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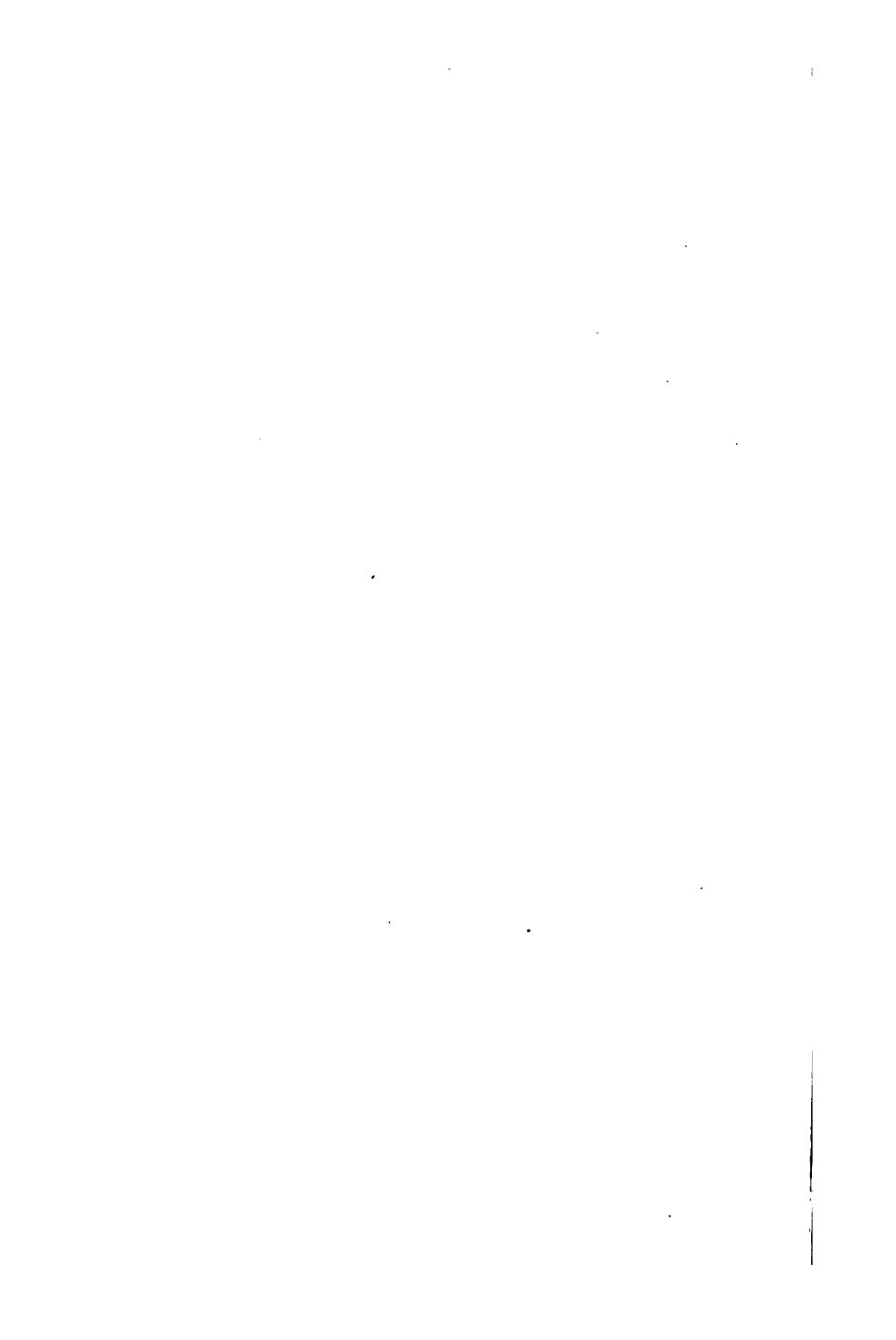


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PICKED UP IN THE STREETS

A ROMANCE

FROM THE GERMAN

OF

H. SCHOBERT

Bode, Hedwig (Harnisch) Schobert, Baronin

BY

MRS. A. L. WISTER

M 285507

"For when would you, my lord, or you, or you
Have found the ground of study's excellence
Without the beauty of a woman's face?"

SHAKESPEARE



OF NEW YORK

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I.—A WHIM	7
II.—THE RUE ROCHEFORT	16
III.—THE INEXORABLE FLIGHT OF TIME.	24
IV.—AN AWAKENING	33
V.—AT THE OPERA	42
VI.—AT THE LOUVRE	49
VII.—ANOTHER ARBANOFF	59
VIII.—A MARRIAGE	69
IX.—AN ADVENTURE	75
X.—A PETTY GERMAN COURT	89
XI.—AWAKENED MEMORIES	118
XII.—WINTER ENTERTAINMENTS	126
XIII.—COUNTERPLOTS AND THEIR RESULT	151
XIV.—CONGRATULATIONS	179
XV.—HER HIGHNESS'S BIRTHDAY	185
XVI.—THE SNAKE IN THE GRASS	212
XVII.—A BLOW AND ITS CONSEQUENCES	230
XVIII.—THE BAZAAR	254
XIX.—MARIA PAULOVNA'S PHILOSOPHY FAILS	284
XX.—ACHILLE TO THE RESCUE	304
XXI.—CONCLUSION	329



— * —
OF NEW YORK.
PICKED UP IN THE STREETS.

CHAPTER I.

A WHIM.

“THE idea is an insane one, Achille.”

“Possibly. All the same she must have red hair and green eyes. Pshaw! there are blonde and brunette beauties by the dozen,—they are commonplace,—but red hair and green eyes! Think of what a sensation she would make! The men would adore her, painters would rave, all Paris would be in love, and I——”

“Oh, there’s not a doubt that you would be the same.”

The speaker’s thin lip curled contemptuously as his eyes wandered over the crowd on the Boulevard, an expression of intense *ennui* on his faded aristocratic features.

“I?” Prince Achille Arbanoff sighed, and fixed his eye-glass more firmly in his eye. “I should at least try to be. Perhaps I could manage it once more,—for the last time.”

Vicomte Leroy shrugged his shoulders by way of reply. He was too familiar with such outbursts on his friend's part to consider them worth further notice. They sauntered on together along the Boulevard, which presented a brilliant spectacle. Both were clad after the latest fashion; the favourite flower of the season was stuck in the button-hole of each. Apparently they were the best of friends,—the hand of the taller of the two lay lightly on the arm of the other,—their age was about the same, and yet the dissimilarity between them was so great as to be strikingly emphasized in every feature, in every trait of movement and carriage.

Achille Arbanoff was a Russian, and decidedly of the Sarmatian type. Handsome as his face was, it was weary and worn, his eyes looked out from beneath drooping eyelids, and there was a negligent stoop in his undeniably fine figure. Life had been for him a round of pleasures, in which he had acknowledged no other responsibility than that of spending an enormous income, and he took pride in making his extravagances the talk of Paris. This being his principal, if not his sole, occupation, it is not to be wondered at that he had become bored and *blasé*, an old man, though young in years,—he was barely thirty,—while his father was still ruling his peasants at home and hunting wolves on the Russian steppes.

Anatole Leroy, on the contrary, an attaché in the diplomatic corps, was short, but very erect, had a thin,

sallow, aristocratic face, with a sneering expression about the mouth, and clear, keen eyes, which nothing escaped. He was without means, but was very ambitious, passionate by nature, but with a large amount of self-control. He called himself Achille's friend, and made use of this friendship to procure enjoyments which he must otherwise have foregone, and for which he requited their giver with cool contempt, sharp sarcasm, and sometimes disdainful compassion. Not one of Achille's foibles escaped him, while his own character remained an enigma for the Russian, who knew little of him beyond the kind of cigars and cigarettes that he preferred.

Achille swung his cane to and fro in the air. "Of course you sneer at my ideal of beauty. I am perfectly aware of that. But if you had seen it, Anatole, —the lovely head, the softly rounded cheek, the hair, the eyes——"

"Aha, I thought so! The original of this green-eyed nymph is living. Where? if I may be allowed to ask." And again Leroy's face wore the expression of contemptuous compassion with which he was wont to regard his friend's vagaries.

"By Jove, if I knew I should not be here! No, once when I was a boy I found her picture in a gloomy lumber-room in our old castle. I carried it to the light, and then and there fell in love with the sweet face which I could not forget. It really had red hair, and green eyes that positively sparkled when a

ray of sunlight fell upon them. The lovely head rested against a background of folds of crimson velvet; never have I seen anything like it in real life, often as I have searched for it."

"Flowers, messieurs! Buy some flowers!"

A dirty little hand held up a few bouquets of violets before the gentlemen, and its owner tripped on beside them.

Anatole Leroy silently pushed the little beggar aside with his gold-headed cane; Achille mechanically put his hand into the pocket of his paletot in search of a coin.

"Let the brat alone; we are barring the way," the attaché said, impatiently.

But the child had noted the gesture of the Russian. She wound her way through the loungers like some tiny eel, and a moment later Arbanoff again saw the dirty little hand held up before him, inhaled the odour of violets, and heard the childish treble, "Flowers, monsieur! flowers!"

He looked down at his little persecutor, and—"Tiens!" exclaimed Achille Arbanoff, with a quick pressure of his friend's arm, "here is my picture in the flesh."

The child's large eyes gazed up at him; feminine instinct told her that something about her pleased the gentleman, ragged and dirty though she were. A coarse ragged apron was wrapped about her arms and shoulders; her little feet shuffled along in shoes

much too large, and a short, tattered petticoat was tied about her waist. She was shivering with cold, for the season had already turned, and the sun was setting; its last rays fell directly athwart her short dishevelled curls, and they shone with a red-gold lustre that was positively metallic, while there was a gleam of green in the eyes that sparkled beneath long brown lashes.

Achille stared. "Come here, little one. What is your name?"

They stepped aside out of the crowd. Anatole bit his lip impatiently, but humoured his friend's whim.

"Fernande; they call me Ferra, monsieur," the child said, in a shrill childish voice, "and the flowers are a franc."

"I should like to see her grown up, Anatole, and that head against a background of crimson velvet! You can't think how striking the resemblance is. Shall we take her with us?"

"What nonsense! For heaven's sake, Achille, don't make such a terrible fool of yourself. Come!"

He took Arbanoff by the arm, and, with a glance over his shoulder at the child, said, harshly, "There are ten francs. Now be off!"

Ferra dexterously caught the coin tossed to her, and with delight in her eyes held out the flowers to the giver.

"Let us walk on, Achille."

"Not at all. My carriage is waiting over there. You'll come with us, Ferra, eh?"

"Yes," was the instant reply, as the coin was tightly clasped in one dirty little hand while the other pressed the flowers to the chilled breast. The gentlemen were generous, and one of them looked kind,—fear was a sensation unknown.

"Achille!" exclaimed the attaché, wellnigh pale with dismay. "Are you mad? What! let that beggar's brat sit beside you in your carriage? Let me be off first, then."

"Stuff! don't be afraid of ridicule, Anatole," and Arbanoff grasped his friend's arm in his turn. "You must come too, of course. Think what a chance it is! Most wonderful! Go on before us, little one," he turned to the child, "and wait for us at the next street corner; do you hear?"

She nodded and tripped along at a short distance in front of them, light as a bird and dirty as the ground. Anatole looked after her with disgust in every feature.

"I cannot understand you, Achille!"

"Did you look at her face? It is enchanting."

"A dirty little vagabond. She will infect the carriage."

The Prince paid no heed to his words, but lifted the child on to the blue damask cushions, the two men followed, and away rolled the vehicle to the Palais Arbanoff. The Vicomte leaned back in a very ill humour, perpetually waving his scented pocket-handkerchief to and fro in the air; Achille gazed at Ferra,

who, on the back seat, sat watching the trees and houses fly past through the carriage-window. For the first time in her life she was in a carriage, and the enchantment of the moment was clearly mirrored in the lovely childish face.

At last the carriage stopped. Achille delivered the child over to his valet, with an order to take her directly to Ma'amselle Clarisse, the housekeeper, to be bathed and dressed. Ivan, smiling maliciously, knocked at Ma'amselle's door; she opened it herself, and gazed in amazement at his little companion.

"What under the sun, Ivan, have you got there?" The question was uttered in a tone of outraged dignity, such as befitted a housekeeper of Ma'amselle's high rank. "It has no business here! Take it away; take it away this instant!"

"No, no! His Highness ordered me to take the child to you, and to bring it back to him when it was washed and combed."

"But, Ivan, you could not have heard what he said. His Highness never could have expected me, the housekeeper of the Palais Arbanoff, to touch that bundle of rags and dirt."

The old lady spoke in a tone of gentle helplessness, although she generally stood upon a war-footing with all the servants. She was really hurt by having such services required of her.

"An order is an order," Ivan said, with a shrug. "But call Ninon; there is no need of your doing it

yourself. I should like to know where he picked it up," he added under his breath.

Ferra stood motionless. Her large brilliant eyes wandered curiously about her, and rested upon the two elderly people, who evidently disliked her. It did not trouble her much; she was used to cross looks. Her head was filled with strange thoughts.

Was it not all just like one of the stories which the lame old flower-manufacturer in the third story sometimes told her, and to which she listened with such breathless attention? Well, she was content; it must surely be better here than in the gloomy cellar, with a father who was always drunk and a mother who was always either crying or asleep. In silence she let herself be bathed, in silence she let herself be clothed afresh from top to toe, and an hour later she found herself standing before Ma'amselle's tall cheval-glass, that the finishing touches might be put to her toilette. Completely absorbed in contemplation of her small self, she gazed at her reflection, and at Ninon's dexterous fingers.

Was that really Ferra, the little flower-girl,—the beggar who had hitherto run about the streets of Paris unwashed and uncombed? The pure white linen seemed to her a wonder of creation as it fell away from one rounded shoulder, showing a skin as fresh and as velvety as a ripe peach. She was slight and delicate as a gazelle,—her face, framed in golden wayward curls, and lit up by brilliant eyes undeniably

greenish, was enchantingly lovely; and let Ninon comb and brush as she would, the hair curled and waved about her head like a natural aureole.

As she stood thus in unconscious wonder at her own beauty, gravely looking at herself in the mirror, Ivan, entering, cleared his throat and coughed discreetly behind his hand, with a glance of inquiry towards Ma'amselle Clarisse. But the old maid was also gazing into the mirror, and made no reply, even when the valet whispered, "His Highness has sharp eyes,—wonderfully sharp eyes, mademoiselle."

CHAPTER II.

THE RUE ROCHEFORT.

IN a large and magnificently-furnished apartment, pleasantly heated by a fire blazing in the chimney, Vicomte Anatole Leroy sat near the hearth reading. He had deluged himself with jockey-club to dispel the plebeian odour which had so offended his aristocratic sense, and he had at last regained his equanimity. Achille was pacing the room impatiently to and fro.

"*Ma foi*," said the attaché, at last, clapping to his book and looking up at his friend, "one would think you expected a marvel of the next hour. The whole affair, which seems to have interested you so remarkably, is absurd."

The Prince would have replied, but just then Ivan made his appearance, ushered in Ferra, and withdrew with a profound bow. There the child stood motionless, something of the glow from the blazing fire illuminating her face and shining upon the golden hair. Achille Arbanoff exclaimed, in a tone of exultation, "Well?"

"If she keeps her present promise, she will probably be very beautiful; but she is a mere child, and there is no certainty as to her future development."

"How old are you, Ferra? Come nearer, little

one, and don't be afraid," said the Prince, extending his hand kindly to the child, who thus addressed instantly obeyed.

"Eight years old, monsieur," she replied to his question; "at least my mother thinks so."

"Are you hungry?"

The question was suggested by the longing looks which the little girl was casting through the half-drawn portière into the next room, where stood a well-spread table loaded with silver and Venetian glass.

"I'm always hungry, please, monsieur," she said, very decidedly, making one of the prettiest courtesies which the lame flower-maker had taught her.

"Then come and have something to eat, Ferra," said Achille, in the best of humours. "We will keep each other company."

For the first time her glance strayed towards the man seated near the fire, and as she encountered Leroy's eyes an involuntary expression of dislike appeared upon the perfect childish face. Achille noticed it and laughed. "You've made no conquest there," he said, nodding towards Ferra.

"Even were she ten years older it would not annoy me," said Leroy, haughtily. "You know my taste."

Ferra's ideas concerning the use of a knife and fork were undeniably primitive; nevertheless, she conducted herself with so much native grace that the Prince was warm in her praise. Ah, how delightful it was to be allowed to eat as much of all these dainties as she

chose! When Achille at dessert loaded her plate with candied fruit and bonbons, she nibbled away at them like a little squirrel. The glass of wine that she had drunk sent the clear vermilion blood into her cheeks, her eyes shone, and she laughed softly to herself.

"Should you like to stay here always, Ferra?" asked Achille, amused. She looked around at the costly furniture, the rich rugs, the silken hangings, the glittering chandeliers, and then up into her new friend's face.

"Yes, please, monsieur. At home it is cold and ugly and dark; it almost freezes me to sell flowers all day long, and then my father gets drunk and beats us,—my mother and me."

"What are your parents' names, and where do they live?"

"Rue Rochefort, 94, in the cellar in the yard. My father's name is Pierre Doutrange. May I really stay here, monsieur?"

Her eyes sparkled with entreaty.

"I am not sure yet——"

"Achille, don't be a fool; be warned betimes."

Ferra turned on the instant; she bit her under lip and looked angrily at the speaker, then slipped her hand caressingly into Achille's and whispered, "Don't believe him; I will be a good, gentle girl, never naughty."

He passed his hand thoughtfully over her curls, and then, lighting a cigarette, threw himself into an

arm-chair. Ferra, thus left to herself, wandered about the rooms, until at last she lay down upon a huge bear-skin before the fire, resting her head between the brute's ears and clasping her arms about its neck. "How warm and beautiful it is here!" she murmured; "just like one of Désirée's stories."

Then, overcome by the wine, the warmth, and the unwonted sense of comfort, she dropped asleep almost as soon as the words had passed her lips.

As she lay motionless, Achille arose noiselessly and beckoned to Leroy, and together they stood looking down at the sleeping child. The flushed little face nestling in the thick fur was bewitchingly lovely, and the hair was wonderful.

"If you are wise, Achille, you will have her carried home now," Leroy said, at last. "She will think she has been dreaming, and that will be the end of it."

"No, I shall not do that. It would be a sin to let so much beauty waste in poverty. Nature is not often so lavish. I shall see her parents, and then have her trained and educated——"

"And then?"

Struck by his tone, Achille looked at the speaker; then laughed low and repeated, "And then? and then? By Jove, Anatole, you grow insufferable. When the time comes matters will adjust themselves."

"You forget how every action bears fruit in consequences which we are powerless to control. She will probably be very handsome, this *protégée* of yours."

“Aha! and you think that a reason for giving her up. Is that natural, Anatole?”

“It would certainly be wise. What is to become of her? It is very easy to perform what is called a work of charity on a sudden impulse, but very foolish to burden ourselves for the future with its consequences. What is to become of her?”

“How can I tell? She may turn out a governess for my future children; perhaps a nurse for myself in my old age. At all events, she shall go now to the convent school of the *Sacré Cœur*. What do you think?”

“Once more, carry her back to her cellar.”

“You are brutal. The child herself certainly seems to have no predilection for her home. Let us drive to the Rue Rochefort while our little Venus is asleep. Come with me, Anatole.”

Leroy shook his head, but made no further remonstrance. It really was a matter of small moment to him, and his habit of yielding thus at the last moment always strengthened the tie between Achille and himself.

The distinguished arrivals in their well-appointed equipage made a great stir in the narrow gloomy street. Half a dozen filthy guides were only too ready to show the way to Père Doutrange's cellar, from the open door of which issued the fumes of brandy. On a heap of straw in the corner lay the man, while his wife was busy over the fire preparing their miserable

supper. The lame flower-maker stood beside her, asking after Ferra.

"I do not know where she is; she has not come home."

"But it is dark night,—oh, poor little thing!"

"No need to pity her; she would only have been beaten, as I have been, if she had been here."

Just then Achille entered, walked directly up to the women, and asked, "I am looking for a family by the name of Doutrange; is this the place where they live?"

The woman stared at the stranger, wiped her hand on her greasy apron, and nodded assent.

"You have a daughter, a ragged little beggar, who sells flowers, and goes by the name of Ferra. The child has taken my fancy. I want to keep her. What do you ask for her?"

From the straw in the corner the drunkard lifted his coarse, bloated countenance, then staggered to his feet, and came forward. "Oh, monsieur, monsieur," he whined, "I am an honest man; how can you propose to me to sell my jewel, the comfort of my old age, my daughter?"

"She shall want for nothing, and will be better taken care of than here," said Achille, disgusted, retreating as the man approached him.

"And her mother, her poor mother! No, monsieur, it is impossible!"

Anatole advanced. "Decide quickly," he said, im-

periously. "Three thousand francs are a fortune for you, and we have no mind to stifle in this hole."

"Our foster-daughter, our jewel!" whined the man, but in quite a different tone. "Monsieur, we took her from a dead vagabond, of whom we knew nothing, and since then she has been as our own to us."

"Three thousand francs," Leroy repeated, harshly; "yes or no?"

"Yes, then, yes——"

The three thousand francs lay upon the table in the wretched room, as the two friends, with a shudder of disgust, emerged from its atmosphere of brandy, poverty, and filth. In the yard outside the lame flower-maker stood beside them. "God bless you for the good deed you have done, although I shall miss the child sorely. Take my love to Ferra, messieurs."

"This is too much," said Leroy. "A moment more and this old creature will establish a claim upon us. You see now, Achille, to what your whims lead. For heaven's sake let us get to the *Café Riche* as soon as possible, that we may feel like cultivated human beings once more. They say that childish impressions never lose their influence, in which case Ferra is badly off. It was terrible there!"

Two days after the above transaction the gates of the convent of the *Sacré Cœur* closed upon Ferra Doutrange, whom the young Prince in person delivered over to the Mother-Superior, recommending the child to her special protection.

THE RUE ROCHEFORT.

25

“Now I have done my duty, and I am really curious to see what will be made of her.”

“*Qui vivra verra!*” Anatole replied, laconically, as he lighted a cigarette. “Whatever happens, ‘*tu l’as voulu, Georges Dandin.*’”

CHAPTER III.

THE INEXORABLE FLIGHT OF TIME.

EIGHT years passed. Prince Achille Arbanoff, lying back on a lounge of peacock-blue plush, his hands clasped beneath his head, yawned loudly. Near the large window, with his back to the light, sat the Vicomte Anatole Leroy, absorbed in the latest newspapers.

Profound silence reigned in the apartment, broken only now and then by the crackling of the logs on the hearth and the rustling of the paper in the Vicomte's hands.

Achille yawned more loudly than before.

"Pray don't do that again," said Anatole, laying down his paper. "It gives me the cramp in my jaw to hear you."

Whereupon the diplomat arose, sauntered wearily to and fro in the apartment for a few minutes, and then paused beside a little table, upon which, on a silver waiter, lay the Prince's letters for the day, still unopened.

"Your letters," he said, pointing to them,— "shall I bring them to you?"

"For heaven's sake, no; they are of no possible consequence."

“Not this one? An enormous envelope, addressed in a very stiff hand; quite scentless. 'Tis a pity the seal is blurred. It is—it looks like—yes, it is a pierced heart. Will you not open it?”

“No, thank you; open it yourself instead.”

Anatole opened the letter, read the first lines, and then dropped it with an exclamation of astonishment.

“Well?” asked Achille from his corner.

“The letter is from the Mother-Superior of the *Sacré Cœur*, reminding you of your duty with regard to her pupil, *Fernande Doutrange*. She says, further, ‘Since the time expires to-morrow which was fixed for the completion of our pupil’s education, and as her place here is already disposed of in another quarter, I should be very glad if your Highness would make some arrangement for her future. I would not have it appear as if I wished to be rid of my pupil; on the contrary, we all love the sunny-tempered young creature, but her mental development, which I have laboured to assist, is far outstripped by her physical growth. She has become very beautiful. I must impress this upon you that you may understand me. Her wishes and inclinations all tend towards a worldly life; her character will be as wax in the hands of those who influence her. She has all the faults and the virtues of a genuine woman, but a longer stay in the convent would be impossible for her. I have done my duty by her, and now resign her to the hands from which I received her eight years ago. It is true that

you have shown no interest in the girl since then, but I ascribed this to your social position, and silently awaited the time when I should again recall her to your memory. That time has now arrived. A week from to-day Ferra must leave the convent forever, and if I receive no further directions from you, I shall send her in charge of Sister Beata to the Palais Arbanoff. . . .” Leroy laid aside the letter and looked eagerly towards the dark corner where Achille lay. But all was silent there.

“Well?” he asked at last. “Have you heard what I have been reading?”

“Deuce take it! yes. What in the world am I to do with the girl, Anatole?”

“That seems to me to be your affair. I don’t know.”

“What is to be done? She is not a fact to be easily ignored. A woman! Just fancy a woman running about here all day long with her everlasting chatter! How could I endure it?”

“These are the consequences, *mon ami*. Do you remember how I did my utmost to persuade you to give up your foolish scheme? You would not listen to me, and the consequences of our acts are, as you see, just as little to be disposed of as the acts themselves.”

Achille sighed. “It’s no end of a bore. I can’t see why the Mother-Superior wants to be rid of the girl; she might have had any money she wanted.”

“The order is recruited only from families of the

first distinction. Who is Ferra? 'Tis easy enough to understand," said Leroy, with a shrug.

"But for heaven's sake, what am I to do?" Achille asked again.

There was a knock at the door, and Ivan's white head appeared.

"What is it now?" his master asked, irritably.

"Sister Beata, your Highness, is here from the Sacré Cœur."

"Alone?" Achille sat upright.

"No, your Highness; with a young lady, and she wishes to speak to your Highness."

Achille groaned. "Already? What does it mean? I thought it was to come in a week."

"Probably the letter has been lying here for that length of time," said Leroy, looking for the date. "Precisely; it has been here unopened."

"Where are they?"

"With Ma'amselle Clarisse."

Ivan was dismissed by a gesture, and Achille again asked, in despair, "What now? What am I to do?"

"No need to worry about it now. Give her in charge to your housekeeper for the present, and decide hereafter. You ought to see her, I suppose, or are you no longer interested in her?"

"No," was the rather petulant reply. "When a matter annoys me I take no further pleasure in it."

"But before you decide you must know what she looks like." And before Achille could gainsay him

Leroy had rung the bell and ordered Ivan to show *in* Ferra.

"I must confess that the whole affair is an intolerable bore," Achille remarked; nevertheless he screwed his eye-glass into his eye, and turned so that he faced the door of the room.

In the same spot where Ferra had stood eight years before she was now left standing when Ivan gently closed the door behind her. Now, as then, the fading daylight and the glimmer of the fire in the chimney filled the luxurious apartment. Now, as then, the two men gazed at her, but Achille did so with scarce-concealed annoyance, while Leroy's glance was one of eager curiosity; and now, as then, the girl advanced slowly a few steps and then paused with downcast eyes.

She wore the prescribed dress of the pupils of the convent, a gray gown with a broad white collar, but it detracted nothing from the beauty of her supple, well-developed figure. The red-gold hair curled about her brow and temples, and her cheeks were a brilliant carmine. She was beautiful, as beautiful as in her childhood she had promised to be.

Achille sat erect and gazed at her speechless. He did not think it worth while to rise; for him Ferra was still only the little beggar-girl whom he had rescued from the Rue Rochefort, and who owed him everything, in spite of the passage of years. At present she was an intrusion upon the repose of his

life, and although he did not intend to show that this was so, she nevertheless perceived it.

"Come nearer, Ferra," he said at last, after a pause, which was painfully embarrassing for the young girl, "and tell me what you propose to do in future. Your arrival is unexpected."

She advanced a few steps, her cheeks flushed scarlet, for the Prince's manner offended both her feminine sensibility and her vanity.

"I know it, your Highness," she said, with head erect and sparkling eyes. "I am sorry, but I cannot help it. Your Highness should have remembered me before."

"*Au fond,*" said Achille, much surprised by her indignation, "it is of no consequence. You can stay with Clarisse until I have found some suitable occupation for you; she will take excellent care of you. And there are a thousand things that she can teach you in the household, which I suppose you cannot have learned in the convent. Clarisse will see to it all."

"I will try my best to make myself of use, your Highness. I know that I owe everything to you, and——"

"For heaven's sake, spare me, child! I am an invalid, and everything I have ever done has been done to please myself,—I make no claim for gratitude."

"Nevertheless your Highness must receive it from me." From beneath the red-gold hair the sparkling

eyes had a look in them that was half entreaty, half remonstrance, and the lips expressed determination. "I have no one in the world save yourself to whom I can be grateful. I cannot readily resign this privilege."

She smiled as she spoke the last words, and an indescribable charm was added to her beautiful face. Achille nervously wiped his brow with his handkerchief. "But you must be tired," he said.

"After that short drive?"

"Oh, yes, yes," he hurriedly insisted, "you are tired, and Clarisse will take care of you."

Ferra silently complied. If the Prince chose, why should she not be tired? She was glad to get away from the oppressive atmosphere of the room and to have it over,—this first interview with the man whom her childish imagination had transformed to a demigod.

As she followed Ivan back to Ma'amselle Clarisse her young life was the poorer by an illusion. Her introduction to the Palais Arbanoff had humiliated and disappointed her. He at whose feet she, in the fervour of her youthful enthusiasm, would have cast her warm, grateful heart, had shown her plainly enough that his generosity towards her had been nothing more than a whim,—hastily indulged, then forgotten, and now a burden to him.

When they reached Clarisse's room Ivan said, "His Highness orders that the young lady shall be placed entirely in your charge, ma'amselle. She can have the

rooms here next your own, and whatever you think fit."

"Not the pink rooms, then?" the housekeeper asked, looking searchingly in the valet's face. "Are you sure?"

"No, not the pink rooms, I am sure," he replied, with a significant look that induced Clarisse to nod her head with much satisfaction.

She produced a huge bunch of keys to set about her arrangements, but as she left the room she cast her first kind glance at the young girl, who had seated herself at the window, and was looking out into the gathering night. When the housekeeper returned Ferra was still in the same spot, her elbow resting on the windowsill, her eyes covered with her hand. Clarisse, whose old eyes were still sharp enough, saw tears rolling down the soft cheek which the hand did not cover, and obeying a sudden impulse, she went up to the girl and, laying her hand caressingly on the thick curls, said, "All beginnings are hard, mademoiselle, but they soon grow easy. You must not cry. Since you are to be my charge, we shall surely get on well together. Good will goes a great way."

Ferra looked up. The old maid's wrinkled face, which had hitherto so chilled her, wore a kindly, sympathetic expression that quite sufficed to restore the girl's gaiety. Before Clarisse was aware of what she was doing two soft arms were thrown around her, the girlish cheek was laid close to her own, and even while

the tears were glistening in her eyes, Ferra, quite consoled, laughed and whispered, "Ah, yes, we shall be happy together; I like so dearly to laugh, and I was afraid it would be impossible in the Palais Arbanoff."

CHAPTER IV.

AN AWAKENING.

FOUR monotonous, dreary weeks had passed, and Ferra had seen nothing of Paris, nor had it once occurred to Achille to summon her again to his presence. Strangely enough, it annoyed him to remember the girl, and he did his best to forget her existence.

It was otherwise with Leroy. He had, to be sure, seen Ferra but for a moment on that first evening of her arrival, when she had not apparently noticed him, but that glimpse had taken his fancy by storm and threatened to rob the sober diplomat of his self-possession. Awake and in his dreams he saw the charming girlish form; he was vexed with Achille for not sending for her again, and he daily ascended the broad flight of steps leading from the garden to the story in which were the housekeeper's rooms, in hopes of another glimpse, however fleeting, of Ferra. But the long corridors, the landings where stood broad-leaved tropical plants, were silent and deserted, and Achille was deaf to all his friend's hints, ignorant as he was of the flame that inspired them.

On a dreary, damp November afternoon the attaché betook himself, as was his wont, to his friend's man-

sion, having accepted an invitation to one of the small suppers which Arbanoff frequently gave to his intimates, and wishing at the same time to make his adieux to him for a few days, as he had been chosen by the Minister to undertake a mission to a German petty court.

These suppers, which assembled a select number of the *jeunesse dorée* at the Palais Arbanoff, were sure to be brilliant affairs. The viands, the wines, and the company were alike choice. Of old, Achille had been the life and soul of the small circle, charming all by his brilliant talk, his original fancies,—and the change that years had wrought in him had been so gradual that his guests scarcely noted that his gayety was more fitful, and that the host frequently leaned back wearied and pale in his arm-chair, or rested his head on one hand while the other hung down white and lifeless over the crimson cushions, as if incapable of a firm grasp.

All had grown accustomed to this change, and no attention was paid to it.

The table had been cleared but for the fruit and wine; the flowers in the vases drooped and were fast fading, while their fragrance was all the more intense; the lights were reflected in glasses half filled with ruby wine or with sparkling champagne, and the atmosphere of the room was warm and oppressive.

Prince Arbanoff disliked to have coffee served at the dinner-table; he was accustomed to take it in a small

adjoining room, where in former days he had written his letters, and which was therefore called the study. It was octagonal, and the walls and the furniture were covered with stamped leather. A dim half-light reigned here; the fire on the hearth was but a heap of smouldering embers, the red glow from which played over the heavy carving of the table, where, on a silver waiter, were ranged the tiny coffee-cups and the gilt liqueur-glasses. It had for all these years been Clarisse's special duty to see that everything here was ordered as it should be, and if, induced by a fit of rheumatism, she sent Ferra on this occasion to fulfil her office, it was only because she knew that the girl's noiseless ministrations could reach the ear of none of the guests, who were still at the dinner-table.

Ferra pushed aside a chair here, and set a cup straight there, enjoying her capacity to arrange and adjust attractively. The talk and laughter in the next room reached her ear through the closed doors, only as a vague murmur, as one after another she took the liqueur-flasks out of their stand and held them towards the light, examining their contents. They were green, yellow, and white, and exhaled a delicious fragrance when she removed the stoppers. Ferra had never tasted anything of the kind, and she suddenly longed to know what it was like. She was alone, no one could see her, and a sip could do her no harm.

She reflected for a moment, and then curiosity got the upper hand. She took up one of the small glasses,

and the Chartreuse trickled into it like oil. She smelled it, and then touched it with her lips. It was delicious! She sipped and sipped, until at last, throwing back her head, she was draining the last drop, when the door behind her opened noiselessly and Leroy appeared on the threshold. As he perceived Ferra he smiled, hastily closed the door, and, advancing, laid his hand gently upon her arm. She started with an exclamation of terror, but while at sight of Achille she would have been confused and ashamed, the presence of Leroy called up within her only indignation. She frowned angrily.

"A first trial," he said, jestingly. "Tell me how you liked it."

"How odious that you should have seen me!"

"But I am very discreet and indulgent where I am friendly. Besides, why should any one be such a fool as not to try at least to make life as agreeable as possible?"

His hand slipped from her arm and glided around her slender waist. "Are we not good friends, Ferra?" he whispered, his face close to her own.

The girl repulsed him with flashing eyes. "You mistake, M. le Vicomte! Although I am dependent upon Prince Arbanoff's bounty, you have no right to insult me."

"I meant no insult," he said, hastily altering his tone and seizing her hand. "No, by heaven! but your eyes rob me of reason."

As he spoke he listened eagerly to the sound from the next room. If Achille's guests would only appear. If they should see and admire Ferra he might consider himself nearer the goal of his desires.

"Hush!" she said, sharply, trying to release her hand from his clasp. "Let me go, M. le Vicomte, that no one else may find me here."

"And why should you not be found here, Ferra? Why should you not test the power of your beauty before you allow yourself and your life to be fettered?"

"Who wishes to fetter me?"

