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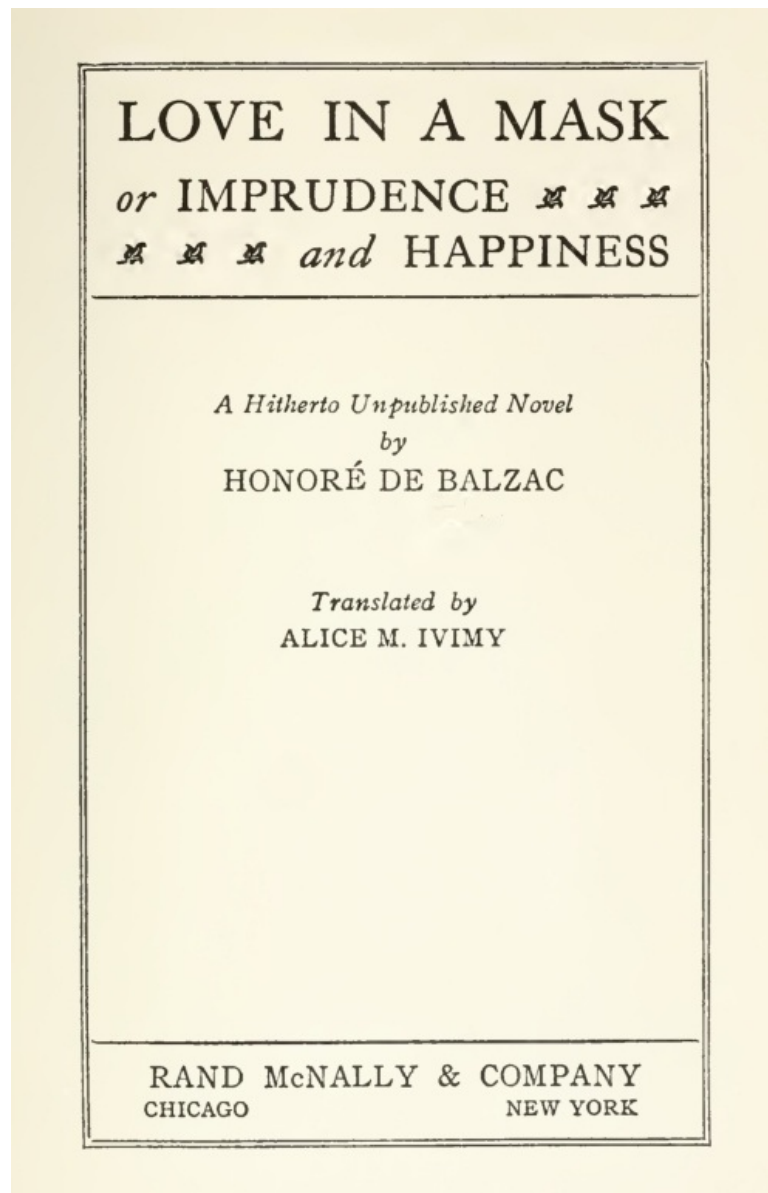
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**LOVE IN A MASK**  
*or* IMPRUDENCE *and* HAPPINESS

*A Hitherto Unpublished Novel by*

# HONORÉ DE BALZAC

*Translated by* ALICE M. IVIMY

RAND McNALLY & COMPANY

CHICAGO — NEW YORK

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## A NOTE

Balzac, in gratitude to the Duchesse de Dino for her friendship and unfailing kindness to him, one day presented her with the story of "L'Amour Masque" (Love in a Mask) in his own handwriting. The duchess was one of the few French aristocrats who in Balzac's time welcomed untitled authors to their salons, and her library boasted many such offerings from the literary men of her day. She placed Balzac's unpublished book on her shelves by the side of similarly unpublished poems by Alfred de Musset, and stories by Eugene Sue and others. The Balzac manuscript was incased in a finely tooled binding of great richness and beauty, bearing the *ex libris* of the ducal family.

For more than half a century the manuscript remained where the duchess had placed it. Then her son, M. Maurice de Talleyrand-Perigord, the present Duc de Dino, made it a present to his friend, the learned Lucien Aubanel. By him it was given to M. Gillequin, with the suggestion that it be published, and it accordingly appeared in print for the first time in March, 1911. The Duc de Dino, in a letter written to M. Gillequin on this occasion, guaranteed the history of the volume which for so long had been one of the treasured possessions of his family.

THE PUBLISHERS.

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## LOVE IN A MASK

OR

## IMPRUDENCE and HAPPINESS

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### I

Midnight was striking, and all Paris was astir; the streets were filled with people bent on merrymaking; it was the eve of *Mardi Gras* (Shrove Tuesday).

Léon de Préval, a young cavalry officer, had just made his way into the Opera Ball. There, for over an hour, he wandered aimlessly amid the throng that seethed forward and backward, finding no one he knew, and quite failing to grasp the meaning of the stupid greetings flung at him from time to time by the women he passed. Finally, choked with dust, overcome with heat, dizzy with the ceaseless buzz of all these black-robed specters, he asked himself impatiently whether this were indeed pleasure, and turned to find the door.

At that moment two masked women came down the steps into the ballroom. Both were strikingly graceful, and both were strikingly well dressed. They were accompanied by a genial looking man without a mask. A little murmur of admiration greeted them, and a band of giddy youths fell in behind them, hurling flippant compliments and extravagant gallantries at the two masks.

Léon followed with the rest. At every step the curiosity of the crowd added to the numbers of the little procession; soon, it encountered a group of masqueraders, themselves the center of a cortège, who, coming from the opposite direction, threw such confusion into the ranks that one of the ladies, the younger looking of the two, was separated from her friends. Glancing anxiously around her in search of a protector, her eyes fell on Léon, who was following her movements with a good deal of interest, and, hastily seizing his arm, "Oh, I implore you," she said nervously, using the familiar *thou*, "get us out of this and help me find my friends."

"I am at your service, lovely Mask. Don't be afraid; trust yourself to me, and come with me."

And, with the lady clinging to one arm, with the other he cleared a way for her through the press, bringing her safely out at last to the cloak room; there he seated her on a bench, and volunteered to go to find her some refreshments.

"No, stay with me," she said; "I don't want anything. I am really ashamed to have given way to such foolish terror."

"Ah, but I am ready to bless the cause; without it, I should not have known the happiness of being chosen by you to protect you."

"I am willing to admit that you have rendered me a great service, and I am grateful. I will even implore you to continue to extend your protection until we can find my friends."

"What! You want to leave me already? Ah, if only from gratitude, grant me a few minutes."

"Well, then, as a reward, I will stay a few minutes with you."

They sat down side by side, and the time sped swiftly while they chatted gaily, lightly together.

At last the charming Mask bethought herself once more of her missing party.

"But who are these friends of yours?" said Léon. "Is it your mother, or sister? And, perhaps, a husband?"

"A husband? No, indeed, thank God!"

"You are not married?"

"No, not now."

"What, already a widow? How sorry I am for you!"

"Pray, why should you suppose that I am to be pitied? Are all husbands so kind? Are all men so tender? Is there, on the contrary, one who deserves to be regretted?"

"Oh, what an anathema! He is a happy fellow who succeeds in inspiring you with juster, milder feelings!"

"Toward men? Heaven forbid!"

"Then you are determined to drive to despair all the troop of admirers who, no doubt—"

"I haven't one; I have just arrived from the other side of the world, and know nobody here."

"Nobody, really? Then, fair Mask, I put myself down as your first, and you will see that I shall be ever the most devoted, the most constant—"

"Constant! *Bon Dieu!* If it is in that strain you are going to talk, I shall leave you forthwith."

"What, does constancy—?"

"Constancy is but a chain that we pretend to wear in order to impose its weight on another. Now that I am free, perfectly free, I intend to remain so; no man living could induce me to forswear myself."

"There is no more freedom for me, I feel that, but I cannot regret it. The chain shall, however, be for me only; you cannot prevent my loving you, or hoping—"

"Ah, no, no, no, monsieur; I do not want love; I do not want promises; and least of all do I want any one to hope for anything from me."

"But, cruel Mask, incomprehensible Mask, what then *do* you want? What must one do to obtain at least your pity?"

"One must neither rave nor deceive; neither exaggerate a feeling of which he is barely conscious, nor fancy it possible to induce a sensible woman to change her plans for a few romantic words, or hypocritical attentions; one must be humble, discreet, patient. I must have time to make up my mind, to find out exactly what I want, and then, perhaps—"

"Then, perhaps, what? Charming Mask, finish the sentence, let me know my fate. I will be obedient; silence, submission, patience, I promise everything."

As he spoke Léon's face glowed with love and hope, and he gazed eagerly into the large, black eyes, which, soft and sparkling, appeared to be studying him with calm and close scrutiny.

Entirely disregarding his impassioned tones, she went on with a thoughtful air:

"This gold braid must betoken a grade. You are in the service, no doubt?"

Confounded by her self-possession, Léon could only reply by a gesture of assent.

"In what regiment?"

"I am captain in the Sixth Horse," he replied, a little hurt.

"You are on furlough, perhaps? Does your family live in this city?"

"No; my people belong to a distant part of the country. They are far from rich, but they are honorable and highly respected. I only came up with my regiment, and, like you, lovely Mask, have been but a few days in the capital; like you, too, I know no one here; like you, I am free, with no attachments and no ties. Fate seems to have brought me here to lose at one blow my heart, my liberty, and my peace of mind."

"And find in return, of course, nothing but a hard-hearted, ungrateful woman! These are the conventional things that we all say. Now, I am going to do justice to Chance, that is at times kind to us, and I am inclined to believe that it has been so this time in bringing us two together. It may be that I shall have it to thank for the one blessing that was lacking in my life."

