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Title: Prince Zilah — Volume 2

Author: Jules Claretie

Release date: April 1, 2003 [EBook #3928]

Most recently updated: January 9, 2021

Language: English

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Release Date: April, 2003 [Etext #3928]

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PRINCE ZILAH

By JULES CLARETIE

BOOK 2.

CHAPTER XII

A DARK PAGE

As Marsa departed with Vogotzine in the carriage which had been waiting for them on the bank, she waved her hand to Zilah with a passionate gesture, implying an infinity of trouble, sadness, and love. The Prince then returned to his guests, and the boat, which Marsa watched through the window of the carriage, departed, bearing away the dream, as she had said to Andras. During the drive home she did not say a word. By her side the General grumbled sleepily of the sun, which, the Tokay aiding, had affected his head. But, when Marsa was alone in her chamber, the cry which was wrung from her breast was a cry of sorrow, of despairing anger:

"Ah, when I think—when I think that I am envied!"

She regretted having allowed Andras to depart without having told him on the spot, the secret of her life. She would not see him again until the next day, and she felt as if she could never live through the

long, dull hours. She stood at the window, wrapped in thought, gazing mechanically before her, and still hearing the voice of Michel Menko hissing like a snake in her ear. What was it this man had said? She did not dare to believe it. "I demand it!" He had said: "I demand it!" Perhaps some one standing near had heard it. "I demand it!"

Evening came. Below the window the great masses of the chestnut-trees and the lofty crests of the poplars waved in the breeze like forest plumes, their peaks touched by the sun setting in a sky of tender blue, while the shadowy twilight crept over the park where, through the branches, patches of yellow light, like golden and copper vapors, still gave evidence of the god of day.

Marsa, her heart full of a melancholy which the twilight increased, repeated over and over again, with shudders of rage and disgust, those three words which Michel Menko had hurled at her like a threat: "I demand it!" Suddenly she heard in the garden the baying of dogs, and she saw, held in check by a domestic, Duna and Bundas, bounding through the masses of flowers toward the gate, where a man appeared, whom Marsa, leaning over the balcony, recognized at once.

"The wretch!" she exclaimed between her clenched teeth. It was Menko.

He must have debarked before reaching Paris, and have come to Maisons-Lafitte in haste.

Marsa's only thought, in the first moment of anger, was to refuse to see him. "I can not," she thought, "I will not!" Then suddenly her mind changed. It was braver and more worthy of her to meet the danger face to face. She rang, and said to the domestic who answered the bell: "Show Count Menko into the little salon."

"We shall see what he will dare," muttered the Tzigana, glancing at the mirror as if to see whether she appeared to tremble before danger and an enemy.

The little salon into which the young Count was introduced was in the left wing of the villa; and it was Marsa's favorite room, because it was so quiet there. She had furnished it with rare taste, in half Byzantine and half Hindoo fashion—a long divan running along the wall, covered with gray silk striped with garnet; Persian rugs cast here and there at random; paintings by Petenkofen—Hungarian farms and battle-scenes, sentinels lost in the snow; two consoles loaded with books, reviews, and bric-a-brac; and a round table with Egyptian incrustations, covered with an India shawl, upon which were fine bronzes of Lanceray, and little jewelled daggers.

This salon communicated with a much larger one, where General Vogotzine usually took his siesta, and which Marsa abandoned to him, preferring the little room, the windows of which, framed in ivy, looked out upon the garden, with the forest in the distance.

Michel Menko was well acquainted with this little salon, where he had more than once seen Marsa seated at the piano playing her favorite airs. He remembered it all so well, and, nervously twisting his moustache, he longed for her to make her appearance. He listened for the frou-frou of Marsa's skirts on the other side of the lowered portiere which hung between the two rooms; but he heard no sound.

The General had shaken hands with Michel, as he passed through the large salon, saying, in his thick voice:

"Have you come to see Marsa? You have had enough of that water-party, then? It was very pretty; but the sun was devilish hot. My head is burning now; but it serves me right for not remaining quiet at home."

Then he raised his heavy person from the armchair he had been sitting in, and went out into the garden, saying: "I prefer to smoke in the open air; it is stifling in here." Marsa, who saw Vogotzine pass out, let him go, only too willing to have him at a distance during her interview with Michel Menko; and then she boldly entered the little salon, where the Count, who had heard her approach, was standing erect as if expecting some attack.

Marsa closed the door behind her; and, before speaking a word, the two faced each other, as if measuring the degree of hardihood each possessed. The Tzigana, opening fire first, said, bravely and without preamble:

"Well, you wished to see me. Here I am! What do you want of me?"

"To ask you frankly whether it is true, Marsa, that you are about to marry Prince Zilah."

She tried to laugh; but her laugh broke nervously off. She said, however, ironically:

"Oh! is it for that that you are here?"

"Yes."

"It was perfectly useless, then, for you to take the trouble: you ask me a thing which you know well, which all the world knows, which all the world must have told you, since you had the audacity to be present at that fete to-day."

"That is true," said Michel, coldly; "but I only learned it by chance. I wished to hear it from your own lips."

"Do I owe you any account of my conduct?" asked Marsa, with crushing hauteur.

He was silent a moment, strode across the room, laid his hat down upon the little table, and suddenly becoming humble, not in attitude, but in voice, said:

"Listen, Marsa: you are a hundred times right to hate me. I have deceived you, lied to you. I have conducted myself in a manner unworthy of you, unworthy of myself. But to atone for my fault—my crime, if you will—I am ready to do anything you order, to be your miserable slave, in order to obtain the pardon which I have come to ask of you, and which I will ask on my knees, if you command me to do so."

The Tzigana frowned.

"I have nothing to pardon you, nothing to command you," she said with an air more wearied than stern, humiliating, and disdainful. "I only ask you to leave me in peace, and never appear again in my life."

"So! I see that you do not understand me," said Michel, with sudden brusqueness.

"No, I acknowledge it, not in the least."

"When I asked you whether you were to marry Prince Andras, didn't you understand that I asked you also another thing: Will you marry me, me— Michel Menko?"

"You!" cried the Tzigana.

And there was in this cry, in this "You!" ejaculated with a rapid movement of recoil-amazement, fright, scorn, and anger.

"You!" she said again. And Michel Menko felt in this word a mass of bitter rancor and stifled hatred which suddenly burst its bonds.

"Yes, me!" he said, braving the insult of Marsa's cry and look. "Me, who love you, and whom you have loved!"

"Ah, don't dare to say that!" she cried, drawing close to the little table where the daggers rested amid the objects of art. "Don't be vile enough to speak to me of a past of which nothing remains to me but disgust! Let not one word which recalls it to me mount to your lips, not one, you understand, or I will kill you like the coward you are!"

"Do so, Marsa!" he cried with wild, mad passion. "I should die by your hand, and you would not marry that man!"

Afraid of herself, wresting her eyes from the glittering daggers, she threw herself upon the divan, her hands clasped tightly in her lap, and watched, with the look of a tigress, Michel, who said to her now, in a voice which trembled with the tension of his feelings: "You must know well, Marsa, that death is not the thing that can frighten a man like me! What does frighten me is that, having lost you once, I may lose you forever; to know that another will be your husband, will love you, will receive your kisses. The very idea that that is possible drives me insane. I feel myself capable of any deed of madness to prevent it. Marsa! Marsa! You did love me once!"

"I love honor, truth, justice," said Marsa, sternly and implacably. "I thought I loved you; but I never did."

"You did not love me?" he said.

This cruel recalling of the past, which was the remorse of her life, was like touching her flesh with a red-hot iron.

"No, no, no! I did not love you! I repeat, I thought I loved you. What did I know of life when I met you? I was suffering, ill; I thought myself dying, and I never heard a word of pity fall from any other lips than yours. I thought you were a man of honor. You were only a wretch. You deceived me; you represented yourself to me as free—and you were married. Weakly—oh, I could kill myself at the very thought!— I listened to you! I took for love the trite phrases you had used to dozens of other women; half by violence, half by ruse, you became my lover. I do not know when—I do not know how. I try to forget that horrible dream; and when, deluded by you, thinking that what I felt for you was love, for I did think so, I imagined that I had given myself for life to a man worthy of the deepest devotion, ready for all sacrifices for me, as I felt myself to be for him; when you had taken me, body and soul, I learn by what? by a trifling conversation, by a chance, in a crowded ballroom—that, this Michel Menko, whose name I was to bear, who was to be my husband; this Count Menko, this man of honor, the one in whom I believed blindly, was married! Married at Vienna, and had already given away the name on which he traded! Oh, it is hideous!" And the Tzigana, whose whole body was shuddering with horror, recoiled instinctively to the edge of the divan as at the approach of some detested contact.

Michel, his face pale and convulsed, had listened to her with bowed head.

"All that you say is the truth, Marsa; but I will give my life, my whole life, to expiate that lie!"

"There are infamies which are never effaced. There is no pardon for him who has no excuse."

"No excuse? Yes, Marsa; I have one! I have one: I loved you!"

"And because you loved me, was it necessary for you to betray me, lie to me, ruin me?"

"What could I do? I did not love the woman I had married; you dawned on me like a beautiful vision; I wished, hoping I know not what impossible future, to be near you, to make you love me, and I did not dare to confess that I was not free. If I lied to you, it was because I trembled at not being able to surround you with my devotion; it was because I was afraid to lose your love, knowing that the adoration I had for you would never die till my heart was cold and dead! Upon all that is most sacred, I swear this to you! I swear it!"

He then recalled to her, while she sat rigid and motionless with an expression of contempt and disdain upon her beautiful, proud lips, their first meetings; that evening at Lady Brolway's, in Pau, where he had met her for the first time; their conversation; the ineffaceable impression produced upon him by her beauty; that winter season; the walks they had taken together beneath the trees, which not a breath of wind stirred; their excursions in the purple and gold valleys, with the Pyrenees in the distance crowned with eternal snow. Did she not remember their long talks upon the terrace, the evenings which felt like spring, and that day when she had been nearly killed by a runaway horse, and he had seized the animal by the bridle and saved her life? Yes, he had loved her, loved her well; and it was because, possessing her love, he feared, like a second Adam, to see himself driven out of paradise, that he had hidden from Marsa the truth. If she had questioned one of the Hungarians or Viennese, who were living at Pau, she could doubtless have known that Count Menko, the first secretary of the embassy of Austria-Hungary at Paris, had married the heiress of one of the richest families of Prague; a pretty but unintelligent girl, not understanding at all the character of her husband; detesting Vienna and Paris, and gradually exacting from Menko that he should live at Prague, near her family, whose ancient ideas and prejudices and inordinate love of money displeased the young Hungarian. He was left free to act as he pleased; his wife would willingly give up a part of her dowry to regain her independence. It was only just, she said insolently, that, having been mistaken as to the tastes of the man she had married for reasons of convenience rather than of inclination, she should pay for her stupidity. Pay! The word made the blood mount to Menko's face. If he had not been rich, as he was, he would have hewn stone to gain his daily bread rather than touch a penny of her money. He shook off the yoke the obstinate daughter of the Bohemian gentleman would have imposed upon him, and departed, brusquely breaking a union in which both husband and wife so terribly perceived their error.

Marsa might have known of all this if she had, for a moment, doubted Menko's word. But how was she to suspect that the young Count was capable of a lie or of concealing such a secret? Besides, she knew hardly any one at Pau, as her physicians had forbidden her any excitement; at the foot of the Pyrenees, she lived, as at Maisons-Lafitte, an almost solitary life; and Michel Menko had been during that winter, which he now recalled to Marsa, speaking of it as of a lost Eden, her sole companion, the only guest of the house she inhabited with Vogotzine in the neighborhood of the castle.

Poor Marsa, enthusiastic, inexperienced, her heart enamored with chivalrous audacity, intrepid courage, all the many virtues which were those of Hungary herself; Marsa, her mind imbued from her infancy with the almost fantastic recitals of the war of independence, and later, with her readings and reflections; Marsa, full of the stories of the heroic past—must necessarily have been the dupe of the first being who, coming into her life, was the personal representative of the bravery and charm of her race.

So, when she encountered one day Michel Menko, she was invincibly attracted toward him by something proud, brave, and chivalrous, which was characteristic of the manly beauty of the young Hungarian. She was then twenty, very ignorant of life, her great Oriental eyes seeing nothing of stern reality; but, with all her gentleness, there was a species of Muscovite firmness which was betrayed in the contour of her red lips. It was in vain that sorrow had early made her a woman; Marsa remained ignorant of the world, without any other guide than Vogotzine; suffering and languid, she was fatally at the mercy of the first lie which should caress her ear and stir her heart. From the first, therefore, she had loved Michel; she had, as she herself said, believed that she loved him with a love which would never end, a very ingenuous love, having neither the silliness of a girl who has just left the convent, nor the knowledge of a Parisienne whom the theatre and the newspapers have instructed in all things. Michel, then, could give to this virgin and pliable mind whatever bent he chose; and Marsa, pure as the snow and brave as her own favorite heroes, became his without resistance, being incapable of divining a treachery or fearing a lie. Michel Menko, moreover, loved her madly; and he thought only of winning and keeping the love of this incomparable maiden, exquisite in her combined gentleness and pride. The folly of love mounted to his brain like intoxication, and communicated itself to the poor girl who believed in him as if he were the living faith; and, in the madness of his passion, Michel, without being a coward, committed a cowardly action.

No: a coward he certainly was not. He was one of those nervous natures, as prompt to hope as to despair, going to all extremes, at times foolishly gay, and at others as grave and melancholy as Hamlet. There were days when Menko did not value his life at a penny, and when he asked himself seriously if suicide were not the simplest means to reach the end; and again, at the least ray of sunshine, he became sanguine and hopeful to excess. Of undoubted courage, he would have faced the muzzle of a loaded cannon out of mere bravado, at the same time wondering, with a sarcastic smile upon his lips, 'Cui bono'?