"Oh, Achille, and Clarisse too."

He spoke in his customary tone of easy indifference, half absently it would seem, as he released her hand and moved towards a chair. How could she know that this was all assumed to hide the intense eagerness with which he listened for approaching movement from the next room and——

The door opened, and on the threshold stood the guests, at first pausing in surprise, and then thronging into the room with awakened curiosity. Several exclamations of admiration, although hastily suppressed, reached the girl's ear.

She could have sunk into the floor with mortification. In her shame she did not venture to lift her eyes.

"Thank you, Ferra," said Achille's languid voice, and what welcome deliverance there was in the sound! "Everything is as it should be; you need not stay

an instant longer." She courtesied and left the room. Timid and ashamed as she was, her gait and bearing were those of a queen. Outside in the long corridor she pressed her hands upon her throbbing temples, and hurried to take refuge behind the screen of leafy plants which were grouped in a corner of the hall. In the room she had left a storm of eager inquiry arose.

"What exquisite creature was that?"

"Did you contrive that *tableau vivante* for us, Achille?"

"Why did she go?"

"Oh, you sly scoundrel!"

"Who is she?"

"Let her come back. Only for a moment, Achille!"

"You are all quite mistaken in your surmises. Ferra is my foster-daughter, as it were. No one is to know her or to see her."

"What stupendous selfishness!"

"She is under the protection of my old housekeeper, and sheltered beneath my roof."

"How did you find her?"

"She is desperately lovely!"

And the storm broke forth again.

"Anatole will tell you about it. Anatole!"

But Anatole was not in the room, and Achille had to tell the story himself.

Meanwhile Leroy had tracked Ferra to her hiding-place.

"Why have you followed me?" the girl said, frowning, as he made his appearance, and she would have left him, but Leroy detained her.

"Why do you try to escape me, mademoiselle?"

"I do not try to escape you," she said, haughtily, seating herself upon a small cushioned lounge in the corner.

"We try to escape when we are afraid, and you do not fear me, Ferra, do you?"

"Most certainly not!"

"Your name is upon every lip in that room now. They are all talking of you."

"It was terrible to be found there!"

"And why? Ah, child, you are not yet conscious of your power; it is great and dangerous. Those men in there are better instructed. Achille is now telling them your story."

"Why should he?" she asked, angrily, biting her lip. "Is it necessary that every one should know what I was?"

"He looks at it from a different point of view," said Leroy, contemptuously. "To-morrow you will be still more admired, but—differently, of course,—as Achille will be too, good fellow! Can you comprehend this?"

She plucked a leaf from the shrub beside her and picked it to pieces, her anger rising. "He has a right to me, and I must be content with what he does."

"Oh, Ferra, do you prize your beauty so lightly?"

Is there a man beneath this roof who would not adore you, idolize you, if you would allow it?"

"Why do you repeat that to me so often?"

"Because—because——" He laid his hand upon her arm. His touch aroused her aversion, and, yielding to a momentary impulse, she thrust him from her.

"Ha, little tigress!" he said, angrily, clasping her waist,—thrown off his guard by the effect of her beauty and of the wine he had taken,—“your claws are sharp, but have a care. I will subdue you although it cost me my life, for I love you!"

She made no reply, but struggled with him, her teeth set, writhing in his clasp like a serpent.

"Little tigress!" he said, again, his hot breath upon her cheek. "I like you thus! But I shall tame you."

He drew her forcibly to him and pressed his lips upon hers, but on the instant, with a suppressed exclamation, he dropped his hands and released her. Ferra had struck him full in the face.

"For this you shall repay me with interest, be sure of that!" he said, under his breath, but with intense malice, as, his features distorted with impotent rage, he turned and left her.

For a moment Ferra stood motionless, very pale, hardly capable of thought. Her anger had vanished, and her heart was filled with unutterable bitterness and contempt. She went sadly to her room and locked herself in, finding it impossible to go to Clarisse or to wish her, as usual, a gay good-night. Tears streamed

from her eyes ; for the first time she felt entirely unprotected and defenceless ; for the first time she had a dim sense of the humiliations that she might encounter upon her path through life, and her self-consciousness, which had hitherto found expression only in an innocent little vanity and coquetry, awoke to life for the first time in full vigour.

“Hateful, detestable creature!” she said, in the midst of her sobs, rubbing her desecrated lips with her handkerchief until they very nearly bled. “I never—never will forgive him.”

CHAPTER V.

AT THE OPERA.

FERRA'S appearance at the Prince's supper was much talked of. Those present expressed to the host their admiration of so beautiful a creature, and Leroy took care to turn it all to his own advantage in the development of his plans. Ferra must now, so he surmised, be shown to the world, be exposed to all the temptations of the capital, and then—then the hour would surely come for his sweet revenge.

The first time that he was alone with his friend after his return to Paris he skilfully introduced the subject, flattering Achille's vanity by recalling the lively impression made by his protégée upon his guests of the supper-party, and then, going straight to the point, he asked, "Why do you keep the girl in such nun-like seclusion? Why play the jailer to a creature eager for society, who will make you once more famous in Paris? Pshaw! I cannot understand you."

"But you can understand that her appearance in public would create a scandal."

"And are you sure that she would suffer from that? I doubt it. How many women are worth the scruples and stings of conscience which they cause us in

our melancholy moods? If you had left her in her cellar what would she have been by this time?"

Achille sighed.

"That is why," the tempter continued, "I do not understand you. Let her be seen as you would show some rare gem that chance had thrown in your way, make yourself an object of envy, and smile when an attempt is made to rob you of your jewel. You certainly might do that."

"What do you propose that I should do?"

"Send her to the opera, to your box; let her drive in the Bois in your carriage; of course without that old owl Clarisse. Perhaps they will pay you the compliment of taking her for a relative of yours."

"A relative? Hardly! No, Anatole, there is nothing in common between Arbanoff blood and the Rue Rochefort."

When Leroy had left him, Achille reflected seriously for a while. Then he rang the bell, and had Ferra sent to him.

The girl had passed an anxious, troubled time since the evening of the supper. What if Leroy should complain of her? What should she say, how explain to Achille the blow she had given? When he sent for her to-night at dusk to read to him, she went, blushing with shame, but more beautiful than ever. Achille contemplated her for a while in silence. His friends were right, she would create a *furor*; he was a fool to keep her any longer concealed.

"I have a proposition to make to you, mademoiselle," he said at last, languidly, as though speech were an effort to him. "You live so lonely a life here that you must be weary of it. Would you like to go to the opera?"

Ferra looked up, involuntarily advancing a step as if to make sure that she had heard aright. Her gleaming eyes sparkled with delight. "Oh, your Highness! Is it possible?"

"Of course, if you would like it."

"If I should like it!" She very nearly shouted with delight. "When can I go?"

"To-night, to-morrow,—whenever you choose."

"Then I choose to go to-night." She was breathless with joy, like a child. "May I tell Clarisse?"

"Clarisse must not go with you; you must go alone, Ferra; then you can use my box. Or are you afraid?"

"Oh, no, your Highness; who could harm me?"

She looked confidently at him, and he never reflected that he was sacrificing her and her future merely to gratify his vanity, and that the world would rob her of that which it could never again restore to her. "Then get ready to go this evening."

With a joyous exclamation the girl flew to the old housekeeper, and, throwing her arms around her neck, told her of the Prince's permission. Clarisse did not share her joy; on the contrary, she disapproved.

"You have been confided to me, Ferra, and the first

time that you really stand in need of my protection I am left behind. His Highness is very unwise. I, with my respectability, should be in place everywhere; but you, alone,—I cannot approve it.”

She shook her head and grumbled, but that was all that she could do, and she finally fastened into the girl's hair a diamond star which Arbanoff once in a generous mood had bestowed upon her as a reward for her faithful service.

Ferra was as lovely as a fairy leaning back in a crimson velvet arm-chair in Arbanoff's box. Every opera-glass in the house was directed towards her beautiful face, and she would have been less than woman, and certainly no Parisian, if she had not observed and enjoyed the admiration she aroused.

“*Diantre!*” said the old Prince du Faure, in an opposite box, still a well-known connoisseur of beauty in spite of his bald head and bent figure, “who is that over there? *Ravissante!* What hair, and what eyes! Who is she? Where does she come from?”

People shrugged their shoulders, guessed, suspected. No one knew her. It made her doubly interesting.

“I did not know that Arbanoff liked red hair,” the little Countess Orsoni said, with half a sneer, looking steadily at Ferra through her opera-glass.

“Arbanoff has good taste, but she,—what can she find attractive in that tiresome fellow? If she likes him for his revenue's sake, the man who could offer her the same would have the same chance,” said young

Morny, stroking his dark moustache. "I shall ride past the Palais Arbanoff daily, and renew my old intimacy with Achille."

"Does no one know who she is? Who can tell us anything about her?" exclaimed his companion.

"I can," said Anatole Leroy, entering the box and closing the door behind him.

He had just come, and stood clearing his opera-glass, surrounded by the members of the various popular clubs, who, at these first two words of his, pushed eagerly forward to question him. His face was perfectly impassive as he went on :

"Charming as she is, she is sprung from the filth and misery of the Rue Rochefort, where Achille bought her, a starving little flower-girl, from her vagabond parents, who inhabited the cellar in a yard in that aristocratic quarter. He sent her to a convent, had her educated, and now reveals this embodied whim of his to the world. He is nothing if not eccentric, our worthy Achille!"

"What is her name?"

"Ferra Doutrange."

"You lucky fellow!"

"Why?"

"You are Arbanoff's friend."

Leroy shrugged his shoulders, and looked across at Ferra with an air of supreme indifference. She avoided his glance, and then for the first time the attaché smiled.

In the front row, between her husband and her mother, a dark-haired young woman was sitting; she too saw Ferra; she heard the whispers,—half of envy, half of admiration,—marked the sneers and the smiles, looked but once towards their object, and then, changing colour, took up a position in which she turned her back to the Arbanoff box. Not once again was the lovely but rather haughty face turned towards Ferra, not even when her husband particularly directed her attention to the girl's beauty. She only nodded absently.

“Oh, good heavens, such women! Yes, such women,” said the aristocratic and dignified elderly lady; “they monopolize every one's attention. Alice, give me the opera-bill.”

Her daughter, whose cheeks were now crimson, handed it to her. “Here it is, mamma.”

Ferra, leaning slightly forward in her box, gazed with sparkling eyes at the three. “Alice!” was her joyous thought. She had discovered her best friend of the *Sacré Cœur*.

How unfortunate that the young lady did not even turn round, in spite of every quiet attempt to attract her attention, when Ferra longed so eagerly to greet her! After seeing Alice the world seemed not so large, after all, and she herself not half so lonely. Before the conclusion of the opera the three arose and left their places without noticing Ferra.

“If I only knew where she lived,” the young girl

thought, "I would go and see her to-morrow. How glad she would be, my dear Alice, and how we should laugh together at the chance which prevented her to-night from even turning her head!"

CHAPTER VI.

AT THE LOUVRE.

PRINCE ARBANOFF was duly informed by Leroy of the sensation produced by Ferra at the opera, and he smiled languidly in the consciousness that a pale reflex of her triumph was his. His conscience seemed dead with regard to the girl.

The numerous visits which he received were an excellent commentary upon Anatole's account, and when among the cards left he found many which he had not seen for years he smiled again, and with a depreciatory wave of his hand remarked, "Flies! flies crowding about a lump of sugar."

Ferra meanwhile, all unconscious, was daily teasing Clarisse to let her go out. The outside world was so beautiful, and she saw so little of it in the Palais Arbanoff. Her longing for enjoyment of life and the world, which had always been native to her, increased, until there was no resisting it, and, averse to gratify it though the strict old housekeeper was, she could not but yield at last.

"Paris is a terrible place," she said, shaking her head, "but what can I do save advise? Go to the Louvre then, Ferra, and Gabriel shall go with you."

The halls of the Louvre were cold and empty, as Clarisse had prudently hoped that they would be. But what of that? the pictures, the mute marbles enchanted Ferra; the story of her life was gaining every moment in warmth and colour. Followed by Gabriel, she had just entered a fresh room, when she saw standing before the Venus of Milo a group of three people,—a gentleman and two ladies. The younger of the ladies, enveloped in costly furs and velvet, turned her side-face to Ferra, and in an instant the girl rushed towards her with an exclamation of delight: “Alice! dear Alice!”

With arms outspread she stood ready to embrace her friend, only a little surprised, perhaps, at Alice’s delay in rushing into them.

What did it mean? The ladies retreated a step and put up their eye-glasses. The gentleman turned, and the three pair of eyes stared at her so coldly, so disdainfully, that Ferra felt the hot blood flush her cheeks as she slowly dropped her arms at her sides.

“Alice!” she said once more, softly, almost timidly.

Thus addressed, the young lady measured her from head to foot with a cold glance, and then said very firmly,—

“Mademoiselle, I supposed you possessed of sufficient tact to forget, as I have done, that we ever knew each other. Since you force me to a personal explanation, let me tell you distinctly that I must decline any recognition on your part.”

"What—what have I done, Alice?" Ferra stammered, turning pale, while burning tears rushed to her eyes.

"I am the Marquise Remacin," the other rejoined, haughtily. "Come, Gaston, let us go." She took her husband's arm and left the hall without another glance towards the poor girl, upon whose ears the elderly lady's comment fell with a crushing weight :

"Such an extremely insolent young person!"

Ferra was bitterly wounded. She sat down on the nearest seat and tried to understand what had happened. What had she done? Why had Alice behaved as if she were insulted by Ferra's accosting her? She could not divine, but she was suddenly aware that for some unknown cause they had wished to humiliate her. And a sense of her forlorn condition caused tears to rain from the eyes where laughter seemed so much more at home.

"You are crying, Ferra. What is the matter?"

She looked up startled, and saw Leroy confronting her. Instantly the memory of her last meeting with him awoke distinctly within her. She timidly cast down her eyes, and as he sat down beside her she moved as far away from him as the seat would allow. But when he quietly repeated his question as to what had distressed her, her tears flowed afresh, and, sobbing, she told him what had occurred.

"I do not know what I have done to her," she said in conclusion, and the tears that filled her eyes pre-

vented her from perceiving the exultant gleam in Leroy's. He had looked forward to this moment, but he had not dared to hope that it would come so soon.

He made no direct reply to what she had said. He only remarked,—

“You will always find enemies in women, as you will always find men ready to lay at your feet everything that they possess—except—their names.”

“And why?” she asked almost angrily, her old pride stirring within her.

“Why?” he repeated. “You are young and beautiful; you live in the palace of Prince Arbanoff, and he is unmarried. The world is pitiless in its conclusions: it judges according to appearances; it is a tyrant in its claims; all must bow to its demands, and—you understand me at last, I hope.”

She wrung her hands, and looked up at him with eyes in which tears had given place to a nameless terror. “No, I do not understand you,” she said, helplessly. “I implore you, Vicomte, not to torture me with riddles.”

“Well, then, since you will have it,—you are taken for Achille's——”

With a cry of horror, she suddenly hid her burning face in her hands. Conviction had flashed upon her. With horrible distinctness she understood it all, Alice's avoidance,—everything. And there had been no one—no one to warn her! She sprang up.

"I must go," she said, breathlessly, "no matter where, but away, away from the palace. Oh, why, why was I left in my blindness?"

Honest and genuine as was her misery, Leroy saw in her only the beautiful girl, not the outraged woman.

"I will go home instantly and decide what to do, how to act. Farewell, M. le Vicomte."

Before he could detain her she had vanished. When she reached the Palais Arbanoff, she threw herself in intense agitation into Clarisse's arms and poured out all her misery. "I must go, Clarisse, I must go away! Good heavens, there must be some spot on this broad earth where I can be of use."

The girl shed no more tears; her eyes flashed,—the injustice of mankind had stirred her to all the rebellion of which she was capable. "I will tell the Prince to-day; he will not oppose me when he knows my reasons."

Clarisse murmured something unintelligibly, and then said, "If you are in earnest, Ferra, and if his Highness consents, I have some relatives in Brittany—simple old people—who would receive you. But you are young and fond of pleasure. I do not know how to advise you."

The young girl sighed profoundly. The future thus offered was not alluring, but what was to be done? For dear honour's sake she must leave this roof; but whither should she go? When Ivan came to summon her to read to the Prince she was resolved to speak

frankly to him, not without a secret hope that he might devise a pleasanter solution of her trouble.

Achille perceived that she had been crying, and that her voice was unsteady, but before he could make up his mind to inquire into the cause of her grief Ferra laid aside her book, arose, and, with her hands clasped upon her breast, said, "I must speak with your Highness."

She could ask for no explanation that would not be annoying. Instead of replying, Achille cleared his throat. Ferra took his silence for consent, and continued: "I must leave the Palais Arbanoff!"

"Why?" he asked, in such surprise that he half rose and leaned his head upon his elbow. "Your reasons, if I may be allowed to ask them."

Ferra stood erect, her face turned towards the window, the red light of the setting sun playing about her head. She made no reply.

"'Tis a great pity," Achille thought to himself, "an immense pity that existing circumstances exclude her from a position in society. How magnificently she would adorn it!"

"Well, Ferra?" he asked at last aloud, "are your reasons so difficult to give?"

"Oh, you know them, and so does the Vicomte. I trusted you as one trusts him to whom one owes everything. There was nothing in which I would not have obeyed you blindly if you had required it, I was so sure, so sure that you meant only well by me. You told me

of the protection which this house would afford me: how could I dream that it was this very protection which would bring misfortune upon me?"

Achille passed his hand across his forehead: he was excessively uncomfortable.

"Do not look at matters so tragically, Ferra; circumstanced as you are, you must either live like a nun, or make up your mind not to care what people say, and the latter course seems to me by far the wiser."

"You knew it all, you knew it all beforehand. Ah, it was not right; not right," she repeated, with an accusing glance. "And now I must go away."

"Where will you go?"

"To Brittany, to Clarisse's relatives."

"Nonsense!"

"I cannot stay here any longer. Oh, I cannot bear it!"

And then, slowly at first, but soon faster and faster, her tears flowed, until at last she sobbed like a child.

Achille arose nervously and drew her hands away from her face. "Do not be unreasonable, Ferra; wait for one week, and I will have matters arranged for you. But, pray, stop crying; it makes me quite ill, and spoils your beauty. You shall have no cause to complain in future, but now be reasonable."

And as she left the room, partly reassured, he threw himself again on the lounge, and resigned himself to disagreeable reflections.

"What an infernal fool I was!" was their theme, as

he recalled the afternoon on the Boulevard when he had seen Ferra for the first time. To distract his thoughts he ordered his carriage and drove to his club.

But, as if everything had conspired against him, all his acquaintances harped upon the same string. Ferra's name greeted him from all sides. He was chaffed and envied until at last he lost patience.

"I have certainly explained with sufficient clearness," he said to Prince Salerno, "that I intend to keep watch over her, and to guard her good name as far as lies in my power, and I will send a bullet through the brains of any one who dares to question her purity. Any one! Were he my dearest friend?"

Whereupon all straightened their faces while he was present; but he knew how they talked as soon as his back was turned, and it annoyed him intensely. He went home provoked and uneasy, and late in the evening he sent for Leroy, feeling in need of some one with whom he could discuss a resolution at which he had arrived, and which seemed to him the only possible solution of all the difficulties by which he found himself suddenly surrounded.

"Good heavens!" said the attaché, throwing himself into an arm-chair before the fire, "what induced you to send for me at this hour?"

Achille did not reply; he examined his well-kept nails, finding explanation difficult.

"Well?" said Leroy, impatiently.

"It is about Ferra. I feel responsible for her future, and—I have not done right by her in some respects."

Leroy laughed. "What a hypocrite you are, Achille!"

"I feel it incumbent upon me to do something for her; not to let her go out into a world where she has no one to care for her."

Anatole smiled faintly. "That is it, is it? She wants to go, then? Pshaw! I do not suppose she has any serious intention of going. But what do you propose to do?"

"The only possible way to procure peace is to marry her."

"Achille!" The attaché started up so suddenly that he overturned his chair.

"I am in earnest," the Prince said, irritably. "I have done her wrong, and I choose to atone for it, if for no other reason than to be at peace. My constitution is not strong enough to stand this constant worry over my affairs."

A dark red spot appeared upon the attaché's sallow cheek; the game which he had thought so successfully trapped was escaping him, and he was obliged to look on helplessly.

"Achille," he said, with sudden gentleness, laying his hand on his friend's shoulder, "I have been attached to you for many years, and I entreat you to do nothing without due consideration. Such sporadic

schemes are seldom wise ones. Wait at least one week before you propose to Ferra."

"What I want is peace," the Prince declared, frowning. "What am I to do to comfort her meanwhile?"

"Do not see her."

"As you please; but my mind is made up; I must atone to her for the gossip that has outraged her."

"Wait a week, Achille."

He nodded consent, and pressed Leroy's hand rather more warmly than usual. His resolution now seemed to him irrevocable, and he was content. It would put a stop to gossip of every kind.

That very night the attaché put into the post with his own hand a letter addressed to old Prince Arbanoft, informing him duly of his son's latest whim, and invoking paternal interference to prevent Achille from allying himself with a girl from the very dregs of society. This letter, a masterpiece of diplomatic art, was signed simply 'A Friend.'

CHAPTER VII.

ANOTHER ARBANOFF.

THE letter was handed to Prince Constantin Arbanoff upon his return from hunting. Taking time only to dine and to exchange his hunting-dress for a convenient travelling suit, he drove to the nearest railway-station and started for Paris.

"I'll put a stop to the affair," he thought. Not having seen his son for ten years, he was conscious of no sentimental weakness with regard to him, nor had there ever been much congeniality between them. "Achille will yield."

"*Bon Dieu, cher papa!* What brings you so suddenly from the middle of Russia to Paris, without giving me the faintest hint of your visit?" exclaimed the young Prince, as the tall, stalwart form of the lord of the estate, Félicité, and of the broad acres of Arbanoff suddenly appeared before him one afternoon, his magnificent fur-lined cloak thrown back from his shoulders, his keen glance taking in all the luxurious arrangement of the room and the languid figure of his son leaning back in an arm-chair. "What brings you here?"

"Business."

“Business, *cher papa?*” he drawled. The word seemed entirely unsuited to the atmosphere of the Palais Arbanoff. “Well, whatever it is, I am rejoiced to see you again.” But there was no trace of joy on the weary, languid features. Achille foresaw only a multitude of disagreeable complications as the result of his father’s arrival. The two men, utterly diverse in temperament, had never felt any affection for each other. The son looked with something akin to envy at his father’s upright figure,—the only concession to age in the old Prince’s appearance was to be found in his snow-white hair and moustache.

“My poor boy,” the father said, with a touch of compassion, “what have they done with you? You ought to go back to the Russian steppes and begin life afresh in that pure unbreathed atmosphere.”

Achille shuddered. “For the love of heaven, *cher papa*, what are you thinking of? I have lived my life, and have no fancy for a second edition. We of to-day live fast, and I do not complain.”

When the smoking samovar was placed upon the table, to the satisfaction of Prince Constantin, who was fond of his national beverage prepared after the national fashion, and Leroy had made his appearance, the father said, “’Tis a pity, Achille, that you have no woman’s hand here to prepare our tea. I miss it. Is there no one whom you can summon to perform this office for us?”

“Ferra,” said Achille, with some hesitation. He

dreaded his father's questions, but nevertheless he sent Ivan for the girl.

"Must I go, dearest Clarisse?" Ferra asked, in great agitation. "You know how terrible it is for me."

"Of course you must, so long as you are here. But you need have no fear, child: the Prince is an old man; and, besides, I wrote to Brittany to-day about you."

"For all that, he will think evil of me, as they all do," the girl persisted.

"Oh, never mind that," said Clarisse, soothingly, stroking back the rebellious curls from Ferra's brow. "Be reasonable, Ferra."

Reasonable! reasonable! Every one used the word to her, and in each mouth it had a different significance. But there was no use in puzzling as to its true meaning, and she followed Ivan resignedly to the tea-room. The eyes of the old Prince rested with pleasure upon the lovely young creature, whose blushes and timidity did but heighten her charm in his eyes. He could understand Achille's resolve, although he was not prepared to sanction it.

Poor Ferra passed an hour of misery behind the shining samovar. The pair of keen eyes that watched her unceasingly made her self-conscious and awkward, and kindly as were the words addressed to her by the old Prince, she found it difficult to reply to them. She thanked heaven when the moment came for her release, postponed as long as possible as it was by Achille, who dreaded the explanation that must ensue upon her

departure. Contrary to the young man's expectation, Prince Constantin asked no questions. He seemed to find nothing strange in the presence of a beautiful young girl in the Palais Arbanoff, and with a sigh of relief Achille withdrew for a while. No sooner had he left the room than Prince Constantin beckoned Leroy to come nearer, and said, in an undertone, "You are the friend, are you not, who informed me of Achille's matrimonial scheme?"

The attaché hesitated a moment. "Yes," he said at last, determined at all hazards to preserve an appearance of frankness.

"The girl is beautiful."

"Very beautiful, your Highness."

"And virtuous?"

"She came from the Convent of the Sacré Cœur only two months ago, and knows absolutely nothing of the world or of its temptations."

"But stupid?"

"Only shy, your Highness."

"Where did Achille find her?"

"Good!" his Highness remarked, briefly, waving his hand, as Leroy concluded his narrative and Achille re-entered the room. "Not a word more at present."

Prince Constantin seemed bent upon diffusing delight and gratitude throughout the lower regions of the Palais Arbanoff. Not only did he endow Ivan, who had been born on the Arbanoff estates, with a large

gift of money in return for his faithful services, but he went in person to visit Clarisse to declare his appreciation of her merits.

The old housekeeper courtesied to the ground in a perfect paroxysm of delight. "Your Highness is too good, too condescending. It has been indeed an honour to occupy my present position in the Palais Arbanoff; I have ever endeavoured to do my duty faithfully, and to——" Here she became aware that she was addressing the empty air. Prince Constantin had caught sight in a mirror in the next room—the door of which was ajar—of Ferra's slender figure at the window among her flowers, and he instantly crossed the threshold and approached her.

"Good-morning, mademoiselle! I am curious to know whether you are as silent in your own home as you are, to my regret, when you preside over our tea-table. Beautiful women should talk; it becomes them better than silence."

"But I am not a beautiful woman, your Highness." It was not humility that prompted these words. Ferra knew very well that she might fairly compete in beauty of face and figure with many who were called beautiful, but to be really so she ought to have what she did not possess,—rich dresses and ornaments.

"Upon that point we should disagree," the Prince said, gallantly. "But I can easily imagine that you reserve your conversational gifts for Achille. He loves you passionately, does he not?"

Ferra looked up in astonishment. "Of whom is your Highness speaking?"

"Why, of my son, of Achille."

"Ah, your Highness, I have always been a burden to him,"—she cast down her eyes and blushed with mortification,—“but how could I help it? I am alone in the world.”

"Nonsense, Ferra! He loves you, I tell you."

"Oh, no, your Highness,"—and the clear, truthful eyes now looked straight into his own,—“whoever told you so has deceived you. I do not know exactly what love is, but I am quite sure that Prince Achille feels none for me.”

"And you?"

"I am grateful to him; he rescued me from misery."

"But now. Why do you speak of the past?"

"Because I wish to go away, your Highness."

"Have you been insulted?"

"Yes, by the world. I did not know what I was doing in remaining here."

"Poor child!" the Prince said, kindly, taking her hand. "Can I help you?"

"Ah, if you could! Clarisse wrote to her relatives in Brittany, but they do not want me; I am too fine a lady, they say. Now I do not know where to go, but the farther from here the better."

"Poor child!" He sighed as he looked at the lovely blushing face before him. "It is a pity that one must grow old," he said then.

“Are you really old?” Ferra asked, gravely. “Perhaps that is why I feel more confidence in you than in any one else.”

“Thank you,” he said, kindly, pressing her hand. “Are you fond of flowers, Ferra?”

“Indeed I am.”

“Then you must let me send you some every morning, that I may give you at least a little pleasure. Farewell, my child.”

Left to herself, Ferra felt extremely flattered by the Prince’s kindness, but what availed his distinguished attentions when she did not know where to lay her head?

The next day, when Ferra made her appearance at the tea-table, Prince Constantin said to her in an undertone,—

“I see no violets on your breast, *mon enfant*; was I so unfortunate as not to please you with my choice of flowers?”

“Your Highness is very kind.” Ferra blushed. The beautiful basket of violets in which she had taken such delight was untouched in her room; she had not ventured to despoil it of a single flower.

“So you always say, but it would greatly please me if you would testify your pleasure in the flowers I send you by always wearing some of them.”

From that day Ferra appeared every afternoon wearing some of the flowers from the Prince’s morning bouquet. They set off her dark dress, and Prince

Constantin's keen eye would dwell with delight on the fresh young face above the nosegay, and seating himself beside her, he would chat with her most amiably. Gradually her shyness with him wore off, her natural grace and ease of manner asserted themselves, and her merry young laughter mingling with the deep tones of his voice enlivened the dim, firelit room.

"She is the most cunning of coquettes, the most calculating creature in the world," Leroy thought angrily, but nevertheless she inspired him with a certain degree of respect,—the respect accorded by a man of the world to the worldly-wise. If, in spite of her sixteen years and her seclusion in the convent, Ferra understood how to attract Prince Constantin thus, she could no longer be regarded as merely a beautiful girl.

The Prince's departure was at hand. Ferra was sitting one evening at the tea-table, Achille was suffering from headache, and his father was evidently given over to grave reflections.

"To-morrow I take my leave of you," he said at last.

"So soon?" Achille asked, with languid courtesy. "Paris has no very great attraction for you." In fact, he was glad to be free from the restraint imposed upon him by his father's presence.

The Prince looked at Ferra.

"I'm sorry, very sorry!" she murmured, and her eyes filled with tears.

"You will miss me, child?"

"Very much, your Highness."

She felt as if her good angel were leaving her. Since he had been in the house she had felt that no malicious tongues could assail her for remaining there. Now he was going, and she should be left alone even more unprotected than heretofore, with an enemy at hand like Leroy, whose evil intentions she instinctively divined rather than comprehended. And yet, where should she go?

"Give me one of the flowers you are wearing, Ferra, for a memento. I will bid you good-bye tomorrow."

With a blush she handed him a rose.

The Prince looked after her as she left the room, and then said, as if to himself, "The girl is like sunshine."

"Sunshine as a constancy is annoying; it dazzles. I never admit it here." Achille arose wearily, and, resting his hand on the table as if too exhausted to stand without support, looked at his father's erect figure with something like admiration in his eyes. "I could almost envy you, *cher papa*; you still have so much sensibility, so much capacity for enjoyment, such freshness of sentiment! I am very much fatigued again. Good-night!"

Prince Constantin looked after his son with a strange indefinable expression as the young man slowly and languidly left the room. For a moment it seemed

as if the father would fain have detained him, but instead he arose himself and stood erect, strong and vigorous, as he murmured, "No use, no use. Ashes, nothing but ashes!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A MARRIAGE.

FERRA was sitting in her pretty simple dressing-gown in her own room an hour afterwards, lost in thought, her head resting on her hand. What was to become of her? Her future looked more dark and uncertain than ever.

There was a soft knock at the door. She started up as Prince Constantin appeared on the threshold.

"Do not be startled. I only want to bid you farewell, *mon enfant*," he said in his wonted kindly fashion, while he looked admiringly at the graceful figure before him, "and I thought that after all I had best do so this evening."

Blushing and embarrassed, she felt painfully conscious of her *deshabille*, and was wondering whether she ought not to call Clarisse to her aid, when Prince Constantin touched her lightly on the shoulder, and said, with a smile, "Do not be so dismayed, Ferra. I am an old man, and I wish to speak seriously with you. You desire to leave the Palais Arbanoff. My child, I understand your reasons, but whither would you go?"

"I do not indeed know, your Highness."

"Beautiful, alone, and unprotected,—dangerous fac-

tors for this world as it is," he said, shaking his head. "I cannot leave you to its mercies,—you are too innocent and too pure to be thus forsaken. Come with me, Ferra!"

"Ah, if I might!" Her eyes were lit up by a ray of indescribable joy. The Prince was an old man,—surely she could safely trust herself to him, and he was so truly kind to her. She felt keenly enough the difference between his and Achille's treatment of her.

"Sit down, my child, and let us talk about it," her friend went on, stroking his white moustache the while. "You are impetuous in your resolves, and have not considered all the consequences. In the first place, you would have to leave Paris."

"What difference would that make?"

"And my son,—tell me frankly,—has he a place in your heart?"

His gaze rested upon her with eager interest,—she hung her head.

"I am grateful to him," she stammered.

"But you do not love him. Thank God, Ferra! Your affection would be wasted,—there is no possibility of arousing him to life again. A woman's heart would be crushed, intrusted to the keeping of such a man. And yet he could hardly be blamed; but——"

The Prince paused and looked greatly agitated. "Why should I hesitate?" He then went on quickly, and his breath came fast as he arose and stood before her. "I am an old man, and fire in the heart is hardly

consistent with snow on the head. Nevertheless, Ferra, I love you! Not as a father loves the daughter, but as a man who asks, 'Will you be my wife?'

She looked startled, with wide eyes, into his face. Was she dreaming?

"Ferra, will you come with me and be my wife?"

He had said it again. There was no longer any room for doubt. The future which she had once dreamed so golden-hued, took shape again and confronted her in all its former brilliancy. She felt giddy with delight. Gone were all fear and anxiety, gone all the humiliations which she had endured. In an instant she had attained the goal for which so many were striving. The change brought to her no sense of humble gratitude; it was with an exultant cry that she threw herself into the arms outspread to receive her.

"Yes, yes! oh, yes!" she cried.

He tenderly stroked her golden hair and clasped her to him, with a strange expression of renunciation in his smile. "You are so young, Ferra, and your choice is hard,—it is for life, my child. But I will see to it that you do not repent it. Your soul is an unwritten page, and so it shall remain while I live. No blurred characters of passion and remorse shall sully or deface it."

There was sadness in his tone; he could not but be painfully aware at this moment that youth, although to a certain extent a matter of temperament, is irrevocably lost when the eye dims and the hair bleaches. Ferra

was half conscious of his unexpressed pang; she bent over his hand and kissed it. "Oh, you are so good to me, so good!" she murmured.

"Hm!" Clarisse thought to herself, as, walking to and fro in her own room, she distinctly heard the murmur of voices in Ferra's little study, "who can be in there at this hour? Can Ivan, the old gossip, or any one else——? I really cannot allow it, and I must tell Ferra so."

In some irritation she opened the door, and very nearly screamed, as she stood, with fluttering cap-ribbons and clasped hands, upon the threshold. Ferra, her charge, was sitting clasped in the arms of Prince Constantin. Mademoiselle, speechless in virtuous indignation, stood waiting for the skies to fall. Instead of which the old Prince arose.

"Come here, Clarisse," he said, in his kindly but commanding fashion. "You have appeared just at the right moment. Ferra has consented to go back to Russia with me, and to-morrow you must be the witness to our marriage, since you have been so faithful a friend to my betrothed, will you not?"

"Can your Highness be in earnest?" exclaimed the astonished housekeeper. "Ferra,—the little flower-girl from the Rue Rochefort?——" Incapable of standing, she sank into the nearest chair.

"Perfectly in earnest; and you are quite right. My betrothed shall be adopted by one of my countrymen, that there may be no further reason for remem-

bering that to which you refer. I see you are surprised, Clarisse; try to collect yourself, and, above all, be silent."

"What will Prince Achille say?" moaned the housekeeper.

"Very little, in all probability. Do you imagine he will break his heart because I depart without further leave-taking, and carry Ferra away with me? She has never been anything but a burden to him."

Clarisse did not perceive the sarcastic emphasis of his words. She sat, like a Cassandra, staring ominously at the pair. "Oh, heavens! oh, heavens!" she ejaculated under her breath.

