did not see, was standing behind the physician. In the fatigued face of Soublaieff's daughter could be read the effects of sleepless nights and grief. For three days she had not had an hour's sleep, for Dr. Psaroff's arrival had added to her fears. The young prince was suffering from an attack of meningitis which might become tuberculous, and consequently contagious and mortal.

Vera had thereupon telegraphed to the prince at Singapore, where she thought he was likely to be. Then, as it was impossible that Pierre Olsdorf should arrive in time to embrace his son if he was to succumb, she had not hesitated to send to Mme. Meyrin the telegram which had brought her thither. She did not think she had the right to deprive a child of the last caresses of its mother.

Within the last twenty-four hours, however, the skillful physician was somewhat more hopeful. The abundant bleedings he had practiced, notwithstanding the tender years of the patient, seemed to have given some relief. Still, the doctor refused to pronounce a final opinion. All fear of new complications was not over.

When, the crisis having passed, Dr. Psaroff raised his head, the child was calm, his eyes were closed, his thin little face no longer bespoke suffering, but a deep exhaustion. Lise touched with trembling lips the darkened eyelids of her son, and stretched out her hands to the doctor, who drew her aside and said: [Pg 195]

"You were right to come, madame. From the first day of his illness Alexander has been tended by an angel of goodness whom fear of contagion has not checked for a moment; but sometimes a mother's kisses can do more than all our science. If we can struggle on for five or six days more, without any new accident, I will answer for the result."

"May God hear you," said the unhappy woman.

Then, through her tears, recognizing Soublaieff's daughter, who had drawn near and was bending to kiss her hand, as formerly, she took her to her heart, saying:

"You? Ah, may Heaven reward you!"

"Madame la Comtesse," replied Vera, giving, from an exquisite delicacy of feeling, her maiden rank to the ex-Princess Olsdorf, "I have only done my duty."

"Yes; may Heaven reward you!" Mme. Meyrin repeated. "I know well what your life has been since you left Elva. Calumny itself has not dared to breathe a word against you. Let us forget the past and speak of it no more. Let us think of nothing but the union of our efforts to save my son."

Alexander's mother noticed now that Vera was dressed as humbly as when she lived with her father, and still wore the national head-dress. Since her return to Pampeln the adorable girl had kept the oath that she swore to herself in that hour of despair when she believed that she was forsaken. She would not have had it that anything in her dress should recall the blissful days she had spent in Paris; she desired that on returning home Pierre Olsdorf should meet her again as he had found her when he took her from the farm at Elva.

Lise Barineff guessed this and her heart thrilled; but banishing every thought that had not to do with her fears as a mother, she smiled on Vera, pressing her hands affectionately. [Pg 196]

From this day forward there was a sublime struggle between these two women. They watched in turn by the sick-bed. The disease was at its worst, and the child could not be left for a moment, for when certain symptoms were manifest the most energetic remedies had to be used.

From fear of contagion, in case the meningitis Alexander was suffering from should become tuberculous, Mme. Meyrin was obliged to refrain from seeing Tekla. She had kissed her hastily, and had hung for a moment only over the beauty of the little girl, who was growing to be ravishingly pretty. As a measure of prudence they had placed her with her maid and Mme.

Bernard, the governess of the little prince, in the left wing of the château, while Mme. Meyrin was to share Vera's rooms.

As for Mme. Podoi, Dr. Psaroff required that she should not have a room near her grandson, as a sick-chamber should be visited by as few people as possible. In consequence of this arrangement, Lise hardly saw her mother once a day, and then but for a few minutes. There could, therefore, be no question between them of anything but the state of Alexander's health, and she was thus protected from the unkind remarks that the general's wife would have been sure to make in reference to the past if their interviews had been more frequent and longer.

For six days and nights Mme. Meyrin took no rest. When she was by her son her eyes never left him, tortured as she was by his moans, watching his slightest movement, trying to make out the disconnected words that he uttered in the height of delirium, beseeching him with sweet words and a low voice to know her, and caressing with her lips his little thin, burning hands. When she had to yield her place to Vera, and go and lie down in an adjoining room, she could not get a moment's sleep. If her son should die while she was away from his side! And if, on the other hand, his first look, his first conscious moment, should be another's, and not hers!

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Then she would creep to the half-closed door and listen, panting, anxious, jealous, and ready to spring forward.

This martyrdom had lasted for a week with alternations of hope and despair, when one morning, after a night better than any he had had since he took to his bed, the little patient opened his eyes, and, through the goodness of God's love and pardon, his look was turned to his mother and showed the surprise he felt. Then he closed his eyes again slowly, as if to sink once more into a sweet dream. In a few moments, opening them again, he hesitated for an instant, like a child who has scarcely learned to speak, and a smile struggling to his lips, still discolored by his sickness, he murmured: "Mamma."

Lise stifled a cry of happiness, and fell upon her knees.

"Be calm, madame," said the doctor, appealingly, he and Vera being present at this return to life.

But Mme. Meyrin heard nothing but this word, "mamma," which told her that her son knew her again, and was restored to her. What blessed sunshine for a mother is such a look from her child! How her heart, turned to ice by fear, is warmed again by it! What a chain of iron are his little weak arms when they are twined about her neck! What a delight is his laugh!

Bending over her son, Lise prayed and smiled together. The doctor had not the heart to order her away; but when, after a short examination, he declared that the patient was saved, she grew deathly pale, and pressed her hand to her heart. She felt as if she were being suffocated. Happily, almost immediately afterward she burst out sobbing:

"Let her weep," said Psaroff to Vera; "tears are the best soothers."

Mme. Meyrin, in fact, soon grew stronger. Pressing in hers the hands of Soublaieff's daughter, who tended her affectionately, she again went to the bedside.

The doctor was not mistaken. In a few days' time the young prince's convalescence began. It was to be rapid, as the time was the beginning of the summer; but one might have thought that it was his mother's life that revived the child, for each day Lise grew paler and weaker. When, her son and daughter on either side of her, she walked down to the park, she looked like a sick woman whose uncertain steps two guardian angels were supporting. If they said to her, in their simplicity, "Mother, you won't leave us again, will you?" she covered them with kisses instead of replying. The unhappy woman was in despair at the thought of being forced to part again from them, now that they were doubly dear to her.

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One day, as they extended their walk rather further than usual, her son drew her toward the great avenue of larches and fir-trees, where she had sunk, a few years ago, into the arms of Paul Meyrin. As they were about to pass into its accursed shadows, the ex-Princess Olsdorf, suddenly remembering, cried:

"Oh, not there—with you—never!"

She gently drew back Alexander, who did not understand his mother's emotion.

This day she told herself that she must be going.

Now that her child's health was no longer a subject of inquietude, all her surroundings reminded her cruelly of the past. In this château, the doors of which pity alone had opened to her again, she had reigned as its sovereign; in these halls, now deserted, she had received the representatives of the highest Russian nobility; she had been paid court to and welcomed throughout this domain whither she had not dared to return save in fear and trembling. How far away were all these things now. She was no longer the Princess Olsdorf, and yet no one ventured to call her Mme. Meyrin. By Vera Soublaieff's directions, she was addressed in her maiden name—the Countess Lise Barineff—so that in the eyes of the servants, whose duty it was to wait on her, she might not appear to have descended from her social rank. Even the respect she was the object of on the part of every one became a painful humiliation to her.

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Besides, in Paris she had duties to fulfill toward that other child, who was no less than Alexander and Tekla flesh of her flesh, and one of the objects of the only love henceforward permitted her.

It was true that nearly every day Mme. Daubrel had sent good news of her daughter, but she had scarcely mentioned her husband. Lise did not know how he had taken her departure, and Marthe, in her latest letter, had said: "As your son's life is saved, do not delay your return." Resigned as she was, complete, too, as was her abandonment beyond recall all hope of happiness in her married life, she was alarmed by this pressing summons. She foreboded some new misfortune.

That very evening Mme. Meyrin told her mother of her resolution to leave Pampeln next day, and the general's wife, whose heart could not but be touched by her daughter's conduct, found a few kind words to say to her. Lise had shrunk from letting her know how matters were between herself and her husband. With heroic courage she affected to be quite at ease about the future. Paul, it was true, had committed a fault, as so many other men had done before him, but he had come back to her, and all was forgotten. The ex-Countess Barineff believed in this untruth, dictated by her daughter's pride, and promised to keep up with her an affectionate and frequent correspondence.

After this interview with her mother, Lise went to Soublaieff's daughter in her rooms.

She was there alone.

"Dear Vera," she said, "I shall leave Pampeln to-morrow at day-break, before my son and daughter are awake. If I were to hear their voices, if their eyes were to be turned on mine again, I should not have the strength to go. You understand my feelings, do you not?"

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The young girl replied by a movement of the head simply. She dreaded this last, inevitable interview, and dared not trust herself to speak.

Lise went on:

"But I can not go without saying how grateful I am, not only for your devoted care of my children, but for your welcome of myself. The law forbade my crossing the threshold of Pampeln, and you opened its doors to me. May God bless you! When Alexander and Tekla ask what has become of me, find some tale to tell them which will explain and excuse my absence. Tell them I love them with all my soul, and that I will soon come back. Let them love and respect me always."

Vera made an earnest gesture of assent.

"Oh, I know that it has always been so," Mme. Meyrin continued. "You are a noble and saintly girl. God could not give them a more worthy guardian. I will beg of Him, in my most earnest prayers, never to part them from you. Swear that you will fill my place always, not because I am going away, but because I shall not live long."

"Madame la Comtesse!" cried Vera, her eyes full of tears, and covering with kisses the young woman's hands, which pressed hers convulsively.

"Oh, I feel it. I am mortally wounded. Can a mother divide her heart into two parts? It is my punishment. You will see the prince again. Tell him all that I have suffered. I hope he will pardon me when I am dead. Adieu, I shall go hence, full of love and respect for you."

The ex-Princess Olsdorf had drawn to her the sobbing young girl. She kissed her with a long and feverish kiss, saying:

"For them Vera—for them, and for you."

Then she fled, stifling her sobs.

Next morning, after having brushed with a kiss the eyelids of her sleeping children, who it may be were dreaming of her, Mme. Paul Meyrin, bent with sorrow, took her place in the carriage that was to bring her to Mittau.

