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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MISS HILDRETH: A NOVEL, VOLUME 3 ***

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A Novel.

BY
A. DE GRASSE STEVENS,
AUTHOR OF
"OLD BOSTON," "THE LOST DAUPHIN," "WEIGHED IN THE BALANCE,"
ETC.

In Three Volumes.
VOL. III.

LONDON:
WARD AND DOWNEY,
12, YORK STREET, COVENT GARDEN, W.C.
1888.
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MISS HILDRETH.

CHAPTER I.

A VIGIL.

The news of Patricia Hildreth's arrest on a criminal warrant had flown like wild-fire throughout society. Mr. Tremain found himself almost the only one of his world not cognisant of the facts from the beginning; and as he listened to one garbled statement after another, coloured according to the narrator's fancy, he cursed the evil fortune and his own selfishness, that had kept him so effectually out of the way, and made him play so blindly into the enemies' hands.

He knew very well that had he been at home, or allowed his letters and papers to be forwarded to him, matters would never have reached so serious a pass; but shutting himself away as he had done from all outside communication, there had been no one at hand to avert the blow as it fell, or to force a more definite showing from the attacking parties, before the extreme measure of arrest was put into execution.

Esther Newbold's absence, and the uncertain movements of the *Deerhound*, had proved an additional disaster for Patricia. It was only on the yacht putting in at New London, that Esther heard of her friend's trouble. A flaming poster outside the hotel had caught Mrs. Newbold's attention as she sauntered along the planked side-walk with Miss Darling, and the next moment they were both reading with horrified comprehension the bold sensational headings:

"Arrest of Miss Hildreth. Further developments expected shortly. Miss Hildreth's appearance in Ludlow Street, etc., etc."

These were the lines, in staring red letters, that first greeted Esther on her landing, after a three weeks' cruise; and their effect upon her can better be imagined than described. She was, however, essentially a person of action, and not an hour had passed before she, her husband, and Dick Darling, were on their way to New York, leaving the yacht and its guests to dispose of themselves.

That Patricia should be in such dire trouble, and alone, struck Esther as something so preposterous as to be almost incredible. Patricia, who counted her lovers and admirers by the score; who was always triumphant and victorious and worshipped wherever she appeared; whose smile was a reward highly coveted; whose favour was a prize eagerly courted—to be in prison, arrested on some crime too horrible even to be named. Alone; subjected to indignities and privations whose very meaning had been hitherto unknown to her easy, luxurious existence.

"Ah, do let us get to her at once," Esther had cried, imploringly, after she had poured out all the horrible story in George Newbold's astonished ears. "Only to think of her in that dreadful place; how she must suffer! And in this weather too, so hot and breathless as it is; and we never knowing all the time, but enjoying ourselves like brutes and heathens! Oh, Patricia, Patricia, is this what your wilfulness has brought you to? Oh, George, do make haste; and to think what a viper we entertained in that dreadful Count Mellikoff!"

"Well, he certainly hasn't turned out an angel," answered George, in his slow fashion. "For once, my dear Esther, the scripture has gone back on itself, for he *was* a stranger, and we made him very welcome; in return for which he took us in most neatly."

"Don't be profane," retorted his wife, "I'm sure this is no time for such joking. Isn't poor Patty a lesson to us all, and the evil that has overtaken her a judgment on our folly? But will you make haste? We shall lose the train if you are so deliberate. There's the gig along-side at last; good-bye, my Mimi, be very good and you shall come to Mumsey in a day or two."

She put her little daughter out of her arms, drew down her veil, and hurried off her husband and Miss Darling, without further leave-takings. Little Marianne stood on the deck straining her blue eyes for a last glimpse of the dancing boat, her white frock and golden hair fluttering in the light breeze.

Mr. Tremain found himself embarked on a fruitless expedition when he yielded to Dick Darling's entreaties and started off impetuously to visit Miss Hildreth in prison, and, as Dick evidently expected, wrest her there and then from its odious confines.

Indeed, had he been less overwhelmed by the calamity that had fallen upon Patricia, he would have saved himself the needless journey; for, although the evening was still young when they reached the gloomy building, no amount of bribery or corruption could effect an entrance at that hour. In vain Philip pleaded the exigencies of the case and his own legal position; the not too polite official was adamant to all entreaties. His instructions were decisive; any one wishing to see the prisoner must come at the proper hours, and with a proper permit.

"But I am her counsel," urged Philip, with a reckless disregard of truth.

The man looked at him disdainfully. "I guess that won't wash, Judge," he said, and turned away determinately.

Mr. Tremain looked down at Dick, who stood crying openly beside him, not even taking the trouble to wipe away the tears as they fell.

"It's no use, Miss Dick," he said, "we can do nothing until morning. You must let me take you home."

"Oh, it's too horrible," cried Dick, sobbing. "It's brutal, it's wicked! Only to think that poor Patricia is *somewhere* in this awful place and we can't get to her. Oh, Mr. Tremain, which one of those dreadful windows with the iron bars belongs to her—?" she could not bring herself to say "Cell," so choked down the final word in a fresh burst of tears.

"Ah, which indeed!" answered Philip, sadly. The same thought had come to him, as his eyes traversed quickly the long blank stone front of the building, its monotony of outline only broken by the narrow barred casements.

Behind which of those apertures lay Patricia, abandoned in her extremity? Her beauty tarnished, her fair name tossed from lip to lip, her character at the mercy of an unsympathetic human world.

"Oh, Patty, Patty," he cried to his own heart; "has it come to this, my love? Have all your pride and loveliness brought you only to this?"

He turned away slowly, and, drawing Dick's hand within his arm, led her to the carriage that stood some little distance down the street.

"Will you go back to Esther?" he asked as he helped her in.

"Yes," she answered; "and oh, Mr. Tremain, come with me; oh do, please do."

He hesitated for a moment; then giving the address, stepped in and seated himself beside her.

Neither Philip nor Miss Darling ever forgot that long night drive, or the moving panorama made up of lights and shops and people, that seemed for ever passing and repassing before them. It was as if they stood still, while all this restless pageant went by them in brilliant sequence.

As they turned into Broadway, and drove somewhat slowly up that narrow thoroughfare, they met the stream of pleasure-seekers at its height; the theatres were just over, and a crowd of brightly-dressed, gay-voiced people were passing from the entrances into the streets. Now and then a light laugh, or some careless jest, would reach the silent occupants of the carriage, and wound them; as a blow wounds falling upon a hurt still fresh and bleeding.

"Oh," cried Dick at one such moment, "how cruel the world is, how unfeeling! Ah, Mr. Tremain, how can any one laugh and jest when *she* lies in that awful place,—while Patricia is in prison?"

But Philip said nothing; the anguish of his own heart was too absorbing to leave room for

superfluous words of comfort. For no anguish is so great and so overwhelming, as the knowledge of one's powerlessness to help when one's best beloved is in dire need of aid.

Fifth Avenue was reached at last, heralded a long way off by the huge electric transparency, which flaunts its advertisement high above the heads of the pedestrians, and causes the very stars of heaven to pale before its garish light.

Turning down a side street, well up among the "thirties," and then into Madison Avenue, the coachman drew up before a large brown stone house, across whose many-windowed front not a light was to be seen, save the faint gas-jet of the ornamental brass sconce in the vestibule.

Miss Darling sprang out unassisted, and running quickly up the steps, pulled out a latch-key and swung open the door as Philip came up behind her.

"You will find Esther in her morning-room," she said briefly, and leaving him to find his own way, turned towards the stairs. Philip watched her as she mounted them wearily, step by step. There was dejection and despondency in her movements, and in the tired droop of the young shoulders beneath the long dark cloak.

A deeper feeling than he had ever believed it possible for him to entertain for gay, volatile Miss Dick, had been born within his heart that evening; and, as he stood now and watched the girlish figure fade into the shadows of the upper corridor, it was with a sense of sudden loneliness that he turned and walked slowly across the wide entrance hall.

Mrs. Newbold's town house wore that look of desolation and inhospitality that is born of holland covers over the furniture, carpets rolled up into corners, statues, ornaments, and chandeliers wrapped in protecting winding-sheets. The advent of the mistress of the house had been sudden and unexpected, and the mansion had not as yet thrown off the depressing atmosphere of care-takers and board-wages.

In Esther's boudoir, however, matters were a little more homelike; the cases had been taken off the chairs and couches, and various feminine belongings, flowers and books, redeemed somewhat the forlornness of shrouded pictures, and a fireless hearth.

Mr. Tremain knocked in a perfunctory way on the door, and immediately Mrs. Newbold's voice bade him enter. He found her lying on a couch drawn up to an open window, over which the Venetian blind had been lowered.

She had been crying bitterly, and the face she raised from the pillows bore but a faint resemblance to its usual *insouciant* blonde prettiness, in the blurred lines, heavy eyes, pallid cheeks, and tumbled golden hair.

She sprang up impetuously on seeing Mr. Tremain, and ran towards him holding out her hands in welcome.

"Oh, Philip," she cried, "have you come at last? Oh, is it not all too dreadful? Have you seen her, Philip? How is she? Is she brave and full of courage? Oh, Patricia! poor, poor Patricia!"

Mr. Tremain took her hands in his as he answered:

"No, I have not seen her, Esther. We were too late."

She turned away from him and sank down again on the couch, looking up at him with the tears gathering in her tired blue eyes.

"I made sure you would see her," she said, simply. "I never doubted your power, I never thought *you* could fail."

"Alas, I am not omnipotent," he answered, somewhat bitterly. "Even a little brief authority, officially bestowed, can render me powerless. It will not be for very long, however. I shall go back again at the earliest possible hour in the morning."

"And you will help her, Philip, you will not let any foolish feeling of pique come between you and her now? You will not remember her cruelties, you will only think of her sufferings? Oh, Philip, you must take up this matter for her, and you must plead for her, when the time comes, as you have never done before. You will, Philip, promise me you will?"

"There is little need for that," he answered, sadly; "all my services are at her disposal if she will accept them."

"Yes, I am sure of it," replied Esther. "Ah, Philip, I did not think *this* would be the service she was to require from you, when I begged you, that last day at the Folly, to help her if occasion came."

"No, nor did I," answered Philip, quietly; then after a moment's pause he continued: "Do you think, Esther, you can bear to tell me a little more about this matter? So far I know nothing beyond the bald fact of the arrest, and the nature of the charge lodged. Miss Darling was too much overcome to enter into particulars. If I put a few plain questions, will you answer them?"

"Oh, yes, I will try," replied Mrs. Newbold, clasping her hands closely together, and looking earnestly up at him.

Philip drew forward a low chair, and placing it in front of her, sat down wearily, and with a half sigh.

"Do you know when—she—she was arrested?" He avoided Patricia's name with something of the same dread which makes us hesitate over that of one but lately dead.

"I think it was only a few days ago, but I don't know exactly; I cannot give you the precise date," answered Esther.

"Ah, that accounts for the delay that has occurred in their pushing on the matter," said Philip, more to himself than to her. "August is the legal holiday month, and Anstice, the District Judge, before whom the examination, if there be one, would be made, is not due here for another week. We have therefore seven clear days before us, in any event, without counting on the chapter of accidents for further delays. Now tell me, who was it brought the application for arrest?"

"Count Vladimir Mellikoff," replied Mrs. Newbold. "Oh, Philip," she added, her eyes flashing, "is he not a coward, and does not his seem coward's work, when one remembers how he was received and trusted?"

Mr. Tremain answered by a gesture of his hand.

"One would rather not think of that," he said; "let us try and put aside personalities, and look at the case only from an outside point of view. You may be very sure Count Mellikoff wasted neither time, nor the opportunities afforded him by your hospitality, to work out his nefarious scheme. But what I wish to ask you, Esther, will, I know, grieve you to answer; still I must clear up one or two points in my own mind, before I see her. Who was the person murdered; and why is she suspected of complicity in the crime?"

He spoke sternly, and the hard lines of his face appeared in greater prominence. Esther looked at him half frightened.

"He believes her guilty," she thought, with quick and decisive perception. "How terrible! But it is so, I see it in his face." Then she said aloud, and with a slowness that was almost hesitancy: "The name of the murdered man was Count Stevan Lalloovich; but I can't tell you—that is—at least I don't know, how it is that they prove Patricia to be mixed up in the horrible affair."

Mr. Tremain noted her hesitancy and the sudden reserve that had come over her; he put it down to the knowledge of some facts she was wilfully withholding from him, and this suspicion added weight in the scale, that balanced so evenly between Patricia's innocence and guilt.

When he next spoke, his voice was even colder and harder than before.

"There is something very mysterious in the whole affair," he said, looking Esther straight in the eyes; "it seems inconceivable that an American citizen should be arrested in her own country, on the charge of a foreign agent, for a murder committed in a foreign land, on a foreign subject. Of course Count Mellikoff has no power to arrest of himself; he must therefore, have laid sufficiently compromising evidence before our authorities to obtain a warrant, and an officer to execute it. As it appears now the whole affair reads more like a midsummer madness than anything else; but a madness pregnant with serious complications and results. Who was this Stevan Lalloovich, Esther, and did—she—know him?"

"He was a cousin, or a relation, or a near connection of the Russian Tsar's," answered Mrs. Newbold, still avoiding Philip's eyes. "I heard Patricia—I mean I believe she did once admit knowing him when she was in St. Petersburg. He was a great swell there, I am told, and the favourite of the Court society. I don't know anything more about it, Philip, indeed I don't. And oh, it is all so horrible, and so dreadful, how can you go on asking questions in that cold way? It's just as if you admitted to yourself that there was a possibility of her—her knowing something about the death of this miserable man. Oh, Philip, how can you doubt her? How can you, when you think of her in prison, and remember it is Patricia, our own Patricia, they accuse of this terrible crime?"

And Esther buried her face in her hands weeping passionately.

But Mr. Tremain was scarcely moved; he remained sitting, resting his head on his hand, and apparently lost in close study of the carpet under his feet. Esther's words rang in his ears.

"Oh, Philip, how can you doubt her?"

And yet he knew he did doubt her. He knew that when Mrs. Newbold admitted Patricia's acquaintance with the murdered Stevan Lalloovich, and placed that acquaintance within the ten years of Miss Hildreth's absence—those ten unexplained years—he felt all the old distrust and suspicion leap into life again, and range themselves before him in mute confirmation of Miss James's calculated insinuations.

"Ten years is a long time—long enough to plant and sow and reap—long enough to sink one's self to the neck in intrigue, to bury one's self in crime."

How could he declare her innocent when this terrible, impassable gulf lay between them? Since she had known this Stevan Lalloovich, might not another of Miss James's suppositions prove true? Might she not also have known Vladimir Mellikoff in that past, and have reason to fear him now? How much could he believe even of what she, Patricia, might tell him?

Several long moments passed by in silence, during which Esther sobbed hysterically, before he roused himself, and, getting up, said, very quietly: "I will not trouble you further to-night, Esther;

you had better get to bed, little woman. You do not quite trust me, I know, but you may, my dear; never fear, she shall not suffer or be overcome if I can prevent it. I will come back to-morrow after—I have seen her—and tell you of her."

"Oh, Philip, be gentle to her," pleaded Esther, "be very gentle; remember you did love her—once."

"I am not likely to forget it," he replied, and then he turned away abruptly and left her.

All night long he walked to and fro, up and down, across an open common of waste land that skirted the railway at Manhattanville, and all night long, as the hours crept by, and the stars faded, and the dawn drew on, he fought the battle over and over against himself—the battle of his love for her, against his doubt of her. And when the day broke in a sunrise of golden splendour, it found him still uncertain, neither victor nor vanquished; still loving her, and still doubting her.

CHAPTER II.

LUDLOW STREET JAIL.

Mr. Tremain did not return to his rooms with the dawning of the day; he indeed shunned them with an almost superstitious dread of what he should find there. It seemed to his overwrought nerves that they must for ever be haunted by the horrible spectres evolved by Miss Dick, and by the memory of her terror-stricken eyes and tear-stained face.

With the lengthening of the morning hours civilisation awoke again to its monotonous round of employment. A grey-coated policeman, making his way to the park, yawning as he walked, and but half awake, passed Mr. Tremain, and turning round stared at him inquiringly.

And, indeed, Philip, as he stood outlined against the clear blue sky, his hands thrust into his pockets, his hat drawn down over his eyes, his face stern and pale, his dress disordered from his long night vigil, appeared a strangely incongruous figure, out of keeping with the fresh dewy daintiness of the summer morning, and might well arouse suspicions in the commonplace mind of a respectable Central Park policeman.

The pertinacity of the man's curiosity awoke in Philip at last a sense of his position, and brought back to him, with a sudden rush, the reason of his presence there—the reason of the dull anguish that grew into keener suffering with each heart-beat. In the bright sunshine everything appeared more hard and real; the night vigil had soothed him somewhat, and the slow on-coming of the dawn had held something of illusive hope in its vague tertiary half-tones; but with the breaking forth of the sun, in the vast triumphant heaven of illimitable blue, came the sternness of reality, the hardness of fact, banishing the gentler mood, and renewing the struggle and vacillation of his mind against his heart.

As the bell of the Sacred Heart Convent rang out for early mass, Mr. Tremain turned his steps citywards, and, walking with long swinging strides, was soon skirting the river Boulevard, and, entering the Park on the west side, made his way to the Fifth Avenue gates, and so down that deserted promenade until he came to an hotel; here he went in, ordered a room, and flinging himself on the bed fell into a deep and dreamless sleep which lasted for hours. It was nature's demand to recuperate her exhausted faculties, and would not be denied.

When Philip awoke it was close upon noon, and greatly annoyed at the flight of time, he swallowed a cup of tea and hurried away. On reaching the gloomy building in Ludlow Street, he demanded an interview with the superintendent, and after considerable delay, was admitted to that functionary's presence.

The office of prison superintendent is one not altogether to be desired; the men who fill the post are usually drawn from the rank and file of disappointed office seekers on a larger scale, who for political reasons consent to be mollified by the less honourable appointment. As a rule they are neither refined in mind nor manner, and, with an eye to the main chance, look upon the inmates committed to their charge as so many victims to be fleeced according to their means.

As we know, there is a golden key that fits all locks, before which even bolts and bars have been known to fly apart, and nowhere is its power so potent and so comprehensive as in the cases of a certain class of prisoners awaiting trial, who if they can control the "coin" can be supplied with every luxury, save those of freedom and fresh air.

The man who received Philip, with a short nod, was neither better nor worse than others of his tribe. He was apparently very busy—or wished to seem so—over a large assortment of letters and bulky documents, which, he rustled ostentatiously, and a trifle offensively, as he looked at Philip over his large round spectacles, and bade him, "Morning."

"Good morning," replied Mr. Tremain, with considerable hauteur.

"Now then, what can I do for you, sir?" asked the superintendent, fussily, and with another documentary rustle.

"I have called," said Philip, quietly, "to obtain full permission to visit and to wait upon a lady now confined here, at all times, and on all days, that I may deem it necessary to do so. The lady's name is—Miss Patricia Hildreth."

He hesitated as the last words passed his lips; how strange it seemed to use her name to this coarse unsympathetic official, how incompatible with all the traditions of his and her past!

"As for my own name," he continued, "it may be better known to you than my personal appearance."

He drew out his note-book and put one of his cards on the table. The superintendent took it up and scrutinised it narrowly.

"Oh, so you're Mr. Tremain, are you?" he said at last, rolling the card between his fingers as he spoke. "Oh, yes, I've heard of you, sir, often enough. I guess we oughtn't to be strangers, Mr. Tremain, since we're both in the same profession."

"Oh, indeed," replied Philip, seeing an answer was expected. "You are a lawyer, then?"

"You can bet on that, sir; I've served my day at the bar, out in the west there," with a comprehensive jerk of his thumb, "and I can tell you we get through some pretty tall work out there. Plenty of cases like the one you're interested in, you know; plenty of blood-letting, and many a pretty young woman mixed up in it all."

Philip winced; this classing of Patricia with the lawless crimes of a wild civilisation seemed little short of brutality, and brought home to him with terrible exactitude the attitude she had assumed, in the eyes of the public, by her association with crime.

The keen eyes of the official noted Philip's susceptibility, and he drew his own conclusions.

"Beg pardon if the subject's distressing," he said, not unkindly; "it's a pretty bad look-out as it stands, Mr. Tremain, and if I was a friend of the lady's, I should own to feeling uncommon squeamish. It takes a deal of evidence to get a warrant issued at any time, and specially against such a top-sawyer as Miss Hildreth. But there, that foreign Count, he's left no stone unturned; he's like one of those old blood-hounds down south, that used to track the niggers before the war. *He's* tracked to some purpose."

All this was horrible to Philip. It seemed to him he could not stand there and endure this man's crude criticisms and cruel deductions, passed so unconcernedly upon Patricia. To him each look was an open insult, each word a lash wherewith to strike at her; they brought the reality of her position before him with unvarnished accuracy.

She was no longer Miss Hildreth surrounded by her own little court, the cynosure of every eye, the honoured guest of every drawing-room, the reigning favourite of all society; she was only Patricia Hildreth, stripped of all accessories, a woman under arrest, a woman charged with murder, a prisoner awaiting the law; just as any other of the poor wretches within those hateful precincts awaited it, and with no more merciful outlook than had they. It was indeed, as he had said, horrible, incredible, maddening.

His silence had at length impressed itself upon his loquacious companion, who now sat looking up at him keenly, turning the visiting card round in his fingers. It was Philip who was the first to speak, coming back to his immediate surroundings with a start, and turning so sad a face, and such sorrow-haunted eyes, upon the little official, as to rouse to life all the dormant sympathy of his shallow soul.

"And the permit?" asked Philip, quietly. "I should like to use it now, if you please."

His very gentleness disarmed his opponent, who without further comment drew towards him a large volume, and filling in a blank order, tore it out noisily and handed it across the table. Mr. Tremain took it and folded it quickly without glancing at it. Each separate item in this horrible drama was agony to him; he had never fully recognised the gravity of Patricia's position until brought face to face with the official details of it.

"I've made it out as you wanted," said the superintendent a little protestingly, as Philip took up the scrap of paper, "it's available for any day and any hour, up to the official inquiry. You'd like to go to her now, perhaps." He touched an electric bell, and in the moment that passed before the summons was answered, said somewhat awkwardly: "I'm real sorry for the lady, Mr. Tremain, we all are. I've done what I can to make her comfortable, and let us hope her stay with us won't be a very long one. Woods," he continued, addressing the tall warder, who had entered as he was speaking, "take this gentleman to Miss Hildreth, and, look here, he's to come and go as he pleases, do you understand? Good morning, Mr. Tremain."

Philip bowed and walked out of the official presence as one in a dream. He lost even his own identity as he followed the guide down endless passages and corridors, and heard the jingle of the keys he carried suspended by a ring from his finger.

It seemed to him he was back again at the Folly; he was walking along the paths of Esther's flower-garden, with the stillness and hush of the night above and around him. And now he had reached the little hazel-copse and was pushing back the bough that barred his entrance; there was the marble fountain in the distance, he could hear the drip of the water as it fell from the upraised vase in the boy Narcissus' hands; and there was the rustic bench, and the figure in the

flowing, shining, white drapery, that rose up hurriedly and came forward a little, holding the soft laces closely about the white throat and heaving bosom.

Yes, it was Patricia—Patricia in all her regal loveliness, in all her wealth of beauty; with her eyes glowing beneath the dark brows, her mouth tremulous and wistful.

He started forward quickly—the vision faded, the night fled away, the tinkling water-drops resolved themselves into the surly clink of key against key on the warder's ring. All the poetry, and grace, and glory fell away from him, as he found himself brought to a standstill before a heavy door, into the lock of which Woods fitted a key from those on the ring, unlocked it, and with a slight push threw it open.

Philip was conscious of a muttered "I'll be back in an hour, sir," and the noise of a closing door behind him; and then he realised that he was alone—face to face with Patricia.

CHAPTER III.

"FATHOM HER MOTIVES, PHILIP."

"Philip!" she cried, eagerly, and came forward, her hands held out in greeting, and then, as if struck by some sudden remembrance, and with a return to her old imperious manner, she dropped her hands, and turning, walked away from him towards a small table that stood at the further end of the room.

Mr. Tremain remained motionless just within the door, his senses taking in by degrees the surroundings, and growing accustomed to the half gloom that served as an apology for daylight, and that made its way through the narrow barred casement set high up in the whitewashed wall.

The room was too large to be called a cell, and if sparsely furnished, was not uncomfortable. Philip noted an easy-chair and a rug spread beneath the table, while on the table were writing materials and books, and a vase of delicate-hued roses; the counterpart of those he had seen in Esther's boudoir the night before. It touched him strangely to see this proof of Esther's love and Esther's faith; the golden blossoms came, he knew, from the rose-houses at the Folly, and spoke eloquently of Mrs. Newbold's belief in Patricia's innocence, since their presence in that prison-room—fraught as they were with so many memories—must, if she were guilty, prove a scourge rather than a comfort.