He sometimes called heroism a trick; and yet, in everyday life, he had not much regard for tricksters. Excessively fond of movement, activity, and excitement, he yet counted among his happiest days those spent in long meditations and inactive dreams. He was a strange combination of faults and good qualities, without egregious vices, but all his virtues capable of being annihilated by passion, anger, jealousy, or grief. With such a nature, everything was possible: the sublimity of devotion, or a fall into the lowest infamy. He often said, in self-analysis: "I am afraid of myself." In short, his strength was like a house built upon sand; all, in a day, might crumble.

"If I had to choose the man I should prefer to be," he said once, "I would be Prince Andras Zilah, because he knows neither my useless discouragements, apropos of everything and nothing, nor my childish delights, nor my hesitations, nor my confidence, which at times approaches folly as my misanthropy approaches injustice; and because, in my opinion, the supreme virtue in a man is firmness."

The Zilahs were connected by blood with the Menkos, and Prince Andras was very fond of this young man, who promised to Hungary one of those diplomats capable of wielding at once the pen and the sword, and who in case of war, before drawing up a protocol, would have dictated its terms, sabre in hand. Michel indeed stood high with his chief in the embassy, and he was very much sought after in society. Before the day he met Marsa, he had, to tell the truth, only experienced the most trivial love-affairs.

He did not speak of his wife at Pau any more than he did on the boulevards. She lived far away, in the old city of Prague, and troubled Michel no more than if she had never existed. Perhaps he had forgotten, really forgotten, with that faculty of forgetfulness which belongs to the imaginative, that he was married, when he encountered Marsa, the candid, pure-hearted girl, who did not reflect nor calculate, but simply believed that she had met a man of honor.

So, what sudden revolt, humiliation, and hatred did the poor child feel when she learned that the man in whom she had believed as in a god had deceived her, lied to her! He was married. He had treated her as the lowest of women; perhaps he had never even loved her! The very thought made her long to kill herself, or him, or both. She, unhappy, miserable woman, was ruined, ruined forever!

She had certainly never stopped to think where the love she had for Michel would lead her. She thought of nothing except that Michel was hers, and she was his, and she believed that their love would last forever. She did not think that she had long to live, and her existence seemed to her only a breath which any moment might cease. Why had she not died before she knew that Menko had lied?

All deception seemed hideous to Marsa Laszlo, and this hideousness she had discovered in the man to whom she had given herself, believing in the eternity as well as in the loyalty of his love.

It was at a ball, at the English embassy, after her return from Pau, that, while smiling and happy, she

overheard between two Viennese, strangers to her, this short dialogue, every word of which was like a knife in her heart: "What a charming fellow that Menko is!" "Yes; is his wife ugly or a humpback? or is he jealous as Othello? She is never seen." "His wife! Is he married?" "Yes: he married a Blavka, the daughter of Angel Blavka, of Prague. Didn't you know it?"

Married!

Marsa felt her head reel, and the sudden glance she cast at the speakers silenced, almost terrified them. Half insane, she reached home, she never knew how. The next day Michel Menko presented himself at her apartments in the hotel where she was living; she ordered him out of her presence, not allowing him to offer any excuse or explanation.

"You are married, and you are a coward!"

He threw himself at her knees, and implored her to listen to him.

"Go! Go!"

"But our love, Marsa? For I love you, and you love me."

"I hate and scorn you. My love is dead. You have killed it. All is over. Go! And let me never know that there exists a Michel Menko in the world! Never! Never! Never!"

He felt his own cowardice and shame, and he disappeared, not daring again to see the woman whose love haunted him, and who shut herself away from the world more obstinately than ever. She left Paris, and in the solitude of Maisons-Lafitte lived the life of a recluse, while Michel tried in vain to forget the bitterness of his loss. The Tzigana hoped that she was going to die, and bear away with her forever the secret of her betrayal. But no; science had been mistaken; the poor girl was destined to live. In spite of her sorrow and anguish, her beauty blossomed in the shade, and she seemed each day to grow more lovely, while her heart became more sad, and her despair more poignant.

Then death, which would not take Marsa, came to another, and gave Menko an opportunity to repair and efface all. He learned that his wife had died suddenly at Prague, of a malady of the heart. This death, which freed him, produced a strange effect upon him, not unmingled with remorse. Poor woman! She had worthily borne his name, after all. Unintelligent, cold, and wrapped up in her money, she had never understood him; but, perhaps, if he had been more patient, things might have gone better between them.

But no; Marsa was his one, his never-to-be-forgotten love. As soon as he heard of his freedom, he wrote her a letter, telling her that he was able now to dispose of his future as he would, imploring her to pardon him, offering her not his love, since she repelled it, but his name, which was her right—a debt of honor which he wished her to acquit with the devotion of his life. Marsa answered simply with these words: "I will never bear the name of a man I despise."

The wound made in her heart by Menko's lie was incurable; the Tzigana would never forgive. He tried to see her again, confident that, if he should be face to face with her, he could find words to awaken the past and make it live again; but she obstinately refused to see him, and, as she did not go into society, he never met her. Then he cast himself, with a sort of frenzy, into the dissipation of Paris, trying to forget, to forget at any cost: failing in this, he resigned his position at the embassy, and went away to seek adventure, going to fight in the Balkans against the Russians, only to return weary and bored as he had departed, always invincibly and eternally haunted by the image of Marsa, an image sad as a lost love, and grave as remorse.

CHAPTER XIII

"MY LETTERS OR MYSELF"

It was that past, that terrible past, which Michel Menko had dared to come and speak of to the Tzigana. At first, she had grown crimson with anger, as if at an insult; now, by a sudden opposite sentiment, as she listened to him recalling those days, she felt an impression of deadly pain as if an old wound had been reopened. Was it true that all this had ever existed? Was it possible, even?

The man who had been her lover was speaking to her; he was speaking to her of his love; and, if the

terrible agony of memory had not burned in her heart, she would have wondered whether this man before her, this sort of stranger, had ever even touched her hand.

She waited, with the idle curiosity of a spectator who had no share in the drama, for the end of Menko's odious argument: "I lied because I loved you!"

He returned again and again, in the belief that women easily forgive the ill-doing of which they are the cause, to that specious plea, and Marsa asked herself, in amazement, what aberration had possession of this man that he should even pretend to excuse his infamy thus.

"And is that," she said at last, "all that you have to say to me? According to you, the thief has only to cry 'What could I do? I loved that money, and so I stole it.' Ah," rising abruptly, "this interview has lasted too long! Good-evening!"

She walked steadily toward the door; but Michel, hastening round the other side of the table, barred her exit, speaking in a suppliant tone, in which, however, there was a hidden threat:

"Marsa! Marsa, I implore you, do not marry Prince Andras! Do not marry him if you do not wish some horrible tragedy to happen to you and me!"

"Really?" she retorted. "Do I understand that it is you who now threaten to kill me?"

"I do not threaten; I entreat, Marsa. But you know all that there is in me at times of madness and folly. I am almost insane: you know it well. Have pity upon me! I love you as no woman was ever loved before; I live only in you; and, if you should give yourself to another—"

"Ah!" she said, interrupting him with a haughty gesture, "you speak to me as if you had a right to dictate my actions. I have given you my forgetfulness after giving you my love. That is enough, I think. Leave me!"

"Marsa!"

"I have hoped for a long time that I was forever delivered from your presence. I commanded you to disappear. Why have you returned?"

"Because, after I saw you one evening at Baroness Dinati's (do you remember? you spoke to the Prince for the first time that evening), I learned, in London, of this marriage. If I have consented to live away from you previously, it was because, although you were no longer mine, you at least were no one else's; but I will not—pardon me, I can not—endure the thought that your beauty, your grace, will be another's. Think of the self-restraint I have placed upon myself! Although living in Paris, I have not tried to see you again, Marsa, since you drove me from your presence; it was by chance that I met you at the Baroness's; but now—"

"It is another woman you have before you. A woman who ignores that she has listened to your supplications, yielded to your prayers. It is a woman who has forgotten you, who does not even know that a wretch has abused her ignorance and her confidence, and who loves—who loves as one loves for the first time, with a pure and holy devotion, the man whose name she is to bear."

"That man I respect as honor itself. Had it been another, I should already have struck him in the face. But you who accuse me of having lied, are you going to lie to him, to him?"

Marsa became livid, and her eyes, hollow as those of a person sick to death, flamed in the black circles which surrounded them.

"I have no answer to make to one who has no right to question me," she said. "But, should I have to pay with my life for the moment of happiness I should feel in placing my hand in the hand of a hero, I would grasp that moment!"

"Then," cried Menko, "you wish to push me to extremities! And yet I have told you there are certain hours of feverish insanity in which I am capable of committing a crime."

"I do not doubt it," replied the young girl, coldly. "But, in fact, you have already done that. There is no crime lower than that of treachery."

"There is one more terrible," retorted Michel Menko. "I have told you that I loved you. I love you a hundred times more now than ever before. Jealousy, anger, whatever sentiment you choose to call it, makes my blood like fire in my veins! I see you again as you were. I feel your kisses on my lips. I love you madly, passionately! Do you understand, Marsa? Do you understand?" and he approached with outstretched hands the Tzigana, whose frame was shaken with indignant anger. "Do you understand? I

love you still. I was your lover, and I will, I will be so again."

"Ah, miserable coward!" cried the Tzigana, with a rapid glance toward the daggers, before which stood Menko, preventing her from advancing, and regarding her with eyes which burned with reckless passion, wounded self-love, and torturing jealousy. "Yes, coward!" she repeated, "coward, coward to dare to taunt me with an infamous past and speak of a still more infamous future!"

"I love you!" exclaimed Menko again.

"Go!" she cried, crushing him with look and gesture. "Go! I order you out of my presence, lackey! Go!"

All the spirit of the daughters of the puszta, the violent pride of her Hungarian blood, flashed from her eyes; and Menko, fascinated, gazed at her as if turned to stone, as she stood there magnificent in her anger, superb in her contempt.

"Yes, I will go to-day," he said at last, "but tomorrow night I shall come again, Marsa. As my dearest treasure, I have preserved the key of that gate I opened once to meet you who were waiting for me in the shadow of the trees. Have you forgotten that, also? You say you have forgotten all."

And as he spoke, she saw again the long alley behind the villa, ending in a small gate which, one evening after the return from Pau, Michel opened, and came, as he said, to meet her waiting for him. It was true. Yes, it was true. Menko did not lie this time! She had waited for him there, two years before, unhappy girl that she was! All that hideous love she had believed lay buried in Pau as in a tomb.

"Listen, Marsa," continued Menko, suddenly recovering, by a strong effort of the will, his coolness, "I must see you once again, have one more opportunity to plead my cause. The letters you wrote to me, those dear letters which I have covered with my kisses and blistered with my tears, those letters which I have kept despite your prayers and your commands, those letters which have been my only consolation—I will bring them to you to-morrow night. Do you understand me?"

Her great eyes fixed, and her lips trembling horribly, Marsa made no reply.

"Do you understand me, Marsa?" he repeated, imploring and threatening at once.

"Yes," she murmured at last.

She paused a moment; then a broken, feverish laugh burst from her lips, and she continued, with stinging irony:

"Either my letters or myself! It is a bargain pure and simple! Such a proposition has been made once before—it is historical—you probably remember it. In that case, the woman killed herself. I shall act otherwise, believe me!"

There was in her icy tones a threat, which gave pleasure to Michel Menko. He vaguely divined a danger. "You mean?" he asked.

"I mean, you must never again appear before me. You must go to London, to America; I don't care where. You must be dead to the one you have cowardly betrayed. You must burn or keep those letters, it little matters to me which; but you must still be honorable enough not to use them as a weapon against me. This interview, which wearies more than it angers me, must be the last. You must leave me to my sorrows or my joys, without imagining that you could ever have anything in common with a woman who despises you. You have crossed the threshold of this house for the last time. Or, if not—Ah! if not—I swear to you that I have energy enough and resolution enough to defend myself alone, and alone to punish you! In your turn, you understand me, I imagine?"

"Certainly," said Michel. "But you are too imprudent, Marsa. I am not a man to make recoil by speaking of danger. Through the gate, or over the wall if the gate is barricaded, I shall come to you again, and you will have to listen to me."

The lip of the Tzigana curled disdainfully.

"I shall not even change the lock of that gate, and besides, the large gate of the garden remains open these summer nights. You see that you have only to come. But I warn you neither to unlock the one nor to pass through the other. It is not I whom you will find at the rendezvous."

"Still, I am sure that it would be you, blarsa, if I should tell you that to-morrow evening I shall be under the window of the pavilion at the end of the garden, and that you must meet me there to receive from my hand your letters, all your letters, which I shall bring you."

"Do you think so?"

"I am certain of it."

"Certain? Why?"

"Because you will reflect."

"I have had time to reflect. Give me another reason."

"Another reason is that you can not afford to leave such proofs in my hands. I assure you that it would be folly to make of a man like me, who would willingly die for you, an open and implacable enemy."

"I understand. A man like you would die willingly for a woman, but he insults and threatens her, like the vilest of men, with a punishment more cruel than death itself. Well! it matters little to me. I shall not be in the pavilion where you have spoken to me of your love, and I will have it torn down and the debris of it burned within three days. I shall not await you. I shall never see you again. I do not fear you. And I leave you the right of doing with those letters what you please!"

Then, surveying him from head to foot, as if to measure the degree of audacity to which he could attain, "Adieu!" she said.

"Au revoir!" he rejoined coldly, giving to the salutation an emphasis full of hidden meaning.

The Tzigana stretched out her hand, and pulled a silken bellcord.

A servant appeared.

"Show this gentleman out," she said, very quietly.

CHAPTER XIV

"HAVE I THE RIGHT TO LIE?"

Then the Tzigana's romance, in which she had put all her faith and her belief, had ended, like a bad dream, she said to herself: "My life is over!"

What remained to her? Expiation? Forgetfulness?

She thought of the cloister and the life of prayer of those blue sisters she saw under the trees of Maisons-Lafitte. She lived in the solitude of her villa, remaining there during the winter in a melancholy *tete-a-tete* with old Vogotzine, who was always more or less under the effect of liquor. Then, as death would not take her, she gradually began to go into Parisian society, slowly forgetting the past, and the folly which she had taken for love little by little faded mistily away. It was like a recovery from an illness, or the disappearance of a nightmare in the dawn of morning. Now, Marsa Laszlo, who, two years before, had longed for annihilation and death, occasionally thought the little Baroness Dinati right when she said, in her laughing voice: "What are you thinking of, my dear child? Is it well for a girl of your age to bury herself voluntarily and avoid society?" She was then twenty-four: in three or four years she had aged mentally ten; but her beautiful oval face had remained unchanged, with the purity of outline of a Byzantine Madonna.