"Come, come, Clarisse, collect yourself. To-morrow at ten I shall come for you. Until then I resign to your care my betrothed, the future Princess Arbanoff."

He drew Ferra towards him and kissed her most tenderly, his face transfigured with emotion. "Until to-morrow," he whispered.

When he had gone Clarisse heaved a profound sigh, while Ferra threw her arms around her old friend's neck.

"Ah, how happy I am! Too happy, Clarisse! I shall have a home. I shall go to court in the winter, and be called Princess, and wear diamonds; and I shall have a pony-carriage, and order my dresses of Worth. Ah, how kind Prince Constantin is to me!"

"But why all this secrecy?" asked Clarisse, still troubled.

“He wishes it to be so, and what he wishes must be for the best. Besides, I like it,—I shall not have to see the Vicomte again. He will be surprised and angry.”

And the girl laughed with all her heart, her cheeks glowing and her eyes sparkling.

The next morning everything happened as the Prince had said. First came the adoption that transformed Ferra Doutrange into a Russian aristocrat before she became the Princess Arbanoff, and then the marriage.

When the hour for tea at the Palais Arbanoff arrived, the newly-married pair were far on their way home.

CHAPTER IX.

AN ADVENTURE.

It was a fresh clear night in January.

Sober citizens were already housed for the night; only a few belated revellers were to be seen at intervals on the long and lonely streets leading from the heart of the capital of one of our German principalities out to the quiet suburbs. Along one of these a lady was walking, wearing a magnificent cloak of dark crimson brocade, the gold threads with which the stuff was interwoven gleaming now and then in the light of the street-lamps as she passed beneath them. Her head was wrapped in a cloud of white lace, which covered her forehead and left her profile partly hidden. She was walking neither slowly nor quickly, neither lost in thought nor with any show of timidity, in spite of the lateness of the hour, but rather with the gait of one enjoying the freedom of exercise in the open air, and this although the huge cathedral clock was just striking eleven.

The lady paused and listened, then read the name of the street at the nearest corner, laughed softly to herself, turned round and looked up and down the

streets that stretched out in the distance with their endless rows of lamps in puzzling uniformity.

"This is ridiculous! I have lost my way," she murmured to herself. "What will Mietza say?"

She turned and walked back whence she had come, at a rather quicker pace, but evidently more amused than annoyed.

For some moments a well-dressed man, tall and graceful in carriage, had been walking behind her, his interest evidently aroused by this lonely lady. When she paused to examine the street-signs, and then retraced her steps, he stepped up to her, lifted his hat, and said, most courteously,—

"Allow me, madame; you seem to have lost your way. Can I be of any assistance?"

A pair of brilliant eyes instantly scanned him from head to foot, a small well-gloved hand pulled the lace more completely over its owner's face, and a cool, haughty "No, thank you," was the only reply which he received.

He silently lifted his hat and retreated. The lady walked on, apparently quite sure of her way, although she was in reality trusting to luck, without an idea as to where she was. The long lines of street-lamps were most bewildering.

The regular footsteps of the gentleman resounded upon the opposite pavement; he made no further attempt to follow up his courteous offer, but seemed to find it the most natural thing in the world that a lady

should be promenading the streets at this hour. When she perceived this, she regretted her curt refusal of his kindness, and was even considering whether she should not appeal to it, when a door, above which a red lantern was burning, opened widely, and a crowd of young men, not over-sober, swarmed out from it. On perceiving the lady, they immediately surrounded her. "No further, my beauty, without toll," a young fellow cried out, advancing towards her with outstretched arms.

"Stand aside, gentlemen!" The tone was commanding, but it only provoked the laughter of the lads,—they were little more,—who began to perform a kind of frantic dance about their victim.

"Stand aside instantly!" And the speaker stamped her foot angrily, as the lace that had concealed her features fell back, revealing masses of golden hair, a delicately-rounded countenance, and a pair of large and wonderfully brilliant eyes.

"By Jove, she *is* beautiful!" one and another said, in undertones, but they did not release her.

"Come, come, gentlemen, 'tis time this jest were ended," a deep voice was suddenly heard to say, and a strong hand was laid on the shoulder of the ringleader of the crowd. "It is time for us all to go home."

The words were spoken with such authority, and the bearing of the speaker was so cool and self-possessed, that the young men obeyed without further disturbance.

"The way is clear for Jack to reach his Joan," the

chief among them remarked, with a grandiloquent emphasis, waving his hand. "Forward, march!" And they all pursued their way, laughing and singing.

The two left thus alone confronted each other. "If I offer you assistance for the second time, madame, will it be refused?"

"Ah, no; I thank you sincerely." She had evidently lost confidence in herself.

"May I venture to offer you my arm?"

"Thank you. One moment. I must first arrange my veil."

He stood and watched her as she did so. The movements of her hands in their long gloves, her carriage, her whole manner, forced upon him the conviction of her ladyhood. But how came she here at this hour? She was a riddle to him.

She took his arm, and from time to time cast a fleeting glance at him, pleased with the impression he produced upon her. He was dark and slender, but strongly built. His eyes were well opened and honest; he wore a very large moustache, but no beard; his was the type of man sure to arouse her interest and confidence, and her manner grew more assured. This he observed, and smiled.

"I owe you special thanks," she began, gently. "Without your interference I might have been terribly annoyed. I did not know young men could be so rude."

"Oh, madame, be just. A lady alone in the streets

at this hour——” He shrugged his shoulders and paused.

“Good heavens! what harm is there in that?”

“Not much; it only bids defiance to universal custom, and whoever does that must take the consequences.”

“You judge severely.”

“Not at all, but I frankly confess it is what no lady of my acquaintance would venture to do.”

“Thank God I am accountable to no one! Besides, I thought people could discriminate.”

“Of that you have just had an opportunity of judging.”

“But you,” she said, at once irritated and triumphant,—“you never had any-doubt in the matter?”

“I? Not for an instant,” he confessed.

“There, you see.”

“But that makes no difference as to the impropriety. You see, madame, I am frank to brutality.”

“Then let me be quite frank also,” she rejoined, rather dejectedly. “I have been to the theatre; I am a stranger here, but I sent my carriage home, for after all the heat and glare I wanted to walk in the cool darkness. I thought I knew my way, but I must have lost it at once, for I walked and walked——”

“Very imprudent. You must be worn out, madame.”

“Not at all. I am used to long walks. Let us go a little faster now.”

"You have not yet told me whither to conduct you."

She mentioned the most fashionable quarter of the capital, the street where dwelt only people of rank and wealth, and she noticed her conductor's glance of surprise. "Then we shall soon be there," he said, quietly.

"Will you do me a favour?" she asked, suddenly pausing. "Will you forget this night's adventure? Not that I am ashamed of it," she added, hastily,— "I am the sole judge of my actions,—but I see your opinion of my little escapade, and I should be sorry to have it shared by others."

"You may rest assured of my discretion."

"That is not all. I do not wish to tell you where I live. When we reach Prince's Street I shall know where I am, and you will leave me?"

"I am entirely at your service, madame."

"You will make no attempt to discover?"

"You may trust me implicitly, madame."

"That satisfies me. No meeting, then, and no recognition in the future?"

She offered him her hand, since he had paused in their walk and she had convinced herself by a glance that her home was in sight.

"The last is all that I can promise."

"That is enough. Good-night, and many thanks for your courtesy."

"I should have shown the same to any lady in

your place." He pressed his lips upon the offered hand, hailed a passing fiacre, entered it, and was gone.

"Strange! he did not even look round after me!" was the thought in the mind of the woman whom he left standing on the pavement. And she turned and walked on swiftly.

The house where she stayed her steps was somewhat imposing in its exterior, and was even more so when the folding-doors flew open at her summons, revealing a spacious, brilliantly-lighted vestibule adorned with marbles and flowering plants.

"Madame ordered that your Highness should be told that she was awaiting your return in the blue drawing-room," a liveried servant informed her, with a low bow.

The young Princess Arbanoff nodded, threw off her wrap, and hurried to the blue room, in which her elderly relative, Frau von Bogdanoff, was lounging in an arm-chair nibbling bonbons.

"Were you anxious about me, Mietza?" Ferra asked, ready to apologize for her fault.

"Not in the least. Why should I be? Because you are whimsical, and prefer walking to driving? Every woman has her whims, and you are old enough to indulge yours."

"I should think so," Ferra said, with a laugh, tossing aside the white lace that had been wrapped about her head. "You were very wise, Mietza dear, but I

remembered that Constantin was always anxious about me if I overstayed an appointed time."

Maria Paulovna, as she was called in the baptismal register, shrugged her shoulders significantly, pushed the bonbons aside, and, drawing towards her a little tray, proceeded with great skill to roll a cigarette with the materials lying upon it.

"Will you have some tea, Ferra?"

"Yes, I should like a cup. It is quite cold outside."

"You look fresh as a rose."

"I have had an adventure,—a real adventure, Mietza."

"Stop; before you begin make yourself comfortable. Let Jacqueline bring you some tea, and go and put on a dressing-gown. It will be far pleasanter, and then we can talk for an hour. It is just twelve, and I never go to bed until one."

Ferra nodded, rang the bell, gave her orders, and then disappeared with her maid by a door on the right leading to the suite of rooms appropriated to her sole use, while a like suite on the left belonged to Frau von Bogdanoff,—the blue drawing-room being neutral ground.

Mietza Bogdanoff, as she was called by familiar friends, was short of stature, with a sallow Tartar physiognomy and keen black eyes. She smoked continually, and never hesitated to utter whatever came into her head. The influence which she undeniably exerted upon those about her was strange, since she

was, by her own confession, cold-hearted, never expressed any warmth of feeling for anything or anybody, and was extremely calculating, and at times cruel. During her husband's lifetime she had played a conspicuous part as ambassadress at several courts, had been engaged in various intrigues, but had never in the least compromised herself. She now lived in a certain seclusion at D——, did only what pleased her, and was high in favour at court, although she put no restraint upon a tongue which was often witty and sometimes malicious. She was, in addition, toleration itself.

Constantin Arbanoff had been her cousin. When she heard of his hasty marriage she shrugged her shoulders and called him a fool; when she saw Ferra she said, with a laugh, "I understand it perfectly." Her pride of rank was untouched, for the young Princess passed everywhere for the niece of Dimitri Nasakoff, who had educated her in the convent of the *Sacré Cœur*. No one had the least suspicion of her adoption, of her sojourn in the *Palais Arbanoff*, or of her obscure origin, and it was needless for Constantin Arbanoff to caution Ferra to be silent upon these points. In her position they were a sore subject to herself, and it distressed her to recall them. When Prince Arbanoff had been married a year and heard by chance that Bogdanoff was at the court of St. Petersburg in some official capacity, he determined to confide his young and inexperienced wife to the hands of Maria Paulovna, the experienced woman of the

world, and to present her at court. Maria Paulovna gladly accepted the charge; it had always pleased her to introduce youthful beauties to society, although she was perfectly aware that she acted only as an effective foil for them. Her character was absolutely free from petty envy or jealousy.

On the evening of the court ball at which Ferra was to be presented for the first time to their Imperial Majesties, as she was sitting *en grande toilette* muffled to her ears in blue-fox fur beside her husband in their carriage, the horses took fright, ran away, overturned the vehicle, and so injured Constantin Arbanoff that after lingering a year, during which he was bedridden, he died.

When the accident occurred, the wounded man, whose young wife had escaped injury as by a miracle, was carried to the Palais Bogdanoff, and Maria Paulovna never forgot the impression produced upon her by the tall, slender figure in the blue satin dress embroidered with silver, and with the pallid, lovely face.

Constantin Arbanoff and Peter Paul Bogdanoff died in the same year. The latter's widow, who did not mourn him excessively, passed the ensuing summer in the picturesque capital D——, where she had formerly held intimate relations with the court circle. At first she meant to leave it in a year or two, thinking its interests generally too petty and restricted, but gradually she had become content to establish herself there permanently. She had a large villa in the most fashionable part of the town, occupying only half of it, and

as little by little she grew averse to move and rather gouty, it occurred to her one night when she was sleepless that it would certainly be much more amusing to have about her a young person of her own rank, who should inspire her life with some interest, were it only a negative one, in emotions and sensations with which indeed she had been experimenting all her life, taking the delight of a vivisector in investigating their causes and effects, without ever experiencing them in her own person. The result of this sleepless night was an invitation to Ferra Arbanoff.

“You are a widow,” she wrote, “young, beautiful, wealthy. It would be folly to mourn my cousin for longer than three years; life has claims upon you, as you have claims upon it. Young as you are, you can go nowhere with impunity without a duenna. Come to me. Court life here in D—— is no social El Dorado, but it is certainly more amusing than the Russian steppes. You can stay as long as you please. Dismiss your companion and order some dresses of Worth; the half of my villa is at your disposal. Bring your maid with you. We shall be no restraint upon each other; each must enjoy entire freedom; there must be utter toleration between us, no exactions, and no superfluous sentiment. We are both alone, and will try to bear each other company for a while to our mutual advantage. If you consent to come, telegraph to me on what day to expect you.”

Maria Paulovna felt absolutely sure that Ferra would

accept her invitation, nor was she mistaken. For three days the young Princess had now been beneath the roof of the Villa Bogdanoff. She was at twenty-two more mature, more developed, even more beautiful than ever, and her elderly relative could not suppress an exclamation of satisfaction at sight of her. She foresaw that Ferra's appearance would provoke a tempest, and though it were only a tempest in a teapot, it would be amusing to watch it, and Maria Paulovna thirsted for amusement.

Her sharp eyes had keenly scrutinized Ferra's character in these first hours of their acquaintance, and she was curious to see how all the qualities she had discovered would develop in the forcing atmosphere of a court. The next evening was to introduce the young Princess to it for the first time.

She was busy picturing to herself beforehand the surprised looks of Prince Dagobert and of the Princess Sibylla, the whispers and astonishment of the courtiers, clouds of smoke circling upwards from her cigarette the while in the dim light of the pleasant room, when Ferra returned, her evening dress exchanged for a Turkish dressing-gown, and her red-gold hair waving over her shoulders. Mietza Bogdanoff contemplated her through half-closed eyelids, as though she were some rare work of art.

"Brava! You look wonderfully lovely, Ferra. After to-morrow evening many a one will envy me these *têtes-à-tête* with you."

Ferra laughed, and lay back comfortably in an arm-chair.

"Nevertheless, my vanity has had a terrible blow this evening."

"How so?"

"Did I not tell you I had had an adventure? I made but a very slight impression upon the hero of it."

She sipped her tea and smiled. The conviction of her irresistibility had been so impressed upon her by her husband's adoration that her late apparent failure to charm merely amused her. Then she began her story.

"And he did not even turn to look after me," she repeated, in conclusion, "although the circumstances were certainly interesting; do you not think so, Mietza?"

"That is Rommingen's way."

The cup nearly slipped from Ferra's hand.

"What? You know him and never told me?"

"I waited until you had finished. You say he was tall, finely formed, dark, and frankly courteous: that is Rommingen to the life, and Rommingen only."

"Only Rommingen?"

"Detlev, Count Rommingen-Erdenflueh, Prince Dagobert's adjutant."

"Ah!" It was a sigh of satisfaction. "Can you tell me nothing more about him, Mietza?"

"He is not my kind," Frau von Bogdanoff con-

fessed. "Very reserved, very formal, and quite *sans reproche*. Such men are inconveniently strict judges of everything that does not conform to their code of manners and morals. They estimate our sex by a standard of virtue, and forgive a woman a large foot sooner than a flirtation. Rommingen always reminds me of some saint or other. I don't believe he ever loved any woman but his grandmother, and he is now seeking in the present generation his second ideal, who must emulate her perfection."

"So handsome a man!"

"Yes, and in such favour at court that my worthy friend Neukirch is sometimes jealous of him. There! it is striking one. Good-night, cousin."

Maria Paulovna arose and went to her rooms on the left; she was very methodical in her habits. The young Princess sat still for a while, gazing into the dying embers on the hearth.

Perhaps she was dreaming of future conquests and triumphs.

CHAPTER X.

A PETTY GERMAN COURT.

THE palace of the reigning Duke looked dark and deserted all the year round. Duke August Theodor was a recluse by nature and years, and certain experiences of a private, domestic character had strengthened his tendency to seek retirement. He attended faithfully to the political requirements of his position, and was both loved and revered by his people, but he was seldom seen by any one, even by his nephew, although, since August Theodor was unmarried, this nephew was his presumptive heir and successor. In his hours of leisure he pursued the study of astronomy, and at all court balls and festivities he was represented by his old High Chamberlain. The only woman who was admitted within his doors was the Princess Sibylla, when she considered herself called upon to prefer complaints of her husband, which was often the case, eminently distasteful to the Duke though it was. For although he could not but disapprove frequently of Prince Dagobert, he had no liking whatever for the Princess Sibylla.

When on some occasion of administering a gentle reproof to his nephew the Duke would hint at this

antipathy of his own, the young man would laugh, and say, with a shrug, "What is the use, uncle? She had money, and money has always been lacking to us. I bear my yoke patiently; can you blame me for trying at times to ease the burden of it?"

No one blamed him; on the contrary, Prince Dago-bert was more loved and respected than he deserved to be.

August Theodor had his abode in the ancient plain and massive royal residence, an antique pile of time-worn stone, pierced by numerous straight windows, and without balconies or towers. The heir with his spouse occupied the modern castle, a spacious building of reddish marble, with wealth of carving, iron scutcheons, gilded screen-work; in short, as elegant and luxurious a dwelling as could gratify the reverential gaze of a populace accustomed to behold it daily with a loyal interest that never waned.

In this castle, in the 'Hall of Mirrors,' an apartment famous even outside the limits of the kingdom, the first ball of the season was to take place, at which Frau von Bogdanoff had requested permission to present her cousin to their Royal Highnesses. This permission had been most graciously accorded. Frau von Bogdanoff's position, her wealth, her aristocratic proclivities, all were sufficient warrant for the beautiful Russian who had chosen to take up her residence in D—— for the winter.

The ladies came late. The crush in the corridors

and on the stairways was quite over, the latest arrivals were hurrying to take their places in the Hall of Mirrors, when Frau von Bogdanoff and Ferra reached the dressing-room, and the young widow, taking off her wrap, stood revealed in a rich but simple dress of white satin, trimmed with marabout feathers, among which, and in the red-gold hair, diamonds were sparkling. She was indeed enchantingly lovely.

“Make haste,” said Frau von Bogdanoff; “we are late.”

As they entered the hall the doors from the royal apartments were just opening, the Chamberlain's staff gave the three premonitory taps, and the Prince and Princess Dagobert crossed the threshold. All bowed before them; the bald heads of the Excellencies present bent like ripe wheat before the breeze, the ladies courtesied to the ground amid much rustling of silk and satin, and Ferra looked on in wide-eyed interest. The ball-room, with its walls one vast mirror, its chimney-piece of white porcelain, richly gilt, its heavy white damask draperies, was most effective. The musicians sat in a gallery behind a gilded wrought-iron screen, and the corners of the vast apartment were rounded by groups of crimson azaleas. Ferra felt her heart throb high as she beheld it all. Diamonds and glittering orders flashed and sparkled in the rays of the magnificent Venetian chandeliers, reflected on all sides; rich stuffs and hangings fell in soft folds, the air was laden with perfume, and all about her seemed to smile,

as if this were all that the world could offer worth living for.

She was slightly confused by the general brilliancy, or she would have seen that the toilettes of the ladies around her were neither very modern nor very tasteful ; that there was an undeniably rococo air about the assemblage, and that she herself was the object of universal amazed curiosity, as soon as the princely cortége had passed.

His Excellency Neukirch actually opened his half-closed eyes to their fullest extent with surprise, and touched lightly the arm of his neighbour. "*Sapristi !* who could fancy the Bogdanoff's having such a cousin !" And he added to himself, "The Prince must be looked after." Ex-governor though he were of the heir-presumptive, he was more than suspected of seconding him in his youthful follies ; he certainly considered himself, and was considered by all, as the best friend of the future sovereign.

Prince Dagobert, without being strictly handsome, produced a most agreeable impression ; his figure was manly, and his carriage graceful and distinguished. The Princess at his side suffered much by contrast. He had evidently lived fast ; there were deep lines in his countenance, although he was not yet forty, but they did not conceal the amiable kindness of disposition expressed in his bright gray eyes and in his easy gestures. He really lost little by comparison with his handsome adjutant, who, of equally distinguished

presence, but characterized by far more reserve and formality of demeanour, stood behind his royal master. Both wore the infantry uniform,—Rommingen's decorated with the gold bands of an adjutant, the Prince's with various orders and stars.

Princess Sibylla was taller than ordinary, but so thin and angular as to be destitute of all feminine charm; her complexion, at its best by gas-light, was sallow and thick, her hair and eyes were undecided in colour; in short, she was one of those women to whom nature has denied all power to charm. Conscious of this, for despite great faults and weaknesses of character the Princess Sibylla was very intelligent, she had introduced into her court a strict, almost Puritanic simplicity, and had taken care that none of her ladies-in-waiting should excel herself in personal attractions.

The malicious tongues of the court circle had dubbed the wing of the castle occupied by the Princess and her ladies 'the chamber of horrors,' and Neukirch maintained that the name was an invention of Frau von Bogdanoff.

To the utmost of her ability the Princess waged a private warfare with everything young, elegant, and beautiful, tormenting the Prince by her unceasing jealousy, for which there was probably sufficient cause. Of late she had contrived to have a very pretty and favourite prima donna dismissed from the Royal Theatre on account of the too evident homage paid her by

the Prince. The story had gone the rounds,—D—furnished admirable stuff for a *chronique scandaleuse*,—and there was now not a person in the ball-room who did not watch with eager interest the presentation of the beautiful Russian, whose position placed her above the reach of hostile intrigue, and all could easily interpret the malicious smile upon the lips of Frau von Bogdanoff.

Ferra was greatly disappointed by a closer view of the royal party. She was disgusted with the Princess in her gown of yellow brocade, her hair pulled back behind her ears. She herself would not have been seen in such a dress. She cast a stolen glance at her own mirrored image, and felt extremely self-satisfied.

Herr von Rommingen would have a better idea of her to-night. She looked towards him so eagerly that she did not perceive the Prince's long gaze of surprise and admiration as he approached her. Detlev saw and recognized her, scarcely crediting his eyes. He had been sure on the previous evening that the unknown of his adventure was a lady, but he had not dreamt of such a lady, nor of meeting her this evening in the atmosphere of the court. He set his teeth for a moment: surprise almost paralyzed him; their eyes met, and an arch smile played for one instant about her mouth.

“The Princess Arbanoff, introduced by her cousin, Frau von Bogdanoff, desires to be presented to your Highness.” It was the Chamberlain's voice. The short

figure at Ferra's side almost disappeared among its folds of violet velvet and Ferra hastily courtesied low.

Princess Sibylla scanned with a keen glance the beautiful creature thus bending low before her; her jealousy, ever on the alert, divined a rival here, but she preserved great dignity of demeanour as, after a kindly but formal greeting, she added, "I am surprised, my dear Frau von Bogdanoff; I did not know of the younger members of your family, but I congratulate you that your solitude is over. Do you propose to make a lengthened stay with us, madame?"

"My plans are quite undecided, your Highness. I dislike to be bound by hasty resolves."

Maria Paulovna took secret and great satisfaction in observing the effect of these words upon the Princess. She knew her face well enough to perceive how gladly the royal lady would have heard that the visit of the lovely Russian was to be but of short duration.

"Since we have succeeded in throwing our chains here in D—— about you, madame," the Prince interposed, condescendingly, looking gayly down at the little figure, with whose sharp tongue he was quite familiar, "we may cherish a hope that your lovely cousin will not play the part of a bird of passage. Birds of passage bring the summer, but leave winter behind them. Am I not right, Princess Arbanoff?"

Ferra smiled; the Prince's gallantry pleased her for his adjutant's sake.

"But I, your Highness, came with snow and ice."

"They will melt in the light of your eyes."

Princess Sibylla walked on, and Ferra said, in some surprise, "Is it the Prince's fashion to say such pretty things?"

"Apparently, if he is pleased with any one. You will be able to judge from your own experience."

The court circle had observed this meeting with eager interest. "He is much struck with her," they whispered among themselves. "Princess Sibylla will have a hard contest this time."

"She is enchanting!" was the unanimous verdict of the men.

"A very conspicuous toilette! Very rich! And such diamonds!" the women said with envy. "Yes, if one may judge from exteriors."

Meanwhile, the royal party had taken their places on the raised dais at one end of the room, and the Chamberlain gave the signal for the ball to begin. From this time rigid etiquette was wont to give way to a greater lack of formality, and Prince Dagobert enjoyed being merely the host of the occasion, amusing himself with his guests.

"Ah, Neukirch! There is Neukirch! Excuse me for a moment, Sibylla."

He sprang lightly down the couple of steps, and the next instant was threading his way through the crowd. The Princess compressed her lips slightly; she knew that her husband would not return for the next hour, but at least she could follow him with her eyes.

She saw him bestow a condescending nod here, a tap on the shoulder there; saw him whisper into the ear of a pretty woman a compliment that left her blushing, then turn to say a few words to an officer whose breast glittered with orders, all the while making his way through the throng of guests, until at last he reached Neukirch, who placed himself in his way as soon as he perceived his approach.

"At last," said his Highness. "My way to you has not been an easy one. What do you think of her?"

"I am almost paralyzed with astonishment, your Highness."

"Come, come; did you really know nothing of her?"

"Nothing, on my honour!" His Excellency pressed his hand to his dazzling shirt-front. He was one of those who carry on a daily warfare with the passing years, and, although he was as silent as to his age as a society belle in her third decade, it was evident that he was no longer young. Had he been a king his valet would have been prime minister.

"His evil genius," murmured the Princess, observing this meeting, and a slight frown appeared between her eyebrows as she stood waiting on her lonely eminence. "If I had the power to tread upon the head of that serpent it would be best for every one."

"A charming acquisition!" Prince Dagobert drew his confidant aside into the recess of a window. "Distinguished, beautiful, of undeniable rank, and *chic*!"

He kissed his finger-tips. "Yes, *chic*; there is nothing else that so graces a woman as that nameless something. I prefer it to beauty; the fair Russian possesses both. So much the better!"

"So much the worse," the old fop rejoined, with a satyr-like smile. Prince Dagobert laughed.

"I do not deny that I have a weakness for beautiful women. No greater pleasure exists than to gaze into a woman's glorious eyes, to watch the play of her countenance, to call up a blush or a smile—Pshaw! you understand me."

"I am, as ever, entirely at your Highness's command."

"We must see, we must see. The Sommerfeld affair is too recent, and the Princess's jealousy is on the watch; but learn all that you can with regard to this lovely Russian. The Bogdanoff is your old friend, and I shall cultivate her myself. Her cousin is like some royal swan,—a royal swan."

Prince Dagobert was quite charmed with this comparison of his, and determined to note it in his memory for future use. Duke August Theodor, in like circumstances, would have alluded to a star; perhaps both similes might be turned to account.

"A swan among geese," was Neukirch's thought, as he glanced around him at the groups of ladies. There certainly were some charming fresh young faces among them, but the Princess's well-known taste for simplicity of attire had been a disadvantage to the ladies of the court circle in D——.

While the Prince was devising diplomatic measures to enable him to approach the fair guest who had so impressed his fancy, Ferra was already surrounded by army officers, old and young, as well as by members of high official circles and of the *haute finance*. Names and titles were dinned into her ears, to be forthwith forgotten by her when their wearers withdrew, each with the agreeable consciousness of having been specially distinguished by her, for she bestowed upon all so beaming a smile, such pleasant words uttered with so pretty a foreign accent, that she created adorers on all sides.

The only one whom Ferra missed among those who thronged about her was the adjutant; but she was content to wait, for she perceived that he was still standing near the Princess, in fact beside her, and that she had engaged him in conversation.

"Perhaps he is longing just as I am to laugh together over our last evening's encounter," she thought to herself, seeing that he still stood in the same position. "How tiresome all this etiquette must be for him!"

"Madame, have you a dance left for the most devoted of your admirers?" asked Prince Dagobert, confronting her.

Ferra glanced helplessly towards her cousin. She knew that her dancing-card was entirely filled, but feminine instinct also told her that she could hardly refuse the Prince's request. Maria Paulovna nodded slightly, Ferra advanced, and in a moment the Prince's

arm was around her waist and she was whirling among the waltzers. Prince Dagobert waltzed admirably.

"Thanks, your Highness!" Ferra paused, slightly out of breath, quite heedless of the fact that she had done so at the end of the room opposite to that where her cousin was sitting.

Her partner laid her hand within his arm as he said, "Allow me to take you to one of the adjoining rooms; they are much cooler, and you are warm."

She innocently assented, never dreaming that she was pursued by hundreds of eyes and by hundreds of malicious whispers as she disappeared behind the white hangings. Her hand lay on the arm of a future sovereign. For a moment the 'divinity' that 'doth hedge a king' had dazzled and impressed her, but the sensation had all vanished. His compliments were just like those paid her by other men; her power as a beautiful woman made her the superior, and she was conscious of the fact.

"That's just my luck," a slender, curly-haired lieutenant of hussars said to an infantry officer, looking after the pair and stamping his foot lightly on the ball-room floor. "The Princess Arbanoff had promised me this dance."

He whom he addressed, a tall, slender man, with a narrow fox-like face, looked down at the angry lieutenant, and said, sarcastically,—

"Learn betimes, Baron, to say, on certain occasions, 'After you, monseigneur!'"

Baron Eustach von Deuren flushed angrily. "I never mean to learn that, but to take to heart '*noblesse oblige.*' True, some of us hardly understand it."

As he turned away there was an ugly smile on the face of the other as he muttered, "Wait, my fine fellow; every one's turn comes at last."

Prince Dagobert had conducted his companion first to the Gobelín room, hung with costly old tapestries, and then to the winter garden, where a few couples were already wandering among the large-leaved plants, above which electric lights shed magic rays, and among which gleamed the silvery spray of fountains.

Here he seemed first to see how surpassingly lovely she was,—how the diamonds gleamed on her snowy neck and arms, how wondrous were the lights reflected from her red-gold hair. She still breathed quickly from the exertion of the dance as she leaned upon his arm. A most seductive creature,—made to be loved, nay, adored. He longed to tell her so, but Ferrá was the first to speak. His gaze annoyed her, and as she looked up the colour mounted to her cheek and brow.

"Shall we not rest for a moment?" she said, in some confusion.

"With pleasure. Here is a charming seat that seems made for murmured confidences, for talk of love. Will you not take it, madame?"

"Thanks; but without those additions," she said, gayly.

"And why? The thing that makes life worth living is love, and love alone."

He had taken her fan of white ostrich feathers from her, and was gently fanning her as he watched the effect of his words. If she blushed he should think that they had fallen on fruitful soil, but she did not blush. She said, in a voice quite free from embarrassment and with a gentle sigh,—

"Ah, yes; so it has seemed to me."

"Has seemed?" Prince Dagobert said, slowly.

"Yes; since my husband's death it has been so lonely at *Félicité*, our home, that I was glad to accept *Maria Paulovna's* invitation and come hither."

"Of course I cannot ask you yet how you like it?"

"Very much; every one receives me very kindly."

"Oh, all the men will be only too ready to lay their homage at your feet, *Madonna*," he said, gallantly. "See how utterly I am become your slave."

Ferra smiled. "I shall not put your Highness to the test," she said, in her pretty foreign German.

"Either she is a thorough coquette or very innocent," thought *Dagobert*, puzzled, for he clearly perceived that he had not made the least impression upon her. "I shall know before long which she is. At all events she is bewitching."

They talked on. To his surprise, the Prince learned that *Constantin Arbanoff* had been an old man, and that his memory was still inexpressibly dear to his young widow.

"But life is short, madame," he said, with a melancholy intonation. "We should conscientiously enjoy each day as it passes, seeing that when the eye dims and the hair bleaches we shall have memory only to beguile the years."

"I will take to heart your Highness's wise counsel." The same smile curved the red lips that had bewitched Prince Constantin, but the eyes that met Dagobert's glance were as clear as crystal; one seemed to look through their pure depths into the woman's very soul.

"If I could be your counsellor!"

He leaned towards her so that she felt his breath upon her cheek; the open fan concealed all of his face save his eyes. Again Ferra felt annoyed; she turned away hastily. "There is the Princess," she said, just as the yellow brocade made its appearance at the entrance of the conservatory, its wearer leaning on the arm of the adjutant. The fan was instantly closed and handed to its owner with a courteous inclination.

"Have you also found the heat of the ball-room too great, Sibylla?" the Prince asked, negligently, as he arose. "It is deliciously cool here. Our guest needed repose after the dance."

"And do you think you have bestowed it upon her?" There was a degree of sarcasm in her tone which quite vanished as she added: "I must ask you to resign your rôle of Good Samaritan, however. We have duties, Dagobert."

"*Changez les dames.*" The Prince amiably offered

his arm to his consort, and Rommingen went up to Ferra. "I shall see you again." He bowed, waving his hand condescendingly, as was his wont when he felt some apology necessary.

"No scene for the present, Sibylla, I entreat," he said, urgently, when they had walked on a short distance.

The Princess looked at him contemptuously. "I leave you to your conscience and to the opinion of the world."

"You are extremely kind. Princess Arbanoff is a stranger here, and our guest. I should like to enlist you in her behalf, Sibylla."

"It is hardly necessary for so self-possessed a lady. You are bewitched again, Dagobert."

"Will you not say a few courteous words to her?"

She made no reply, but tapped her open palm impatiently with her closed fan, as the music from the ball-room began again.

"Would you like to return to the dancers, madame?"

It was Rommingen who spoke. Ferra shook her head. "No, it is much pleasanter here. I would rather stay here for a while."

A new dance had begun, and she perceived that the conservatory was quite deserted, a fact which pleased rather than annoyed her. Her hands, holding her fan, lay idly in her lap, her white satin train gathered about her feet in rich folds, as she sat before him, the dark green of the tropical foliage making the most effective

background for her pure, harmonious beauty. She looked up, as if to say, "I am waiting."

Detlev would hardly have been a man had he been insensible to the charm that encompassed this woman like an atmosphere; but he did not yield to it without a struggle; mere external beauty could not subdue him, however victorious it might appear.

"Well?" she asked at last, impatiently.

Rommingen smiled slightly; he knew perfectly well what she desired, but he had no intention of yielding immediately to her wishes.

"I am at present reproaching myself for my selfishness in robbing some one of the pleasure of dancing with you, madame."

"I am rather tired, and do not wish to dance; but—that was not what I wanted you to say." She leaned back and looked up at him reproachfully. "Do you really not recognize me?"

"Recognize you! Most certainly, but I remembered my promise."

"There's no need to regard it so seriously. When I exacted it of you I did not know who you were. I feared some misapprehension; since we meet here any such is impossible. Were you not very much surprised?"

"Dismayed, madame!" He spoke with some hesitation.

"Do you still think I was wrong? I do so detest always to have to ask whether I may do thus and so.

Why should the Princess Arbanoff not do what may be done with impunity by any tradesman's daughter?"

"Precisely because she is the Princess Arbanoff."

"It is so tiresome always to remember that."

"Decorum demands of us much that is far from amusing, but its laws prevail, nevertheless."

"Hardly, with me," Ferra declared, half defiantly, half laughing. "Who in all this world has a right to reprove me?"

"Your own consciousness will be your incorruptible judge."

She looked very thoughtful. The conversation was taking an unexpected turn.

"Promise me never to say a word to any one of our evening encounter; I am really beginning to regard it as you do, and to be ashamed of it."

"I am glad to hear it, madame, very glad."

"Still carping?"

"No, by heavens, not carping, only glad to remember that to be conscious of an imprudence insures against its recurrence."

"I promise you that there shall be no more adventures in the street." She had risen, and stood looking at him,—two rare human beings confronting each other.