It took Philip some moments to realise his position and to adjust his faculties; when at last he roused himself and looked across the dimly-lighted room, it was to meet Patricia's eyes fixed upon him with an expression of proud endurance, that was more pathetic than tears.

She had seated herself at the table and was leaning forward, her hands folded across the portfolio that lay open before her. She was dressed in black, and the severe lines and folds of the yielding cashmere seemed to mark with painful accuracy the increased slenderness of her form—a slenderness, it struck Philip, that had almost reached attenuation. Her face was very pale; only the vivid burning scarlet of her lips, and the blue fire of her eyes beneath the straight dark brows, redeemed it from absolute pallor.

The confinement, added to the tropical heat without, and the close atmosphere within, had told visibly upon her freshness and vigour; there was a lassitude about her attitude and a weariness in the lines of her face that bespoke mental as well as physical exhaustion, and now that the sudden flush, called up at sight of him, had died out of her cheeks, Philip perceived how hollow they had grown, and how the circles under her eyes had darkened. Her hands as they rested on the open portfolio were stripped of all their wonted brave array of rings, and looked as white as the paper beneath them, the blue veins painfully apparent.

It was thus that he saw her again; it was thus that they met after that parting on the night of the theatricals when she, radiant, beautiful, sparkling with jewels, triumphant and successful, had laughed aside his love, and swept by him with a light jest and indifferent word, that wounded deeper than she might ever know. He had gone from her then, smarting under his humiliation, and in the hour of his pain proffered the love she had rejected to another woman, who could scarcely be called her rival, and yet who influenced him as potentially as she.

And what the result had been of that second wooing he dared not now remember, for even as he recalled his bondage to Adèle Lamien, and as he looked upon the wrecked beauty, the stained loveliness of the woman before him, so, too, he realised that he loved her and her only, loved her better in this her hour of disgrace and misery than ever before; and that never in reality had his true allegiance swerved from this one woman of his heart—Patricia Hildreth.

The silence between them grew oppressive, embarrassing; it was she who first broke through it, saying, in a voice that trembled somewhat, and with a little laugh that was but a pitiful mockery of its old gaiety, and that ended in a half sob:

"So you have come at last to see me, Philip. Well, and is it not absurd that you should seek and find me—here?" She emphasized her words by a swift glance up at the grated window and around the bare un-homelike room.

At her voice Philip awoke as it were to life, his eyes followed hers in that momentary, but comprehensive glance, and he understood only too well the meaning of the quickly-repressed sigh, that half escaped her, as she caught the gleam of yellow light upon the roses in the tall vase.

He crossed the room quickly, and standing beside her, rested his hand near hers, bending over her and speaking rapidly, in a voice whose deep emotion was only kept in check by his strong will.

"Patty," he said, "believe me, I came as soon as I could. I knew nothing of your trouble until last evening, when Miss Dick came to me about it. I lost no time then. I, we, came to—to this place late as it was, but we were not permitted to see you, we were obliged to go away and wait until the morning."

At the sound of her homely, familiar diminutive her lips trembled, though she answered with a little smile:

"Yes, the rules of this—this institution are rigorously observed;" then with a sudden transition to the old mocking raillery: "Ah, Philip, in all your gloomy prognostications for my future you never once thought of me as coming to—this—did you?"

The flippant words and manner jarred on him, he drew back from her mentally, and found himself wondering if there could be any situation in life, however tragic, that she would take seriously; and as he thought this, Patricia was noting the difference between his hand and hers, as they rested on the table side by side. Hers so white and dainty, luxurious, useless, with rounded nails and rosy finger-tips; his strong and nervous, with fine lines in the long firm fingers and well-modelled wrist. Were they not fitting types of their two characters?

"Patricia," he said again, and even more gently because of his half criticism of her, "it is a very terrible grief to me to find you here, and to know the—the reason of it all. I have come now because I want you to hear one thing from my own lips, and that is, Patty, that all I have, or can give you at this time, is yours without the asking, if you care to make use of it. I know I may be too late in offering you my services—indeed, I may be too late to be of any practical advantage to you—but in any case, as a lawyer, or a friend, I beg you will command me. You can surely trust my friendship."

At the last word she smiled, and raising her eyes met his, with a sudden leaping to life of the old blue fire in her own.

"Yes," she said slowly. "Yes, oh yes, I am quite sure I can rely upon the disinterestedness of your—friendship." Then, after a moment's silence: "Have you seen Esther? How is she? These are her roses. Are they not exquisite, and redolent of the Folly?"

"They are redolent of *my* folly," he answered sharply, and then continued, hurriedly withdrawing his hand from its close proximity to hers, "I saw Mrs. Newbold last evening; she has made herself quite ill by grieving over you and your present position. She is a most loyal friend, Patricia."

"And loyalty is so priceless an ingredient in—friendship," replied Miss Hildreth, "one should put a fictitious value upon it when one finds it. Will you find a chair, Philip, and sit down? I believe I shall make use of your protestations now."

He crossed the room in answer to her invitation, bringing back with him the one other chair afforded by official regulations. Her eyes followed his movements, and a smile, half tender, half wistful, trembled about her lips, fleeting in its gentleness as was her mood; for, when Philip returned and seated himself at some little distance from her, the fine well-cut lips were closed firmly and with something of sternness in their expression.

"Philip," she began, in a low distinct voice, and looking at him with resolute decision, "let us have done with this beating round the bush; let us be quite frank with one another for this one half-hour at least. You know why I am here; you know I have been arrested on a warrant for complicity in a murder."

He made a hurried gesture of appeal, and would have spoken, but she appeared not to heed him.

"They are ugly words; it is an ugly charge to bring against me, but since it has been brought I should like you to tell me, Philip, just what will be the course pursued. What will be the next move in the game? I have been here now—in prison—three days; ah, it does not do to mince one's words, my friend! And so far I am absolutely in the dark regarding my possible fate. What will happen to me next, Philip? What is the next step usual in such cases?"

For a moment Mr. Tremain looked at her in unfeigned amazement. Her coolness, her almost indifference staggered him. He had expected to find her overcome with apprehension and dismay, full of fears for the future; dependent, humble, imploring. Instead of which she met him with her accustomed ease and grace, and with even a touch of that old badinage which had always jarred somewhat upon him.

He could not but contrast Dick Darling's passionate pleading, and Esther's tears, with the calmness and self-possession of the friend for whom they wept and pleaded. Was she worthy of the intense devotion it seemed her prerogative to call forth? With this question his old doubt of her reawakened, and when he answered her it was with a possession no less assured than her

own.

"To reply with anything like accuracy I must be professional," he said. "That you will understand?"

She made a little gesture of assent.

"It is useless for me to cite any usual course of procedure," he continued, "because all the details and circumstances surrounding this case are of so peculiar a character as to admit of no ordinary precedent. You have been arrested, not under the law strictly speaking, but under what is defined as the comity of nations; that is, that sufficient evidence of an incriminating character has been lodged against you to induce the authorities to accede to the pressing request of a foreign Power and to issue a warrant for your arrest. This arrest will be followed by an official inquiry, which consists chiefly in an examination of the warrant, to determine its regularity, and the identity of the person therein named with the person arrested."

"And this examination," she interrupted, "where does it take place?"

"Before the District Judge. Undoubtedly it will come under his jurisdiction."

"And this particular inquiry—my inquiry? How soon shall *I* be inquired into?" she asked again, with a scornful inflection of voice, and a little smile.

"Judge Anstice is the District Judge for New York," he replied, in his coldest and most professional manner; "this particular examination will come on next week at the latest, it has only been delayed on account of Anstice's unavoidable absence."

"I see," she answered. "And what happens next, Philip? You must forgive my utter ignorance, the situation is a novel one for me."

Again there was a sufficiency of mockery in her voice to strike Mr. Tremain afresh with the complete incongruity of the entire situation. It was evident she either did not, or would not, comprehend the gravity of her position; she was still looking at it as an outsider and not as the principal actor, the pivot upon which all turned; just as she forgot or put aside the terrible nature of the charge, and the fearful compensation demanded should that charge be substantiated.

"Good heavens," thought Philip; "she cannot realise it is for complicity in a murder that she stands accused! She cannot realise the nature of the obstacles that lie between her and acquittal, or how awful will be the consequences should our efforts in her behalf fail."

"Well," she said again, "what happens next, Philip? What is the next proceeding of the law? You have brought me as far as the Judge and the inquiry, what follows after?"

"Should there be any fault in the warrant papers," answered Mr. Tremain, speaking against his will, and in short detached sentences, "or should the evidence brought forward by those who obtained the arrest fail to be of such a character as to justify the person under arrest being put on trial, that person would be discharged, and therefore freed from any further action. The arrest in fact falls to the ground, unsubstantiated, there being no *primâ facie* case."

"And if otherwise, Philip? If the evidence is of such a nature as to prove a *primâ facie* case, what then?"

She asked this question very slowly, looking at him steadily with unflinching eyes.

"Then," he answered as slowly, and with every line of his stern face tense and drawn, "then I fear—I believe, that the person under arrest would be dealt with in the same manner as though legally proved guilty; the accused would doubtless be sent back to the country from which the request for arrest emanated, and where the crime was committed, for trial according to that country's laws."

"I understand," she said, after a moment's absolute silence; "and in this particular case—in my case—that would mean—Petersburg?"

He made no other reply save an assenting gesture of his hand.

For a long interval there was silence between them; a silence in which each was lost to the other's presence, and which was so full of dark meaning, so pregnant with dread possibilities, as to leave upon each like traces to those once impressed indelibly upon the countenance of a saint of old, who for one brief second was permitted to gaze into the bottomless pit of anguish.

Again it was the woman who first broke the silence, and though it was but the lightest whisper it pierced Philip's soul with dismay.

"Petersburg," she murmured, "and that means the mercies of the Imperial Chancellerie!"

"Patty," cried Philip with sudden passion, "this terrible alternative must never come to pass—it must be averted at all costs; do you hear me?—*must* be. You must be frank with me now, as frank as though your last hour had come. Answer me with absolute truth the questions I shall ask. I can only save you if you will save yourself."

She was not slow to read his meaning beneath his words, and the smile that curved her lips was bitter enough as she exclaimed:

"So you doubt me, Philip—you!" Then, with a quick indrawn breath: "Ask any questions you like, I will answer them."

"You know by whom your arrest has been accomplished?" he said quickly, avoiding any definite answer to her reproach.

"Yes, by Count Vladimir Mellikoff."

"And the charge?"

"For being an accomplice in the murder of Count Stevan Lallovich," she answered quietly.

"Did you ever know this Count Stevan Lallovich?"

"Yes."

"Did you know of his murder?"

"Yes."

"Do you know the circumstances connected with it?"

"Yes."

"Will you tell them to me?"

"I had rather not do so—now."

"Very well, let that pass. Did you ever know Count Mellikoff previous to meeting him at the Folly?"

"No, I think not. One meets so many people in the course of one's life; but I am quite sure I had never met Count Mellikoff before."

"Do you know of any reason he might have for enmity against you?"

"No, indeed; none whatever."

"It is very extraordinary," Mr. Tremain continued after this brief colloquy. "I cannot but think there is some other person mixed up in this affair besides Count Mellikoff, some one who has perhaps personal motives to serve in bringing this charge against you. Can you think of any one who has sufficient cause against you to make such a course possible? Any woman, let us say, to whom the blackening of your character would give a vindictive satisfaction?"

"Ah," she replied, with a scornful gesture, and the superiority of a beautiful woman over her plainer sisters, "I cannot follow you there. We all have our feminine enemies without doubt; but who of us can put our finger on the most venomous of them?"

"All the same we must find this one, Patricia; when we find her we shall perhaps unearth the secret of her spleen. I am convinced Count Mellikoff has a woman for his ally."

Miss Hildreth shrugged her shoulders, but made no further reply. Presently, however, she turned a little more towards him, leaning still further across the table, and looking full into his eyes, said, with sudden directness:

"Why do you ask nothing concerning your friend, Adèle Lamien, Philip? Do you not know that she, too, is implicated in this affair?"

"Adèle Lamien!" he exclaimed, taken off his guard by the unexpectedness of the assault. "Good Heavens! what has she to do with all this?"

"Ah, what indeed?" answered Miss Hildreth, slowly. "Fathom her motives, Philip, and you will lay bare the secret of my arrest."

"Patricia," he cried again, strangely moved and excited by her words and manner, and by the sudden return of that vague, intangible influence, evoked by the mere mention of Mdlle. Lamien's name, that had from the first played so distinct a part in his intimacy with her, "Patricia, what do you mean? Explain yourself. What can Adèle Lamien have to do with you?"

"Ah, what indeed?" she answered, in the same measured tones, still looking at him earnestly. "What indeed? All—or nothing,—Philip. Simply that."

"I must know more," he exclaimed, almost roughly. "You must tell me what you mean. I must find her."

"That may prove more difficult than you imagine," answered Miss Hildreth, quietly, and as she said the words, Woods the warder entered, and Philip understood the end of his interview had come.

He got up mechanically and held out his hand. "It is best I should go for a little while," he said. "I will come back again. After all, we have settled very little."

"I should say we had settled a great deal," she answered, with another of those quick, mocking smiles.

Then she bade him good-bye; and it was not until he had walked up the longer half of Broadway,

that Mr. Tremain remembered two things. Patricia had calmly ignored his outstretched hand, and he had forgotten to inquire of the superintendent the nature of Mdlle. Lamien's complicity in the charge brought against Miss Hildreth.

CHAPTER IV.

MIXED MOTIVES.

Mr. Tremain had not been far wrong when he told Esther Newbold that the arrest of so prominent and well-known a person as Miss Hildreth bid fair to develop into an international question.

The charge entered against her was of too grave a nature not to excite and sustain public attention. It certainly appeared to the community at large a very arbitrary and high-handed proceeding that an American citizen could be thus imprisoned at the request of a foreign Government.

Her offence being in no respect a political one, this loophole of escape could not be urged in her favour, for in that case the foreign Government interested in her committal would never have demanded her arrest or expected her surrender into their hands. Doubtless had Miss Hildreth been but a poor workwoman, on whom depended the support of her family, no such strenuous efforts would have been put forth to accomplish her arrest, or a precedence have been created to deal with her position.

But being what she was, and controlling almost unlimited wealth and influence, the case assumed potential proportions, and therefore it was deemed expedient to allow an official inquiry to take place, and to permit the greatest latitude in its operations, even to the calling of witnesses.

To meet this position of affairs great exertions were made on the part of Miss Hildreth's friends, foremost among whom stood Philip Tremain. He had quitted Patricia's presence, at the conclusion of that first interview, as undecided in his own mind as to her guilt or innocence as he had been when he heard of her arrest. Her words, her insinuations, her reticence, had all been so many damning factors against her, while her manner, so light-hearted, so inconsequent, so trivial, were the only elements in her favour.

To Philip, indeed, that very light-heartedness—which he called flippancy—appeared the most suspicious feature of her behaviour. It seemed to him that any woman, no matter how frivolous or hardened, must have given vent to tears and protestations when brought so close to the awful consequences of even supposed guilt; whereas, he found Miss Hildreth even more composed—if that were possible—and more trivial than at their parting in the flies on George Newbold's birthday night.

Good heavens, how long ago that seemed! And what a page of tragedy—or was it melodrama? he had construed since then!

As he walked back to his rooms from Ludlow Street Jail that hot August evening, his mind was very full of Patricia's farewell words:

"Fathom Adèle Lamien's motives, Philip, and you will lay bare the secret of my arrest."

He had, indeed, in the sudden tumult and agitation of Dick Darling's appearance and communication, lost sight of Mdlle. Lamien's claims upon him; nor was it until Patricia spoke with that enigmatical smile that he remembered them, or paused to consider what was likely to be her attitude in the present complication of affairs.

He had neither heard from or of Mdlle. Lamien since their parting, and while he held himself bound to her by honour, he could not help reflecting upon the fact that no actual engagement existed between them, and that she might so regard their equivocal position, and desire him to understand her silence as an expression of her final refusal of his suit. However that might be, he felt matters had reached such a crisis as to make his seeing her an imperative duty, since, by so doing, he might elucidate the true motive for Patricia's arrest. Recalling Adèle Lamien's last words, and the note of victory in her voice—"surely this should be triumph enough, even for me, to know that I have won you from the remembrance, nay, from the very presence of Patricia Hildreth"—he felt more than ever convinced that Vladimir Mellikoff had not only been helped by a woman, but by this very woman.

Had not her own words betrayed her jealousy and dislike of her former rival? What more natural than that she should join issue with Count Mellikoff, and play into his hands, not realising perhaps the nature of the train she set alight, or the gravity of the consequences?

Was she not a Russian, and had not Mellikoff himself enlightened him regarding the system of that secret police, whose ranks were reinforced by members of one's own household! According to the Count's black note-book, the very people who ate your bread, who clasped your hand in friendship, who instructed your children, were, one and all—if Russian—banded against you, and ready to strike at you in the dark at the word of command.

Separated from Mdlle. Lamien, and freed from the dominating influence of her personality, Mr. Tremain realised how little his own volition had had to do with his offer of marriage to her.

In looking back at their interview, it seemed to him he had been possessed by some demon of evil who urged him on to his doom; and under whose specious reasoning and cunning insinuations, his own stronger sense and will had become but passive agents.

How gladly would he not now welcome any honourable means of escape from the light fetters that bound him! He knew this, and acknowledged it frankly; even while he also realised that, were he again to stand before Adèle Lamien, and listen to her low suggestive voice, and look upon her strangely familiar face, he would again yield to her influence as he had yielded before, and be subjugated by that same nameless *something*, to which he had succumbed before. It was not a pleasant position for any man to accept, and yet he was obliged to accept it from its very uncontrovertibility.

He walked all the way from Ludlow Street to his up-town chambers with such reflections for his only companions; it was not to be wondered at, therefore, that he felt himself out of tune with his surroundings, or that the light-hearted gaiety apparent in those he met, whose labours over for the day, were evidently on pleasure bent, jarred upon him as exuberant examples of positive callousness. Just so would they laugh and smile and jest, even though the worst predictions came true; and she, counted guilty, had already set sail across the ocean of destiny to meet her fate—alone, in a land where neither his skill nor his love could avail her anything. He reached his rooms at last, exhausted in body and mind; he found them in the most scrupulous order, Harris, the invaluable, having reduced everything to the level of every-day commonplace. Not a trace of last night's emotional interview remained, even Miss Dick's little glove had been neatly folded and lay upon the table, with the faded rose-bud from her corsage placed on top of it. With a sigh, Mr. Tremain threw himself down upon a couch drawn up against an open window, and passed his hand wearily over his forehead. The silence and coolness and half darkness were absolute rest and refreshment to him after the heat and glaring sunshine, and conflicting experiences of the day; it was a physical relief to sink into a state of semi-apathy and to pass from the tense excitation of feeling into a corresponding insensibility.

Philip could not have told how long he remained in this state of suspended activity; he was aroused at length by the slamming to of the heavy outer door, and with this ordinary sound he reawakened to the exigencies of the immediate situation. He got up wearily and struck a match, not with any definite object in view, but because he felt he must be doing something, and that something could be better accomplished in the light.

The slowly igniting candles on his writing-table threw but a faint aureola into the darkness, sufficient, however, to reveal to Philip's eyes the pile of unopened letters, across the topmost one of which was written that under-scored *immediate*.

He took it up indifferently. "It is Mainwaring's writing," he thought listlessly, and had almost a mind to put it by until a more propitious moment—until he had written that letter to Adèle Lamien demanding an interview, upon the wording of which it had taken him so long to decide. John Mainwaring's communication could not possibly be of such importance as to demand instant attention; it had waited several days as it was, it might wait a few hours longer without disaster.

And so it is with the wisest and most sagacious of us. We pray on bended knees, and with streaming eyes, for one, only one chance, one opportunity more wherein to work out our salvation; and then when the grace is given we reject it because, forsooth, it comes to us in so accustomed and natural a guise we cannot believe in its efficacy.

How should Philip, hesitating and uncertain, holding Mainwaring's letter in his hand, guess that within the long business envelope lay the solution of all that was most enigmatic to him—the key to what was now a locked book to his perceptions?

Do any of us ever know the exact moment when we stand upon a mental precipice, or realise how far our next step may carry us on to our doom?

He broke the seal at last, more from habit than impatience, and glanced carelessly down at the page as he unfolded it. It was not a long letter, only a few lines written hastily across one side; but had it been a printed folio of engrossing depth it could not have riveted Philip's attention more closely. The candles, flaming up with a sudden assured brilliancy, shone full upon his face, and upon the startled, excited, incredulous expression which spread over it as he read.

It was a long time, many moments, that he stood thus, reading and re-reading John Mainwaring's hurried lines, and when at last he raised his head and threw back his shoulders, he took a long deep breath as of one who, but lately spent and exhausted, sees opening before him a fair plain, smiling and verdant, wherein his tired nature may refresh its weary faculties.

"If this is true," he said, half aloud, "why then——" and finished his soliloquy with a smile.

Half an hour later Mr. Tremain was ringing the bell at Mrs. Newbold's door, and somewhat astonished the servant by the vehemence of his demand for her mistress.

"Tell her I must see her," he said, "it is of the utmost importance;" then he pushed by the maid and made his way to Esther's boudoir.

He found the room empty, though traces of late occupancy were apparent in a book tossed

carelessly down on the tumbled cushions of the couch, and a long strip of artistic needlework, in which the needle was standing upright, and a tiny gold thimble, that had fallen down and lay beside a "Kate Greenaway" picture book.

He had scarcely time to note these particulars before the door was opened, and Esther came towards him quickly, looking a little pale and excited, her fair hair tumbled about her face, and the long train of her *négligé* making a slight rustle as she moved. She came close up to him and raised her eyes to his; they caught the reflection of the hopeful gladness therein, and her cheeks flushed suddenly, as she cried, putting out her hand and touching his arm:

"Philip, oh, Philip, you have news—good news?"

Her voice had a ring of expectancy in it that did not escape Philip.

"Esther," he replied, looking down at her steadily, and speaking gravely, "I have come to you at this late hour for one reason only—to ask you one question. Will you be frank and honest in your answer?"

"Ah," she exclaimed, "there are both reproach and reflection in your words. Ask me the question first, Philip, and judge of my veracity by my reply."

She turned and walked to the couch, seated herself, and, taking up the strip of embroidery, examined it attentively.

Mr. Tremain followed her.

"It is all very well, your trying to parry my thrust, Esther; but it is useless. I shall oblige you to give me a direct answer."

He drew up a chair as he spoke, and, as he sat down, took from his pocket a note-case.

"Will you oblige me by reading this letter?" he said, handing her Mainwaring's communication.

She took it with a deprecatory shrug of her shoulders, and read the few lines it contained with an absolutely expressionless face.

"Well?" asked Philip, after several moments had passed.

"Well?" she echoed, folding the letter with exactness and handing it back to him, but avoiding his eyes.

"Esther," he said, bending forward and forcing her to look at him, "Esther, the news contained in that letter is no news to you."

Still she did not reply; she had again taken up the strip of embroidery, and her fingers trembled a little as she drew out the needle. Mr. Tremain put out his hand and took it from her.

"My dear Esther," he said once more, in the same measured tones he had used from his first greeting of her, "you can at least answer a direct question. Did you know of this before?"

"Since you put it in that way—yes," she replied.

"For how long—all the time?"

"Yes, all the time."

"And you have kept it to yourself—why?"

But to this she made no answer.

"Why did you keep it from me?" he asked, more sternly. "Do you think you had any right to do so?"

"Yes, I do," she answered, quickly, stung by the reproach in his voice. "I think so still. A promise should always be sacred."

"A promise—and to whom?"

"If you consider that a necessary question, I do not," she answered, with a touch of asperity in her voice. "You surely have lost somewhat of your customary acumen, Philip, to ask it."

"Then let me put it in another form," he replied, not in the least disturbed by her show of temper. "Did you promise—*her*?"

She looked at him for a moment, before she spoke, and the rebellious blood dyed her cheeks scarlet, her blue eyes flashed.

"I am not compelled to answer you," she said mutinously, "but I will do so. Yes, I promised *her*."

"But why, Esther, why? What induced you to make so absurd a promise? And, having made it, why, when such extraordinary circumstances arose, did you still keep your lips closed? Why did you not tell me that evening, when I came to you, and when you were in such grief and anxiety? Surely you must have known it would have greatly simplified matters."

But Mrs. Newbold was obstinately silent. She shut her lips firmly together and looked at Philip beneath a decided frown.

"Do you mean to tell me," he continued, a trifle impatiently, "that you could believe such a matter was not of vital importance? Do answer me, Esther, I beg; what motive can I have save to help ___"

"Oh, if you will look at it in that light," interrupted Mrs. Newbold, quickly, "why then I must say, I don't see what great difference your having known this would have made. It couldn't stop the arrest, you know."

"I know nothing of the kind," he replied shortly; "I am not at all sure that it might not have done so. It is always far more difficult to rectify a blunder than to prevent one. I cannot but feel that you have treated me badly in this matter, Esther; at such a time and under such circumstances the utmost candour should have been shown."