Then—life has its awakenings—she met Prince Andras: all her admirations as a girl, her worship of patriotism and heroism, flamed forth anew; her heart, which she had thought dead, throbbed, as it had never throbbed before, at the sound of the voice of this man, truly loyal, strong and gentle, and who was (she knew it well, the unhappy girl!) the being for whom she was created, the ideal of her dreams. She loved him silently, but with a deep and eternal passion; she loved him without saying to herself that she no longer had any right to love. Did she even think of her past? Does one longer think of the storm when the wind has driven off the heavy, tear-laden clouds, and the thunder has died away in the distance? It seemed to her now that she had never had but one name in her heart, and upon her lips—Zilah.

And then this man, this hero, her hero, asked her hand, and said to her, "I love you."

Andras loved her! With what a terrible contraction of the heart did she put to herself the formidable question: "Have I the right to lie? Shall I have the courage to confess?"

She held in her grasp the most perfect happiness a woman could hope for, the dream of her whole life; and, because a worthless scoundrel had deceived her, because there were, in her past, hours which she remembered only to curse, effaced hours, hours which appeared to her now never to have existed, was she obliged to ruin her life, to break her heart, and, herself the victim, to pay for the lie uttered by a coward? Was it right? Was it just? Was she to be forever bound to that past, like a corpse to its grave? What! She had no longer the right to love? no longer the right to live?

She adored Andras; she would have given her life for him. And he also loved her; she was the first woman who had ever touched his heart. He had evidently felt himself isolated, with his old chivalrous ideas, in a world devoted to the worship of low things, tangible successes, and profitable realities. He was, so to speak, a living anachronism in the midst of a society which had faith in nothing except victorious brutalities, and which marched on, crushing, beneath its iron-shod heels, the hopes and visions of the enthusiastic. He recalled those evenings after a battle when, in the woods reddened by the setting sun, his father and Varhely said to him: "Let us remain to the last, and protect the retreat!" And it seemed to him that, amid the bestialities of the moment and the vulgarities of the century, he still protected the retreat of misunderstood virtues and generous enthusiasms; and it pleased him to be the rear guard of chivalry in defeat.

He shut himself up obstinately in his isolation, like Marsa in her solitude; and he did not consider himself ridiculously absurd or foolishly romantic, when he remembered that his countrymen, the Hungarians, were the only people, perhaps, who, in the abasement of all Europe before the brutality of triumph and omnipotent pessimism, had preserved their traditions of idealism, chivalry, and faith in the old honor; the Hungarian nationality was also the only one which had conquered its conquerors by its virtues, its persistence in its hopes, its courage, its contempt of all baseness, its extraordinary heroism, and had finally imposed its law upon Austria, bearing away the old empire as on the croup of its horse toward the vast plains of liberty. The ideal would, therefore, have its moments of victory: an entire people proved it in history.

"Let this world boast," said Andras, "of the delights of its villainy, and grovel in all that is low and base. Life is not worth living unless the air one breathes is pure and free! Man is not the brother of swine!"

And these same ideas, this same faith, this same dreamy nature and longing for all that is generous and brave, he suddenly found again in the heart of Marsa. She represented to him a new and happy existence. Yes, he thought, she would render him happy; she would understand him, aid him, surround him with the fondest love that man could desire. And she, also, thinking of him, felt herself capable of any sacrifice. Who could tell? Perhaps the day would come when it would be necessary to fight again; then she would follow him, and interpose her breast between him and the balls. What happiness to die in saving him! But, no, no! To live loving him, making him happy, was her duty now; and was it necessary to renounce this delight because hated kisses had once soiled her lips? No, she could not! And yet—and yet, strict honor whispered to Marsa, that she should say No to the Prince; she had no right to his love.

But, if she should reject Andras, he would die, Varhely had said it. She would then slay two beings, Andras and herself, with a single word. She! She did not count! But he! And yet she must speak. But why speak? Was it really true that she had ever loved another? Who was it? The one whom she worshipped with all her heart, with all the fibres of her being, was Andras! Oh, to be free to love him! Marsa's sole hope and thought were now to win, some day, forgiveness for having said nothing by the most absolute devotion that man had ever encountered. Thinking continually these same thoughts, always putting off taking a decision till the morrow, fearing to break both his heart and hers, the Tzigana let the time slip by until the day came when the fete in celebration of her betrothal was to take place. And on that very day Michel Menko appeared before her, not abashed, but threatening. Her dream of happiness ended in this reality—Menko saying: "You have been mine; you shall be mine again, or you are lost!"

Lost! And how?

With cold resolution, Marsa Laszlo asked herself this question, terrible as a question of life or death:

"What would the Prince do, if, after I became his wife, he should learn the truth?"

"What would he do? He would kill me," thought the Tzigana. "He would kill me. So much the better!" It was a sort of a bargain which she proposed to herself, and which her overwhelming love dictated.

"To be his wife, and with my life to pay for that moment of happiness! If I should speak now, he would fly from me, I should never see him again—and I love him. Well, I sacrifice what remains to me of existence to be happy for one short hour!" She grew to think that she had a right thus to give her life for her love, to belong to Andras, to be the wife of that hero if only for a day, and to die then, to die saying to him: "I was unworthy of you, but I loved you; here, strike!" Or rather to say nothing, to be loved, to take opium or digitalis, and to fall asleep with this last supremely happy thought: "I am his wife, and he loves me!" What power in the world could prevent her from realizing her dream? Would she resemble Michel in lying thus? No; since she would immediately sacrifice herself without hesitation, with joy, for the honor of her husband.

"Yes, my life against his love. I shall be his wife and die!"

She did not think that, in sacrificing her life, she would condemn Zilah to death. Or rather, with one of those subterfuges by which we voluntarily deceive ourselves, she thought: "He will be consoled for my death, if he ever learns what I was." But why should he ever learn it? She would take care to die so that it should be thought an accident.

Marsa's resolve was taken. She had contracted a debt, and she would pay it with her blood. Michel now mattered little to her, let him do what he would. The young man's threat: "To-morrow night!" returned to her mind without affecting her in the least. The contemptuous curl of her lip seemed silently to brave Michel Menko.

In all this there was a different manifestation of her double nature: in her love for Andras and her longing to become his wife, the blood of the Tzigana, her mother, spoke; Prince Tcheretteff, the Russian, on the other hand, revived in her silent, cold bravado.

She lay down to rest, still feverish from the struggle, and worn out, slept till morning, to awaken calm, languid, but almost happy.

She passed the whole of the following day in the garden, wondering at times if the appearance of Menko and his tomorrow were not a dream, a nightmare. Tomorrow? That was to-day.

"Yes, yes, he will come! He is quite capable of coming," she murmured.

She despised him enough to believe that he would dare, this time, to keep his word.

Lying back in a low wicker chair, beneath a large oak, whose trunk was wreathed with ivy, she read or thought the hours away. A Russian belt, enamelled with gold and silver, held together her trailing white robes of India muslin, trimmed with Valenciennes, and a narrow scarlet ribbon encircled her throat like a line of blood. The sunlight, filtering through the leaves, flickered upon her dress and clear, dark cheeks, while, near by, a bush of yellow roses flung its fragrance upon the air. The only sound in the garden was the gentle rustle of the trees, which recalled to her the distant murmur of the sea. Gradually she entirely forgot Michel, and thought only of the happy moments of the previous day, of the boat floating down the Seine past the silvery willows on the banks of the sparkling water, of the good people on the barge calling out to her, "Be happy! be happy!" and the little children throwing smiling kisses to her.

A gentle languor enveloped the warm, sunny garden. Old Sol poured his golden light down upon the emerald turf, the leafy trees, the brilliant flowerbeds and the white walls of the villa. Under the green arch of the trees, where luminous insects, white and flame-colored butterflies, aimlessly chased one another, Marsa half slumbered in a sort of voluptuous oblivion, a happy calm, in that species of nirvana which the open air of summer brings. She felt herself far away from the entire world in that corner of verdure, and abandoned herself to childish hopes and dreams, in profound enjoyment of the beautiful day.

The Baroness Dinati came during the afternoon to see Marsa; she fluttered out into the garden, dressed in a clinging gown of some light, fluffy material, with a red umbrella over her head; and upon her tiny feet, of all things in the world, ebony sabots, bearing her monogram in silver upon the instep. It was a short visit, made up of the chatter and gossip of Paris. Little Jacquemin's article upon Prince Zilah's nautical fete had created a furore. That little Jacquemin was a charming fellow; Marsa knew him. No! Really? What! she didn't know Jacquemin of 'L'Actualite'? Oh! but she must invite him to the wedding, he would write about it, he wrote about everything; he was very well informed, was Jacquemin, on every subject, even on the fashions.

"Look! It was he who told me that these sabots were to be worn. The miserable things nearly madame break my neck when I entered the carriage; but they are something new. They attract attention. Everybody says, What are they? And when one has pretty feet, not too large, you know," etc., etc.

She rattled on, moistening her pretty red lips with a lemonade, and nibbling a cake, and then hastily departed just as Prince Andras's carriage stopped before the gate. The Baroness waved her hand to him with a gay smile, crying out:

"I will not take even a minute of your time. You have to-day something pleasanter to do than to occupy yourself with poor, insignificant me!"

Marsa experienced the greatest delight in seeing Andras, and listening to the low, tender accents of his voice; she felt herself to be loved and protected. She gave herself up to boundless hopes—she, who had before her, perhaps, only a few days of life. She felt perfectly happy near Andras; and it seemed to her that to-day his manner was tenderer, the tones of his voice more caressing, than usual.

"I was right to believe in chimeras," he said, "since all that I longed for at twenty years is realized to-day. Very often, dear Marsa, when I used to feel sad and discouraged, I wondered whether my life lay behind me. But I was longing for you, that was all. I knew instinctively that there existed an exquisite woman, born for me, my wife—my wife! and I waited for you."

He took her hands, and gazed upon her face with a look of infinite tenderness.

"And suppose that you had not found me?" she asked.

"I should have continued to drag out a weary existence. Ask Varhely what I have told him of my life."

Marsa felt her heart sink within her; but she forced herself to smile. All that Varhely had said to her returned to her mind. Yes, Zilah had staked his very existence upon her love. To drag aside the veil from his illusion would be like tearing away the bandages from a wound. Decidedly, the resolution she had taken was the best one—to say nothing, but, in the black silence of suicide, which would be at once a deliverance and a punishment, to disappear, leaving to Zilah only a memory.

But why not die now? Ah! why? why? To this eternal question Marsa made reply, that, for deceiving him by becoming his wife, she would pay with her life. A kiss, then death. In deciding to act a lie, she condemned herself. She only sought to give to her death the appearance of an accident, not wishing to leave to Andras the double memory of a treachery and a crime.

She listened to the Prince as he spoke of the future, of all the happiness of their common existence. She listened as if her resolution to die had not been taken, and as if Zilah was promising her, not a minute, but an eternity, of joy.

General Vogotzine and Marsa accompanied the Prince to the station, he having come to Maisons by the railway. The Tzigana's Danish hounds went with them, bounding about Andras, and licking his hands as he caressed them.

"They already know the master," laughed Vogotzine. "I have rarely seen such gentle animals," remarked the Prince.

"Gentle? That depends!" said Marsa.

After separating from the Prince, she returned, silent and abstracted, with Vogotzine. She saw Andras depart with a mournful sadness, and a sudden longing to have him stay—to protect her, to defend her, to be there if Michel should come.

It was already growing dark when they reached home. Marsa ate but little at dinner, and left Vogotzine alone to finish his wine.

Later, the General came, as usual, to bid his niece goodnight. He found Marsa lying upon the divan in the little salon.

"Don't you feel well? What is the matter?"

"Nothing."

"I feel a little tired, and I was going to bed. You don't care to have me keep you company, do you, my dear?"

Sometimes he was affectionate to her, and sometimes he addressed her with timid respect; but Marsa never appeared to notice the difference.

"I prefer to remain alone," she answered.

The General shrugged his shoulders, bent over, took Marsa's delicate hand in his, and kissed it as he would have kissed that of a queen.

Left alone, Marsa lay there motionless for more than an hour. Then she started suddenly, hearing the clock strike eleven, and rose at once.

The domestics had closed the house. She went out by a back door which was used by the servants, the key of which was in the lock.

She crossed the garden, beneath the dark shadows of the trees, with a slow, mechanical movement, like that of a somnambulist, and proceeded to the kennel, where the great Danish hounds and the colossus of the Himalayas were baying, and rattling their chains.

"Peace, Ortog! Silence, Duna!"

At the sound of her voice, the noise ceased as by enchantment.

She pushed open the door of the kennel, entered, and caressed the heads of the dogs, as they placed their paws upon her shoulders. Then she unfastened their chains, and in a clear, vibrating voice, said to them:

"Go!"

She saw them bound out, run over the lawn, and dash into the bushes, appearing and disappearing like great, fantastic shadows, in the pale moonlight. Then, slowly, and with the Muscovite indifference which her father, Prince Tcheretteff, might have displayed when ordering a spy or a traitor to be shot, she retraced her steps to the house, where all seemed to sleep, murmuring, with cold irony, in a sort of impersonal affirmation, as if she were thinking not of herself, but of another:

"Now, I hope that Prince Zilah's fiancée is well guarded!"

CHAPTER XV

"AS CLINGS THE LEAF UNTO THE TREE"

Michel Menko was alone in the little house he had hired in Paris, in the Rue d'Aumale. He had ordered his coachman to have his coupe in readiness for the evening. "Take Trilby," he said. "He is a better horse than Jack, and we have a long distance to go; and take some coverings for yourself, Pierre. Until this evening, I am at home to no one."