"Adorable and mysterious lady, if only I could fall at your feet, and there swear that henceforth Léon de Préval, grateful and humble, will do all in his power to merit so sweet an avowal!"

"An avowal!" she said. "You call that an avowal? Did one ever see anything to equal the presumption of these men?"

"But how can one help believing a little in what one so fondly hopes? May I not know who is the fascinating creature that takes a pleasure in teasing me? May I not raise the mask that hides the features—"

"Which perhaps are not so very plain!"

"If only I might see them for a moment, if I might but read there!"

"Can't you read all you need to know in my eyes?"

"They are bewitching, but suppose a sweet smile went with them?"

She rose from her seat, and in a colder, more serious manner she said:

"No, you will never see me, never know me, and never will you learn anything about me."

Léon stood as though petrified.

"Did one ever hear of such inconceivable caprice? It is useless, madame, for me to trouble you any longer. I see you are anxious to rejoin your friends. We must look for them."

She interrupted him, not noticing his anger.

"Léon de Préval, that's your name, isn't it," she said dreamily, "captain of the Sixth Horse? Do you expect to stay long in the city?"

"What can that matter to you, cruel one, since you do not mean to see me ever again?"

"But what makes you think I don't mean to see you again? How little it takes to throw these wiseacres off their balance! I am, on the contrary, so determined to see you again that—"

"*Mon Dieu*, my dear, what ever has become of you?" cried a woman's voice behind them. "We have been hunting for you these two hours past."

It was the friend and escort of the pretty Mask. Thus suddenly brought together again, each in turn ran quickly over the incidents of the night.

"I am worn out with fatigue, and bored to death," said the lady who had just arrived upon the scene. "For pity's sake, let us go home."

"With all my heart. There is nothing to keep me here any longer."

"What, so soon?" exclaimed Léon. "At least, you will not forbid me to accompany you to your carriage?"

This favor was granted, and the pair followed the others out of the hall.

"Be merciful," said Léon, "and finish the charming sentence you had begun when we were so annoyingly interrupted. We were talking of meeting again. But when? Where? And how? Think that in a minute more I shall have lost everything but the remembrance of you. Will you not leave me a little hope?"

"Ah, then he has got over his fit of temper?"

"Do not play with me now. I am about to lose you. How shall I be able to—"

"Well, there is just the possibility that I may come to the Mi-Carême ball here."

"Three weeks to wait! Ye gods, three centuries!"

"Yes, three weeks, perhaps, and perhaps never."

"I shall be dead by that time, dead with impatience and worry."

"That will entirely upset my plans."

"Your plans?"

But they had reached the door. A carriage had just drawn up, but in the darkness it was impossible to distinguish either its color or its coat of arms. A black servant was holding the door

open.

"May I not at least cherish the hope that you will be sorry for my sufferings?"

"Indeed, I fancy you are going to occupy my mind considerably."

As she finished speaking, she sprang lightly into the carriage, and the horses dashed rapidly off.

Léon stood and gazed after that coach which was carrying away from him his new conquest, and, caring no more for the ball, he made his way homeward, his brain in confusion, his heart a little troubled; his mind ran upon his adventure, and he reproached himself bitterly for not having found some means of carrying it a little farther.

"Who can she be," he said to himself, "so attractive and so odd? She cannot be a *demi-mondaine*, with that noble bearing, at once modest and proud, and with such unmistakable ease of manner. What can she want? And why should she alternately encourage and repel me? She talked of her plans, and wanted to know all sorts of details about me; our meeting might prove a happy thing for her—yet I am never to see her again, and must never know who she is—Was she only playing with me? If I thought that, what a revenge I would take! But pray, how and on whom? She may not come to the next ball; I may have lost all trace of her forever. I should be sorry, for I am convinced that she is charming. What a soft sensuousness there is in her pretty, flexible figure! What beautiful eyes she has, and what an expressive voice! And such a graceful, witty way of talking! These three weeks are going to be endless. I had better spend them in looking for and finding her. It might be as well to get some sleep in the first place!"

But there was no sleep for Léon that night. At an early hour he rose and began at once his search.

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## II

The whole of the first week was spent in searching the streets, shops, theaters, and pastry-cooks'; in following up every woman who seemed to bear the faintest resemblance to the stranger; committing a thousand blunders, and many impertinences, with no other result than to prove to himself the utter uselessness of his attempt. The second week found him thoroughly disheartened, and in the course of the third he began to wonder how much longer he was going to act as a puppet in the hands of a coquette who was perhaps only concealing herself from his eyes in order to enjoy the sight of his discomfiture. Then one day a missive was left at his door containing these words:

"M. de Préval will of course remember that he is expected on Thursday at the Opera Ball at one A.M., under the clock."

As he read, his hopes were fired anew. On the day appointed, midnight had scarcely struck when Léon took up his position beneath the clock, consumed with amorous impatience and keen curiosity.

A long hour had slipped away when, at length, the white domino flitted by. She bowed slightly, and, slackening her pace to allow her companions to pass on before her, she accepted the arm that Léon had sprung up to offer her. Delighted to meet her again, beside himself with hope and happiness, he gently pressed her round arm to his side, and described in eloquent terms all the sufferings of the last few days, his vain search, his fears, his impatience. Quietly she listened, then suddenly interrupted him.

"Well, I fared better than you," she said, "for I found out at once all I wanted to know about you."

"About me?"

"Yes, indeed; I found all you had told me was strictly true, but I learned in addition that you are popular with your comrades, and that your superior officers think highly of you. They say, moreover, that you are capable of acting honestly by women, and might even be trusted to keep any promise extorted from you."

"That would be merely my duty; do please let us talk about my happiness. Have you really been thinking about me? Is it possible you were sufficiently interested in me to hope I might be worthy your regard, and to try to find out—"

"But I had to, if I meant to carry out my plans!"

"Ah, those plans of yours! I hope I am now going to hear what they are. Kind Mask, go on; do, I beseech you, trust the fortunate mortal whose heart already beats for you alone, and who is only waiting a word from you to give himself to you forever."

"I should be very sorry!" she exclaimed hastily.

For a few moments Léon was silenced.

"Oh," he said at last, "do not play this cruel game with me any longer. Why tease me with alternate kindness and coldness? This is the last of these balls, but do not think to escape me again. I shall dog your footsteps and follow you until you promise to meet me again, and give me an opportunity to lay my heart and my hopes at your feet, and hear from you what these plans can be."

"Oh, no, no; I must first be quite sure of your reasonableness and prudence. There are certain

conditions I shall have to impose, and your word of honor duly signed and sealed, must be my guarantee of their fulfilment."

"My word of honor! My signature!" said Léon, considerably astonished at her cold-blooded precautions and also at the solemnity she seemed to attach to a treaty made at the Opera Ball.

He looked down at his companion. She was clearly embarrassed and meditative; her bosom heaved with obvious agitation; and he almost fancied he could detect a blush beneath her mask. She on her side was abstractedly watching him, and seemed perplexed and doubtful.

Convinced that the moment had come when with a little pressure she would give way, Léon went on eagerly:

"Charming but inexplicable creature! Well, then, I consent to whatever you ask, and I will renew the vow I made at the last ball to be obedient, docile, and discreet. I accept your conditions beforehand, if you in return will leave me the joy of hoping to meet you again and holding finally in my arms her—"

"It must be so," she murmured absently, apparently replying rather to some thought in her own mind than to what he was saying.

But Léon noticed only her words, and they completely turned his head.

"Oh, how glad I am!" he cried. "Let us go away, dear, unknown Lady. Perfect my happiness by coming away with me out of this tiresome crowd. Let us go where I can tear off this odious mask and take your commands. Then in greater freedom than is possible here, let me pay love's debt."

As he spoke he drew her gently forward; but suddenly she paused, withdrew her arm, and regaining the haughty carriage that seemed natural to her she said in a calm cold voice:

"You are strangely mistaken, M. de Préval. Your rash transports and vain declarations offend and hurt me. Believe me, I am not what you dare to think, and I am entitled to more consideration, greater respect, and more prudence from you. I am going to overlook this offense, however, because I admit that my own odd behavior might well have misled you; but you must do all I tell you. Tomorrow you shall hear from me and I will then let you know exactly what conditions I mean to make. Till then, be patient and resign yourself."

As she spoke, she moved away into the crowd, intending to give him the slip, but he dashed after her in pursuit.

"No," he cried, "I am not going to leave you. You shall not run away like this. Cruel creature, you touch my heart, set my imagination on fire and then forsake me."

"Take me to my carriage," she said, and in her voice there rang a note of command.

He grasped the hand she offered, and again poured forth his lamentations and prayers, but all to no effect.

The faithful Negro was standing at the door. The stranger quickly entered her carriage, saying to Léon, "Good-bye, till tomorrow. You may rely on my promise."

"At least permit me to see you home," he said, his foot on the step.

"Close the door, and drive home," she said energetically.

Her order was instantly obeyed, and once again Léon saw his hopes vanish with her who had inspired them.

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### III

The impatience with which Léon waited for the morrow may be more easily imagined than described. How often did he run up to his rooms to see if the letter had yet arrived! How delighted he was when at last it was handed to him! But what was his astonishment to read these words:

"Yesterday M. de Préval appeared keenly to desire to see again the lady in the white domino whom he met at the Opera Ball. To obtain this favor he declared himself ready to do anything she asked of him.

"Here are the conditions on which he may have what he so persistently demanded:

"1. M. de Préval must be in his rooms at midnight tomorrow; a trustworthy man whom he has already seen once will call for him with a hired carriage which will convey him to his destination, only M. de Préval must allow his eyes to be blindfolded.

"2. He must refrain from questioning his guide, and must not attempt to bribe him (this would be quite useless), but he must quietly follow instructions.