He did not speak angrily, but with so much of sadness in his voice, Esther felt compunction stealing over her and absorbing her late vehemence and impatience.

"I should much prefer your being angry with me, Philip," she said, wistfully, "or that you shook me; it's much more awful to see you look so hurt and pained. But can't you believe me, can't you understand? It was her wish—her demand—from the very beginning. She made me solemnly swear that no one should know—least of all—you."

"Ah, yes—I least of all," he replied, half sadly. "Very well, my dear Esther, I will ask you no more questions. You shall not be tempted further to break your promise. Let us only hope that this unfortunate secrecy may not in the end prove our greatest stumbling-block. I do not see the way any clearer before me because of this unexpected document, but I shall do my best to use it to our advantage. After all, what a truly womanly bit of *finesse* it was—and is!"

As Philip spoke the door was again thrown open, and Dick Darling came in, followed by little Marianne carrying a basket filled with roses. She ran up to her mother, holding out the basket to her, and crying:

"They've only just come, Mumsey. Perkins brought them up himself. Oh, they do smell puffedly 'licious!"

Esther took the flowers from her little daughter's hand.

"You can guess whom they are for," she said to Philip, smiling a little. "Dick and I intend taking them early to-morrow morning."

Mr. Tremain took up one of the fragrant blossoms, and, bending down towards Esther, said, in a half undertone:

"And is Miss Dick also a sharer in this secret?"

Esther shook her head.

"Not through me," she answered.

"And Mainwaring, how did he become a conspirator?"

"I do not know," she replied, looking down again. "I do not know—how should I?"

He made no answer for a moment, during which his eyes never left the downcast face before him.

"Good-bye," he said simply, at last, and including Miss Darling in his leave-taking by a half bow, passed out of the room, carrying the red rose-bud with him.

It was a distinct source of pleasure to him, as he contemplated the little flower, to remember for whom its sister roses were destined. The tiny blood-red blossom seemed to put him in touch once more with his old life—that life which antedated his visit to the Folly—when Adèle Lamien was still unknown to him.

CHAPTER V.

A WOMAN'S LOGIC.

The first check experienced by Count Mellikoff in the fulfilment of his well-laid plans, was one of which he took but slight account.

In calling into action the machinery of the law, and thereby obtaining the warrant for Miss Hildreth's arrest, he overlooked one point. He had designedly delayed this summary action until such a moment, when knowing the Newbolds and Mr. Tremain to be well out of his way, he could proceed without apprehension of interference on their part.

He was quite well aware that to act against their combined forces would be a far more serious undertaking than to attack Miss Hildreth alone and unbefriended. But could he once accomplish her arrest, he believed that here in America, as in Russia, he had only to demand an official inquiry, as a matter of form, and it would at once be granted; at which inquiry, trusting to the strength of his evidence, he foresaw her immediate committal for trial, and expected by the time

the *beau monde* were returning to New York, and before a cabal could be raised in Miss Hildreth's behalf, to be already on his way to Petersburg with his prisoner, about whose subsequent fate, when once she was handed over to the Imperial Chancellerie, he had no need to concern himself.

Then he would be free to seek Olga, and, laying his love and his life at her feet, demand that reward for the sake of which she had persuaded him to undertake this mission. Patouchki also would be convinced of his loyalty by this last signal service in the Emperor's behalf; and even the Tsar himself might bestow a further distinction upon him; one ribbon more, perhaps, to swell the number of those upon which his beautiful Olga set such store.

And, indeed, so far fortune had favoured him and his plans; up to a certain time events marched according as he directed. The warrant was obtained; Miss Hildreth was arrested; and, save John Mainwaring, none of her special friends were in town to stand by her or act in her defence. On Mainwaring, Count Mellikoff bestowed not a thought; he had not even seen him in the crowd of transient guests at the Folly, and his name was suggestive of nothing.

The matter of an immediate official inquiry, however, was not so easily managed. Count Mellikoff found countless obstacles to overcome, raised by that very organ, the law, which so far he had played upon to his own purpose. Innumerable technicalities and difficulties were for ever cropping up, resulting in unheard-of delays. Even Mellikoff's patience gave way at last, and he anathematised the entire Western continent, its institutions and customs, in language more forcible than polite. Despite of his choler, however, Vladimir Mellikoff was obliged to swallow his wrath, and bear with what patience he could muster, that most difficult of all trials—enforced inaction.

Meantime he heard again from Patouchki, and the tone of his letter was such as to create a fever of anxiety and unrest, that threatened to prostrate him mentally and physically. From Olga Naundorff he received neither word nor sign.

And so the long, hot days came and went, and by none of the waiting actors in that life-drama were they ever forgotten in the years that followed.

To Patricia, Philip, Esther, Dick Darling, Vladimir Mellikoff, and Rosalie James, each sunrise brought but an increasing weight of torturing anxiety; each nightfall was fraught with an additional burden of suspense.

Within the week after his return, Mr. Tremain had another interview with Miss Hildreth. He found her in the same half flippant, half rebellious mood that had so angered him at their last meeting. He stayed with her for more than an hour, during which she remained as adamant to all his arguments, entreaties, prayers. He left her at last in anger, and with hot words of passion as his farewell.

"You force me to draw my own conclusions," he said. "It would be more reasonable if you would give me ever so foolish a motive as your reason for denying the truth of the assertion contained in this letter." He struck John Mainwaring's offending epistle as he spoke. "Once more, Patricia, will you, or will you not, acknowledge this affirmation as true?"

She had grown very pale under the lash of his ill-concealed anger; but she gave no other sign either of embarrassment or yielding, and when she answered she looked him straight in the eyes, and spoke without a falter in her clear musical voice:

"I have nothing to say, Philip. Mr. Mainwaring is the best person for you to apply to for confirmation, since he has made the statement."

"And that is all you have to tell me—all you will tell me?" he asked, his voice reflecting the doubt and pain of his mind. "At least, Patricia, since I know on what grounds Count Mellikoff will seek to justify your arrest, you might confide the truth to me. Are you, or are you not——"

"My dear Philip," she broke in hastily, the colour rushing to her face in a sudden overwhelming torrent, "cannot you see what I am?—is not that enough? Why should you try to solve Vladimir Mellikoff's motives? It is he who has brought this charge against me, let him prove its validity."

"And Mainwaring?" he asked, slowly, looking at her keenly.

"Mr. Mainwaring shall answer to me for his officiousness," she replied, quietly.

"And this is all you have to say, Patricia? This is all you will tell me?"

"Yes, that is all I have to say," she answered.

And at her reply he turned from her abruptly and left her; nor did he again seek an interview with her during the few days that remained before her quasi-trial.

Philip could not but contrast the emotions with which he had sought this meeting, with those which overwhelmed him at its close. John Mainwaring's letter had apparently opened the way to a satisfactory unravelling of the tangled skein, and it was with a full belief in the solution thus presented, that he had gone to Patricia, and begged for a more explicit explanation than that suggested in Mainwaring's statement. He believed also, that at last he had fathomed Mdlle. Lamien's part in the transaction, and the secret of her power over him; he had already accused her of being Count Mellikoff's accomplice, and now he thought he saw how it was that all

unconsciously she played advantageously into his hands.

It needed but a word from Patricia to reduce his theory to reality; but this word Miss Hildreth declined to pronounce, nor could he force from her any admission upon which he could establish his hypothesis. The only outcome of his interview with her was a return to the old uncertainty and doubt that had made his life a torture for so many days.

To the great surprise of every one, Mr. Tremain did not appear as Miss Hildreth's solicitor, nor, indeed, take any active part in her behalf. It was John Mainwaring who was selected by Patricia as her adviser, and to John Mainwaring she opened her whole heart; holding nothing back, and in no way excusing or exonerating herself for the part she had played in the plot, that bid fair to develop all the characteristics of tragedy before its termination. She bound the young lawyer by the most solemn of promises not to reveal certain portions of her confession, although the consequences of his secrecy might be the worst possible for her. And Mainwaring, being a man of quick sympathies and ardent chivalry, had, under the spell of her beauty and her emotion, passed his word of honour to use only such particulars of her statement, in her support, as she should designate.

"I think you are mistaken," he had said, after urging a greater latitude upon her, "I cannot say how far your reticence may not tell against you. I wish you would be quite frank with me, Miss Hildreth, or rather let me be on your behalf. I don't believe you half realise the gravity of your position, or how terrible the result may be for you should I fail to overthrow the validity of the warrant. You see a certain amount of complicity we must acknowledge, since we cannot set up an *alibi*, and that will go just so much against you if I may not show the context. Won't you reconsider, Miss Hildreth, or let me take another opinion upon the matter?"

"No," she answered with decision, "I cannot reconsider. It is impossible. Only think in what a position it would place him were I to allow you to proclaim my miserable attitude. No, be the consequences what they may, I have brought sorrow and shame enough upon Philip Tremain through my influence, I will not disgrace him publicly by having my weakness dragged out to the light of day. You have given me your word, Mr. Mainwaring. I have no fear of your breaking it, and I do not care for any second opinion. I must stand or fall by the line of argument we have marked out between us."

And from this decision he could not move her.

After he left her, Miss Hildreth sat for a long time quite still and motionless. The slow heavy tears gathered in her eyes and fell down her cheeks unnoticed and unchecked; the sobs, deep weary sobs, burst now and then from her brave heart; and at last, as the evening shadows lengthened into night, and all about her became wrapt in soft impalpable darkness, she fell upon her knees, bowing her proud head to the ground, and praying as she had never prayed before; entreating forgiveness for her wilful pride, her cruel selfishness, her obdurate egotism, through which, not she only had been brought to so terrible an alternative, but he whom she loved bid fair to be dragged down with her in her fall.

"No, no, no," she cried aloud, clasping her hands together and throwing them outward in a passionate gesture of entreaty, "I will never give in. I will never confess the shameful part I have taken in this deception. I will never, my poor Philip, by word or sign permit one slight or sneer to fall on you through me. If I have failed in everything else, I will not fail in this. At least, I have courage and endurance left, I am not afraid but that they will stand me in good stead; and should the very worst consequences fall upon me, I deserve them all. Yes, every individual item, in that horrible possibility of which he spoke, is not too much for me to bear in punishment. Oh, Philip, Philip, to think I should be the one to bring the disgrace upon you of biting scorn, and evil laughter, and venomous tongues! I, who love you, and yet whose love can point to no higher achievement than this!"

CHAPTER VI.

A QUESTION OF COMITY.

The morning of the fateful 15th of September dawned at last; and long before the hour fixed for the official inquiry, the court-room was filled to overflowing by a crowd gathered from every grade of Society, to each member of which the arrest and possible fate of so prominent a person as Patricia Hildreth assumed a special and individual importance.

The very secrecy and mystery that had surrounded the case from the outset, and the reticence of the Press regarding it—usually so garrulous and self-opinionated—served only to whet the sensation-loving appetite of the community. The examination being held in open court, any one was free to enter, and to exercise that naïve candour of criticism and good-natured interference in other people's affairs peculiarly American. Not a member of the assemblage but was cognisant of the case in all its details, or who could not, at a moment's notice, reel off a synopsis of its peculiar features, embracing the names, social standing, personal incomes, and general habits of the persons most implicated in it.

The Folly, the *Deerhound*, and Esther Newbold, as the mistress of both, were fully canvassed,

together with Miss Darling's openly expressed anger at being detained by the accusing party to give special evidence, and Mr. Tremain's extraordinary conduct in refusing to act as Miss Hildreth's solicitor; while Patricia's private life, her jewels, wealth, and beauty, were scarcely more absorbing topics than were the treachery, blackheartedness and ingratitude of Vladimir Mellikoff; who, having been received with such cordial hospitality, returned it in so evil and back-handed a fashion.

A strong party of Patricia's friends occupied prominent places, among whom were George Newbold, Sir Piers Tracey, Freddy Slade, and Jack Howard, further enforced by a feminine contingent of the *super-chics*, to whom a morning spent in a court of inquiry, of which they formed, as it were, an independent jury, to decide upon the guilt or innocence of one of their own sex and order, offered too new a sensation to be despised in this age of satiated experience. They came, therefore, arrayed in the most exquisite of costumes, and bringing with them their individual fads and fancies in the way of salts, eau-de-cologne, and fans. They rustled into their places with the same arrogance and assurance with which they distinguished a "first night" at Wallack's or the opera, and, raising their long tortoise-shell handled *pince-nezs* with elaborate superciliousness, gazed at the gathering crowd with the same indifference as they inspected the unfamiliar face of an aspirant to histrionic fame whose success was still in embryo.

Patricia Hildreth had indeed no severer tribunal to stand before than these butterflies of the hour, who were equally ready to bestow upon her smiles, congratulations, and assurances of their undeviating fidelity, or scoffs and jeers of objugation—none the less defamatory because spoken in soft tones and with downcast eyes—according as the decision was given for or against her.

As the great clock in the tower of the City Hall struck ten, echoed by all the lesser clocks of the neighbourhood, the little crowd of black-coated lawyers and attorneys, that filled the space between the bench and a certain railed off space, within which a chair had been placed, separated, the different members taking their places to right and left of the official bench set apart for the District Judge, before whom Patricia Hildreth was to stand arraigned, by virtue of arrest, on a charge of murder. It was understood, of course, that the proceedings were in a manner informal; the inquiry purported to deal solely with the validity of the warrant issued against Miss Hildreth, and did not in any sense partake of the nature of a trial; that, should Count Mellikoff substantiate the arrest, would take place in St. Petersburg, before a Russian tribunal. Nevertheless, to all those concerned in the case, and to the onlookers, this official inquiry was regarded in the light of a trial, especially since, owing to the gravity of the circumstances, witnesses were to be allowed on both sides.

John Mainwaring's dark, clean-shaven face wore a somewhat anxious expression as he bent down towards George Newbold and spoke earnestly to him. Mr. Tremain, Esther, and Miss Darling were not present in the court-room; later they were to be called to give evidence. Count Mellikoff was there, however, looking very pale but perfectly self-possessed, his deep-set burning eyes flashing looks of disdain upon the unfriendly crowd, whose hostile expressions did not fail to reach his ears.

As his solicitor Vladimir had engaged Peter Munger, one of the most famous members of the Bar, whose name alone was supposed to ensure success. He was a large man, with a forbidding forehead and an offensive smile; and his very aggressiveness was popularly supposed to weigh heavily with the Bench.

He spoke very little to any one, but scowled darkly upon Mainwaring, and muttered a rather unprofessional expletive beneath his breath, against his opponent's youth and inexperience.

"I had rather it had been Tremain," he had growled out to Count Mellikoff, when first apprised of the name of Patricia's solicitor, "it's worth my while to beat *him*; but that youngster—bah!" And out flew a shower of little chewed-up quids of paper, which it was the great man's habit to indulge in as a break-water to the more pernicious tobacco.

Count Mellikoff had shrugged his shoulders and held out his hands in deprecation, but made no other reply, upon which the giant snorted out something not over polite regarding foreigners, which Vladimir felt it was wiser not to notice.

As the last stroke of the hour died upon the air a moment's silence fell upon the assembly, and in that silence the peal of old Trinity's bells rang out, calling the worshippers to morning service. Vladimir, as he listened to the deep peal, thought of Petersburg, and found himself waiting involuntarily for the victorious pæan, "How glorious is our God in Zion," which in his country followed the striking of the hour, drowning the sadder notes of the *Miserere*.

But the bells ceased, and with their final chord of aerial music the small door behind the official bench was thrown open, and the legal *cortège* entered and took their seats in a silence that was absolute, save for the throbbing of the air stirred by the expectant breathing of the waiting crowd.

Judge Anstice, the District Judge for New York, was eminently imposing both in person and manner. He was unusually tall, with an intellectual head, a face of much power and kindness, and a reputation for leniency whenever compatible with a strict observance of justice. It was to him that both John Mainwaring and Mr. Tremain looked instinctively for sympathy, though knowing him to be before all things a strict disciplinarian in all points pertaining to his profession. He was, moreover, a popular favourite with the public, who hailed his appearance

with subdued satisfaction.

The half murmur of applause which greeted Judge Anstice developed into decided expressions of excitement as a tall, slight figure advanced, piloted up the narrow aisle by a policeman, and shown into the railed off space before the Bench. The new-comer was Patricia Hildreth, and the hush of expectation, that followed close upon the audible comments called forth by her appearance, became breathless, as, with a firm step and upright bearing, she took the place indicated and stood for a moment confronting her accusers.

Her beautiful face was colourless, her blue eyes looked black and luminous beneath the dark brows, her lips were resolutely closed, with just a touch of defiance in the firm set curves. She was dressed plainly in black, and she wore no veil.

It had never been Miss Hildreth's custom to hide her beauty when most triumphant; why should she do so now in the hour of her extremity?

It was intimated to her that she was at liberty to sit down, and with a slight bend of her proud head she availed herself of the permission.

Mr. Munger opened the proceedings with a short and technical explanation as to the nature and purport of the warrant of arrest, the issuing of which had been formally requested by the Russian Government, and acceded to by that of the United States, not as a matter of absolute right, but through that comity of nations by which the relationships existing between two great powers were kept intact and justly balanced. The warrant thus issued had been executed upon the person of Patricia Hildreth, *alias* Adèle Lamien, *alias* Adèle Lallovich, on the charge of her having been an accomplice in the murder of Stevan Lallovich, which occurred at St. Petersburg in the month of December last. The investigation of this warrant was what they had before them now, and in so doing he would first call attention to the point of nationality, since upon this point very much depended. Should Miss Hildreth, or rather should Adèle Lamien, prove to be a Muscovite subject, the American authorities could have but one course open to them, namely, to surrender her to the Russian officials, and let her be put upon trial in the country, and according to the laws, where the crime was committed.

A like course had been adopted by another foreign Power, when the United States was the petitioner, and the offender a political criminal. Spain had at once delivered up this fugitive from justice,^[1] though not legally compelled to do so, and the offender was brought to trial solely through the courtesy of a foreign Government. Having then this case as a precedent, it would, according to national honour, be impossible to refuse a like amenity in the present instance. As the Bench was aware, the circumstances in the case now before them were of so extraordinary a nature, it had been deemed wise to allow of evidence being given, a course entirely at variance with the usual procedure in such cases. Special emergencies, however, required special treatment. But before he availed himself of the privilege thus accorded, he would call the attention of the Bench to a few of the peculiarities of this case, by which it would be seen how weighty and grave were the reasons which led to the demand and the issuing of the warrant.

In his opinion there had never been a more deliberately planned and executed murder than that of Count Stevan Lallovich, nor one in which greater skill and *finesse* had been displayed, both before and after the perpetration of it. It was needless for him to tell the Bench who the lady purported to be that stood accused before them; her name and her position were far too well known and defined to require any blazoning forth by him. His task was the more unpleasant one of proving that this Patricia Hildreth had no right to her recognised patronymic, since she, under the name of Adèle Lamien, had contracted a marriage with Count Stevan Lallovich, and had subsequently consented to, and participated in, the murder of the same Stevan Lallovich. It was owing to these exceptional features that the warrant had been issued against her, and he submitted to his honour that the papers of arrest would be found regular on all these points.

Having gone thus far, Mr. Munger paused and threw an imperative glance at the Judge and auditors collectively; it was plainly evident that his statement had made a decided impression.

The public interest in the case had been pronounced enough even when but little of its real nature had been revealed, and now, when the true aspect of the charge was exposed, and Patricia Hildreth stood stripped of all protection, even that afforded her by her name and position, and was openly branded not only as a murderer, but as a wilful impostor and adventuress, the excitement reached fever heat, and not one pair of all those hundreds of watching eyes but were turned upon the proud beautiful face of the accused woman; that face never faltered nor winced beneath their gaze, eager though they were to note the first sign or expression of fear upon it.

After this scarcely perceptible pause, Mr. Munger took up his theme again, and in incisive phrases, with rough eloquence, told the story of the brilliant, dissolute, captivating Russian noble, Stevan Lallovich; painting his character in forcible lights and deep shadows; dwelling strongly on his blood connection with the Muscovite Emperor, his life at Court, the unstinted adulation poured upon him, the continuous round of success that attended his every caprice; until it became an article of belief in his circle that he had but to express a wish, or whisper a desire, and the fulfilment of it was accomplished without the asking. Like Jove of old, did he but nod his head his whole world trembled, or smile and they rejoiced. With great skill the able pleader brought down his narrative to ten years ago, when, as he said, with a disagreeable smile, Miss Hildreth, then in the full glory of her exceptional beauty, had left her native country—he would

not suggest under what circumstances—and for the greater part of those succeeding ten years had been an independent wanderer over the European continent, answerable to no one; concerning her experiences during those ten years Miss Hildreth was known to be obstinately reticent. They had her admission, however, as he would show later, of her having been in St. Petersburg a part of that time, and also of her having known Count Stevan Lalloovich. The date of her acknowledged visit to Petersburg comprised the month before and the very day of Count Stevan's murder. She returned to America early in February, the crime having been committed in the December previous.

It was a well-known fact among Count Lalloovich's friends, that about a year before his ill-fated death he had become so infatuated by the extreme beauty of a foreign lady—foreign in the sense of her not being a Muscovite subject—as to marry her according to the ceremonies of the Roman Catholic Church, which Church, not holding communion with the Greek religion, is looked upon in Russia as schismatic. After a few months of retired felicity the affair became known to the Tsar, who revoked the marriage by Imperial ukase, and recalled Count Stevan to Petersburg; the unfortunate lady was thus turned adrift, with her character ruined, and her personality numbered among the many suspects, over whom the Chancellerie keeps so close a watch.

On the morning of the 28th of December, Count Stevan Lalloovich was found murdered in his own palace, stabbed through the heart. The assassin had left behind no more tangible proof of identity than was contained in a small handkerchief, evidently dropped in the haste of flight, marked across one corner in embroidered letters *A. de L.*; above these letters the initials *P. H.* had been carelessly written in ink. The handkerchief was that of a woman, and was traced as belonging to Adèle Lamien, or de Lalloovich, Count Stevan's repudiated wife. Suspicion fell naturally upon this woman, a suspicion which soon became assurance; but she, with consummate cunning, eluded every effort put forth for her apprehension, and finally escaped to America, landing in New York some time within the month of February last.

It would be understood that in so grave and terrible a crime, where the victim was a member of the Imperial Russian family, no efforts would be spared to track and find the perpetrator of the deed. From positive and unimpeachable evidence the Chancellerie had reason to believe the assassin to be in the United States, and they accordingly authorised Count Vladimir Mellikoff, a member of the Tsar's household, to act as their agent in the matter; and he it was who in the furtherance of this work had traced the criminal link by link, and bit by bit, until he was able to lodge such information before the proper authorities in this country as resulted in the arrest of Patricia Hildreth; who now, as Adèle Lamien, or Lalloovich, stands accused of her husband's murder.

"That, your honour," summed up Mr. Munger, "is my statement. To prove the regularity of the warrant, and the validity of the evidence upon which it was issued, I propose first to show that the lady calling herself Patricia Hildreth is, *in propria personâ*, Adèle Lalloovich, and that by her marriage with Stevan Lalloovich, she became *de facto* a Russian subject, and is therefore answerable to Russian authority. To do this, I will avail myself of the precedent established for this case, by taking informal evidence upon it. I will therefore ask Count Mellikoff to come forward."

[1] The late Mr. W. M. Tweed.

CHAPTER VII.

NON-COMMITTAL.

As Vladimir Mellikoff stepped out from the group of men surrounding him and took the place indicated by Mr. Munger, a low murmur of disapproval surged up from the highly wrought crowd of listeners and onlookers, at the sound of which his colourless face flushed, for one brief second, while the dark eyes in the cavernous sockets gleamed intemperately, and the mouth beneath the dark beard and moustache tightened visibly.

He gave his evidence quietly and dispassionately, but with great deliberation, his restless eyes glancing now at Miss Hildreth's calm, unmoved face, now at John Mainwaring's dark, shapely, outlined countenance, and back again to Mr. Munger's beetling brow and heavy frown.

Each word he uttered told with distinct force against Patricia, and gathering confidence as he went on, Count Vladimir carried the wavering opinions of the public with him.

Able interrogated, he proved the presence of Miss Hildreth in St. Petersburg at the time of Count Stevan's murder, her acquaintance with him, and her precipitate and mysterious flight from the Russian capital the morning after the perpetration of the crime. He next proved that a lady, calling herself Adèle Lamien, had taken passage and sailed in a steamship of the International Line from London for New York; that, on the ship's arrival at the latter port, Miss Hildreth was found to be among the passengers, while Adèle Lamien was missing. Miss Hildreth's friends were kept in ignorance of her arrival for several days, and when questioned regarding her sudden and unexpected return, she displayed the greatest reticence.