The summer day passed very slowly for him in the suspense of waiting. He opened and read the letters of which he had spoken to Marsa the evening before; they always affected him like a poison, to which he returned again and again with a morbid desire for fresh suffering—love-letters, the exchange of vows now borne away as by a whirlwind, but which revived in Michel's mind happy hours, the only hours of his life in which he had really lived, perhaps. These letters, dated from Pau, burned him like a live coal as he read them. They still retained a subtle perfume, a fugitive aroma, which had survived their love, and which brought Marsa vividly before his eyes. Then, his heart bursting with jealousy and rage, he threw the package into the drawer from which he had taken it, and mechanically picked up a volume of De Musset, opening to some page which recalled his own suffering. Casting this aside, he took up another book, and his eyes fell upon the passionate verses of the soldier-poet, Petoeffi, addressed to his Etelka:

Thou lovest me not? What matters it?
My soul is linked to thine,
As clings the leaf unto the tree:
Cold winter comes; it falls; let be!
So I for thee will pine. My fate pursues me to the tomb.
Thou fliest? Even in its gloom
Thou art not free.
What follows in thy steps? Thy shade?
Ah, no! my soul in pain, sweet maid,
E'er watches thee.

"My soul is linked to thine, as clings the leaf unto the tree!" Michel repeated the lines with a sort of defiance in his look, and longed impatiently and nervously for the day to end.

A rapid flush of anger mounted to his face as his valet entered with a card upon a salver, and he exclaimed, harshly:

"Did not Pierre give you my orders that I would receive no one?"

"I beg your pardon, Monsieur; but Monsieur Labanoff insisted so strongly—"

"Labanoff?" repeated Michel.

"Monsieur Labanoff, who leaves Paris this evening, and desires to see Monsieur before his departure."

The name of Labanoff recalled to Michel an old friend whom he had met in all parts of Europe, and whom he had not seen for a long time. He liked him exceedingly for a sort of odd pessimism of aggressive philosophy, a species of mysticism mingled with bitterness, which Labanoff took no pains to conceal. The young Hungarian had, perhaps, among the men of his own age, no other friend in the world than this Russian with odd ideas, whose enigmatical smile puzzled and interested him.

He looked at the clock. Labanoff's visit might make the time pass until dinner.

"Admit Monsieur Labanoff!"

In a few moments Labanoff entered. He was a tall, thin young man, with a complexion the color of wax, flashing eyes, and a little pointed mustache. His hair, black and curly, was brushed straight up from his forehead. He had the air of a soldier in his long, closely buttoned frock-coat.

It was many months since these two men had met; but they had been long bound together by a powerful sympathy, born of quiet talks and confidences, in which each had told the other of similar sufferings. A long deferred secret hope troubled Labanoff as the memory of Marsa devoured Menko; and they had many times exchanged dismal theories upon the world, life, men, and laws. Their common bitterness united them. And Michel received Labanoff, despite his resolution to receive no one, because he was certain that he should find in him the same suffering as that expressed by De Musset and Petoefi.

Labanoff, to-day, appeared to him more enigmatical and gloomy than ever. From the lips of the Russian fell only words of almost tragical mystery.

Menko made him sit down by his side upon a divan, and he noticed that an extraordinary fever seemed to burn in the blue eyes of his friend.

"I learned that you had returned from London," said Labanoff; "and, as I was leaving Paris, I wished to see you before my departure. It is possible that we may never see each other again."

"Why?"

"I am going to St. Petersburg on pressing business."

"Have you finished your studies in Paris?"

"Oh! I had already received my medical diploma when I came here. I have been living in Paris only to be more at my ease to pursue—a project which interests me."

"A project?"

Menko asked the question mechanically, feeling very little curiosity to know Labanoff's secret; but the Russian's face wore a strange, ironical smile as he answered:

"I have nothing to say on that subject, even to the man for whom I have the most regard."

His brilliant eyes seemed to see strange visions before them. He remained silent for a moment, and then rose with an abrupt movement.

"There," he said, "that is all I had to tell you, my dear Menko. Now, 'au revoir', or rather, good-by; for, as I said before, I shall probably never see you again."

"And why, pray?"

"Oh! I don't know; it is an idea of mine. And then, my beloved Russia is such a strange country. Death

comes quickly there."

He had still upon his lips that inexplicable smile, jesting and sad at once.

Menko grasped the long, white hand extended to him.

"My dear Labanoff, it is not difficult to guess that you are going on some dangerous errand." Smiling: "I will not do you the injustice to believe you a nihilist."

Labanoff's blue eyes flashed.

"No," he said, "no, I am not a nihilist. Annihilation is absurd; but liberty is a fine thing!"

He stopped short, as if he feared that he had already said too much.

"Adieu, my dear Menko."

The Hungarian detained him with a gesture, saying, with a tremble in his voice:

"Labanoff! You have found me when a crisis in my life is also impending. I am about, like yourself, to commit a great folly; a different one from yours, no doubt. However, I have no right to tell you that you are about to commit some folly."

"No," calmly replied the Russian, very pale, but still smiling, "it is not a folly."

"But it is a danger?" queried Menko.

Labanoff made no reply.

"I do not know either," said Michel, "how my affair will end. But, since chance has brought us together today, face to face—"

"It was not chance, but my own firm resolution to see you again before my departure."

"I know what your friendship for me is, and it is for that reason that I ask you to tell me frankly where you will be in a month."

"In a month?" repeated Labanoff.

"Give me the route you are going to take? Shall you be a fixture at St. Petersburg?"

"Not immediately," responded the Russian, slowly, his gaze riveted upon Menko. "In a month I shall still be at Warsaw. At St. Petersburg the month after."

"Thanks. I only ask you to let me know, in some way, where you are."

"Why?"

"Because, I should like to join you."

"You!"

"It is only a fancy," said Menko, with an attempt at a laugh. "I am bored with life—you know it; I find it a nuisance. If we did not spur it like an old, musty horse, it would give us the same idiotic round of days. I do not know—I do not wish to know—why you are going to Russia, and what this final farewell of which you have just spoken signifies; I simply guess that you are off on some adventure, and it is possible that I may ask you to allow me to share it."

"Why?" said Labanoff, coldly. "You are not a Russian."

Menko smiled, and, placing his hands upon the thin shoulders of his friend, he said:

"Those words reveal many things. It is well that they were not said before an agent of police."

"Yes," responded Labanoff, firmly. "But I am not in the habit of recklessly uttering my thoughts; I know that I am speaking now to Count Menko."

"And Count Menko will be delighted, my dear Labanoff, if you will let him know where, in Poland or Russia, he must go, soon, to obtain news of you. Fear nothing: neither there nor here will I question you. But I shall be curious to know what has become of you, and you know that I have enough friendship for you to be uneasy about you. Besides, I long to be on the move; Paris, London, the world,

in short, bores me, bores me, bores me!"

"The fact is, it is stupid, egotistical and cowardly," responded Labanoff.

He again held out to Menko his nervous hand, burning, like his blue eyes, with fever.

"Farewell!" he said.

"No, no, 'au revoir!'"

"'Au revoir' be it then. I will let you know what has become of me."

"And where you are?"

"And where I am."

"And do not be astonished if I join you some fine morning."

"Nothing ever astonishes me," said the Russian. "Nothing!"

And in that word nothing were expressed profound disgust with life and fierce contempt of death.

Menko warmly grasped his friend's thin and emaciated hand; and, the last farewell spoken to the fanatic departing for some tragical adventure, the Hungarian became more sombre and troubled than before, and Labanoff's appearance seemed like a doubtful apparition. He returned to his longing to see the end of the most anxious day of his life.

At last, late in the evening, Michel entered his coupe, and was driven away-down the Rue d'Aumale, through the Rue Pigalle and the Rue de Douai, to the rondpoint of the Place Clichy, the two lanterns casting their clear light into the obscurity. The coupe then took the road to Maisons-Lafitte, crossing the plain and skirting wheat-fields and vineyards, with the towering silhouette of Mont Valerien on the left, and on the right, sharply defined against the sky, a long line of hills, dotted with woods and villas, and with little villages nestling at their base, all plunged in a mysterious shadow.

Michel, with absent eyes, gazed at all this, as Trilby rapidly trotted on. He was thinking of what lay before him, of the folly he was about to commit, as he had said to Labanoff. It was a folly; and yet, who could tell? Might not Marsa have reflected? Might she not, alarmed at his threats, be now awaiting him? Her exquisite face, like a lily, rose before him; an overwhelming desire to annihilate time and space took possession of him, and he longed to be standing, key in hand, before the little gate in the garden wall.

He was well acquainted with the great park of Maisons-Lafitte, with the white villas nestling among the trees. On one side Prince Tchereteff's house looked out upon an almost desert tract of land, on which a racecourse had been mapped out; and on the other extended with the stables and servants' quarters to the forest, the wall of the Avenue Lafitte bounding the garden. In front of the villa was a broad lawn, ending in a low wall with carved gates, allowing, through the branches of the oaks and chestnuts, a view of the hills of Corneilles.

After crossing the bridge of Sartrouville, Michel ordered his coachman to drive to the corner of the Avenue Corneille, where he alighted in the shadow of a clump of trees.

"You will wait here, Pierre," he said, "and don't stir till I return."

He walked past the sleeping houses, under the mysterious alleys of the trees, until he reached the broad avenue which, cutting the park in two, ran from the station to the forest. The alley that he was seeking descended between two rows of tall, thick trees, forming an arch overhead, making it deliciously cool and shady in the daytime, but now looking like a deep hole, black as a tunnel. Pushing his way through the trees and bushes, and brushing aside the branches of the acacias, the leaves of which fell in showers about him, Michel reached an old wall, the white stones of which were overgrown with ivy. Behind the wall the wind rustled amid the pines and oaks like the vague murmur of a coming storm. And there, at the end of the narrow path, half hidden by the ivy, was the little gate he was seeking. He cautiously brushed aside the leaves and felt for the keyhole; but, just as he was about to insert the key, which burned in his feverish fingers, he stopped short.

Was Marsa awaiting him? Would she not call for help, drive him forth, treat him like a thief?

Suppose the gate was barred from within? He looked at the wall, and saw that by clinging to the ivy he could reach the top. He had not come here to hesitate. No, a hundred times no!

Besides, Marsa was certainly there, trembling, fearful, cursing him perhaps, but still there.

"No," he murmured aloud in the silence, "were even death behind that gate, I would not recoil."

CHAPTER XVI

"IT IS A MAN THEY ARE DEVOURING!"

Michel Menko was right. The beautiful Tzigana was awaiting him.

She stood at her window, like a spectre in her white dress, her hands clutching the sill, and her eyes striving to pierce the darkness which enveloped everything, and opened beneath her like a black gulf. With heart oppressed with fear, she started at the least sound.

All she could see below in the garden were the branches defined against the sky; a single star shining through the leaves of a poplar, like a diamond in a woman's tresses; and under the window the black stretch of the lawn crossed by a band of a lighter shade, which was the sand of the path. The only sound to be heard was the faint tinkle of the water falling into the fountain.

Her glance, shifting as her thoughts, wandered vaguely over the trees, the open spaces which seemed like masses of heavy clouds, and the sky set with constellations. She listened with distended ears, and a shudder shook her whole body as she heard suddenly the distant barking of a dog.

The dog perceived some one. Was it Menko?

No: the sound, a howling rather than a barking, came from a long distance, from Sartrouville, beyond the Seine.

"It is not Duna or Bundas," she murmured, "nor Ortog. What folly to remain here at the window! Menko will not come. Heaven grant that he does not come!"

And she sighed a happy sigh as if relieved of a terrible weight.

Suddenly, with a quick movement, she started violently back, as if some frightful apparition had risen up before her.

Hoarse bayings, quite different from the distant barking of a moment before, rent the air, and were repeated more and more violently below there in the darkness. This time it was indeed the great Danish hounds and the shaggy colossus of the Himalayas, which were precipitating themselves upon some prey.

"Great God! He is there, then! He is there!" whispered Marsa, paralyzed with horror.

There was something gruesome in the cries of the dogs, by the continued repetition of the savage noises, sharp, irritated, frightful snarls and yelps, Marsa divined some horrible struggle in the darkness, of a man against the beasts. Then all her terror seemed to mount to her lips in a cry of pity, which was instantly repressed. She steadied herself against the window, striving, with all her strength, to reason herself into calmness.

"It was his own wish," she thought.

Did she not know, then, what she was doing when, wishing to place a living guard between herself and danger, she had descended to the kennel and unloosed the ferocious animals, which, recognizing her voice, had bounded about her and licked her hands with many manifestations of joy? She had ascended again to her chamber and extinguished the light, around which fluttered the moths, beating the opal shade with their downy wings; and, in the darkness, drinking in the nightair at the open window, she had waited, saying to herself that Michel Menko would not come; but, if he did come, it was the will of fate that he should fall a victim to the devoted dogs which guarded her.

Why should she pity him?

She hated him, this Michel. He had threatened her, and she had defended herself, that was all. Ortog's teeth were made for thieves and intruders. No pity! No, no—no pity for such a coward, since he had dared—

But yet, as the ferocious bayings of the dogs below became redoubled in their fury, she imagined, in terror, a crunching of bones and a tearing of flesh; and, as her imagination conjured up before her Michel fighting, in hideous agony, against the bites of the dogs, she shuddered; she was afraid, and again a stifled cry burst forth from her lips. A sort of insanity took possession of her. She tried to cry out for mercy as if the animals could hear her; she sought the door of her chamber, groping along the wall with her hands outspread before her, in order to descend the staircase and rush out into the garden; but her limbs gave way beneath her, and she sank an inert mass upon the carpet in an agony of fear and horror.

"My God! My God! It is a man they are devouring;" and her voice died away in a smothered call for help.

Then she suddenly raised her head, as if moved by an electric shock.

There was no more noise! Nothing! The black night had all at once returned to its great, mysterious silence. Marsa experienced a sensation of seeing a pall stretched over a dead body. And in the darkness there seemed to float large spots of blood.

"Ah! the unhappy man!" she faltered.

Then, again, the voices of the dogs broke forth, rapid, angry, still frightfully threatening. The animals appeared now to be running, and their bayings became more and more distant.