"In the street?" he said, doubtfully. "The street is not the most dangerous place, its perils are the most evident; there are more treacherous dangers on smooth polished floors."

“ You mean—— ?”

“ Very little, if such is your desire, madame, but, if I might dare to counsel, everything !”

In mute acquiescence she laid her hand on his arm, and they walked together along the broad gravelled path. Ferra was all attention ; she felt that this man must know best all that it behooved her to know about the court here, but Rommingen found it difficult to clothe in words what he wished to say.

“ Envy, intrigue, and scandal,” he said at last, cautiously, “ are to be met with everywhere, especially in a court, where they breed a miasma full of peril for the healthiest lungs.”

The beautiful woman waved her hand impatiently. “ What of that ? My power of resistance is great.”

Frau von Bogdanoff had observed her cousin’s absence, but it caused her no anxiety whatever. She now perceived approaching her Neukirch, who, when near enough to speak, shook his finger at her. “ Oh, oh,” he said, reproachfully, “ my dear friend, I never would have believed it. I am wounded to the heart !”

“ By what ?”

“ You have treated your faithful ally like a stranger, never even mentioning to him this lovely cousin.”

“ And in consequence, now that she has made her appearance, he can enjoy the surprise with the rest of the world.”

“ You know, Maria Paulovna, that every throb of my heart is dedicated to you in the truest friendship.”

"Do not mention so mythical an object as your heart."

"A cruel jest! But, of course, his Royal Highness is all fire and flame."

"No wonder! with such inflammable materials."

"And the Princess?"

"You hypocrite! The old story of opposite poles, I suppose. But why ask me?"

"Because feminine ears are sharp, especially yours, madame, in the matter of a small triumph."

The little Russian laughed. "Unfortunately, I can take no credit for my cousin's beauty."

"Nevertheless, we understand each other. My dearest friend, we understand each other."

"For just so long as one is not deceived by the other, and the one deceived shall certainly not be myself," she reflected, with some amusement.

The tall, spare lieutenant, who had previously had the short colloquy with the handsome hussar, sauntered about the room until he perceived that the Princess had vanished upon the arm of Rommingen, and that one of her ladies-in-waiting, thus released from duty for a while, had begun to talk with her acquaintances. He then pushed awkwardly through the throng until he reached her side.

"Good-evening, Amanda."

"A clumsy, impertinent brute, that Nobbe," said a comrade, upon whose toes he had just trodden in his haste, and to whom he had made but a very scant

apology for so doing; "he thinks himself perfectly secure in his position because his sister exercises so unaccountable an influence upon the Princess Sibylla."

"That may cease at any moment."

"Not likely. It makes no difference to me, but Nobbe's manner has of late been so excessively offensive that I may feel myself called upon before long to call him to a serious account."

"Come, come, gentlemen, no warlike demonstrations in the piping times of peace, or, if you must have any such, storm that fortress!" said an elderly captain who had overheard the young men's talk, and who now directed their attention to a group of girls and young married women standing near.

Meanwhile, the maid of honour had turned on being addressed. "Ah, is it you, Erdman? I have had no time to speak to you before. How are you?"

"How should I be? Matters are at their worst."

He offered his sister his arm, and she took it with a sensation of indescribable pride. All the warmth and tenderness left in Fräulein von Nobbe's desiccated heart she shared between her brother and her royal mistress, the former having by far the largest share because of the anxiety he caused her, and because she regarded him as the sole representative of their race. She looked up at him anxiously.

"What, again, Erdman?"

"Yes, again," he repeated, with a sneer. "You women have an infernally meagre idea of the demands

made upon us by our daily life. Can't we go somewhere and sit down? This standing is the very devil. Can't we follow the example of the Prince and his lovely partner? Aha, the Princess soon found him out!"

"Hush!" Fräulein von Nobbe looked timidly around. "Come into the Gobelin room; we can rest there for a few moments."

Erdman von Nobbe threw himself into an arm-chair, stretched out his long legs, and yawned. "Can I see you to-morrow, Amanda, and when?"

"Good heavens! do you want more money?" The maid of honour bit her thin lip; it was the only expression she allowed her anger.

"By your kind permission, yes. You want me to marry money, and to do that I must keep up appearances. Moreover, you cannot possibly need all your salary. In your confidential relations with the Princess you live with her all day long."

"I could not possibly make out if I had to provide anything save my dresses," she said, sighing, "and your demands are far beyond my means."

"You forget, my lady, that it is from me that you learn all the news of the town, all the talk of the place; that it was I that investigated the Sommerfeld affair. You certainly owe me something. And as for your dresses, the less you waste upon them the better; they cannot do much for you. Dress the Arbanoff in rags, and she would still outshine a queen." And he laughed insolently.

"That's a matter of taste. But if you are as imprudent as you have been this evening, Erdman, something terrible will happen."

"I suppose you want me to keep an eye upon the Villa Bogdanoff?" he asked, not heeding his sister's reproof.

"Of course, as far as is possible; but she is a princess,—a very different thing from a stage queen."

"'Tis all one to the Prince; he'll be sure to play the lover, and you women are all such cursed hypocrites."

"For shame!" his sister began, but she suddenly sprang up: the Prince and Princess entered the Gobelín room. The tall lieutenant nearly bent double in his reverential devotion, while the Princess nodded graciously, with, "Ah, what an attentive brother! It is always refreshing to see such affection between a brother and sister."

Meanwhile, the ball was approaching its close. Prince Dagobert had another brief interview with Ferra, and afterwards said to Frau von Bogdanoff, with a sigh, "She is dangerous, very dangerous! Had you no pity for my poor fellow-men, madame?"

"It is never worth while to pity men, your Highness."

The two Russians were surrounded on their way to their carriage by gentlemen, each wishing for a last word or look.

"Shoo!" said Frau von Bogdanoff, waving her arms

as if to drive off a flock of fowls. "Do not trample me under foot in your eagerness, gentlemen!" And then she sank back with a sigh among the cushions of her coupé. Her young cousin's lovely head appeared once more, looking from the window as if in search of some face in the throng, and then the carriage rolled swiftly out of the castle court-yard.

"I think you ought to be content, Ferra," Maria Paulovna observed, with an air of triumph.

"I certainly am, my dear Mietza! It was so kind of you to invite me to come here."

"Amuse yourself as much as you can; you are perfectly at liberty, you are your own mistress; but never compromise yourself, or I shall be obliged to repudiate you on the spot, although I am none too rigid a moralist."

"But how could I?"

In the vestibule, where a drowsy footman was awaiting his mistress's return, Ferra paused for a moment and said, as if it were the spoken conclusion of a train of thought, "He paid me less attention than the rest all through the evening; you know whom I mean, Mietza."

And Frau von Bogdanoff answered, composedly, "*N'importe*. He is not comfortable in the atmosphere that surrounds us."

"What atmosphere?"

"Too much cigarette-smoke and too little formality, too much freedom and too little——" She yawned.

“Good-night, Ferra. I am tired; we’ll talk another time.”

And the Princess Arbanoff pondered long upon her words, puzzled to know what the atmosphere about her lacked in Rommingen’s appreciation.

The principal club in D—, frequented by the aristocracy and by army officers in especial, had been very popular with Prince Dagobert before his marriage. He was seldom seen there now, but the easy tone of intercourse which he had introduced still continued. None but gentlemen by position were members, and there was a certain degree of license allowed in the discussion of topics of private as well as of public interest. Since the court had been divided into two parties, the two elements had been evident at the club also. The coterie of the Prince numbered more adherents, and usually assembled in the front rooms, while Erdman von Nobbe, who represented the interests of the Princess, was the centre of but a small circle, for which his own want of popularity was probably to blame in a certain degree.

The gentlemen of this circle were seated about a round table, on the night after the ball, sipping punch.

“For what reason, pray,” said von Nobbe to his neighbor, a man in a dress-coat and white necktie, of quiet, gentlemanly aspect, “are you so very down in the mouth to-night, Laudin? You have been gazing into the fire without uttering a word for the last half-hour. Are you so tired?”

"No, not exactly," was the reply. The man addressed was the artist Laudin, at present engaged in painting the Princess Sibylla's portrait.

"Do your debts worry you?"

"Herr von Nobbe!"

"Mine are the only things that give me low spirits," said Erdman. "I trust there is nothing wrong with her Royal Highness's portrait. That would be a disaster."

"On the contrary, I am wonderfully content with it."

"Well, then, what is the matter? Have you perhaps fallen in love with the Arbanoff? That would account for your dejected demeanour."

Nobbe laughed and drained his glass, while one of the young men present turned to the painter and said, "But tell me, Laudin, did she not inspire you, artist that you are? Could you put that hair on canvas?"

"I do not know. Every attempt that I have ever made to do so has failed," Laudin frankly confessed; adding, with a sigh, "That may have been the cause of the melancholy to which Herr von Nobbe has just alluded so delicately. I was thinking of my Helen."

"Your Helen? It sounds mysterious. What has that to do with it?" was asked right and left.

"Tell us the story, Laudin; we are all interested."

"It is no story,—only an illusion destroyed, a hope that has never been fulfilled——"

"Nonsense! We want to hear about your Helen."

Laudin passed his hand through his fair hair, and seeing the eyes of all fixed upon him, and that escape was impossible, he again riveted his deep blue eyes upon the flickering flame on the hearth, and began slowly, hesitating as if summoning up some memory :

“It was in Paris, at the Grande Opéra. I had been at work all day long upon the sketch for a picture,—‘The Rape of Helen.’ I was convinced that it would bring me both fame and money if I could only find a model for my Helen. But I despaired of discovering what I wanted ; and I was sitting in the gallery looking down, when—I never shall forget it—I saw a lady sitting alone in one of the principal boxes. Very young she was, and enchantingly lovely,—my Helen. She was dressed very simply in comparison with others. A single diamond gleamed in her red-gold hair. I stared at her for an hour, and then rushed down below and tried to find out who she was, but this no one knew.”

“*Demi-monde*, of course,” said Nobbe, yawning. “I hoped for something better, Laudin.”

But the artist took no notice of the interruption : he had warmed with his subject.

“I rushed home ; I mixed colours until my brain was giddy and my eyes smarted, simply to produce the shade of the hair. It was useless : I could not succeed ; and to-day,” he smiled sadly, and then sighed, “my picture is unfinished ; the fame and the money are both myths ! My Helen has played me false.”

“ Well, but——”

“ To-night, when the Princess Arbanoff appeared in the ball-room, I grew dizzy. There was the hair of which I had dreamed, and as I looked I had a vision of the crimson velvet cushions of her chair at the opera against which the pure profile was so admirably relieved. The resemblance is wonderful !”

Nobbe sat upright in his chair, and, as he fixed his eye-glass in his eye, said, negligently, “ And you never discovered who your Parisian beauty was ?”

“ The box-opener replied with a shrug to my questions. The box belonged to some wealthy magnate, a Hungarian or a Pole, I believe, to whom the lady stood in certain relations. I only know she was not his wife.”

“ Most delicately said ! And this lady wonderfully resembled the Princess Arbanoff ?”

“ Most wonderfully.”

“ Let me advise you, my dear Laudin, to be more cautious with your narratives. You might get yourself into serious trouble. That sallow little Bogdanoff is a very energetic dame, who would cause you to rue it if she should hear of your circulating such tales.”

“ But, really, Herr von Nobbe, I have said nothing,” the artist said, dismayed. “ Gentlemen, you can bear me witness that I only mentioned a striking resemblance, such as is very frequent. What possible harm could there be in so doing ?”

“ That is my affair,” Nobbe thought to himself, as

he replied, "I only meant to put you on your guard, Laudin. We here of course should never repeat or think again of your story, but there might be some one——"

"I shall take good care not to speak of it again. I thank you for your warning, for I certainly never should have dreamed of any harm's resulting from what I said."

"You may be glad that Leroy was not here; he would never have let the chance escape him of defending the Bogdanoff."

"But, good heavens!"

"Yes, yes; I know——" Nobbe's tone was half confidential, half patronizing, and the conversation took another turn. Some of the gentlemen sat down to cards, some preferred billiards. Laudin remained where he had been sitting, lost in thought, pondering upon his Helen:

CHAPTER XI.

AWAKENED MEMORIES.

THE castle court-yard was white with a light fall of snow. The three Tritons, as well as Father Neptune, from whose trident, held high in air, the water leaped in summer, all wore little white caps, and Detlev Rommingen, standing at the window in the Prince's antechamber, looked out at their partly-veiled figures, and at the sparrows flitting about them.

His Highness had sent for his adjutant to accompany him in a drive, and Detlev was awaiting the arrival of the light phaeton which the Prince made use of on such occasions. He had not long to wait, for the next moment the door of the antechamber was hastily opened, and Prince Dagobert appeared.

"Delicious weather! We must hurry, Rommingen." The Prince seemed full of animation, and looked remarkably well in his civilian's dress and sables. He sprang lightly into the phaeton, followed by Detlev, took the reins, and in a moment they were rolling swiftly along the high-road.

In these daily drives Prince Dagobert liked to hold the reins himself. His adjutant and a groom were his only companions.

To-day, after driving among the avenues of the park outside the town, where the trees and bushes showed fairy-like in their white veils of snow, the Prince turned towards the quarter where stood the Villa Bogdanoff.

He had hitherto scarcely spoken a word ; now and then he had absently tickled the ears of his horses with his long riding-whip, a smile broadening on his face the while. Suddenly he brought the phaeton to a stand. "One moment only, my dear Rommingen. I wish simply to ask after the ladies' health. I shall be back again immediately."

He tossed the reins to the groom and vanished within the villa, the doors of which closed noiselessly behind him. The adjutant was rather surprised, but he thrust his hands into the pockets of his overcoat and resigned himself to his fate, preparing to wait a quarter or even half an hour. But these passed and the Prince did not return.

Dagobert was ordinarily an extremely chivalric, amiable lord, whom it was easy to serve, but now and then upon occasions like the present he betrayed the belief, so common among the magnates of this earth, that the rest of mankind are created solely to render their own existence more easy. Detlev von Rommingen was irritated, but, strangely enough, his irritation was excited less by his Highness than by the beautiful woman whose vanity was detaining him in her well-heated rooms in spite of the warning so lately given her. And yet Ferra was least of all to blame

for the long delay. When the Prince found Frau von Bogdanoff—for whom he had inquired—alone, she could not help laughing at his disappointed face before she said, "Have patience, your Highness, for a moment, and I will have Ferra informed of your visit."

She sent Jacqueline to her mistress, and Prince Dagobert waited for Ferra's appearance long enough to express to the little Russian his admiration for her cousin.

"But she is abominably outspoken and natural," Maria Paulovna objected.

"It is just that which makes her so bewitching. I pray you to leave her so. In the stifling atmosphere in which we live she is like a fresh breath from the mountains——"

"You are enthusiastic, Prince Dagobert," she dryly interposed. "I believe it is your fashion to be so." She occupied herself diligently with the ball of red silk she was winding, as she continued: "Rather a dangerous proclivity for a man of your age and position."

Prince Dagobert looked amazed for an instant, and then laughed good-humouredly. "You are severe, madame, but nevertheless I forgive you."

When Ferra entered, fresh and blooming, as attractively lovely by daylight as she had been in the blaze of gas-light in the ball-room, the Prince sprang up, advanced to meet her, and kissed her hand.

"I need not ask after your health, madame," he said, with a glowing look bent upon her face. "I re-

proached myself on my way hither for disturbing the ladies at so early an hour, but——”

“Nevertheless you came!” Frau von Bogdanoff completed his sentence.

“The temptation was irresistible, and, besides, I came to make sure of your both joining a sleighing-party which we have in contemplation. It has been planned for a long while,—my worthy Neukirch is really very inventive,—but until now there has been no snow. Now that it has come, we must make haste. You know my little hunting-castle, Frau von Bogdanoff, and the Princess Arbanoff will not be frightened by ice and snow, since she is so familiar with the Russian steppes. Moreover, cold is a means of preservation.”

“Is that the reason why you leave your poor adjutant outside so long?” Frau von Bogdanoff asked, with a glance from the window. “He looks quite frozen.”

“By heavens, I forgot him! You are to blame, mesdames.”

Ferra had walked to the window, and was looking out compassionately. “Why did you not have him brought in, Mietza?”

“Pshaw! Rommingen is a soldier; and who would not gladly have been in his place for the sake of the look in your eyes at present, madame?” Prince Dagobert observed, politely.

“Under these circumstances I fear I should hardly be able to satisfy both of you in my position as hostess,” Maria Paulovna remarked.

The Prince shrugged his shoulders and took leave.

"Beg pardon for keeping you waiting," he said, apologetically, as he took his seat again beside Detlev.

Rommingen replied by a mute inclination; he was much irritated. Dagobert turned and looked him full in the face.

"Rommingen, what do you think of the Princess Arbanoff? You are a man of the world, and will not judge by any petty standard."

"I have had so little opportunity——"

"What has that to do with a first impression? She pleases me, pleases me extremely,"—he elevated his eyebrows and sighed,—“but I know she will be regarded with hostility here. It is the way of the world to attack what cannot be attained. All our ladies will be her enemies.”

He cracked his whip savagely and knit his brows, while his adjutant preserved silence.

"I only wish there were some one here in the capital who would espouse her cause warmly,—some one to whom no false motives for so doing could be attributed. Neukirch is always compromising. You know how the world judges. But you, Rommingen——"

The Prince had gone on hurriedly without looking again at his adjutant. Now he paused quite out of breath.

"In my opinion, which is of little consequence, your Highness, it would be far simpler by a prudent reserve of demeanour to give rise to no gossip. A

woman is always her own best guardian, and can easily disarm all enemies if she so choose."

"Ah, well, let us drop the subject." His Highness was evidently angry. "Nevertheless I cannot see why you do not understand, as I do, the utter defencelessness of women in certain situations; but *passons là-dessus!*"

Prince Dagobert remained out of sorts, while Detlev's thoughts were uncomfortable. "To stand guard over the reputation of a woman to whom the Prince chooses to pay court, and who receives his attentions!—a foolish waste of time!" And yet involuntarily, perhaps hardly consciously, he added, "Nevertheless, I will watch, and will warn her as well as I can."

After the Prince's departure, Frau von Bogdanoff picked up her novel, and taking out her marker, began to read. Ferra stood at the window, looking out into the street. She was quite content with her life, rejoicing in the whirling snow, the whitened trees, the prospect of a merry sleigh-ride, of which she had always been fond; in short, she was thoroughly happy,—a state of mind to which perhaps the image of a certain adjutant, always present somewhere in the picture of life thus contemplated, contributed more than she was aware of.

In entire absence of mind she began to hum softly to herself, keeping time to the air with a slight rhythmic movement of her supple figure. The undertone in

which she sang was hardly louder than the trill from a bird's throat, but nevertheless Frau von Bogdanoff dropped her book in her lap and gazed at her cousin with eyes of wonder.

“Voyez ce beau garçon,
C'est l'amant d'Amande,”

sang the Princess Arbanoff, and Maria Paulovna asked, suddenly,—

“Where did you learn that song, Ferra?”

“I do not know; it suddenly came to me, and I hummed it. It is the extent of my art.”

“Constantin surely never allowed you to sing such coarse songs, or to visit the haunts where they are sung,” said the Russian, severely.

Ferra approached her, surprised and curious. “But, dearest Mietza, I know nothing about it. Was what I sang so bad? Where could I have heard it?” She sat down and, leaning her head on her hand, gazed thoughtfully into the fire. “It must have been long ago, and I really cannot remember. Where did you hear it, Mietza?”

“Oh, I? that is quite another thing.” She paused and rolled up a cigarette for herself. “I like to see the world from every point of view, and so I used to go with Peter Paul into many a haunt of vice and misery in Paris, when I was tired of studying the higher orders of society. That song was the fashion in cafés of the lowest description. Once I even heard

it sung by a child,—a little girl,—and it shocked me so painfully that I cannot bear to hear a note of it.”

Ferra's large, gleaming eyes rested upon her cousin's face for a moment in positive terror. Scales seemed to fall from her sight. She saw around her a dim dirty court, a steaming den, where dwelt people whom she called father and mother, and she herself was in a short spangled petticoat which she greatly admired, and slipping up crooked filthy stairs to her old friend, Mademoiselle Désirée. Then through various narrow streets she reached a little café where there were men and women talking, smoking, and laughing, who threw her oranges and sweets when she hopped about like a little wren and sang—what? Ah, yes, she remembered it now to her sorrow :

“ Voyez ce beau garçon,
C'est l'amant d'Amande.” .

She had been so proud of her song then ; now she shuddered at the thought of it. Never since then had it recurred to her ; it had now presented itself, uncalled for, from the recesses of the past, and had aroused Maria Paulovna's memory and her own. Perhaps she had been that very child ! Gone, thank God ! buried, forgotten. She sat here wealthy, young, independent, with a sovereign to pay her homage, and no one had the faintest suspicion of what her earliest years had been.

“ I never, never will sing it again !” she declared, passionately.

CHAPTER XII.

WINTER ENTERTAINMENTS.

PRINCESS SIBYLLA had the headache. Lackeys glided about the long corridors on tiptoe, the curtains were drawn close before the windows, and the court physician had prescribed a soothing draught. The mistress of the robes was taking a well-earned rest in her own apartments, and only Fräulein von Nobbe, her Highness's favourite, was in attendance.

Prince Dagobert had shrugged his shoulders upon hearing of his wife's illness, and had made use of a rather disrespectful exclamation to his old friend Neukirch, in whose society he had left the castle soon afterwards, not without being observed by Fräulein von Nobbe, who stood behind the closed curtains in the sick-room and dutifully made her report to her Highness.

Princess Sibylla hastily sat erect from her half-reclining position and exclaimed, "It is maddening, positively maddening! Always that Neukirch,—the Prince's evil genius, and my enemy."

Fräulein von Nobbe wagged her head and said, evasively, "Your Royal Highness has no enemy."

"Say, rather, no friend, and you will tell the truth,"

the Princess replied, bitterly. She did not perceive that the maid of honour was, as it were, making preparations for some disclosure which she did not wish to mention too suddenly—when the latter continued with emphasis: “Those who desire only good and are always sacrificing themselves to prevent evil must learn to wait in patience, your Highness.”

“Oh, if it were only that I would not complain, Amanda. But it is wretched to see how with Parisian toilettes, diamonds, some grace of manner, and mere external beauty, virtue can be bribed, to the forgetfulness of every just claim and the neglect of all duty. I would wager that in the club they are already jesting about this new passion of the Prince’s and shrugging their shoulders over me. I was so glad to be rid at last of the Sommerfeld. Who could have dreamed that that sly, sallow little Bogdanoff would have thrust her cousin into the breach! And this nonsensical sleighing-party which the Prince has arranged in her honour! I cannot postpone it a second time, after doing so to-day by my headache. It will take place, and Frau von Bogdanoff will smile triumphantly.”

“The delicate-minded of our sex, your Highness,” said Fräulein von Nobbe, with unction, “must submit to be unappreciated. Their only consolation must be that the time will surely come when eyes now dazzled will be opened to the truth.”

“Oh, yes; if one chose to dress in Parisian toilettes,

to dye one's hair, and learn to flirt,—then, perhaps. But I have no taste for such things, my dearest Amanda. A luxurious life is foreign to my inclinations, and as for appearing in public as *décolletée* as the Princess Arbanoff, my delicacy forbids it."

"It was dreadful." Fräulein von Nobbe shuddered at the recollection, and rubbed her long bony hands. "The world is very wicked, your Highness——"

"And we cannot change it," the Princess said, sighing.

"But we can be, for those who are ever striving for perfection, a pattern of lofty morality."

"Bah! who is thus striving nowadays?" Her tone was very bitter.

"If I might be permitted, I would, with all due respect, remind your Highness that my brother is devoted body and soul to his royal mistress, that he worships everything that she accounts pure and noble, that he is ever occupied in influencing the minds of others in favour of virtue, and is incessantly diligent in removing every annoyance from your Highness's path. Surely he is an example, and only one among many, of true appreciation of worth."

"Yes, I know, Amanda, that your brother is very devoted to us," the Princess said, absently.

"God knows he is!" Amanda laid her hand upon her heart and piously lifted her eyes towards heaven. "He was with me a short time ago; his sensitive devotion drove him to impart——"

"What, my dear Amanda?" said the Princess, her interest suddenly aroused, for she had learned much after this irregular fashion.

"I hardly know, your Highness; it was a vague report,—the merest shadow, one might say, of a report——" Fräulein von Nobbè hesitated and stammered.

"You know me, Amanda; I can be trusted; and I certainly have sufficient self-command to betray nothing. Does the report concern the Prince, my husband?"

"No, your Highness; it concerns—why should I not tell you?—it is about the Princess Arbanoff."

"Oh!" The Princess lay back again in her chair and looked with eager curiosity into her friend's face.

"Your Highness is aware that after a ball the gentlemen congregate at their club, and the other night Erdman heard there from the painter Laudin of the striking resemblance of the Princess Arbanoff to a lady of at least doubtful reputation in Paris. Laudin could not possibly explain it,—it was so surprising."

"Impossible, my dear Nobbe."

"Impossible indeed, as Erdman thought, to suspect or to discover any reason for such a likeness, and he cautioned the artist not to mention it again. It might cause some unpleasantness; it is so easy to start a scandalous report. And since Frau von Bogdanoff has introduced her cousin at court, and his Highness the Prince has so distinguished her, the consequences of such gossip might be very disagreeable."

"Hm!" The Princess grew thoughtful, and gazed long at a wonderful engraving of the head of Christ which hung in a rich frame above her writing-table. "Strange things happen in this world. Foreigners, Russians,—you understand me, Amanda."

"Your Highness could not possibly suspect anything!" the Fräulein exclaimed, as in dismay.

"I do not mean precisely that. But we must investigate her antecedents. I do not deny, Amanda, that I like to feel secure as to those who compose my circle, that it may be entirely free from any questionable element; it is my duty; doubly so, since the Prince is unfortunately inclined to laxity of principle. Moreover, the Arbanoff's manners are, to say the least, extremely easy, and she is prodigal of her charms in public, which does not speak well for her. I am grateful to your brother for his hint; pray tell him so, and that I shall regard any further intelligence which he may bring me as a special service. We must fight with the same weapons which are used against us. Oh, where, where are peace and happiness to be found?" The Princess fell back among the cushions with a sigh and closed her eyes wearily. Fräulein von Nobbe pulled down some shades and softly departed, leaving a greenish twilight behind her.

To the Princess's vexation, the snow lay long and glittering on roads and meadows, as the weather was clear and frosty. Prince Dagobert, who had, with great courtesy, but nevertheless with a clouded brow,

acquiesced in the postponement of the sleighing-party, now pushed forward the preparations for it.

On the appointed day from every street of the capital came handsome sleighs filled with a pleasure-loving throng to assemble in the castle court-yard, the place of rendezvous.

The gentlemen in fur-lined coats, the ladies in dark winter dresses, were really a picturesque crowd as they waited for the drawing of lots, by which each lady was assigned her cavalier for the occasion. Many a pretty face laughed up contentedly from under a Rembrandt hat at the escort who had fallen to its owner's share, while there were, of course, other fair ones who turned away with a sigh when the names drawn by them from an antique vase did not accord with their secret preferences.

This drawing of lots was the Prince's plan, and he greatly enjoyed carrying it into execution, presiding over the fateful vase himself, and jesting, congratulating, or condoling, as he judged best from the face of each lady after the drawing, still keeping a sharp lookout the while for Frau von Bogdanoff's sleigh.

At last the wished-for vehicle appeared, drawn by a spirited pair of steeds. Prince Dagobert heard the bells, saw the scarlet plumes waving upon the horses' heads, and turned to meet these guests of his. Ferras's costume of dark green velvet trimmed with blue-fox fur, and imitating the national costume of her husband's native province, was most becoming. Her

wonderful hair gleamed from under the jaunty cap, a pale ray of sunshine lit up the roses on her cheeks, and the susceptible Prince gazed at her with rapture. "At last!" he exclaimed. "You must not blame me, madame, if but a limited chance is left you."

He offered her his arm, and as he conducted her to the urn, he continued, in an undertone, "Why must I be excluded from among the fortunate ones who may hope for the chance of at least spending an ever-memorable hour in your society? The man to whom fortune grants such a favour to-day will be my debtor while he lives."

Ferra laughed. "But if he does not please me, I shall be your Highness's creditor for the same space of time."

"I should like that even better, madame."

She put her hand into the urn and unfolded the paper she drew thence; there was an expectant silence, and the guests thronged about her to hear.

"Detlev, Count Rommingen-Erdenflueh," she read, with the foreign accent peculiar to her. With sparkling eyes she looked about the hall in search of him; every one saw that she was satisfied with her fate.

"It seems I deserve your gratitude," the Prince said, with a shade of jealousy and wounded vanity, for she paid him no further attention.

"Yes, your Highness, you do indeed."

The Prince turned away, biting his lip, and approached his wife, who, standing surrounded by her

faithful adherents, received him with a look of half-concealed contempt.

“Are you ready, Sibylla? May I give the signal for departure?”

“You see I am entirely ready.”

She looked less attractive than ever, as if it were her intention to show that the costly toilettes, the refined elegance of the two Russians neither impressed her, nor inspired her with any desire to emulate them. The Prince saw it, and secretly sighed; his æsthetic taste was shocked. He offered her his arm, and conducted her down the castle steps to their sleigh. The next contained the Mistress of the Robes and her husband, with Fräulein von Nobbe and her brother, and never had the ‘Chamber of Horrors’ more fully justified its reputation than on the present occasion.

“Chance has brought us together again,” said Ferra, with an enchanting smile, to Rommingen. “I hope you are going to be very amiable to-day.”

“Was I ever otherwise?”

She bit her lip. “That admits of a question.”

Frau von Bogdanoff had taken her place in Neukirch’s sleigh, leaving her own for Ferra and her escort. It was in shape a shell, the wood-work inlaid and gilded, the seats and covers of bearskin. The coachman who stood behind the pair looked not unlike a huge bear, so muffled was he in fur, and as he handled the scarlet reins most skilfully, he added not a little to the picturesque effect of the whole. The

gay procession of sleighs glided swiftly through the streets to the sound of music from a good band, of jingling bells, and of light laughter, and people gathered in groups to watch it as it passed, thus taking some share in the joys of their more fortunate fellow-mortals.

Frau von Bogdanoff's sleigh was the object of special admiration, as were the pair who occupied it. The adjutant was tolerably well known, but Ferra attracted all eyes. "Oh, the pretty lady! The pretty lady!" shouted a little girl from the arms of her nurse, who had lifted her up that she might see better. "Look at the gold on her head!" And a bunch of violets, thrown by a half-grown boy, who shyly disappeared among the crowd, fell directly into Ferra's lap.

"They all pay you homage," Detlev said to his companion, as he heard the shout and observed the admiration she excited. "I hope it does not annoy you."

"Oh, no," she replied, simply; "I am used to it. They are far worse in Russia."

"And you are quite conscious of your power, madame?"

"I think so," she assented, with some hesitation, for she was perfectly honest towards herself, and too free from all thought of evil not to be so to others.

"Then you must have disliked my late warning."

"Oh, no; I know you mean kindly by me."

"I do! By heaven, I do!" he assured her. "We men do, indeed, judge many things more harshly than

women usually do, and perhaps our judgment is all the more correct."

"I am very much spoiled," Ferra said, lightly, leaning back. "Constantin gratified my every desire, never blamed me, and even yielded to all my caprices. He was very kind to me, for he loved me very much."

"And can you not imagine a love as true and great which nevertheless may sometimes find cause to blame or to differ from the one loved?"

"It would be a very inconvenient love."

He looked in her face and said to himself that it would require immense moral courage to refuse her anything, or to persist in any desire which she should oppose. "We men are weaklings," he thought, and for the first time in his life this weakness seemed to him not contemptible but seductive.

The towers of a many-gabled castle upon a slight eminence appeared above the snow-laden hemlocks, its roofs and windows sparkling in the sunlight. A light breeze was blowing above the hills and forests, stirring the fir-trees here and there. The crows fluttered cawing in the tree-tops, startled by the music and the sleigh-bells, and brushing down the snow from the boughs until the air was filled with glittering particles. Then the gay procession vanished beneath the arched gateway of the court-yard, leaving deep tracks on the shining white road, which crows and rooks eyed with curious, suspicious glances.

In the spacious oaken wainscoted hall furs and hats

were laid aside, and the guests distributed themselves here and there through the long suite of apartments. In each room there was a huge buffet sparkling with glass and silver, whereon were set out all kinds of refreshments, while small tables were scattered about in orderly disorder, where parties of four or six might seat themselves.

"I thought your Highness would approve this arrangement," Neukirch observed to the Prince, with a smile on his wrinkled face, and his Highness pressed his hand and assured him, "Admirable! Admirable, *mon vieux!*"

"You lucky fellow!" said Eustach von Deuren, the young hussar, with a dissatisfied expression on his handsome, frank face. "If envy were not foreign to my noble nature I could envy you, Rommingen. Can't you be content with outranking us all? At least let us sit together, that I may have some small share of your good fortune."

"With all the pleasure in life, my dear boy, provided the Princess Arbanoff has made no other arrangements."

"How miserable it is to be controlled by one's position!" the Prince said, with exaggerated melancholy, to Ferra, detaining her as she was crossing the room after a short conference with her cousin. "Are not we rulers of the earth to be pitied? Duties, duties, everywhere! Whilst others quaff from flowing fountains, we stand aloof, hungering and thirsting."

Ferra laughed, and pointed to a buffet. "Certainly, your Highness, no one need be hungry here; and as for the fountains, they are all frozen at present." Still laughing, she walked away and left him.

"The deuce!" thought the Prince, in dismay. "Either she is a finished coquette or naïve to a degree; she certainly does not accord me the consideration that is my due, and to which I am accustomed." This reflection, however, he kept to himself.

A fanfare of trumpets was the signal for all to take their seats. The Prince and his consort, with their immediate circle, had their table in the centre room, where were, beside several high officials and various elderly persons, Frau von Bogdanoff and Neukirch. There were comparatively few tables here. The young people were under less restraint in the other rooms. Prince Dagobert could not refrain from casting longing looks to the right and left, particularly when now and then a burst of laughter made itself heard above the music, for Sibylla was very silent, only whispering now and then with her maid of honour, and toying with the pastry upon her plate. She had none but monosyllabic replies for the Prince's remarks.

The dessert was on table. Champagne was still flowing down thirsty throats. Dagobert could endure it no longer; with his Venetian wineglass in his hand, he started up and went into the room where Ferra was sitting. The band was playing the duet from Boccaccio, and, humming in a low voice, 'Of the

fair ones of Florence, the fairest art thou,' he held out his glass to hers. The adjutant instantly arose, but the Prince signed to him to keep his seat. "I do not mean to be a spoil-sport," he said, lightly clinking his glass against Ferra's, "but only to see that my guests are enjoying themselves. I hope you are pleased, madame?"

"Delighted, your Highness!" Her love of enjoyment, her natural light-heartedness, had broken all bounds, and showed themselves in her laughing eyes and glowing cheeks.

"And if you could have chosen you would have had no other attendants than those whom chance has accorded you,—these two officers of mine?"

"No, your Highness. Chance has decided precisely in accordance with my wishes," she said, simply, quite unaware that the Prince might have expected at least a less decided reply. Dagobert stroked his long, sandy moustache.

"Women are incomprehensible," he said, trying to jest; "to-morrow the sun of your favour may have set for these fortunate men, and may be shining upon another. Pray, clink your glass again with mine."

"Does your Highness intend, according to a Russian custom, to emphasize a wish?" she asked, merrily, her head a little on one side and provoking laughter in her wonderful eyes.

"A wish?—yes," he whispered, as the glasses touched; then, completely bewitched, he added, "Per-

haps I may one day have an opportunity of uttering it in words."