He, Vladimir Mellikoff, had arrived in New York somewhat later in the same month of February,

but, owing to various causes of delay, he made no progress in his mission for several weeks; and, while waiting the further development of events, he had accepted an invitation extended to him by Mr. George Newbold, to pay him a visit at his country-house, the Folly, on Staten Island. The first evening of his arrival he met Miss Hildreth, and from something in her manner, he was led to observe her closely; these observations resulted in the conviction that she was playing a part, which it was vitally important she should succeed in. An unexpected clue to her secret had fallen into his hands that very evening; he had found beneath Miss Hildreth's chair, when she and the house party had withdrawn for the rehearsal, a fine cambric handkerchief, edged with lace and embroidered in a monogram, *A. de L.*; the very counterpart, in fact, of the one left by the criminal in her precipitate flight from the rooms of the murdered Stevan Lalloovich, the only point of difference being that the one now in his possession did not have the written initials *P. H.* upon it.

He next drew attention to the presence at the Folly of a person calling herself Adèle Lamien, who filled the position of governess to Mr. Newbold's little daughter. He, personally, had not met Mdlle. Lamien during his visit; but others had done so who would prove her identity with the lady before them. He had, however, been witness to an interview between Mdlle. Lamien and Mr. Philip Tremain, during which Mr. Tremain made no secret of his knowledge concerning that lady's past life. He had also in his possession a note addressed to Miss Darling, one of the young lady guests at the Folly, signed Adèle Lamien, written on paper bearing the Lalloovich crest, and dated the 3rd of May; the very evening on which Miss Hildreth was said to have arrived at the Folly.

During all of Count Mellikoff's narration, Patricia never once took her eyes from his dark, inscrutable face; she watched him with the same expressionless countenance which she had worn from the opening of the inquiry. But at the mention of the interview between Adèle Lamien and Philip Tremain her face changed perceptibly, a wave of emotion passed over it as she turned her troubled eyes appealingly towards John Mainwaring. Then the mask of impenetrability settled over it again, and she sat immovable, her hands clasped together on her lap, her head thrown back in proud defiance.

Count Mellikoff's further statements were purely technical, and related chiefly to his position in Russia, his credibility, authority, etc., all of which were vouched for by the Russian Ambassador.

As Vladimir resumed his seat, a low murmur of disapproval escaped from the crowd, a murmur promptly subdued, but that told of the growing excitement. Mr. Munger, on hearing its threatening notes, tossed back his head with a snort of defiance, and called up his next witness with prompt alacrity.

As the slight, thin figure of Rosalie James appeared in answer to Mr. Munger's call, another change passed rapidly across Patricia's face, her lips curled slightly, while into her eyes there flashed a look of comprehension. Had not Philip hinted at some hidden woman enemy; some one to whom she, Patricia, had given cause for anger, for retaliation, for revenge? And had not this girl, with the sharply outlined face, always held aloof from her? Had she not often found those keen, observant eyes fixed upon her with the same scrutiny with which they now regarded her? She had put Mr. Tremain's supposition by as not worth consideration; she saw now how important had been its bearing, for in Rosalie James she recognised, with a woman's quick perception, her most pronounced and calculating enemy. And with this certainty came another.

This girl loved Philip, and knowing her passion to be hopeless, she had sought out, with the unflinching prescience of slighted love, the woman who was her rival, hoping that in striking at her she would also wound the man who had rejected her. Love is proverbially cruel, none knew this truth better than Miss Hildreth; it was, therefore, with a strange illogical sympathy that she listened to Miss James's defamation of her.

Rosalie spoke in her usual high pitched voice, every note of which carried her words into the furthest corners of the crowded room. Under Mr. Munger's manipulation she gave a condensed and telling account of her instrumentality in the arrest of Miss Hildreth. In substance it was as follows.

She had been a guest at the Folly at the same time as Patricia, and had taken part in the same theatricals, though not in the same play. She had often heard Miss Hildreth discussed before she met her, and from what had been said had formed no very high opinion of that lady's character. Miss Hildreth was always singularly reticent concerning her experiences during her residence abroad. She had only once heard her make any voluntary allusion to her visit to St. Petersburg, and that was on the morning of the 4th of May, when some of the house party were gathered together in Mrs. Newbold's boudoir. Miss Hildreth had then related a curious tale; she had not actually detailed the murder of Count Stevan Lalloovich, but she had alluded to it very pertinently and with great excitement of manner. She had also distinctly named Adèle Lalloovich as the victim of a moral crime, and had intimated the form of her revenge.

To her, Miss Hildreth had from the first appeared as a woman with a secret, and she had determined to fathom that secret. She had her reasons for doing so, they were purely personal reasons. She had, from the first day of her arrival at the Folly, heard a great deal about Adèle Lamien. She had seen her once or twice, but had paid little attention to her, noticing only that she shunned observation and kept as much in the background as possible. On the arrival of Mr. Tremain, however, Mdlle. Lamien apparently lost her shyness, for she, Miss James, had several times seen them together, and had once discovered the governess in a state of great agitation.

She had not liked Mdlle. Lamien at any time, and believed her quite capable of the most flagrant deception. Mrs. Newbold had been remonstrated with for her credulity, and on one such occasion she had related to her guests an extraordinary story, which purported to be that of her governess, and which was substantially that of Adèle Lallovich, as told by Count Mellikoff; the details and make-up differed somewhat, and the murder of Count Stevan was not touched upon, but the main features were the same. Mr. Tremain was present on the occasion, and it had occurred to her at the time that Mrs. Newbold had some covert meaning in her recitation; at all events Mr. Tremain seemed much moved by it. Mdlle. Lamien was not at the dinner-table when her story was discussed.

She had first suspected Miss Hildreth and Mdlle. Lamien of being one and the same person, from a hint thrown out by Count Mellikoff. She had previously remarked that Mdlle. Lamien and Miss Hildreth were never present at the same time, and on the evening of Miss Hildreth's arrival, it was given out that Mdlle. Lamien had suddenly been called away. It was not long before these suspicions became assurances; she could not form an opinion as to the motives for the deception being practised upon them all; she had no previous acquaintance with Miss Hildreth, consequently she could not vouch absolutely for her identity; but in any case it was plain that the lady passing under that name had some desperate motive for doing so.

It was not until the last day of Mr. Tremain's visit at the Folly that the nature of this intrigue was made plain. The theatricals took place on the evening of the 4th of May, Mr. Newbold's birthday; on the following morning Mr. Tremain announced his departure for that afternoon. About half-past four she and Count Mellikoff were seated on the stone terrace beneath the library windows; they did not observe any one enter the room until close on to five o'clock, when Mr. Tremain came in, walked first up to the book-cases and then passed on into the music-room, which was separated by *portières* only from the library. She and the Count remained a few moments longer on the terrace, and then entered the library by one of the open French windows; as they did so a sudden exclamation from the inner room arrested them, and they thus became the listeners to a very remarkable interview between Mr. Tremain and Adèle Lamien, during which Mdlle. Lamien played and sang in a manner which seemed to greatly affect Mr. Tremain. At the close of the song he had offered himself to Mdlle. Lamien, and this had called forth from her a confused and rambling statement, in which she hinted at crime and shame being not unknown to her. Mr. Tremain's ardour, however, had not been daunted by these equivocal innuendoes; he pressed her for an answer, and Mdlle. Lamien had at last accepted him conditionally. The interview terminated by Mdlle. Lamien exclaiming, excitedly: "Surely this should be triumph enough, even for me, to know that I have won you from the remembrance, nay, from the very presence, of Patricia Hildreth!"

She had thought them remarkable words at the time; but they assumed a still greater significance when Mdlle. Lamien pushed back the *portières* and, walking rapidly across the library, turned as she reached the open door and looked back. Believing herself to be alone, she let the mask of deception fall from her, and, despite all disguise of paint and powder, they recognised in the countenance thus turned towards them, smiling and triumphant, the face of Patricia Hildreth!

Miss James gave her evidence throughout in so calm and assured a manner, and in such cold and concise sentences, as to admit of no interruption and impress the seal of unimpeachable truth on all she said. Both her face and voice were hard and impassive; but, notwithstanding her pronounced, unsympathetic attitude, she carried weight with her, and reduced the majority of wavering opinions into affirmative antagonism against Patricia.

Looked at through the medium of Count Mellikoff's and Miss James's statements, that lady's conduct did indeed appear not only perplexing but condemning.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DAMAGING PROMISE.

With the close of Miss James's testimony, the noon recess was called, and to the relief of every one the mental strain and tension was laid aside for an hour.

Miss Hildreth walked out of the court-room with the same firm tread and upright bearing with which she had entered it; Judge Anstice disappeared through a private door, and his withdrawal was followed by the instantaneous appearance, on every side, of sandwich-boxes and lunch-baskets. The ladies under George Newbold's escort regaled themselves on chickens' wings and "cup;" the humbler crowd making audible comments thereon over their humbler fare.

The silence was broken by a Babel of voices all raised to concert pitch, all going together, and all discussing volubly the events of the morning.

The public pulse stood at fever height, and public opinion, with its usual consistency, was veering round in favour of Vladimir Mellikoff. Miss Hildreth had been chief favourite when the inquiry opened, but Miss Hildreth's chances for keeping that position looked scarcely favourable now, judging from public expressions.

The refreshment hour passed all too quickly, and with the prompt return of Judge Anstice, the crowd settled itself down, re-nerved and fortified, for the long afternoon's work that evidently lay before it.

Once more Miss Hildreth took her place within the railed-off space, and those nearest to her were quick to perceive the additional pallor of her face, and the troubled look in her dark blue eyes.

Almost imperceptibly the *modus operandi* of this informal inquiry had assumed the proportions and importance of a legal trial; and so exceptional and perplexing were the circumstances surrounding the case, the usual manner of procedure was tacitly waived, and the investigation carried on on broader lines. The dramatic element so predominated, it insensibly bore both the Bench and the crowd along with it, breaking down all ordinary barriers of legal treatment.

The stipulated point at issue was of course the examination of the warrant papers, and if Judge Anstice stretched the cordon in this respect it was scarcely to be wondered at. The case virtually had no precedent; it was only in deference to that unwritten code of the courtesy of common law between nations that any such inquiry took place at all, and had the charge been a less grave one than that of murder, no proceedings would have been entered upon. But, as has been said, exceptional cases demand exceptional remedies, and since an arrest and inquiry had been granted, the lines for the carrying out of the latter could not be too broad and comprehensive.

Mr. Munger reappeared like a giant refreshed, and immediately called up Mrs. Newbold as his next ally. Esther's fair, pretty face, flushed and anxious, looked as much out of keeping with its surroundings as did her costume of lace and muslin. She glanced appealingly at Miss Hildreth before speaking, and that silent appeal called up a ghost of a smile to Patricia's lips.

Despite the soft prettiness of her blonde colouring, however, Mrs. Newbold could lay claim to plenty of self-possession, and Mr. Munger found her not quite so malleable as he had imagined. She answered any question put directly to her as briefly as possible, but she would not advance any detail or explanation. Notwithstanding the neutrality of her replies, however, her evidence was gravely important, for it established beyond question the fact that Miss Hildreth and Marianne's governess, known at the Folly as Adèle Lamien, were one and the same person. Esther did not attempt to deny this, nor did she vouchsafe any explanation concerning it. When asked if she had always been cognisant of this fact, she answered, simply:

"Yes."

"Had she then assisted Miss Hildreth in the deception?"

"Yes."

"Had she told the story purporting to be that of Adèle Lamien, as recounted by Miss James?"

"Yes."

"Was she present when Miss Hildreth indicated that of Adèle Lalloovich?"

"Yes."

"Did she endeavour to stop her?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because she thought Miss Hildreth was indiscreet."

"Was she acquainted with Miss Hildreth's reasons for wishing to keep her identity with Adèle Lamien secret?"

Mrs. Newbold's face flushed, and she turned another appealing look upon Patricia before she replied, slowly:

"Yes."

"Would she state those reasons?"

"No, she could not."

"Why?"

"She was under a promise."

"To whom?"

"She would rather not say."

"To Miss Hildreth?"

"Yes."

"Had she agreed with Miss Hildreth's reasons?"

"Not altogether."

"Yet she assisted her to carry them out. Why?"

"She would rather not say."

"Had those reasons anything to do with Mr. Tremain?"

Mrs. Newbold was silent, and, with a snort and a smile, Mr. Munger continued:

"Did Mrs. Newbold know Adèle Lamien, or Lallovich, to have committed a crime at some period of her life?"

"Yes, she had been told so."

"And Mrs. Newbold was perfectly sure that the lady calling herself Miss Hildreth was the same person who, at the Folly, was known as Adèle Lamien?"

"Yes."

"Then Mrs. Newbold believed her friend—Miss Hildreth—to be guilty of murder?"

Clear and sharp came the answer:

"No, I do not."

"What then did Mrs. Newbold believe?"

And Esther, her face flushing and paling alternately, her blue eyes fixed dauntlessly upon her tormenter, replied, that while forced to admit that Patricia Hildreth and the person purporting to be Adèle Lamien were to her certain knowledge one and the same, to the best of her belief this was not the whole truth. Miss Hildreth had reasons, grave reasons, for what she had done, and she, Mrs. Newbold, had consented to help her, never foreseeing the grave and terrible consequences that might ensue. She was not at liberty to state those reasons; but she was as certain as she stood before them then, that Miss Hildreth was absolutely guiltless of the crime of which she was accused.

"How did Mrs. Newbold account for the two handkerchiefs marked *A. de L.*?"

"She could not account for them."

"Had Miss Hildreth ever spoken to her concerning her life abroad—especially her life at St. Petersburg?"

"No; Miss Hildreth had always been uncommunicative on all such topics."

This closed Mrs. Newbold's statement; and Esther could not but feel, as her husband handed her to a seat not far from Patricia, that she had done more to injure her friend's cause than to help it.

"Oh, if she would but have let me speak!" she said to her husband, the tears dimming the brightness of her blue eyes.

Patricia caught the half whispered exclamation, and saw the glistening tear-drops; but she only folded her hands more closely together, and waited with a look of quiet endurance on her pale face.

Dick Darling was next interrogated, and her violent partisanship was decidedly refreshing to the excited listeners. She indignantly denied any possible connection between Miss Hildreth and Adèle Lallovich; but when pinned down to say why, she could only shake her brown head and declare she was sure of it from a moral point of view.

Yes, she had received the pink note from Mdlle. Lamien, on the evening of the 3rd of May. She could not say if the handwriting was that of Miss Hildreth, or if it was the same as that on the handkerchief. She was not familiar with Miss Hildreth's calligraphy. She had never had the smallest suspicion of Miss Hildreth's identity with Mdlle. Lamien; she didn't believe it. She was not given to looking for suspicious motives in every-day life; thank goodness she was not a sneak, and hoped she never might be; this last with a malevolent glance at Miss James. Miss Hildreth had told the story of Adèle Lallovich at her special request. Yes, she had used both names in telling it, Lamien and Lallovich.

Miss Darling finished with an open scowl at Mr. Munger, and a smile at Patricia, and fluttered off to Esther's side, where she kept up a running commentary on all subsequent events.

Once more there was a few moments' interval or breathing space, and then Mr. Munger played his trump card by requesting Philip Tremain to step forward. It had been, undoubtedly, a disagreeable surprise publicly when it transpired that Mr. Tremain was not to appear as Miss Hildreth's solicitor; but it created a still greater sensation that he should be called in evidence against her; and, for a few moments, as he stood there, composed, dignified, and impassive, such a silence fell upon the assemblage that even the dropping of the proverbial pin would have resounded loudly.

And in that brief interval Philip lost all sight or knowledge of those around him; he saw only the pale, proud face of the woman he loved, the close-shut curve of her lips, the anxious expectancy of her eyes. Was she fearful of him then, and of what he might say? he asked himself a little bitterly. She had never rightly estimated his love, why should he expect her to do so now?

Perhaps, since she had deceived him, she judged him by her standpoint of deception.

Then he lost touch with the more personal elements of the scene, and remembered only where he was, and why he stood there. That woman yonder, that dark, silent, motionless figure, with the clasped hands and the pallid beautiful face, was Patricia Hildreth—the woman of his life-long devotion, the love of his youth and his manhood—and she was charged with what? Murder!

And he? He could do nothing to exonerate her, nothing; he was helpless, powerless. She had refused even to give him an explanation of her position, and should Vladimir Mellikoff come off triumphant and she be taken from him, taken away to that Russia whose hand is as iron, whose vengeance is of blood, whose retribution stern as death, he should never know—never, never—how much of truth, how much of falsehood, she had kept back from him; or what was the secret that not all his passionate pleadings could wrest from her.

Patricia had not lifted her eyes from her folded hands, or apparently taken any notice of Philip's appearance; only for one brief moment a faint wave of colour tinged her cheeks and faded slowly away.

Mr. Munger's harsh voice broke the silence, and with an audible sigh of relief the audience fixed its attention upon Mr. Tremain. In replying to the lawyer's questions, Philip made his statement as brief as possible.

He had gone to the Folly by invitation, and had had no expectation of meeting Miss Hildreth there; he had not seen Miss Hildreth for ten years previous to his meeting her at the Folly. He had not found her particularly changed; and had not had much intercourse with her. Yes, he acted in the same play with her—*The Ladies' Battle*—on the evening of Mr. Newbold's birthday, but as Miss Hildreth did not arrive until the afternoon of the day before, they had not rehearsed together. He had first met Mdlle. Lamien the evening of his arrival at the Folly; she had interested him at once, and increased that interest by her courage on the occasion of the carriage accident. He had never for a moment suspected Mdlle. Lamien and Miss Hildreth of being the same person; he could see no resemblance between them beyond height and certain tones of voice. No, he had never seen Mdlle. Lamien in full daylight; at the time of the accident she wore a thick black veil drawn closely over her face.

Miss Hildreth had never spoken to him of her absence abroad, or volunteered any information concerning it. He had known Miss Hildreth for ten years; yes, at one time they had been engaged to be married. The interview described by Miss James had certainly taken place between him and Mdlle. Lamien; he had no wish to repudiate his position; at the end of the interview he considered himself engaged to Mdlle. Lamien; nothing had since occurred to alter his relations towards her. He had been out of town from August to September; his orders were that no letters or papers should be forwarded to him. He returned to New York on the evening of the 8th of September; he had only just reached his rooms when Miss Hildreth's arrest was made known to him; it was Miss Darling who told him. He had gone at once to Ludlow Street but was denied admittance; he then went to Mrs. Newbold's house in Madison Avenue. It was only two days ago that he had learned that Miss Hildreth and Mdlle. Lamien were supposed to be one and the same person. Yes, he had asked Miss Hildreth either to confirm or negative the charge, but she had declined to do so. He had no reason to believe that Miss Hildreth had contracted an unhappy alliance while abroad, nor had he any for denying the possibility of her having done so. Miss Hildreth was his friend, he would not therefore insult her by protesting his belief in her innocence. He had never seen Count Vladimir Mellikoff before meeting him at the Folly, on the evening of the 2nd of May.

With the termination of Mr. Tremain's statement further inquiry was adjourned until the following morning. The long, hot day had run its course at last, and as the pent-up crowd surged out into the mellow, lambent atmosphere of the summer evening, and melted away in all directions, twilight and desertion settled down upon the empty court-room.

Patricia, turning for one last look, as she passed out of the private door, smiled sadly at the change wrought in so short a time. Would it be so when she too had passed out of the lives of those who surrounded her now? Would her name—her place—become but an empty memory—a recollection to be put aside with all haste? Would he forget her, too—he, Philip, for whose love she had played so hazardous a game? Would *he* forget her, as these people forgot her, glad to rush away from the excitement of looking at her to the greater excitement of condemning her? Must she, too, like Adèle Lalloovich, drink to the very dregs the bitter cup of humiliation and desertion?

When all this grim comedy—this farce that touched so close on tragedy—was over, when Russia's hand had closed upon her, would he think of her then? Would he come to know her better when she had passed from out his life for ever, and, perchance, give now and then one backward look, one sigh, to the days that were no more?

"Ah, Philip," she murmured, "I would rather far you should never know, lest in knowing you should come to despise me for my weakness and my love!"

CHAPTER IX.

CONFLICTING IDENTITIES.

On the second day of the inquiry public excitement and interest reached a higher pitch than ever, when it became known that Mr. Mainwaring would occupy the greater part of the morning in refuting the evidence given, and in protesting against the legality of the warrant.

Considering how positive had been the evidence, even of Miss Hildreth's own friends, it was difficult to see what possible line of argument the young lawyer could take, with any surety of success. Mrs. Newbold's testimony had disposed effectually of any doubts as to the identity of Miss Hildreth with that of the governess at the Folly—Adèle Lamien—and with this fact established irrefutably, was not Miss Hildreth's complicity in the murder of Stevan Lalloovich a foregone conclusion?

The suborning of Miss Hildreth's particular friends against her had certainly been a master stroke on Mr. Munger's part; how could John Mainwaring confute such a mass of convicting testimony? Of course he was bound to make a brave fight for his client; but—and here the public shrugged its shoulders collectively—they were sorry for him, and sorry for the poor figure he must inevitably cut; and then went to work to show their sorrow by discussing Patricia's guilt as a proved premise, and her probable fate only a question of time.

John Mainwaring had once again sought Miss Hildreth, and, with every argument he could bring to bear, every pleading of rhetoric and common-sense, entreated her to reconsider her decision, and loose him from that promise of reservation respecting one point in her confession.

But Patricia was not to be moved one jot or tittle. She heard him to the end in silence, sitting, as Philip had last seen her, at the little table, her hands clasped upon it, and leaning slightly forward. Her face looked worn and sad, her eyes pathetic in their weariness, but the beautiful lips were set in firm decision, their expression one of dauntless courage and endurance.

The sweet, pungent perfume of the Maréchal Niel roses, grouped together in a tall glass vase, filled the heavy atmosphere with overpowering sweetness. She waited until John Mainwaring had quite finished speaking, and then said, slowly, and with the musical notes of her voice less reverberant than usual:

"No, Mr. Mainwaring, I cannot alter my decision; I cannot give you leave to drag my poor secret out into the light of day; not, believe me, on my own account, but on *his*. To you only have I opened my whole heart—you alone know my weakness and my strength. For my own part, I should care very little how much was known of my motives; but for him—for Philip Tremain—I could not bear the thought and live, that, through me, and my love, he should be exposed to public ridicule. Ah, Mr. Mainwaring, was it for nothing, do you think, that I sat through those long, terrible hours yesterday, and heard the murmurs of the crowd, their open comments, their cruel innuendoes, their still more cruel laughter? Do I not know how eagerly they would seize upon my poor secret, and, tearing it limb from limb, dissect it and discuss it, in their cold, cruel, analysing fashion, until even the garment of reverence that clothes all love, however poor and mean, was torn from it, and it lay revealed—a poor denuded passion in tatters? Do you think he could bear that? Do you think Philip Tremain could hold up his head against such disgrace? Would he not despise and hate the one who brought it upon him, and would he not have reason to cast from him for ever all memory or recollection of such an one? Could I plead anything in extenuation to him—then? No; better, far better, the worst fate that can befall me than to clear myself in the eyes of the world, at the expense of sinking for ever in the estimation of him, to gain whose love I have placed myself in so terrible a position."

John Mainwaring made no reply; indeed, what answer could he make to such passionless reasoning as this? Whenever he was brought face to face with Patricia, and listened to her clear, calm voice, he felt himself carried away by the very attitude of her pleading. He saw things only from her point of view, and was ready to acquiesce and agree with her, however over-strained he considered her arguments. But when he was away from her, and without the radius of her personal influence, he was apt to anathematise himself in unparliamentary language, and to wish Miss Hildreth's selection of a lawyer had fallen on some one less susceptible to impressions.

"Since you give me no option, Miss Hildreth," he said presently, somewhat sullenly, "I must perforce make the best of my material; but, I warn you, my reasoning will sound very weak after yesterday's testimony, and Munger is sure to pounce upon its weakest point, in substantiation of which I have nothing to advance—positively nothing."

"I am very sorry for you, Mr. Mainwaring, believe me," she answered, earnestly, "and very grateful; but I cannot change my mind."

Then he had gone away, and for many long minutes Miss Hildreth sat as he had left her, her hands outstretched upon the table, her face quiet and expressionless, save for the close set curve of the mobile lips.

John Mainwaring, on leaving Miss Hildreth, walked quickly to his office, not in the most enviable frame of mind. As he entered the outer room, his clerk came forward and whispered a few words to him, then preceding him to the inner office, opened the door and held it back for Mainwaring to enter. As he did so, a dark figure rose up from the depths of a lounging chair, and advanced towards him. The brilliant sunshine from the outer room struck full athwart the stranger's face, and revealed the features of the Italian, Mattalini; then the door swung to, and the clerk returned

to his desk in the full glare of the hot sunshine.

By ten o'clock the court-room was again filled to overflowing, apparently with the identical crowd of the day before. The battalion of fashionable ladies showed an increase of recruits, and the knot of lawyers gathered about the Bench was augmented in numbers. Close beside the railed off space, sat Mrs. Newbold and Dick Darling, while not far off, engaged in earnest conversation, were Mr. Tremain and Mainwaring.