"3. He must promise to make no noise, and no scandal; he must not make a fuss about the darkness, and must not attempt to induce the person who will be waiting for him to break the silence she has determined to keep.

"4. Finally, when his guide returns to fetch him, he must follow him out to the carriage and thence homeward, with the same precautions, and afterward, without making vain attempts to discover what is to be done with him, he must patiently await the

enlightenment that is faithfully promised to him.

"5. If M. de Préval accepts these conditions he can write on the foot of this sheet that he will keep them, add his signature, and leave it in an envelope at his door to wait till called for."

When he had read through this extraordinary document Léon, astonished beyond measure, was torn by a thousand conflicting feelings.

How was he to reconcile the elaborate precautions of this strange compact with the enlightenment that was promised? How could he make this appointment agree with the air of lofty distinction and reserve of the stranger?

He told himself over and over again that it would be the height of folly and imprudence to sign such a treaty, and embark on such a wild-goose chase. And yet, as the graceful image of the pretty Mask rose before his mind's eye, and their animated talk at the ball recurred again to his memory, the contrast between her pride and her weakness, the piquancy of the situation, his now strongly aroused curiosity, and his vanity at stake, all combined to make up an irresistible temptation. For a moment he even fancied there might be a spice of danger in trusting himself to some unknown man to be led to an unknown place, his hands tied by his promise, and his person exposed defenseless to all risks. But this prospect added savor to the rest.

"No, indeed," he cried, "I shall not draw back now; the precious reward offered is well worth a little folly."

And, seizing a pen, this wise Cato wrote like any harebrained youth:

"I accept all the conditions imposed, and undertake on my word of honor to fulfil them scrupulously. I only ask permission to wear my sword. "LÉON DE PRÉVAL."

In the course of the evening some one called for his answer, and on the following day he received another note, containing these few words:

"He may wear his sword, but M. de Préval has nothing to fear for either his honor or his safety."

Never was day so long.

For two hours Léon, ready dressed, had been walking up and down his room when the sound of a carriage drawing up to the door brought his heart into his mouth. Seizing his sword, he ran rapidly downstairs, and found the black servant standing there. The man motioned him to get into the carriage, and then, in his bad French, respectfully asked permission to bandage his eyes.

Léon made no resistance.

After driving a short time the Negro ordered the coachman to stop, and helped Léon to step out on to the pavement. Together they walked a few yards, and then entered a house where they mounted a short staircase. Léon could perceive that he was being led through some large rooms until they reached one that was filled with sweet scents. At this moment his bandage was removed, and, glancing eagerly round, he found himself in a dark apartment, at the end of which was an open door that revealed an elegant boudoir dimly lighted by an alabaster lamp.

The Negro standing beside him with a dark lantern in his hand pointed to the boudoir and in a low tone uttered the words: "Honor and silence." He then disappeared.

Léon laid aside his sword, and entered swiftly. A woman, his unknown friend, dressed in a simple *négligé*, her head wrapped in a veil, was half reclining on a sofa.

Léon threw himself at her feet.

"I am a happy man!" he cried. "But what? Are you still hiding your face from me? For pity's sake make no more mystery; throw off your veil."

As he spoke he lifted his impatient hand. No obstacle was interposed but at the same instant the lap went out.

We dare not throw light on the darkness that Léon respected. We will not infringe the order of silence; we will only say that his highest hopes were surpassed by the reality, and in the pleasure of that meeting he had no desire to break his word.

Time passed quickly, and the night was far advanced when a slight sound was heard in the apartment; a secret door had been opened, the stranger disappeared, and Léon found himself alone. The Negro stood again before him, and respectfully requested him to replace the bandage over his eyes and follow him.

"No," he replied, both pained and vexed, "I will not go until I have seen her—until I have obtained —"

A woman's voice interrupted him, whispering close beside him, "Honor and silence."

Léon rushed toward the voice to find only a wall; he groped along it and came upon a small door fastened on the other side, through whose cracks he could distinguish a light that receded rapidly and then disappeared.

"Cruel," he said, not daring to speak aloud, "stop one moment, only one word—"

"Honor and silence," said the Negro firmly.

"Yes," Léon replied sadly. "I am bound to honor, I promised, I submit. I can only hope that others will be as faithful to their word as I am to mine."

The bandage was replaced, and Léon followed his guide out to the carriage. Soon he was at home again, where, alone with his memories, alternately delicious and sad, happy and anxious, he, now madly in love, wondered if indeed the whole thing were not a dream, and fell asleep in the hope of prolonging it.

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#### IV

But who shall describe his anxiety and distress as the days went by, then a week, a second and a third, with still no news from the stranger? Still she took no trouble to soothe his impatience.

His mind dwelt painfully on the incident.

"What!" he said, "is it possible that my loyalty and honor were invoked merely to satisfy the passing caprice of an unprincipled and immoral woman? No, no I am unjust to her and ungrateful too. I could feel her heart beating with fear. O my beloved lady why hide from my love? Why lift me to a pinnacle of bliss only to dash me to earth again directly after? The memory of the moments we spent together entirely absorbs me; is it possible they have no power over you?"

In this apostrophe to his mysterious belle Léon was interrupted by the arrival of a letter which seemed nicely timed to reply to it. He recognized at once the handwriting of the conditions, and opened the envelope with a hand that shook with pleasure. This is what he read:

"How many illusions I am destroying! What tender hopes will now be blighted! What prestige dwindle away! You think yourself the victor, but instead you are under orders. Your vanity must have been stirred at the thought of the irresistible influence you wielded over a weak woman but it is you who have to obey her will. You are of course waiting impatiently to see and know her, to establish your empire over her by fresh transports on your side and fresh weaknesses on hers—and that moment will never come. All is over between her and you.

"Nevertheless, the loyalty and delicacy of your behavior deserve some recognition from me. I don't think I can better prove my gratitude than by confiding to you those plans you were so curious to hear, and explaining the conduct which must have seemed strange at least in your eyes, if not imprudent, though, thanks to you, I believe I shall never have cause to regret it.

"An unequal match which brought me only misery, humiliation, injustice, and violence has left in me an invincible repugnance for a tie that weighs heavily on the weak, upholds the strong and sanctions injustice. When therefore I found myself at the age of twenty-five free, wealthy, and my own mistress, I vowed to remain so always, but I very soon discovered that I was purchasing my independence at the price of nature's sweetest solace. When I looked around me I found not a creature who needed my care and tenderness, not one to love me and tell me so. I was continually haunted by sorrow for my childless condition, and by degrees this became a real grief. I was born beneath a fierce sky, and my blood is hot, my passions strong. What more can I say? I gradually came to form the singular plan by which I might know the joys of maternity without submitting to a hated yoke. Still, do not think me a strong-minded woman, and do not imagine that I scorn as prejudices those laws which I know to be useful to society. No, I have the greatest respect for them, and if, for this time alone, I have dared to set them aside, believe me, it is for this once only, because special circumstances made it possible for me to save at the same time appearances and reputation.

"My plan, formed in the first instance in fear and trembling, soon occupied all my waking thought. I will confess that there was a romantic glamour about it that lent it an additional charm in my eyes. Soon it grew to be a passion. You know how I succeeded in putting it in execution, and to you I shall owe the sole blessing that my life lacked. At first I meant to leave you in ignorance of the truth, and forget you entirely. Now I have changed my mind and have come to think that I owe you some explanation. Moreover, if my hopes are fulfilled, I may die before the object of my affection is old enough to take care of itself. It will inherit all my fortune, but I think I ought not to deprive it of its natural protector.

"No matter then where duty may call you, when the time comes you will receive from me a split ring on which there will be engraved the date of a birth; the setting will inform you of the sex, a diamond signifying a son, an emerald a daughter. The second half of this ring will be given to the child in the event of my death, with all the clues necessary for finding you out. When the second half is placed in your hand the fact of its matching your own will prove the right of the bearer to your protection, and my personal regard for you makes me very sure it will not be asked in vain.

"Adieu, monsieur, adieu, Léon; farewell forever! Take no steps to discover me; they would be in vain, since in a few days I shall be far away. Forget a fantastic creature whom you do not and must not know; forget the dream of a single night that cannot return. Be happy; this is my one wish for you, and if I learn that it has been realized, I shall be happy too."

"Happy!" cried Léon, flinging the letter down angrily. "I am to be happy when she coldly informs me I am never to see her again; when her insulting confidences just reveal the value of the prize that is lost to me, never to be regained! But let her not think to escape me altogether; she is mine; she herself formed the tie between us. Could she have done it only to sever it immediately? Wherever she goes I shall follow her, and everywhere I shall insist on my claims being heard. She cannot shirk them."

Then, after a moment's reflection, he added: "Alas! I am forgetting that she is going away. She is



probably returning to her own land, and the wide seas will divide us. Unhappy man that I am, why did I ever go to the ball! Why was I such a fool as to accept her artful conditions?"

The suddenness of the blow thus inflicted on his fondest hopes took such effect on Léon that for several days he was ill. As soon as he was able to go out again he started his search with more energy than ever, but, being himself a stranger in the city, there were few means open to him, and he soon found himself reduced to a state of passive regret, which is perhaps the worst of all evils. During this period of his life his temper took on a tinge of melancholy which never entirely deserted him.

Brought up by an honorable family who had instilled good principles into the lad, Léon had never indulged in the usual license of barracks; his professional studies, and a succession of fatiguing and glorious campaigns, had left him little leisure to form any lasting liaison. Though of an affectionate disposition, he had never loved, and this, the first serious impression made upon him, was so much the deeper in consequence. And now Chance had thrown in his way an attractive woman, rendered still more piquante by the mystery with which she had surrounded herself, and she had vanished like a shadow. On the very eve, perhaps, of becoming a father, he was yet never to be allowed to press to his heart the child of his love; united by the tenderest and strongest of ties to persons visible only to his imagination, he was doomed never to know them in the flesh.