He went on to other tables, and the young hussar, looking after him, said, "His Highness would have liked to change places with one of us."

"Ah," she rejoined, indifferently, playing with her fan, "compliments are the merest froth."

"Even when paid by a prince?"

"More so perhaps, than in any other case."

Just then the sharp, sallow face of Fräulein von Nobbe appeared in the room, and she came directly towards Ferra. "Her Highness the Princess Sibylla begs the favor of madame's society for a few moments," she whispered, confidentially. "Allow me to conduct you to her."

Ferra arose in surprise. The adjutant and his friend looked inquiringly at each other.

"What does it mean?" Eustach asked, in an undertone.

"Malice hiding behind a smile," the adjutant replied, in an equally low voice.

"I am afraid we have all been weighed in the balance and found wanting," Deuren continued.

Meanwhile, the Princess had offered the guest a seat beside herself. "I am pleased to see you at home among us," she said, courteously, but the cold tone of her voice belied the kindness of her words.

"Your Highness is very kind."

"You have hitherto lived upon your late husband's estates, have you not?"

"I have been there since his death, three years ago."

"'Tis odd," Sibylla went on; "but to the best of my remembrance it is only the first marriage of Prince Arbanoff, with a Princess Romanoff, that is recorded in the Russian *Almanach*. There is no mention made of his second marriage."

"I know nothing about that, your Highness," Ferra replied, perfectly unembarrassed.

"My dear Amanda, however, has an admirable memory; I may be mistaken——" She looked around, and, not finding the object of her search, turned again with a frigid smile upon her thin lips to Ferra. "But there is no need to consult her; I have a far better informant here,—yourself, madame. I take great interest in genealogy, and, in opposition to the levelling tendency of the day, which is to make of no account birth and ancestry, I hold that to be nobly born refines the character, therefore I have a detestation for *mésalliances*. From what noble family are you sprung, madame?"

Ferra's breath came quick; the fan in her hand trembled slightly. Fräulein von Nobbe had drawn near at a sign from the Princess; her round eyes stared fixedly at the victim of her spite.

"My cradle was rocked in no princely mansion, your Highness. Dimitri Nasakoff, a simple Russian noble, called himself my father." She hesitated,—a direct falsehood was odious to her.

"Ah! a simple noble," the Princess drawled. "Then your dowry was probably considerable?"

"I cannot say."

"Where did you live, madame? Where did you become acquainted with your husband?"

"In Paris. I was educated at the convent of the *Sacré Cœur*. And as for Constantin, he taught me to believe that he married me for love," she said, hastily, hoping that this examination would cease.

"But you were so young. Did you accept his hand from ambition or——"

"From gratitude," Ferra interposed, heedless of etiquette.

"From gratitude? Was there such cause for gratitude?"

Ferra fanned herself nervously. A blush reddened her cheek. She felt as though caught in a trap, but she would not have been her downright loyal self if she could have been false for a moment to her sense of her husband's magnanimity. She uttered a decided 'yes,' and then looked up with so brilliant a smile at Dagobert, who was approaching, that it quite turned his head.

"I come to ask you to take a turn through the green-houses, Sibylla; Neukirch has had them lit up with Bengal lights. Quite a pretty effect, although they are but primitive affairs after all; more for use than for show," he said, turning to Ferra.

"No, thank you; the warm air gives me headache," the Princess replied.

"May I pray you to come, then, madame?"

Ferra readily laid her hand upon his arm, glad to be released, while Sibylla whispered to her confidante, "The report is not entirely without foundation. Did you see, Amanda, how startled she was?"

"Not a look of hers escaped me."

"And yet the Prince does not hesitate——" She bit her lip. "It is too vexatious, Amanda!"

The doors into the hot-houses, which formed a circle at the back of the castle, were open; green, blue, and red lights strangely illuminated palms, yuccas, mangoes, and other varieties of tropical trees and plants. The houses really were very simple structures,—mere forcing-houses; narrow paths led to their inmost depths, where there was but little light, for there was seldom any one here save the gardeners. Now there were a few guests wandering about, and their number increased when the Prince, with Ferra on his arm, stepped into the warm, damp atmosphere. He gazed down at her, glowing in all the pride of her youthful beauty, and sighed. She looked up.

"Is anything the matter, your Highness?"

"Yes; I am sad, madame."

She paused. "Impossible! Prince Dagobert, who always has a smile and a merry word for all? No one will believe it of your Highness."

"It is all acting!" he said, in an undertone, with an ardent glance. "My entire existence is mere sham! Duties, nothing but duties! After a cold, loveless youth, comes a cold, loveless middle age; I do

long sometimes to be a free, untrammelled human being——”

“Such moods are very fleeting,” she remarked, innocently.

“That may be, after one has sacrificed to them one’s very heart’s blood.”

They were standing rather isolated, surrounded by huge palms; the Bengal lights near them had gone out, but others still gleamed at some distance amid the green. The drops falling from some broad-leaved plants could be plainly heard in the silence. For a moment Ferra felt embarrassed.

“I dare not say it to you, madame,” the Prince began, in a still lower voice, “without fear of——”

A firm tread sounding on the gravel-walk caused him to pause. With an impatient gesture he retreated a step, drew towards him a palmetto-leaf as if to examine it, and said, aloud, “I thank you for your interest, madame.”

Rommingen stood just behind them. “Her Highness wishes to know if it is not time to return.”

“Oh, there is no hurry,” the Prince replied, rather irritably. “The day was devoted to this, and it must still be very early.” He took out his watch. “Positively, it is eight o’clock! Who would have thought it? Well, madame, you shall not leave Tannhorst without some memento.”

He walked hastily down a narrow path opening just before them, where various flowers were gleaming, and

where grew a delicate rose-bush, from which he plucked its single bud.

"In memory of to-day," he said, significantly, as he offered it to Ferra.

"Thanks!" She took the flower and held it up to examine it. "Why, it is black, your Highness, but still a rose in form and fragrance." And as she inhaled its breath she looked across it at Rommingen, standing silently in the background.

"I must make my peace with the Princess for loitering here so long," Dagobert said, evidently annoyed by his adjutant's intrusion, and, with a bow, he walked towards the arched entrance.

"Whither shall I conduct you, madame?" Detlev asked, in a colder tone than he had ever before used to her. She laughed.

"You shall attend me here," she replied, gayly. "What is the matter? Are you vexed with me for laughing?"

"You laugh at everything, madame,—at my warnings, at the fool who supposed he could do any good by them. You have taught me a lesson."

She looked at him with eyes still brimming with merriment. "I hope there is no harm in my teaching. Would you have me rude to the Prince?"

"I would have you more prudent."

She stamped her foot lightly. "This begins to tire me. I could find it in my heart to have nothing to do with prim precepts and suspicious caution."

“Do not say that, madame. If not for your own sake,—then for mine.”

He took her hand for an instant. His touch thrilled her, and she turned upon him eyes filled with a kind of terror as she began slowly to walk towards the entrance. “Have I angered you?” he asked. She shook her head without replying.

“I could not endure to have you slandered,” he went on. “The mere idea makes my blood boil. Tell me that you do not resent my frank words.”

Instead of replying she looked up at him, large tears shining in her eyes.

“Do not weep,” he said, passionately, his self-control wellnigh lost. “Your tears would burn me to my heart’s core.”

She brushed them hastily away. “Take me to Maria Paulovna.”

The little Russian was standing before the Princess and gesticulating eagerly when Ferra silently approached her, the traces of agitation still evident in her face to a close observer. But she was not angry; on the contrary, she was possessed by an indescribable sensation of happiness.

What a miracle had been wrought within her during the last quarter of an hour! Her every thought and feeling were occupied with Rommingen, and she started as from a revery when Fräulein von Nobbe, approaching and observing the rose which she had in her hand, said, in her high, shrill voice,—

"A black rose! What a novelty!"

"A black rose!" Princess Sibylla changed colour and advanced several steps towards Ferra. "It is indeed my wonderful rose!"

Ferra looked distressed. "His Highness plucked it for me in the greenhouse."

"And was there no gardener there to tell you that the graft was my special care, and that I was intensely interested in its success?" The Princess looked really agitated.

"No one, your Highness. But pray allow me to atone as far as I may for the unfortunate mistake by restoring the flower to you." And she held it out towards the Princess.

"I resign all right to it," Sibylla said, haughtily.

"We may admire it, however," Fräulein von Nobbe said, extending her hand for the flower. "Only the outside leaves are black; the inner ones are deep crimson, and how fragrant it is!" she exclaimed, ecstatically.

"Let me look at it," the Mistress of the Robes also approached and looked with great compassion at the flower. "Such a pity," she murmured. "A sad disappointment for her poor Highness."

The words were uttered just loud enough to reach Ferra's ears. Poor child! she stood as if upon burning coals among these women, who, she felt instinctively, were hostile to her, and whose looks seemed to her worse than their words. Not a trace of kindly sympathy did she see in any of the faces around her. She

could read there only envy, malice, and ill will. She looked for consolation to the sallow little face of Maria Paulovna, but she had vanished.

Suddenly Princess Sibylla extended her hand for the rose which Ferra still held out towards her. Fräulein von Nobbe tried to hand her the flower, and between them the opening bud was broken off close to the stem and fell on the floor. With an affected little shriek of dismay, Fräulein von Nobbe stooped to pick it up.

“Oh, dear! It is utterly ruined!”

The words might have been addressed as well to Ferra as to the Princess, who, holding the flowerless stem, asked, “How did it happen?”

“When such an accident happens among common people, your Highness, the saying is ‘fate interferes to prevent a wrong,’” said Frau von Bogdanoff, who had suddenly appeared, and with the most engaging smile; “but of course we are above all such plebeian superstition, are we not, Fräulein von Nobbe?”

The maid of honour blushed slightly, and the Princess, taking the rose from her, held it out towards Ferra, saying, “I return it to you, madame; it is yours by right.”

Frau von Bogdanoff, who stood beside Ferra, took the rose carelessly from her Royal Highness, and, with the most self-possessed air imaginable, tossed it into the dying flame of the fire in the chimney. “We care little for what is ruined, your Highness,” she said, as

the flower lay for a moment bedded among the glowing embers, and then shrivelled and disappeared.

Ferra looked about her as if seeking help from some quarter; but the adjutant's tall figure did not appear.

The signal for departure was given. The princely pair had seated themselves in their sleigh, and Rommingen, in attendance until the last moment, turned to look for his charge. She was standing ready, with Frau von Bogdanoff, beneath the high archway of the castle vestibule, the light from within illuminating her loveliness; at sight of her an indescribable delight possessed him.

Outriders bearing flaming torches first left the courtyard, the sleighs followed them; Ferra was silently helped into hers by Rommingen, and they drove off into the frosty, starlit night.

Both were silent; their hearts throbbed fast, commonplace talk seemed impossible. Detlev asked himself if this bewildering sensation could be love. A few weeks since and he would have ridiculed the idea of so sudden and so blind a subjugation; he would have been sure that reason must have a voice in the matter, and reason would have told him that he had but a slight knowledge of Ferra; but where were all such considerations now?

Sometimes a crimson ray from the torches would reveal clearly her lovely face, and anon the smoke from them curling above the snow in light clouds would obscure it;—its charm was always the same.

She had taken her hands from her muff and was slipping the bracelets on her wrist farther up her arm ; her eyes were so downcast that they seemed almost to be closed.

“Madame,” he said at last, in a low tone, laying his hand on hers, “you are not displeased with me?”

“No ; I never have been so.”

A timid glance met his own ; he took the hand that lay beneath his and kissed it repeatedly. If he had spoken then it must have been madly, passionately, but he had not quite lost his self-control. He relinquished her hand, and they were silent again.

When the Bogdanoff sleigh was driving the adjutant home, after Ferra had alighted at the villa, he perceived a small white object beside him on the seat ; it was her lace handkerchief. He picked it up and held it for a while, as if it were some bond between them.

He longed to keep it, to press it again and again to his lips,—had it not touched hers? But when the sleigh stopped, pride conquered, and he quietly laid it back upon the cushion. “I will do nothing that I have not the right to do,” he thought, and, although it cost him a struggle, he parted with the trifle which was hers, and which had dried the tears he had caused her to shed.

The Prince and Princess also had rather a silent drive home. Her Highness mentioned the affair of the rose, and did not relax her severity when the Prince assured her that he had plucked the rose quite unconscious of

her interest in it. She then remarked, "Moreover, as Madame von Arbanoff's father was not of the highest rank, I think you would do well, Dagobert, to be less demonstrative in your attentions to her."

"How do you know that?" he asked, surprised.

"From herself."

His Highness suppressed a slight yawn. "In fact, however, it is of but little consequence; that she is the Princess Arbanoff suffices."

"For you, perhaps, but not for me. Beauty is not all that I require."

"But she is very agreeable," the Prince avowed, with a slight smile. "I confess I could sooner dispense with a brilliant pedigree than with her charm."

"Indeed?"

The tone in which the word was spoken was so cold and contemptuous that Prince Dagobert was silent, and leaned back as if weary, closing his eyes.

But the Princess thought, with indignation, "He assumes every right for himself, and daily shows me how little he values me. What if I should seek elsewhere the love so lacking in my life? Why should I struggle thus when, if I should yield to such a temptation, there is no one to feel robbed?"

She clasped her cold hands and stifled the sobs that rose in her throat. She would not struggle. Before her mind's eye arose the grave, earnest face of another man, one worthy of her affection, and he whispered words of love which his eyes repeated,—and to herself.

CHAPTER XIII.

COUNTERPLOTS AND THEIR RESULT.

“WHAT is the matter with you, my boy?” Rommingen asked the young hussar, taking his arm as he met him by accident in the street. “You look so very grave.”

“I was thinking of you, and of some one else. How do you stand in relation to the Princess Arbanoff, Detlev?” Eustach asked, with a sudden resolve.

“Hm!” The adjutant tugged at his moustache. “There are things which cannot be discussed even between the most intimate friends. You surely understand that?”

“Yes, certainly; but then, my dear fellow, there are also things that make one’s blood boil. It is enough to drive one mad to see how easy a thing it is to sully a human being’s reputation. If a woman is cold and reserved, she is accounted stupid; if she is merry and attractive, she is accused of coquetry; and if she is fearless too,—why, it is all over with her.”

“Are you talking of the Princess Arbanoff? Speak plainly!” Detlev exclaimed, impatiently.

“Oh, I have told you already,—hints, glances, smiles,—nothing that you can take a fellow by the

collar for. Laudin is said to have seen her in Paris ; others cast up their eyes as soon as Prince Dagobert is mentioned ; and you are spoken of, too, in connection with her."

"I?" The adjutant was fairly roused. "Who dares——"

"There! you see how sore you are. Moreover, old friend, if one is not perfectly blind—— Why should you struggle? You cannot possibly attach any importance to all the gossip and slander."

"No,"—he bit his lip,—“but the Princess herself is often to blame for what is said ; her indifference to the requirements of the court and of society is really too sovereign."

"Marry her," Eustach proposed, gravely and honestly. "That will put an end to the whole matter. You love her, and she prefers you. If I were in your place all the gossip might go to the deuce. Unfortunately, I am not, but now I have at least done what I could. Do consider it, Detlev, my dear fellow. Never heed the tattle of the crowd. I should so like to see you happy." And before Detlev could reply, Eustach, with a light tap on his friend's shoulder, was gone.

Ah, if he only knew how Detlev von Rommingen had considered it ! Ferra's image never left him ; he had foreseen, his knowledge of human nature had told him, that she would be calumniated ; it did not surprise him to hear of it, but it hurt him. How gladly he would have shielded her, how gladly have taken her to

his heart and defended her! Why did he not do so? He never credited one word of slander of her. That was not what stood in his way, but an inexplicable something that stirred within him and raised a voice against her. What was it? He sought in vain to analyze it.

He loved her. He was perfectly conscious of that when he was with her and could hear her sweet voice and look into her brilliant eyes. Sometimes she had moods in which she looked so gentle and maidenly, so Madonna-like, that the hunger was almost irresistible to take her in his arms, cover her golden hair with kisses, and implore her to be his own forever.

Then a bolder glance, a louder laugh, a freer expression than he would have liked in his wife, would chill him and close his lips.

"Why does he not speak?" thought Ferra. "Can he not see what he is to me?"

And then she would be perhaps too frank towards him, afterwards resenting his silence, and coquetting with the Prince, who was as devoted as ever, quite turning his back upon his adjutant. Once after some such scene she perceived Detlev's eyes resting thoughtfully upon her when the Prince had taken his departure.

"You would like to find fault with me again," she said carelessly to him over her shoulder.

"No, madame. I do not do so any more."

She bit her lip; his tone sent the blood to her face.

"What have I done? Good heavens, what have I done?" she exclaimed, impatiently; "the Prince likes me as I am."

Detlev made no reply.

"Why do you not speak?" she said, her cheek crimson. "Can you be jealous, Count?"

"Would the knowledge that I am so content you, madame? Would it not, on the contrary, spur you on to increased exercise of your power?"

"You have a poor opinion of me."

"I judge simply from facts."

"No," she said, firmly, in a low tone, "you have no right to judge me as you do; you less than any other."

And then she turned and walked away slowly, her head held high, as full of haughty grace in form and carriage as was her heart of sadness and anxiety.

"I never can be like the woman whom he would call wife," she thought, in self-humiliation, and, though tears were nearer to her eyes than laughter to her lips, she seemed gayer, and flirted with the Prince more than ever.

Rommingen stood aloof and observed her. Every word of disapproval that he addressed to her seemed but to erect a fresh barrier between them, although he knew that he was hopelessly spell-bound, that no barrier would avail, and that all struggle was useless. And yet he struggled on from principle.

The day had been divided between rain and snow. Prince Dagobert was lying on a lounge in his study, his hands under his head and a cigar in his mouth. Neukirch sat opposite, rubbing his withered hands. He never smoked.

"Well, old friend," said the Prince, "you must admit that I am the least exacting of mortals. What is it that I ask? Only to be allowed to amuse myself for a couple of hours with talk and laughter; to experience something besides reproaches from one quarter and exaggerated respect from another. The Princess Arbanoff has the effect upon me of sparkling champagne. Why should I deny myself the charm of her society?"

"Count Rommingen seems to find the same charm in it, your Highness."

"Pshaw! Rommingen! He's altogether too fond of life by rule. He does not prize a little originality. Did you see his face the other evening when she tapped me lightly with her fan?" And, remembering the jest that had called forth the rebuke, Prince Dagobert laughed heartily.

"I cannot help perceiving, your Highness, that your adjutant has an influence upon the moods of the Princess Arbanoff."

But the Prince waved his hand with an incredulous glance. "Stuff! No, but I think she has heard something lately to my disadvantage. The Nobbe, the Bogdanoff, and even my consort herself are women

not to be trusted in this respect. The Princess Arbanoff has certainly been very cold and reserved towards me of late. She is quite changed."

"There are many explanations for such a change, your Highness." Neukirch coughed slightly, and waved away the hateful cigar-smoke from before his face. He would have rather enjoyed being love's messenger, but in this case there seemed no chance of anything of the kind.

"I should like," the Prince began again after a while, "I should really like to have an opportunity for once of seeing the Princess Arbanoff alone. I could soon induce her to tell me the cause of her changed behaviour. If it is because of all this gossip, I could convince her of its falsehood. If it should proceed from anything else,—from a reserve—or—"

The Prince paused, and for a while was so persistently silent that Neukirch thought it well to remind him of his presence by clearing his throat softly. His master thereupon started, and, raising himself on his elbow, asked,—

"Could not you arrange that, old friend?"

"If chance should come to our aid, your Highness."

"Pshaw! that is not at all my way. If it comes it is sure to be awkward, and if one invokes it, it is too long coming. No; try to arrange it. With your intimacy at the Bogdanoff villa you ought to be able to contrive something that should look like chance."

Neukirch seemed to reflect for a moment, and then

said, in his softest voice, "My royal master will always find me ready to serve him. I hope to be able to satisfy him. Only patience, your Highness; have patience."

"Oh, I have had to learn that." And he sank back among the cushions with a sigh. The clock on the mantel struck, and at the same instant a shower of hail rattled against the window-panes.

"Frightful weather! And yet it is time to drive out. My uncle requires punctuality. Heaven knows what new star he has discovered of late. He looks for his stars in the skies, I for mine on the earth. You can drive with me; I will set you down at your own door. And pray, Neukirch, tell my adjutant that he is relieved from duty in the castle, but that I beg him to accompany the Princess and her ladies to the opera. I never can reckon to the minute the time his Royal Highness will consume in instructing me as to some wonderful heavenly phenomenon, and so I may possibly be a quarter of an hour late, and Sibylla is so precise that my delay might vex her and give rise to suspicions, but if Rommingen is there she will at least know that I mean to come." And with a graceful wave of his hand the Prince dismissed his old friend upon his errand, while he himself went to dress.

The overture to 'Lohengrin' had begun. The opera-house was quite full, for the knowledge had spread

abroad that the Prince and Princess were to honour the performance with their presence.

The Princess Sibylla, clad with Puritanic simplicity, sat stiff and prim in the gorgeous royal box, which was hung with crimson velvet, the curtains being held back by gilt halberds and the national arms. Fräulein von Nobbe sat behind the Princess, and Rommingen behind the empty chair of the Prince. He watched the foreigners' box where Frau von Bogdanoff with her cousin had taken seats for the winter. He longed for a sight of Ferra. He was more deeply in love than ever. In the small proscenium-box on the stage sat Neukirch 'freshly painted,' as Fräulein von Nobbe remarked, stretching her long neck to see him, where he sat unconcernedly gazing through his opera-glass at the pretty faces opposite him.

At the last notes of the overture Frau von Bogdanoff entered her box, but alone. She threw back the heavy curtain, took her opera-glass, and settled herself comfortably; evidently she expected to remain alone.

"Slightly put out with *la belle cousine*, I imagine," said Amanda, with a long stare at the little Russian, who did look rather irritated.

Detlev was disappointed that the seat which he had been watching was not to be occupied. As always when Ferra was absent, his passion for her waxed stronger, and nothing save the winning of her seemed of worth to him. When Elsa, wrongfully accused, crossed the stage seeking for an avenger, she seemed to

him to personify Ferra in all her innocence and beauty. The actress had fair hair, which heightened the resemblance, and if instead of being in the court box he had been beside Ferra in the theatre at this moment, possibly the barrier between them might have been levelled in an instant. Whilst he was occupied with such thoughts, scheme after scheme went chasing through Neukirch's brain. He had seen that Frau von Bogdanoff was alone; a glance at the mirror at the back of his box showed him that the Prince's chair was still empty. The conversation of the afternoon occurred to him; he had been very desirous of gratifying his Highness, and now chance came unexpectedly to his aid; it was in his power to take advantage of the situation, and Neukirch was too old and too experienced a courtier not to make a Prince's desire the rule of his actions.

He summoned the box-opener, and by him sent a tiny bunch of violets, which he took from his button-hole, to Frau von Bogdanoff, with a request that she would let him know why her lovely cousin was not with her.

"Princess Arbanoff has a headache," was the laconic reply, and Neukirch, to whom headache and caprice signified the same thing where women were concerned, felt that his time had come. With great caution he half closed the screen in front of the box, and, when he thought no one was observing him, slipped out.

The first act came to an end, and a universal stir ensued upon the falling of the curtain. Visits were paid

in the boxes, and the royal box was enlivened by the reverential greetings of various members of the court circle.

"Your cousin is not with you," her Highness said to Maria Paulovna, who also presented herself.

"No, your Highness; she has a headache."

"A wretched malady; I know it well."

While Sibylla was thus doing her duty in the foreground, Erdman von Nobbe was standing in the background beside his sister. He never neglected any opportunity of bowing down before the Princess, and if possible extorting a few words from her, judging that this degree of familiarity would give him, in his comrades' eyes, an importance which his general conduct made eminently desirable.

"I thought the Prince would be here by this time," he remarked, with a glance at the empty chair.

"Not yet. The Princess has asked after him impatiently several times. She does not like to appear in public without him."

"Naturally, since if he is not with her she is the object of general compassion as a slighted, betrayed woman. He has been in the theatre, however."

"The Prince? You are mistaken, Erdman."

"I am never mistaken. Prince Dagobert was half-way up the stairs when Neukirch met him. I was in a hurry, for I wanted to get to the buffet, and I passed them without their noticing me."

"Strange!"

“Strange?” Nobbe grinned contemptuously. “If you think so you must be stupider than I take you to be. How is it that the Princess Arbanoff happens to have a headache this evening?”

“Erdman!”

“One has to look low sometimes for the threads that make up the stuff,” the tall lieutenant said, in his insolent way; “but what I saw I can vouch for.” He glanced towards Neukirch’s box, where the screen was pulled aside again, and the worthy ex-governor was sitting with folded arms and a benevolent smile, as peaceful and innocent as if he could not injure a fly. “The old sinner!” said the tall lieutenant, contemptuously. For it was oddly enough the case with all these people that each one who peeped at his neighbour’s cards felt a certain contempt for him, without ever asking himself if his own proceedings were more honest.

Princess Sibylla had at last begun to talk with Detlev, when the rising of the curtain put a stop to conversation. The maid of honour observed two round scarlet spots upon Sibylla’s cheeks, always with her a sign of agitation, and Amanda ascribed them to the continued absence of the Prince.

“Your Highness,” she said at last, leaning across the back of the Princess’s chair, while Ortrud was singing her song of revenge, “my brother saw his Highness the Prince in the theatre a quarter of an hour ago.”

“What, Amanda? Impossible! Where can he be?” The Princess was all eager attention.

The maid of honour shrugged her shoulders. "He was speaking with Neukirch, who must have been waiting for him."

"Who saw them?"

"My brother, your Highness, as I said before. Everything that Erdman says is trustworthy. He is so afraid lest his loved Princess should be anxious. He has very sensitive feelings, and is so devoted to your Highness. But there can be nothing the matter, or Neukirch would at least have given the adjutant a hint of it. Some little appointment, possibly, or— Good heavens, your Highness, how pale you are! Ah, take my salts!" she added, almost in a whine.

In fact, the Princess trembled violently; jealous suspicion, never at rest within her, was torturing her.

"I would not attach any consequence to it, your Highness; I never thought of that. I meant it kindly——" She was going on in the same tone, when the Princess interrupted her angrily,—

"Still, you do attach consequence to it, Amanda?"

Fräulein von Nobbe drooped like a drenched flower. "I do not know."

The Princess leaned back, and, unfolding her tortoise-shell fan, held it before her face.

"Count Rommingen!" She suddenly turned to the adjutant and looked at him with restless, eager eyes. Detlev leaned forward as far as he could, but the music prevented him from understanding her.

"Push your chair close to the front; my husband

will not be here for some time yet," Sibylla said, with a bitter ring in her voice. "He is seldom in a hurry, and I have something to say to you."

The adjutant obeyed, and waited inquiringly. He waited in vain. The Princess opened and shut her fan, bending the sticks as if to test their strength. Apparently she had forgotten her request. He saw the pulses in her neck throb, her thin lips were compressed, and, crack! the costly fan was broken in her nervous hands. Fräulein von Nobbe exclaimed under her breath, but the Princess, usually so careful, who never even bestowed a gift upon an attendant, paid no heed to the mischief she had wrought. Her thoughts were elsewhere.

"Will you do me a service, Count?" Her face flushed crimson as she spoke.

"Your Highness may command me."

"It might be, however, that this service—this service would require the greatest caution." She breathed quickly, as if half stifled.

"What can she want?" Detlev wondered.

"Frau von Bogdanoff said just now that her cousin had a headache. I know what terrible suffering it is, but I have a specific for its cure."

She looked at him as if she expected a reply, an assent. But Detlev was silent. With the best will in the world he could not divine what the Princess wanted.

"Common humanity requires us to be compassionate, Count!" Again the fan cracked in her grasp.

"Most certainly, your Highness."

"What is there more often, more eagerly, and more vainly sought than a sympathetic heart?" she said, with a wonderful intensity of emphasis. A glance met his, so ardent, so strangely expressive, that it startled him. Was it possible that those eyes could belong to the Princess Sibylla? The light had deceived him. He looked again into the face beside him, usually so impassive, and it wore its usual aspect, and was gazing towards Frau von Bogdanoff's box.

"And yet I could have sworn—the effects of light are certainly very bewildering," thought Detlev to himself.

"I should like to send the Princess Arbanoff my vinaigrette. Will you do my errand for me, Count?"

"It is very late, your Highness," Detlev ventured to remark.

"If I send you? My dear Count, I do not believe that Russians are as strict as—let us say, our Germans. There is something of license in their blood. Besides, the end sanctifies the means."

A strange, cold smile curled her lip as she took from the pocket of her gown a long, narrow, silver vinaigrette. "Here it is. I will excuse your absence to the Prince if he should come before the opera is over. And say to the Princess Arbanoff that I trust she is feeling better."

She handed him the tiny flask, and through her glove he could feel that her hand was like ice as, with weary, expressionless eyes, she bade him go.

The adjutant's heart beat high as he left the box. Surprised as he was, and even slightly annoyed, by the Princess's commission, he would have been neither man nor lover not to have resigned himself at last to a sensation of intense happiness. He was, perhaps, to see Ferra this very evening, and by no agency of his own. Even if it were but for a moment and in the presence of her maid, he should be near her, breathe the same air with her, and give her a word of sympathy. He hailed a passing fiacre, jumped in, and drove to the Villa Bogdanoff, while the Princess was saying in a trembling whisper to her confidante, "Was there not a people of antiquity, Amanda, whose women, knowing what they did, sent their dearest ones—husbands, sons, brothers, lovers—to certain death to save their honour?"

"I do not know, your Highness," replied the maid of honour, whose knowledge was limited to the *chronique scandaleuse* of the present; "but I will look it up to-morrow. It ought to be in any 'Encyclopædia.'"

"Never mind," said Sibylla; adding mentally, "As if it were done only in ancient times! The same thing goes on to-day with no martyr's crown as a reward."

The nearer Detlev came to the villa the more unsettled was his mind. What if Ferra should regard his late arrival as an insult? He could not stay in the vehicle. In spite of the snow and rain, he ordered

the driver to halt at the last corner, and sprang out, resolved to walk the rest of the way. His eyes, following his longing thoughts, were eagerly gazing towards the villa, when he saw standing before it a low, elegant coupé. A tall, manly figure crossed the pavement from the mansion and disappeared within the vehicle, which then rolled rapidly towards the city.

Detlev von Rommingen stood for a minute as if paralyzed. Gladly as he would have doubted, it was impossible; he had recognized the Prince. Pain and indignation seemed choking him. The demon of jealousy clutched his heart. Was this mere accident or had the Princess divined it? The poor Princess! He did not say 'poor Detlev,' but he set his teeth and clinched the hand that held the silver flask. He had accepted a commission; it must be fulfilled. Nothing could relieve him from that duty. But he would content himself with handing the flask to Ferras's maid; the wretched farce was too bald. When he thought of his conversation with Eustach on that very afternoon he laughed. The good fellow would have had a lesson could he have been with him now,—a lesson to teach him that the world does not judge without some justification for its judgment. The snow and rain beat against his face. He did not know it, nor did he know that the sensation of cold, of pain, and of an aching void that possessed him, came from within, not from without. The tempest was raging in the very depths of his nature, usually so calm and equable. He was scarcely

his own master when the doors of the Villa Bogdanoff flew open in answer to his touch upon the bell.

Prince Dagobert entered his box just as the curtain was rising upon the third act. The Princess changed colour slightly when she saw him, and the maid of honour was not a little startled. The Prince looked heated and out of humour. When he observed Rommingen's place vacant, he frowned.

"Is my adjutant not here, Sibylla?" he asked, seating himself. "I ordered him to be in attendance."

"He was here a quarter of an hour ago. I gave him a commission to attend to."

"Which took him away?"

"Yes."

"I must request you, Sibylla, not to do anything of the kind in future. Where has he gone?"

"To the Princess Arbanoff, with my vinaigrette. Frau von Bogdanoff told me her cousin was suffering from headache," Sibylla replied, looking coldly and fixedly at her husband, who avoided her glance and nervously twisted his moustache.

"Ah, indeed? That is another affair, and you might be quite sure of my approval, although—it is very late, Sibylla, and such a visit might give rise to gossip. Did you think of that? And you are not wont to be so compassionate." In his turn he scanned her face coolly.

"I do my duty as I see it," the Princess replied, frigidly. "I trust you will allow me the privilege of deciding for myself, Dagobert, what it should be."

Her husband bit his lip, and picking up the broken fan from a chair beside him, amused himself by snapping the sticks that were still unbroken; it seemed to relieve his irritation to wreak it thus upon an inanimate object.

"Ah," said the Princess, watching his occupation, "it is not everything that can be so easily crushed, *mon cher*."

Dagobert looked up startled, then laid the fan aside. "Excuse me, I shall have the pleasure of replacing it for you."

He listened to the rest of 'Lohengrin' in moody silence. Sibylla watched the door of the box, looking for Rommingen's return. It did not open, he did not come. The opera was ended, the princely couple arose,—still the adjutant did not appear. The Prince commented severely and with a frown upon his absence, although Neukirch had immediately offered his services. The Princess's heart throbbed fast; she leaned back in the corner of the carriage, not speaking even to Amanda, thus filling that lady's heart with keen anxiety.

In the vestibule of the Villa Bogdanoff a lackey confronted Detlev. Ma'amselle Jacqueline's pert face was

just disappearing behind the *portière* which hung before the corridor leading to Ferra's apartments.

"Is her Highness at home?" Detlev asked, with a kind of disgust at the question.

"Unfortunately, Madame has a headache." A contemptuous smile hovered upon the young man's lips. For the world a headache,—the world which he belonged to,—but not for Prince Dagobert.

"Call her maid."

"Here I am, Herr Count." And Jacqueline advanced, courtesying.

"If your mistress is not to be seen," said Detlev, exerting all his self-control to suppress any show of interest before the two servants, "give her this little flask. Her Highness the Princess sends it to her in the hope that it will cure her."

The maid did not perceive the scorn in his voice. "I will take it to her instantly. But will not the Herr Count wait an instant? His Highness the Prince has also just been here to ask after Madame, but she would not see him, although he waited for a quarter of an hour in the blue drawing-room. Perhaps now Madame may wish to send a message; pray wait a moment." She led the way to the blue room, and hurried away, with a courtesy.

There was only a single light burning in the chandelier, but for all that Detlev knew he might have stepped into a blaze of sunshine. There was a new earth about him; he could have shouted for joy. The Prince had

not been received. All the misery that had weighed down his soul was scattered like dust before the wind. He grovelled in spirit before Ferra, entreating her pardon for his unworthy doubt of her. Here in this very room the Prince had waited and hoped,—he was not waiting and hoping. He should think it perfectly natural if she refused to make an exception in his favour.

Upon one of the low seats lay a lace kerchief such as is worn around the neck by ladies. He picked it up and kissed it. What if it belonged to Maria Paulovna? He did not care.

In the silence around him he seemed to hear his own heart beat. He could have called her aloud, so passionate a longing for a sight of her suddenly overcame him. He pressed his hands upon his temples and murmured "Ferra!"

"Good-evening, Count." It came like an answer to his low call. There she stood, one arm lifted to hold aside the blue damask *portière*, the other hanging by her side.

Her gown, a kind of wrapper of some soft, white woollen stuff, fell in rich folds about her tall figure, and was confined at the waist by a thick cord of white-and-gold silk. Her golden hair, loosely knotted up, had escaped to lie in heavy waves upon her shoulders; her glorious eyes looked archly into his own.

He fairly staggered with the shock of surprise and delight upon seeing her thus before him.

"I am no phantom," she said, entering the room,

“although you look as if I were. Are you shocked that I should receive a gentleman so late at night? Are you not her Highness’s messenger?”

“I certainly am. Frau von Bogdanoff said you were suffering,” he stammered.

She laughed merrily. “It is gone; my sufferings never last long, and you have come just in time; I was growing very weary of my own society, and I shall not let you go soon.”