Again there arose the concentrated murmur of many voices as Miss Hildreth took her place within the rails, and at the same moment Judge Anstice walked quietly to his seat on the Bench; and so began the second act in the tragic drama.

Mr. Munger intimated to his honour that his part in the proceedings had terminated with yesterday's evidence; which, he repeated, was in itself sufficient to incriminate a dozen suspects, and to prove a dozen *primâ facie* cases. Bearing this in mind, it was not necessary for him to recapitulate it in detail, or indeed to make any comments upon it. The point at issue was the identity of the lady arrested with the person named in the warrant as Adèle Lamien, or Lallovich. Yesterday's evidence—that of Miss Hildreth's intimate friends, and especially Mrs. Newbold's—had conclusively established that point; there could therefore be no hesitancy in proclaiming the warrant a valid one, and surrendering the lady up to the Russian Government. As to the guilt or innocence of Adèle Lamien, or Lallovich, in the affair of Count Stevan's murder, they were not called to pronounce upon; she must take her trial on that charge in the country where the crime was committed. The only point they were called upon to prove, was the legality of the warrant papers, and the identity of the person arrested; this point having been substantiated beyond question, he could not see any cause for further delay in the matter.

And then Mr. Munger sat down with an ugly triumphant frown on his rough-hewn face, and out flew a shower of his favourite paper pellets.

The silence that followed was intense. The hot summer sun beating in through the bare windows fell across a sea of expectant, excited faces, all turned in one direction, towards the slight, dark, upright figure seated within the railed off space. She, who, as the rich and beautiful Miss Hildreth, had been the object of their covetous envy, and who now, as Adèle Lamien, stood charged with so vile a complicity in crime as to separate her for ever from the poorest and lowest of that onlooking multitude, beside whose poverty and honesty her wealth and beauty fell away in torn and soiled fragments.

In the midst of this silence John Mainwaring arose to address the Bench.

Mr. Mainwaring's face was at all times non-committal, it wore now an absolutely sphinx-like imperturbability. Tossing back the heavy lock of black hair that fell over his forehead, and squaring his shoulders with a motion that bespoke both doggedness and obstinacy, Mr. Mainwaring's first words fell upon the listening audience with ringing distinctness, and with sudden, unexpected surprise.

"His learned friend," he said, "had proved, beyond all shadow of doubt, the question of Miss Hildreth's identity with the lady, who, as governess to Mrs. Newbold's little daughter, was known as Adèle Lamien. It was not a point upon which they could for one moment disagree; he had no reason or desire to raise issue upon it; in fact, he not only acknowledged the identity, but had been cognizant of it from the outset. Miss Hildreth herself had no wish to dispute it; so far, indeed, from that being the case, he desired particularly to impress upon his honour the absolute truth of the assertion. Miss Hildreth was one and the same person as that Adèle Lamien, who became Marianne Newbold's governess. He wished to keep this fact distinctly before them; it was a very important fact, as he would show them before he had finished."

At this uncalculated-upon acceptance of their theory, both Mr. Munger and Count Mellikoff showed signs of perturbation. They had not, at any one of their conferences upon the line Mainwaring was likely to take up, imagined so bold an expedient as his flitching from them the very corner-stone of their plan, and building upon it such an edifice as should best suit his requirements. It was a decidedly clever move, and sent John Mainwaring up in Mr. Munger's estimation at a bound.

"Well, then," continued Patricia's defender, "that point well established, he would go on to the next; and here he must just remind them of Mr. Munger's concise recapitulation of the case. They were not there on any other business than that of proving, or disproving, the legality of the warrant on which Miss Hildreth had been arrested, as also of proving the identity of Miss Hildreth with that of Adèle Lamien, or Lallovich, named in the warrant, who was charged with complicity in the murder of her husband, Count Stevan Lallovich. This was the only point at issue; all other points were extraneous, and they need not trouble themselves about them. Now, while he acknowledged frankly that Mr. Munger had proved the identity of Miss Hildreth with that of the person received and known at the Folly as Adèle Lamien, he desired humbly to submit one question to his honour. In establishing the validity of this identity, how had they proved the identity of the Adèle Lamien—Mrs. Newbold's governess—with that of the Adèle Lamien, or Lallovich, who had murdered her quasi-husband, Count Stevan? He unhesitatingly declared that they had not established such identity in any particular.

"They had heard," he said, "a great deal of testimony, all of which had been cited only to prove that Miss Hildreth and the governess at the Folly were one and the same. That was not at all difficult to prove, because Miss Hildreth had never for one moment denied the impeachment; but

he must say he failed to see how proving that, proved also her identity with the cast-off wife of the dissolute young Russian noble, Stevan Lalloovich; and until such identity was established, he certainly should protest against the accused being delivered up to the tender mercies of the Russian authorities. He would not call into question the truth of the facts and details, concerning the murder, as related to them—they could all be verified if necessary; but it was not necessary. Undoubtedly the poor deserted woman had committed the crime imputed to her—it would be but a savage justice after all. With that he had nothing to do; but when it came to the arrest of a lady, an American citizen, in her own country, on the charge of so grave a crime, it behoved that country to be very careful in its investigations, and to leave no stone unturned to come at the actual truth. It was a terrible alternative, that of handing over a fellow-countryman to the despotic treatment of a foreign Power, and before such a thing was made possible, every item of extenuation should be urged in behalf of the accused.

"He had listened to every word of the evidence, and while in every instance he could lay his finger on weak links, he would pass them all over, and recall only to his honour the substance of Miss James's, and Mr. Tremain's, statements. The former had dwelt mostly upon the evidence of her own eyes, and upon the nature of an interview which had taken place between Mrs. Newbold's governess and Mr. Tremain. Miss James had not hesitated to affirm that she recognised in the lady's face, despite artistic accessories, the countenance and features of Miss Hildreth. Mr. Tremain, on the contrary, assured them positively that he had never at any time during his visit at the Folly, entertained the slightest suspicion of this identity; it was not until after Miss Hildreth's arrest that this complication was made known to him, and Miss Hildreth, to whom he appealed for confirmation or reputation, refused to reply. Miss Hildreth had her own reasons for thus treating the matter.

"He would next ask them to listen to a very strange chapter in this strange story, and if it appeared incredible and beyond possibility, he must beg them to remember that truth was often stranger than fiction.

"Early in the autumn of the last year Miss Hildreth had gone to Russia, with the intention of travelling from place to place to form her own opinions upon the customs and people of that country. While on one of her expeditions one of the horses cast a shoe, and while waiting its replacement she was invited to rest at a villa some four miles outside of St. Petersburg. She did so, and was greatly impressed by the luxury and beauty displayed in the interior arrangements of the unpretending mansion. It was some little time before the lady of the house came to her; but, from the moment she entered the *salon*, Miss Hildreth was conscious of a sudden curious sympathy, that sprang to life in her heart, combined with a puzzling certainty of having in some past situation met and known the beautiful woman, who advanced towards her with a smile of welcome. This perplexing enigma was presently solved in the most commonplace way; Miss Hildreth and her hostess, rising together to examine some object of art, passed a long mirror, and one glance towards it was sufficient to explain the familiarity of the stranger's countenance and bearing; between the two ladies there existed a marked and positive likeness in feature, form, and colouring. So pronounced indeed was it that both commented upon it. The impromptu visit lasted some hours, and on parting Miss Hildreth carried with her the name and rank of her chance acquaintance. She was known to her narrow, outside world as Adèle Lamien, but she was in reality secretly married to Count Stevan Lalloovich, a near relative of the Tsar.

"Being often at Court and mingling in Court society, it was not long before Miss Hildreth came in contact with Stevan Lalloovich, who was accounted the gayest, wealthiest, most fascinating, and most dissolute man of his circle. He chose to devote himself conspicuously to Miss Hildreth, and though posing as a bachelor, he more than once hinted at some special reason for his attentions. Miss Hildreth accounted for them as a tacit acknowledgment of the likeness that existed between herself and his wife. She more than once drove out to the villa across the Troitski Bridge, and each time returned more and more interested in its mistress.

"Early in December, all St. Petersburg was thrown into a state of consternation by the murder of Count Stevan Lalloovich, who was found dead in his palace, stabbed through the heart. With one of those marvellous intuitions, granted only to women, Miss Hildreth, on first hearing the bald details, felt confident as to the hand that had dealt the fatal blow. She hurried alone and by night to the villa, and there found the poor wife, whom desertion had changed into a demon of revenge, and without a moment's reflection changed clothes with her, and by morning both were flying across country, making straight for the frontier, protected by Miss Hildreth's passport for herself and maid, and by her unstinted use of money. In Paris they separated, Miss Hildreth continuing her journey to England, and embarking on board the *Suisse*, of the International Line, as Adèle Lamien, for the express purpose of turning the Russian police off the track. The real Adèle Lamien, or Lalloovich, remained under the protection of her mother's family, well-to-do people in the west of France."

So far, Mainwaring had gone on from point to point with rapid and uninterrupted utterance, carrying his audience with him, who, from sheer amazement, sat spell-bound and breathlessly attentive. He stopped now, and with another upward toss of his head threw back the offending lock of hair, turned a quick comprehensive look at his audience, and then fixed his eyes for a brief second upon Patricia.

She sat bending forward a little, her hands folded, her face raised, on either cheek a streak of vivid crimson staining their wax-like pallor; her eyes beneath the dark, straight brows met his with one responsive flash of their old quick fire.

With the very slightest smile of encouragement upon his lips, John Mainwaring drew a deep breath and took up the thread of his discourse.

CHAPTER X.

A GLEAM OF LIGHT.

"And now, your honour," his deep voice rang out, "I come, perhaps, to the most inconsequent and incomprehensible part of any that Miss Hildreth has played in this curious and complicated history of a crime. I have shown you how she, actuated by an enthusiastic and Quixotic chivalry, imperilled her own life to help and succour a sister-woman, who, in a moment of mad passion, had committed such a crime as put her life in danger. Miss Hildreth, with a courage few men could emulate, had not only planned her flight, but accompanied her in it, and accomplished it with safety. It was a daring and hazardous undertaking; but Miss Hildreth considered neither the danger nor the hazard, so long as there was a chance of escape for that cruelly-wronged woman, who had struck down the villain who ruined her.

"The crime committed by Adèle Lamien was an offence against the laws of man, and being such, she stood a criminal and fugitive in the eyes of men. But what should be said of the false-hearted traitor who had committed a far graver moral crime, when he killed for ever the soul and heart of the woman he had called his wife? That was a question for a higher tribunal than any mere earthly one to answer, and before that eternal justice Stevan Lalloovich had entered, with the guilt of moral murder fresh upon him.

"As he had already told his honour, Miss Hildreth parted from Adèle Lamien in Paris, and although she kept up her disguise and name until she reached America, it was only to gain time for the poor fugitive, and to give a false scent to the police. On reaching New York Miss Hildreth landed under her own proper name, and proceeded at once to her country place in the White Mountains, where she remained for several weeks without acquainting her friends with the fact of her return home. This desire on her part to remain quiet and unnoticed did not arise, as Mr. Munger would have them believe, from any criminal wish to keep her whereabouts unknown, but was the outcome of purely personal motives—motives he was not at liberty to divulge; but this much he would say, these motives had nothing whatever to do with Adèle Lamien's movements; Miss Hildreth had indeed heard nothing from, or of, that lady since their parting.

"During this month or six weeks of solitude Miss Hildreth was engaged upon a very delicate and purely personal matter, the successful result of which she had very deeply at heart, and in the carrying out of which she was willing to adopt any measures, no matter how compromising.

"Upon the nature of this work his lips were sealed, but he was willing to stake his honour as to the probity and lawfulness of Miss Hildreth's intentions. In the furtherance of this object circumstances arose which, in Miss Hildreth's opinion, made it necessary for her to adopt another character than her own; to enter, in fact, upon a little play-acting, in which she personated the sole character. What more natural than that she should make use of the name and disguise of the lady she had so lately protected? As Adèle Lamien—a foreigner and dependent, with the suspicion of a tragic past to give effect to the present—she could enter without fear of detection upon the delicate mission she had marked out for herself.

"The danger of such a personation never occurred to her; Miss Hildreth was not one always on the outlook for danger-signals. She desired to borrow Adèle Lamien's name and story, the latter with modifications, for a certain length of time, and she did so, without thought of any possible evil arising therefrom. But, to carry out her project, Miss Hildreth was obliged to take some one person into her confidence, some one who, knowing the why and wherefore of this masquerading, would keep her secret intact while aiding and abetting her. And this some one she found in Mrs. Newbold. They had all heard Mrs. Newbold's statement; she acknowledged frankly that Miss Hildreth and her governess, known as Adèle Lamien, were one and the same, that she had always known this to be the case, and had given her countenance and support to the deception. But here he would remind them of Mrs. Newbold's refusal to give any reason for her collusion with Miss Hildreth, or any explanation of the latter's motives. Like himself, Mrs. Newbold's lips were sealed by a promise; she could not reveal her friend's motives, even though that revelation were to save her from a graver situation than the present one."

Once more John Mainwaring paused, and once more a sympathetic murmur ran through the crowd.

He had struck the right chord in his opening sentences, and from the moment of that favourable beginning he carried the harmony of his audience along with him.

Even Judge Anstice leant forward in his chair and followed him point by point with a keen and appreciative interest. Mr. Munger snorted and tossed back his leonine head, and Vladimir Mellikoff's dark face grew sterner and more set, while both of them acknowledged that the young lawyer had hit upon a productive mine, and was working it to good advantage.

Patricia Hildreth changed neither her attitude nor expression, only the crimson stain upon her cheeks grew deeper as Mr. Mainwaring entered upon more delicate ground.

Philip Tremain never took his eyes from her face; gradually, and at first in faint gleams only that grew steadier as his memory added the one touch needful, the true meaning of John Mainwaring's defence was breaking upon him, and with the overwhelming rush of the revelation he felt all the old love and tenderness for Patricia spring afresh to life within his heart. He longed to snatch her up from out that curious, eager crowd, and, carrying her away to some spot of safety and seclusion, lay her head upon his heart and bid her be for ever at peace.

Meantime John Mainwaring had begun again.

"Mrs. Newbold, your honour, having consented to sustain Miss Hildreth in her adopted character, the two ladies laid their plans and *modus operandi*, and when the invited guests assembled at the Folly, in the month of April, they found there a foreign lady whose appearance and manner were unmistakably suggestive and interesting, to whom they were introduced as Mdlle. Lamien, the new governess, and whose strange story Mrs. Newbold related one evening during dinner. And so well did Mrs. Newbold guard her friend's secret, that not even her husband was entrusted with it.

"Mr. Tremain was one of the guests, and his attention was immediately attracted to the quiet, retiring foreigner, an attraction which soon developed into a stronger sentiment. Mr. Tremain had told them, that he found no point of resemblance between Miss Hildreth and Mdlle. Lamien; there were similar tones in their voices, but that was no uncommon coincidence: he had, however, never seen Mdlle. Lamien in broad daylight, though this fact made no impression upon him at the time; how positive had been Mdlle. Lamien's influence over him was shown by his subsequent proposal of marriage to her. He, Mr. Mainwaring, felt convinced that were he but free to speak frankly at this point he could show sufficient reason for this proposal; reasons arising from an outside source, and which unfortunately he was not at liberty to explain.

"Miss James had said that she suspected Miss Hildreth from the first; Miss James was certainly a very clever young lady, for she admitted entertaining similar doubts of Mdlle. Lamien. She, however, if they excepted Count Vladimir Mellikoff, would seem to have been the only one who had suspected a play within a play. Miss Hildreth's arrival was announced for the 2nd of May, and from the time of her advent, *in propriâ personâ*, Mdlle. Lamien disappeared. Miss James had not failed to make a note of this coincidence. Mr. Tremain's proposal to Mdlle. Lamien, whose reappearance took place after his *adieux* to Miss Hildreth, was made on the afternoon of the 5th of May, and from that day he had heard nothing from her, although he considered himself in honour bound to her. Nor had he again seen Miss Hildreth up to his return from Maine early in September, when he was met with the astounding news of her arrest. Here again, unfortunately, he was debarred from frankly explaining Miss Hildreth's conduct at this juncture.

"She had carried out her project to a certain limit, and then it would seem had capriciously abandoned it; for they must not lose sight of the fact, that, though Mr. Tremain believed himself to be addressing his proposals to Mdlle. Lamien, it was in reality Miss Hildreth who received them. On this point he would make no comment, he was not in a position to do so.

"A good deal of stress had been laid upon the two handkerchiefs, the one found in the drawing-room at the Folly, the other left in the apartment of the murdered Stevan Lalloovich, both of which bore the same embroidered initials. To his mind there was nothing incriminating in this, the coincidence was a strange one, but nothing more. What was more likely than that during one of the frequent visits paid by Miss Hildreth to the villa outside St. Petersburg, she should have taken in mistake one of the unfortunate Adèle Lamien's handkerchiefs, and, on seeing her error, have remarked it carelessly with her own initials; or that after a time the bit of muslin should have found its way back to its rightful owner? As to the second handkerchief, that was a very simple riddle; Miss Hildreth had in her possession many articles of dress belonging to Adèle Lamien, having required them in her first disguise as that lady. The note-paper was easily explained in the same way; he could himself prove that the penmanship was Miss Hildreth's, though slightly disguised. As to the conversation which took place in Mrs. Newbold's boudoir, and the latter lady's evident agitation during it, he would only ask his honour to consider the decidedly awkward position in which Mrs. Newbold was placed. She knew what the consequences would be were Miss Hildreth's Quixotic protection of the real Adèle Lamien to become known, and she already had her suspicions regarding Count Mellikoff: she alone rightly estimated the danger run by Miss Hildreth in personating one who was a fugitive from justice.

"As to the part Miss James had played in the whole matter, he should be sorry to call it by its right name; he believed there was no enmity so bitter or treacherous as the enmity of a jealous woman. Might not the motive power of Miss James's conduct be found in the one word—jealousy? However, with that he had nothing to do. He begged again, and finally, to submit to his honour's consideration the point at issue; namely, the proved identity of Miss Hildreth, not with the governess known as Adèle Lamien, but with the real Adèle Lamien, the wife and murderer of Stevan Lalloovich, which identity he submitted, had in no particular been established. The warrant of arrest must therefore fall to the ground."

Up to a certain point Mr. Mainwaring felt that he carried his public with him; but beyond that point—when he came to the equivocal position held by both Miss Hildreth and Mrs. Newbold—he knew himself to be losing touch again. He could calculate his audience's pulse to a fraction of a beat, and he was aware of the exact moment when their allegiance fell away from him, and veered back again to the opposing scale.

It was as he had warned Patricia it would be; the instant he touched delicate and doubtful ground

and advanced a theory in support of which he could produce no proofs, that instant the *entente cordiale* failed him. The public likes to believe in its own strict integrity, and its abhorrence of anything not honest and above-board, and to have so extravagant a story as this masquerading of Miss Hildreth's thrust down its throat, accompanied by such lame excuses as sealed lips and secret promises, was not at all to its taste.

Therefore when Mr. Munger sprang to his feet, he but expressed the public's opinion when he told his honour "that Mr. Mainwaring must gauge them by a fool's measurement, if he expected them to swallow such a cock-and-bull story as that he had expounded. If Miss Hildreth had not some awkward secret to conceal, why should she bind the tongues of both her lawyer and her friend? What possible reason could she have for concealment, unless the work she was engaged upon would not bear official scrutiny? Mr. Mainwaring had begun boldly enough, and had not spared his insinuations as to the good faith of those opposing him; but he must say he failed to see how Mr. Mainwaring had established even one point in his elaborate theory.

"He had submitted that while Miss Hildreth was Adèle Lamien, still she was not Adèle Lamien. Such reasoning sounded to him very like a page out of 'Alice in Wonderland,' where everything was not what it seemed, and seemed not what it was. Why did not Mr. Mainwaring bring forward proofs to establish his theory of there being two Adèle Lamiens? Were they to meekly accept this melodramatic story of Miss Hildreth's heroic championship of the wretched woman who had killed her lover, and not ask for proofs? Both Mr. Mainwaring and Mrs. Newbold had made a great show of acknowledging Miss Hildreth as Adèle Lamien, the governess; and then they asked his honour to accept the absurd tale of Miss Hildreth's personating Adèle Lamien, only to further some foolish plot of her own devising, some personal intrigue that would not bear investigation.

"Either Miss Hildreth was or was not Adèle Lamien-Lallovich. She had been proved to be the Adèle Lamien of the Folly, and had been acknowledged by Mr. Mainwaring as such, and yet now, forsooth, he wanted to prove that while she was the one Adèle Lamien, she was not the real Adèle Lallovich—not the Simon Pure article. It was about as logical a deduction as that of a child, who told you it either rained, or it did not rain; it did not rain, therefore it rained! Altogether too much time had been spent in such foolish arguments; on his side time was valuable, would his honour, therefore, make known his decision; a decision which could only be made in one way, and end this farce by declaring in favour of the validity of the warrant, and the identity of the Adèle Lamien, therein named, with the lady calling herself Miss Hildreth."

Mr. Munger's harsh voice threw out his words energetically, while he clenched each sentence by a single hammer-like beat of one hand upon the other. He had sprung up so suddenly, and poured out his rough eloquence in such a stream, no one had an opportunity of interrupting; he finished with another contemptuous snort and settled himself down in conspicuous defiance.

With the calling of the noon recess, the case against Patricia Hildreth had assumed a more ugly and threatening aspect than ever.

CHAPTER XI.

CHECKMATE.

When the Court re-assembled, however, a change in the moral temperature had evidently taken place.

John Mainwaring entered with a certain assured step, and with almost a smile upon his sombre countenance.

The audience, quick to notice the bent of any straw in this stream of sensationalism, became at once aware of the slight increase of definite self-possession in Mr. Mainwaring's bearing, and whispered amongst themselves that the young lawyer had "caught on" to something new since his speech of the morning, and was looking mightily pleased and smiling over it.

So soon as the room was reduced to order, Mr. Mainwaring arose, and, addressing Judge Anstice, begged to be permitted to substantiate his statements of the morning through one witness only.

"He had," he said, "been jumped upon so summarily by his learned friend, Mr. Munger, almost before he had finished his few remarks—he could not dignify them by calling them a speech—that he had had neither time nor opportunity in which to introduce this *vivâ voce* evidence. He might be somewhat out of order in wishing to do so now; but, as to that, the entire examination had been conducted on purely informal lines. They had all understood why it had been so conducted, for, where such grave issues were at stake, it was not to be cavilled at if a few exceptions were given and taken."

As he understood, the present position of affairs stood in this wise. Could he prove that there were two Adèle Lamiens, or rather that Miss Hildreth, in personating Adèle Lamien, had in truth portrayed the only Adèle Lamien, and that the whereabouts of that lady were known to him and could be substantiated? Should he establish this, he supposed the charge against Miss Hildreth would be withdrawn. Doubtless the story he had related to them, did sound incredible and marvellous; but they must bear in mind that it was not given to every one to understand and

appreciate the higher gifts of heroism and courage. Mr. Munger had clearly pointed out that what was required were proofs, proofs and nothing but proofs. As he had said, truly, either Miss Hildreth was, or was not, the woman, Adèle Lamien, wanted by the Russian police. If she was proved not to be Adèle Lamien, then she would be released from her present painful position, and would go out from this examination without a stain upon her character. On the other hand, if this point was not established, but remained doubtful, or if she was proved circumstantially to be Adèle Lamien, then her fate was a hard one indeed; she had only the tender mercies of the Russian law to look to.

Mr. Munger had seen fit to taunt him with his frank acknowledgment of Miss Hildreth's personation of Adèle Lamien; he had, indeed, made very merry over his childish logic. He could not hope to emulate Mr. Munger's flow of rhetoric, still he could and would meet Mr. Munger's demand for proofs, by introducing certain conclusive testimony. He would put aside all extraneous matter, whether personal or otherwise, and stick to one or two points only. Was there another Adèle Lamien, beside Miss Hildreth, who was the real criminal, and if so, where was she to be found? If he established these two points he should consider the question of identity definitely disposed of. He would now produce his sole and only witness.

At the sound of his name the Italian, Mattalini, stepped forward, and with the slightest shrug of his shoulders, gave a meaning smile, as his eye caught and held that of his master Vladimir Mellikoff.

At the sight of this paid servant of the Imperial Chancellerie appearing against him, Vladimir Mellikoff gave a perceptible start, and for the first time his belief in the ultimate success of his mission wavered. He was, however, too seasoned a diplomatist to show any outward signs of his inward disquietude, and, save for that momentary impulsive change of expression, his dark, cold face remained as inscrutable as ever.

Following Mr. Mainwaring's lead, the Italian began by telling how and why he had first become attached to the service of Count Mellikoff. He had been sent by the Imperial Chancellerie about a month ago to wait upon Count Mellikoff as valet. He had not been told in so many words that he was also to act as a spy upon his master, but he knew this was what was expected of him. It was the system employed by the Chancellerie; each one of their agents had a double, whose business it was to report to headquarters the other's every action, movement, or word: it was a fine system, because it distributed power irrespective of rank.