Thoughts such as these left him no peace; yet, after reading her letter over and over again, he fancied he could detect in it some faint promise for the future.

All hope of finding his unknown mistress was not yet lost; this enigmatic ring that she promised him, and that was to announce the most passionately longed-for of events, constituted in itself a kind of correspondence. Besides, since an arrangement was to be made by which the child should at any time be able to find its father, it was evident that his fate and existence must continue to interest the mother, and the thought that the invisible stranger would be watching over his fortunes took hold of his imagination and afforded him some consolation.

But a fresh grief awaited him; orders were given for his regiment to go into garrison in a small town of the north of France, and Léon, forced to accompany his men, was plunged anew into the depths of despair. He felt that in leaving Paris he lost all chance of discovering traces of her he sought, and that, once buried in the distant provinces, he might easily be forgotten; even the message he was awaiting with such impatience would perhaps never reach him there. Still he had no alternative but to leave, and residence in the little town, with no society and no resource but solitary country walks, did not contribute greatly to relieve Léon's melancholy mood.

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## V

Whilst Léon, brooding in dull exile over his troubles, was mentally calculating the hours that must elapse before the expected message could be despatched, his unknown friend, also in seclusion, but in a charming estate situated on the road from Tours to Bordeaux, was freely indulging in those joyful anticipations that her audacity, coupled with her warm, eager blood, had warranted. In the independent position in which she now found herself everything was new, and everything seemed pleasant.

Born in Martinique, and reared amongst a slave population, the youthful Elinor at sixteen had never known any restraint but that of her parents' indulgent rule; she had never felt the salutary yoke of the hard and fast laws of society. But at this period of her life her beauty, which had begun to make some stir in the place, aroused the admiration of M. de Roselis, the richest settler in the island. He came forward to ask for her hand, and his wealth so dazzled her ambitious relatives that it was granted immediately.

He was a man of some forty years, with a handsome face but a character as odious as it was contemptible. He had been the overseer of the property he now owned, and had spent his life there, and the habit of command had developed in him all those vices which invariably spring from isolation and unlimited power. Suspicious and violent, unprincipled and unscrupulous, his vanity, flattered by the possession of the handsomest girl in the colony, soon effaced in him any sentiment for her except that of a mean jealousy, which he indulged with the inflexibility of his imperious temper.

Elinor, shut up amongst her Negresses, over whom she had no control—many of them being, indeed, her own rivals—had now to endure the vilest treatment. Her proud and sensitive heart was filled with a deep-rooted resentment, and she visited on all men the hatred and contempt which were merited by the only one whom she had opportunity of judging.

Her parents died of grief at having thus sacrificed their only child, and shortly after her husband, worn out by a manner of life whose pleasures he had thoroughly exhausted, began to make preparations to remove to France. He had already arranged for the purchase of an estate in that country, when he was suddenly overtaken by death in the midst of a debauch.

Thus the beautiful Elinor de Roselis found herself at the age of twenty-five at once the richest and most independent woman in the colony, but, disgusted with a place in which she had known only sorrow, she resolved to put into execution her husband's plans, and settle in France. One of her childhood friends, M<sup>me</sup>. de Gernancé, who had been more fortunate than herself in marriage, was also about to remove with her family and fortune to France, so a vessel was chartered for

them, and Mme. de Roselis, having once more vowed on the tomb of her parents to give no man in future a right to dispose of her person and fate went on board, her mind filled with a thousand schemes, and nursing as many fond hopes.

In the first years of her unhappy married life Mme. de Roselis had suffered keenly from her disappointment in having no children; later she found consolation in the fear lest a child of hers should inherit the vices that caused her such lasting and acute pain.

In the first flush of her recovered liberty this regret returned with fresh force; alone, without relatives, without affection, on the eve of landing on a foreign shore where she knew no one, she realized that independence is not the only requisite for happiness, and that we all need some interest in life to attach us to it. The company of her friend's children, who were constantly with them during the voyage, riveted her thoughts to the subject, and it was their kisses and the games she played with them that first gave her the idea of the strange scheme we have seen her carry out. The long journey afforded her plenty of leisure in which to devise a way to guard against the serious inconveniences that might arise from such a proceeding; and in proportion as the idea took shape in her mind she became ever more enchanted with it, until by the time Bordeaux was reached she was completely under its spell.

Making only a short stay in that city, she quickly followed M. and Mme. de Gernancé to Paris, where they intended to spend the winter together. We have seen with what rashness and success she accomplished her object, and how her lucky star threw in her way a man like Léon de Préval, whose honesty and steadiness of character saved her from the dangers to which she was bent on exposing herself.

Admitting only her faithful black servant into her confidence, she had commissioned him to find for her in some distant suburb the little house that in the interval between the two balls she arranged to suit her purpose. The secret spring that extinguished the lamp and the secret door by which she escaped were the fruit of the careful forethought that she lavished on a scheme which assuredly could be justified by none.

As she was staying in the same hotel as her traveling companions, she was obliged to prepare them for her disappearance by telling them she intended to leave for the country on the day following the *Mi-Carême*. Accordingly, on the day appointed, notwithstanding her friends' entreaties, she duly left, attended by the Negro, but she went only as far as the little house. The rest of her household having started a few hours earlier, all passed off as she had planned.

After the meeting that she had arranged with such care she remained concealed a short time in the villa. It was from thence she had written to him the letter that had caused Léon so much pain. A few days later, she left for Touraine.

Her first care on arriving was to spread a report in the district that her husband, already ill when they started, had died on the voyage; this was confirmed by her mourning dress. Soon she allowed it to be known that she was hoping shortly to possess a tardy token of their union. After some time the hope became an obvious certainty, and toward the end of the autumn Mme. de Roselis obtained her heart's desire, and gave birth to a daughter who was brought up by her side in the chateau.

With what transports of joy she pressed her long-desired child to her bosom—the child in whom all the happiness of her life was bound up, and in whom all her tenderest feelings would be centered!

"You will love me dearly," she said, "you will thank me for the care and love I shall lavish on you. I shall live for you only, and shall never have to fear lest desertion and insult may be the reward of my devotion. At last I have at my side a creature who is bound to me by the sweetest and closest of ties, whose innocent affection and childish joy will, I hope, suffice for my own happiness."

It was but natural that the memory of him to whom she owed her new happiness should be present with her in the first glow of it. She thought how delighted Léon would be if he could see his child, and this brought back to her mind the promise she had made to let him know the date of its birth.

The Negro was sent to Paris to order the ring that had been described to Léon. He was told to find out at the War Office the whereabouts of his regiment, and to start immediately, at full speed, to take him this last message. He was himself to place it in the hands of M. de Préval, and to depart instantly, without giving the young officer time to ask a single question. The black carried out his instructions with as much accuracy as intelligence.

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## VI

One morning, Léon, who had hailed with some excitement the opening of the month of November, returned from drill in low spirits and full of anxious thought. He was about to go at once to his quarters when he heard behind him the trot of a horse, and, turning his head, recognized the Negro. He uttered a cry of surprise and delight as the black rode up to him and, without dismounting, said:

"Here is something I was ordered to bring to you," and at the same moment he placed in his hand a sealed box.

Then he set spurs to his horse and was out of sight in an instant. Léon, dumbfounded, followed him with his eyes, and but for the box he still held would have been tempted to set the sudden event down to an apparition to be attributed to his own nervous condition.

Hastily, he opened the case. It contained only the half of a gold ring, split like a French wedding ring, on which was engraved "November 22, 18—" It was set with a very fine emerald.

"So it is a girl!" cried Léon. "I am a father—and not a line, not a word for me! She is still making sport of me! This ends everything, probably, and I shall never hear another word about her. Who ever can she be, this unget-at-able creature who does as she likes with me and seems to hold my future in her hand, who remains invisible, and yet can find me out in this distant spot, and, according to her wayward humor, seeks me or forsakes me? Wretched ball! Fatal meeting!"

He turned the matter over in his disturbed mind in a hundred different ways, but never came to any satisfactory conclusion.

A long year passed in this way. Then, with the approach of the following spring, there were rumors of a coming war; a Spanish expedition was talked of, and the officers, looking forward to promotion and glory, were thankful for the prospect of escape from inaction.

Léon was specially impatient for the signal to enter the fray, for he was sick of living with his memories, in the idleness that fostered them. What then was his surprise to receive one day a despatch from the War Office, informing him of his nomination as aide-de-camp to General de X. and ordering him to start at once for Paris, where he was to join that officer.

To Léon, who had never seen his chief, and knew no one about his person who could have exerted any influence in his behalf, this promotion was inexplicable. For some time past, however, he had been living in an atmosphere of extraordinary events; this last filled him with mingled joy and hope. Might not his unknown mistress have had a hand in the matter? If so, surely here was a clue to her name and place of residence. At all events, he was going back to Paris, and however short his stay in the capital, some lucky chance might help him in his search.

Thus he found himself once more back in the city, where he was received in the kindest way by his general, who installed him in his own house and gave him a place at his table.

At first the multiplicity of his duties prevented him from taking any of those steps which he had already proved to be more than useless, but after a little while, having won the regard of his chief and having become in some sort a favorite with him, he ventured to ask the name of the person to whom he owed this post of honor. The general informed him that the recommendation of M. de B., who was in charge of the war staff, and the record of Léon's distinguished conduct in the last campaign, had led him to ask for the young man as his aide-de-camp.

"And that reminds me," he continued, "you ought to go and thank him. I shall be going there one evening soon, and if you like I will take you with me."