He took a seat obediently, feeling a little giddy. “Nevertheless, you would not receive the Prince?”

“Oh, the Prince! That is quite another thing.” She frowned and spoke gravely. “There was no reason why I should receive him, and—— There is no accounting, however, for our likes and dislikes.”

She was looking steadily at him, and toying as she spoke with a gardenia which she had plucked from a jardinière close by.

“Each sometimes falls to our share undeservedly,” he observed, hardly knowing what he said.

• “Sometimes even against our wishes.” She leaned back and looked upward. “I have known people who cared very little for my liking,” she said, with some hesitation.

“Impossible, madame!”

“You, at least, have no right to say so.”

“You ought to know better,—Princess.” He spoke the last word lingeringly, as if to set a mark beyond which he might not venture.

"Yes, I know it well enough. I am not strong, magnanimous, great, and lofty-minded; only a woman, with all the weakness of my sex, and therefore, perhaps, I am all the more sensitive when I am misunderstood and no pains is taken to discover whether I am condemned unjustly."

"Who condemns you, madame?" He took her hand, and as it lay soft and warm in his own an electric current seemed to flow from it, thrilling him to his heart's core.

"He whom you see there," she said, half laughing, half tearfully, as she pointed to the tall mirror opposite, in which Detlev's handsome face and figure were reflected. "Can you not speak a good word for me to him? because—because it makes me so unhappy that he should not think well of me."

She had cast down her eyes, and was evidently struggling with her tears. What if she were neither lofty-minded nor great, he would not have exchanged her at this moment for all the virtues incarnate. It was her sweet self that he desired.

"Ferra," he said, passionately, and in a low voice, for the beating of his heart seemed to stifle his voice, "if you could dream how I love you, how intensely I love you, how I have struggled——"

He got no further. Two soft arms were thrown about him, and a flood of red-gold hair rippled across his chest, while the eyes so near his own shone through brimming tears, and she whispered, in tones of inde-

scribable happiness, "At last! at last! Ah, how could you treat me so!"

As he pressed his lips to hers, all the rest of the world vanished; he knew how truly, how passionately he loved her, how impossible it was that he should now be separated from her.

"Mine, always mine, Detlev? Are you sure?" she asked, tenderly, as they sat side by side on a low lounge. "I am unspeakably happy! Ah, I have so doubted your love for me that I must hear you tell it again and again. I warn you, I shall be insatiable."

She leaned back and looked at him from beneath drooping eyelids, her hands tight clasped in his. The charm that there was about her enveloped him like a cloud; he felt weak and a slave beneath its spell. He kneeled upon a cushion at her feet, and poured into her ear all the ardent protestations, all the tender words he had so often spoken to her in dreams.

"And you will always love me thus, Detlev? Always?" she asked, a world of true affection in her eyes.

"Always!"

"Just as I am? With all my faults?"

"Just as you are, my own love."

As he knelt she wound about his neck, laughing, a strand of her golden hair. "Now you are really my prisoner," she cried, merrily.

The little porcelain clock on the mantel struck eleven. Detlev extricated himself from his fetters and arose. "We have forgotten the time, Ferra; I must go."

She clasped her hands, and without stirring, said, "Stay, Detlev."

He walked hesitatingly towards the door.

"Stay!" she said again.

He turned and knelt at her feet again. "Ferra, your power over me terrifies me. God grant that no serious question should ever intervene between us."

"Could you not forget it for love of me?" she asked, hastily, with something like a dawning dread in her tone.

"I cannot tell. But why disturb the delicious present with impossible surmises? What could come between us? Are you not free, and am not I the same? Do we not love each other? and is there not a golden future before us? Oh, my love! my love! you cannot dream as yet how you are everything in this world to me!" And he clasped her passionately, and yet with reverent tenderness, to his heart.

"Heyday!" It was Maria Paulovna's voice.

They had not heard the carriage drive up, nor the opening of the door, and now the little Russian was standing on the threshold, her head on one side, her almond-shaped, obliquely-set eyes fixed upon the lovers. In an instant they had started apart, and Ferra flew to her cousin.

"Mietza, dear Mietza, he loves me! We are betrothed." And then, remembering the first evening of their meeting when she had described him in this very room, she added, archly, "You see, after all, our atmosphere was not without danger for him."

"All's well that ends well," said Frau von Bogdanoff. "At present, of course, you see roses blossoming on every bush, and I can do no less than wish you joy. By and by you will find out that the gate of Eden, through which you think you are passing, is nothing but a rainbow, behind which the world looks pretty much as it does before it."

But there were 'kindly drops' in the small black eyes, although no one would have denied their existence so stoutly as Maria Paulovna herself.

Detlev walked home like a man in a dream. Was it really true? Ferra, the admired of all, the desire of all hearts, his own! Hitherto there had been no charm for him in the idea that the woman whom he might woo should be courted also by other men. No, he had often thought it would interfere with his sole possession of her; but how could Ferra help the charm that subdued every one? He had proved its might. And they loved each other,—loved like two happy children, with no obstacle to their happiness. If destiny should ever bring down upon them its brazen hammer, would it separate them or weld them together for all time? Detlev put this question from him; his happiness was so new, such a gift from heaven, that any question with regard to it seemed to him a sacrilege. One thing was certain, she loved him no less than he loved her, and honest love would bridge over every chasm. He actually opened wide his arms in the rain and darkness as he saw before his mind's eye Ferra in

her simple white robe with her gleaming hair and glorious eyes.

“Oh, my love! my love!” he murmured, “your path through life shall be one of roses. I shall know how to clear away all the thorns.” And remembering Eustach’s hints, his heart swelled with anger and pity. “No one shall ever dare to breathe a word against you.”

The cousins soon bade each other good-night in the Villa Bogdanoff. Since Maria Paulovna found it impossible to maintain a cool demeanour, the only way was to go to bed.

As Jacqueline was brushing her mistress’s hair, she said, slyly, “Madame can have no idea of how the Herr Count looked when I told him that Madame was not receiving, and that I had had to send away the Prince. Why, he looked ready to embrace me.”

Ferra laughed, and took a costly bracelet from its velvet case on the toilette-table. “Here, Jacqueline,” she said, kindly, “take that in memory of to-day, which has brought me great happiness, and on my wedding-day you shall have a dowry, so that you can marry any one whom you choose, for it must be very sad to be separated from one whom we love.”

The maid’s gratitude warmed Ferra’s heart; she would have liked to make the whole world happy, now that she had attained what had seemed to her so far beyond her reach.

“My Detlev,” she said, half aloud, as she laid her

head on the pillow, possessed by a sensation of such bliss as she had never before thought possible. Suddenly she started up, and, leaning on her elbow, looked eagerly through the room, illuminated by the fire on the hearth, towards an opposite mirror, which reflected her image as she reclined among her pillows. "Am I doing wrong not to tell him that I came from the Rue Rochefort?" she thought. "Must I tell him tomorrow? He is so odd in some things, he might not regard it as Constantin did." She covered her face with her hands; the mere thought of his forsaking her because of it made her dizzy. How she loved him! She had never dreamed that there could be so mighty a power in the world. She dropped her hands, looked at herself again in the mirror, and the consciousness of her beauty comforted her, at first only partially, then entirely.

"He loves me, and he will love me more and more," she thought, smiling at the remembrance of how a word had brought him to her feet again; that proof of her power greatly pleased her. "Why should I trouble him and myself with disagreeable memories? His love is stronger than his pride. And I am too much of a coward to speak; he knows that I am not of the stuff that heroines are made of.

"After we are married I will tell him all about it, and he will kiss me and forgive me for not telling him before. It really is of no consequence. I will be married in white velvet. Ah, Detlev, you shall be

proud of your wife, even although——” Here she cut short her train of thought and recurred to her lover ; it was so much pleasanter to dwell upon the present and the future than upon the gloomy past, which she had made up her mind to say nothing about to Detlev.

CHAPTER XIV.

CONGRATULATIONS.

THE next morning his Highness received his adjutant with a frown when Detlev presented himself to explain his long absence upon the previous evening.

"Yes, it was quite incomprehensible," Prince Dagobert repeated, pacing the room to and fro, pondering how to contrive to learn, without arousing suspicion, whether Rommingen had recognized him, since he must have met him when going to the Villa Bogdanoff.

"Your Highness will, I am sure, be more lenient," Detlev began, with a smile, "when you have heard my excuse. I was betrothed yesterday evening to the Princess Arbanoff."

"Betrothed? to the Princess Arbanoff?" Dagobert was very nearly put off his guard by the intelligence, but, recovering himself in time, he walked hastily to the window, and, standing with his back turned to his adjutant, said, "Tell me about it. I am greatly interested. It must have been very unexpected."

"Not quite, your Highness; my betrothed and I have cared for each other for some time." How proudly he said it! How strangely sweet the words 'my betrothed' sounded!

Prince Dagobert drummed one march after another with his fingers on the window-sill.

“Did you—did the Princess Arbanoff not tell you that I went myself to inquire after her health last evening?” he said at last.

“We are both most sensible of your kindness, your Highness, and most grateful for it.” Detlev spoke very gravely. Dagobert turned, came towards him, and, holding him by a button of his uniform, looked him directly in the face and said,—

“Rommingen, you are a thief. Laugh at me if you choose. I will not deny that I was most sentimentally disposed with regard to the lovely Russian. Of course that is all past now. You have always been to me a dear comrade, in spite of some slight differences of late—hm!—you understand me. But knowing you as I do, this hurried betrothal has surprised me extremely. I congratulate you, congratulate you from my heart, Count,—both yourself and your beautiful betrothed.” And clapping him on the shoulder, the Prince added, with a sigh, “Lucky fellow! On my honour you are greatly to be envied!”

“I thank your Highness most sincerely.”

“At all events we should be grateful to you for keeping the Princess Arbanoff here.” Dagobert tried to speak jestingly. “What will the Princess Sibylla say? Of course I must do my part and dispense with your society for to-day. Let Neukirch come to me. And again accept my congratulations, Rommingen.”

The adjutant bowed. "May I be allowed to return to the Princess Sibylla in person the little flask she confided to me last evening?"

"Do so, do so, my dear Count, and tell her at the same time how it paved the way for the union of two hearts. It will interest her extremely,—extremely."

Fräulein von Nobbe, with elevated eyebrows, announced to her mistress that Prince Dagobert's favourite adjutant was waiting in the anteroom desiring an audience. It was so unheard-of a circumstance that Sibylla's heightened colour as she gave orders to admit him might well be pardoned. The maid of honour discreetly withdrew to the recess of a window, and the Princess asked her visitor, with some eagerness, "Is there any unusual cause for your visit, Count?"

"First of all, I wish to return this flask to your Highness."

"Oh, there was no reason for such haste. I supposed it still in the Princess Arbanoff's possession. Had you no opportunity to give it to her?"

"Oh, yes, your Highness. But the Princess was so far recovered that I had no hesitation in bringing it back to its owner."

"You saw her, then?" Her voice expressed incredulous surprise. "It was late."

"It certainly was, your Highness. Nevertheless, I had that happiness. From small causes greater effects

may spring. Owing to your Highness's kindness in intrusting the flacon to me, I am enabled to pray your Highness for your congratulations upon my betrothal to the Princess Arbanoff."

Detlev had been prepared for an exclamation of surprise, but the effect of his words was entirely unexpected. The Princess started up and turned very pale. "Impossible!" she half gasped.

"Impossible, your Highness?" There was something of warning in his tone, and it recalled Sibylla to herself. She passed her handkerchief over her lips, and said, taking a long breath,—

"I am excessively surprised."

"Has your Highness no congratulations for me?"

"No!" she said, in a hard tone, half turning from him, "for I see no happiness for you in such a union. I have always considered you a man in the best sense of the word. I cannot have been mistaken in you, although now I see you bow blindly to beauty, and to mere beauty." She spoke hurriedly, and advanced towards him. Detlev was amazed beyond expression, feeling at once embarrassed and irritated by her words.

"Your Highness is severe."

"For your sake I hope I may be wrong, but beauty is in my eyes a doubtful gift. It vanishes and leaves a melancholy void behind. Still I will not withhold from you my wish that I may have been too strict a judge. May you find in your betrothed everything

that you have hitherto prized most highly in woman! May you be happy!"

"I confidently hope to be so, your Highness."

She offered him her hand, which he carried respectfully to his lips, although his heart revolted from the homage, and it was only as a courtier that he paid it. Sibylla had apparently entirely recovered her wonted self-possession.

"Take a greeting from me to Frau von Bogdanoff, as well as to your betrothed."

It was with decidedly conflicting sensations that Detlev left the castle. Sibylla's words had struck a discordant note within him. One glance from Ferras's eyes and the discord would be resolved to harmony, but for the moment his sky was overcast. He had supposed that his betrothal would be especially welcome to the Princess as freeing her from any cause for jealousy. He had been mistaken, and he was annoyed.

"What do you say to it, Amanda?" asked the Princess, seating herself so that her back was turned to her confidante.

"I am paralyzed, your Highness."

"I had credited Rommingen with more prudence, more discrimination."

"He is but a man, after all," Fräulein von Nobbe observed, with immense contempt.

All D—— was greatly excited. The news spread like wild-fire among those classes of society which took an interest in the court and its doings. Eustach nearly

shook his friend's hand off, and vowed that nothing in the world could have given him such delight, that he rejoiced to know that slanderous tongues would now be silenced forever, and that he should from this time forth have a higher opinion of his best, truest friend. All this boyish enthusiasm touched Detlev,—it was so frank and honest,—although he was quite aware that Eustach had hardly escaped scathless from the magic of Ferra's glance, and that nothing but her entire unconsciousness had prevented the young fellow from engaging his heart too deeply.

“And you will never be jealous, however devoted I am to her?” the hussar asked, frankly. “A quarrel with you, Detlev,—no woman on earth would be worth that to me.”

“Never, my boy,” the adjutant said, smiling. “I would ask you rather to give her a share of the friendship which you bestow upon me.”

“Be sure of that,” said the hussar; “and be sure, too, Detlev, that nothing shall ever sever our friendship, my dear fellow.”

CHAPTER XV.

HER HIGHNESS'S BIRTHDAY.

BEFORE the spring was fairly abroad in the land Princess Sibylla celebrated her birthday in a small, select circle of her friends. On this occasion the 'Chambers of Horrors' were all thrown open, and the invitations were issued through Fräulein von Nobbe by the Princess herself.

The blasts of a stormy day whistled over the roofs and through the houses, shrieked among the weather-cocks, and sounded especially loud in the royal castle, as Sibylla stood at the window of a little drawing-room belonging to her suite of apartments, looking out at the trees, whipped by the wind, and tossing their still leafless boughs as if in agony. At the other window stood the table loaded with her gifts, and decorated by the tasteful hand of the Countess Lenheim, her Mistress of the Robes. The Duke had sent several costly works of art in bronze and majolica, and Prince Dagobert, various articles of jewelry, which from their open cases shed a warm lustre in spite of the clouded daylight.

The official congratulations were over; only the Princess's most intimate friends had been present; for

those whose loyalty yearned to find expression on this day a paper had been prepared for signature in the anteroom,—a paper privately studied afterwards by the Princess, that she might on occasion know where to bestow her favours.

Prince Dagobert had taken his departure after kissing her hand and murmuring his good wishes, in return for which she had coldly thanked him for his gifts. She knew perfectly well that he had probably just seen them for the first time, if indeed he had taken the trouble to look at them. The Mistress of the Robes and the faithful Nobbe had arranged the whole affair, after discussing with their royal mistress what the gifts were to be.

Not one of them was accompanied by a cordial word from her husband, not one of them was intended as a pleasant surprise for her; they were here merely in conformity with a conventional duty. It was fulfilled, and that was all.

And yet the Princess had searched eagerly through all the costly articles on the table, careless of disarranging them, apparently looking for something else. And then she had said to the Countess Lenheim, "You have arranged everything most tastefully, my dear Countess; you are sure nothing is forgotten? The Prince is sometimes careless in such matters."

"Your Highness honours me by such praise. No, there is nothing forgotten of the Prince's. Seven pieces. Here they are."

Sibylla frowned, and nodded indifferently. "By far

too many! All useless, my dear Countess, mere outward show."

The suite of rooms thrown open in the evening glittered in the light of hundreds of candles, but there was a strange air of comfortlessness and coldness about them in spite of their splendour. It was impossible to feel at home there, at least so thought Ferra, as, upon the arm of her betrothed, she walked through them towards the small reception-room in which the Princess received her guests.

Tea was served in this room, where, indeed, only the ladies were seated; the gentlemen stood about with their cups in their hands. Fräulein von Nobbe, who was presiding at the tea-table, talked in an undertone with her brother; the artist Laudin, graciously invited by the Princess, stood apart in a corner and watched Ferra, who was talking and laughing with Detlev and Eustach; the Prince was in the adjoining room with some guests of the diplomatic corps.

Sibylla's glance rested upon the three handsome, happy people near her with a strangely gloomy expression, which was quickened to eager interest as she noticed, among the bracelets on the wrist of the hand which Ferra laid upon Detlev's arm to engage his attention, a hoop of diamonds so brilliant that it seemed to dart forth flame. The longer she looked at it the paler she became; she bit her lip, and finally, with a sudden resolve, put down her cup and approached the group.

"Will you allow me to admire that bracelet,

madame? The setting seems to me as unique as the stones are costly."

Ferra rose and tried to unclasp the ornament, but without success. She turned to her betrothed. "Unclasp it, Detlev."

He had just pressed the spring of the clasp, when Prince Dagobert appeared at the door of the room and beckoned to his adjutant. Detlev laid the bracelet in Ferra's hand before he left her, and she handed it to the Princess.

Sibylla blushed, perhaps disapproving of the unconscious familiarity of Ferra's manner towards her betrothed. She examined the bracelet closely. The clasp of the hoop was a wonderfully well executed head of the Sphinx.

"As artistically beautiful as it is costly. It is immensely valuable, madame."

As she spoke she looked directly in Ferra's face, calling up there a blush of embarrassment.

"I know very little about that, your Highness," she said, with some hesitation.

"If it was a present," Sibylla went on, "the giver might well be a Prince Arbanoff, a husband of fabulous wealth."

"I really did not know that it was of any extraordinary value, your Highness. I have a great many things of the kind."

"That cannot prevent your prizing one more than another, if only for the sake of the giver," the Princess

said, significantly. "Ask Count Rommingen if he does not think it a most costly and original ornament."

With a smile that was anything but gracious the Princess turned away. Eustach was talking to some one else, Detlev had not returned, and so for one moment Ferra stood alone in the room. A helpless feeling of distress, a foreboding of evil, suddenly possessed her. The bracelet, which she still held, seemed to scorch like fire. For one instant she wondered what the Princess could mean, the next she longed to fling the bracelet away and take refuge at Detlev's side.

"What, madame? Alone? And melancholy?" It was Lieutenant Nobbe's nasal voice that addressed her. "No one seems quite cheerful. The Princess is out of sorts; all the world is tired at the end of the season. Allow me."

He offered his arm, and Ferra, who had no idea that she had long been an object of observation to him, took it.

"I should like to go to my cousin," she said, instinctively seeking protection.

"Ah, she is in the third room on the right. But may I not first be of assistance in replacing your bracelet, madame?"

She still had the hoop in her hand, uncertain what to do with it. At that moment she accidentally encountered Sibylla's glance. It was so provoking, so full of contemptuous dislike, that beneath it Ferra's distress was transformed to anger. With a smile of

haughty defiance, and with head erect, she clasped the bracelet on her wrist again. There was to be war between them, then. Well, she was ready. The aversion which she had half unconsciously felt to the Princess burst into a flame, and, yielding to the impulse of the moment, as she always did, she said to her companion, who was looking at her with a sarcastic smile, "I wish this evening were over; I dislike being here very much."

The lieutenant made no rejoinder to this remark, but, still smiling, silently conducted her to the room where Frau von Bogdanoff was the centre of a knot of acquaintances. Here Ferra took her seat, her heart filled with defiance and a sense of injury. Nobbe also joined the group.

Meanwhile, Detlev, who had been requested by the Prince to fetch an important document from the other wing of the castle, had returned with it, and stood awaiting further orders. But Prince Dagobert said, kindly, "I will not be so cruel, my dear Rommingen, as to detain you any longer. Your lovely betrothed gave me a glance just now that was scarcely gracious. Pray return to her."

When Detlev entered the reception-room, where the Princess was still sitting with some ladies, he found that Ferra had left it, but when he would have followed her example the Princess came forward. "Have you a moment to bestow upon me, Count?"

"I am entirely at your Highness's commands."

"Then pray come with me to my boudoir and help me to choose places for these beautiful bronzes. I have a high appreciation of your artistic taste."

She had spoken aloud, and as if it were all a very simple matter, and now she took his arm. Detlev, although rather amazed that the Princess should have awaked so suddenly to a sense of his artistic ability, saw no hidden significance in her request, and did as he was bidden. She talked continuously and rather loudly as they passed through the rooms where there were guests. When they entered the boudoir, Sibylla closed the *portière* herself, and, aware that they could not reckon upon being alone for longer than a few minutes, spoke hurriedly and to the point.

"I did not bring you here, Count Rommingen, to discuss the arrangement of my bronzes. Pray be seated."

She pointed to a low, cushioned seat close beside her arm-chair. Detlev obeyed; it was quite clear to him that she found it difficult to say what she intended to. She was flushed with suppressed agitation, and her voice sounded veiled as she began.

"Did you observe the bracelet that the Princess Arbanoff wore to-night?"

"The one which I unclasped to show to your Highness?"

"The same."

"Was there anything to observe about it?" Detlev asked, annoyed at what seemed to him so trivial a question.

"I am afraid you will resent what I wish to say," she replied, as if wavering in her determination; "we are rarely grateful to those who inform us of what is disagreeable."

"Your Highness has said either too much or too little to hesitate to continue." The adjutant's manner was almost dictatorial, and there was a frown on his brow.

"I will not hesitate,—you shall hear all,—all, Count, and I will leave you to judge for yourself. That bracelet was a present to the Princess Arbanoff from my husband."

"Impossible!" Detlev started as if he had received a blow; then, recovering his self-possession by an effort, he continued: "Your Highness has been misled by a striking similarity."

"Do you imagine I should have spoken if it were so?" Her eyes held his as by a spell; her hands played nervously with a delicate little porcelain figure which she had taken from the table beside her.

"Then I must beg your Highness for further details." Detlev's voice was coldly monotonous, but he feared Sibylla would hear the beating of his heart, it sounded so loud in his own ears.

"Three days ago I accidentally found the ornament on my husband's writing-table. Naturally I said nothing about it, expecting to find it to-day among my birthday gifts. It was not there, and I saw it again on the Princess Arbanoff's arm. The workmanship is so unique that a mistake is impossible."

"But how comes it that the Princess Arbanoff receives gifts from Prince Dagobert?" the adjutant asked, haughtily, in positive torture.

"The Princess Arbanoff—your betrothed—in a stage queen it might be pardoned, of course, but for a high-bred lady——"

"There must be some misunderstanding," Detlev interposed. "I have no doubt that my betrothed will explain it."

He drew his hand across his forehead, and moistened his dry lips.

"How he must love that woman!" the Princess thought, seeing how he was tortured, but she had no compassion for him.

"Will your Highness allow me to withdraw?"

She laid a detaining hand upon his arm. "Not yet. Wait a few moments, until you are calm. Every one would observe your agitation, and why should they? It is enough that we must bear our own burdens; why allow others to perceive their weight?"

"Thanks for your Highness's warning."

"Oh, I am accustomed to think of these things," Sibylla said, with a melancholy smile; "and before you go, Count, give me your hand in pledge that you cherish no unkindness towards me. What I have said springs from a desire to serve you. There are things which are far more innocent than they appear, but which nevertheless may cast a shadow upon a man's name when they are known to the world, and I

will not—I will not have your name thus shadowed !” She had risen and had taken Detlev’s hand, clasping it firmly, while her eyes seemed to burn into his own. Detlev stooped and pressed his lips upon the hand which held his.

“Frivolity is sure to sting the hearts of others,” she said, as if to console him. “Never allow it, Count; it is the serpent in Eden. You can act and demand. You are a man. A woman can only endure in silence.”

He forced his features to assume their wonted composure. Her last words were but a dull murmur in his ears.

“Go now,” said Sibylla. “I hear footsteps.” He left the boudoir with a mute inclination. Then first she saw that the little figure she had toyed with—a tiny Psyche of Meissen porcelain—lay broken at her feet, its wings crushed by its fall.

“The inhabitants of the stars alone need wings,” she thought, looking down at the shattered toy. “We must have weapons if we would live.”

The approaching footsteps had retreated again, and she was alone for a few minutes. She sat down, closed her eyes, and, listening to the howling of the wind outside, repeated incessantly to herself, “What will he do?”

Detlev traversed the rooms as slowly as before, when the Princess’s hand lay on his arm. Every step seemed to cost him an effort. His pride was in arms.

What Sibylla had just told him was an accusation of the being whom he loved best on earth. He longed to shout out her defence to all the world ; to declare that Ferra might indeed have acted thoughtlessly, but that she could never have been guilty of a degrading act or thought. Why had she not consulted him before consenting to accept a bracelet from the Prince? He had a right to her every thought,—a right he was not minded to relinquish.

The more he reflected the more Prince Dagobert seemed to him the one to blame. How had he dared to present a costly gift to his betrothed without his knowledge? without Sibylla's knowledge? Did Frau von Bogdanoff know anything about it? And why should Ferra not have acknowledged to the Princess that the bracelet was the gift of the Prince, her husband? His anger choked him. By heavens! he was neither suspicious nor distrustful, but he was sensitive on many points, and a stern judge. It was his nature to be so, and he could not acquit of blame any one connected with all this. As he thus struggled with anger and wounded pride, he heard Ferra's rippling laughter in the next room. It did not soothe him ; on the contrary, it irritated him. Perhaps she was jesting with the Prince. The blood rushed to his head at the thought. The Princess was right, he must first control himself; and yet, without delay, he drew back the *portière* at the entrance of the next room. It was a rather small, octagonal apartment.

Ferra was standing before a large mirror; both hands were lifted to her head, showing her lithe, graceful figure to the greatest advantage. In one hand she held a small pair of scissors, and in the other one of her golden curls, already half severed. Perceiving in the mirror Detlev's entrance, she turned her lovely face towards him. Frau von Bogdanoff, Neukirch, Laudin, Nobbe, and two other guests were seated about, looking on. No one save Ferra and the tall lieutenant had observed Rommingen's entrance. Ferra smiled at him without interrupting her occupation. It never occurred to her that her betrothed could object to it.

Detlev paused in dismay. Still struggling with himself, he was disposed to judge by an unusually severe standard everything that conflicted with conventional propriety, and that something of the kind was in progress here, his betrothed's attitude and the interest of the spectators led him to suspect. His wrath gathered fresh fuel.

Meanwhile, the scissors had completed their task, and Ferra triumphantly held out the severed curl. "I have kept my promise," she said, offering it to the artist Laudin. "If I could only gratify all wishes as easily——"

On the instant she felt a cold, firm clasp upon the hand holding the curl, and Rommingen stood beside her, a little paler than was his wont. "Allow me to learn something of this interesting transaction before you

conclude it, Ferra," he said, quietly, and yet there was something in his tone that made her look at him in surprise.

"By and by," she said, piqued, for the firm grasp of his hand annoyed her.

"No, now, if you please. It is not always wise to gratify every wish." He took pains to speak jestingly, but he hardly succeeded.

"Madame von Arbanoff was only following the dictates of common humanity," Nobbe's nasal tones interposed, and all present could not help perceiving, with a certain embarrassment, that Rommingen was taking the matter very seriously.

"Thank you," Detlev rejoined, over his shoulder, "but Madame von Arbanoff's explanation will quite suffice me."

"Still, he is very right," Maria Paulovna exclaimed, shrilly. "Don't play the tyrant, Rommingen."

"That magnificent shade is indeed worthy of an artist's brush, as Herr von Rommingen must be well aware," said Neukirch. Then, leaning across Frau von Bogdanoff's chair, he whispered, "Such a fuss about a mere jest."

Ferra was silent, even when Laudin, at Detlev's interference, dropped the hand he had raised to receive the curl, and said, changing colour, "Of course, Herr Count, I submit absolutely to your decision, but Madame von Arbanoff, by the sacrifice of that curl, would have enabled me to complete a picture upon which I

have founded great hopes,—hopes of which another could hardly judge,—and which needs just that shade of hair to perfect its subject.”

Involuntarily, he had spoken almost in a tone of entreaty. Detlev felt that all eyes were upon him, and, after a moment's struggle, he said, with composure, “I merely wished to have my curiosity satisfied. Of course I should be sorry to prevent the Princess Arbanoff from performing a kindly office. Only let me pray you to return the curl when it has served your purpose. Naturally, I do not wish to resign my right to the possession of even such a trifle.”

“I promise,” Laudin said, gravely.

“I begged him again and again to paint his Helen's hair another colour,” Nobbe said, with an ugly smile, “but artists are obstinate folk.”

After this a certain constraint was felt by all. The various members of the small circle scattered, and the lovers were left alone. Ferra had seated herself upon a low divan that ran all around the sides of the room. Detlev stood gazing at her gloomily. She yawned slightly and looked away from him, her foot tapping the floor impatiently beneath the lace of her dress. The brilliants in the Sphinx bracelet shot forth their lightnings. Silence reigned in the room, even between the betrothed couple. A faint flush appeared in Ferra's cheeks, which soon deepened to an angry crimson; her eyes sparkled; she sprang up and approached him. “What does this mean, Detlev?”

“Can you ask me?” he replied, in equal agitation. “Am I to look on in calm content while my betrothed gives away a curl of her hair?”

“What? Jealous?” Her voice had lost all its irritation.

“Jealous? No! I dislike it because it is opposed to everything that I have been accustomed all my life to consider delicate and sacred, to all that is modest and becoming.”

She started as if she had been struck, and grew deadly pale. “Detlev!” she cried.

He bit his lip and was silent.

“Are you in earnest?” she stammered.

“What else can I be when my betrothed accepts presents——?”

“What do you mean?” she interrupted him, with wide, wondering eyes.

“Who gave you that bracelet?” he demanded, in return, grasping her wrist almost savagely.

“You hurt me.” There was a certain terror in her low tone; it almost appeased his wrath to hear such entreaty in it.

“Was it the Prince?” he asked, hoarsely, awaiting her reply as the prisoner awaits the death-sentence.

“Yes,” she said, looking up at him surprised and timid; “he brought it to me this morning.”

“And you accepted it? You could accept it, Ferra? You could grieve me so?”

He shivered as if from a fever-fit.

"I do not comprehend you. What harm can it do you, Detlev?" He did not reply. "Detlev, Detlev, what have I done?"

"You do not comprehend," he said, bitterly. "It is that which so dismays me. Have you no feeling for the——" 'the disgrace' he meant to say, but as he looked at her gazing at him, so crushed and uncomprehending, he bethought himself, and said instead, "the pain you cause me?"

"No," she replied, in honest amazement. "The Prince brought me the bracelet to-day; he had bought it when he was selecting birthday-gifts for the Princess. It was to replace one which fell off my arm when I was dancing, and which he accidentally stepped on and crushed. I took it, although I did not care much about it. I have more than enough of such gewgaws, but I did not wish to offend him; he has always been very attentive to me. You find no fault with my accepting flowers. Where is the difference?"

Detlev fairly gasped; it seemed to him incredible that Ferra should not regard the matter as he did. How could she accept flowers and diamonds with equal ease? She must be wanting in that delicate tact which had so distinguished the women of his family, and which was for him as inseparable from a high-born woman as the fragrance from a flower; but she certainly had acted in perfect innocence, without a thought of evil.

"Well?" she asked, impatiently, looking him full in the face. "Why do you not speak, Detlev?"

"Because I do not understand your view of this matter."

"If you expect to see any great value attached to these stones they must be given to some one else, not to me," she said, with irritation, taking her seat again on the divan. "I believe there are women who go into ecstasies over such jewels; for me they are worth nothing."

"And why did you not tell the Princess that the bracelet was a gift from her husband?" He sat down beside her, and, taking her fan from her, began to open and shut it. She blushed.

"That is quite another thing. I cannot help feeling that she watches me with Argus-eyes; nothing that I do escapes her. She hates me."

"You go too far, Ferra. The Princess may have narrow views upon some points, but she means well. We should respect principles and convictions even when we do not share them."

She glanced up at him quickly. "You defend her? And against me?"

He sighed. "I wish I could endow you with some of my sentiments. Child, have you never reflected that such thoughtless actions as the acceptance of a bracelet, and the bestowal of a curl may give rise to unpleasant surmises?"

She laughed. "What do I care what the people here say about me? Dear Detlev, I do not share the ambition of your German women to be faultless, and

to be canonized for my virtues. I am what I am. Tell me, is that so very dreadful?"

She looked at him with her wonderful eyes brimming with laughter, seductive, enchanting, irresistible as no other woman had ever been for him. He was terrified by her power over him.

"You must think somewhat of me," he said, looking down at the fan he held to avoid her gaze. "You expose me to unpleasant surmises, and they annoy me. The Princess knows about the bracelet."

"And why should she not?" she said, haughtily. "It can make no possible difference to me."

"But to me. She reproached me for allowing it, and I cannot endure a shadow cast upon the name of her whom I call mine."

Ferra's head drooped low, her breath came short and quick, the hands clasped in her lap trembled, and hot tears fell upon them. Detlev watched her silently for a moment, and then he could bear it no longer; her tears cut him to the quick.

"Do not cry," he begged, putting his arm around her, and reproaching himself for his harshness.

"You will not care for me any more," she said, with a helpless, imploring glance.

He took her hand and kissed it. "Can you need to be contradicted, Ferra?" His voice trembled.

She looked shyly around the deserted room, then leaned her head upon his shoulder. "I will return the bracelet to the Prince, dear Detlev; and what shall I do

about the curl? Laudin besought me so for it, and Mietza thought there was no harm in it,—but tell me, you tell me what I ought to do.”

Her face shone as if with sunshine. She sprang up, dried her eyes, breathed upon her handkerchief, put it to them, and looked in the mirror.

“Do I look as if I had been crying? No, Detlev, they shall not think you a tyrant, although Constantin”—she gave a little sigh—“was more indulgent to me.”

“What? A tender *tête-à-tête*? Well, we will try not to be curious,” said Prince Dagobert from the door-way.

Detlev arose, and Ferra replied, “Not at all tender, your Highness. Ah, how he has scolded me!”

“You are a savage, Rommingen! What can your betrothed have done to deserve such treatment? Are not beautiful women always in the right?”

“Then, your Highness, the other is doubly to blame,” the adjutant said, fearlessly.

“And that other?” Dagobert was struck by his adjutant’s tone, and looked at him inquiringly.

“Is the giver of this bracelet, your Highness.”

“Ah, indeed! ah, indeed!” The Prince, in some embarrassment, twisted his long moustache, and tapped the carpet with his foot. “The matter is a very simple one. I owed Madame a bracelet for one which I accidentally spoiled. It was given precisely as it was accepted.”

“Of that I have not the slightest doubt, your Highness. But will not others have the right——?”

“What others?” the Prince asked, haughtily. He was annoyed, and Detlev did nothing to smooth over matters.

“Her Highness the Princess Sibylla, for example.”

Prince Dagobert shrugged his shoulders,—a very uncomfortable pause ensued.

“So much ado about nothing!” he said at last, nervously. “I regret excessively having caused you annoyance, madame.”

Ferra had taken off the bracelet and held it out between her finger-tips, as if she were afraid it would burn her.

“May I return it to your Highness?”

“Since you request it I cannot refuse, madame.” He took it and thrust it into his breast-pocket. “The thought that it has at least adorned your arm for a few hours must reconcile me to my disappointment.”