From something he heard at Petersburg, before joining Count Mellikoff, he had reason to believe that the Chancellerie were not altogether pleased with the Count's manner of procedure; he was, therefore, despatched to look after Count Vladimir, and report upon his progress. He had not been long in New York before he made up his mind that Count Mellikoff was working on a wrong scent; he knew the nature of the Count's mission, and he very soon discovered that the Count was not showing his usual discretion in this case; he was, in fact, taken in by a lay of circumstances, and by the assurances of the young lady, Miss James. He had endeavoured, on one occasion, to speak to the Count upon the subject; but he had been told to hold his tongue; a piece of advice he strictly adhered to, until such a time when his not holding it would most injure the Count. No one told him to hold his tongue twice, for nothing.

Yes, he was ready solemnly to swear that the young lady, Miss Hildreth, was in no way identical with the fugitive, Adèle Lamien, the murderer of Stevan Lalloviich. He had at one time often seen Adèle Lamien; there was a strong resemblance between her and Miss Hildreth; but he knew for a certainty that Miss Hildreth was not Adèle Lamien, and that Adèle Lamien was, at the time he quitted Russia, in Petersburg, where she still remained. He did not know this when he first came to Count Mellikoff; but he did know it for a fact now, and he was quite ready to bear out this statement; and, what was more, he could prove that Count Mellikoff was not unaware of this fact; that he had indeed been warned by the Chancellerie of Adèle Lamien's presence in Petersburg, which had been sworn to by a member of the council, though, so far, they had not been able to verify the report. He could not say why Count Mellikoff had paid no heed to the warning and discredited it; it had come straight enough to him—Mattalini—and from an unimpeachable source.

Miss James had several times visited Count Mellikoff at his hotel; he had overheard one of their conversations, he had listened purposely; it was the conversation in which the manner of Miss Hildreth's arrest had been planned; it was arranged to take place during the absence of Miss Hildreth's friends. Miss James had urged Count Mellikoff to greater haste in the matter; she had seemed consumed with hatred of Miss Hildreth. Oh, yes, he knew quite well what it meant to hate any one; he hated Count Mellikoff, and was glad to pay him back for some of his haughty insolence. He had known from the beginning of the inquiry that Miss Hildreth was not Adèle Lamien, but he had had no absolute proof of it until that morning. He had gone to Mr. Mainwaring and told him what he was now telling his Excellency. Mr. Mainwaring had asked him for proofs, but he had none then, only the proof of his inward convictions. Mr. Mainwaring told him that they were no good; but within the last hour he had got proof, and that proof he wanted to give up now.

Within the last hour a sea-telegram had come for Count Mellikoff; it was his—Mattalini's—business to receive all telegrams and bring them to the Count; it was not his habit to open and read them first; but of this one the yellow envelope was not stuck down—when an envelope was not stuck down it was no crime to look at the contents. He had done so, and the first words he saw made him glad he had not been a stupid fool of an innocent and stuck down the envelope

flap, as for a moment he had thought of doing. The telegram was in cipher, but he knew enough of the Chancellerie cipher to make it out. It was sent by one Paul Patouchki, who was the chief of the Chancellerie Council, and it ran to this effect:

"The woman, Adèle Lamien, arrested this evening in the Nevski. She attempts no defence. Your presence before the Council peremptory. Return immediately."

As the Italian finished he drew out of his pocket a thin, crackling, yellow envelope, indicative of a telegraphic message. He looked at it fondly for a moment.

"*Ecce!*" he exclaimed, "'tis a little thing with which to save one woman's life, and yet big enough to kill another!"

Then he handed the missive up to the Judge, and stood waiting further developments.

The sensation caused by the Italian's statement was beyond all precedent; the excitement of the crowd burst all restraints; it seemed as though, having once doubted Patricia Hildreth, they could not now be loud enough in vociferating her innocence.

The clamour lasted but a few seconds; but in that short interval Vladimir Mellikoff caught sight of such a sea of angry, menacing faces, and heard the echo of such violent threats as to shake even his trained courage, and warn him of the perilous position he should occupy if once that public Nemesis was set loose.

The rage and anger of his own heart knew no bounds. To be duped and done in such a fashion by his own paid assistant; to find out all too late that a spy had been dogging his actions at every step of the way, and that that spy had been sent by the Chancellerie—by Patouchki, his chief, on whose honour he would have staked his own!

This then was his reward, this was Russia's gratitude! A thrust in the dark, a blow from behind, and he was laid low, unable to defend himself or fight for his life. He realised all too well what this failure meant for him—disgrace utter and complete; the Chancellerie never forgot or forgave a false move in the game, any more than it ever remembered the many successes and triumphs achieved for it. To fail once was sufficient, when one had reached so high an altitude as his, and with failure came a downfall more disastrous and engulfing even than that of death.

And Olga? But no, he must not think of her now, or he should go mad. He must forget her, put her by, believe in her, trust her; he must pull himself together, he must not succumb like the veriest novice before this blow. Were not all those cruel faces turned upon him, those hundreds of eyes peering with wonder and delight at him? He must not let them see any fear upon his face, they must not hear a word of cowardice from his lips.

Then he became aware of a single voice addressing him, and the sounds slowly resolved themselves into Judge Anstice's familiar tones, asking him to examine the cablegram, and state if the Italian's translation of the cipher was a correct one.

He took the slip of flimsy paper with a hand that never trembled, and scanned the few bald lines. Mattalini had read them only too correctly, they were confirmation positive of the utter breakdown of all his elaborate structure.

He could have leapt upon the Italian then and there in his blind rage, and struck him to the ground; he could have beaten him senseless and felt a savage joy in each blow he dealt him. Had he not ruined him for ever, not only in the eyes of the Chancellerie, but in those of Olga Naundorff? That was where the lash cut deepest, that was the agony impossible to bear.

And yet, despite all this mad tumult going on within him, he still was conscious of standing up and answering Judge Anstice in his usual controlled voice. The Italian Mattalini had perfectly translated the cipher, the message ran as he had said. A person called Adèle Lamien had been arrested in Petersburg; he should immediately demand further confirmation of the matter; in the meantime he left the custody of Miss Hildreth in the hands of the Bench. He had no statement to make; he had acted throughout in good faith and according to instructions; he would at once communicate what further particulars he received to Judge Anstice; without doubt his Government's Ambassador would stand surety for the integrity of his future movements. He begged to return the cablegram to the keeping of the Bench.

Then he sat down, and after a few moments' whispered conversation with Mr. Munger and Mr. Mainwaring, Judge Anstice rose and withdrew, and the crowd were free to force their way out into the streets, flooded with the golden sunshine, and there to discuss this last change in the day's excitements. And so ended the second day of what, in after years, came to be known as Patricia Hildreth's trial.

CHAPTER XII.

OUR LADY OF KAZAN.

When Ivor Tolskoi quitted the presence of Patouchki, he carried with him the remembrance of

the chief's troubled face, and almost imperative appeal:

"Find me the woman, here, in Petersburg, and I shall know how to act."

"I will find her," he had replied, and it needed no strong oath or asseveration to convince Patouchki that Ivor would grudge nothing in the fulfilment of this promise.

It was early afternoon when Tolskoi left the Chancellerie; it was long past sundown ere the chief aroused himself from the anxious reverie into which the young man's suspicions and insinuations had plunged him.

Despite the hardness and impregnability of Patouchki's nature, there existed somewhere, deep down in the inner recesses of his rugged heart, a softer spot than he was ever given credit for, and in that remote and hidden nook he had set up the fidelity and friendship of Vladimir Mellikoff, as the one bright sentiment in which to believe and trust. He had watched his career from the outset, and had spared neither influence nor interest to advance the abilities and talents he believed him to possess. He entertained for him a feeling as nearly approaching love as his temperament was capable of experiencing. And he had beheld with concealed delight the increasing regard manifested by his august master towards his favourite. It was owing entirely to his exertions that this last delicate mission had been entrusted to Mellikoff's skill and courage, and he had for once spoken almost with enthusiasm, at the council, of Vladimir's peculiar fitness for the undertaking. He had said to himself that with his success in this Mellikoff's name might be fearlessly put forward for some signal mark of Imperial favour.

It may be imagined then with what proportionate anger and disappointment he listened to Tolskoi's plausible insinuations. They did not lose one feather's weight of value in Ivor's manner of expressing them; the very candour of his words, the collectedness of his bearing, but increased their reasonability; and Patouchki, with his quick perception, realised this, and gave it more weight, perhaps, because of that weakness which he knew existed in his heart for the absent Vladimir.

There is no judge so cruel and relentless as a human heart that owns but one outlet for its affections. Unlike those happier natures who sympathise, and in a manner love all fellow mortals, because of their common humanity and common redemption, this poor starved soul sets all its store on one poor fallible object, and then, when the floods of doubt and mistrust are let loose and sweep away the idol, marring its beauty and exposing its blemishes, it owns no larger creed to fall back upon, and so drifts into the opposite extreme, and welcomes with sardonic pleasure the mocking devils of resentment and retaliation.

It was so with Patouchki. Out of the very affection he had borne Vladimir, sprang now the hydra-headed demon of doubt; and since he could doubt him in one particular, he could doubt him in all. Ivor had set alight such a train of implacability as even he would have hesitated to fire, could he have foreseen its consequences; for with the downfall of Patouchki's perspicuity came his resolve, to punish the one who had thus dared to set at naught his judgment, and who by playing the rôle of deceiver had inflicted on his self-love so dire a wound.

It was well for Vladimir Mellikoff that he could not see the chief's face at that moment, for, as the evening shadows closed around the motionless, lonely figure, sitting so still and rigid, they paused, half afraid to creep about the stern hard countenance, whose eyes gleamed with such passionate fire, whose lips were locked in so firm and cruel a line. And so he sat for hours, his busy fingers idle, his active brain absorbed in bitter contemplation of broken trust and ruined faith.

It had appeared to Ivor an easy and simple task to track and find the poor fugitive, Adèle Lalloovich. Petersburg and its environs covered a considerable area, it was true; but these, when compared with Paris or London, sank into insignificance, and yet every day fugitives from justice were hunted down and trapped in those great cities, whose mileage so far exceeded the Muscovite capital.

"It needed but system," so he told himself, with a smile and a shrug of his shoulders at the tactics of the Chancellerie old women. "System and perseverance, and a judicious use of gold," he would back these three against the craft and *finesse* of any woman. He therefore set about laying the plan of his operations, being careful, however, to keep himself out of the actual work, and to be recognised in it only as the agent of the Chancellerie.

But day succeeded day, and week followed on week, without the least success attending his efforts. Either he had mistaken a chance likeness in some transient worshipper at St. Isaac's for the fugitive, or else Adèle Lalloovich had again made good her escape across the frontier. Each day Patouchki looked at him with the same strange, hard expression, as he asked:

"Have you found her?"

And each day Ivor, with a frown, was obliged to reply:

"Not yet! but I shall do so."

Then the chief would turn away with a grim smile, and Tolskoi would vow with hot intemperance that he would be successful, even if his life were to be the penalty.

And so the summer drew on apace, and Petersburg became a desolate wilderness; empty, save

for the thousands of poor souls who toiled on and on, irrespective of the seasons' changes, and whose sole recreation was a walk across the Troitski, or Nicholas bridges, stopping for an instant's prayer before the shrine of the good name-saint, or leaning against the granite parapet, drinking in the languid breeze that came, touched with a suspicion of coolness, from off the grey Neva; or an hour's stroll in the Boulevard-park, shorn now of its aristocratic idlers, but gay enough with the brilliant colours in the costumes of the less favoured *mondaines*.

The Court had long since flown westward; and after a few weeks' halt at Gatschina, the gentle Tsarina had taken a favoured few of her *personnel*, among whom was Olga Naundorff, and departed for her native Denmark; where, in the dear old home of her childhood, she dropped the restrictions of royalty even as she put off her state robes and jewels, and in a cotton frock and straw hat became a girl again, outvieing even her daughter, the Grand Duchess Xenia, in her happiness and delight.

Neither Patouchki nor Ivor left Petersburg. The former because no place possessed half the charm for him as did the frowning Chancellerie, and his own office within its walls; no music sounded so sweet to his ears as the triumphant clang of the *jubilate* chimes, or the mournful cadences of the *miserere* bells; no recreation so well pleased him as an hour passed in reviewing the Chancellerie's past achievements, or in building up vast schemes for its future greatness.

And Ivor stayed because his self-imposed task was not yet accomplished, and because he felt the time growing daily shorter, when, unless he could redeem his word and find the woman Adèle Lalloovich, his rival would return and snatch his prize from out his very arms.

Therefore he waited and he watched with a dogged patience and perseverance. The July days passed into August, and August became September, and still he made no further progress in the path of victory; while on the other hand, according to private despatches from the Italian, Mattalini, Vladimir Mellikoff was apparently succeeding in his undertaking beyond his most sanguine hopes, and spoke confidently of his speedy return to Petersburg.

Ivor felt the situation to be critical, and yet was unable to force the march of events. So far his every effort had miscarried; each well-laid plan, each secret scheme had but resulted in failure. Adèle Lalloovich seemed to have as completely vanished from out the orbit of his machinations, as though she had never come within that of his vision.

And so the 15th of September dawned, and Tolskoi, with the sense of defeat pressing heavily upon him, failed for the first time to report himself at the Chancellerie. He felt he could not bear with equanimity Patouchki's piercing glance, or the harsh tones of his voice as he put the invariable question—"Have you found her?" and still less could he meet the slow, cold smile that curled the chief's lips at the monotony of his negative reply. He knew, too, that this was the day appointed in America for the examination of the warrant papers, under which Count Mellikoff had effected the arrest of a certain person calling herself Adèle Lamien, and should this inquiry terminate in the establishment of the woman's identity with the murderer of Stevan Lalloovich, Mellikoff would lose no time in starting for Russia; and, when once on the ground, and his influence over Patouchki restored, what would become of his, Ivor's, charges against him? The deepest laid schemes must fall to pieces under the pressure of bald fact. It had never been a part of Ivor's design that Vladimir should return triumphant; his defeat and disgrace, while absent, were necessary factors in the carrying out of his project. It was on that very defeat and disgrace that he depended most for his success with Olga; like her royal ancestress, she could not tolerate or forgive the sin of failure.

The day had been very close and hot; what breeze there was came laden with a fiery touch, the great gilded dome of Isaac's Church blazed with blinding intensity, the tall, lance-like spire of the great Petropavlovsk fortress quivered in the palpitating atmosphere; there was no retreat, however secluded, that was not laid bare and permeated by the searching, cruel sunshine.

Ivor had remained a voluntary prisoner all day; but as evening drew on, and the garish sun sank gradually down to rest in a panoply of royal crimson and gold, he roused himself, and passed out into the rapidly filling streets. Walking idly along the Boulevard de Cavalerio, he made his way to the Nevski—the Rue Rivoli of Petersburg—stopping now and then to look in the shop windows, and to wonder aimlessly which one of all the pretty baubles displayed in the Circassian Bazaar would best please Olga's fancy.

After half an hour's wandering through the arcades he turned in the direction of the church of Our Lady of Kazan. The great doors stood open, and on either side the semi-circular colonnades, like those of St. Peter's at Rome, made deep and shadowy resting-places for the weary.

Pushing past the kneeling beggars gathered about the entrance, Ivor passed in to the deep stillness and tranquillity of the grand interior. No service was going on, and the hushed silence was unbroken save for the occasional footsteps of coming or retreating worshippers. The rich glory of colour and ornament, for which Our Lady of Kazan is famous, were half hidden by the gathering on of night; here and there, where a taper gleamed, the sparkle of gems, the reflection of gold, the green of malachite, or the blue of lapis-lazuli would flash out, lost again in the feeble, flickering rays.

Half hidden by one of the great columns, Ivor watched the ever-changing stream of visitors, as they came and went, and fell to speculating upon the nature of the petitions they pleaded so earnestly, throwing themselves on their knees, bowing their heads, beating their breasts, and making unceasingly the sacred symbol upon brow and heart. He did not kneel himself; he would

have told you that he had out-grown all such old-world superstitions, but he watched with half-amused, half-sympathetic toleration the rapt devotion of those about him.

Presently a woman, some little distance away, got up from her knees, and, after a moment's hesitation, turned and walked swiftly down the dim aisle. Ivor looked at her without much thought beyond the half-formed one that her long cloak of black serge and closely-veiled bonnet were ill fitted for the heat of that summer evening. As she drew near to him his attention wandered, caught by the trifling incident of a baby's cry, and when his thoughts returned to the heavily-draped figure it had vanished out of sight.

In another moment Ivor also quitted the now dark church and retraced his steps to the Nevski, where fascinated again by the frivolities in the Circassian shop he halted, and returned to the vexed question of Olga's taste in the matter of a gift.

Next door to the Bazaar was a small, rather bare-looking shop, whose only sign of business was the significant one of St. Nicholas' three golden balls. The entrance door was low, and as it opened or shut a tiny bell above the transbeam gave out a warning jangle. It was this bell that aroused Tolskoi's attention and caused him to look up suddenly. As he did so, a tall figure dressed in a thick black serge cloak and close bonnet came out of the low door; the nature of the woman's errand was painfully apparent, for in her hand were two or three coins, over which her head was bent down.

Ivor at once recognised her to be the same woman he had seen in the church of Our Lady of Kazan, not half an hour before, and his interest thus reawakened, he watched her not unkindly.

As she passed him the light wind caught at her long black veil, floating out one end of it; she put up her hand to catch it, turning a little as she did so, and there, in the half lights, partially concealed by the black folds surrounding it, Ivor saw again the face that had haunted him for so many months; the face he had seen wild and haggard and imploring at the great door of St. Isaac's—the face of Adèle Lalloovich!

His first impulse in his excitement was to cry out, to speak to her, to stop her further progress, to make her his prisoner by violence if necessary, to force her to accompany him to the Chancellerie. Then as swiftly reason reasserted itself, and he determined to do nothing rash; he had no power to arrest, he would but give her another chance of escape if he raised a street *émeute* against her. He understood too well the organised power of the Nihilists; at one cry from this woman a dozen defenders would spring to her assistance; she would be rescued before his very eyes, and he should get but a fool's recompense for his pains.

No, what he must do was this. He must follow her adroitly, without arousing her suspicions; he must track her to her place of abode, and when sure of her refuge, send for Patouchki and deliver her into his hands.

The woman walked on swiftly, threading her way deftly between the droschkies and heavier vehicles that thronged the Nevski, and as stealthily as a sleuth-hound, Ivor kept pace behind her. At the door of a good-sized, respectable house she stopped, raised her hand and knocked twice; in an instant the door opened on a cord, and she passed into a narrow passage. The pent-up shadows rushed forward to greet her, and swallowed her up in their dark embrace. Then the door swung to noiselessly, and Ivor was left without, staring vacantly at the non-committal walls and casements.

An hour later and night had thrown her sombre mantle over the gay city. One by one as the hours crept on, the noise of returning revellers grew fainter and less frequent; gradually the peace of midnight settled down upon the myriads of human souls who make up the sum of Petersburg's life. The heavens were dark and formless, save for the millions of shining stars; Isaac's golden dome loomed up in giant outline against the sombre sky; only the glittering lance-like spire of Peter's fortress caught and held a transitory gleam upon its slender shaft.

And then presently a noise of wheels broke the stillness, wheels that came ever nearer and nearer; down the Boulevard first, and then into the Nevski, where the pace slackened, and a covered droschky drew up in front of the commodious and respectable house, before which Ivor had stood baffled.

Three persons got out of the carriage, two of whom were easily recognisable, despite the disguise of mufflers and low hats, as Patouchki and Tolskoi. Not a word passed between them, while Ivor, stepping a little in advance, knocked twice distinctly. Instantly the door swung back on its cord, and the three men entering shut it quietly behind them.

A light gleamed at the head of the stairs, and a woman's figure detached itself from the surrounding gloom. She held a lamp high up above her head, from which the close black bonnet had been removed. And thus looking down upon them, calm and unsuspecting, they saw the beautiful face of the fugitive Adèle Lalloovich.

For, indeed, she was still very beautiful, despite the lines passion and pain had graven on her forehead, and about her eyes. The eyes themselves were deep blue beneath black pencilled brows; the dusky hair, wherein a thousand golden tints played at hide and seek, fell loosely about her throat; the curve of the lips was proud, with a touch of suffering in its downward droop.

This, then, was the woman they sought! This was the defenceless being against whom they came armed with Russia's law! This was Stevan Lalloovich's wife—this was his murderer!

For a moment they hesitated, stayed by the fearlessness and dependence of her position; then Patouchki stepped forward and ascended the staircase. She watched him as he came, step by step, and she knew that her days were numbered.

She was alone in the house, save only for a little serving-maid; any resistance would be but vain. She did not mean to resist. She had prayed night and day for months that some release might come to her. Had she not that very evening begged Our Lady of Kazan to have a little pity upon her; to give her some little respite from the horrible dreams and spectres that haunted her; to let her forget for only one small fraction of time, the horror and reproach that had settled on her lover's face when she dealt him his death-wound?

Our Lady of Kazan never turns a deaf ear, it is said. Was not this her answer to that wild, imploring cry?

Patouchki reached her at last. She faced him boldly and with eyes that never flinched; the lamp in her upraised hand burnt on steadily, no tremble of weakness made its flame flicker, or grow dim.

And now Patouchki laid his hand upon her shoulder.

"You are Adèle Lamien," he said, in his harsh, bullet-like tones, "and as such I arrest you, for the murder of Count Stevan Lalloovich."

She made no gesture either of assent or dissent, she only looked at him, with all her soul in her wonderful eyes. Then she spoke slowly and with deliberation.

"I am Adèle Lalloovich," she said, "I recognise no other name."

"That makes small difference," replied Patouchki. "I must trouble you, madam, to accompany me."

Again she raised her beautiful eyes to his, and spoke, this time a little wildly.

"I am Adèle Lalloovich—and I killed him—my husband—with my own hand."

Then she turned, and walked with quick steps across a narrow hall, where on a peg hung her black cloak and bonnet. She set down the lamp, and with dexterous fingers put on her outside garments. When this was accomplished she took some money from her pocket—the few silver pieces Ivor had seen her counting over in her palm—and, wrapping them in a bit of paper, wrote across it.

"It is for Paulina," she said in explanation, "my little maid."

Then she turned, and motioning Patouchki to precede her, followed him down the stairs and along the passage. The door opened as noiselessly as before, and was closed with equal caution. There was a moment's whispered consultation, the slight dark figure stepped into the waiting droschky without assistance, followed by Ivor and Patouchki; the door was shut, and the vehicle moved quickly away down the deserted Nevski in the direction of the Chancellerie, whose frowning portals were watched over by Petropavlovsk's grim fortress.

As the noise of the wheels grew fainter, the sad *miserere* bells rang out the quarter past midnight.

On the following morning Patouchki, with an unusual light in his eyes, and a cruel smile on his lips, wrote out the telegraphic cable, that sounded the death-knell to Vladimir Mellikoff's love and hope.

CHAPTER XIII.

NO EXPLANATION.

Not many hours passed after that dramatic scene in the court-room, in which the Italian, Mattalini, played so conspicuous a part, before ample confirmation of his statement came over the ocean telegraph, establishing beyond all question of doubt the arrest of the real Adèle Lamien, and the innocence of Patricia Hildreth.

As John Mainwaring had said, his theory once confirmed, all shred of suspicion must, as a matter of course, fall from her, and she would re-enter society's world stainless in character and reputation. At the end of the second day's examination, however, she returned voluntarily to Ludlow Street Jail, refusing with decision the conditional liberty bestowed upon her.

"I had much rather wait," she said to John Mainwaring. "Please, Mr. Mainwaring, do not urge me to go against my conscience. You can surely understand my feeling in this matter. I will not leave what has been my prison, until my innocence is unqualifiedly established, and until those who forced me into this position are convinced of its falsity. After a week's experience of the delights of Ludlow Street, what can a few additional hours matter?"

She finished with one of her rare smiles, which made John Mainwaring again realise the utter

futility of his eloquence, when pitted against the charm of her loveliness.

So Patricia returned to her house of detention, and John Mainwaring left her at the entrance thereto, with a more cheerful look upon his dark countenance than had visited it for many a day.

It was still early in the afternoon when the inquiry terminated, and the sunshine lay upon all things external with so lavish a touch and so tropical a force, that the dark corridors and dim halls of the gloomy building appeared most grateful to Miss Hildreth's tired brain and eyes.

She entered her room, the scene of so many conflicts between her love and pride, and sank wearily down upon the chair before the table, on which the yellow roses in their tall glass vase made a single spot of golden colour. Resting her elbows on the open portfolio, she buried her face in her hands and remained motionless, wrapt in a long desultory retrospect of the week's events.

She was too weary even to remove her bonnet, or the light scarf of lace about her shoulders.