Although this reply was a disappointment to Léon, he gratefully accepted the offer, and a few days later the general took him in his own carriage to call upon M. de B.

They found a number of people already assembled in the drawing room when they arrived, and Mme. de B. had just arranged some card tables and resumed her place near the fire, where she was chatting with a small circle of friends, consisting of some three or four women and as many men. When Léon was introduced to her he endeavored to obtain from her the information he was so eager to get, but in vain. After some civilities the conversation again became general, and Mme. de B. begged one of the gentlemen to continue the story he had commenced. Thus Léon, his hopes frustrated, found himself obliged to listen with the rest.

A string of tales, some amusing, others strange, were told by one and another of the guests, and then Mme. de B., careful that each in turn should have an opportunity to shine, turned toward Léon and asked him, with a smile, whether in the course of his campaigns and the vicissitudes of a soldier's life, he had not met with some adventure that would bear relating. Léon's mind was ever engrossed with his own recent experiences, and he at once told the tale, placing it, however, to the account of a brother officer, but imparting to it the living interest that only a man who is full of his subject can command.

When he had finished, a lively discussion of this singular fad of independence followed. The ladies judged with just severity the inexcusable imprudence that had led a woman so lightly to expose herself, and they blamed her for having sacrificed her principles to a mistaken taste for freedom. The men held that her action was a sign of character and imagination, and that she had lived her romance with as much wit as decision, and they set her down as a charming woman. They all wished they had been in the shoes of that officer, but all declared they would not have allowed themselves to be so easily shaken off, for no vows would have induced them to refrain from unmasking and subjugating the beautiful fugitive.

"Indeed," said a lady of a certain age, with some dryness, "one need hardly have been so scrupulous with a person who had so little respect for herself."

"I admit," said a very pretty woman seated in the corner of the fireplace, "that it is impossible to justify her conduct. Still, one may suppose that her aversion for a second marriage rested on some powerful and secret motive. The passion of maternity seems to have done the rest, and which of us, when fondling the child who smiles up at us, but can find in our heart some excuse for an error prompted by this feeling?"

"But you must at least admit that it was very hard upon this poor officer?"

"Why, what harm has she done to him?" asked the pretty lady in a careless tone.

"What harm!" cried Léon with some heat. "Is it then nothing for him to be ever pursued by the memory of a charming woman whom he loves for her grace and spirit, the possession of whom caused him such exquisite pleasure, and who now obstinately conceals herself from his sight and his affection—a woman who, apparently, only aroused his passion to forsake him at once, and who only preserves just such relations with him as may keep alive a desire that she never means to gratify? He is a husband and a father, and yet may not know the objects of the most natural of sentiments; he does not even know their whereabouts, though he is followed, found, and disposed of at will. Obligations are forced on him while he, less fortunate than the lowest of men, will never enjoy the reward of that domestic happiness which is open to all except himself."

"Oh, admit there is some exaggeration in all this. What is to prevent him from marrying?"

"But how can he, madame? Even supposing time should at length wear out the deep impression made on him by his transient happiness, can he be said to belong to himself now? As long as she he loves is free, can he cease to be so too? If that odd aversion for a natural tie should pass away, and he could some day obtain the hand he has so long desired, how would he console himself if in the meantime he had disposed of his own?"

"You certainly attribute to your friend very great delicacy of feeling," said the lady, fixing on Léon a glance in which there was both softness and interest.

He was touched, and went on with increasing fervor:

"And then this ring divided between his child and him, is not that too a chain that must hold him forever? No matter in what position he may be placed, his affection and fatherly care may one day be claimed—he belongs henceforth to some one, though no one belongs to him! And as a finishing touch to a unique situation, he can only hope to find his child by losing its mother! The first sight of that beloved object will tell him that one dearer yet is no more; and it is only at the price of a husband's happiness that he can hope for that of a father!"

As he pronounced the last words Léon's voice broke; a tear gathered in his eyes.

"My word, my dear Préval," said the general, smiling, "you have given us so pathetic a picture of the young man's situation that one is tempted to think you are drawing it from life."

Mme. de B., seeing Léon's emotion and embarrassment, hastened to change the subject. He remained standing against the chimney piece, near the pleasant-looking woman.

There was a moment's silence.

"You have roused a good deal of interest in your friend," she said gently. "Impossible to depict his feelings with greater eloquence."

"At least, madame, the picture is a true one, but the campaign now about to begin will distract his mind from his troubles, and the hope of putting a glorious end to a life that offers no prospect of happiness—"

"What are you thinking of, monsieur?" said the lovely lady. "If you have any influence over him you ought to use it to turn his mind from so terrible an idea; and tell him it is his duty to preserve his life for that child."

"But why should he recognize duties that can bring him no recompense? How can he owe his life to those who have spoiled it for him? But," he added with a melancholy smile, "a bullet settles very many questions."

At that moment the general called to him, and they took their leave amid cordial wishes from their friends for future glory and a safe return.

"That is a very interesting young man," said Mme. de B. when the general and his aide-de-camp had left; "he has a charming face and a fine mind. It would be a great pity if he perished in Spain."

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## VII

From that moment Mme. de Roselis (for she, of course, it was) lost the tranquil ease and proud indifference she had flattered herself she would be able to preserve. She now measured the gravity and danger of her act by the severity with which the women had judged it, while the light comments of the men revealed to her the magnitude of the debt she owed to Léon's rare delicacy of conduct.

This consideration increased her regard for him. By degrees the idea that she had injured a man who worshiped her and whom she could not help liking, the peril and glory that hung around him lending him the glamour that women love, and, finally, the element of anxiety about him,—the food on which both love and memory thrive,—all these things helped to waken in her heart a feeling that was new to her.

She was seized with a longing to see her daughter again, and regain her solitude, and her one thought was to get away as quickly as possible.

While paying her farewell visit to Mme. de B. she heard that General X. and his pleasant young aide-de-camp were on their way to Spain, where hostilities had already begun. Her heart smote

her. She cut her call short; an almost painful restlessness impelled her homewards to hasten the preparations for departure.

What a difference there was between her present state of mind and that in which she had arrived at the beginning of the winter, when on Mme. de Gernancé's pressing invitation she had agreed to spend that season in Paris. Cheerful, contented, in the flower of her youth, looking forward to every kind of enjoyment, such was Mme. de Roselis then, and it may be imagined with what favor the beautiful and wealthy widow was received in a society where happiness constitutes a great merit. Mme. de B. was one of the first persons to whom Elinor was introduced. M. de Gernancé was an intimate friend of that lady's husband and when the first rumors of war had begun to circulate in the city the idea had struck Elinor to utilize this friendship to procure a better and less dangerous post for Léon. She had given M. de Gernancé to understand that the young man had been recommended to her by his family, and she only requested that her name might not be mentioned in the transaction.

Her intervention was crowned with success, and then by a coincidence the meeting between the two had taken place and the whole course of her life was suddenly changed.

Mme. de Roselis then wended her way back to Touraine, worried, anxious, vexed with herself for the folly that had brought about such unlooked for results. Her lively imagination painted as imminent all the most terrible disasters that could possibly befall, and her heart melted at the contemplation of misfortunes that she was inventing for herself. She left her black servant in Paris to collect and forward all the news that came in from Spain, for she was beginning to take a keen interest in the events that were passing there.

At the sight of her daughter she felt her dearer to her than ever; she detected a likeness hitherto unnoticed, and new kisses, fonder than the first, were the result of this discovery.

More lonely now than she had ever been, Mme. de Roselis spent the summer watching the daily progress of her darling babe; every month it grew in beauty and in intelligence. Elinor was charmed; yet frequently she would have been glad to find at her side some one who could share her maternal enthusiasm.

"It is sad, after all," she said to herself, "to have nobody with me who can enter into my happiness and share it with me. I suppose," she went on, with a sigh that her pride promptly stifled, "only a father could take pleasure in these childish things. And even so, who knows, but afterwards, a despotic lord and master might hinder my plans for bringing her up, and his rigid strictness—Ah, but Léon would never be despotic. He has a very gentle expression and a tender smile. He would make a good father."

Then she remembered that he was far away, and exposed to all the dangers of war; that he sought death, was perhaps already dead.

And Mme. de Roselis wrote for tidings from Spain, only regaining her cheerful and proud mien when she learned that M. de Préval was in such or such a town, and in good health.

As winter approached, her friends, unable to conceive what was the attraction that kept her away alone, wrote urging her to come up to town and stay with them again. But she could not make up her mind as yet to leave her little Léonie again, for she loved her more passionately every day, and, not caring to inform Mme. de Gernancé of the child's existence, she made various excuses for postponing her departure.

It was not until January that she finally went up to Paris. But all the brilliant gaiety and pleasant parties that had so delighted her the previous year now failed to interest her at all; they seemed tedious and insipid. She returned home worn out, and discontented; felt lonely when she got there, and began to wonder whether the independence that she worshiped was not too frequently purchased at the price of an empty heart and the dullness it involves.

Wearied by the persistent attentions of a crowd of triflers, who were encouraged by her position, she told herself that she would have done better to attach to her side one who would have rid her of the rest; that in society an attractive and beautiful woman needs a protector who will compel all others to respect her; and imperceptibly, the memory of Léon became less indifferent to her.

Then, suddenly, there came tidings of fierce fighting in Spain.

In great alarm Elinor, filled with the gloomiest presentiments, hastened to call on Mme. de B. She found her friends already occupied with the subject that filled her thoughts, but what was her emotion when, after mentioning the names of several officers who had perished in the engagement, Mme. de B., turning to her, said:

"Do you remember, madame, that nice young aide-de-camp of General X.'s who told us that strange story? Well, he has disappeared since the battle. He is not to be found among either the living or the dead."