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On her arrival in Paris she was scarcely recognizable. In forty-eight hours she looked ten years older. When Mme. Daubrel saw her come into the room in the Rue d'Assas, where she was sewing near the sleeping Marie, she could not hinder a movement of surprise.

"Yes," said Lise, sinking into her friend's arms, "it is so, is it not? I am much changed?"

"No, no, but the journey has tired you," said Marthe. "What else could be expected?"

"Yes, it has," she said, with a sad smile. "And Marie?"

"You can see. The dear little thing is as well as possible. I have been with her every day, and all day long."

"I knew I could depend on you."

Mme. Meyrin kissed her daughter softly, fearing to disturb her; and sinking into a chair opposite Marthe, asked:

"And—my husband?"

"He has been away some days."

"Where is he?"

"At Rome. He was sent for about some important work."

"At Rome? Work? Marthe, do not lie to me. Can any new misfortune surprise me? Do not fear. I am brave. Monsieur Meyrin has gone away with that woman."

"I don't know, but I do not believe it."

"And I am sure of it. Has he left nothing for me—not a word?"

"He sent me this letter before he went."

Mme. Daubrel took from under the clock on the mantel-shelf a sealed letter and gave it to Mme. Meyrin, who tore open the envelope, devoured the contents of the inclosed letter, without a muscle of her face betraying the emotion it occasioned, and, handing it to the young woman:

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"Read," she said.

"Oh, it is infamous," cried Marthe, after her eyes had taken in the purport of the following lines:

"MY DEAR LISE,—You won't blame me for following your example, that is, acting as a free agent. I am glad that your son has recovered his health, and that while you were away nothing serious has happened to your daughter, who also is your child. It might have been otherwise; but doubtless the son of a prince fills a greater space in his mother's heart than the daughter of a simple artist like me. I am about to start for Rome where a commission I have to execute will detain me for a pretty long time. I hope you will be so good as to send me news there, addressing to the Villa Medici, of yourself and Marie."

"No, it is not infamous," murmured Mme. Meyrin, "it was fated, and, on the part of God, it is justice. Twice married, I have now no husband. The mother of three children, all I have with me is the one in the cradle there. Dumesnil and you are the only friends I have left now."

"Lise, my dear Lise," said Mme. Daubrel.

"Listen to me, dear friend," continued the unhappy woman, in feverish excitement. "I am sure that soon you will have to watch by my pillow. Promise that you will hide my condition from everybody, above all from Monsieur Meyrin, and from my mother herself, until all hope is gone."

"I promise readily," replied Marthe, "so sure am I that a few days' rest will bring you calmness and health."

Mme. Daubrel was mistaken. In less than a week Mme. Meyrin, attacked by a severe fever, had to take to her bed, and the doctors summoned to a consultation regarded her state as critical. They were in doubt only about the cause of the malady. They did not guess that the innocent caresses of her little daughter were insufficient for the poor, despairing creature who was dying of unsatiated maternal love.

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The ex-Princess Olsdorf, so courted of old, had near her only an old actor and Mme. Daubrel, whose social position we must now sketch more completely than we have yet done.

CHAPTER VII. MADAME DAUBREL'S STORY.

At the time of his marriage with Mlle. Marthe Percier, M. Raymond Daubrel was nearly forty years old. His wife, on the contrary, was barely twenty.

The son of a Frenchman in business in New York, where he represented the house of Percier, of Paris, in which he was a partner, Raymond Daubrel was sent to France by his father on the death of M. Percier, whose widow retained an interest in the business.

Mme. Percier had then a daughter of seventeen, pretty, gentle, well-bred, and a good musician, whose youthful charms made a deep impression on M. Daubrel. Having no relations in Paris, feeling lonely, and being kept by the serious turn of his mind from loose love affairs, he had little choice about living as one of the family with the widow of his father's late partner. He soon fell in love with the young girl, who was a very tolerable match for him, and proposed for her. Mme. Percier, a sickly and rather melancholy woman, consulted with Marthe, as a matter of form, and this business-like marriage was celebrated within less than six months of M. Daubrel's arrival in France.

Mme. Percier saw in the union a means of avoiding a separation from her daughter, her son-in-law having to remain at the head of the business house in Paris. As for Marthe, who was fancy free, notwithstanding that she had a tender heart and a rather romantic mind, she had accepted without enthusiasm, but also without repugnance, the first husband that was offered to her.

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The death of her father having happened at the time when she was about to make her entry into the world as a woman, she had not up to that moment met with any one who especially pleased her. She could be certain that M. Daubrel was an excellent man, rather commonplace perhaps, but presentable enough, and even fairly good-looking, who would no doubt do his best to make her happy.

His means were far above those of his young wife. Her dowry was only about four thousand pounds, while he had in hand nearly twice as much, leaving out of account what his father would bequeath him at his death, and the considerable profits he derived from the commission house at the head of which he was in France.

After their marriage, M. and Mme. Daubrel set up housekeeping in a handsome suite of rooms in the Faubourg Poissonnière, hard by the merchant's office; and for three years everything went smoothly.

Raymond was neither very demonstrative nor very passionate in his love, and Marthe felt only a calm and honest affection for her husband; but this moderate conjugal sentiment seemed enough for both of them. Their temperament led them to dream of nothing more. Mme. Daubrel became the mother of a son that she worshiped. Her husband was consistently kind and attentive to her, refusing her none of the pleasures which his easy circumstances warranted him in allowing: in the winter, the theaters and an occasional ball, in the summer a couple of months at the sea-side at Dieppe or Trouville, outings during which Mme. Percier accompanied her daughter, so that she might not be left alone when M. Daubrel was kept in or called back to Paris by his business.

There was, therefore, in this middle-class but fairly refined and tolerably active life, all that was necessary for the happiness of a young woman reared simply and in good moral principles; or there would have been, had not its very monotony, regularity, and calmness roused in Marthe's mind aspirations, which she herself at first scarcely understood, for rather more stir and excitement. She was not likely to find with the Meyrins what she lacked.

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Mme. Frantz, we know, was nothing if not staid. There was capital music at her house, but not much conversation; and the auditors at her matinées were changed too often for an enduring acquaintance to be formed among them. It resulted from this that the pretty Mme. Daubrel had not a single woman friend such as women love to tell their petty sorrows to, and that her life seemed to her very dull and drear.

As long, however, as her son was an infant, that is, while her care over and watchfulness of him were needed at every hour, Marthe triumphed over the weariness of her mode of life; but when the child was handed to the care of a nurse, the young mother felt herself alone; her husband was scarcely seen except at meal times, and not unfrequently he returned home at night so tired out that he would go straight from table to his bed.

Nor was Mme. Percier a very agreeable companion for her daughter. Being in poor health, she rarely left her home, and often several days would pass without Marthe seeing her. The widow, for that matter, would not have understood what there was for her daughter to complain of. She had led a very calm and passionless life. She would have laughed at, or perhaps sharply blamed, her daughter for not being perfectly happy.

It was inevitable that Mme. Daubrel should soon find the days long and the evenings endless. She took to reading, first the Parisian newspapers—echoes of the scandal of love affairs which up to now had been matters of indifference to her—then the novels of the day. She took a feverish interest in the heroines of love stories, comparing their lives with her own, and contrasted the male characters with her husband, always to his disadvantage.

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M. Daubrel naturally saw nothing of what was going on. If he sometimes noticed the care-worn face or paler complexion of his wife, he attributed the change to a slight ailment, and would offer her some trifling amusement or outing, which Marthe would refuse with a constrained smile.

In this frame of mind, in this hunger of soul and weariness of everything, Mme. Daubrel was in the fourth year of her marriage when she went with her mother to Luchon.

M. Daubrel had hesitated about letting his wife go to take the waters at so distant a place, whither he could not run down to her by train every Saturday, as his wont was when she went to the sea-side, and was but a few hours distant from Paris, but Mme. Percier, whose doctor insisted upon her trying the Pyrenees, having declared that she would not have the courage to go alone, the worthy merchant had yielded. He kept his son Charles with him, whom Marthe, indeed, good mother though she was, had not spoken of taking with her. Besides, the stay was not meant to go beyond a month, and the child's health was perfect.

Mme. Percier and her daughter accordingly undertook the journey, and arriving at Luchon engaged rooms at one of the best hotels in this fashionable watering-place, where, salutary as the waters might be for certain ailments, people were wont to amuse rather than physic themselves.

At the beginning of July the season sets in. There are concerts, balls at the Casino and at private residences, besides hunting parties in the forests of fir-trees, boating parties on the Oo Lake, and excursions to the Devil's Cave, the port of Vénasque, and the romantic villages of Oneil and Lys. Here and there an occasional patient was to be found taking the waters with severe regularity, and likely to feel the benefit of the course when he came to return home, but at Luchon the treatment seemed to more commonly consist in pleasure and various amusements. Acquaintances were readily formed, as they are in all places of this sort. If the Americans had not invented flirting, it would have been born in the shades of the Alpine avenues of Etigny or on the banks of the Pique. What else was there to do if not to flirt, in a charming neighborhood where were found an Avenue of Sighs and a Fountain of Love, as in the days of the Queen of Navarre; where one could fancy one heard constantly retold, in the echoes of the bounding mountain torrents, the liveliest stories of Heptameron!

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Mme. Percier and her daughter found the place very pleasant, and the next morning after their arrival they began to make acquaintances, in the garden of the hotel, near the band-stand, and at the medicinal springs, which were especially welcome to Mme. Daubrel, who, as they left Paris, had dreaded that during their absence her part would simply be that of a nurse to her mother. It was, alas! to be otherwise, and one of the friendships began here was to have a fatal influence on Marthe's future. The friendship was formed one night at a concert, with a young poet, Robert Premontier.

He was a good-looking fellow of five- or six-and-twenty, full of conceit and literary pretensions, and posing, from taste, as a neglected genius, a sort of Gilbert or Chatterton. Mme. Daubrel, who had introduced him to her mother, too quickly let him see beyond a doubt the pleasure she took in listening to him; so much so that he soon came to think he had the right to pay close court to her.

This was not Robert's first appearance in the lists of gallantry. He began adroitly with the young woman by avowing his pure and platonic love for her. He wished only to regard her as a sister; he only besought that she would permit him to adore her on his knees. The poor, simple woman heard this sort of thing now for the first time; she believed it, and the affair ended as all encounters do between the inexperienced and the bold. Marthe fell, the excuse she found for herself being that she too, as well as others, had a right to a share of happiness in the world, and that the loneliness of her heart was the cause of her fault.