Now that the long strain was ended, the tension slackened, she felt her strength lapse from her, and an overpowering weakness take its place.

It was true she stood cleared in the eyes of the public, who now regarded her in the light of a heroine, concerning whose courage and chivalry they could not say enough. But was she cleared in her own eyes? It was well for her that the secret of her disguise had not been dragged ruthlessly out of its hiding-place. Had that been the case, would not this same public be gloating over it now; mouthing it and discussing it, with even greater avidity than they had displayed in the discussion of her late situation? She was spared such an humiliation; but was she spared the humiliation of her own thoughts, the scorn of her own accusing conscience? Must not the knowledge of her motives, in thus playing with the misery of another woman's crime, separate her for ever from the very one for whose sake she had entered on the path of deception? Could good ever come out of evil? Did the end ever justify the means?

All the suffering and anguish of those last seven days would seem as nothing, she told herself, could she but face Philip Tremain with unfaltering integrity; could she but look into his eyes and not feel her own fall beneath the honesty of his. Woman-like, she forgot his doubt of her, his half belief in her criminality, a criminality which, if proved, would have swept away all lesser indiscretions in its magnitude.

No; she gave no thought to the part he had borne. A woman is never so happy as when she forgives, with all her heart, some wrong-doing on the part of the man she loves. But with Patricia this active magnanimity was not called into requisition, for the simple reason that Philip's attitude during the past week was clean forgotten by her—swept away as were all lesser matters in the contemplation of her own moral obliquity.

How long she sat thus absorbed and motionless she could not have told; but it was long enough for the light in the room to wane, and for the dying rays of the sun to gleam aslant through the narrow window, casting long tremulous bars of tinted light upon the bare unlovely walls. Presently a slight noise aroused her, and, the chain of reflection thus broken, she raised her head and saw, standing some little way from her, with the tinted sun-rays resting on his stern face, the man of whom she thought.

For a moment she gazed at him without realising the actuality of his presence; and then, as her sad beautiful eyes sought his they faltered, while a rush of sudden colour dyed the pallor of her face.

"Philip!" she exclaimed, drawing in her breath with a half sob, "Philip!"

Her voice broke the spell, and, while its trembling cadences still lingered on the air, Mr. Tremain came nearer and stood beside her, looking down upon the troubled face and anxious eyes that dared not meet his own.

"Patricia," he said, "I have come to you now, because I must know the truth. Because, notwithstanding the speciousness of John Mainwaring's pleading, there still remains a little matter between you and me that needs some explanation. I have come, Patricia, to hear that explanation from your own lips."

His voice was harsh despite the tender supplication of his eyes; and Miss Hildreth, looking down, missed this contradictory tenderness, and realised only the commanding ring of his tones.

Her face hardened, and the old look of mocking defiance settled down upon it. She gave a little laugh; the artificiality of its ring jarred on Philip's sensibilities, and caused the tenderness in his eyes to give place to quick anger.

"Ah!" said Miss Hildreth, "how could I forget that you, Philip, would require even stronger proof than any afforded by Mr. Mainwaring's eloquence, to convince you of my inability to commit a murder? I failed, you see, to take into account the incredulity of a legal mind."

If her words were insolent, the smile and laugh accompanying them were more so, but Mr. Tremain would not let his hasty temper get the better of his discretion. He had come to her with the unformed theory, evoked by John Mainwaring's ambiguous words, still at work within him, and he determined, if it lay in his power, to force confirmation of it from her.

"You know that is not what I mean," he said gently; "no one can ever again entertain so vile a suspicion against you."

"Yet *you* doubted me, Philip," she interrupted; "you doubted me throughout."

"Yes," he answered, "if you like to classify a feeling, that scarce had formation in my mind, under so grave an emotion as doubt—why, then—I did doubt you, Patricia."

She made no reply to this, and after a short pause he began again:

"That, as you know, is not the subject to which I referred just now. You may put me by with subterfuge and raillery, Patricia, but I shall always come back to my point, again and again. Patty, what was your reason for personating that most miserable woman, Adèle Lamien? What was your inducement for imposing upon all at the Folly? What was your motive in wishing to deceive me?"

Still she made him no answer. She had turned her head away as he spoke, and taken one of the yellow roses from the vase. She raised this now, and drew it once or twice across her lips. She felt his eyes upon her, but she would not meet them. She knew this to be the crucial moment; and she must meet and overcome it as best she might.

"Patricia," he said again, and his voice grew sterner, "you force me to impute to you motives that are unworthy of you, unworthy of any woman. But how can I think otherwise, if you will not help me to do so? How can I put any other construction upon your conduct, save that of wilful and wanton cruelty, when I remember, that twice as Miss Hildreth, you refused me, scorning my love; and then, that only a few short hours afterwards, as Adèle Lamien you accepted me, and all I had to offer—accepted me, with a lie upon your lips, and deceit in your smile. Have you no explanation to give me, Patricia? Oh, my dear, I will accept any pretext you may offer; only make some little excuse, no matter how trivial, for the duplicity of your conduct."

His voice grew pleading as he finished. Looking at her, as she sat there, so near to him, and yet so far; a beautiful, lovely woman, whose very beauty had brought suspicion and distrust upon her, and remembering how first he had loved her in the full tide of her girlish fairness and innocence, and how through all these years he had cherished her memory, and could not put her from out his heart, all the old tenderness and longing surged up within him, and he knew he could forgive her everything, if only she would give him one little opportunity for such forgiveness.

Had Miss Hildreth but looked up at that moment, while the light of love still lingered in his eyes, and trembled on his lips, surely her foolish pride would have broken down, and all the misery of those last few weeks slipped from her, in the peace of a confession made with his arms about her, her head upon his breast.

But Miss Hildreth, like many a woman before her, let slip the golden chance, and passed by the propitious moment. She still played with the yellow rose and avoided his eyes as she replied, slowly:

"I can explain nothing, Philip; I have no excuse to offer. You must form your own opinion, and I must be judged and sentenced according to it."

"But, Patricia," urged Mr. Tremain, "I ask for so little. Will you not at least assure me, that it was no more wanton motive than love of conquest and power of coquetry, that led you to deceive me, and draw from me that mad proposal, which you, as Adèle Lamien, were pleased to triumph in against your own proper self? My dear, give me but one such assurance, I will be content, I will ask for nothing more."

"No," she replied in a dull, quiet voice, "I cannot. I have nothing to add to my former words. You had better leave me, Philip, and—forget me."

"That I can never do," he said, "I have never for one moment forgotten you in all the ten years of our separation. I am not likely to do so now, when I have again looked so often and so longingly, upon your beauty."

Her lips trembled a little at his words, but she made no response.

"Good-bye," he said sadly, and turned from her.

She listened to his firm footsteps as they traversed the floor; then came the click of the lock in the catch, the sound of the opening and shutting door, and then again the echo of his footsteps down the long stone passage.

Then all was still. The tinted sun-rays paled and faded, then vanished altogether; and Miss Hildreth, bowing her head upon her clasped hands, burst into a passionate storm of tears.

CHAPTER XIV.

"FORGIVE HER."

A week later the daily papers chronicled two events.

The first was contained in a short paragraph, supplemented by a long leader, stating that evidence having been received from Russia, confirming the arrest of the real criminal, Adèle Lamien, or Lalloovich, the conspiracy against Miss Hildreth had fallen to the ground, and she had been released from her very unpleasant and unjust position. Miss Hildreth, on leaving Ludlow Street Jail, had immediately retired to her country place in the White Mountains.

The second item was even more briefly worded, though commented on exhaustively in a still longer leader, and ran to the following effect. That Count Vladimir Mellikoff, having failed signally in his efforts to traduce and incriminate a certain young lady, prominent in New York circles for her wealth, beauty, and amiable qualities, had sailed on the previous Saturday for Havre, *en route* for St. Petersburg.

And so the "comity sensation," as it was called by *Town Optics*, died a natural death, and the next social scandal, hurrying close upon its heels, crowded it out of general consideration and recollection.

But those whom it had concerned so nearly could not forget it thus easily; to them it always remained a very vivid and terrible experience, out of which it seemed they had escaped almost by a miracle.

Mrs. Newbold returned at once to her island home, taking Dick Darling with her; and there, after several weeks had elapsed, Mr. Tremain sought her.

He took an early afternoon boat from the city, and walked up from New Brighton to the Folly; where not finding his faithful friend within that Palace of Idleness, and being informed vaguely by Perkins that his mistress was "somewhere about the gardings," Philip, declining his aid, set forth in search of her.

And so it came about that unconsciously his feet followed his memory, for very soon he found himself at the opening of the little hazel copse, where he and Patricia had so nearly touched on reconciliation.

The marble boy Narcissus was still there, and still holding aloft the vase from which the water trickled in a gaily tinkling stream. There, too, was the rustic bench, and seated on it, doing nothing very gracefully, was Esther Newbold.

She jumped up at sight of him and ran forward, dragging her scarlet parasol behind her. Her face was bright with welcome, her smile affectionate and a little patronising.

"My dear Philip, what a pleasure!" she exclaimed, putting out her small hand in a loose gardening glove. "We began to think you had given us up altogether for 'a bad lot,' as my slang-loving Dick would say. Why have you not come before, sir?"

And holding that frank little hand in his, and looking into the sincerity of her blue eyes, Mr. Tremain asked himself the same question, and answered it truly, as he replied:

"Esther, my dear, I did not come, because—I was afraid."

"Ah," she said quickly. "Afraid! That is not like you. Of what, or of whom, were you afraid?"

"Of you, and of your powers of persuasion," he answered; at which Esther shook her head, and laughed a little.

"It is as well you should acknowledge it," she said, "and with your first breath. For, of course, you know, I don't mean to speak with you upon any but one subject. Philip, why are you here; why are you not already at the feet of Patricia?"

"Yes, I knew you would ask that," he answered; "but, my dear Esther, how can I go to Miss Hildreth, when she herself has raised an impassable barrier between us?"

But Esther failed to follow his reasoning.

"Nonsense," she said, a little brusquely. "Nothing should be impossible to a man who loves; and all things should be forgiven to the woman who loves him. I have no patience with either of you; but least of all with you, Philip. Were I a man, no fantastical barrier should keep me from the woman of my heart. Do you always intend to go on like this? To live and to die, or, worse, grow old and grey, waiting for the barrier to tumble down of itself, and never put out a hand to help its overthrow?"

Mr. Tremain could not but smile at her vehemence; he felt his spirits rise under the energy of her assault.

"It is for Patricia to make the first overture," he said. "I went to her, as you know, at once, and begged of her to give me ever so trivial and light an excuse for the ambiguity of her conduct towards me, but she would not. She had no explanation to offer, she said, and she let me go from her without any word of resistance, any sign of relenting."

"Then she was a little fool," cried Esther, "and I wish I had her here to scold, and pet, and tease, and kiss. But you, Philip, are not much wiser. I dare say you went at her hammer and tongs, with your gravest face, and in your longest words! Of course Patricia could not bear that sort of

argument. I wonder, for my part, that she listened to you at all."

"But, surely, my dear Esther, you must admit I had a little show of reason on my side," said Mr. Tremain, more quickly. "You must acknowledge that Patricia's conduct in refusing me repeatedly, as Miss Hildreth, and then accepting me, as Adèle Lamien, requires a little explanation. It is not over pleasant to one's *amour propre* to feel that one has been duped; but to have been duped wantonly, is more than unpleasant—it approaches insult."

Mrs. Newbold looked at him earnestly for several moments before replying; when she spoke it was in a far graver and more serious manner.

"And have you no idea, Philip, why Patricia played this somewhat ignoble rôle? Cannot you form some theory concerning it?"

Mr. Tremain shook his head.

"I have formed a dozen theories, my dear Esther, and dismissed them all; each seemed less tenable than the other."

"And yet, you are very sure you love her?"

"Yes, I am very sure of that. I wish I was as sure that she cared one-fifth part as much for me."

"Ah!" said Esther, a satisfied smile creeping in and out of her dimples. "Then, Philip, I think I must read the riddle for you. *Patricia deceived you—because she loved you.*"

But if Mrs. Newbold expected Mr. Tremain to indulge in heroics at this declaration, she was destined to be disappointed. Instead of rhapsodies of delight, he replied with an echo of scorn in his voice.

"Are you aware what a paradoxical sentiment you are promulgating, Esther? Love is not commonly supposed to take pleasure in deception."

"Ah," she interrupted, "but Patricia is not a common woman; perhaps she is as paradoxical as my sentiment. However that may be, I assure you, Philip, she deceived you because she loved you. Do you remember receiving a letter from her, early in the spring?"

"I do indeed."

"Very well. I don't absolutely know what was in that letter, but I have my shrewd suspicions, and I do know that your answer, when it arrived, was not what she had looked for. She came to me soon after she received it, and I was positively frightened by the look of pain and determination on her face. She told me that she had written to you, that she had humbled her pride sufficiently to do so, because she loved you, and had never loved any one else but you. Then she told me of your answer to her letter. She should never forgive you, she said, never, until she had made you suffer, through a woman, some portion of the pain and humiliation you had brought upon her. And then she told me her plan."

Here Mrs. Newbold paused and stole a look at her auditor. He was standing with his arms folded, his eyes fixed upon the sparkling drops of water as they fell from the uplifted vase, in the marble-boy Narcissus' hand. With a quickly-repressed shrug of her shoulders, Mrs. Newbold opened her scarlet umbrella, and continued, watching Philip meanwhile from under its friendly shade.

"And this was Patricia's plan. She would come down to the Folly, ostensibly as Mimi's governess, and as such she was to be introduced to you. I was to tell the story of Adèle Lalloviçh, more or less modified, as if it were her own, and she was to strive to win your interest and regard, despite the damaging evidences of so black a past. 'I will conquer him yet,' she said, 'he shall not escape me always; and then, when he has acknowledged himself vanquished, when he has laid down his pride and his superiority for the sake of Adèle Lamien, why then, it will be my turn to scorn and reject him, and he shall understand what it is to make advances and be repulsed.' She was very angry, Philip, and hard and desperate; and I was obliged to yield to her wishes for fear of something worse. So we arranged it all between us, and I comforted myself with the thought that perhaps, after all, good might come out of it, if even under a disguise, Patricia could win you back again to her."

Again Mrs. Newbold paused, but Philip neither changed his attitude nor raised his eyes. So intent was his gaze, he might have been counting the drops as they fell, with rhythmic measure, into the marble basin.

Mrs. Newbold continued.

"And then at last you came, Philip; and the rest was easy work, because from the very first, you were apparently strangely attracted to Adèle Lamien, and I felt almost righteous when I saw how well all was working as we had planned. Patricia came to me the evening of the day you left the Folly, and falling on her knees beside me, told me of her interview with you, as Adèle Lamien. She cried and laughed and was girlishly happy over it, because, as she said, she could see all the time, even when you were urging your suit most impetuously, she could see that it was not Adèle Lamien you really loved, but she—in her own proper person—Patricia Hildreth. 'Oh, Esther,' she cried, 'I know, I know he loves me! And now, oh, how shall I ever face him; how shall I ever tell him by what subterfuge and deceit I have won him from—myself? Oh, Philip, it was unworthy of me, unworthy of my love; and yet I did it because of my love.'"

Once more Mrs. Newbold stopped, and looked at him, but Philip was oblivious of her gaze. She smiled, and closing her scarlet umbrella moved a step or two nearer to him.

"And then you know," she went on, "our party broke up, and Patricia left me. She promised me she would lose no time, she would write and tell you all; she would keep nothing back, she would restore your pledge to you, which she held as Adèle Lamien, and she would ask nothing from you but your forgiveness. You who know Patricia's proud nature, can realise how difficult such a confession would be for her; and indeed, Philip, she would have carried out her purpose had I been able to keep near her. Away from me, and alone, she grew fearful and lost courage. 'I cannot do it,' she wrote me, 'Esther, I cannot do it. I could not bear the scorn of his eyes, the lash of his words. I cannot tell him that I deceived him, wantonly and cruelly, and of set purpose. My dear, I love him, and yet see what my love has brought me to. Do you think he could ever believe in it, or me, or trust to it, or me, again? No, let me say nothing; let me drift out of his life. As Adèle Lamien I can easier bear the certainty of his contempt, since I mean never to claim his promise, but as Patricia Hildreth I should die beneath the scorn of his just anger. I have been rightly punished for my wilfulness. Do not urge me any further. I cannot tell him, Esther, I cannot.' Then you know, Philip, came the terrible blow of her arrest, and the first thing she demanded of me, when I went to see her, was that I should swear to keep silent regarding the motive of her disguise. 'He must never know,' she said, 'more than ever, he must never know; and Esther, of this be very sure, I will face anything, Russia, condemnation, exile, rather than that my weakness and folly shall be dragged out as my excuse, and he be made the object of public derision. I have harmed him enough, Heaven knows, but he shall suffer no more through my pride and weak revenge. I would rather he believed me guilty of this horrible crime, Esther, than that I should make him ridiculous, as the dupe of a selfish woman, in the eyes of the world.' That is why John Mainwaring had so poor a defence to work upon, and that is why both my lips and his were sealed."

Mrs. Newbold came still closer to him, she put her hand on his arm, her eyes forced his to look at her; there were tears in their blue depths, her voice was tremulous and she spoke impetuously.

"You know the rest, Philip; I have kept nothing back, and I think when you remember the severity of her punishment, the bitterness of her suffering, the humiliation of her spirit, you will forgive her. She loves you, Philip; it is from her very love that all this misery has fallen upon her. Will you leave her to bear it alone, or will you go to her? Ah, Philip, no one has ever had a braver opportunity for carrying out the old, old precept; the legacy left to us by One whose mercy and forbearance knew no bounds, and who said, forgive, even if it be until 'seventy times seven.'"

CHAPTER XV.

VLADIMIR'S WELCOME.

It was winter once more, and the gay Russian capital had returned to its round of festivities and merry-makings.

The Imperial family were in residence at the Winter Palace, and the long *salon* resounded nightly to the laughter and jests of the Court circle. Not a cloud apparently marred the harmony and well-being of Petersburg.

All without was bright and brilliant; the sun shone on the dazzling snow, the merry sleigh-bells rang out on the frosty air, and the Nevski arcades were thronged with richly-dressed *mondaines*, who laughed and chatted, and tossed over the costly trifles in the Circassian shop with careless fingers. Within were ease and comfort and luxury; huge fires of keen-scented woods, heavy draperies to shut out the shrewd air, and respectful attendants to minister to the most wilful caprice.

But beyond and below all this brave assumption of security, there lay hidden a terrible passionate hate. Slowly, slowly, the patient masses of that under world had wakened to the consciousness of their wrongs, and with the bitter knowledge of contrast came the thirst for compensation; the burning desire to throw off the hand that had so long oppressed them, the yoke that had galled for centuries.

"What maketh us to differ?" was the cry of thousands; and, with the wording of the dumb misery that had held them silent so long, there awoke also the craving for vengeance. "How long," went up the cry to heaven, "how long, O Lord, shall the wicked oppress us?" And in the pause that ensued between petition and answer, pleasure was stalked by blood-red fear, and distrust kept pace with merriment.

The Countess Vera had opened the season by a grand *bal costumé*, in the huge palace of her name. It was the maddest of all the little Countess's mad freaks, for her guests were to come attired as beasts of the forest, the chase, and the field. Grizzlies from the Rockies elbowed white lambs, elephants and camelopards hob-nobbed with pussy-cats and fawns, while tigers and wolves flirted tentatively with rabbits and red squirrels.

The Countess, in a delightful white-cat costume, with diamond eyes and jewelled paws, was the life and soul of the revels; flying hither and thither, her little feet in their white fur boots treading

as lightly as her namesake, and startling more than one king of the forest by the sharp tap of a little fur paw, and the merry smile beneath the pussy-head that covered her giddy little brain.

It was during one of these frolicsome onslaughts that she caught sight of Ivor Tolskoi's fresh face and yellow locks, looking ridiculously out of keeping under the heavy disguise of a polar bear. She ran up to him lightly, and stood before him laughing, a tiny figure set against his feet and inches.

"Oh, my brave Ursa Major!" she exclaimed, "what a beautiful fierce creature you are, to be sure! I am quite frightened to look at you."

Ivor glanced down at her smiling, but he failed to toss back her jesting words with an equally quick repartee.

The little Countess laughed and shook her head, until the diamond eyes in the pussy-cat mask danced with a thousand reflections.

"Oh, what a cross Ursa Major it is!" she cried, "and all because of *some one* who is not here, and who will not come." Then she came a step nearer, and, dropping her bantering tone, said quickly: "I am sorry for your disappointment, *mon cher*, but it is one of the prerogatives of beauty, to be fickle. She would, and she would not, and the latter, you see, won the day. Olga Naundorff has declined to honour my ball with her presence. But is that a matter of such grave importance to you? Ah, I see, it is the old story; he who has most, always craves more. You are not satisfied with having won the Court favourite, even to the naming of the wedding day, but you must be miserable because she is not always present to swell your triumph! Be content, my dear boy, you *have* won her, and broken Vladimir Mellikoff's heart, that ought to suffice; and after you are married, you can force her to attend any and all kinds of festivities."

Ivor did not respond to this pleasant outlook, and Vera, with a mutinous grimace, continued, banteringly:

"For my part, my sympathies all go out to that most unfortunate Count Mellikoff. Only to think of what he has come to! So established as he was in the Emperor's regard, so esteemed by the Chancellerie; such a diplomatist and courtier, so distinguished and beyond reproach. And now, behold, where is he? Poof! he is but a feather, blown about by each contrary wind of prejudice. A failure, a fallen idol, a suspect. Bah, I would rather die than be a failure! Be content, *mon cher*, be content; you are on the crest of the wave, don't spoil your success by a fit of the sulks."

Then she laughed again, and shook her fan of soft white feathers at him, and fluttered off to a sedate elephant, whose thin cheeks and eagle eyes beneath the grotesque head-gear, betrayed him to be a certain State minister, whose word was law, whose smile power.

"Such a foolish boy I never saw," cooed the Countess Vera in the statesman's ear, "as that Ivor Tolskoi. Not contented with ruining Vladimir Mellikoff, and winning the lady of his affections, he mopes because, forsooth, she is not here to illustrate his triumph. Youth is very hard and illogical, monsieur; it takes older heads and hearts to be merciful." And the little Countess sighed profoundly.

"Ah," she said, suddenly, "my heart is all in tune with the fallen Mellikoff. I wonder, monsieur, what is to be the nature of his punishment, and what his—destination?"

But the wary minister was not to be caught even by Vera's casuistry.

"Punishment is so entirely a relative matter," he replied. "I, for instance, can imagine no severer sentence, no more desolate outlook than to be shut away for ever from the light and sweetness of the Countess Vera's presence."

"A thousand thanks," she answered quickly. "I appreciate your chivalry, monsieur; but when one adds the mines, or a casemate in Petropavlovsk, to the lesser evil—what then?"

"Neither are to be desired, madame," he replied, gravely, "and neither can ever come within the experience of the Countess Vera. The mines, and Petropavlovsk, are for those who betray, or mock at, Russia; not for loyal subjects of his Majesty."

"Loyalty is such a very big word," sighed the Countess flippantly; and then she flew away with a laughing gesture. But to herself she said:

"I know your destination now, my poor friend. I back a woman's wits against a statesman's imperturbability. Alas! poor Vladimir!"

It was as the Countess Vera had said. Ivor Tolskoi had triumphed beyond his most sanguine hopes. Olga was now his formally betrothed bride, and the marriage day was in the immediate future.

With the arrest of Adèle Lallovich in Petersburg, came the downfall of Mellikoff's mission, and the ruin of all his cleverly-laid schemes. He would reach Russia only to find his disgrace had preceded him, and only to find distrust and displeasure on every side. He too well knew the nature of Russia's resentment, to strive to stem the current that set so steadily against him.

It was worse than useless to expect such a thing as justice, at the hands of the Chancellerie, or to look for condonement from the Council.

He had not only failed, but he had bungled, and in so doing had opened the flood-gates of public opinion upon the Imperial policy. Russia never forgave inefficiency, still less inefficiency that brought ridicule in its wake. He knew this, and he knew also that his disgrace was imminent. Still he clung to Patouchki, to his belief in the chief's calm equipoise of judgment. He could endure a public expression of disgrace, if only Patouchki absolved him from intentional failure.

And then, too, was not Olga awaiting him? He had done nothing to alienate her love; she stood far above and beyond the lesser prejudices of political intrigue and jealousy. He was still her lover. What mattered anything so long as he had Olga to cling to; Olga's love and trust for his haven of refuge? He would marry her at once, and take her away, out of the fœtid artificial air of Petersburg, out of the network of personal envy and political stratagem, to those wide, far-reaching estates on the Balkan frontier, and there they would be free and untrammelled, removed from the narrow suspicions and cruel dogmatism of the Court.