It was a slight solace to his irritation to ignore Rommingen, who stood by, as he kissed Ferra’s hand and then left the room.

“Are you satisfied now?” Ferra asked her lover. “You will make me afraid of you, Detlev!”

“At least we have done all that we could; but let me entreat you, Ferra, to guard against such thoughtlessness, or——”

“Oh, Cæsar, thou hast said it!” exclaimed Maria Paulovna, suddenly appearing, and rustling towards the

pair. "What now? The best you can do is to bow low, and submit to the will of the lady of your choice, like every other man. Come, Ferra, I want to present to you a very good friend of mine who has just returned from a journey, and to whom I have been praising you to the skies."

With a laugh, and a grimace at Rommingen, she drew her cousin away with her. Detlev stood aside and looked after the two figures so strangely dissimilar. He was disturbed in mind. He had been thrown off his mental balance, and he was very nearly at odds with himself and the world. The greater the power gained over him by his love,—and that it increased from day to day he was well aware,—the deeper the wounds made by the thorns in his path. There were moments when he was feverishly on the lookout for excuses for his betrothed's conduct, and yet he had always regarded it as a foregone conclusion that the woman who was to be his wife should go through life in spotless purity, untouched by any breath of slander.

Maria Paulovna had conducted her cousin to the room where the Princess was again seated amidst her friends, apparently perfectly calm. From afar she observed that the bracelet was no longer upon Ferra's arm, and a triumphant smile played about her lips for a moment. Rommingen had followed her advice, then. Ferra looked rather depressed; the Princess was quite skilful in reading faces. She dismissed, with a gracious gesture, a gentleman who had been paying

his respects to her, and who now turned and looked towards the two Russians as they advanced.

At sight of them he started slightly, but his features were so entirely under his control that not a muscle quivered. He half closed his eyes, and from beneath their drooping lids shot a glance that belied the easy indifference of his bearing.

When Ferra perceived him she uttered a low cry, tottered, and, leaning heavily upon her cousin's arm, looked for an instant as if upon the point of fainting.

"What is the matter?" Frau von Bogdanoff asked in amazement.

Ferra pressed her handkerchief to her eyes, struggling for composure.

"You come at an unfortunate moment, Vicomte," said Maria Paulovna. "My cousin does not seem well."

"It is over now," Ferra said, faintly, but the pallor of her cheek belied her words.

"Then let me present to you, Ferra, Vicomte L roy, a bearer of despatches from the French Republic and a friend of my family."

"And still more of its representative here; do not forget to add that, Maria Paulovna, for it is my pride," said Leroy's hard, unmusical voice, as he bowed low. "I count it an honour to pay my respects to the Princess Arbanoff."

His words and tone were those of the merest conventional courtesy, nor was there a trace of recogni-

tion in the look which rested upon Ferra, and yet she was perfectly aware that at the moment his thoughts no less than hers were busy with the luxurious little palace in Paris, with Achille, Clarisse, the entire past which she had thought dead and buried. She was grateful for an instant that he treated her as if he had never before seen her, but, strangely enough, the old feeling of antipathy for him awoke within her more strongly than ever.

She sank into the nearest seat. She seemed to herself to be upon the brink of a dizzy abyss. Detlev! What would Detlev say if he should learn what Leroy knew? She was tortured by an anxiety that made speech almost impossible. She did not see that Maria Paulovna had turned away to join an ambadress who had just appeared. She suddenly felt Leroy's breath upon her cheek, and heard him say in an undertone, "I trust, madame, that I have merited your thanks. There are things about which silence and forgetfulness are best. No one here knows of your stay in Paris. I pray you consider me as your devoted friend and treat me as such," he continued, persistently, when she made no reply.

"Then be silent in future!" she said, quickly, with a sigh of relief.

"Did you doubt me? What would I not do for you, madame, might I only be allowed?"

Ferra's brow was clouded. Leroy's voice, the glance of his eyes, affected her as disagreeably as they had

done when he had sought her love in the Palais Arbanoff. Did he wish to approach her as a lover now? Was that why he offered to be silent? But Detlev was here, her betrothed! She hoped that the thought of him would soothe her. She looked about for him; he was not in the room, and she was not soothed; on the contrary, after the scene of to-day her conscience was troubled by the idea that she was not at all sure how a knowledge of her past would affect him. Of course, that which she thought of in that past was the being found in the dark, damp cellar in the Rue Rochefort; she forgot the evil tongues that work such misery in the world.

At sight of her the passion which Anatole had conceived for her when he saw her first in the bloom of her beauty in Achille's dimly-lit apartment had started to life again, but in a different form. The conquest of the Ferra of that former time had seemed to him an easy achievement. The Princess Arbanoff, on the contrary, young, beautiful, and wealthy, would be a charming wife for him. True, she had a lover to whom she was shortly to be married, and whom she perhaps loved. But what of that? He, Anatole, knew her secret, and with that knowledge possessed a power over her which he was determined to use to his own advantage. He had lived fast since they had met last, but never had he seen a woman who had cast over him the spell that lay in the first glance of Ferra's eyes, and he was resolved to win her at all hazards.

Ferra felt the ardour of his look, and, with a slight frown, she asked bluntly, without being at any special pains to conceal her antipathy, "How did you happen to come to D——?"

Leroy smiled. "I was sent here by our ambassador in Berlin. But allow me one question. How is Achille?" he asked, with apparent innocence. "You will pardon the slight reminiscence; no one hears us. I take for granted that he no longer bears any malice towards his lovely step-mother."

"I do not know." She would have preferred not to reply, but she forced herself to do so. There was a fleeting expression of satisfaction on Anatole's face; she did not know, then, that he had quarrelled with his former intimate, and that after a fashion scarcely creditable to himself. She still thought them bosom-friends. So much the better for him.

"He took your flight very hard; indeed, he was quite beside himself," Leroy continued, thoughtfully, as though the past were slowly rising before his mental vision. "I came to the conclusion that his fair *protégée* had crept much nearer to his heart than he had cared to admit. Such natures sometimes take us by surprise. Accept the tribute of my profound admiration, madame, and——"

"Herr Vicomte," Ferra interrupted him haughtily, and with irritation, for this man always had the power to provoke her anger, "we have agreed to be strangers. Let each hold to the agreement. Pray remember this

in future." She looked so proudly unapproachable that involuntarily he felt a respect for her.

"Pardon me, madame; so it shall be," he murmured. She arose and went to meet Detlev, whose arm she took, leaning upon it with an indescribable sensation of anxiety and forlornness.

"Are you pleased with me again? Quite pleased?" she asked, in a low voice.

"Ah, my darling,"—he pressed her hand close to him,—"~~you know how impossible~~ it is for me to be vexed with you."

She sighed. The world had changed for her this evening.

"You are yawning, Vicomte," said Maria Paulovna to Anatole, who was looking from beneath his half-shut eyelids after the couple.

"I never yawn," he replied, hastily. "I do not see how I could; it would be a confession of mental inanity. The man who yawns must be positively without ideas."

"Nevertheless, you were very near it," the little Russian maintained. "And I suppose you were driven to it by the sight of that pair of lovers; it always drives every idea out of my head. Remember my prophecy, however,—in spite of his love for her he will tyrannize over her horribly, and will never allow her to adjust her life according to her own wishes. Every German husband is something of a despot."

And as they were driving home, Maria Paulovna repeated much the same sentiment to Ferra. "He will tyrannize over you, and you will have to obey, child. You had a slight foretaste of it this evening. If you must marry, why not take somebody like Leroy, for example, who would take your money and give you an equivalent for it? Rommingen will never do that."

"He never ought to, Mietza. I want a husband who shall guide and direct me. Let him find fault and scold if he pleases, but my confidence in him must be absolute; I must look up to him in everything," Ferra said, earnestly. "And I love him! I love him!"

Nervously excited as she was, she burst into a passionate fit of tears. Frau von Bogdanoff was prudently silent, reflecting that the same quality was necessary in the treatment of lovers as in that of invalids,—namely, forbearance.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SNAKE IN THE GRASS.

IN the principal street of D—— there was a very fashionable restaurant, beneath the trees in front of which ladies would sip a cup of coffee or take an ice, while one of the rooms inside was luxuriously furnished as a breakfast-room for the officers of the garrison. Hither they were accustomed to come after service, to discuss regimental affairs, horses, and other subjects of common interest. There was a deal of loud talking, —the gentlemen put but little restraint upon themselves when they were alone. Erdman von Nobbe was fond of leading the conversation.

“How could you imagine for a moment,” he said to his neighbour, offering him his open cigar-case, “that the story would not run through all D——? Were there not eyes and ears enough to bear witness to it? The Prince makes Rommingen’s betrothed a present of a bracelet, which she wears! By Jove! the worthy adjutant must be as blind as a mole not to take alarm. And when she cut off a curl for Laudin! Why, it is a wonder that the story, with variations, did not get into the newspapers. We are all burning with curiosity to see what will come next.”

"According to your version of the matter, it must have been exceedingly interesting," said the man addressed, choosing a cigar from the case. "What surprises me is that Rommingen takes it all so quietly."

"Yes, that surprised me at first; but then you never know what goes on behind the scenes."

"And the striking resemblance that Laudin insists upon."

"Oh, there are all sorts of reports."

Gradually the conversation became general. Every one was interested in the Princess Arbanoff, her betrothal, and the Prince.

"Fascinating as that nimbus of mystery as to the past might be in certain women, I should hardly like it in a wife," some one remarked.

Meanwhile, Eustach von Deuren had entered unobserved; he hung up his hat and cloak and took his place in a corner, looking out of humour. He had had a hard time at drill.

"It will certainly be very entertaining to watch Rommingen as a married lover, while the Prince retires modestly to the background. Women like the Arbanoff know how to manage all that."

The tall lieutenant ogled his glass of port, twirling it slowly between his fingers, as he gave vent to these gall and wormwood utterances.

Eustach overheard his last words, and approached the table, his handsome, honest face flushed.

"You had better refrain from remarks of that kind;

they might get you into trouble, since you know as well as I do that there is not one word of truth in them."

"Your childlike faith does you honour," drawled Nobbe, staring insolently at the intruder through his eye-glass. "Still, yours is rather a callow sentiment."

"Possibly," said Eustach, flaring up, "but at all events more honourable than slander in the dark. Against such insinuations other weapons than words should be used."

"I am at your service with any others," said the lieutenant, his affected serenity quite gone. "You need have no hesitation in using them."

"Then I shall expect to hear from you," said Eustach, haughtily, as he turned and left the spot.

He felt glad, and satisfied with himself. If he could but give that poisonous reptile something to remind him to curb his vile tongue he should have done a good work. What kind of friendship was that which could be found wanting at such a moment? It made no difference to him whether it were Detlev's or Ferra's name that was dragged in the dust; they belonged together. He was no longer in love with Ferra, but his boyish heart was wide open to good and noble influences, and it was filled with pity for her, seeing how, when there was no longer any chance to prefer a claim to her hand and her wealth, she was criticised and slandered. He was determined to tell Rommingen nothing of what had occurred, let the result be what it might.

"Wait a little, my fine fellow," Nobbe said, as

Eustach turned away ; “ it will not readily occur again to any one to call me to account. Moreover, a lesson will do no harm to that young cavalryman, and he shall have it to-morrow ; but do not let it spoil our afternoon. Waiter ! a bottle of Roederer, *carte blanche*, and another in ice.”

The spring had fairly come. The earth exhaled fresh odours, the grass showed green, the buds swelled, and the larks circled singing aloft in the clear sunlit atmosphere.

Frau von Bogdanoff and Ferra were driving ; Rommigen was continually on duty, and Leroy, who enjoyed the little Russian's special favour, rode beside the carriage upon a spirited chestnut, and talked with the ladies. They met him continually in society.

“ Come and take a cup of tea with me this afternoon,” Maria Paulovna called out to him when, taking off his hat, he bade them farewell as the carriage turned into Prince Street. He accepted the invitation by a low bow, and sat motionless for a moment, looking after the vehicle as it rolled away. There was both anger and disappointment in his face. He could not mistake Ferra's manner towards him ; she seemed either quite unconscious of the hold he had upon her, or quite indisposed to admit it. He must convince her of its reality. But to do so he ought to see her alone, and Maria Paulovna was her cousin's inseparable com-

panion. At one time he thought of engaging her as an ally, but he soon relinquished the idea; she was not to be depended upon, and might spoil all. Ferra! At the mere thought of her his pulse quickened; she should not escape him this time; he would prevent it by every means that fate should place at his disposal. He slowly turned his horse and rode home, just as Ferra was saying impatiently to her cousin,—

“I do not understand you, Mietza. Why do you invite that odious man to your house? I detest him, and Detlev will probably come this afternoon.”

“Never mind! Then we shall be a party of four, which is more interesting than three. Do you call Leroy odious? I assure you he is a very clever man, and were it not for his lack of means he would have a brilliant career.”

“I detest him,” Ferra persisted, “and I think him a bad man besides.”

Maria Paulovna smiled shrewdly. “Unfortunately, in all my long life I have never been able to draw the line accurately between good and evil, and I am inclined to believe it a matter of individual opinion. Moreover, you have no cause to complain, my dear; Leroy pays you very little attention.”

“Thank God!” Ferra exclaimed, with a shudder. For the moment she seemed to feel his baleful presence, as she had done years before in the Palais Arbanoff.

A few hours later three people were seated around the pleasant tea-table at the Villa Bogdanoff. The samovar steamed and hummed softly; the lamp shed a mellow light; Maria Paulovna lay curled up like a cat on her lounge talking with Leroy, and Ferra sat lost in thought, taking no share in the conversation. On a sudden the little Russian sprang to her feet.

"It is high time I were at the committee-meeting," she said, with a sigh. "Countess Lenheim is probably there already; we are to arrange about the bazaar which the Princess wishes to hold for the benefit of the sufferers by this last catastrophe in the Harz Mountains. Bazaars instituted by the court always bring in a deal of money, and there are to be all sorts of entertainments besides. I confess I am greatly in favour of this sort of charity, only I dislike to have it rob me of my comfortable cup of tea. I will see that you have a good booth, Ferra, and you, Vicomte, entertain this lady, who is longing for her lover's arrival, as well as you can until I return. I hope to be through with it all in half an hour."

"I should like——" Ferra began, rising, but Leroy interposed,—

"I will exert myself to the best of my ability." And as he spoke he fixed his eyes upon her with so strange an expression that she gave up all opposition, sat down again, and only looked longingly after Maria Paulovna as she hurried from the room.

"I am grateful to chance for this opportunity," said

Anatole, after a short pause, during which he watched the gentle sway of the *portière* after Maria Paulovna's impetuous exit. "I have waited a long time for it."

"You can have nothing to say to me that all the world might not hear." Ferra had moved aside, and sat gazing at the embers on the hearth.

"Do you think so, madame?" There was such a sneer in the voice that she turned and looked him full in the face.

"There was a time in my life," he began, "when I tried to be your friend. You repulsed me; life separated us. If I proffer you friendship again to-day, will you accept it?"

"I possess the love of a man whom I revere," she said, impetuously, "and therefore I need no man's friendship."

"It is unwise so to depend upon a man's love." He leaned forward and also gazed into the fire, speaking slowly and in a low voice, weighing every word.

"Upon the love of a betrothed, of a husband? Constantin taught me otherwise."

"He was an old man, who knew precisely what he required of life. Then, too, from him you had no concealments."

She started and bit her lip. "That matters nothing, now, either to him or to me." Her voice trembled slightly, although she tried to speak haughtily.

"To Count Rommingen?"

"Precisely."

"Wrong, wrong!" he said. "You may, after your

fashion, be able to estimate men, but this man, with his strong characteristics, his keen sense of honour, his impulsiveness as soon as there is any question of hereditary tradition and principle,—him you do not know. I fear Count Rommingen will teach you,—perhaps at the price of your happiness.”

She had grown very pale. Her lips were compressed; her every nerve quivered with emotion.

“You are mistaken,” she stammered, at last; “Count Rommingen loves me.”

“That is even worse for him than for you. It makes the struggle more severe. The end will be the same.”

She felt as if she must throw herself at his feet and implore his silence, but his cold, immovable face, which the firelight seemed to make still colder, robbed her of all courage. She could only exclaim, helplessly,—

“But, good heavens, what fault is it of mine that I was not born on a throne, but first saw the light in the Rue Rochefort? Who could reproach me with it without injustice?”

Anatole looked in her quivering face and gloated over the misery he read in its every line. It did not move him. “Oh, if that were all!” he said, with a low laugh.

His tone excited her wonder; it sounded as if he were ridiculing some ignorance of hers. “And what else is there?” she asked, hurriedly. “I pray you, for once in your life, be frank with me.” Involuntarily

she had clasped her hands as she looked imploringly at him. He turned aside, and, taking up the poker, thrust it among the glowing embers.

“Your residence in the Palais Arbanoff will be a far greater disadvantage to you. Achille was, unfortunately, well known in Paris,” he said, without looking at her.

At first she stared at him without a ray of comprehension of his meaning in her eyes. Gradually her face changed; she stretched out her hands as if to defend herself from something horrible.

“Good God!” she exclaimed. All strength seemed to leave her.

Leroy arose and approached her. She did not hear him or know that he had done so until he touched lightly the cold little hand that trembled upon the arm of her chair. “Ferra,” he said, in a half whisper,—what his calmness cost him he alone knew,—“Ferra, you know the world judges by appearances,—what else has it to judge by?—and appearances are against you. One word as to your past breathed into the world about you here would let loose an avalanche to crush you. Do you not know this?”

She uttered no sound. Like some half-dead, tortured child, she stared wide-eyed into space without a glance at her tormentor.

“But why should I ask? You live in this society,” he went on, in the same tone. “You are familiar with such moral murders. Reflect how, if the

Prince and Princess knew of your past, they would despise you; and do you suppose your betrothed would still cling to you? You build upon the belief that it will all remain concealed, but the world is so small. If a falsehood can make to itself wings to fly from house to house, how much more an interesting fact?"

She moaned.

"Frau von Bogdanoff would have nothing more to do with you. No one would recognize you. The greater the homage you have received the deeper would be your disgrace. You would be an outcast from society, and in spite of all this you would still rely upon Rommingen's love for you? Would you have him choose between duty and that which has hitherto been the will of his life? For duty alone could bind him to you then."

"Can you really believe that the gossip of society is mightier than love?" she asked, sitting erect at the sound of her own energetic words.

"Yes!" The word came coldly but with entire conviction from his lips. "And my advice to you, madame, would be to dissolve, before it is too late, a tie that can result only in disappointment, pain, and woe for each of those between whom it exists."

She cried out and covered her face with her hands. "Death rather than that!" she sobbed.

"Do you love him, then, so much?" Bitter as the words sounded, she had no suspicion of the pangs of jealousy and envy that were tormenting him. Very

different words were upon his lips, but he suppressed them. Why have recourse to violence when he could gain his point more quietly and anger her the less? Suddenly Ferra sprang to her feet.

"I will listen no longer," she said, her endurance at an end. "Go! Do not torment me any more! Only tell me one thing. Will you keep silence or not?" She came close to him in her eagerness. He felt her breath upon his cheek; her eyes seemed to look into his very soul. Anatole shivered, and his drooping eyelids hid the fire of his glance.

"I will be silent as long as I can," he said, calmly.

"Ah, then all will be well." Her breath came short and quick; she pressed her hands upon her temples; a weight seemed to fall from her heart, and she looked forward with more composure to the future. "You terrified me, Vicomte. Surely I am as credulous and foolish as a child. All the phantoms that you conjured up are, after all, creatures of the imagination only; at least so I will believe them, and not allow them to embitter the present for me. And you will be silent, if only because you know, better than any one else, how false and unfounded all slander would be."

Her own words soothed her and allayed her doubts, and at last she offered him her hand. "Give me your promise," she said, earnestly.

To her surprise he did not take her hand. "I am not master of the future," he said, guardedly; "but you cannot doubt my wish to serve you, madame."

"I will be content with that. It will suffice to shield me and to guard my secret, and in return I will apologize for everything, Vicomte, both here and in Paris. You know I had no special confidence in you there."

"Yes, I know." His face flushed angrily. What folly to remind him of it!

"Count Rommingen-Erdenflueh!" the servant announced.

Ferra hurried towards her lover, and, regardless of Leroy's presence, held out both hands to him with, "Detlev! dear Detlev!"

His reception of her, although very gentle and courteous, was cool. Any exhibition of affection before a third person was distasteful to him. Ferra dropped her hands, and was conscious of a sharp pang. He perceived this, and to atone he passed her hand through his arm, and complimented her jestingly upon her blooming looks.

"Perhaps you are the cause, Vicomte," he said, turning to Leroy. "Your conversation must have been very interesting."

"We were talking of you, Count."

"Many thanks. I trust you were praising me."

"Not at all. At least, not in my opinion," said Ferra, her heart beating fast. "The Vicomte thinks you so wedded to your views that nothing in the world could induce you to change them."

"Perhaps he is not far wrong." Detlev smiled at

Ferra's incomprehensible eagerness, which was no less evident in her next words.

"That would be cruel, Detlev. That is—of course it depends upon the nature of the question to be decided."

"Suppose," Leroy began, secretly rejoicing in Ferra's imprudence,—“suppose the question regarded a sin of omission, some concealment from a near friend dictated by affection, how would you pronounce sentence then, Count?”

“Such a sin of omission—a concealment, as you call it—would rank in my mind with falsehood and hypocrisy. The closer the tie between two people, the more perfect the confidence that should exist between them. Think of the misery of knowing that there is something which one is concealing from a near friend.”

“What, even when silence does no one any harm, and when to speak would do no one any good?” Ferra asked, trembling.

“That would make no difference. The fault would be no less.”

“But, Detlev, only consider,” she began, her beautiful eyes full of entreaty; “things are so different in real life. One's theories may be so grand and noble, but when the moment comes for acting up to them, one dreads to cause pain, either to one's self or to another, just to satisfy one's own sense of right.”

“No, Ferra; on this point I am quite clear; I could forgive anything easier than an untruth, a concealment, in one whom I loved, and in whom I had confidence.”

There was a pause. Ferra plucked nervously at the lace of her pocket-handkerchief, and her lips quivered. In her distress she could have cried aloud. Leroy came to her assistance, but she could distinguish the evil triumph in his tone as he said, "Do you not see that I was right?"

For reply she glanced towards him angrily, and yet with entreaty in her eyes. Perceiving this, he smiled. But Detlev, longing to soothe her agitation, leaned towards her and whispered, "Why torment yourself, my darling, with such questions? What I love best in you is the utter frankness of your nature, which would rather incur blame than be untrue to itself."

She turned her head aside; there were tears in her eyes, and if they had only been alone it is more than likely that she would have told him all then and there. But Leroy was present; she felt his warning glance resting upon her, although she did not look at him, and she was silent.

On a sudden Frau von Bogdanoff made her appearance, looking heated and vexed.

"Thank heaven that's over!" she exclaimed, dropping into the largest arm-chair. "By rights there should be a strict law against women's meetings, and a severe penalty attached to its infringement. They were invented for the destruction of one's neighbour's reputation!"

"What is the matter?" Ferra asked, going to her cousin, and glad of the interruption. Maria Paulovna made no direct reply.

"What induced your friend to be so stupid?" she said, irritably, to Detlev, who looked at her in surprise.

"To what do you allude, madame? Pray be a little more explicit."

"Then you know nothing of the duel?"

"The duel?"

"Between Deuren and that tall Nobbe. 'A judgment of heaven' his sister called it, looking to the skies with her head on one side."

"I know nothing about it. I have not seen Eustach for three days."

"Indeed! Then go to him immediately and scold him well. What call has he to be Ferra's champion?"

"Then you know the cause of the duel?" Detlev asked, dismayed. "What had Ferra to do with it?"

"It appears that Nobbe made use of some very innocent expressions, which Deuren chose to resent. The Princess is quite beside herself."

"'Tis just like him, Hotspur that he is," Detlev said, smiling. "Under the circumstances, however, you must excuse me. I must see after him. *Au revoir.*"

Ferra followed him into the next room. She had grown very silent. "Shall you come back again, Detlev?"

"Hardly to-night, my love. Poor Eustach! I'll wager he has acted like a goose, but it was for us, and I must sift the matter to the bottom. He is a true, trustworthy friend."

She grasped his arm by a sudden impulse, as if to detain him. "Stay here!" she begged, and tears stood in her eyes.

He kissed her tenderly. "You do not ask that in earnest, Ferra?"

With a sigh she relaxed her clasp. "I wish you cared for no one—no one in all the world except me," she said, with an expression of intense melancholy, "and would go with me to Félicité, where I was so happy."

"You shall be infinitely more so," he whispered, passionately. "My love is stronger than you dream."

"Stronger than you dream!" She repeated it to herself as she returned to the blue drawing-room, and it comforted her immensely.

Meanwhile, Count Rommingen hurried to his friend's rooms. He found Eustach on the lounge, his arm in a sling, rather pale and weak, but with an expression of entire content on his handsome face, which flushed slightly as Detlev entered.

"What has happened, Eustach?" he asked.

The hussar's air was quite unembarrassed as he replied, "A slight mishap, as you see." He pointed to his arm. "It is really of no consequence; hardly worth mentioning," he added, observing the adjutant's grave look.

"Thank heaven! Only a flesh-wound, then. Will you not tell me the cause of the quarrel?" Rommingen passed his hand caressingly over the young fellow's curls, and his voice was very gentle.

“Turn the light down a little; so,—that’s right! Well, you see, one loses patience at last. I have been longing for some time to bestow a small memento upon that fellow Nobbe.”

“It had something to do with my betrothed, had it not?”

“Why should you think that?”

“Frau von Bogdanoff learned it at her committee-meeting.”

“Heavens, these women! They know everything!” Deuren laughed outright. He was determined to conceal from Rommingen the true cause of the duel. “I really hardly remember, Detlev. It may be that he used some word or other that put me in a passion——”

“You must see that in that case it should be my business to take the matter up,” said Detlev, feeling hot at the bare thought. “So be honest with me.”

“Really, Rommingen, with the best will in the world, I can give no details, and the matter seems to me completely attended to. Nobbe may feel triumphant at present, but he who laughs last laughs longest. And there was nothing to be resented here save the merest gossip. Stuff not worth a thought,” Eustach went on, carelessly. “If the world chooses to be merciless in its judgments, it is best not to heed it.”

Detlev was content. If there had been any grave matter of dispute the young fellow would have been sure to ask advice of his elder friend. Frau von Bogdanoff’s mood had coloured her view of affairs,

painting them blacker than they were in reality. Eustach's wound was very slight, and there was no necessity for further action save to thank his friend heartily for his generous championship.

CHAPTER XVII.

A BLOW AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

"You are growing pale and silent," Frau von Bogdanoff said to her cousin one day from the midst of a cloud of cigarette-smoke, "and I do not like it at all. Order the carriage and take a drive; the weather is charming."

"Will you come too, Mietza?" It was a fact that Ferra was changed. The burden constantly, however unconsciously to herself, weighing upon her mind, and her daily, unavoidable meetings with Leroy, had had an unfavourable effect upon her disposition, spirits, and looks.

"No, thank you. I have a cold, the only condition of existence that gives one the undeniable right to be cross. But I do not want to keep you at home. Go and drive in the park."

"I am tired of seeing people. I would rather drive out into the country."

"Then drive out into the country. Drive where you choose, and stay as long as you choose. Do not let me prevent you."

An hour later the Bogdanoff equipage turned away from the principal drive in the park, crowded at this

hour with carriages, and drove along a secluded road, which gave its young occupant ample opportunity to enjoy the glorious spring day.

There were a few light, fleecy clouds floating overhead, the tender leaves were quivering in the sunlight, the fields were a delicious green, and the birds were singing everywhere. Ferra drove on farther and farther. Leaning back among the cushions, with eyes dreamily half closed, she was not aware how far behind her lay the capital.

Suddenly she sat erect and looked about her. She had reached a modest little village, its houses scarcely more than huts, but nevertheless she ordered the coachman to stop at the small inn of the place, distinguished by a foaming can of beer painted in brilliant colours on a sign-board, and, alighting, passed into its garden.

Here stood a few rough wooden tables and benches. Cherry- and walnut-trees afforded shade in summer. The paths were of yellow gravel. But, despite its unpretentious appearance, Ferra seated herself and ordered a glass of milk. The warm air had made her thirsty. The quiet of the place was new to her, and soothed her. Bees hummed about, swallows flitted to and fro. Some intrusive fowls were scratching among the gravel. Mietza's elegant equipage was sheltered behind a high hawthorn hedge. Ferra laid her hat and parasol on the table before her, drew off her long gloves, and leaned her golden head against the rough trunk of the tree behind her. It was long since such

peace had possessed her ; she closed her eyes, felt the warm air breathe upon her neck and temples, and gave free play to her thoughts.

A sudden step on the gravel at a distance startled her, and, with a sensation of being watched, she opened her eyes. Leroy, in complete and elegant riding costume, stood opposite her, a small, gold-headed riding-whip in his gloved hand ; but Ferra felt as if some ugly reptile were crossing her path.

“ You here, madame, and alone ? ” he said, without testifying much surprise. “ When I saw the carriage I supposed the fine weather had tempted the ladies to take a little excursion. ” He laid his whip on the table beside her parasol and took off his hat. “ I am quite warm. Permit me, madame. ” There was no question in his tone ; he seemed to take it for granted that a place at the table would not be refused him.

“ I must go home, ” Ferra said, taking her parasol from the table. It was an elegant little toy, the handle set with precious stones, which sparkled in the sunshine. Leroy looked down at it. “ Really a little work of art, ” he said, with the air of a connoisseur. “ Positively, madame, life seems to have fulfilled all your desires. Must you really go ? It is very pleasant here, and chance has again brought us together. ”

She had grave doubts whether chance had anything to do with it ; but since Leroy seemed quite at his ease, she thought it best to imitate his example. She would

not fear him. "There is no very great hurry," she said, indifferently.

"Thank you for the admission. Then you do not expect Count Rommingen?"

"Hardly before evening." She was still seated. He looked at her askance; she felt his gaze, and the blood mounted to her cheek. She frowned, and hastily turned to him. "Herr Vicomte, have you anything to say to me?" she asked, haughtily.

"I have; most certainly. Heaven sends me this opportunity."

"Well, then, I am waiting."

He smiled; there was something diabolic in the curl of his thin lips. "Ferra," he said, and his voice was neither low and earnest, nor tender, but there was a tone in it that startled her, "can you not yet make up your mind?"

"To what?" A cold hand seemed to clutch her very heart.

"To dissolve your betrothal. I have been waiting for it since that evening when Rommingen unconsciously pronounced your sentence."

"Never!" she exclaimed, growing pale.

"Still, you must be aware of the wrong you are doing him. Since that conversation you can have no doubts. He never will forgive you for deceiving him."

"Leave that to him and to me," she said, with a last effort to maintain a dignified composure.

"No, I cannot. You were neither born nor bred to

understand these things, and your judgment is frequently at fault. I am not only justified in being frank with you, but it is my duty to be so."

"Did you not promise me to keep silence?"

"I did, and it is therefore all the more incumbent upon you to act."

"To destroy happiness for both of us because of a prejudice? You cannot be in earnest!" she said, terror in her eyes. "Detlev could hardly thank me for that."

"Do not deceive yourself, Ferra. You know as well as I do that Rommingen is a rigid aristocrat, who would prefer death rather than a life at variance with his principles and ideas. Therefore you are silent."

"Oh, God!" she cried; where was the peaceful, sunny, spring day? Horror and distress held her again in bondage.

"And you are a woman," he continued, "incapable of drawing conclusions, or of logical deductions; even if you could you would not; you would rather close your eyes and totter into an abyss, dragging others with you, than carry out a stern resolve. It would perhaps be hard to condemn you for this, but it would be wrong not to open your eyes to it."

"And what would you have me do?" Ferra asked in a broken voice; she had a horrible sensation of being subject to Leroy's cruel play for as long as it might please him so to torture her; escape seemed impossible.

"Dissolve your betrothal; you have no other choice."

She groaned, and covered her face with her hands. For a while he contemplated her silently.

“Well?” he asked at last.

Then she looked at him. “No, never!” she said, resolutely. “Do you not see that I love him beyond all telling?”

“I know it.”

“And have you no pity for me?”

“None,” he said, coldly. “Have you had any pity for me, either in Paris or here? And yet I love you more ardently, more passionately, than you dream,—more even than you can possibly understand.”

She sprang up, her face aflame. “Not another word! I will not listen!”

“You must!” He grasped her wrist and held it as in a vise. “For once I will speak to you without reserve, and you have no choice save to hear me. Yes,” he added, dropping her hand with a smile of contempt as he observed her glance towards where the carriage was concealed behind the hedge, “you can call your people. They would hear you; the hedge is not very far off, but in your own interest I advise you not to do so.”

She sat down again, apparently calm, but with throbbing pulses. “Go on!” she said, leaning her head upon her hand.

“I love you, Ferra. My love is not of yesterday, I have loved you since I first saw you at the Palais Arbanoff,” he began immediately, “and I know well what love is. Ah! it makes slaves of us. I dream of

you when you are absent, I live only during the short minutes when you are by. I would defy the world for your sake,—commit any crime so it might make you mine——” Emotion choked his utterance.

“And therefore you threaten me,” she said, with cold disdain.

“I am resolved to possess what I so desire. In Paris I could offer you only my heart; the Princess Arbanoff I can ask for both heart and hand.”

“Neither is at my disposal.”

“But you will free yourself; you must. Then go to Félicité; I will follow you shortly, and you shall never repent your decision, Ferra; I swear it to you by all that is sacred!”

“What is sacred to you? Neither purity nor innocence; neither love nor a promise.”

“Do not drive me mad,” he whispered, hoarsely, leaning forward so that his face nearly touched hers. “Neither heaven nor hell shall protect you from me. I know everything; from me you have no concealments; just as you are I want you for my own.”

Her patience was exhausted. She arose, aversion and disgust in her eyes. “Stand aside! I have heard enough!”

The slant rays of the sun, now low on the horizon, playing about her golden head gave her the halo of a martyr; the sight but inflamed him the more. “Have you no answer for me?” he asked, controlling his voice with difficulty.

“None! Move aside, or I will summon the servants,” she added.

But at that moment she felt his arm around her waist, his hot breath upon her cheek. No longer mistress of herself, so intense was the disgust he aroused within her, and scarce knowing what she did, she seized the riding-whip that lay upon the table and struck blindly.

As the lash whistled through the air she was released; Anatole’s arm dropped at his side. He stood motionless for an instant, pale as a corpse, except where, from the left ear to the corner of the mouth, the red welt made by the whip was plainly to be seen. The expression of his face was so terrible that Ferra dropped her weapon and leaned against the table for support. Even an outburst of anger from him would have been a relief, but he uttered not a word; he hardly glanced towards her again, but slowly picked up his whip, then turned and left the garden. A few seconds later she heard the tramp of his horse’s feet upon the high-road.

She was perfectly aware that she had made a mortal enemy,—all trace of passion had vanished from his face, leaving it to express intense hatred only,—a mortal enemy who, had she been a man, would have wiped out in blood the disgrace he had undergone. His revenge could be ample, however; she was in his power, her reputation and her happiness were at his mercy, and he was perfectly aware of the fact.

She leaned her head against the trunk of the tree again. The sun had gone down, and a cool breeze had sprung up; the birds had ceased singing, and for her all joyousness had vanished. A wretched sensation of despair and loneliness overcame her, and yielding to it, she burst into tears and wept,—wept convulsively, as if tears could wash away her misery. After a long while she arose, stroked her hair away from her hot forehead, got into the carriage, and drove back to D—. Just outside the town she recognized her lover in a distant horseman evidently riding to meet her. But instead of welcoming him as she would have done a few short hours before, she nestled back among the cushions, as if she were asleep. The thought of being obliged to speak to him caused her what was almost physical pain. He soon perceived the chestnuts, and rode up beside the carriage. “Ferra! my darling! Ah, how glad I am to find you!”