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In a word, when Mme. Daubrel returned to Paris she had a lover. Her life henceforward was but a series of wild raptures, lies, and terrors. Little made, as a whole, for a great passion, too chaste, notwithstanding her sins, not to be more reserved than formerly with her husband, she was a poor dissembler; she gave rise to suspicions, and soon afterward the treachery of a maid in whom she had confided precipitated the inevitable discovery.

M. Daubrel was neither a violent nor a romantic man, but simply an honest fellow. At first he would not believe in the frightful misfortune with which he was so suddenly overwhelmed after four years of peaceful happiness; but he watched his wife, bought Robert's letters from the treacherous servant who had already sold her mistress, and, when he had acquired the certainty that he was deceived, being filled with contempt rather than anger for the guilty woman, he had her taken *in flagrante delicto* and lodged forthwith in St. Lazare.

A month afterward Marthe and Robert were sentenced to three months' imprisonment, and a judgment of the tribunal pronounced a decree of separation between M. and Mme. Daubrel, on the petition of the husband.

The decree was pronounced against M. Premontier in his absence, for he had fled the country, abandoning, like a coward, to her despair the woman he had ruined. Mme. Percier was nearly killed by the shame of the scandal.

She said she would never look upon her daughter again.

As for Marthe, she was still a prisoner in St. Lazare, in a state of moral and physical prostration impossible to describe, when she was told that her husband had left Paris to return to New York, intrusting to his cashier the liquidation of the business.

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M. Daubrel took with him his son, not giving his mother the chance to embrace and say good-bye to the child.

When she heard this the poor woman thought she would go out of her mind. All was over; everything was falling with a crash around her; nothing was left to her in the world. Her lover, who had so hatefully deserted when he ought to have supported her, she did not wish to see again, understanding now the hollowness of the love she had so simply believed in; her mother cast her off; her son was taken from her. Her health was so seriously affected by all these trials that for some weeks her life was despaired of. Mme. Percier hurried to St. Lazare, and having got by telegraph from M. Daubrel the authority for Marthe's release, she had her carried to her house, where, four months afterward, the adulterous wife, weeping tears of shame, was brought to bed of a child that only lived a few weeks.

For many days the unhappy woman was in danger, but her youth mastered the illness. Little by little she regained health and strength, to live on with her regrets and remorse. Her lover, Robert Premontier, died abroad, after leading a life of debauchery and excess, not having written to her once. Her heart could not even regret him. Resolved thenceforward to live an exemplary life, caring nothing whether she were still young and handsome, Marthe hid herself away and broke with all her friends, except Mme. Frantz Meyrin, who had steadily shown great affection for her through all her trials, but whom Marthe did not visit, and only then at long intervals until more than two years after the conjugal drama of which she had been the miserable heroine.

There, as we have seen, she made the acquaintance of the Princess Olsdorf, toward whom she was drawn by an instinctive sympathy and the similarity between her past and the present circumstances of the great foreign lady.

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Meanwhile Mme. Percier had won upon M. Daubrel to send her each month news of her grandson which she told to her daughter, whose only happy moments these were, though they recalled to her a dread time. Mme. Percier, touched by Marthe's repentance, never failed in replying to her son-in-law, to tell him how his wife was doing her utmost to expiate her sin, and

M. Daubrel, after avoiding for several years any reference to this subject which was so painful to him, had come little by little to show that he was less indifferent as to what would become of the woman who bore his name.

Then Marthe began to hope that one day she would see her son again. At last, in reply to a letter from the adulterous wife imploring her husband's pardon he had written, "perhaps," and sent her kisses from her son, who had been reared in respect and love for his mother.

This was the state of things between the parted husband and wife when, in less than three years after her divorce and her marriage with Paul Meyrin, the ex-Princess Olsdorf found herself the deserted woman whose humiliation and sorrows we have tried to depict.

CHAPTER VIII. ABANDONED.

From the early days of the autumn, Mme. Meyrin's condition became so quickly worse that the doctors summoned to a consultation pronounced her in danger. They had to deal with a case of anæmia from which nothing could rally the patient, and they feared grave complications affecting the lungs, as too often happens in cases of debility. The wasting away of the poor woman was frightful. Alas! all her dazzling beauty was gone. Her eyes were hollow, her face as pale as death, while there was from time to time a hectic flush on the height of her cheeks which augured the worst.

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She could not walk more than a few steps, so great was her weakness. She scarcely left her bed but to lie on a sofa, by which Mme. Daubrel and Dumesnil passed part of their time, doing all they could to distract her thoughts and give her courage. Lise, touched as she was by their affection, scarcely answered them; and when, to make them believe that she did not despair, she tried to smile, the smile was heart-breaking and drew tears from these two friends, whose devotion was admirable. The old actor especially was deeply affected by the sorrowful sight he saw every day.

In discovering in Mme. Meyrin the fruit of his amour with Madeleine Froment, the young girl whose mother's pride had made her a princess, and whom fate had brought to be the companion of a painter who was almost a celebrity, Dumesnil had perhaps at first been gratified merely in his vanity, and, without betraying his secret, had rather inflicted himself upon the house, where, however, as we have seen, he had always had a very affectionate welcome. But his paternal love, in the highest acceptation of the word, had already kindled at Lise's sufferings, and he accused himself now of all the misfortunes that had come upon her one after the other.

Why had he been silent when Mme. Froment married Count Barineff? Ought not he at that time to have claimed his daughter? Had it been really out of regard for her future that he had consented to her being adopted by the husband of his old mistress? Had not vanity had much to do with this abandonment of her? And, besides, had not he feared somewhat the burden of so young a child? He had been guilty at that time of a bad action for which he could not pardon himself. It was quite certain that had he reared Lise she would have become a great artiste, and he would not be watching her to-day, dying, alone, parted from her children, without a husband, and in despair.

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This was what Dumesnil kept on repeating to himself remorsefully.

One might have fancied that Mme. Meyrin could read the good fellow's heart and that she knew more of the truth than he supposed, for every day, as if to punish herself somewhat for having thought him slightly ridiculous when first she knew him, she was more and more charming toward him.

Formerly when he came in she would only hold out her hand to him; now she offered him her forehead to kiss, and when she could dine at table it was near her that he must sit. She flattered his tastes and his habits, talking of theatrical matters and of his favorite authors, reminding him thus of his successes and his youth, and even leading him to give some of those poetical extracts at which he was so ready and so skilled.

Sometimes, too, incidentally, without seeming to attach much importance to what she said, Lise would go back upon the past and speak of the time when her mother was one of the stock company at the Odéon, in Dumesnil's time. At the mention of these by-gone days the old actor stammered and blushed, putting a curb on himself so that he might not say too much, and turning the conversation into another channel.

These were the best, or rather the only pleasant moments of the woman who had been the Princess Olsdorf, for when neither Mme. Daubrel nor Dumesnil was there, Lise sunk into a state of complete lethargy, taking interest in nothing and not even reading. When her brother-in-law and sister-in-law came to see her—Barbe coming out of shame—they could not get her to speak, except to beg them not ever to speak of her husband, which they sometimes ventured to do, partly out of pity and also to attempt a defense of Paul. He was young, had easily been led astray, and would return to her. Then she would pardon him. Unquestionably he must be suffering, too; it was nothing but his lack of energy that hindered him returning to France.

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The deserted woman only replied by long, sad looks to these consoling words, which were hypocritical on the part of Mme. Frantz. Her husband was an honorable man and severely blamed the conduct of his brother, while Mme. Meyrin, the mother, dared never speak of her son. Lise's sad looks said, better than any words could have done: "I do not believe you; and if he were ever to return it would be too late."

While the ex-Princess Olsdorf was thus gently fading away, a strange change came over her: she was again coquettish and elegant as of old. One might have supposed that, only too certain that very little time remained for her to live, she wished to avenge the privations which the jealousy and avarice of her husband had imposed upon her since the second year of their marriage. She took delight in loosening her hair, which was still wondrously beautiful; she adorned her arms and wasted shoulders with the jewelry which had been so long put away; she affected to be cold, that she might wrap herself in splendid furs, as in the good old times, and she had taken again, with an undefinable sense of luxury, to the wearing of the wrappers trimmed with lace, and the excessively fine under-linen which had so greatly offended Mme. Frantz's sense of propriety.

"I don't want to die like a petty tradesman's wife, but like a princess," she said to Marthe, showing her embroidered coverlet and her pillow trimmed with rich lace. "If my mother were to come she would not know her daughter by my looks, but she shall find her again at least in all my surroundings."

And with childish pleasure and vanity she moved her little feet covered by silken hose, in their velvet slippers embroidered with pearls.

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There was but one thing in the past that she would not hear spoken of, that she refused to see again—Paul's studio. Since her husband's departure she had not gone into it, and had given orders that it should be closed against everybody. She caused to be removed from her sight everything that could remind her of art and artists, never asking about the theaters, new books, or exhibitions of pictures.

Nevertheless, she had kept in her bedroom Paul's painting of her, half nude, as Diana the Huntress, before which Mme. Daubrel had surprised her one day, her eyes filled with tears, murmuring: "And I was as beautiful as that once!"

Marthe wanted them to have the picture taken away, but Lise opposed it, saying:

"No; I will see myself so to my dying hour. It will be my punishment."

At her friend's, so to speak, posthumous coquetries, Mme. Daubrel smiled courageously, but she could not without grief hear her speak of her mother, for if Lise still hoped to soon receive a visit from the general's wife, and attributed her silence to ignorance of her daughter's condition, Marthe knew that the ex-Countess Barineff was acquainted with the facts. Indeed, she had written to her at Carlsbad, where the newspapers had mentioned that she was with her husband, and the answer had been sharp and ill-natured, proving that she was far from having pardoned her daughter, as the latter might have reasonably hoped in view of the terms on which she had parted from her mother at Pampeln.

"I am, of course, concerned about Lise's poor state of health, but I am sure she will soon be better, if she will forget her second husband as she forgot her first. When I come to Paris at the beginning of the winter, I shall find her as well as ever, and, perhaps, for all one can say, ready to be divorced again.