And so planning, hoping, believing, Vladimir Mellikoff turned his face towards Petersburg. He lingered on his homeward journey, hoping against hope at each halt to receive more pacific communications from the Chancellerie; and thus when at last he reached the Russian capital, the first month of the long Muscovite winter was already on the wane. He drove to his lonely palace on the Neva, where the dark windows and barred doors afforded but a sorry welcome.

It was a dreary home-coming, and Vladimir, as he crossed the threshold and met the cold, damp atmosphere of long-closed and disused rooms, shrank back shuddering. Unsuperstitious though he was, he could not throw off the chill of apprehension which seized him, as he entered the echoing corridor and passed on to a small drawing-room, that served as study and office.

A fire smouldered in the stove, and the curtains were closely drawn, giving a less cheerless aspect to the apartment. A couple of candles in tall silver sticks were lighted on the chimney shelf, and beneath them were arranged the numerous notes and cards of invitation that had accumulated during his absence. Somewhat apart from these lay a small sealed envelope, addressed in a clear, flowing hand.

Vladimir glanced over the notes and cards, holding in his hand the while the huge ticket, covered with a Noah's Ark gallery, by which the Countess Vera had invited her friends to her unique *bal costumé*. With a half smile on his lips, called out by the little Countess's vagaries, Vladimir caught sight of the note lying apart by itself, and in a moment his heart told him who was the sender.

"It is from Olga," he murmured passionately, as he took it up and touched it with his lips. "It is from Olga; it is my welcome home."

Then he broke the seal and drew forth the thick, creamy paper; as he did so a slight, subtle perfume floated across the air.

It was a short letter; brief almost to cruelty. But when one deals a death-blow, it is as well to strike swift and sure.

Vladimir read the words through, again and again, without comprehension, without understanding; and then, suddenly, as their meaning struck him, one low and terrible cry burst from him; he flung himself down on his knees, burying his face in his hands. The letter floated slowly from his grasp and fell noiselessly upon the carpet, the distinct careful penmanship plainly visible in the candlelight.

"Vladimir," the lines ran, "I never forgive or forget treachery or failure. You have failed, and you are a traitor. Knowing this, you must also realise that all is over for ever between you and

"OLGA NAUNDORFF."

That was all. No word of regret, no expression of sorrow, no hint of personal grief and pain.

Simply he had failed: failure was a sin never to be condoned by Mdlle. Naundorff. It was shipwreck utter and entire—shipwreck without a chance or hope of rescue. He knew it, he realised it, as perfectly as though Olga had stood before him in her proud beauty, and spoken the cruel words in her sweet, cold voice.

What was death compared to this agony of loss that overwhelmed him? What was life—oh, God! what could life be without Olga?

How long he knelt there he never knew. The hours crept on long past midnight, the great house was silent as a tomb. Outside, the stars shone in myriad numbers, lighting the cold, dark heavens with thousands of fairy lamps. The snow lay dense and white, stretching miles away, in unbroken masses along the Neva's banks.

Presently the cathedral chimes struck the quarter, and the *miserere* bells followed with their minor chant, "Have mercy upon me, O Lord, have mercy upon me."

As the last note died away Vladimir arose; and with the change of attitude he became aware of a stealthy, muffled sound—a sound that came ever nearer and nearer; and that was neither the sweeping up of the wind, nor the jangle of bells, but a sliding, creaking noise, as of two smooth surfaces in friction.

A low exclamation escaped him, a look of horror crept over his dark face. For a moment he stood as if paralysed, then he moved suddenly, with soft, quick steps, towards one of the heavily-draped windows.

The stealthy, creaking noise had ceased.

He cautiously drew back a corner of the heavy curtain and peered out. All was still and silent; a great field of glistening snow, with the dull swish of the Neva against its banks. Was he mistaken? Had he not heard aright? For a moment the wild beating of his heart threatened to overpower him, then as suddenly it grew still.

Drawn up within the shadow of the deep *porte-cochère*, standing out black and distinct against the white background, stood a covered droschky; the horses' flanks steaming in the chill air, the lamps carefully shaded. A figure stood beside the vehicle, wrapped in a heavy coat and peaked fur cap; where the folds of the coat opened a gleam of steel was visible.

Vladimir dropped the curtain and came back to the centre of the room.

"It has come," he said in a half whisper. "It is my turn at last. I, who have gloried in Russia's stern vengeance, am I to feel her power now?"

Then his eye caught the open letter on the carpet.

He picked it up, touching it half-tenderly.

"How little it matters to me, now!" he said. "But you, Olga, shall be freed from all reproach, and no one shall ever know that it is through you the heaviest disgrace of all has come upon me. That much I can still spare you."

He looked at the signature she had written with so firm a hand—Olga Naundorff—"Good-bye," he said again, "good-bye."

He pressed his lips to her name, then held the paper in the candle-flame with a steady hand, and watched it burn slowly, slowly.

As the last bit fell from his fingers and fluttered down to the little heap of ashes on the velvet mantel-shelf, the door opened without noise, and two men stepped within the room.

Vladimir turned and faced them. The foremost spoke quietly, and without menace or threat.

"Count Vladimir Mellikoff, you are arrested in the name of the Emperor. Long live the Tsar."

Vladimir bowed, and a smile for one moment passed over his dark face.

"I am ready, gentlemen," he said, and turning, took up his heavy coat and cap of sables.

In the meantime the second intruder had crossed the room, attracted by the faint odour of burnt paper. He fingered the little pile of ashes suspiciously. Again Vladimir smiled.

"A burnt-out passion, monsieur," he said, "a discarded love-letter. That is all; nothing in any way interesting to the Chancellerie—or, its agents."

Then he put on the heavy furred coat and signified his readiness to depart.

A moment later the three dark figures were lost in the shadowy interior of the waiting droschky, and the curious scraping noise of steel runners upon frozen snow began again.

As one of his captors leant forward to give a last instruction to the officer without, a gleam from the shaded lamp fell across the face beneath the high-peaked hat; in it Vladimir recognised the boyish contour and innocent blue eyes of Ivor Tolskoi.

The heavy equipage moved on, and as the hour of dawn struck from the great cathedral clock, and the chimes clashed out triumphantly the liturgical chant, "How glorious is our Lord in Zion," Vladimir Mellikoff stood a prisoner, within a nameless casemate of the impregnable fortress of Petropavlovsk.

CHAPTER XVI.

AN ETERNAL FAREWELL.

It was the 4th of January—the New Year's Day of Russia.

All the morning, from the earliest peep of dawn, the bells had rung clamorously and joyfully; from every public building the blue, red, and white standard floated in the keen breeze; the streets were full of merry-makers, the Boulevard de Cavaliero and the Nevski, were thronged with sight-seers, the little shrine and chapel of St. Nicholas, on the Nicholas Bridge, were buried in lights, evergreen wreaths, and votive offerings; an air of festivity and joyousness pervaded the atmosphere, and even the grim Chancellerie, and Peter's Fortress, crept out of their habitual gloom, under the lavish caresses of the brilliant sunshine.

The old year was dead—dead and buried—with all its weight of sin and failure; of wrongs unrighted, of crimes unavenged, of evils unremedied. Let it go, let it go! "Ring out the false, ring in the true!" Welcome this jocund New Year, this youngster, with the rosy cheeks and sturdy limbs, this herald of a new *régime*, this hopeful progeny of a decrepit past!

It wanted but half an hour to mid-day, and already the approaches to St. Isaac's Church were thronged by a numerous and ever increasing crowd. The eight grand entrances were all thrown open; down the wide central granite steps a rich carpet was spread, and up this crimson pathway passed a continuous stream of guests, the bright costumes of the ladies mingling with the uniforms, Court dress, and plainer citizen habiliments of the sterner sex, until one and all became submerged and impersonal in the greater glory of the grand cathedral's gorgeous interior.

A line of the Petersburg Grenadiers, in their sombre green uniform, were drawn up on either side of the central approach, while behind them were grouped a guard of honour of the Caucasus Cossacks, their long scarlet tunics adding picturesque vividness to the scene. All that was best and brightest, most distinguished and most renowned, of the great Tsar's Court was represented within St. Isaac's, on that winter morning, and nothing could exceed the brilliancy and vivacity of the scene.

For not only was it the festa of the gay New Year, but it was also the marriage day of Olga Naundorff, and the religious function was to be celebrated with Royal splendour and pomp, honoured by the presence of the Tsar and Tsarina, who took this occasion to testify their friendship for the beautiful orphan, whose father had laid down his life in the service of Russia.

And now excitement reached the highest pitch, for the Imperial *cortège* was in sight, each equipage drawn by four black horses, mounted by postillions, and accompanied by outriders. The Tsarina, looking fair and fresh and young, bowed her acknowledgments to right and left, smiling as she did so, while the Grand Duchess Xenia laughed girlishly at the sparkling pageant. And now Alexander himself appeared, the great Tsar of all the Russias, wearing his favourite crimson kaftan, and saluting courteously in response to the old patriotic cry, as it echoed again and again: "Health we wish your Imperial Majesty! Long live the Tsar!"

But the greatest and final burst of enthusiasm was reserved for Olga. When she appeared—stepping down from the royal equipage, her white draperies sweeping behind her, a cloak of regal ermine wrapped about her neck and shoulders, from which her proud, beautiful face arose as cold and white as the surrounding snow, crowned by the shining masses of her golden-tinted hair, in which the Imperial gift of diamonds shone resplendent—a hush of admiration held the onlookers for one brief second; then, as she passed up the crimson foot-path, a deep low murmur burst forth, growing in strength and enthusiasm, until, as the great portal received her, it broke all bounds and ended in a prolonged and hearty cheer.

Within St. Isaac's all was hushed and reverent, though gorgeous and magnificent in its adornments. The lights from the eight great candelabra threw their beams on the golds and purples, the reds and blues of the mosaic decorations, and flashed forth in myriad reflections from the jewels that gleamed and sparkled in the costumes of the Court ladies.

The ceremonial was of the grandest; the Metropolitan, vested in cloth of gold, entered by the central door and was met by a procession of priests, who walked before him to the great altar, where the eight massive malachite columns, and priceless lapis-lazuli shafts, separated "the holy of holies" from the body of the cathedral. The trained voices of the Imperial choir rose and fell in regular cadences, unsupported by instruments of any kind, but perfect in harmony and unison. The bells chimed at intervals, while the worshippers, as they fell upon their knees, repeated again and again the symbol of the cross on forehead and breast.

And so it was that Olga Naundorff became the wife of Ivor Tolskoi.

Sanctioned by the most solemn ritual of her faith, surrounded by the highest nobility of her land; loved, admired, feared, and envied, Olga, the beloved of Vladimir Mellikoff, pledged her vows to Ivor Tolskoi; and shuddered even as she did so, at the light of triumph that flashed in his bold blue eyes, when, as her husband, he bent his head, and for the first time pressed a kiss upon her proud lips.

She had made her choice. But, after all, was it a wise one? Could she be sure of ruling this lover, who had now become her husband? Despite the *insouciance* of his boyish face, despite the frank boldness of his blue eyes and innocent smile, was he not destined to be the master, she the slave? Already she could feel the iron hand beneath the velvet glove, already she descried the touch of cruelty beneath his gayest smile, the echo of tyranny beneath his fondest caress.

Alas, poor Olga! If the dawn of her marriage morning was marred by such fore-bodings, what were its noontide and evening likely to prove?

We may not follow her so far into the future; and even if we dared, it were wisest to draw the curtain close about that ruined life, and not seek to pry into its wretchedness. A woman scorned is of all beings the most desolate, so Vladimir Mellikoff had said, little thinking that his prophecy was one day to come true of his passionately-loved Olga. Let us refrain from gazing on her in her hour of despair.

There is no fairer woman to-day, in all Russia, than Olga Tolskoi; one more envied and feared, nor one more hopeless and beyond hope. Like her Imperial ancestress, she has forsaken the good for

the evil; and, in giving rein to the lower passions of her nature, has lost for ever the power of repentance and contrition. She who once ruled supreme, is now the neglected wife of a husband who is one in name only, and whose indignities have long since reached the climax of insult.

Ivor has risen higher and higher on the wave of success. He holds a foremost place in the Imperial Councils, he is esteemed and feared in the Chancellerie, bowed down to and fawned upon at Court. Only within the privacy of his own household is his true character known; only there does he lay aside the mask of hypocrisy, and let loose the passions of cruelty and oppression; only there does he give rein to the bitter joke and cutting mockery, which are all that remain of the once humble wooing and suppliant entreaty.

And Olga, knowing how he has deceived her, finding out too late by what cunning subterfuge he turned suspicion upon Vladimir Mellikoff, and thus won from her the only free gift a woman has to bestow—herself—hates him, with an ever increasing hatred and loathing, that drives her to the wildest deeds of imprudent folly.

And so the baser nature within her triumphs, and the better nature dies; crushed out by passions too consuming to bear contradiction. Alas, poor Olga! So to her has come the lesson, that not even the fairest charms of woman's beauty and purity can bind the constancy of one, who, knowing his legal rights secure, scorns to keep them intact, and throws fidelity to the winds in the indulgence of the moment.

Well may the old despairing cry break from her in her splendour and loneliness, as she thinks of the time when Vladimir loved her, and her faith and trust in him were still unbroken:

"*Eheu fugaces! Postume, Postume!* Oh, for the days that are lost to me, lost to me!"

Brilliant indeed was the scene within the Onyx Hall, of the Winter Palace, on that New Year's night, the morning of which had seen the completion of Ivor Tolskoi's highest hopes. The bride and her husband were already far on their way towards those vast possessions on the Ural frontier, of which Ivor was so justly proud; but the time-honoured ceremonies of the festa were no less gay and joyous because shorn of Olga's fair presence.

The great Onyx Hall was filled with guests, awaiting the magic signal, gathered together in groups, chatting, laughing, intriguing, while ever nearer and nearer the hands on the dial of the large gold incrustated clock, standing at one end of the apartment, crept on to the hour of midnight. Suddenly a single stroke from the great bells of Isaac's Church, rang out, and a hush fell upon the waiting assembly; the clock chimed deep and full—twelve slow notes, whose dying echoes were caught up and thundered back by twelve salutes from the guns of Petropavlovsk, broken here and there by the triumphant strains, "How glorious is our Lord in Zion!" And as these died away the cathedral chimes broke forth in resonant glad music.

Simultaneously the folding doors at the top of the great hall were thrown open, and the Tsar entered, with the Empress leaning on his arm, and followed by the Imperial family. Passing down between the double lines of the Preobrashensky Grenadiers, and the Semenoffskoie Guards, drawn up on either side, his Majesty walked up to the chief actor in this brilliant pageant, and, halting before the tiny figure of the smallest cadet in the Russian army, dressed in the historical uniform of the Emperor Paul's Grenadiers, bent down over the mimic warrior and bestowed upon him the kiss of peace.

At this mark of kindly condescension the trumpets burst forth in a grand flourish, the bands struck up the spirited national air, and all the guests cried out with one accord:

"Many years to the Tsar! Health we wish your Imperial Majesty!"

And thus the first day of the New Year sinks to rest, crowned by the old but ever fresh benison, "Peace on earth, to men of good will."

With the departure of their Majesties the tongues of the guests were once more let loose, and the little Countess Vera, flitting across the wide hall, stops long enough beside the grave keen-eyed State minister, who in the guise of an elephant had graced her costume ball, to say, in a half whisper, and with a mocking smile:

"Well, monsieur, and were you present at the famous marriage function this morning? Was ever man so lucky as *ce cher* Ivor?—if it be luck to win so cold and cheerless a bride as Olga Naundorff. For my part, I could think of no one save that unfortunate Vladimir, whose shrift I hear is to be short enough. No trial for him, poor soul! He has played his game but ill, and we know, monsieur, you and I, what fate awaits one who has played to win for the Chancellerie and—lost. It's a dreary march to Siberia, even in the best of company; what must it be then when one's companion is a murderer by confession? *Hélas*, poor Vladimir, you should not have failed; for to failure Patouchki is implacable, and for failure Russia can punish silently and surely. And so ends the farce, monsieur, or was it tragedy? But let me whisper one word—let him laugh loudest who wins last. There are evil days in store for Ivor, or I am no true prophet; and for his bride? Bah! she will get but what she deserves; I will leave her fate in the hands of the gods, whose mills, we are told, 'grind slowly, but with justice grind they all.' And, after all, her beauty will not last. *Sans adieu, monsieur, à tantôt.*"

Then with another laugh the little Countess flew away, and was lost in the undulations of the crowd.

A second day's journey had begun for Ivor and his bride; the afternoon was already closing down upon them, as they halted at a small post-house where a relay of fresh horses awaited them. Ivor sprang out, glad to exercise his cramped limbs and light a cigarette; but Olga remained within the sleigh, buried in her costly wraps of fur.

There was some little delay, and as she sat alone, half lost in a retrospective dream, she was suddenly aroused by the dull clank of arms and the regular tread of marching feet. Leaning forward she looked out, and saw coming towards her a party of men and women, who trod wearily, with downcast heads, and hopeless hanging hands, and whose every step was accompanied by the monotonous clank of steel chains. As she gazed upon them she realised their situation and their destiny. They were Russian criminals, arrested by Russian law, on their way to Siberia and the mines.

Instinctively she drew back, shivering; as she did so the foremost detachment of prisoners came into line with her sleigh. At that moment a halt was called, to enable the officers in charge to refresh themselves at the bar of the post-house.

Once more Olga leant forward; her heart beat rapidly, her breath came quick and short, she clasped her hands together passionately, and as her white face gleamed out from the heavy sables surrounding it, one of the prisoners, he who was nearest to her, lifted his head, and thrust back as well as he could with his manacled hand, the peaked hat that shaded his forehead.

As he did so he turned his head slowly towards her, and in the dark haggard face, the burning feverish eyes, Olga beheld the countenance of Vladimir Mellikoff!

Fascinated, she gazed upon it, her own face blanched, her eyes wild with horror. She tried to speak, to call out, to break the cruel band of silence that held her as in a vice. It was useless. No words would come, no sound, no cry.

And as she thus looked upon him, a sudden light of recognition sprang to life within his eyes. He bent forward, holding her gaze with his; studying each curve and line of that fair, beautiful countenance, noting each golden curl where the hair lay about her neck and upon her brow, reading each fleeting expression of the proud lips, and deep blue eyes. And as he thus held her spell-bound, a smile passed over his worn face, a smile so pitying and accusing that Olga shuddered and drew closer her rich wraps, as if to ward off the cruelty of its tenderness.

For full a moment they looked thus upon one another, without word or gesture of recognition. Then the order came for the march to recommence, and Vladimir, with a single upward movement of his manacled hand, bade her an immutable farewell.

As he did so the figure next to him was drawn forward by the heavy chain that linked them together, and thus turned upon her companion in exile a face so beautiful, despite the marks passion and suffering had stamped upon it, that again Olga started, and drew back instinctively.

It was the face of Adèle Lamien, the murderer of Count Stevan Lallovich.

In another moment the exiles were in full march, and Olga, straining her eyes to the utmost, could see nothing save an indistinct moving mass against the miles of far-stretching snow; which even as she watched was lost in the evening shadows that crept up with silent but resistless steps.

It was a farewell from out eternity.

Truly Ivor Tolskoi's vengeance was complete, when Patouchki's cruel sentence was carried out to the letter, and Vladimir Mellikoff, linked to Adèle Lallovich, passed onward to that desolate Gehenna—Siberian exile.

For Russia never forgets, and Russia never forgives.

CHAPTER XVII.

AFTER TEN YEARS.

It was a golden day in the golden month of October, when Philip Tremain stepped down from the railway train, and stood, a solitary traveller, upon the platform of the open station at Beetons, high up among the rolling "white hills" of New Hampshire.

An open waggon, drawn by four sturdy mountain ponies, was in waiting beside the rustic platform, and into this he sprang; the driver cracked his long whip, accompanying it by a shrill whistle, and off the willing little creatures started.

Up the steep winding roads and down again they went at a swift, even gallop, while Mr. Tremain, with a sudden recollection of Mrs. Newbold's park ponies and irreproachable basket phaeton, laughed aloud at the dissimilarity between them and his present primitive conveyance, and at the contrast of the solemn hills, and long wooded slopes, with the suburban and ornamental prettiness that environed the Folly.

All before him stretched the grand White Mountain range, from Jefferson's and Madison's verdure-tipped sides, to Washington's rocky cliffs and snow-crowned peak. On every side the richest glory prevailed; scarlet and crimson of the sugar maple, gold and amber of beech and birch, russet brown of oak, and sombre green of hemlock. A keen pine-scented breeze swept past him, swaying the tall golden-rod and blue asters, and shaking out the bitter-sweet perfume from the purple gentian where it grew far up the mountain side.

The road wound on, up and up, growing steeper and steeper with each mile, fringed on either side by tall ferns, grasses, and brown bracken, and starred with late yellow-and-white ox-eyed daisies. To his right the steep mountains rose far above his head, to his left the beautiful "wild Ammonoouc" leapt from stone to stone, and dashed into rivulets against the lichen-covered boulders, breaking over them in creamy foam.

Once Philip bade his charioteer stop, and climbing down over the high-sided vehicle, he gathered a nosegay of the wild, white daisies, adding a maple and beech leaf as a set-off to the pure petals. Then, with a smile upon his lips, he took his place beside the taciturn Jehu, and on they went again, with the same long swinging gallop.

As the last roseate glow of sunshine was lighting up the western heavens, and the great Phœbus was sinking to rest in the arms of grey and violet clouds, they came upon a long low house, built far out on a projecting spur of rock, which seemed to hang 'twixt earth and sky, and looked as if a stiff north-easter would make short work of its walls and foundations. This house was painted a dull venetian red, and was covered with creepers and wild vines, and brilliant with rows of scarlet geraniums marking each casement.

It glowed like some bird of tropical plumage, alighted suddenly upon the cooler neutral tints of this northern land.

And this was the home of Patricia Hildreth.

Door and window stood open wide, and Philip's impatient feet carried him over the threshold into the dainty atmosphere of Patricia's drawing-room. And what a paradise it was to his hungry eyes! And how redolent of her!

Flowers, birds, books, an open piano, and through the windows such a view of mountain towering above mountain, all transfigured and etherealised by the magic touch of the dying sun-god. Ah, it was good to be here, it was good to breathe this free, keen air; it was good to stand within her home, to think how soon, how very soon, he should look upon her face, and read within her deep blue eyes the secret hidden there for ten long years.

The sunlight blinded him, the birds' song dulled his hearing, the perfume of the flowers steeped his senses; he was lost in a day-dream of ecstatic bliss.

And did he still dream, or was this reality? This graceful, bending figure, whose hands flashed in and out among the piano's ivory keys, awaking the music of a plaintive strain, that, as it grew into melody, became so strangely familiar?

It was no surprise to hear it, and still less was it a surprise to find the melody take shape in words, falling across the refrain, half chanted, half spoken as they were.

"I am a woman,
Therefore I may not
Call to him, cry to him,
Bid him delay not.
Showing no sign to him,
By look of mine to him,
What he has been to me.
Pity me, lean to me,
Philip, my king!"

"Patty, my little Patty! Oh, my darling, I have found you at last, I shall never let you go from me again."

"And have you forgiven me, Philip?" she asked, some long minutes after. "Have you forgiven me my selfishness, and wilfulness, and deception? I sometimes think I can never forgive myself."

He framed the beautiful face in both his hands, and feasted his eyes upon it.

"Forgive you, my darling! Forgiveness is not necessary between us now. We have found our love, Patty, after ten long years of loss; thank God, my darling, we have not found it too late."

And to them both it seemed, that a little of the joy and beatitude of heaven had come down to them on the golden sunset clouds.

"And so it was you, Patty," Philip says again, "who sang that very song that evening—how long

ago it seems, dear—at the Folly; and it was your presence and your personality that influenced me so strongly, that drew me to you as Adèle Lamien, and yet that perplexed and troubled and almost frightened me?"

"Yes, Philip, it was I," she answered. "And, do you know, through all my trickery and deceiving, it gave me keen delight to see how truly you did love me; for, after all, Philip, even as Adèle Lamien, when I won your half avowal of love, I was scarcely treacherous, because it could be no treachery for Patty, to win you from—Patricia Hildreth."

It was specious reasoning mayhap, but it served.

It was Miss Hildreth's old mocking laugh that next broke the silence, and Miss Hildreth's most tantalising voice that said:

"Ah, but Philip, there is one thing more that lies between us. Do you remember a certain evening ten years ago, when an angry lover parted from his fickle sweetheart? And do you remember his words when she begged for one little good-bye token? 'When I can think of you, look at you, speak of you as other men do; when all my love is dead; ask me then, Patricia.'"

"And do you ask me?" he cried, a little of the old masterful ring in his voice. "Nay, Patty, do not ask me, for that supposes it possible for me to refuse you. My dearest, let me rather plead from you."

And there was that within her eyes that gave him leave to gather her close into his arms, and bending down to lay his lips on hers.

And so, after ten years, the kiss was given and taken.

THE END.

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*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MISS HILDRETH: A NOVEL, VOLUME 3 ***

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