What had happened?

One would have said that they were dragging away their prey, tearing it with hideous crimson fangs.

CHAPTER XVII

MARSA'S GUARDIANS.

Was Michel Menko indeed dead? We left him just as he was turning the key in the little gate in the wall. He walked in boldly, and followed a path leading to an open space where was the pavilion he had spoken of to Marsa. He looked to see whether the windows of the pavilion were lighted, or whether there were a line of light under the door. No: the delicate tracery of the pagoda-like structure showed dimly against the sky; but there was no sign of life. Perhaps, however, Marsa was there in the darkness.

He would glide under the window and call. Then, hearing him and frightened at so much audacity, she would descend.

He advanced a few steps toward the pavilion; but, all at once, in the part of the garden which seemed lightest, upon the broad gravel walk, he perceived odd, creeping shadows, which the moon, emerging from a cloud, showed to be dogs, enormous dogs, with their ears erect, which, with abound and a low, deep growl, made a dash toward him with outspread limbs—a dash terrible as the leap of a tiger.

A quick thought illumined Michel's brain like a flash of electricity: "Ah! this is Marsa's answer!" He had just time to mutter, with raging irony:

"I was right, she was waiting for me!"

Then, before the onslaught of the dogs, he recoiled, clasping his hands upon his breast and boldly thrusting out his elbows to ward off their ferocious attacks. With a sudden tightening of the muscles he repulsed the Danish hounds, which rolled over writhing on the ground, and then, with formidable baying, returned more furiously still to the charge.

Michel Menko had no weapon.

With a knife he could have defended himself, and slit the bellies of the maddened animals; but he had nothing! Was he to be forced, then, to fly, pursued like a fox or a deer?

Suppose the servants, roused by the noise of the dogs, should come in their turn, and seize him as a thief? At all events, that would be comparative safety; at least, they would rescue him from these monsters. But no: nothing stirred in the silent, impassive house.

The hounds, erect upon their hind legs, rushed again at Michel, who, overturning them with blows from his feet, and striking them violently in the jaws, now staggered back, Ortog having leaped at his throat. By a rapid movement of recoil, the young man managed to avoid being strangled; but the terrible teeth of the dog, tearing his coat and shirt into shreds, buried themselves deep in the flesh of his shoulder.

The steel-like muscles and sinewy strength of the Hungarian now stood him in good stead. He must either free himself, or perish there in the hideous carnage of a quarry. He seized with both hands, in a viselike grip, Ortog's enormous neck, and, at the same time, with a desperate jerk, shook free his shoulder, leaving strips of his flesh between the jaws of the animal, whose hot, reeking breath struck him full in the face. With wild, staring eyes, and summoning up, in an instinct of despair, all his strength and courage, he buried his fingers in Ortog's neck, and drove his nails through the skin of the colossus, which struck and beat with his paws against the young man's breast. The dog's tongue hung out of his mouth, under the suffocating pressure of the hands of the human being struggling for his life. As he fought thus against Ortog, the Hungarian gradually retreated, the two hounds leaping about him, now driven off by kicks (Duna's jaw was broken), and now, with roars of rage and fiery eyes, again attacking their human prey.

One of them, Bundas, his teeth buried in Michel's left thigh, shook him, trying to throw him to the ground. A slip, and all would be over; if he should fall upon the gravel, the man would be torn to pieces and crunched like a deer caught by the hounds.

A terrible pain nearly made Michel faint—Bundas had let go his hold, stripping off a long tongue of flesh; but, in a moment, it had the same effect upon him as that of the knife of a surgeon opening a vein, and the weakness passed away. The unfortunate man still clutched, as in a death-grip, Ortog's shaggy neck, and he perceived that the struggles of the dog were no longer of the same terrible violence; the eyes of the ferocious brute were rolled back in his head until they looked like two large balls of gleaming ivory. Michel threw the heavy mass furiously from him, and the dog, suffocated, almost dead, fell upon the ground with a dull, heavy sound.

Menko had now to deal only with the Danish hounds, which were rendered more furious than ever by the smell of blood. One of them, displaying his broken teeth in a hideous, snarling grin, hesitated a little to renew the onslaught, ready, as he was, to spring at his enemy's throat at the first false step; but the other, Bundas, with open mouth, still sprang at Michel, who repelled, with his left arm, the attacks of the bloody jaws. Suddenly a hollow cry burst from his lips like a death-rattle, forced from him as the dog buried his fangs in his forearm, until they nearly met. It seemed to him that the end had now come.

Each second took away more and more of his strength. The tremendous tension of muscles and nerves, which had been necessary in the battle with Ortog, and the blood he had lost, his whole left side being gashed as with cuts from a knife, weakened him. He calculated, that, unless he could reach the little gate before the other dog should make up his mind to leap upon him, he was lost, irredeemably lost.

Bundas did not let go his hold, but twisting himself around Michel's body, he clung with his teeth to the young man's lacerated arm; the other, Duna, bayed horribly, ready to spring at any moment.

Michel gathered together all the strength that remained to him, and ran rapidly backward, carrying with him the furious beast, which was crushing the very bones of his arm.

He reached the end of the walk, and the gate was there before him. Groping in the darkness with his free hand, he found the key, turned it, and the gate flew open. Fate evidently did not wish him to perish.

Then, in the same way as he had shaken off Ortog, whom he could now hear growling and stumbling over the gravel a little way off, Michel freed his arm from Bundas, forcing his fingers and nails into the animal's ears; and the moment he had thrown the brute to the ground, he dashed through the gate, and slammed it to behind him, just as the two dogs together were preparing to leap again upon him.

Then, leaning against the gate, and steadying himself, so as not to fall, he stood there weak and faint, while the dogs, on the other side of the wooden partition which now separated him from death—and what a death! erect upon their hind legs, like rampant, heraldic animals, tried to break through, cracking, in their gory jaws, long strips of wood torn from the barrier which kept them from their human prey.

Michel never knew how long he remained there, listening to the hideous growling of his bloodthirsty enemies. At last the thought came to him that he must go; but how was he to drag himself to the place where Pierre was waiting for him? It was so far! so far! He would faint twenty times before reaching

there. Was he about to fail now after all he had gone through?

His left leg was frightfully painful; but he thought he could manage to walk with it. His left shoulder and arm, however, at the least movement, caused him atrocious agony, as if the bones had been crushed by the wheel of some machine. He sought for his handkerchief, and enveloped his bleeding arm in it, tying the ends of it with his teeth. Then he tottered to a woodpile near by, and, taking one of the long sticks, he managed with its aid to drag himself along the alley, while through the branches the moon looked calmly down upon him.

He was worn out, and his head seemed swimming in a vast void, when he reached the end of the alley, and saw, a short way off down the avenue, the arch of the old bridge near which the coupe had stopped. One effort more, a few steps, and he was there! He was afraid now of falling unconscious, and remaining there in a dying condition, without his coachman even suspecting that he was so near him.

"Courage!" he murmured. "On! On!"

Two clear red lights appeared—the lanterns of the coup. "Pierre!" cried Michel in the darkness, "Pierre!" But he felt that his feeble voice would not reach the coachman, who was doubtless asleep on his box. Once more he gathered together his strength, called again, and advanced a little, saying to himself that a step or two more perhaps meant safety. Then, all at once, he fell prostrate upon his side, unable to proceed farther; and his voice, weaker and weaker, gradually failed him.

Fortunately, the coachman had heard him cry, and realized that something had happened. He jumped from his box, ran to his master, lifted him up, and carried him to the carriage. As the light of the lamps fell on the torn and bloody garments of the Count, whose pallid and haggard face was that of a dead man, Pierre uttered a cry of fright.

"Great heavens! Where have you been?" he exclaimed. "You have been attacked?"

"The coup—place me in the coup."

"But there are doctors here. I will go—"

"No—do nothing. Make no noise. Take me to Paris—I do not wish any one to know—To Paris—at once," and he lost consciousness.

Pierre, with some brandy he luckily had with him, bathed his master's temples, and forced a few drops between his lips; and, when the Count had recovered, he whipped up his horse and galloped to Paris, growling, with a shrug of the shoulders:

"There must have been a woman in this. Curse the women! They make all the trouble in the world."

It was daybreak when the coup reached Paris.

Pierre heard, as they passed the barrier, a laborer say to his mate

"That's a fine turnout. I wish I was in the place of the one who is riding inside!"

"So do I!" returned the other.

And Pierre thought, philosophically: "Poor fools! If they only knew!"

CHAPTER XVIII

"THERE IS NO NEED OF ACCUSING ANYONE."

At the first streak of daylight, Marsa descended, trembling, to the garden, and approached the little gate, wondering what horror would meet her eyes.

Rose-colored clouds, like delicate, silky flakes of wool, floated across the blue sky; the paling crescent of the moon, resembling a bent thread of silver wire, seemed about to fade mistily away; and, toward the east, in the splendor of the rising sun, the branches of the trees stood out against a background of burnished gold as in a Byzantine painting. The dewy calm and freshness of the early morning enveloped everything as in a bath of purity and youth.

But Marsa shuddered as she thought that perhaps this beautiful day was dawning upon a dead body. She stopped abruptly as she saw the gardener, with very pale face, come running toward her.

"Ah, Mademoiselle, something terrible has happened! Last night the dogs barked and barked; but they bark so often at the moon and the shadows, that no one got up to see what was the matter."

"Well—well?" gasped Marsa, her hand involuntarily seeking her heart.

"Well, there was a thief here last night, or several of them, for poor Ortog is half strangled; but the rascals did not get away scot free. The one who came through the little path to the pavilion was badly bitten; his tracks can be followed in blood for a long distance a very long distance."

"Then," asked Marsa, quickly, "he escaped? He is not dead?"

"No, certainly not. He got away."

"Ah! Thank heaven for that!" cried the Tzigana, her mind relieved of a heavy weight.

"Mademoiselle is too good," said the gardener. "When a man enters, like that, another person's place, he exposes himself to be chased like a rabbit, or to be made mincemeat of for the dogs. He must have had big muscles to choke Ortog, the poor beast!—not to mention that Duna's teeth are broken. But the scoundrel got his share, too; for he left big splashes of blood upon the gravel."

"Blood!"

"The most curious thing is that the little gate, to which there is no key, is unlocked. They came in and went out there. If that idiot of a Saboureau, whom General Vogotzine discharged—and rightly too, Mademoiselle—were not dead, I should say that he was at the bottom of all this."

"There is no need of accusing anyone," said Marsa, turning away.

The gardener returned to the neighborhood of the pavilion, and, examining the red stains upon the ground, he said: "All the same, this did not happen by itself. I am going to inform the police!"

CHAPTER XIX

"A BEAUTIFUL DREAM"

It was the eve of the marriage-day of Prince Andras Zilah and Mademoiselle Marsa Laszlo, and Marsa sat alone in her chamber, where the white robes she was to wear next day were spread out on the bed; alone for the last time—to-morrow she would be another's.

The fiery Tzigana, who felt in her heart, implacable as it was to evil and falsehood, all capabilities of devotion and truth, was condemned to lie, or to lose the love of Prince Andras, which was her very life. There was no other alternative. No, no: since she had met this man, superior to all others, since he loved her and she loved him, she would take an hour of his life and pay for that hour with her own. She had no doubt but that an avowal would forever ruin her in Andras's eyes. No, again and forever no: it was much better to take the love which fate offered her in exchange for her life.

And, as she threw herself back in her chair with an expression of unchangeable determination in her dark, gazelle-like eyes, there suddenly came into her mind the memory of a day long ago, when, driving along the road from Maisons-Lafitte to Saint-Germain, she had met some wandering gipsies, two men and a woman, with copper-colored skins and black eyes, in which burned, like a live coal, the passionate melancholy of the race. The woman, a sort of long spear in her hand, was driving some little shaggy ponies, like those which range about the plains of Hungary. Bound like parcels upon the backs of these ponies were four or five little children, clothed in rags, and covered with the dust of the road. The woman, tall, dark and faded, a sort of turban upon her head, held out her hand toward Marsa's carriage with a graceful gesture and a broad smile—the supplicating smile of those who beg. A muscular young fellow, his crisp hair covered with a red fez, her brother—the woman was old, or perhaps she was less so than she seemed, for poverty brings wrinkles—walked by her side behind the sturdy little ponies. Farther along, another man waited for them at a corner of the road near a laundry, the employees of which regarded him with alarm, because, at the end of a rope, the gipsy held a small gray bear. As she passed by them, Marsa involuntarily exclaimed, in the language of her mother "Be

szomorú!" (How sad it is!) The man, at her words, raised his head, and a flash of joy passed over his face, which showed, or Marsa thought so (who knows? perhaps she was mistaken), a love for his forsaken country. Well, now, she did not know why, the remembrance of these poor beings returned to her, and she said to herself that her ancestors, humble and insignificant as these unfortunates in the dust and dirt of the highway, would have been astonished and incredulous if any one had told them that some day a girl born of their blood would wed a Zilah, one of the chiefs of that Hungary whose obscure and unknown minstrels they were! Ah! what an impossible dream it seemed, and yet it was realized now.

At all events, a man's death did not lie between her and Zilah. Michel Menko, after lying at death's door, was cured of his wounds. She knew this from Baroness Dinati, who attributed Michel's illness to a sword wound secretly received for some woman. This was the rumor in Paris. The young Count had, in fact, closed his doors to every one; and no one but his physician had been admitted. What woman could it be? The little Baroness could not imagine.

Marsa thought again, with a shudder, of the night when the dogs howled; but, to tell the truth, she had no remorse. She had simply defended herself! The inquiry begun by the police had ended in no definite result. At Maisons-Lafitte, people thought that the Russian house had been attacked by some thieves who had been in the habit of entering unoccupied houses and rifling them of their contents. They had even arrested an old vagabond, and accused him of the attempted robbery at General Vogotzine's; but the old man had answered: "I do not even know the house." But was not this Menko a hundred times more culpable than a thief? It was more and worse than money or silver that he had dared to come for: it was to impose his love upon a woman whose heart he had well-nigh broken. Against such an attack all weapons were allowable, even Ortog's teeth. The dogs of the Tzigana had known how to defend her; and it was what she had expected from her comrades.