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"You can tell her, in the meantime, that I have lately had a good account of my grandchildren, Alexander and Tekla, to whom Vera Soubliaieff continues to be an excellent mother."

Marthe was careful not to read these sad lines to Mme. Paul Meyrin; she thought it better to let her fancy that the general's wife was ignorant of her illness, and to say, by way of reassuring her, that she had heard from St. Petersburg that Mme. Podoi was coming to Paris in or about November.

Mme. Daubrel had done more than this.

Acting in concert with Dumesnil, she had written to Prince Olsdorf a letter describing Lise's position, the disgraceful conduct of her husband, the desertion and loneliness in which she was living; then another to say that the doctors could give no hope of the unhappy young woman; she had but some months, perhaps only a few weeks to live, and it would be generous to let her embrace her children before she died.

Well acquainted with all the circumstances prior to the divorce of her friend, Marthe ended her second letter to Pierre Olsdorf thus:

"PRINCE,—I have lived for a long time in friendship with the woman who had the honor to bear your name, and I swear to you, in the presence of God, that, for three years, she has cruelly expiated the sin she was guilty of toward you. A wife without her husband, a mother without her children, she deserves your pity. Her mother herself has deserted her. There is barely time left for you to pardon her.

"You could have inflicted on her no more dreadful punishment than to join her with the wretch who made her forget her duty. Monsieur Paul Meyrin has avenged you

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hatefully. He knows his wife is dying, and he remains in Rome with that woman, that Sarah Lamber, who will not let him come and close the eyes of the woman whose heart she has broken and whose life she has ruined. Will you dare to refuse her the last kisses of her children?"

The prince had not replied, and Mme. Daubrel feared that her letters had not reached him, for she learned from inquiries at the Russian Embassy in Paris that within the past three years Prince Olsdorf had not appeared again in either Courland or St. Petersburg.

All that was known was that after leaving Russia he had visited Egypt, Zanzibar, and Mozambique, and that he had sailed for Japan, by way of Bourbon, the Isle de France, and the Sunda Straits.

In despair, Marthe decided to write to Vera Soublaieff and implore her to bring Alexander and Tekla to Paris. She had received an affecting letter from her in reply.

After mentioning that the latest account of the prince was dated from Calcutta, and that, according to his plans, he was to go straight to Bombay, the daughter of the farmer of Elva, still out of delicacy not calling by the name of her second husband her whom she had known as the Princess Olsdorf, wrote:

"MADAME,—Pitying more than any one, from the bottom of my heart, Madame la Comtesse Lise Barineff, I could wish to give relief to her sufferings. I have not forgotten the affection that she deigned to show me when I was young, and I shall ever remember the agony she felt as a mother when she joined me to watch over her sick son, as well as that she had to leave Pampeln, alone, and bearing with her only the memory of the last caresses of her children.

"If I have devoted myself to them, tell her, I beg of you, that it was as much in memory of her as to fulfill the duty that I was proud to be charged with. But you ask of me what I can not do. I have not the right, and I am in despair about it. Prince Olsdorf ordered me never to take away Alexander and his sister from Pampeln, even for a day, though it were at the request of Madame Podoi. Providing against any chance, he even appointed the residence to which they were to be taken should anything happen at the château to force them to leave it.

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"Forgive me, then, madame, and beg Madame la Comtesse to forgive me, too. Her children, whom I have taught to pray for her, will win from God the return of their mother's health, and perhaps better times are in store for her whom you love and whose hands I respectfully kiss."

"What a good and pure girl," murmured Mme. Paul Meyrin, when this letter was read to her.

Then, after a short and useless struggle with the thoughts which took hold upon her, she sunk into Marthe's arms, adding:

"And how worthy to be loved."

CHAPTER IX. FAR AWAY.

The particulars that Mme. Daubrel had got from Vera Soublaieff as well as from the Russian Embassy about Prince Olsdorf were correct, or as nearly so as is possible in the case of a traveler from whom letters are received only at long intervals, and who goes hither and thither, aimless and without guide but his whim, or with no wish but to forget. As if in leaving a place one did not carry all with one—hate, love, memories, and remorse.

So Pierre Olsdorf had lived since his departure from Pampeln, and since, having acquired the certainty that Vera loved him, he was forced to confess to himself that he loved her with all his soul. They who have not loved say: "Out of sight, out of mind." The contrary is the fact with the true affections which are not born solely of sensual appetites which other objects can appease, for speedily, to the sorrow of parting and to the passion itself, are joined the torments of jealousy. One thinks naught of the imperfections of the loved one; only the good qualities are remembered. Having lost the satisfaction of his mistress's presence, the lover wonders, fearfully, whether he may not be already forgotten; whether he has indeed done and said all that was needful to be remembered.

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The situation was the more painful for Prince Olsdorf inasmuch as to the regrets he felt was joined his remorse at having been the cause of the evil. He saw no escape from the consequences of his action and he regarded both himself and Vera as condemned to a life-long sorrow.

Whithersoever he fled, the memory of Soublaieff's daughter followed him. Through the distance that divided them he saw her, in fancy, at Pampeln, with the children he had intrusted to her; and her parting words, "Pierre Alexandrowich, you speak of happiness for me and you leave me," were always ringing in his ears.

When he had from her, at long intervals, letters that were adorable in their sweetness and resignation, in which only Alexander and Tekla were spoken of, he would be taken with a mad longing to hurry back to Courland and throw himself at the feet of the woman he had, without the right to do so, associated with his misfortunes.

Once, especially, he was on the point of putting the idea into execution, on finding awaiting his arrival at Singapore a telegram stating that his son was seriously ill; but as, following upon the first telegram which had been lying there for him a week, others came, first encouraging and then wholly reassuring, he had the courage to go on with his wandering travels, while regretting, in a sense, that his anxiety had not been prolonged, as then his fatherly love would have taken him back to Pampeln.

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However, Prince Olsdorf had attempted the impossible in trying to weary his body and so bring peace to his soul. After traveling along the eastern coast of Africa, he crossed the Indian Ocean to China. There he saw Shanghai, Nankin, Amoy, the English colony of Hong Kong, and Macao, the old Portuguese possession where Camoens wrote the *Lusiads*. He went up the river to Wampoa, and thence to Canton, by way of the River of Pearls. Then he sailed south to Singapore, on the voyage to Batavia, through the Straits of Banca. But nothing could win him from the past, neither the strange manners of the inhabitants of the Celestial Empire, nor the fairy-like view of the Straits of Sunda, nor the terrible wild beast hunts in the interior of Java.

From the Malayan world he went to Ceylon, passing through its entire length from Point de Galle to Trincomalee, but neither the subterranean caverns of Candy, nor the splendor of the Valley of Rubies, nor the luxuriant vegetation of the jungle, had calmed his mind. At the top of Adam's Peak, before the foot-mark of Buddha, his eyes turned only to the north, where was his love, and where he was waited for.

He sailed up the coast of Coromandal, visiting in turn Tanjore, Trichinopoly, Pondicherry, Madras, and Melapore, where St. Thomas was martyred and where Christ perhaps lived during His absence from Judea, drawing from the books of the Brahmins the most perfect precepts of His divine teaching.

But neither the sight of the voluntary penitents, who torture themselves in honor of Shiva; nor the fantastical spectacle of the ruins of the city of the great Bali, the domes of the pagodas of which were still wholly visible at the beginning of this century at low tide; nor the chants of the victims of Juggernaut under the wheels of the car of Kali, the goddess of blood; nor the rumbling of the bear of Orissa—nothing had stifled the pain of his heart.

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The Hooghly, with its floating corpses, had scarcely moved him. When, despising the iron road already open, at least in part, from Calcutta to Bombay, he crossed the peninsula of Hindoostan by the ancient routes which traverse the forests of Malwa, in the rude halting places where only shelter for the night and water are to be had, Vera Soublaieff's image never ceased to be before him. In the grottoes of Illora, in the depths of the caverns of Salcette, his ear was dulled to the roaring of the tigers, as it was to the hymns of the Hindoo priests, chanting verses of the Vedas, while he heard eternally the last adieu of Soublaieff's daughter.

His travels had lasted nearly three years, his only companion being the honest Yvan, whose sad and stern face reflected the state of his master's mind, when, returning from an excursion into the country of the Sikhs, the warrior people whom the English have never completely subdued, Pierre Olsdorf found at Bombay the last two letters from Mme. Daubrel.

The accent of truth in them struck him deeply, and, in the state of feeling he was in, a great pity possessed him for the woman he had cursed. She, too, suffered; then she, too, was pitiable. To this had come the woman once called the Princess Olsdorf. Was not the punishment too severe? Had not he abused his power in inflicting it on her? Would not it have been more humane to have avenged his honor in the blood of the guilty pair! Ought not he at least to have left Lise her child, whose presence would have softened her sorrows? And how had the man he had spared been punished for his hateful conduct? Could he suffer him to go longer unpunished? This Paul Meyrin had taken from him his honor, his wife, and, like a villain, he now deserted the home to which he should have felt himself bound by so many obligations. And he was living happy, careless of the misery he had caused. No, that must not be.

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Three years ago the prince had condemned him to death unless he married the woman who had stooped to him. Ceasing to be the legal protector of this woman, forgetting his duty to her, he now exposed himself to the just revenge of the outraged husband; it was for him, Pierre Olsdorf, to avenge the woman who was so cruelly expiating her fault.

What the prince did not say, what he wished not to confess to himself, was that if these wretched events authorized the ending of his exile, he was less drawn to Europe again by all the sentiments of his heart than by the duty to play the rôle which he felt was his. Now it was Paul Meyrin he accused of the sufferings of the past three years. It was he alone who made so many tears fall from Vera's eyes; him alone he hated; him alone he would punish.

Pierre Olsdorf, therefore, determined to set out as quickly as possible, and when Yvan, sent to make inquiries, returned and told him that one of the steamers of a regular service between Bombay and Brindisi was to sail next day, he at once engaged a cabin. Then he sent Mme. Daubrel the following telegram:

"I shall be in Paris within twenty or at most twenty-five days. As you judge it best

to do, tell the patient so and try to give her some courage. I am sending orders to Russia for the children to be in Paris by the time I am. Send news to me in Rome at the Minerva Hotel."

Then, also by telegraph, he begged Vera to be ready to go to Paris at the appointed time with Alexander and Tekla. She was to put up at the Grand Hotel, where she would receive his instructions, awaiting his own arrival there.