Elinor's only reply was a cry of surprise. Fortunately for her, all those present broke into an eager discussion of the news. She listened in silence to conjectures each more dismal than the last, and then hastily took her leave. She knew at last that, notwithstanding all her precautions, a man had the power to disturb her happiness and influence the course of her life.

She remained in Paris a month longer, hoping always to obtain reliable information, but as no news came to throw light on the darkness hanging over the fate of Léon, she decided to return to Touraine.

In vain Mme. de Gernancé, who could not understand her low spirits, tried to dissuade her from

leaving them, fearing, in her uneasiness about her friend's health, lest loneliness might be prejudicial to her. Elinor departed, carrying with her the anxiety and regret that she could not shake off. The sight of her child only increased her sorrow.

"She has only me now," she said. "He who might one day have taken my place is gone."

She watched the post impatiently, but nearly two months passed, and still no news came of Léon's fate.

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## VIII

She sat one evening in a corner of the park, watching the child at play and musing idly on the man whose image Léonie always called up before her mind.

Presently there reached her ear confused voices, coming from the servants, who seemed to be searching for her.

"Madame must be somewhere in the park with her daughter," she heard one say.

"With her daughter!" exclaimed a voice that she recognized as Mme. de Gernancé's.

At the same moment that lady came in sight, and the two friends fell into each other's arms.

"Dear Elinor," said her visitor affectionately, "my anxiety about you gave me no peace. Your letters have been so few and far between, and were so sad, that I felt I must come and see for myself how you really were. I have come to share and, if possible, enliven your solitude for a little time."

But while her friend was uttering her earnest thanks for this mark of friendship, Mme. de Gernancé had fixed her eyes on the child in much surprise and curiosity, for she saw that she was treated by the servants as the daughter of the house, and in her baby talk she constantly called out to her mother.

When they had gone back to the house Mme. de Roselis said, smiling:

"I see your astonishment, and I can guess your curiosity. Yes, dear friend, I have been keeping a secret from you, a secret that I could not bring myself to confide in you. But now, tomorrow, you shall hear all about it, and my story will at the same time explain my sadness."

Notwithstanding the fatigue of her journey, Mme. de Gernancé scarcely slept that night, so great was her anxiety to hear the explanation of what was a mystery to her.

She was up early in the morning, and hastened to find Elinor, and together the two wandered out into the park to have their talk alone. Mme. de Roselis walked in silence by her friend's side, a little shy of making this confidence that she had promised.

At last, hesitating slightly, she thus began:

"It is too late now, dear friend, to attempt to hide from you a secret that I have always wanted to tell you, and which I only delayed because I knew you would not approve. However, since I must confess, the baby who has so excited your curiosity is my daughter. I had so longed for a child, but I could not bear to place my neck a second time under the yoke that had weighed so heavy on me before."

Mme. de Gernancé could not refrain from showing the surprise she felt; but without giving her time to speak, Elinor went on to tell her about the rash scheme she had formed on the voyage, and the means she had adopted for carrying it out.

She came at last to the birth of the child, but here she was interrupted impetuously by her friend.

"What precautions and prudence to bestow on an act of sheer madness! How much you risked! How could you compromise in such a way your reputation, and indeed your very life! And why all these sacrifices? Just to grasp an imperfect happiness you are obliged to hide, and dare not show! So this is to what your excessive caution has brought you! Carried away by your imagination, you have hugged a chimera which led you to refuse the real blessings of life in favor of the hollow satisfaction of following a caprice! Oh, take my advice, lose no time in recalling the father of that dear child. Do not any longer deprive yourself of the pleasures of natural affection and the sweetest of home ties."

"Ah, it is no longer in my power," exclaimed Mme. de Roselis. "Listen a moment, and you shall see how I have been punished for the error you so severely condemn."

Then she reminded her of the young aide-de-camp who had been so much talked about at Mme. de B.'s, and who had been so keenly regretted by everybody.

"What!" cried Mme. de Gernancé, "was it he? Oh, what have you done, Elinor? How I pity you! Now you see how your folly has destroyed your peace of mind and happiness, and by a punishment that you richly deserve, it is not even possible for you to make any amends. Henceforth you will be a wife without a right to bear the name, and a mother, though you scarcely dare to have it known. You will spend your life blushing for the most natural and honorable of feelings, and you, so beautiful, so brilliant, so richly gifted by nature and fortune, have by your own perverse act deprived yourself of the happiness the meanest of women is entitled to enjoy, the happiness of having husband and child, the sweetest of all! But there is

more in it even than that. I can read your heart; it is useless for your pride to try to conceal the fact from your friend and from yourself. Your heart is no longer in your own keeping; you love, you have given it—"

At this, Mme. de Roselis hid her face in her hands; the tears flowed from her eyes.

"Dear Elinor," said Mme. de Gernancé kindly, drawing nearer to her and taking her in her arms, "when I see you weep, I realize I love you too well to be your judge. Don't grieve any more for an evil that may be remedied. Let us hope that Léon is still alive, and that all may yet be condoned."

But at that word Elinor's tears ceased.

"Condoned!" she said proudly. "No, my dear, I do not think I should easily consent to what you call condoning it. I have done wrong, it is true, but not from weakness. I did it on purpose, after long consideration of the troubles I had borne. It is true I grieve over the fate of a man who does interest me, and whose life I have disturbed and perhaps shortened. I cannot be happy again until I know he is not dead; but as for giving up my independence, and by this change of mind letting people think I had been either weak or inconsequent this I shall never consent to."

Mme. de Gernancé saw that it was not the moment to attack either the prejudices or the pride of her friend; from that moment, however, Léon became their one subject of conversation, and by thus constantly talking about him, Elinor unconsciously strengthened the inclination she already felt for him.

For her part Mme. de Gernancé would draw an attractive picture of the happiness she herself enjoyed, and which she assured her friend might easily be hers as well. Elinor, now touched, and somewhat shaken in her resolution, would smile at her friend's advice, and anon, returning to her cherished chimera of liberty, would wax indignant at the suggestion that she should give it up, after the sacrifices she had made in its name. Still, on one point the two friends were ever agreed, and that was in wishing that Léon might return.

Elinor and Mme. de Gernancé were one day together, discussing their favorite subject, when a messenger came to tell them that the servant of a traveler, who was passing along the high road, was imploring help for his master, who, ill and in great pain, had just fainted away in his carriage.

Mme. de Roselis at once gave orders that everything possible should be done for him, and urged by compassion, so natural to women, went herself, accompanied by her friend, to see the sick man. He had been lifted out of the carriage and was lying on the grass, pale, unconscious, and covered with blood; his frightened servant was declaring that the wound had opened and his master was lost.

It was at this moment that Mme. de Roselis arrived on the scene; but scarcely had her eyes fallen on the inanimate form before her when she screamed, and, hiding her face on her friend's shoulder, she said, in a stifled voice:

"It is he! He is going to die before my very eyes!"

"In Heaven's name," replied Mme. de Gernancé in a whisper, "take courage! Don't betray yourself!"

Those few words were enough to bring Elinor to her senses; feeling the danger of the situation, she summoned all her strength and ordered the interesting invalid to be carried, still fainting, into the chateau.

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## IX

When he once more opened his eyes Léon found himself in bed with a surgeon seated beside him. His wound had been redressed, and everything done for him that kindness could suggest. His servant, whom he tried to question, was eager to tell him, in a few words, what had happened, but the surgeon interrupted him and ordered silence and rest.

To Mme. de Roselis, who was anxiously awaiting news of the sick man, it was a shock to learn that he was extremely weak from loss of blood and that, in the event of fever setting in, he could hardly be expected to resist it. Perfect quiet was ordered. It was decided that the ladies must not go into his room, but should content themselves with seeing that he had everything he needed.

Next morning, Elinor rang her bell before dawn, and was terrified to learn that fever had set in during the night, to be followed by delirium. It was only then, in the surprise she felt at her own despair, that she realized how dear Léon had become to her, and she now admitted to herself that she could never be happy without him. Of her pride and futile prejudices nothing remained; her whole being was engrossed by the thought of his danger. Mme. de Gernancé was so afraid her agitation would betray her that she took great trouble throughout the day to keep her out of the patient's room; but the next night, when her household was in bed, and she was once more alone and sleepless in the solemn silence which intensifies suffering and renders fear unbearable, Elinor, unable any longer to wrestle with her anxiety, rose and slipped out into the corridor to listen at the door of Léon's room and find out how he was. He was still evidently delirious, and the distressed accents of his trembling voice came brokenly to her ear. Forgetting everything but her grief, she opened the door softly and went in.

The nurse had fallen asleep. By the dim light of the lamp she recognized the pleasant features that were so deeply graven on her memory; but the eyes were now fixed, the face bright with fever; his labored breathing could scarcely lift the sheet that seemed to weigh all too heavily on his chest. Elinor dropped into an arm-chair that was close to the door and hid her face and her tears in her two hands.

The slight noise she made roused Léon from his momentary stupor.

"Is that she?" he said. "Will she come? I am going to die. Let me see her at last. Tell her I am dying. But where is she to be found? I have lost her—lost her forever."

He paused, and then began again.

"My daughter—bring her to me. Can they refuse to let me see my child when I am dying? Poor little thing! Don't try to find your father. You have none. He was not able even to give you his blessing in his last moments."

This was too much for Elinor, and she burst out sobbing.

Léon started and turned his head slightly, but his eyes, still fixed, saw nothing.

"Where is this mysterious hiding place? What do I see on the sofa? It is you, you whom I adore, you whom I sought. I hold you in my arms. But your mask—take off your mask, do take it off. What! You still want to run away? No, no, you shall not escape me again."

As he spoke, he made an effort to raise himself.

"Léon," cried Elinor, rushing to the bedside, "Léon, stop!"