Had Michel Menko died, Marsa would have said, with the fatalism of the Orient: "It was his own will!" She was grateful, however, to fate, for having punished the wretch by letting him live. Then she thought no more of him except to execrate him for having poisoned her happiness, and condemned her either to a silence as culpable as a lie, or to an avowal as cruel as a suicide.

The night passed and the day came at last, when it was necessary for Marsa to become the wife of Prince Andras, or to confess to him her guilt. She wished that she had told him all, now that she had not the courage to do so. She had accustomed herself to the idea that a woman is not necessarily condemned to love no more because she has encountered a coward who has abused her love. She was in an atmosphere of illusion and chimera; what was passing about her did not even seem to exist. Her maids dressed her, and placed upon her dark hair the bridal veil: she half closed her eyes and murmured:

"It is a beautiful dream."

A dream, and yet a reality, consoling as a ray of light after a hideous nightmare. Those things which were false, impossible, a lie, a phantasmagoria born of a fever, were Michel Menko, the past years, the kisses of long ago, the threats of yesterday, the bayings of the infuriated dogs at that shadow which did not exist.

General Vogotzine, in a handsome uniform, half suffocated in his high vest, and with a row of crosses upon his breast—the military cross of St. George, with its red and black ribbon; the cross of St. Anne, with its red ribbon; all possible crosses—was the first to knock at his niece's door, his sabre trailing upon the floor.

"Who is it?" said Marsa.

"I, Vogotzine."

And, permission being given him, he entered the room.

The old soldier walked about his niece, pulling his moustache, as if he were conducting an inspection. He found Marsa charming. Pale as her white robe, with Tizsa's opal agraffe at her side, ready to clasp the bouquet of flowers held by one of her maids, she had never been so exquisitely beautiful; and Vogotzine, who was rather a poor hand at turning a compliment, compared her to a marble statue.

"How gallant you are this morning, General," she said, her heart bursting with emotion.

She waved away, with a brusque gesture, the orange-flowers which her maid was about to attach to her corsage.

"No," she said. "Not that! Roses."

"But, Mademoiselle "

"Roses," repeated Marsa. "And for my hair white rosebuds also."

At this, the old General risked another speech.

"Do you think orange-blossoms are too vulgar, Marsa? By Jove! They don't grow in the ditches, though!"

And he laughed loudly at what he considered wit. But a frowning glance from the Tzigana cut short his hilarity; and, with a mechanical movement, he drew himself up in a military manner, as if the Czar were passing by.

"I will leave you to finish dressing, my dear," he said, after a moment.

He already felt stifled in the uniform, which he was no longer accustomed to wear, and he went out in the garden to breathe freer. While waiting there for Zilah, he ordered some cherry cordial, muttering, as he drank it:

"It is beautiful August weather. They will have a fine day; but I shall suffocate!"

The avenue was already filled with people. The marriage had been much discussed, both in the fashionable colony which inhabited the park and in the village forming the democratic part of the place; even from Sartrouville and Mesnil, people had come to see the Tzigana pass in her bridal robes.

"What is all that noise?" demanded Vogotzine of the liveried footman.

"That noise, General? The inhabitants of Maisons who have come to see the wedding procession."

"Really? Ah! really? Well, they haven't bad taste. They will see a pretty woman and a handsome uniform." And the General swelled out his breast as he used to do in the great parades of the time of Nicholas, and the reviews in the camp of Tsarskoe-Selo.

Outside the garden, behind the chestnut-trees which hid the avenue, there was a sudden sound of the rolling of wheels, and the gay cracking of whips.

"Ah!" cried the General, "It is Zilah!"

And, rapidly swallowing a last glass of the cordial, he wiped his moustache, and advanced to meet Prince Andras, who was descending from his carriage.

Accompanying the Prince were Yanski Varhely, and an Italian friend of Zilah's, Angelo Valla, a former minister of the Republic of Venice, in the time of Manin. Andras Zilah, proud and happy, appeared to have hardly passed his thirtieth year; a ray of youth animated his clear eyes. He leaped lightly out upon the gravel, which cracked joyously beneath his feet; and, as he advanced through the aromatic garden, to the villa where Marsa awaited him, he said to himself that no man in the world was happier than he.

Vogotzine met him, and, after shaking his hand, asked him why on earth he had not put on his national Magyar costume, which the Hungarians wore with such graceful carelessness.

"Look at me, my dear Prince! I am in full battle array!"

Andras was in haste to see Marsa. He smiled politely at the General's remark, and asked him where his niece was.

"She is putting on her uniform," replied Vogotzine, with a loud laugh which made his sabre rattle.

Most of the invited guests were to go directly to the church of Maisons. Only the intimate friends came first to the house, Baroness Dinati, first of all, accompanied by Paul Jacquemin, who took his eternal notes, complimenting both Andras and the General, the latter especially eager to detain as many as possible to the lunch after the ceremony. Vogotzine, doubtless, wished to show himself in all the eclat of his majestic appetite.

Very pretty, in her Louis Seize gown of pink brocade, and a Rembrandt hat with a long white feather (Jacquemin, who remained below, had already written down the description in his note-book), the little Baroness entered Marsa's room like a whirlwind, embracing the young girl, and going into ecstasy over her beauty.

"Ah! how charming you are, my dear child! You are the ideal of a bride! You ought to be painted as you are! And what good taste to wear roses,

and not orange-flowers, which are so common, and only good for shopgirls. Turn around! You are simply exquisite."

Marsa, paler than her garments, looked at herself in the glass, happy in the knowledge of her beauty, since she was about to be his, and yet contemplating the tall, white figure as if it were not her own image.

She had often felt this impression of a twofold being, in those dreams where one seems to be viewing the life of another, or to be the disinterested spectator of one's own existence.

It seemed to her that it was not she who was to be married, or that suddenly the awakening would come.

"The Prince is below," said the Baroness Dinati.

"Ah!" said Marsa.

She started with a sort of involuntary terror, as this very name of Prince was at once that of a husband and that of a judge. But when, superb in the white draperies, which surrounded her like a cloud of purity, her long train trailing behind her, she descended the stairs, her little feet peeping in and out like two white doves, and appeared at the door of the little salon where Andras was waiting, she felt herself enveloped in an atmosphere of love. The Prince advanced to meet her, his face luminous with happiness; and, taking the young girl's hands, he kissed the long lashes which rested upon her cheek, saying, as he contemplated the white vision of beauty before him:

"How lovely you are, my Marsa! And how I love you!"

The Prince spoke these words in a tone, and with a look, which touched the deepest depths of Marsa's heart.

Then they exchanged those words, full of emotion, which, in their eternal triteness, are like music in the ears of those who love. Every one had withdrawn to the garden, to leave them alone in this last, furtive, happy minute, which is never found again, and which, on the threshold of the unknown, possesses a joy, sad as a last farewell, yet full of hope as the rising of the sun.

He told her how ardently he loved her, and how grateful he was to her for having consented, in her youth and beauty, to become the wife of a quasi-exile, who still kept, despite his efforts, something of the melancholy of the past.

And she, with an outburst of gratitude, devotion, and love, in which all the passion of her nature and her race vibrated, said, in a voice which trembled with unshed tears:

"Do not say that I give you my life. It is you who make of a girl of the steppes a proud and honored wife, who asks herself why all this happiness has come to her." Then, nestling close to Andras, and resting her dark head upon his shoulder, she continued: "We have a proverb, you remember, which says, Life is a tempest. I have repeated it very often with bitter sadness. But now, that wicked proverb is effaced by the refrain of our old song, Life is a chalet of pearls."

And the Tzigana, lost in the dream which was now a tangible reality, saying nothing, but gazing with her beautiful eyes, now moist, into the face of Andras, remained encircled in his arms, while he smiled and whispered, again and again, "I love you!"

All the rest of the world had ceased to exist for these two beings, absorbed in each other.

CHAPTER XX

THE BRIDAL DAY

The little Baroness ran into the room, laughing, and telling them how late it was; and Andras and Marsa, awakened to reality, followed her to the hall, where Varhely, Vogotzine, Angelo Valla, Paul Jacquemin and other guests were assembled as a sort of guard of honor to the bride and groom.

Andras and the Baroness, with Varhely, immediately entered the Prince's carriage; Vogotzine taking his place in the coupe with Marsa. Then there was a gay crackling of the gravel, a flash of wheels in the

sunlight, a rapid, joyous departure. Clustered beneath the trees in the ordinarily quiet avenues of Maisons, the crowd watched the cortege; and old Vogotzine good-humoredly displayed his epaulettes and crosses for the admiration of the people who love uniforms.

As she descended from the carriage, Marsa cast a superstitious glance at the facade of the church, a humble facade, with a Gothic porch and cheap stained-glass windows, some of which were broken; and above a plaster tower covered with ivy and surmounted with a roughly carved cross. She entered the church almost trembling, thinking again how strange was this fate which united, before a village altar, a Tzigana and a Magyar. She walked up the aisle, seeing nothing, but hearing about her murmurs of admiration, and knelt down beside Andras, upon a velvet cushion, near which burned a tall candle, in a white candlestick.

The little church, dimly lighted save where the priest stood, was hushed to silence, and Marsa felt penetrated with deep emotion. She had really drunk of the cup of oblivion; she was another woman, or rather a young girl, with all a young girl's purity and ignorance of evil. It seemed to her that the hated past was a bad dream; one of those unhealthy hallucinations which fly away at the dawn of day.

She saw, in the luminous enclosure of the altar, the priest in his white stole, and the choir boys in their snowy surplices. The waxen candles looked like stars against the white hangings of the chancel; and above the altar, a sweet-faced Madonna looked down with sad eyes upon the man and woman kneeling before her. Through the parti-colored windows, crossed with broad bands of red, the branches of the lindens swayed in the wind, and the fluttering tendrils of the ivy cast strange, flickering shadows of blue, violet, and almost sinister scarlet upon the guests seated in the nave.

Outside, in the square in front of the church, the crowd waited the end of the ceremony. Shopgirls from the Rue de l'Eglise, and laundresses from the Rue de Paris, curiously contemplated the equipages, with their stamping horses, and the coachmen, erect upon their boxes, motionless, and looking neither to the right nor the left. Through the open door of the church, at the end of the old oak arches, could be seen Marsa's white, kneeling figure, and beside her Prince Zilah, whose blond head, as he stood gazing down upon his bride, towered above the rest of the party.

The music of the organ, now tremulous and low, now strong and deep, caused a profound silence to fall upon the square; but, as the last note died away, there was a great scrambling for places to see the procession come out.

Above the mass of heads, the leaves of the old lindens rustled with a murmur which recalled that of the sea; and now and then a blossom of a yellowish white would flutter down, which the girls disputed, holding up their hands and saying:

"The one who catches it will have a husband before the year is out!"

A poor old blind man, cowering upon the steps of the sanctuary, was murmuring a monotonous prayer, like the plaint of a night bird.

Yanski Varhely regarded the scene with curiosity, as he waited for the end of the ceremony. Somewhat oppressed by the heavy atmosphere of the little church, and being a Huguenot besides, the old soldier had come out into the open air, and bared his head to the fresh breeze under the lindens.

His rugged figure had at first a little awed the crowd; but they soon began to rattle on again like a brook over the stones.

Varhely cast, from time to time, a glance into the interior of the church. Baroness Dinati was now taking up the collection for the poor, holding the long pole of the alms-box in her little, dimpled hands, and bowing with a pretty smile as the coins rattled into the receptacle.

Varhely, after a casual examination of the ruins of an old castle which formed one side of the square, was about to return to the church, when a domestic in livery pushed his way through the crowd, and raising himself upon his toes, peered into the church as if seeking some one. After a moment the man approached Yanski, and, taking off his hat, asked, respectfully:

"Is it to Monsieur Varhely that I have the honor to speak?"

"Yes," replied Yanski, a little surprised.

"I have a package for Prince Andras Zilah: would Monsieur have the kindness to take charge of it, and give it to the Prince? I beg Monsieur's pardon; but it is very important, and I am obliged to go away at once. I should have brought it to Maisons yesterday."

As he spoke, the servant drew from an inside pocket a little package carefully wrapped, and sealed

with red sealing-wax.

"Monsieur will excuse me," he said again, "but it is very important."

"What is it?" asked Varhely, rather brusquely. "Who sent it?"

"Count Michel Menko."

Varhely knew very well (as also did Andras), that Michel had been seriously ill; otherwise, he would have been astonished at the young man's absence from the wedding of the Prince.

He thought Michel had probably sent a wedding present, and he took the little package, twisting it mechanically in his hands. As he did so, he gave a slight start of surprise; it seemed as if the package contained letters.

He looked at the superscription. The name of Prince Andras Zilah was traced in clear, firm handwriting, and, in the left-hand corner, Michel Menko had written, in Hungarian characters: "Very important! With the expression of my excuses and my sorrow." And below, the signature "Menko Mihaly."

The domestic was still standing there, hat in hand. "Monsieur will be good enough to pardon me," he said; "but, in the midst of this crowd, I could not perhaps reach his Excellency, and the Count's commands were so imperative that—"

"Very well," interrupted Varhely. "I will myself give this to the Prince immediately."

The domestic bowed, uttered his thanks, and left Varhely vaguely uneasy at this mysterious package which had been brought there, and which Menko had addressed to the Prince.

With the expression of his excuses and his sorrow! Michel doubtless meant that he was sorry not to be able to join Andras's friends—he who was one of the most intimate of them, and whom the Prince called "my child." Yes, it was evidently that. But why this sealed package? and what did it contain? Yanski turned it over and over between his fingers, which itched to break the wrapper, and find out what was within.

He wondered if there were really any necessity to give it to the Prince. But why should he not? What folly to think that any disagreeable news could come from Michel Menko! The young man, unable to come himself to Maisons, had sent his congratulations to the Prince, and Zilah would be glad to receive them from his friend. That was all. There was no possible trouble in all this, but only one pleasure the more to Andras.