Next day, as the Russian nobleman was embarking on the "Osiris," for a voyage which was to be more trying and to seem longer than any that he had yet made, the two telegrams arrived at Paris and Pampeln, causing emotions easy to understand. [Pg 222]

Mme. Daubrel was beginning to think that her letters to Prince Olsdorf would remain unanswered; and yet, the very morning that the telegram from Lise's first husband came to hand, her pretty face, usually so sad, betrayed heartfelt joy, great as her uneasiness was as to Mme. Paul Meyrin's health.

The fact was that her mother, Mme. Percier, had come to acquaint her with news, secretly and timidly longed for, and yet unexpected. M. Daubrel had written from New York, that, touched by the life of expiation and the penitence of his wife, he had almost forgiven the past.

At this news Mme. Daubrel threw herself, weeping, into her mother's arms. She was impatient to tell Lise, who loved her so much, of this new-born hope. But she had now something more and better to tell; she had to tell the poor mother that soon she would embrace her children.

However, when Marthe saw Mme. Meyrin, the patient's feebleness was such that she hesitated. She put the case to Dumesnil, who was there, and whom under some flimsy pretext she got into the little room adjoining the bed-chamber.

"People do not die of joy," exclaimed the old artist, having been told the facts. "Let us not lose a moment in giving our dear patient the only hope that can calm her grief a little."

And leading back Mme. Daubrel to Lise, he said to the latter:

"Our friend has good news to tell you, but she won't speak if you do not promise to be calm."

"Good news," said Mme. Meyrin, with the heart-breaking smile that always played about her discolored lips when they sought to console her. "Can there be any for me? The kisses of my children alone lighten my sufferings, and I shall never see them." [Pg 223]

Her husband's name did not even occur to her.

"Well, well, perhaps," said Marthe, in her gentlest voice.

"Perhaps?" Lise repeated, raising herself suddenly with staring eyes. "Perhaps, you say. Ah! don't deceive me. It would kill me."

Her thin hands had drawn Mme. Daubrel to her with strange energy. Her eyes questioned not less than her voice.

Frightened by this excitement, Marthe dared not say another word.

Dumesnil saw that an end must be put to this agony, even at the risk of a dangerous crisis.

"Well, then, yes," said he, in his turn. "Your children will soon be with you. The prince has telegraphed to your friend that he will be in Paris within a month with Alexander and Tekla. If he has them brought to France, it won't be to deprive you longer of their caresses."

The poor woman's face betrayed that she could not believe what was told her.

"The prince," she stammered, "the prince? He will give me back my children? I shall see my son again—my daughter? Ah, no, it is impossible."

"Read this," said Marthe, giving her Pierre Olsdorf's telegram.

Mme. Meyrin seized it, and when she had read it slowly, in a low voice, several times, as if the better to take in the sense of these blessed words which had winged their way through space to bring her a crowning consolation, she grew deathly pale, crossed her hands and, with a sob, raising her eyes, brilliant from fever, to heaven, murmured:

"Oh, God, I pray that Thou wilt let me live a month longer."

Almost at the same moment, more than five hundred leagues distant, at Pampeln, there was passing another scene not less touching, though of another kind. [Pg 224]

Vera Soublaiëff had been two months without a letter from the prince, and her anxiety was great when she received his telegram from Bombay begging her to get ready to go to Paris.

At first she thought she must have misread and was dreaming; but soon she calmed herself, understood the truth, and felt her heart swell with a great joy. She was going to see again the man she loved, whom she had waited for three years, whose long absence had caused her such cruel sorrow.

Suddenly Vera reflected that if the prince charged her to take his children to Paris, some painful

event must have happened. She who had been the Princess Olsdorf was doubtless dead, and Vera was ashamed of having thought of her own happiness alone. And yet, she thought, if Mme. Meyrin was dead, she would have been told of it by Mme. Daubrel. Without trying to fathom the mystery of what was going on, she ran out to Alexander and Tekla, who were playing a little way off before the main entrance to the château, and covered them with kisses, telling them they would soon see their father again. She dared not, however, in spite of their tenderly questioning looks, utter their mother's name; but she prepared to follow the instructions she had received.

CHAPTER X. TWO HUSBANDS.

On arriving at Brindisi, twenty days after sailing from Bombay, Pierre Olsdorf sent a telegram to Vera Soublaieff, asking her to leave Pampeln for Paris at once. A few hours later he took train from Brindisi, arriving in Rome the next day, where a letter from Mme. Daubrel was awaiting him, in reply to the telegram he had sent her before embarking for Europe.

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The gentle Marthe confirmed the bad news she had sent before. On learning that the prince was coming to Paris, Mme. Meyrin had expressed the deepest gratitude, but no hope was felt of her recovery. The doctors had given her up, and the patient knew the gravity of her illness. She only prayed of God that He would suffer her to live until the coming of the man whose forgiveness she wished to implore.

Pierre Olsdorf replied immediately to Mme. Daubrel that he would be in Paris in three or four days, as would his children. Then he went to the Russian Embassy. It was at the Palace Feoli, on the Corso. He sent his card in to Count Panen, the first secretary, who had been a school-fellow of his at the Institute of Nobles.

Having been introduced at once and most cordially received by the young diplomatist, the prince went straight to the object of his visit.

"My dear count," said he to his countryman, "I have a great favor to ask of you."

"I am quite at your orders, prince," replied the secretary to the embassy.

"I wish you to act as my second in a very serious business. If you require it, I will give you all the explanations that you have the right to ask for; but I should prefer to be silent."

"From a man such as you," replied the count, quickly, "no confidence is needed, for he could not desire anything contrary to the strictest propriety. Keep your secret and command me."

"Thank you. The man whom honor calls upon me to fight to the death, until one or the other of us falls, is Monsieur Paul Meyrin, a painter living in Rome."

"Paul Meyrin, the husband—"

Count Panen was going to exclaim, "The husband of the ex-Princess Olsdorf;" for like the rest of the Russian nobility he was not ignorant of the divorce pronounced a few years ago.

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"Yes, he himself," said the prince, bitterly; "he himself."

"Forgive me."

"I should beg your pardon. Later on you shall know more. Meanwhile I must kill Monsieur Paul Meyrin. I don't know where he is living, but you will easily get his address at the Ecole Française, at the Villa Medici. Be so good as to take a friend with you, to whom you can answer for me if I am unknown to him. Whatever conditions Monsieur Meyrin stipulates for accept, provided that they are of a kind to give a fatal issue to our encounter. I only desire one thing—that this affair may be over quickly, to-morrow morning, if possible. I mean to leave for Paris immediately afterward, if I do not fall."

"In a couple of hours, unless Monsieur Meyrin meets us with a refusal, all will be arranged. A good friend of mine—Baron Zamoieff, our second secretary—will feel it his duty to join with me. Besides, he has the honor of knowing you."

"It is true, indeed; we are distantly related. I remember that in happier days I had the pleasure of receiving him in Courland."

"As for Monsieur Meyrin, I think I know where to find him. But what if he should ask us for explanations?"

"I hope he will understand with half a word. If he does not, you may tell him I will hesitate at no provocation, no matter what scandal may follow upon it. This man, in the past, has done me the deepest outrage possible; it has suited me to wait until now before demanding reparation from him, that is all."

"I understand."

"Thank you once more, dear count. I shall see you again soon, shall I not?"

"As soon as I have seen Zamoieff and we have been to Monsieur Meyrin's, who lives near the Pia Gate, I take it. If you will go back to the Minerva we will join you there as soon as our mission is fulfilled."

"Yes, I will go back to the hotel. Good-bye for a short time."

In less than two hours' time, at the Minerva, a footman announced to Prince Olsdorf the two visitors he was expecting.

Pierre went forward quickly to meet them, offering his hand to Baron Zamoieff, and thanking him for kindly acting as his other second.

The Russian noblemen responded cordially to the grasp of his hand, and the first secretary spoke at once.

"My dear prince," he said, seating himself on a divan with his colleague of the embassy, "we had no trouble in finding Monsieur Paul Meyrin, whom we both know slightly. He was in his studio on the Via Venti Settembri, close to the Pia Gate. I told him the object of our visit, and I must say that he seemed astounded for a moment. At first he could not understand what to think. However, recovering himself after a few moments' reflection, he replied: 'Very well, gentlemen; I ask no explanation, singular as this challenge is, coming from a man whom I have not seen for four years, and who has kept silence all this time. Two of my friends will have the honor to present themselves at the Palace Feoli within an hour.' We are going back to the embassy to wait for them. As soon as we have arranged everything we will come back and tell you about it."

"Thanks, gentlemen," said Pierre Olsdorf, "I feared Monsieur Meyrin might escape me. Let me remind you I accept in advance his conditions, provided they are of the kind I have mentioned; if they are not, make your own: four balls at twenty paces, with the right for each of us to advance five paces; and in default of result we fight with swords until it is absolutely impossible for one of the combatants to hold his weapon."

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"Depend upon us, prince, all shall be arranged as you wish," said Count Panen. "Until this evening."

"Until this evening, count; until this evening, cousin, for we are relatives, my dear baron."

"I have that honor," replied Zamoieff, "and I thank you for the further one you do me in accepting me as a second. Until this evening."

In a few moments Pierre Olsdorf, left alone again, was putting his affairs in order, writing to Mme. Daubrel, to Vera, and to his son Alexander, letters which would be forwarded by Count Panen, if the writer should be killed in the duel with Paul Meyrin.

The Russian nobleman wrote these letters with a firm hand, with all the calmness and courage of a soldier who, in advance, makes the sacrifice to duty of his life.

To Mme. Daubrel he commended the unhappy Lise Barineff; to his son he said in simple and touching terms that he must never forget he was the heir to a stainless name, and that honor was priceless; to Vera he again avowed his love, praying her to forgive him for failing in his promise to return to her.

Meanwhile Paul Meyrin received the two friends he had sent for—two artists they were, like himself; one an Italian, Giacomo Rimaldi; the other a Frenchman, a student at the Ecole de Rome, Alfred Bertin—and he explained what service he claimed of them.

Less discreet than Prince Olsdorf with his countrymen, he told them the story of his amour and marriage with the wife of the man who now came, at the end of four years, to ask for satisfaction for an outrage effaced, one would have supposed, by the marriage with the divorced wife.