He looked up at her, startled, uncertain; then, after an instant's silence, he began again more calmly:

"It is too much. Lift my head. Ah! if I could but sleep!"

By this time the nurse, roused by Elinor's cry, had come forward to support him, but he turned from her, and let his head drop on Elinor's bosom. By degrees, a more tranquil sleep seemed to steal over his senses.

A little later Mme. de Gernancé joined them, looking anxiously for her friend. She too had risen before daybreak and, not finding Elinor in her own apartments, had hastened to the sick room, where the spectacle before her eyes arrested her at the door. Léon was asleep, supported on Elinor's shoulder, while she, seated motionless on the edge of the bed with her head bent over her lover's, was vainly endeavoring to check the tears that streamed from her eyes.

Mme. de Gernancé hastened up to the bed.

"What are you doing here, Elinor?" she said in a low whisper. "How imprudent you are!"

"Leave me alone," her friend rejoined. "Nothing will induce me to leave this bed until this unfortunate man is either dead or saved. I don't care who knows that I love him and that I am his; it is a just punishment for my offenses. If only he might live! Nothing else matters."

Fear of disturbing the patient kept them both silent after that, and Léon's sleep continued as calm as it was sound.

He had slept several hours when, half opening his eyes, and making an effort to lift the heavy lids, his first glance fell on the trembling Elinor, who was trying gently to put him back on the pillows.

He closed his eyes again. Then, once more opening them, "Where am I?" he said in a weak voice.

Then, seeing that he was almost in the arms of a woman who did not look like a nurse, he made a movement to try to help her to set down her burden. His eyes, wild no longer, but filled with surprise and doubt, followed Elinor behind the curtain, where she was attempting to conceal herself.

"Is it a dream?" he said, speaking with difficulty. "I seem to have seen that face before. Ah, madame, am I to believe—"

"He has recognized me," she said to herself in a fright and blushing crimson.

"Once, I think, at Mme. de B.'s house, but once is sufficient. One could never forget you," and his large languid eyes were still riveted on her.

"Be quiet! Be quiet! No more talking. You are ordered the strictest silence. Keep still, and do not even think. Hope and sleep."

The doctor arrived shortly. He declared that the long sleep had done the patient a world of good, that the fever had gone down, and if the temperature now remained steady through the coming night he might be considered to be saved.

Elinor listened, holding her breath, and drinking in the reassuring words. Her joy, too great to be repressed, brought back a charming color to her pale, wet cheeks.

When night fell she insisted on taking her place in a corner of Léon's room, to await the dreaded attack of fever. It did not come, however, and the night proved a good one. The following day the doctor announced that there was no longer any danger, but he thought it his duty to warn Mme. de Roselis that convalescence would probably be slow, and that it would be dangerous to move the patient until the wound was thoroughly healed.

Elinor, making a great effort to show only a cool compassion, trembled with joy at the prospect of



the long days to come, when, in sweet intimacy, she would be able to devote herself to Léon and restore him to happiness as she had already restored him to life.

It was not long before he was able to express his gratitude to the kind chatelaine, whom, as he believed, he had seen but once before, but whose beauty, indulgence, and sensitiveness had made the deepest impression on him.

The two friends hardly left his room. They amused him, read to him, played soft music to him. It was the story over again of Bayard nursed by the two sisters; nay, it was more. Elinor, ever watchful, seemed to guess and forestall his every want; she always knew how to find for him the easiest position, and she surrounded him with those thousand and one little attentions which add to your comfort without attracting your attention.

It was then that Léon told them how, wounded severely in a hot fight in Spain, and left on the field of battle, he had been dragged from the jaws of death by a woman, who, touched by his youth and condition, had taken him home with her and nursed him tenderly. He was recovering when a troop of guerillas arrived at the place and he was forced to flee from his benefactress' house in order to escape from their hands. After many narrow escapes he had finally reached Bayonne, where he had been too restless to stay long enough to be entirely cured, and the fatigues of the journey had brought about the accident to which he owed her generous hospitality. This was his story, and it explained to Elinor the uncertainty that had for so long hung about his fate.

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## X

Meantime, poor little Léonie was the only person who had a right to feel aggrieved by the arrival of the new guest, for she was carefully excluded from his room, where her high spirits might have appeared too boisterous. Elinor had a feeling of shame about showing her to Léon, as if she feared that he might guess his own interest in her; but the child, having been accustomed to be always with her mother, was constantly running after her.

Finding the sick man's door ajar, one day, she softly pushed it, and put her pretty head through to look in. Her eyes, both timid and inquisitive, fell on the stranger whom she had never yet seen.

Léon was the first to catch sight of her. He called out in surprise.

"Where does that beautiful baby come from?" he exclaimed.

She had already fled, but her mother, with beating heart and flushed cheeks, called her back, took her in her arms, and placed her on Léon's knees.

He was conscious of a sudden rush of memory, and in an inexplicable tide of feeling he gazed fondly at her, covered her with caresses, and then inquired her age in a voice that betrayed great emotion.

Elinor, confused and now convinced that he had guessed the truth, added a year.

"I should have taken her to be younger," said Léon, with a sigh and fell into a muse.

The little girl, having forgotten her fears, now refused to leave the lap of her new friend; nor could he bear to set her down.

"But I must part you," said Elinor, smiling; "when I see you so distressed, I regret having brought her in."

"Ah, madame, if you knew of what she reminds me!"

"But if I may take you to be the hero of an interesting anecdote that I have by no means forgotten, I can easily guess—"

"Well, yes, madame, it was I, and though she has betrayed and cast me off, after apparently choosing me, I have remained in spite of myself faithful to her memory, ever regretting a shadow, and pursuing a vain chimera, unable to die, or to live happy any longer."

Elinor could hardly keep back her tears.

"Then," she said timidly, "you love her still?"

"I scarcely know if I do, if I am weak enough to love her still; but our meetings, the moments spent in her presence, her grace, even her capriciousness,—all are graven on my memory. She has bruised my soul, and taken the glamour from life for me."

"Oh," cried Elinor in a heartbroken voice, "such constancy deserves reward. You may be sure that the day will come when she will return, humbled in her turn, softened, to heal the wounds she has caused and to win your pardon."

"Never! For three years that proud, unfeeling woman has never condescended to send me as much as a word of remembrance. She has probably gone back to her own land, to India, America, or where not. She has triumphed, and must be laughing at my credulity, and I should like to forget her. Lately I have almost thought it might be possible, and perhaps, indeed," he added, in an altered voice, "I shall succeed only too soon."

"You will forget her, Léon?"

The words had been spoken in a voice of such tender reproach that Léon gazed at her. He saw that her eyes were full of tears.

"Ah, madame," he said, after a moment's pause, "your sympathy is very dear to me! If only she had your nature, your responsive sensitiveness, I should be a happy man today. My own child, perhaps as pretty as yours, would be now sitting on my knee."

Then, turning on Elinor his still languid eyes:

"And her mother—close beside me—loving—"

"These recollections only sadden you, and do you no good at all," said Elinor, shaking all over, and picking up her child. "Decidedly, I shall have to part you."

"Forgive me, madame; I have been dreaming. But why wake me so soon?"

Not daring to listen to another word, Elinor fled with her child to tell Mme. de Gernancé all that had passed between them.

From that day, little Léonie was as assiduous as her mother in her attentions to the convalescent. He continually asked for her, and became passionately attached to her.

The child, for her part, called him her friend, heaped kisses on him, and insisted on being always between him and her mother. Her artless affection for them both gave rise to many an embarrassing scene that was fraught with pleasure for Elinor, but left Léon ever more depressed and pensive.

Meantime, he was growing visibly stronger; his wound was making progress; time, which passes so swiftly in the happy days of a budding friendship, had brought winter back again with the month of December.

Mme. de Gernancé had for some time talked of leaving them; she now declared she could no longer postpone her departure. Then, all at once, in a voice that showed the effort the words cost him, Léon begged permission to accompany her.

Greatly surprised at so sudden a decision, Mme. de Roselis opposed the plan.

"Ah, madame," he answered quickly, "pray let me go; I have but too long reveled in a happiness that is full of danger, since it is not for me. Let me flee from you and your child, from the spell of your kind care, and these happy days that fly so fast. Let me return to the solitude that must ever be my lot."

"But at least, wait till we can ask the doctor if you are fit to—"

"There are dangers from which the doctor with his science is powerless to preserve me. My destiny is to flee all that is lovable, all that might captivate and charm. I cannot get away from this place too soon—"

"Well, my dear," said Elinor, turning to her friend, "I must then trust my wounded knight to your care. You will answer to me for his safety, at all events."

A little taken aback, perhaps, at her letting him go so easily, Léon went out to give the necessary orders for his departure. Elinor followed him with her eyes, a smile on her face.

"Well, perhaps you will be kind enough to explain this new comedy to me," said Mme. de Gernancé in much vexation. "It is clear that he is running away because he is afraid he might love you. Then what are you waiting for? Why not reveal yourself, and end this folly that has lasted already far too long? Can you find any pleasure in this new way of tormenting him?"

"Ah, dear, how fascinating it is to be your own rival, to win him twice under such different guises! He is true to me even in his inconstancy; he has so much delicacy and honor that he runs from me so as not to betray me. He loved me once; he loves no one but me. How happy I am!"

"But Léon, poor Léon! When are you going to begin to think about his happiness? Say what you have to say to him, Elinor, and let us all go to Paris together, where you can make a marriage that will, I suppose, have no terrors for you."

"No, I have a plan in my head. You go with him, and I will follow you very shortly."

"Elinor, Elinor, still romantic, still imagining wild schemes!"

"Dear friend only this once. It shall be the very last time, I swear!"