And Varhely could not help smiling at the nervous feeling a letter received under odd circumstances or an unexpected despatch sometimes causes. The envelope alone, of some letters, sends a magnetic thrill through one and makes one tremble. The rough soldier was not accustomed to such weaknesses, and he blamed himself as being childish, for having felt that instinctive fear which was now dissipated.

He shrugged his shoulders, and turned toward the church.

From the interior came the sound of the organ, mingled with the murmur of the guests as they rose, ready to depart. The wedding march from the Midsummer Night's Dream pealed forth majestically as the newly-married pair walked slowly down the aisle. Marsa smiled happily at this music of Mendelssohn, which she had played so often, and which was now singing for her the chant of happy love. She saw the sunshine streaming through the open doorway, and, dazzled by this light from without, her eyes fixed upon the luminous portal, she no longer perceived the dim shadows of the church.

Murmurs of admiration greeted her as she appeared upon the threshold, beaming with happiness. The crowd, which made way for her, gazed upon her with fascinated eyes. The door of Andras's carriage was open; Marsa entered it, and Andras, with a smile of deep, profound content, seated himself beside her, whispering tenderly in the Tzigana's ear as the carriage drove off:

"Ah! how I love you! my beloved, my adored Marsa! How I love you, and how happy I am!"

CHAPTER XXI

"THE TZIGANA IS THE MOST LOVED OF ALL!"

The chimes rang forth a merry peal, and Mendelssohn's music still thundered its triumphal accents, as the marriage guests left the church.

"It is a beautiful wedding, really a great success! The bride, the decorations, the good peasants and the pretty girls—everything is simply perfect. If I ever marry again," laughed the Baroness, "I shall be married in the country."

"You have only to name the day, Baroness," said old Vogotzine, inspired to a little gallantry.

And Jacquemin, with a smile, exclaimed, in Russian:

"What a charming speech, General, and so original! I will make a note of it."

The carriages rolled away toward Marsa's house through the broad avenues, turning rapidly around the fountains of the park, whose jets of water laughed as they fell and threw showers of spray over the masses of flowers. Before the church, the children disputed for the money and bonbons Prince Andras had ordered to be distributed. In Marsa's large drawing-rooms, where glass and silver sparkled upon the snowy cloth, servants in livery awaited the return of the wedding-party. In a moment there was an assault, General Vogotzine leading the column. All appetites were excited by the drive in the fresh air, and the guests did honor to the pates, salads, and cold chicken, accompanied by Leoville, which Jacquemin tasted and pronounced drinkable.

The little Baroness was ubiquitous, laughing, chattering, enjoying herself to her heart's content, and telling every one that she was to leave that very evening for Trouville, with trunks, and trunks, and trunks—a host of them! But then, it was race-week, you know!

With her eyeglasses perched upon her little nose, she stopped before a statuette, a picture, no matter what, exclaiming, merrily:

"Oh, how pretty that is! How pretty it is! It is a Tanagra! How queer those Tanagras are. They prove that love existed in antiquity, don't they, Varhely? Oh! I forgot; what do you know about love?"

At last, with a glass of champagne in her hand, she paused before a portrait of Marsa, a strange, powerful picture, the work of an artist who knew how to put soul into his painting.

"Ah! this is superb! Who painted it, Marsa?"

"Zichy," replied Marsa.

"Ah, yes, Zichy! I am no longer astonished. By the way, there is another Hungarian artist who paints very well. I have heard of him. He is an old man; I don't exactly remember his name, something like Barabas."

"Nicolas de Baratras," said Varhely.

"Yes, that's it. It seems he is a master. But your Zichy pleases me infinitely. He has caught your eyes and expression wonderfully; it is exactly like you, Princess. I should like to have my portrait painted by him. His first name is Michel, is it not?"

She examined the signature, peering through her eyeglass, close to the canvas.

"Yes, I knew it was. Michel Zichy!"

This name of "Michel!" suddenly pronounced, sped like an arrow through Marsa's heart. She closed her eyes as if to shut out some hateful vision, and abruptly quitted the Baroness, who proceeded to analyze Zichy's portrait as she did the pictures in the salon on varnishing day. Marsa went toward other friends, answering their flatteries with smiles, and forcing herself to talk and forget.

Andras, in the midst of the crowd where Vogotzine's loud laugh alternated with the little cries of the Baroness, felt a complex sentiment: he wished his friends to enjoy themselves and yet he longed to be alone with Marsa, and to take her away. They were to go first to his hotel in Paris; and then to some obscure corner, probably to the villa of Sainte- Adresse, until September, when they were going to Venice, and from there to Rome for the winter.

It seemed to the Prince that all these people were taking away from him a part of his life. Marsa belonged to them, as she went from one to another, replying to the compliments which desperately resembled one another, from those of Angelo Valla, which were spoken in Italian, to those of little

Yamada, the Parisianized Japanese. Andras now longed for the solitude of the preceding days; and Baroness Dinati, shaking her finger at him, said: "My dear Prince, you are longing to see us go, I know you are. Oh! don't say you are not! I am sure of it, and I can understand it. We had no lunch at my marriage. The Baron simply carried me off at the door of the church. Carried me off! How romantic that sounds! It suggests an elopement with a coach and four! Have no fear, though; leave it to me, I will disperse your guests!"

She flew away before Zilah could answer; and, murmuring a word in the ears of her friends, tapping with her little hand upon the shoulders of the obstinate, she gradually cleared the rooms, and the sound of the departing carriages was soon heard, as they rolled down the avenue.

Andras and Marsa were left almost alone; Varhely still remaining, and the little Baroness, who ran up, all rosy and out of breath, to the Prince, and said, gayly, in her laughing voice:

"Well! What do you say to that? all vanished like smoke, even Jacquemin, who has gone back by train. The game of descampativos, which Marie Antoinette loved to play at Trianon, must have been a little like this. Aren't you going to thank me? Ah! you ingrate!"

She ran and embraced Marsa, pressing her cherry lips to the Tzigana's pale face, and then rapidly disappeared in a mock flight, with a gay little laugh and a tremendous rustle of petticoats.

Of all his friends, Varhely was the one of whom Andras was fondest; but they had not been able to exchange a single word since the morning. Yanski had been right to remain till the last: it was his hand which the Prince wished to press before his departure, as if Varhely had been his relative, and the sole surviving one.

"Now," he said to him, "you have no longer only a brother, my dear Varhely; you have also a sister who loves and respects you as I love and respect you myself."

Yanski's stern face worked convulsively with an emotion he tried to conceal beneath an apparent roughness.

"You are right to love me a little," he said, brusquely, "because I am very fond of you—of both of you," nodding his head toward Marsa. "But no respect, please. That makes me out too old."

The Tzigana, taking Vogotzine's arm, led him gently toward the door, a little alarmed at the purple hue of the General's cheeks and forehead. "Come, take a little fresh air," she said to the old soldier, who regarded her with round, expressionless eyes.

As they disappeared in the garden, Varhely drew from his pocket the little package given to him by Menko's valet.

"Here is something from another friend! It was brought to me at the door of the church."

"Ah! I thought that Menko would send me some word of congratulation," said Andras, after he had read upon the envelope the young Count's signature. "Thanks, my dear Varhely."

"Now," said Yanski, "may happiness attend you, Andras! I hope that you will let me hear from you soon."

Zilah took the hand which Varhely extended, and clasped it warmly in both his own.

Upon the steps Varhely found Marsa, who, in her turn, shook his hand.

"Au revoir, Count."

"Au revoir, Princess."

She smiled at Andras, who accompanied Varhely, and who held in his hand the package with the seals unbroken.

"Princess!" she said. "That is a title by which every one has been calling me for the last hour; but it gives me the greatest pleasure to hear it spoken by you, my dear Varhely. But, Princess or not, I shall always be for you the Tzigana, who will play for you, whenever you wish it, the airs of her country—of our country—!"

There was, in the manner in which she spoke these simple words, a gentle grace which evoked in the mind of the old patriot memories of the past and the fatherland.

"The Tzigana is the most charming of all! The Tzigana is the most loved of all!" he said, in Hungarian,

repeating a refrain of a Magyar song.

With a quick, almost military gesture, he saluted Andras and Marsa as they stood at the top of the steps, the sun casting upon them dancing reflections through the leaves of the trees.

The Prince and Princess responded with a wave of the hand; and General Vogotzine, who was seated under the shade of a chestnut-tree, with his coat unbuttoned and his collar open, tried in vain to rise to his feet and salute the departure of the last guest.

CHAPTER XXII

A DREAM SHATTERED

They were alone at last; free to exchange those eternal vows which they had just taken before the altar and sealed with a long, silent pressure when their hands were united; alone with their love, the devoted love they had read so long in each other's eyes, and which had burned, in the church, beneath Marsa's lowered lids, when the Prince had placed upon her finger the nuptial ring.

This moment of happiness and solitude after all the noise and excitement was indeed a blessed one!

Andras had placed upon the piano of the salon Michel Menko's package, and, seated upon the divan, he held both Marsa's hands in his, as she stood before him.

"My best wishes, Princess!" he said. "Princess! Princess Zilah! That name never sounded so sweet in my ears before! My wife! My dear and cherished wife!" As she listened to the music of the voice she loved, Marsa said to herself, that sweet indeed was life, which, after so many trials, still had in reserve for her such joys. And so deep was her happiness, that she wished everything could end now in a beautiful dream which should have no awakening,.

"We will depart for Paris whenever you like," said the Prince.

"Yes," she exclaimed, sinking to his feet, and throwing her arms about his neck as he bent over her, "let us leave this house; take me away, take me away, and let a new life begin for me, the life I have longed for with you and your love!"

There was something like terror in her words, and in the way she clung to this man who was her hero. When she said "Let us leave this house," she thought, with a shudder, of all her cruel suffering, of all that she hated and which had weighed upon her like a nightmare. She thirsted for a different air, where no phantom of the past could pursue her, where she should feel free, where her life should belong entirely to him.

"I will go and take off this gown," she murmured, rising, "and we will run away like two eloping lovers."

"Take off that gown? Why? It would be such a pity! You are so lovely as you are!"

"Well," said Marsa, glancing down upon him with an almost mutinous smile, which lent a peculiar charm to her beauty, "I will not change this white gown, then; a mantle thrown over it will do. And you will take your wife in her bridal dress to Paris, my Prince, my hero—my husband!"

He rose, threw his arms about her, and, holding her close to his heart, pressed one long, silent kiss upon the exquisite lips of his beautiful Tzigana.

She gently disengaged herself from his embrace, with a shivering sigh; and, going slowly toward the door, she turned, and threw him a kiss, saying:

"I will come back soon, my Andras!"

And, although wishing to go for her mantle, nevertheless she still stood there, with her eyes fixed upon the Prince and her mouth sweetly tremulous with a passion of feeling, as if she could not tear herself away.

The piano upon which Andras had cast the package given him by Varhely was there between them; and the Prince advanced a step or two, leaning his hand upon the ebony cover. As Marsa approached

for a last embrace before disappearing on her errand, her glance fell mechanically upon the small package sealed with red wax; and, as she read, in the handwriting she knew so well, the address of the Prince and the signature of Michel Menko, she raised her eyes violently to the face of Prince Zilah, as if to see if this were not a trap; if, in placing this envelope within her view, he were not trying to prove her. There was in her look fright, sudden, instinctive fright, a fright which turned her very lips to ashes; and she recoiled, her eyes returning fascinated to the package, while Andras, surprised at the unexpected expression of the Tzigana's convulsed features, exclaimed, in alarm:

"What is it, Marsa? What is the matter?"

"I—I"

She tried to smile.

"Nothing—I do not know! I—"

She made a desperate effort to look him in the face; but she could not remove her eyes from that sealed package bearing the name Menko.

Ah! that Michel! She had forgotten him! Miserable wretch! He returned, he threatened her, he was about to avenge himself: she was sure of it!

That paper contained something horrible. What could Michel Menko have to say to Prince Andras, writing him at such an hour, except to tell him that the wretched woman he had married was branded with infamy?

She shuddered from head to foot, steadying herself against the piano, her lips trembling nervously.

"I assure you, Marsa—" began the Prince, taking her hands. "Your hands are cold. Are you ill?"

His eyes followed the direction of Marsa's, which were still riveted upon the piano with a dumb look of unutterable agony.

He instantly seized the sealed package, and, holding it up, exclaimed:

"One would think that it was this which troubled you!"

"O Prince! I swear to you!—"

"Prince?"

He repeated in amazement this title which she suddenly gave him; she, who called him Andras, as he called her Marsa. Prince? He also, in his turn, felt a singular sensation of fright, wondering what that package contained, and if Marsa's fate and his own were not connected with some unknown thing within it.

"Let us see," he said, abruptly breaking the seals, "what this is."

Rapidly, and as if impelled, despite herself, Marsa caught the wrist of her husband in her icy hand, and, terrified, supplicating, she cried, in a wild, broken voice:

"No, no, I implore you! No! Do not read it! Do not read it!"

He contemplated her coldly, and, forcing himself to be calm, asked:

"What does this parcel of Michel Menko's contain?"

"I do not know," gasped Marsa. "But do not read it! In the name of the Virgin" (the sacred adjuration of the Hungarians occurring to her mind, in the midst of her agony), "do not read it!"

"But you must be aware, Princess," returned Andras, "that you are taking the very means to force me to read it."

She shivered and moaned, there was such a change in the way Andras pronounced this word, which he had spoken a moment before in tones so loving and caressing—Princess.

Now the word threatened her.

"Listen! I am about to tell you: I wished—Ah! My God! My God! Unhappy woman that I am! Do not read, do not read!"

Andras, who had turned very pale, gently removed her grasp from the package, and said, very slowly and gravely, but with a tenderness in which hope still appeared:

"Come, Marsa, let us see; what do you wish me to think? Why do you wish me not to read these letters? for letters they doubtless are. What have letters sent me by Count Menko to do with you? You do not wish me to read them?"

He paused a moment, and then, while Marsa's eyes implored him with the mute prayer of a person condemned to death by the executioner, he repeated:

"You do not wish me to read them? Well, so be it; I will not read them, but upon one condition: you must swear to me, understand, swear to me, that your name is not traced in these letters, and that Michel Menko has nothing in common with the Princess Zilah."