"I could well refuse any satisfaction to the prince," he said, "but I won't have it that he shall be able to say a Roumanian was afraid of a Russian. So settle this affair as you please with his seconds; sword or pistol, whichever he likes."

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Paul Meyrin did not add, though he understood, that what the prince wished to avenge was not the past but the present. And it was precisely the present that the painter hoped to free himself from in accepting the proposed duel. It seemed to him that in challenging him Pierre Olsdorf furnished him with a weapon against his wife whom he would then have the right to abandon altogether.

The wretched man had not heard anything of her for two months. His brother had indeed written to him that she was ill; but he did not know her condition was desperate. Like all men without energy, not daring to face the tears and the reproaches of the woman he had basely deserted, he shrunk from learning anything about her, in fear of being forced to return to the Rue d'Assas, if it were but out of common humanity and to avoid making himself a scoundrel in the eyes of even the most indulgent.

It is probable, however, that had he known the true situation of his wife, Paul would have left Rome; but at the time we have reached, Sarah, with whom he lived wholly, was intercepting all the letters from Paris, which she did not even read, out of womanly cunning, that she might have an excuse in reserve for the future. She simply put them on one side.

The painter was also urged on by another reason to finish with Pierre Olsdorf, of whom he could

not be jealous, for he knew through Mme. Daubrel that Lise had not met him at Pampeln when she went thither to nurse her son.

In the early days of his marriage with the ex-Princess Olsdorf he had been applauded and envied. Flattered that one of them had carried off the wife of a great Russian lord, Paul's brother artists congratulated him; for several months he was quite a romantic hero, but when they saw him so soon wreck his home, when they knew he had taken up again with Sarah Lamber, there was surprise that this love which had made so much noise had passed so quickly. Inquiries were made, and in a short time there came whispers from St. Petersburg which gave a handle to the jealous and the envious.

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It was told that it was Prince Olsdorf himself who had made the princess sue for a divorce and forced Paul to marry her. He was thrown down from the pedestal he had been planted on; there was much laughter at the quite novel revenge of the outraged husband; Paul was nicknamed "the husband by order," and, being questioned by his mistress, he lied so poorly that she, in the midst of a quarrel about his household in Paris, retorted upon him, not knowing she had hit the mark so exactly:

"Ah, don't bother me. You won't dare to be away from Paris a couple of days. Your wife's former husband would look you up and lead you back by the ear to your lawful home."

It was after this that Paul Meyrin, to prove he was free and his own master, had left Paris with Sarah and established himself in Rome, where his feebleness, his cowardice, and also his passion for the model, soon made so complete a slave of him that he gave up all idea of going back to Lise, and scarcely thought of his child.

During the first month of his absence he wrote to Mme. Meyrin once or twice to tell her that important commissions were detaining him in Italy; then, when he did not know how to explain his prolonged absence, he rarely answered the letters Mme. Daubrel wrote to him unknown to Lise, for she, too proud to complain, wrapped up in her maternal love, and not desiring to furnish her husband with new occasions for lying, had given up writing to him.

Receiving no replies now from the husband of her poor friend, Marthe told her that Paul had left Rome and was traveling East, where his letters had doubtless not reached him; but the deserted wife did not believe this pious fib; she knew then how unworthy had become the man she had loved so well; and she begged Mme. Daubrel not only to address not another line to him, in any circumstances, but not even to utter his name before her.

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It was from this time forth that Sarah had ventured on hiding away all letters from France. The miserable creature began to hate the woman she had inflicted such torments on. To excuse herself to herself she said that Mme. Meyrin's sickness was a farce, got up by her friends with the idea alone of bringing back Paul to his wife.

Being thus without news, the painter soon came to think it was so himself. Then he fell under the absolute sway of this girl who flattered his vanity and satisfied his senses.

The husband of poor Lise Barineff had rented on the Via Venti Settembri, a couple of hundred yards from the Pia Gate, a small villa, one of the rooms of which he had made into a studio. There he was living with Sarah, not knowing what was really going on in Paris in the Rue d'Assas, when he received the visit he so little looked for from Prince Olsdorf's seconds, and replied to the challenge as has been written above.

A man of stronger fiber than Paul would have been careful to say nothing to his mistress, from self-respect and even from affection. The painter, on the contrary, hurried to tell her all, and then there was a torrent of abuse poured out by the model on the Russian nobleman and the woman who had borne his name.

Sarah loved Paul as a master loves a slave, as a female a male. Even so, but, after all, she loved him with her violent and passionate nature; besides, she was jealous of the past, and as her ignorance in matters of honor did not allow her to suppose that Pierre Olsdorf was desirous of avenging the outrage done to him four years ago, she interpreted the challenge in quite another sense. Either the prince again in love with the wife, wanted to kill her husband to regain her, or his duel with M. Meyrin was nothing but a means of intimidation to force him to return to Lise.

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"You see," she exclaimed, when her lover had told her everything, "all these people are against you. After making you marry his wife that he might be rid of her, here is the prince come now to call you to account. And what for? Does he suppose he has the right to govern your present conduct? Are not you free to live as you please? Do your household affairs concern him? It would be too absurd. A divorced woman sending for her first husband to help her! If it is not so, he wants to fight you because you—betrayed him in the olden time. That would be a still more absurd idea. He has taken time for reflection, and you may be sure that he has not come without some urging on. Well, if I were you I should send this Cossack off about his business. It is simply his former wife who has plotted all this. If you fight you are a fool."

"I can not do otherwise," said Paul, when Sarah let him get in a word, "Prince Olsdorf would say everywhere that I was frightened of him."

"And if he did?"

"If he did? You don't consider that if I refuse to fight, my friends, to begin with, would call me a

coward, and I should be the scoff of every studio in Paris; besides, my foreign patrons, who are mostly Russians, would desert me. Moreover, I have a grudge to pay off. I should not have gone to look for him, but since he challenges me— Well, we shall see. It is time that there was an end put to people saying I married his wife by order. I am not quite so unskilled as I was four years ago. If he thinks I am he makes a mistake, as I will prove to him."

Paul Meyrin spoke the truth. Like all artists, he had devoted a portion of his time to fencing, which had been brought into vogue by some of his most eminent brother painters, first and foremost being Carolus Duran, and had acquired a respectable skill in the use of the weapon. Tall, muscular, active, and robust as he was, he would not be cowed by this undersized, delicately built Russian noble. In a word, he wished to put an end to all the tittle-tattle about, and to have his full liberty.

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Sarah in the end agreed that his view was the right one, and the painter, as we have shown, then gave his seconds a free hand, partly from anger and more out of boastfulness.

Everything was soon arranged between the seconds, and next morning, at eight o'clock, the two adversaries were to fire twice, beginning at twenty paces distance and having the right to advance five paces toward each other; and if this first encounter were without result it was to be followed by one with the sword until one or other of the combatants could no longer defend himself.

So Count Panen told the prince in reply to the question put to him on entering the prince's room with Baron Zamoieff.

The first secretary added:

"I will bring our countryman, Doctor Saniative, physician to the embassy. As to the place of meeting, I will inform Monsieur Paul Meyrin's seconds of it after I have seen Prince Charles B——, who, I do not doubt, the princess and their children being away from home, will let us use one of the avenues of the park in which his villa stands near the Pia Gate. It is essential that the duel should be fought on private ground, for before midnight all Rome will have heard of what is going to happen. I know the police here; we shall be watched from day-break to-morrow."

Pierre Olsdorf warmly expressed his gratitude and accompanied his two friends to the Corso. He returned then to the Minerva where, a couple of hours later, a message from Count Panen reported that all was arranged and that he would be with the prince by seven next morning.

Prince Charles B——, a type of good-heartedness, honor and simplicity, had granted the request of the Russian nobleman, whom he had known intimately for some time, and he had given orders to the gate porter to be ready at day-break to admit the party.

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Being told by his seconds of the conditions of the meeting with Prince Olsdorf, Paul Meyrin, from pride, dared not make any remark to them; nor did he say anything to Sarah about the exchange of shots which was to begin and perhaps end the duel. Next morning, having embraced the young woman with tolerable composure, he accompanied MM. Rimaldi and Bertin. It had been agreed between these gentlemen and the two Russian noblemen that the latter should provide the weapons.

The painter and his seconds had little further to go than across the street. Prince Charles B——'s villa was on the other side of the avenue, not a hundred yards off. When they reached the gate the porter opened it a little way for them and saluted them as they passed. They soon caught sight of two men awaiting them under the trees forming the entrance to the avenue on the left of the park.

They were Baron Zamoieff and Dr. Saniative.

A little further off was the prince, walking with Count Panen, to whom he was giving his final instructions.

Seeing M. Meyrin's seconds approach, the count left Pierre Olsdorf after pressing his hand, and went to MM. Rimaldi and Bertin, whom Baron Zamoieff had drawn a little on one side, to arrange the last conditions of the duel and load the pistols.

This task having been done with scrupulous care, Count Panen and M. Rimaldi drew deep marks in the sand of the avenue at the points where the two combatants were to take their stand, and also the lines they might advance to before firing. It had been agreed that either might fire instantly upon the signal being given by the count, or wait until he had advanced the five paces stipulated for.

Baron Zamoieff and M. Bertin handed the loaded and cocked pistols to Pierre Olsdorf and Paul Meyrin, and led them to the marks which they were not to overpass until Count Panen had said "Fire!"

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The adversaries being opposite to each other, their seconds stood aside to the right and the left. The prince was as calm as if he were in a shooting gallery, and kept his pistol lowered. The painter, clothed in black from top to toe, without an edging of linen at neck or wrist to serve as a mark, and presenting as little as possible of his body by standing sideways, grasped his weapon, on the contrary, with a nervous hand, pointing it straight at his foe.

Lying in their green serge scabbards, a few paces off, were the swords ready to play their part

when the time came.

With a last look Count Panen satisfied himself that all was in order, and, breaking the silence that reigned under the lofty trees he said, in a firm voice:

"Are you ready, gentlemen?"

Then immediately he gave the order:

"One, two, three! Fire!"

At the last word of the signal Paul Meyrin, aiming at his enemy, advanced quickly toward him, but before he had taken two steps a shot was heard and, with a half turn, the painter fell forward on his face like a log.