At that moment, Léon returned. He seemed disturbed and excited. Everything was being got ready for his journey.

Mme. de Gernancé, displeased with her friend, but forced to yield to her, went off to make her own preparations. But when the time came to say good-bye, every one broke down; Elinor, in tears, handed her patient over to Mme. de Gernancé, who promised to take him home with her and to look after him carefully; Léon, white and grave, stood beside the carriage, thanking her over and over again in impassioned tones. He constantly left and then returned to the child, who cried aloud when she saw her friend going away.

Mme. de Gernancé came close to Elinor.

"There is still time," she said in a whisper.

Wavering for a moment, Mme. de Roselis at last replied:

"No, there is only one way in which I can make that difficult confession."

Then Mme. de Gernancé drew Léon away, took her seat in the carriage with him, and the horses started at once, bearing both out of sight.

## XI

Alone again, Elinor found her solitude unbearable; the happiness she had lately tasted could henceforth alone satisfy her heart. Her one thought now was to hasten to rejoin her friend and the man whom she already regarded as her husband.

A week after their departure found her with her little daughter back in her town house. Mme. de Gernancé was the only person who had been informed of her arrival.

After a long talk, in which she explained to her friend the way—a trifle romantic withal—in which she intended to make herself known to Léon, she succeeded in inducing her friend to help her carry out the scheme that pleased her fancy, and the pair separated, having arranged all the details agreed upon.

The season of the Opera Balls had opened, and Mme. de Gernancé invited Léon one night to accompany her to one. He declined at first, with a hot haste she had not anticipated; the scene of the adventure that was to have such an influence upon his life had become hateful to him, and he had sworn never to set foot there again. But Mme. de Gernancé insisted; she asked him only to lend her his arm until she could find a stranger who had promised to come, and whom she wanted to puzzle.

Léon, unable to refuse anything to Mme. de Roselis' friend, at last consented, though with inward repugnance, and they set off together.

His entrance into the ballroom was a painful moment for him; a tumult of memories surged up in his mind.

Mme. de Gernancé made a few turns round the hall with him, and then, pretending to have discovered the person she was seeking, she set him at liberty and said good-bye. Scarcely had she left his arm when a voice, in spite of the slight affectation of manner inseparable from a masked ball, made his every pulse leap, uttered close beside him the words:

"Ah ha, I have caught you, faithless one! It is not for me you are looking, this time, at the Opera ball!"

He turned and saw before him—Who was it? His unknown lady herself. The white domino, the mask, even the diamond buckle that fastened her belt which he had noticed on that other occasion,—all were there.

"It is she!" he exclaimed, seizing her arm and slipping it beneath his own. "Have I found you again? Is it you I am looking at, is it you I hold? By what inconceivable miracle—"

"Is it really so astonishing? You know my talent for miracles."

"It is true. It is the only thing I do know about you."

"But what is past is nothing; there is much more to come. Now that you have fallen again in my power, you may expect the most extraordinary consequences. Your fate is sealed, your destiny is about to be fulfilled."

But while she talked a growing disappointment damped the sudden joy that Léon had experienced at the first sight of her. He was bitterly wounded by the light, imperious tone she had adopted after those three years of total forgetfulness, added to her other wrongs. All the hard thoughts he had harbored of her in the long interval crowded back now upon his mind.

He stopped short.

"Well, madame," he said coldly, "what is it you want of me? What fresh scheme are you devising? What new way of taking me in?"

"Oh, what a change three years can work in a man! Is this the tender, gentle, attentive Léon, who in this very room so fervently vowed to be wholly constant and submissive?"

"Ah, if I am changed, whose is the fault, cruel one? Is it not your own? For you devoted to my undoing all the charm that has most power over the heart of man, and having betrayed my faith, you cast me off, without remorse as without pity. Did you not take a pleasure in teaching me the value of what you cheated me out of, and then leave me for three years to my regrets, to forget you as best I could?"

"Léon, you are too severe. Here I am with you again. I have come back to atone for the wrong I did you, and restore to you all you pined for."

"Ah, how can I put any faith in your words now? Perhaps, in a minute or two, you will once more disappear from my view, leaving no trace behind you but the pain you cause me. You are possibly already contriving some fresh ruse—"

Here she interrupted him, saying in a softened voice:

"No, no more ruses, no more secrets. Ah, Léon, I too have suffered. But let us forget the folly and pain that are over now. You may know and claim your wife now."

"You did not want to be my wife—"

"True, but I was wrong; now I have come back to surrender to your love."

"Once you disdained it—a pure and lasting love that filled my heart for you. What new caprice prompts you now to claim it? Are you sure it still exists for you? Was I to foster an insane passion for an invisible woman who had forsaken me? What makes you suppose me unchanged? Why should I not in my turn reject a chain once hateful to yourself? Why should not I too now cherish my independence? To me its cost is less than it is to you."

These terrible words smote Elinor to the core. All the gaiety and fond hope that she had brought with her to the ball were gone now. She admitted the justice of the unexpected reproaches with which he had met her advances, and in her humiliation, her courage and her strength both deserted her.

Léon saw that she could scarcely stand, and he led her to a bench away from the crowd, seating himself beside her. Fortunately, the pain she was enduring found relief in tears.

"Ah, forgive me," said Léon, touched at the spectacle of her genuine grief, "forgive me, O you whom I cannot understand. I am angry now with myself for my misplaced harshness! Only, having received so many marks of your indifference, could I expect to find you vulnerable?"

Then he pressed her to drop her mask, and allow him to see her home. At first she was tempted to comply, and to reveal the face that would instantly have disarmed him; but she dreaded a scene that might attract all eyes to them, and a wish to put him to one more proof restrained her. Drawing her hood down over her eyes, and disguising her voice more carefully than ever, she said sadly:

"No, why take me home? The hour is late, and you have taught me circumspection. Why remove my mask? Of what use to know a woman you can no longer love? I can see why you are so cold. I know where you spent your convalescence, and whose hands nursed you."

"Well, then, madame," said Léon, seriously, "you know also that my gratitude could not possibly be too warm, or my admiration too high. Yes, I do not deny it. In three months of the most endearing intimacy, tended by a woman whose beauty was the least of her charms, a woman sympathetic and reasonable, who unites the dignity proper to her sex with that kindness of heart that is an ornament the more—could I fail to appreciate so many lovable qualities? Could I ever forget her?"

Elinor, beside herself with joy at his words, felt that if she stayed another moment she would betray herself in spite of her efforts. She rose at once.

"Be happy then," she said. "Your happiness will be mine. I say no more about myself. I ask nothing; you are free. But would you care to see your daughter?"

"Would I, indeed! You cannot doubt it!"

"Then come and lunch with me tomorrow and you shall."

She gave him her address, but without adding her name.

"My people will know," she said. "They will show you in."

She left, deeply affected by what had passed.

"What would have become of me," she said to herself in terror, "what should I have done, if I had never had the opportunity of winning his esteem and his love in another aspect?"

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## XII

That night was spent by Léon in the greatest agitation.

At last, then, he had found the object of such keen desire and such lasting regret! Soon he was to know her! He was to see his daughter—his daughter, whose image he had so vainly tried to conjure up. No doubt it was now open to him to take up the position of husband and father! The title for which he had longed was now, probably, within his reach.

And yet the remembrance of Mme. de Roselis would place itself in the midst of the picture, and the comparison was not to the advantage of the Unknown Lady. Indeed, could any woman match Elinor in his eyes?

On the following day, punctual to the appointment, he arrived at the hour named, and the first person who met his eyes was the Negro who was so closely associated with his recollections.

The black conducted him through several richly furnished apartments to a door which he threw open, announcing M. de Préval.

Léon went forward, and found himself in a boudoir that instantly recalled to his mind one that three long years had not effaced from his memory. The illusion was completed by the sight of a woman in the same attitude as before, wearing the same dress and seated on a sofa. A child was sitting on her lap.

As Léon approached, she turned around.

"What do I see?" he cried. "Elinor! Is such happiness possible? Ah! if this be some cruel game,

stop, I beg you, or I die before your eyes."

At the same moment the little Léonie ran to throw herself in his arms, and showing him a half ring that was hanging round her neck, she said in her sweet, childish way:

"Friend Léon, will you mend my ring for me?"

He glanced at it, made an exclamation, and then, overcome with surprise and happiness, he was forced to drop into a chair, murmuring feebly:

"Elinor! My daughter!"

But Elinor was already at his side. He threw one arm around her, and with the other he held their child on his knee. They gazed into each other's eyes, their tears falling, mingling. Neither could find a word to express what both were feeling.

Then Elinor, leaning her head softly against her lover's shoulder, said tenderly:

"Yes, this is your daughter. And your Unknown Lady, your mistress, friend, and nurse, who in so many different shapes has been caring for your welfare, wants nothing henceforth but to be her mother and your wife. Forgive me, Léon, forgive me all the troubles I have caused you; forgive the wicked folly by which I, too, have suffered; it was the first offense and shall be the last. That haughty, heedless Unknown Lady learned a salutary lesson last night at the ball, and your wife will never forget it."

"Ah, forgive me, too!" said Léon. "My friend, my baby, the dear objects of such anxiety and sorrow, how shall I make up to myself the three years that you have been out of reach of my love!"

Then Mme. de Gernancé arrived, and with friendly cordiality entered into the rapturous joy of the happy couple. But, ever practical and sensible, "Confess, Elinor," she said to her friend, "you would have attained this happy end as surely had you never departed from the path marked out for us by duty and social laws, and you would even have spared yourselves three years of grief."

"Don't let us say anything more about it," said Mme. de Roselis, kissing her. "Don't let us ever say another word about it. I am wholly converted now. It is only at the expense of her happiness that a woman can attempt to escape from the trammels that have been imposed on her sex."

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