She listened, she heard him; but Andras wondered whether she understood, she stood so still and motionless, as if stupefied by the shock of a moral tempest.

"There is, I am certain," he continued in the same calm, slow voice, "there is within this envelope some lie, some plot. I will not even know what it is. I will not ask you a single question, and I will throw these letters, unread, into the fire; but swear to me, that, whatever this Menko, or any other, may write to me, whatever any one may say, is an infamy and a calumny. Swear that, Marsa."

"Swear it, swear again? Swear always, then? Oath upon oath? Ah! it is too much!" she cried, her torpor suddenly breaking into an explosion of sobs and cries. "No! not another lie, not one! Monsieur, I am a wretch, a miserable woman! Strike me! Lash me, as I lash my dogs! I have deceived you! Despise me! Hate me! I am unworthy even of pity! The man whose letters you hold revenges himself, and stabs me, has been—my lover!"

"Michel!"

"The most cowardly, the vilest being in the world! If he hated me, he might have killed me; he might have torn off my veil just now, and struck me across the lips. But to do this, to do this! To attack you, you, you! Ah! miserable dog; fit only to be stoned to death! Judas! Liar and coward! Would to heaven I had planted a knife in his heart!"

"Ah! My God!" murmured the Prince, as if stabbed himself.

At this cry of bitter agony from Andras Zilah, Marsa's imprecations ceased; and she threw herself madly at his feet; while he stood erect and pale—her judge.

She lay there, a mass of white satin and lace, her loosened hair falling upon the carpet, where the pale bridal flowers withered beneath her husband's heel; and Zilah, motionless, his glance wandering from the prostrate woman to the package of letters which burned his fingers, seemed ready to strike, with these proofs of her infamy, the distracted Tzigana, a wolf to threaten, a slave to supplicate.

Suddenly he leaned over, seized her by the wrists, and raised her almost roughly.

"Do you know," he said, in low, quivering tones, "that the lowest of women is less culpable than you? Ten times, a hundred times, less culpable! Do you know that I have the right to kill you?"

"Ah! that, yes! Do it! do it! do it!" she cried, with the smile of a mad woman.

He pushed her slowly from him.

"Why have you committed this infamy? It was not for my fortune; you are rich."

Marsa moaned, humiliated to the dust by this cold contempt. She would have preferred brutal anger; anything, to this.

"Ah! your fortune!" she said, finding a last excuse for herself out of the depth of her humiliation, which had now become eternal; "it was not that, nor your name, nor your title that I wished: it was your love!"

The heart of the Prince seemed wrung in a vise as this word fell from those lips, once adored, nay, still adored, soiled as they were.

"My love!"

"Yes, your love, your love alone! I would have confessed all, been your mistress, your slave, your thing, if I—I had not feared to lose you, to see myself abased in the eyes of you, whom I adored! I was

afraid, afraid of seeing you fly from me—yes, that was my crime! It is infamous, ah! I know it; but I thought only of keeping you, you alone; you, my admiration, my hero, my life, my god! I deserve to be punished; yes, yes, I deserve it—But those letters—those letters which you would have cast into the fire if I had not revealed the secret of my life—you told me so yourself—I might have sworn what you asked, and you would have believed me—I might have done so; but no, it would have been too vile, too cowardly! Ah! kill me! That is what I deserve, that is what—"

"Where are you going?" she cried, interrupting herself, her eyes dilated with fear, as she saw that Zilah, without answering, was moving toward the door.

She forgot that she no longer had the right to question; she only felt, that, once gone, she would never see him again. Ah! a thousand times a blow with a knife rather than that! Was this the way the day, which began so brightly, was to end?

"Where are you going?"

"What does that matter to you?"

"True! I beg your pardon. At least—at least, Monsieur, one word, I implore. What are your commands? What do you wish me to do? There must be laws to punish those who have done what I have done! Shall I accuse myself, give myself up to justice? Ah! speak to me! speak to me!"

"Live with Michel Menko, if he is still alive after I have met him!" responded Andras, in hard, metallic tones, waving back the unhappy woman who threw herself on her knees, her arms outstretched toward him.

The door closed behind him. For a moment she gazed after him with haggard eyes: and then, dragging herself, her bridal robes trailing behind her, to the door, she tried to call after him, to detain the man whom she adored, and who was flying from her; but her voice failed her, and, with one wild, inarticulate cry, she fell forward on her face, with a horrible realization of the immense void which filled the house, this morning gay and joyous, now silent as a tomb.

And while the Prince, in the carriage which bore him away, read the letters in which Marsa spoke of her love for another, and that other the man whom he called "my child;" while he paused in this agonizing reading to ask himself if it were true, if such a sudden annihilation of his happiness were possible, if so many misfortunes could happen in such a few hours; while he watched the houses and trees revolve slowly by him, and feared that he was going mad—Marsa's servants ate the remnants of the lunch, and drank what was left of the champagne to the health of the Prince and Princess Zilah.

CHAPTER XXIII

"THE WORLD HOLDS BUT ONE FAIR MAIDEN"

Paris, whose everyday gossip has usually the keenness and eagerness of the tattle of small villages, preserves at times, upon certain serious subjects, a silence which might be believed to be generous. Whether it is from ignorance or from respect, at all events it has little to say. There are vague suspicions of the truth, surmises are made, but nothing is affirmed; and this sort of abdication of public malignity is the most complete homage that can be rendered either to character or talent.

The circle of foreigners in Paris, that contrasted society which circled and chattered in the salon of the Baroness Dinati, could not, of necessity, be ignorant that the Princess Zilah, since the wedding which had attracted to Maisons-Lafitte a large part of the fashionable world, had not left her house, while Prince Andras had returned to Paris alone.

There were low-spoken rumors of all sorts. It was said that Marsa had been attacked by an hereditary nervous malady; and in proof of this were cited the visits made at Maisons-Lafitte by Dr. Fargeas, the famous physician of Salpetriere, who had been summoned in consultation with Dr. Villandry. These two men, both celebrated in their profession, had been called in by Vogotzine, upon the advice of Yanski Varhely, who was more Parisian and better informed than the General.

Vogotzine was dreadfully uneasy, and his brain seemed ready to burst with the responsibility thrust upon him. Since the terrible day of the marriage—Vogotzine shrugged his shoulders in anger and amazement when he uttered this word marriage—Marsa had not recovered from a sort of frightened

stupor; and the General, terrified at his niece's condition, was really afraid of going insane himself.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" he said, "all this is deplorably sad."

After the terrible overthrow of all her hopes, Marsa was seized with a fever, and she lay upon her bed in a frightful delirium, which entirely took away the little sense poor old Vogotzine had left. Understanding nothing of the reason of Zilah's disappearance, the General listened in childish alarm to Marsa, wildly imploring mercy and pity of some invisible person. The unhappy old man would have faced a battalion of honveds or a charge of bashi-bazouks rather than remain there in the solitary house, with the delirious girl whose sobs and despairing appeals made the tears stream down the face of this soldier, whose brain was now weakened by drink, but who had once contemplated with a dry eye, whole ditches full of corpses, which some priest, dressed in mourning, blessed in one mass.

Vogotzine hastened to Paris, and questioned Andras; but the Prince answered him in a way that permitted of no further conversation upon the subject.

"My personal affairs concern myself alone."

The General had not energy enough to demand an explanation; and he bowed, saying that it was certainly not his business to interfere; but he noticed that Zilah turned very pale when he told him that it would be a miracle if Marsa recovered from the fever.

"It is pitiful!" he said.

Zilah cast a strange look at him, severe and yet terrified.

Vogotzine said no more; but he went at once to Dr. Fargeas, and asked him to come as soon as possible to Maisons-Lafitte.

The doctor's coupe in a few hours stopped before the gate through which so short a time ago the gay marriage cortege had passed, and Vogotzine ushered him into the little salon from which Marsa had once driven Menko.

Then the General sent for Mademoiselle—or, rather, Madame, as he corrected himself with a shrug of his shoulders. But suddenly he became very serious as he saw upon the threshold Marsa, whose fever had temporarily left her, and who could now manage to drag herself along, pale and wan, leaning upon the arm of her maid.

Dr. Fargeas cast a keen glance at the girl, whose eyes, burning with inward fire, alone seemed to be living.

"Madame," said the doctor, quietly, when the General had made a sign to his niece to listen to the stranger, "General Vogotzine has told me that you were suffering. I am a physician. Will you do me the honor and the kindness to answer my questions?"

"Yes," said the General, "do, my dear Marsa, to please me."

She stood erect, not a muscle of her face moving; and, without replying, she looked steadily into the doctor's eyes. In her turn, she was studying him. It was like a defiance before a duel.

Then she said suddenly, turning to Vogotzine:

"Why have you brought a physician? I am not ill."

Her voice was clear, but low and sad, and it was an evident effort for her to speak.

"No, you are not ill, my dear child; but I don't know—I don't understand—you make me a little uneasy, a very little. You know if I, your old uncle, worried you even a little, you would not feel just right about it, would you now?"

With which rather incoherent speech, he tried to force a smile; but Marsa, taking no notice of him, turned slowly to the doctor, who had not removed his eyes from her face.

"Well," she said, dryly, "what do you want? What do you wish to ask me? What shall I tell you? Who requested you to come here?"

Vogotzine made a sign to the maid to leave the room.

"I told you, I have come at the General's request," said Fargeas, with a wave of his hand toward Vogotzine.

Marsa only replied: "Ah!" But it seemed to the doctor that there was a world of disappointment and despair expressed in this one ejaculation.

Then she suddenly became rigid, and lapsed into one of those stupors which had succeeded the days of delirium, and had frightened Vogotzine so much.

"There! There! Look at her!" exclaimed the old man.

Fargeas, without listening to the General, approached Marsa, and placed her in a chair near the window. He looked in her eyes, and placed his hand upon her burning forehead; but Marsa made no movement.

"Are you in pain?" he asked, gently.

The young girl, who a moment before had asked questions and still seemed interested a little in life, stirred uneasily, and murmured, in an odd, singing voice:

"I do not know!"

"Did you sleep last night?"

"I do not know!"

"How old are you?" asked Fargeas, to test her mental condition.

"I do not know!"

The physician's eyes sought those of the General. Vogotzine, his face crimson, stood by the chair, his little, round eyes blinking with emotion at each of these mournful, musical responses.

"What is your name?" asked the doctor, slowly.

She raised her dark, sad eyes, and seemed to be seeking what to reply; then, wearily letting her head fall backward, she answered, as before:

"I do not know!"

Vogotzine, who had become purple, seized the doctor's arm convulsively.

"She no longer knows even her own name!"

"It will be only temporary, I hope," said the doctor. "But in her present state, she needs the closest care and attention."

"I have never seen her like this before, never since—since the first day," exclaimed the General, in alarm and excitement. "She tried to kill herself then; but afterward she seemed more reasonable, as you saw just now. When she asked you who sent you, I thought Ah! at last she is interested in something. But now it is worse than ever. Oh! this is lively for me, devilish lively!"

Fargeas took between his thumb and finger the delicate skin of the Tzigana, and pinched her on the neck, below the ear. Marsa did not stir.

"There is no feeling here," said the doctor; "I could prick it with a pin without causing any sensation of pain." Then, again placing his hand upon Marsa's forehead, he tried to rouse some memory in the dormant brain:

"Come, Madame, some one is waiting for you. Your uncle—your uncle wishes you to play for him upon the piano! Your uncle! The piano!"

"The World holds but One Fair Maiden!" hummed Vogotzine, trying to give, in his husky voice, the melody of the song the Tzigana was so fond of.

Mechanically, Marsa repeated, as if spelling the word: "The piano! piano!" and then, in peculiar, melodious accents, she again uttered her mournful: "I do not know!"

This time old Vogotzine felt as if he were strangling; and the doctor, full of pity, gazed sadly down at the exquisitely beautiful girl, with her haggard, dark eyes, and her waxen skin, sitting there like a marble statue of despair.

"Give her some bouillon," said Fargeas. "She will probably refuse it in her present condition; but try. She can be cured," he added; "but she must be taken away from her present surroundings. Solitude is

necessary, not this here, but—"

"But?" asked Vogotzine, as the doctor paused.

"But, perhaps, that of an asylum. Poor woman!" turning again to Marsa, who had not stirred. "How beautiful she is!"

The doctor, greatly touched, despite his professional indifference, left the villa, the General accompanying him to the gate. It was decided that he should return the next day with Villandry and arrange for the transportation of the invalid to Dr. Sims's establishment at Vaugirard. In a new place her stupor might disappear, and her mind be roused from its torpor; but a constant surveillance was necessary. Some pretext must be found to induce Marsa to enter a carriage; but once at Vaugirard, the doctor gave the General his word that she should be watched and taken care of with the utmost devotion.

Vogotzine felt the blood throb in his temples as he listened to the doctor's decision. The establishment at Vaugirard! His niece, the daughter of Prince Tcheretteff, and the wife of Prince Zilah, in an insane asylum!

But he himself had not the right to dispose of Marsa's liberty; the consent of the Prince was necessary. It was in vain for Andras to refuse to have his life disturbed; it was absolutely necessary to find out from him what should be done with Marsa, who was his wife and Princess Zilah.

The General also felt that he was incapable of understanding anything, ignorant as he was of the reasons of the rupture, of Zilah's anger against the Tzigana, and of the young girl's terrible stupor; and, as he drank his cherry cordial or his brandy, wondered if he too were insane, as he repeated, like his niece:

"I do not know! I do not know!"

He felt obliged, however, to go and tell the Prince of the opinion of the illustrious physician of Salpetriere.

Then he asked Zilah:

"What is your decision?"

"General," replied Andras, "whatever you choose to do is right. But, once for all, remember that I wish henceforth to live alone, entirely alone, and speak to me neither of the future nor of the past, which is cruel, nor of the present, which is hopeless. I have determined—"

"What?"

"To live hereafter an absolutely selfish life!"

"That will change you," returned the General, in amazement.

"And will console me," added Andras.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Life is a tempest
Nervous natures, as prompt to hope as to despair
No answer to make to one who has no right to question me
Nothing ever astonishes me
Poverty brings wrinkles

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