Dr. Saniative and his seconds rushed to him, but it was to hear his last sigh. Pierre Olsdorf's bullet had pierced the heart of Lise Barineff's second husband.

The prince understood, from the gesture of the doctor and the consternation of MM. Rimaldi and Bertin, that all was over. Then, and not till then, his face grew ghastly pale, and for a moment his eyes rested on the corpse that his justice had made. Then he uncovered respectfully, and walked away without a word, leaning on Count Panen's arm.

That day Mme. Daubrel and Vera each received in Paris a telegram to say that Prince Pierre Olsdorf would be at the Grand Hotel by the evening of the next day.

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CHAPTER XI. LISE AND MARTHE.

When she received at Pampeln the telegram which Prince Olsdorf had sent to her from Brindisi to ask her to go at once to Paris with Alexander and Tekla, Vera Soublaieff had stifled a cry of joy; for at first she thought of nothing but the happiness of seeing again the man she had loved with all her soul for more than three years, whose name was spoken night and morning in her prayers, and whom she had for so long dreaded she would not meet again. But soon she felt shame at this first emotion, natural though it was; and, feeling that if the exile was returning so quickly some great misfortune must be threatening, she wept over the poor children who were going to embrace their mother on her death-bed only. She determined to set out at once.

That evening, thanks to the preparations made some weeks before, she was able to take the express train at Mittau with the young prince, his sister, and Mme. Bernard, the governess. She was sure thus, rapidly as he might travel, to be in Paris before Pierre Olsdorf.

She was not mistaken. On arriving at the Grand Hotel she found the telegram in which the prince announced that he would be there next day.

As for Mme. Daubrel, whose second telegram from Rome had come some hours earlier, she had hurried to her friend to tell her of it, and, to her surprise, had found Mme. Podoi there, who had arrived but a few minutes ago.

Having been told by the Soublaieff's daughter that Mme. Meyrin was as ill as she could be, the ex-Countess Barineff had suddenly started from St. Petersburg without a word of warning to anybody.

The interview between Lise and her mother had been heart-breaking. In seeing her daughter deserted, aged, in danger of her life, she felt changed in her that maternal love which for so long had been only pride; and, in spite of her efforts to seem calm and not agitate the patient, despair was in her face.

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Mme. Meyrin had been unable to leave her bed for several days. She had had her little daughter brought to her, and at the moment when Marthe entered the bedroom she was saying to her mother, and pointing to Marie, who was playing with the lace of the pillows:

"You will love her dearly, will you not, when I am no more, and you will rear her strictly as you reared me? But you will not try to make a fine lady of her; try to make of her no more than a happy woman. Above all things, do not marry her where divorce can follow. Divorce, mother, is nothing but a legal prostitution—a sort of challenge to adultery. It is an outrage on the laws of the Church and on modesty. Has any woman the right to pass from the arms of a living husband into those of another husband? Must not the divorced woman's brow redden at the thought of a possible, perhaps of an inevitable meeting between the two men who have possessed her? And her mother's heart, when she has to make two parts of it, one for the children who are no longer hers even in name, and one for those who come to her—must not it bleed mortally? If ever my daughter marries, let it be without the possibility of divorce, I beseech you."

"My dear Lise," said the general's wife, forcing a smile, "I promise to follow your wishes in every respect; but why look so far into the future, why despair? Oh, I am sure you will get better; Marie will have no need of a second mother; you will be here to watch over her, having come forth brave and beautiful from your present trials. You are no longer alone; Alexander and Tekla will

soon be here, and who knows but that your husband, ashamed and penitent, will soon return to you? It is an every-day occurrence."

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At these last words of her mother, Mme. Meyrin shivered with horror, and in a strange voice said:

"My husband! Never speak of him to me. And your hopes are but dreams. Yes, if God spares me, I shall see Alexander and Tekla again, since the man I deceived has taken pity on me; but it will be too late. I lived for my passion, I die of maternal love. God is full of mercy in His justice."

As she spoke Lise closed her eyes. When she opened them again in a few moments she saw Mme. Daubrel, who had softly drawn near the bed.

"See," she said to her mother, designating her friend with a grateful look, "here is my guardian angel. For four months Marthe has been by me. I owe to her my power to live to see you."

The general's wife offered her hand to Mme. Daubrel, without speaking, however, for she felt that sobs would hinder her. She knew the young woman already by what her daughter had said of her at Pampeln, and from the touching letters she had sent to Vera Soublaieff at the time of Alexander's sickness.

"My dear Lise," said Marthe, after returning the pressure of the ex-Countess Barineff's hand, "I bring you good news."

"My children?" asked Mme. Meyrin, with an accent of indescribable tenderness.

"Yes, your children and Prince Olsdorf. He telegraphs that he will be in Paris in less than forty-eight hours, at the same time as your son and daughter. They were to have left Pampeln two days ago."

"Heaven be praised! Where did the prince telegraph from?"

"From Rome."

"From Rome? Rome? Why did he go there? It was not on his way from Brindisi to Paris. Marthe, you are hiding something from me."

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Lise had started up in bed, her eyes dilated.

"No, I swear it," replied Mme. Daubrel. "Read for yourself."

The sick woman read rapidly through the telegram which her friend offered her. She sunk back exhausted on the pillows, half dead, and they heard her murmur:

"From Rome! And Pierre Olsdorf is coming to me, Madame Meyrin! Oh, God!"

"Lise, be calm, I beseech you," said her mother. "These emotions kill you."

The unhappy woman seemed to hear nothing; her eyes wandered, her discolored lips spoke disconnected words. Struggling with some terrible hallucination, she tried with her thin, transparent, bloodless hands to push away the phantoms crowding about her.

This crisis lasted nearly a quarter of an hour, while the general's wife and Marthe thought that Lise was dying. However, the poor martyr presently became calmer, and a little blood returned to her face.

In a few moments, when she had quite regained her senses, and had once more recognized her mother and Marthe, she reassured them with a gesture; then, suddenly, her smiling eyes were turned to the door of the room which had just been softly opened. The ex-Countess Barineff and Mme. Daubrel turned around.

It was Dumesnil who came in.

Recognizing her old lover, though she had not seen him for twenty years, the general's wife could not master her movement of surprise. She knew nothing of the friendly relations between her daughter and the old comedian.

The good man did not seem to recognize Mme. Froment. Thinking only of his cherished patient, whose eyes called him to her side, he drew near, bent to kiss her tenderly, and then only he coldly saluted Mme. Podoi, to whom Lise said, in a faint voice:

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"This is another friend, mother, whom you must love too as you will love Marthe. His devotion to me has been boundless. If I had been his daughter he could not have tended me more carefully. She and he have been all my family these six months. But I remember; you are not strangers. Yes, Dumesnil told me formerly, when I was happy, that he knew me as quite a baby. It seems I was pretty then; and he was infatuated with me. How far away all that is now. I was beautiful as I grew older—too beautiful. And now?"

This was too much for their two hearts. Their grief, so long repressed, was about to burst forth in sobs, when the doctor was announced who paid Mme. Meyrin a daily visit, though he had given up all hope of her recovery.

While the doctor, to acquit his conscience, was examining the patient and trying to encourage her with some generous, professional untruths, the other actors in the painful scene were silent. When the doctor left the room, Lise's mother and Dumesnil followed him out.

In the next room they stopped, but he did not give them the time to question him.

"My duty is not to deceive you, madame," he said to the ex-Countess Barineff. "I can give no hope. Madame Meyrin is so weak that the danger is more imminent. She may struggle for two or three days more; not longer."

The general's wife pressed her handkerchief to her mouth to stifle a cry of grief.

"Courage, madame," said the doctor, as he left them. "She is at least free from pain. Hide your fears from her. She will pass away gently, without a moan, as if she were but falling asleep."

Dumesnil, who stood leaning against the wall, was crying.

"Yes, the doctor is right; do not let her read anything in our faces," said the old man, going up to his former mistress. "With what a cruel punishment, Madeleine, God punishes your ambition and my weakness. Poor Lise! For six months and more I have witnessed her martyrdom, and have never given myself the supreme joy of calling her my daughter. Come, dry your tears, as I force back mine to the bottom of my heart, and let us go back to her." [Pg 241]

"Forgive me, Armand; I have not the courage. If I were to go in there again I should betray my feelings. Give me a few moments."

Seeing that it was indeed better so, the comedian went back alone into the bedroom. Lise was calm and seemed half stupefied. He sat down a short way from the bed and let his tears flow silently.

The night following upon this day of emotions was a bad one for Mme. Meyrin. She was delirious almost throughout it, watched by her mother, Marthe, and a Sister of Charity, who did not leave her for a moment. Next day, at noon, the general's wife saw there was time only to summon a priest to her daughter's bedside. She sent word at once to the Reverend Pope Wasilieff who, for that matter, had been several times to see Lise since the beginning of her illness.

Meanwhile, Mme. Daubrel drove to the Grand Hotel.

Vera Soublaieff had arrived there the previous evening, with Alexander and Tekla. When Mme. Daubrel was announced, she foreboded some misfortune. Leaving the young prince and his sister in the care of Mme. Bernard, she went quickly to the room into which the visitor had been shown.

"Mademoiselle," said Marthe, recognizing Vera in this beautiful girl with the sweet and serious face, "Madame Meyrin is dying; if you would have her embrace her son and daughter, there is not a moment to lose."

"You are Madame Daubrel, are you not?" said the farmer's daughter, "the devoted friend Madame la Comtesse spoke of to me at Pampeln. Yes, assuredly, I will take her children to her. I am expecting the prince at every moment. He will forgive me for acting without his orders. Poor mother!" [Pg 242]

Vera Soublaieff rang, and gave the order to the footman, who answered the bell to send for a carriage.

"You are indeed the noble woman we all love," said Marthe, offering her hand.

"I only ask for time to write two lines, in case Prince Olsdorf should come while I am away. I will ask the governess to have the children ready. Go now; we will be at the Rue d'Assas as soon as you are."

"Thanks, mademoiselle, thanks. May God bless you!"

And quickly leaving the room, Mme. Daubrel went to her cab.

In ten minutes' time Vera was in the landau, with Alexander and Tekla, which had been driven up to the entrance to the Grand Hotel. The young prince and his sister knew they were going to see their mother again, and that she was dangerously ill. Alexander, who had his father's temperament, was grave; his paleness alone betrayed his emotion. Tekla was crying in the arms of Soublaieff's daughter.

In less than a quarter of an hour, the landau drew up in the Rue d'Assas, at the same time as Mme. Daubrel's cab. The two women quickly crossed the vestibule, and, after asking Vera to wait with the children in the little room next to the bed-chamber, Marthe was going to pass in to Lise, when Dumesnil stopped her, saying, in a broken voice:

"The priest is with her. He came a few moments after the departure of the commissioner Madame Podoi had sent for him. He had a presentiment that his presence was necessary."

Vera Soublaieff, to whom the old man spoke as much as to Marthe, sat in a chair and took Tekla on her knees. The little girl wished to do as she was told by her big sister—so in her simplicity she called the daughter of the farmer of Elva—who had asked her not to cry, so as not to pain her mother; and her little face was convulsed by the efforts she made to keep back her tears. [Pg 243]

Leaning against the mantel-piece, his head lowered, the young Prince Alexander did not speak, but the nervous movements of his clasped hands showed plainly enough with what difficulty he kept command over himself. With the heroic courage that women often possess in the most terrible circumstances, Mme. Daubrel by a look tried to calm Dumesnil. It seemed as if in this

heavy silence they could hear their bruised hearts beating in unison.

Almost half an hour had passed when the venerable J. Wasilieff left the sick-chamber. At the sight of the dying woman's children he called them to him, kissed them tenderly, and blessed them. Then, sad and deeply moved, he walked from the room, raising his eyes to heaven, and not speaking again.

Mme. Daubrel was already with her friend, whom she found calm, almost smiling. It seemed as if in freeing her soul from its agony the priest's pardon had given new strength to her body.

"Will you promise me to keep calm?" asked Marthe, in her soft voice.

"Yes," said Lise, slowly, as if seeking to guess why the question was put to her.

Then, suddenly, she cried:

"My children, my children!"

Her mother-heart had guessed. Was there any other happiness that could be given her but to see her children?

And, raising herself a little, she received in her arms Alexander and Tekla, who, brought to the threshold of the door by Vera, had heard her cry and ran to her. Pressing them to her heart, and devouring them with kisses, covering them with tears, caressing them with her smiles, she repeated:

[Pg 244]

"My son—my daughter. Thank God!"

She held them from her a little—oh! only the length of her arms—to see them better for a moment or two, then snatched them back to her heart, raining on them again tears and kisses and a thousand endearments, to which the children replied only by their kisses, their tears, their tenderness, and one word: "Mamma."

Great as was the happiness of the poor mother, and on account indeed of the fullness of her joy, Mme. Daubrel thought it prudent to put an end to so touching a scene.

"You promised me to be good and calm," she said to Lise, calling Alexander and Tekla from her with a look.

"Already?" murmured Mme. Meyrin, who understood. "You want to take them from me already?"

"No," said Marthe; "but you must have a little rest. They shall not leave the house."

"I promise they shall not, Madame la Comtesse," said Soublaiieff's daughter, taking the children by the hand.

"Is it you, Vera? Forgive me; I could see only them. Let Marthe take them, and you come here to me, while I can still speak."

The young prince and his sister went out with Mme. Daubrel.

"How beautiful you are! And you are as good as you are beautiful," said Lise to the young girl, who, before she could hinder it, had kissed her hand as in the olden time. "How worthy to be loved, too!"

"Madame la Comtesse!" said Vera, blushing.

"Oh, I am not jealous," said Mme. Meyrin, with a mournful smile. "You will always love them, will you not, when I am dead? For I am going to die; I know it; I feel it. What strength God had left me to see them I have given them just now. What would have become of them but for you these three years? What will become of them without you, without a mother to guard them? Swear that you will never leave them—swear it, I beg of you. Then I can go before my God grateful and resigned."

[Pg 245]

"I promise you, madame," said Vera, crying.

"Thank you," murmured Lise, in a voice that could scarcely be heard, her eyes closing.

The young girl sprung up. Thinking the patient was dying, she called Mme. Daubrel. She ran in with Dumesnil, leaving the young prince and his sister in the neighboring room under the care of the Sister of Charity.

But the last hour of the deserted woman was not yet come. Her heart beat feebly; with her crooked fingers now and then she tried to draw the bed-clothes about her—a movement common to the dying.

Mme. Meyrin lay thus until the evening. When Marthe, then, was about to take Alexander and Tekla to the room made ready for them, she reopened her eyes, looked round vaguely, and stammered:

"My children."

Mme. Daubrel took them to the bedside. The poor mother scarcely knew them.

At this moment a carriage was heard to stop before the house; the bell was rung; some moments

passed, and a man, pale, and with uncovered head, appeared on the threshold of the room.

It was Pierre Olsdorf. On reaching the Grand Hotel he had found Vera's letter, and had hurried thither.

"The prince!" cried Mme. Podoi, with an ineffable expression of gratitude.

"He," murmured Vera, growing pale.

As if the word "prince" spoken by her mother had suddenly revived her, Lise raised herself and uttered a cry.

The Russian nobleman quickly drew near to the woman who had borne his name.

"You?" she said, raising herself as if galvanized. "Can you pardon me?"

[Pg 246]

"I think of nothing now, Lise, but that you are suffering," replied Pierre Olsdorf, pressing softly in his the suppliant hands which the unhappy woman raised to him.

"Then I can die. Pierre Alexandrowich, listen to me. Vera, come near—very near. Lose not a word, either of you. Oh, God! give me strength. Pierre, Vera loves you. She is a noble and saintly girl. When I am dead you will have the right to marry again. Promise me that she shall be the mother of my children—promise it!"

"I promise—I swear it," replied the prince, in a firm and grave voice.

The daughter of the farmer of Elva felt the blood rush to her heart.

The dying woman spoke now so low that she could hardly be heard, as if she were speaking to herself.

"With her the name of the Olsdorfs will remain unstained."

She would have fallen back heavily if the prince, who was supporting her, had not laid her gently on the pillows.

This effort was her last. In a few moments the dying woman was delirious. Her widely opened eyes were expressionless; her lips, distorted by a convulsive smile, spoke only broken words, the last expression of the last beating of her heart: "My children—Pierre—Vera—Marthe—mother—Dumesnil—all—all are here—and he—only he—"

Pierre Olsdorf understood that Lise's thoughts had turned for a moment to her husband; and he lowered his head that he might not see in a corner of the death-chamber the cradle of the child whose father he had killed.

Suddenly a cry of horror was heard.

Leaning over her daughter, Mme. Podoi had felt her last breath upon her face.

Mme. Meyrin, the ex-Princess Olsdorf, was no more.

Dumesnil, staggering, his eyes haggard, stretched out his arms as if to save himself from falling. Mme. Daubrel, deeply as she herself was moved, rushed to him to support him. But the comedian pushed her away, crying:

[Pg 247]

"She was my daughter—my daughter!"

And he fell on his knees beside the death-bed.

Despair had wrung from the old man the secret which his paternal love had made him keep so bravely for more than twenty years.

A fortnight later, after a funeral ceremony performed in the chapel at Pampeln, in presence of the prince, his children, Vera Soublaieff, and Mme. Podoi, the mortal remains of the Countess Lise were lowered into the vault of the Olsdorfs.

The "divorced princess" had come again under the roof of the man whose name she had borne—but she came a corpse.

Almost at the same hour, on one of the piers of New York, Mme. Daubrel was weeping over her son, while her husband smiled upon them.

Repentant and pardoned, the woman separated by decree from her husband had now a new future before her, and took again her place by her husband's hearth.

THE END.

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Transcriber's Note:

The original edition did not contain a table of contents. A table of contents has been created for this electronic edition.

The following typographical errors present in the original edition have been corrected.

On the title page, "RENÉ DÉ PONT-JEST" was changed to "RENÉ DE PONT-JEST".

In Part I, Chapter II, "the actor as the Odéon Theatre" was changed to "the actor at the Odéon Theatre", and "Well, well we will begin" was changed to "Well, well, we will begin".

In Part I, Chapter IV, "she was *enciante* by Paul Meyrin" was changed to "she was *enceinte* by Paul Meyrin".

In Part I, Chapter V, "some skill as a violinist" was changed to "some skill as a violinist", "she cauld give herself rein" was changed to "she could give herself rein", "It was the Princes Olsdorf" was changed to "It was the Princess Olsdorf", "she bad driven off" was changed to "she had driven off", and a quotation mark was added after "I thought you were alone."

In Part I, Chapter VI, "his wife life lives publicly" was changed to "his wife lives publicly".

In Part I, Chapter VIII, "you were *enciante* by him" was changed to "you were *enceinte* by him".

In Part I, Chapter IX, "when, being drassed" was changed to "when, being dressed".

In Part I, Chapter XII, a question mark was changed to a period after "you are your father's own daughter", and "fell back on the soft" was changed to "fell back on the sofa".

In Part I, Chapter XIII, "ove you more than ever" was changed to "owe you more than ever".

In Part II, Chapter II, "Mme. Frantz eat scarcely anything" was changed to "Mme. Frantz ate scarcely anything", and a missing quotation mark was added after "most adorable little thing ever seen."

In Part II, Chapter III, "expressiong her gratitude" was changed to "expressing her gratitude", "When she was *enciante* with Tekla" was changed to "When she was *enceinte* with Tekla", "so long as you are suckling, Marie" was changed to "so long as you are suckling Marie", and a missing period was added after "let us speak no more of it".

In Part II, Chapter IV, "his artist friends; her dream" was changed to "his artist friends, her dream".

In Part II, Chapter V, "Her letter ended with these wrods" was changed to "Her letter ended with these words".

In Part II, Chapter VI, "the Countess Lise Barnieff" was changed to "the Countess Lise Barineff", "no less than Alexander and Telka" was changed to "no less than Alexander and Tekla", and a missing period was added after "She was there alone".

In Part II, Chapter VII, "tell their petty sorrows too" was changed to "tell their petty sorrows to", and "especially welcome to Mme. Daudrel" was changed to "especially welcome to Mme. Daubrel".

In Part II, Chapter X, "went to Mm. Rimaldi and Bertin" was changed to "went to MM. Rimaldi and Bertin".

In Part II, Chapter XI, a missing quotation mark was added after "You are Madame Daubrel, are you not?"

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