She opened her eyes wearily. “I did not expect you until the evening, Detlev.”

“We got through sooner than I thought. Are you not a little glad? You are so silent.”

She bit her lip. “Very glad.” And as she spoke she looked up to the skies overhead, and would fain have shrieked aloud.

“How pale you are!” he exclaimed, anxiously; and indeed in the evening twilight her features looked ghostly in their pallor. “You ought not to stay out so long, it is too cool. Maria Paulovna ought not to

allow it. Oh, Ferra, my darling, it is time that you were all mine! When—when will you marry me?"

He had rarely spoken to her with such tenderness; they were seldom alone, and Detlev, besides, was one of those men whose most ardent, most sacred sentiments are always more fully roused by a woman's helplessness than by her strength. His horse was close beside the barouche as its rider leaned across its side and bent over her. She was trembling violently. "Soon!" she whispered. "Whenever you choose, Detlev."

"Look at me," he begged, "and give me your hand upon it."

She held out her hand to him, but she was not like herself.

"I believe you are really ill," he said, anxiously. "Had I better leave you and not go home with you?"

"Yes, better leave me alone." Her tone was very sad, and her eyes filled with tears, but, as she looked aside, he did not see them.

"You distress me!" He still held her hand in his, and he suddenly bent over it and kissed it, regardless of the passers-by who might have seen the act. Ferra, knowing him, was deeply touched by such an expression of tender anxiety. How long would it be before he would perhaps leave her and silently avoid her? Why should she not clutch her happiness while she could? She turned to him impulsively.

"No, Detlev, come with me! I cannot bear to see you go away."

“Is it not mere pity for my weakness that gains me this permission?”

“Pity!” she laughed hysterically. “No, it is not pity. It is because I have a right to you.”

For the rest of the evening she was unnaturally gay. She could see that he was watching her, and could perceive that he thought her unlike herself, but she could not help it. When he went, she clasped him passionately in her arms, and he felt her tears upon his cheek, but before he could ask their cause she was gone. He went to his home anxious and puzzled. What ailed his betrothed? He could not tell. If anything were really wrong he ought to be the first to know of it. Perhaps Frau von Bogdanoff was right,—her cousin’s nerves were suffering from the fatigues of ‘the season.’

To Ferra the long-forgotten past was constantly present. She recalled the afternoon in the Louvre, and her meeting with Alice; she remembered the bitter grief she had felt. Ah, yes, the world is evil and cruel everywhere; it has no mercy, no justice, not even for the innocent.

Leroy had ridden home by the most secluded roads. The welt on his cheek burned like fire, but what was that to the raging anger that possessed him? He could not stay quiet at home; he rushed out into the streets, movement he must have or he should stifle. Not only did all his plans for the future, his hope of one day possessing Ferra and her wealth, seem shattered, but he

had been branded by the hand of a woman, chastised like a dog! There was but one comfort, and that lay in the contemplation of his revenge. He slackened his pace as he pondered upon how he should wound Ferra most deeply, and gradually his cold, calculating nature asserted itself.

He suddenly heard some one address him by name, and he perceived Erdman von Nobbe crossing the street to join him. For an instant he looked about for some way to escape him; he would be seen of no one while the red streak showed on his cheek. But it was too late, flight was impossible.

"Very glad I met you," said Nobbe, joining him. "Now we can go somewhere together. I am just from the castle, and I am chock-full of news about the bazaar."

"I agree," replied Leroy, "although," pressing his handkerchief to his throbbing cheek, "I am a marked man at present, and cut but a sorry figure."

"What is the matter? By Jove, that looks terrible!"

"I rode directly against a bough this afternoon," Leroy said, negligently; "it was so low that I did not see it. Come into Tortoni's; we'll have a bottle of claret, and you can tell me your news."

The tall lieutenant scarcely waited for the wine to unlock his lips. He liked to pose as omniscient.

"The Princess Arbanoff has given up her flower-stand, and is going to preside, in the Russian national

costume, over a Russian tea-stall. A famous idea. The Prince and Princess Dagobert will condescend to drink a cup. The Arbanoff will be the only lady not in evening dress."

Leroy laughed. "'Tis a pity."

"Why a pity? Because she comes in costume, or because she has given up the flowers? Pshaw! We shall have to sacrifice our shekels all the same."

"How did the idea of appearing in the Russian costume occur to the Princess Arbanoff?" asked Leroy, slowly sipping his wine.

"Why, it was surely very natural for a Russian to think of wearing her national dress. It was Frau von Bogdanoff's idea."

"The Princess Arbanoff is not a Russian."

"You are mistaken, Leroy. When Laudin discovered that wonderful resemblance, her pedigree was discussed. She was no countess nor princess, but belonged to the lower ranks of the nobility. She was a Nasakoff."

"By adoption."

"The deuce! You seem infernally well informed upon the subject. No one knows anything about it here."

"My dear fellow," said the attaché, deliberately, holding his wineglass up to the light, "there seems to me to be much, about which no one here knows anything."

The lieutenant, in his surprise, dropped his eye-glass

out of his eye and forgot to replace it. "What do you mean by that remark, Leroy?"

"Oh, nothing. Merely a general observation, I assure you."

"I don't believe you. Could there have been something after all in that resemblance of Laudin's?" Nobbe was all agog for gossip.

"Why do you ask me?"

"Because you seem to know more than anybody else about this matter. You ought not to be so reserved, Leroy. Man of the world as you are, you have certain obligations to fulfil."

"Nonsense!" said Leroy, with a laugh, leaning back in his chair and puffing forth clouds of smoke from his cigar. "Don't be so serious about it. Why should my remark have had any special significance? My dear fellow, you must look at things as they are. A lady in society, received at court, betrothed to the Prince's adjutant, is not to be lightly compromised."

"Was she really married to Prince Arbanoff?" Nobbe asked, after a short pause.

"Married! As surely as that you and I are single."

"Frau von Bogdanoff has often told us that she went to the altar from the convent of the *Sacré Cœur*."

"Indeed?" Leroy rejoined, and, although as he spoke he fixed his eyes on the glass ball of the chandelier above them, his companion started as if electrified.

"Oho! Is that where it is?" he asked, hastily, with eager eyes.

"Will you be kind enough to remember," Leroy interposed, "that I say nothing? The Princess Arbanoff is a beautiful, unprotected woman, and I have no reason to wish to harm her."

"But I pray you to reflect," began the lieutenant, laying his hand upon Leroy's arm, "that society has a claim to be made aware of the antecedents of those admitted to its privileges. You assume a great responsibility if you suppress what it is entitled to know."

The attaché shrugged his shoulders. "I shall take good care not to get myself into hot water. My devotion to society stops short of that."

"You are determined, then, not to speak. Remember, to-morrow the bazaar takes place, and the Princess Sibylla has promised to honour Madame von Arbanoff by taking a cup of tea with her."

"Well—and?—"

"You might repent it afterwards."

"Nonsense! What possible interest can D—— have in what took place in Paris years ago? To be sure, if the Princess—but no, that's folly. Do me the favour, my dear Nobbe, to change the subject. How is your sister?"

"Well, thanks," was the reply. The speaker then fell into a revery, in which he forgot to light the cigar between his lips.

“By Jove, this looks as if I had been a spoil-sport,” said Leroy, laughing. “You must know I hate *éclat*; it irritates my nerves. It has always been so. I recollect how it worried me for days when Achille Arbanoff heard the news of his father’s marriage to Ferra——”

He paused as if suddenly bethinking himself, cleared his throat, took a sip from his glass, and hastily replaced it on the table.

“How did we come to speak of that stupid story!” he said, frowning, as if vexed with himself. “A man of the world ought to take for his motto, *Tout comprendre c’est tout pardonner*. Do you know it is getting late, Nobbe? I am going to the club.”

“I am going home,” rejoined the lieutenant, who was eager to write a note to his sister.

Leroy smiled as he separated from his companion in the street. He was perfectly aware of what Nobbe would do.

He put his hand up to his cheek; it no longer burned; but even had every trace of the blow disappeared it would not have deterred him from pursuing the course he had entered upon.

“Revenge is a viand that is most enjoyed cold,” he thought. But beside the idea of revenge he still nourished, unconsciously perhaps to himself, the hope of one day calling Ferra his own.

The next day Leroy stayed at home as if he expected a visit, and when Lieutenant von Nobbe was announced he was made very welcome.

"I am glad to find you at home," said the latter, "although I have come to you about a rather delicate affair."

"Indeed? You make me curious."

"Do you remember our conversation of last evening?"

"Do not let us refer to it!" And, as if desirous of ignoring the subject, Leroy extolled the excellence of the cigars which he offered to his guest.

"Yes, but even at the risk of annoying you I must speak out," Erdman began, crossing his long legs with an air of such determination that Anatole could not forbear smiling slightly. "I was not quite discreet as to your hints with regard to Madame von Arbanoff, and the consequence is that her Highness has commissioned me to inform you that she wishes to see you to-morrow at two o'clock."

"Unfortunate! Most unfortunate!" Leroy sprang up and paced the room restlessly to and fro. "If I had known this I would sooner have bitten off my tongue than have said a word to you yesterday."

"I did what I thought my duty," said Nobbe, with some bluster, "and I am prepared to answer for it."

Anatole laid his hand upon his shoulder. "My dear fellow, there's no need for anything of that kind. I do not reproach you in the least. But be kind enough to bear me witness that I meant no harm. Good heavens! how impossible it is to foresee the consequences of a thoughtless word!"

"I am entirely ready to exonerate you."

"Well, then, we must let affairs take their course."
Involuntarily Leroy passed his hand over his cheek.

"It looks a great deal better,—the mark will scarcely be visible to-morrow," said Nobbe, who had observed the action.

Anatole changed colour; his thin lips were compressed. "I have an excellent salve for it," he said, turning away.

The Princess Sibylla was restlessly walking to and fro in her small reception-room, while Fräulein von Nobbe's sharp, sallow face was peering anxiously down from the window into the castle court-yard.

"There he comes, your Highness," she said, indicating the elegant figure of the Frenchman, who was hurrying towards the castle's entrance.

"Go yourself, dear Amanda, and tell him that I am expecting him. Ah! I fear we are to hear what is very terrible." She pressed her handkerchief to her forehead and lips. "But to hesitate would be wrong."

The maid of honour met Leroy in the antechamber. "Her Highness is greatly agitated," she whispered.

"Do you mean to warn me to be cautious in what I have to say, Fräulein?" he asked, looking her directly in the face.

"On the contrary. Let there be no hesitation; speak without reserve."

So saying, she preceded him into the next room.

"I am at your Highness's commands," he said, with a low bow.

"My reason for requesting this interview has, I trust, been told you by Herr von Nobbe," the Princess began at once. "I rely upon your frankness, Vicomte."

"You may, as upon my devotion to your Highness's interests."

"That, it seems to me, would have prompted you to an earlier avowal of your sentiments, and of the facts in this case."

The Princess was feverishly agitated, and the force which she put upon herself made her voice sound hard and unnatural.

"Your reproof, your Highness, is severe, and hardly deserved, I think. Remember that when I came here I found the Princess Arbanoff secure in her position, and received at court. Of what use would have been any warning so untimely? Was it not rather the duty of those about your Highness to investigate beforehand?"

"It was; you are right!" the Princess assented, while Fräulein Amanda, with her head on one side, looked up to the ceiling with the air of a *mater dolorosa*. "But apparently there was no one here of whom information could be procured. Even the resemblance which Laudin observed could merely awaken vague suspicions. Let me beg you, Vicomte, to be perfectly frank and open with me now."

She sat down, and motioned Leroy to a place beside her, a look of cruel resolve upon her face.

“If your Highness commands me,—actually commands me——” Leroy hesitated from cool calculation, not from pity for his victim. “But I must insist beforehand upon the fact that I had no idea, when yesterday I thoughtlessly mentioned my previous acquaintance with Madame von Arbanoff, that my words would be construed as they were. My position at the Embassy forces me to be extremely cautious.”

“Oh, I know all that,”—Sibylla spoke with a degree of impatience,—“but you must not expect me to desist from my purpose on that account. I know perfectly well what I owe to my name and to my position; I will have no questionable element in my immediate surroundings. Can you give me your word of honour that not the slightest stain attaches to the past of the Princess Arbanoff?”

Leroy was silent, with downcast eyes.

“Ah, your silence is more eloquent than words. Since you hesitate, Vicomte, I lay my imperative commands upon you to speak; I must know everything.”

“May I rely upon it that my name shall not appear in this affair, your Highness?” Leroy said, suddenly, looking up at her. “It would place me in a very distressing position. Oh, heavens! why cannot I be allowed to be silent!”

With a deep-drawn sigh he passed his hand across his brow, as if undergoing a severe mental struggle.

He was so consummate an actor that he deceived every one. Even the Princess wavered for a second, but then, leaning back in her chair, she spoke with stern emphasis :

“I appeal to your honour, Vicomte. Can you look on calmly and see me the object of deceit, perhaps of ridicule? A woman begs you to help her ; in spite of my lofty position,—perhaps because of it,—I am often misunderstood. You alone have the power to prove to myself and the world that in this case my intuitions were correct. Rely upon me to have your name entirely left out of the affair. Can I say more?”

“No, your Highness.” He bowed low over the hand extended to him, and kissed it respectfully ; an act of homage which Sibylla accepted with complacency.

“I had in Paris a friend, Achille Arbanoff, the stepson of the Princess,” he began, hurriedly, in an undertone, as if he feared his resolve would fail him should he hesitate. “He was young, satiated with pleasure, and *blasé* as only those can be who have no serious aim in life. His ideal of beauty he declared to be red hair and green eyes——”

“Ah !” sighed Fräulein von Nobbe, clasping her hands.

“He found it in a little girl who sold flowers on the boulevard ; her name was Ferra !”

“How terrible !” The Princess grew very pale, while her confidante, with an inarticulate murmur of dismay, sank back in her chair.

“Achille bought her of her parents in a cellar in the Rue Rochefort for three thousand francs, and sent her to be educated to the convent of the Sacré Cœur. She gave promise of great beauty.”

The Princess sat erect; her breath came short and quick; her eyes spoke daggers: “And this beggar from the Rue Rochefort has been thrust upon our court!”

Leroy bowed assent. “When the girl was sixteen the abbess sent her back to the Palais Arbanoff!”

“And she stayed there?” exclaimed Amanda, absolutely writhing in horror.

Leroy did not reply, but looked at the Princess. Their glances met.

“Go on.”

“Ferra had kept the promise of her childhood; she was very beautiful. His friends envied Achille, and, liking to be envied, he made a show of his lovely plaything; paraded her, for example, in his box at the Grand Opera. One day his father came to Paris, saw the beautiful girl, fell in love with her, had her adopted by Herr von Nasakoff, ran off with her, and married her. That is the whole story, your Highness.”

“Outrageous! Frightful!” cried Fräulein von Nobbe, covering her face with her hands.

“And this adventuress can boast of being received by us!” the Princess said, indignantly. “It all comes from our absurd admiration for everything foreign, for everything unlike ourselves; I may well feel ashamed. And this story you know; you vouch for its truth, Vicomte?”

"I was Achilles's most intimate friend," said Leroy, a satanic smile upon his thin lips.

The maid of honour arose and approached her mistress. "That was the cause of the terror which I observed on the evening of your Highness's birthday on the face of—of—what shall I call her?" She turned for help to Anatole.

"The Princess Arbanoff. It is her rightful title."

"I saw it plainly, for I was standing so that I looked her full in the face," Amanda went on.

"And I understand much that seemed odd to me," Sibylla said, with a contemptuous shrug. "I am deeply indebted to you, Vicomte."

"And I have not angered your Highness?"

"Angered? My friend, you cannot conceive how hard it is in this distracting world to pursue courageously the path of rectitude. It costs so much self-sacrifice, so much self-denial, and we should be grateful for every aid. I thank you."

She offered him her hand, which he carried to his lips, inwardly wondering what should make it so cold. His revelations could hardly have caused her any real emotion, for, blindly jealous although she were, Ferrer certainly gave her no cause at present for being so. But who can fathom a woman's nature? Leroy wasted little thought upon this problem; he had completed his revenge, and Ferrer might find the consequences of the blow she had given him as painful and as burning as the welt upon his cheek, which had almost disappeared.

"May I venture to remind your Highness of your promise?" the Frenchman said, softly; adding, insinuatingly, "Perhaps your Highness has arrived at some determination,—has devised some scheme——"

Sibylla shook her head. "It needs time and reflection; you may be sure of my silence."

"Thanks!" He saw that he was dismissed, but, instead of going, he added, in a half-veiled voice, "For Count Rommingen's sake I would plead for the greatest possible forbearance. He loves his beautiful betrothed intensely——"

The Princess turned aside so hastily that Leroy could no longer see her face.

"It would be inexpressibly painful to me," Anatole went on, "to sever a tie which is without doubt founded in mutual affection. Nevertheless, the Count's character——"

"Leave all that to me," the Princess said, with evident impatience, and Leroy had no choice save to withdraw.

"There is some by-play here which I do not understand," he said, as he descended the castle staircase with a complacent air, "but it is of no consequence. I have sown the seed, and the crop will spring up,—a crop of thorns for her who has driven me to it. Your part, my lovely Ferra, is wellnigh played out."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BAZAAR.

FOR days Laudin had been busy arranging and decorating in the most harmonious and artistic manner the spacious hall where the Bazaar was to be held. He had succeeded well, and was satisfied with his work, as he stood taking a last inspection in the bright, mid-day sunshine. Nothing was wanting. The booths, draped with the national colours, looked fresh and pretty, and the walls of the hall were concealed up to the ceiling. Upon the tables were exposed all the useless articles which are wont to conjure money from the pockets of the public. Huge groups of palms overshadowed inviting easy-chairs and lounges, and flags and the scutcheon of the country were beautifully arranged over the entrance. The workmen, who had just finished, were gathering together their tools to depart, and Laudin put on his hat. In a couple of hours all would be bustle and gayety here, in the mean while all was silent and quiet.

Just as he was about to leave Laudin glanced once more towards the Russian booth, where the samovar shone brightly, and tiny Chinese cups, with quantities of delicate cigarettes in pretty cases, were arranged on

trays. These last were to be disposed of by Frau von Bogdanoff.

"How exquisite Madame von Arbanoff will look there!" the artist thought with a momentary enthusiasm; "the Russian colours for a background, the becoming costume—— There is something victoriously omnipotent in that woman's beauty!"

He called to one of the workmen, and bade him draw the curtain on one side of the booth a little lower. "Those folds are better," he thought, revelling in artistic fancy. "I shall certainly indulge myself in a cup of tea, although, if the Princess set the example, the crowd here will be very great. Three hours before it begins. I have time for a walk."

In the castle the day had not been without annoyances. After the Princess, on the previous evening, had repeatedly asked to be informed of her husband's return, and had each time been told that his Highness was still with the Grand Duke, she gave up the idea of speaking to him that night, for August Theodor was fond of detaining his nephew, to show him through the telescope some of the wonders which so absorbed his own interest. She postponed her revelations to the Prince until the next forenoon. It was better so. Prince Dagobert would then have less time to oppose her determination, which, in spite of the disgrace, he might have attempted. But scarcely had she risen this morning when the rolling of carriage-wheels called her to the window, whence she saw the Prince in full uni-

form, accompanied by his adjutant, drive out of the court-yard. Soon afterwards a lackey brought her a telegram, to which Dagobert had added a few words in pencil.

The despatch had informed the Grand Duke that the Crown Prince of B——, the son of his dearest relative and faithful ally, was about to pass through the country, and hoped to have the pleasure of seeing some one of the royal family.

“You will go to-morrow morning to the rendezvous, will you not, Dagobert?” the Grand Duke had asked, and his nephew had instantly consented. Neither of them remembered the projected Bazaar, and when it occurred to the Prince, he merely said to Rommingen, “I regret extremely losing the pleasure of admiring your lovely betrothed, but pleasure must yield to duty.”

Detlev heroically suppressed a sigh as he rejoined, “Of that I am well aware, your Highness.”

“And is often its opposite,” the Prince continued his sentence. “I am really afraid that we shall be so late in returning that the whole thing will be over. Well, you will be richly indemnified afterwards. Ah, these lovers’ *têtes-à-tête*!”

“They are gone!” thought the Princess, the reverse of pleased. “It is very unfortunate! Shall I relinquish my plan? I should certainly have liked to speak to Dagobert first, and Rommingen’s presence seems to me indispensable! They will think me cowardly,—not sure of my information.”

She stood pulling to pieces a flower which she had taken from a vase. For a moment she thought of appealing to the Grand Duke, whose authority would be her justification for anything she might do, but then she recalled the strangely transparent glance which she had so often encountered from his eyes, and heard the gentle voice which had replied to her before, "Dear Sibylla, I am only a man; I do not comprehend these feminine complications, but it seems to me that prudence and forbearance are the chief ornaments of your sex." Why, he might even take the Princess Arbanoff's part. Who could divine what Dagobert had told him about her? No, she could not turn to him; since she was alone, she must act alone. And having entirely stripped the rose of its petals, she threw the stalk upon the ground and trod it underfoot.

In the Villa Bogdanoff Ferra was sitting, also with some flowers in her hand, looking down at them lovingly. They came from Detlev with a short note:

"My darling! Duty takes me far from you to-day. It is hard, but that avails nothing. Wear these flowers; touch them sometimes, and then think of me, as I shall constantly of you. It is strange how this little disappointment depresses me. Is it a sign of your ever-increasing power over my life and soul? Yes, so it must be, Ferra, and it would torture me, if it did not make me blissfully happy. Welcome death rather than life without you!"

She read it over again and again. How loyal and

true he was! and how foolish she had been ever to doubt the power of his love, or to torment herself with fancies and misgivings! If he loved her so much, must not everything in that misty past, which could possibly overcloud the present, vanish in the light of such love, like phantoms before the daylight? Why had she hesitated to tell him all frankly? why had she chosen to allow herself to be terrified by Leroy, rather than to confide in him who loved her,—yes, loved her? She reproached herself bitterly for not having spoken before. She pressed the note and the flowers to her lips. Ah, if he were only here! She would weep-out on his breast all the misery of the last weeks, and he would smile and forgive her. Again life lay sunny before her, as she loved to see it,—all shadows fled.

She grew giddy with the delight of having no shadow of concealment between Detlev and herself, and, with glowing cheeks and sparkling eyes, in a sudden access of gayety she hummed in the lowest possible tone,—

“Voyez ce beau garçon,
C'est l'amant d'Amande.”

How they would both laugh over that dim reminiscence of her childhood! She was light-hearted and happy, and there was no one to whisper to her, “Too late!”

Frau von Bogdanoff silently exulted in Ferra's love-liness as she saw her standing in the booth in her

becoming Russian costume, her only ornament Detlev's flowers on her breast. Her wondrous eyes shone bright, her glad anticipation of Rommingen's return gave brilliancy to her complexion, and Maria Paulovna continually said to herself, "Indeed, she is a beautiful creature!"

The hall was soon thronged with people, who pushed and joked and laughed, and priced the various articles, and bought profusely,—wealthy citizens, proud to scatter their gold before the eyes of those above them in rank, and middle-class folk, glad of an opportunity to mingle with the exclusive members of the court circle. Who would lose such an opportunity? And then, too, it was all for the benefit of the starving poor.

Ferra's booth was the centre of the densest throng. Every one who could find any pretext to address her, Rommingen's comrades, all thronged about the small space in front of her table. She laughed and jested; the heat of the hall, the confusion, the clatter of tongues, excited and inspirited her, without affecting her nerves. She handed the gentlemen the cigarettes, she offered tiny cups of tea to the ladies, and in all she took the delight of the honest-hearted child that she was, without reflecting that it would consort better with her dignity as Princess Arbanoff to hold herself more aloof from the world.

Eustach von Deuren was painfully conscious of this; he kept himself in the background, and could

not avoid a slight feeling of satisfaction that his friend Detlev was absent. At a little distance stood Leroy and Nobbe, but Ferra was so occupied that she was not aware of the presence of her mortal enemy.

Slowly, amid the respectful greetings of the throng, the Princess Sibylla came along the narrow path left open for her by the crowd, that closed again behind her. Fräulein von Nobbe was beside her. Sibylla was, as usual, very simply dressed; there was an air of gloom about her on this occasion which made her less attractive even than usual. As she passed the booth where Ferra was making ready to offer her a cup of tea, her face grew pale and her eyes looked haughty indignation.

Leroy, who stood watching, perceived this look, and exulted. "It grows interesting," he thought; "'tis wonderful to what a pitch of excitement such apparently passionless women as the Princess can be wrought up."

But he was shortly disappointed. The Princess preserved her composure and made no scene, appearing absorbed in conversation with her maid of honour, only turning in an opposite direction to nod graciously to the young Countess Schönborn at the flower-stand.

At the end of the hall the Princess turned, and again approached Ferra's booth. It was generally known in court circles that she intended to pause there a moment and sip a cup of tea; also that Frau von Bogdanoff had ordered a costly bouquet to be brought to her cousin, who was to hand it to her Royal Highness. A

whisper of surprise began to circulate when Sibylla pointedly avoided even looking towards the beautifully draped booth with its lovely occupant. As the Prince had not appeared, the interest of all present was centred in his wife.

Frau von Bogdanoff's sharp eyes had also taken note of this apparently intentional ignoring of her cousin, and, impulsive as usual, she made her way to Sibylla's side.

"May I venture to remind your Highness of your promise to take a cup of tea with us?" she said in her loud, shrill voice, while the jet fringes of her black dress rattled with quite a warlike sound.

The Princess was very pale, and her lip curled as if with disgust. They stood so close to the Russian booth that only the narrow counter separated them from where Ferra was standing, and the latter could not but hear every word that was spoken. Those standing around had somewhat withdrawn; Amanda alone stood beside her noble mistress. A sultry oppression seemed to weigh for a minute upon the small circle, and then Sibylla said quietly, almost automatically, as if only thus could she keep her real feeling in check,—

"Thank you, Frau von Bogdanoff. I can accept such hospitality only from one who is in my eyes above reproach." And she looked abroad into space as she spoke.

The little Russian started, and then stood erect; she seemed suddenly to grow taller, her figure took on an

indescribable dignity. "Such an insinuation, your Highness, demands an explanation."

Sibylla smiled. "I know," she said, in the same automatic way, "that foreigners have broader views than ours upon such subjects. They care little as to the origin of beauty which has won wealth and position simply by an attractive exterior. They never ask at what price of reputation such a position has been achieved. But I ask; and I say it is infamous to conceal facts which those who are forced to admit strangers to their circle have a right to know."

Frau von Bogdanoff changed colour. "I still do not understand your Highness." Her little eyes glittered like those of an irritated tiger-cat.

"If you, too, have been deceived," the Princess said, still preserving her composure by an effort, "ask her, now standing there,"—she indicated Ferra by a gesture full of scorn,—"where her cradle stood, if indeed she had one. And do not forget to inquire about the time spent in the Palais Arbanoff, between her departure from the Sacré Cœur and her marriage."

With eyes dilated with terror Ferra had followed every word. She felt as if some strong hand were mercilessly clutching her throat, depriving her of the power to move, to speak, to think. These accusations were like blows from a club,—each word crushed her. With horror she perceived the chasm, made by what had been said, between herself and the rest of the

world. She saw Maria Paulovna's sallow face,—then everything began to whirl before her eyes, and with a cry she let the cup drop from her hands. It lay in fragments on the ground, while she herself sank into the cushioned seat behind her.

Sibylla turned at the sound. All her hatred of youth and beauty was in the glance which she cast at the trembling figure reclining there.

"Adventuress!" she said, contemptuously. Then turning to Frau von Bogdanoff she added, with intense sarcasm, "I have no sympathy with the *demi-monde*; the atmosphere about me must and shall be pure."

She turned to walk on, but the little Russian kept beside her:

"Whence comes your Highness's knowledge of all this?" she asked, quite calmly.

"That is my secret. I do not ask you to believe me without further evidence. Ask your—beautiful cousin; and if that should not suffice you, ask—Prince Achille Arbanoff."

"Who, in your Highness's opinion——"

"Hush!" Sibylla said, authoritatively. "Not a word more! We may be aware of the presence of—vice, but we can avoid all contact with it. I forbid any further discussion."

"And yet, your Highness, I may be permitted to doubt that you have heard the last word from me upon this subject," Maria Paulovna exclaimed, angrily. "Calumny must be crushed!" At that moment she

could have flown at her Highness; the tall, angular figure, the entire woman, seemed to her as ugly and odious as the hypocrisy which in the Russian's eyes she personified. But she merely turned and went back to the booth, where she had left Ferra.

"The bomb has burst," Erdman von Nobbe whispered to his sister. "Sorry I was so far off; I could not hear the words, but her Highness looked like the very devil. And did you see how they scattered before Madame von Arbanoff's booth? Scarcely a soul left."

"Amanda, my salts!"—Sibylla leaned heavily upon the arm of her confidante,—"I do not really feel able to stay here any longer."

"I implore your Highness to yield to no weakness now," the maid of honour whispered in reply. "To condemn, one must be strong."

Sibylla stood erect. "You are right. I thank you. Go on to the next booth; I wish to purchase that kneeling figure."

"Women are fond of scenes, while to us men there is nothing more odious," Leroy said, with a shrug, to Nobbe. "In the Princess Sibylla's place I should have preferred to manage the affair privately. Look! No one knows exactly what has happened, but that something has gone wrong every child here is aware. You see looks of inquiry, meaning glances, on all sides. Every one is asking, 'What is the matter?'"

He uttered the last words rather loudly, and a

passer-by, overhearing them, answered obligingly, "The Princess Arbanoff has been taken ill."

Leroy and Nobbe exchanged glances and laughed. "No wonder, in this atmosphere," said the latter. "Oh, it is a rich story! Prince Dagobert will be rather surprised."

Beneath the palms before the booths, groups collected, discussing and inquiring in those half-whispered tones which always seem to conceal more than they reveal.

"Most strange! Most scandalous!" No one knew precisely what was meant, but exclamations of this kind were heard on all sides. It suddenly seemed as if every one were aware of some mystery which could be alluded to only in detached words, accompanied by shrugs and meaning glances. "An adventuress! *Demi-monde!*" uttered with an air meant to convey that nothing had occurred that might not have been expected.

They began to pity Rommingen, who had allowed himself to be snared so easily.

"How do you suppose he will behave?" There were jeers also at the Prince's credulity, and every one was immensely amused with Frau von Bogdanoff. The entire assemblage enjoyed a sensation which was absolutely inestimable.

When Ferra sank back half fainting on her chair she saw Maria Paulovna pass by the booth beside the Princess without so much as looking towards her. Here too, then, she was condemned,—condemned without a hearing! She knew that the little Russian made

a boast of her coldness of heart; that she had always impressed upon her cousin as the first of rules, 'Never compromise yourself!' Now others had compromised her; to Maria Paulovna she was as one dead. Tears rushed to her eyes. She saw, or rather felt, how all had vanished from before her booth. Her only conscious wish was to get away,—away! Not for an instant did she doubt that it was Leroy's hand that had dealt this blow. She was sure that his cold gray eyes were even now gloating over his victim's pangs. She arose and tried to steady herself against the little table. She must go,—go, she would see no one, not even Detlev. She trembled from head to foot. She could not even think of him,—no, not here!

Just as she was trying to reach the *portière* it was hastily drawn aside from without, and Deuren appeared: "Let me offer you my arm, madame. I see you are not well."

With a timid glance, like some hunted creature who cannot tell whom to trust, she looked up at him. Did he know? Was it pity that brought him to her, or ignorance? But a vertigo that overcame her put a stop to her hesitation: "Thank you very much. Please take me to the carriage."

As she sank back in the vehicle among the cushions, pale as a corpse and trembling violently, with a sudden resolve he took his place beside her. "Detlev never would forgive me if I were to leave you as you are at present," he said, with the air of an anxious brother.

At that name she shrank from him, her lips parted, and then, without uttering a word, she hid her face in her hands and burst into an uncontrollable fit of weeping.

He let her tears have their way for a while, and then he slowly drew down one hand from her face. "You have been grieved,"—he spoke as to a child,—“will you not tell me what has happened?”

His frank, handsome face looked earnest and trustworthy, his whole bearing was respectful and cordial, but she only shook her head passionately.

He did not urge her further. When they reached the villa he helped her out of the carriage, and led her to the little blue drawing-room. The servants had taken advantage of their mistresses' absence, and no one was to be seen save the footman at the entrance. Ferra turned with a gesture of despair and sobbed, "All is over! All is at an end!"

"Why so? Be sure that Detlev will defend you, madame. He is the most loyal of men."

"But it is all true!—true!" she cried, burying her hands in the waves of golden hair that hung in dishevelled masses about her temples. "Yes—yes, he did not tell too much. Born in the Rue Rochefort; so long unprotected in the Palais Arbanoff—until Constantin married me. It is all true,—all! But how can I help it? What fault is it of mine?"

She looked at him with eyes filled with agonized entreaty. Eustach changed colour. "Madame," he

said, reproachfully, "why—why did you never tell Detlev?"

"Because I had forgotten the past. Who has a right to ask about what is over and gone? He learned to know and to love the Princess Arbanoff, and that is I,—that I must remain. Why cannot that suffice?"

He shook his head. The serpent of suspicion stirred even in his breast, despite his childlike credulity.

"I forgot my past," she began again, in a piteous tone, "because Constantin begged me to do so. He saw no evil in it, perhaps because he was so magnanimous, perhaps because he pitied my forlorn, forsaken condition." With a passionate outcry she flung herself upon a lounge, and, stretching out her hands to Eustach, she implored him :

"Speak one word of comfort to me! Tell me that Detlev will not be so cruel as to forsake me."

The young officer was silent. He sincerely pitied the beautiful woman in her misery, but when he thought of Detlev he could give her no word of comfort. He knew his friend well enough to be certain that there would be a life-and-death struggle in his soul, but which side would gain the victory he could not decide. He could not but feel that love, howsoever pure and ardent and passionate, might succumb to inherited prejudices and opinions. How should he himself act in such a case? Like Detlev, rather abjure existence and its degradations than stoop, as he considered it, to share those degradations. Thus Ferra's

sentence was pronounced. She divined his thoughts, she saw them in his hesitation.

"Herr von Deuren," she said, in a voice broken by sobs, "however Detlev may act, I will receive it all submissively at his hands as a punishment for my silence. But you tell him; do not let him hear it in any terrible way. Every one has forsaken me now; do you befriend me. I am not guilty in the sense in which I may seem to be,—and I have loved him so dearly. It was love for him that kept me silent——" Tears choked her utterance. She never dreamed that she had spoken of her love as a thing of the past, but Eustach perceived it, and pity for her again gained the ascendancy in his fresh, young heart.

"I will do all that I can," he assured her eagerly. "Detlev must see you himself; perhaps, after all, all may yet be well."

She shook her head, but she took the hand he offered her, and held it in a close clasp; this young fellow seemed the last tie that linked her to a happy past. "You are his friend," she said, as if to justify herself for thus clinging to him; "tell him"—and she sprang up as if it were impossible for her to keep quiet—"that the heart of the Princess Arbanoff could not beat more warmly and truly for him than it does, if it had been born upon a throne, although it first throbbed in a cellar in the Rue Rochefort."

Her breath came in long sighs. A ray of the setting sun, caught in her dishevelled, shining hair, made it

gleam like liquid gold; her ardent eyes were fixed with a passionate glow upon his face. The young officer's heart beat quick. Of what avail, after all, were rigid prejudices and so-called principles confronted with this loving, longing vital force? Poor Detlev! How hard it was to choose the right!

"Go!" Ferra exclaimed suddenly, pushing him towards the door. "Wait for Detlev,—speak to him,—and—bring him to me! I must see him,—yes—yes, he must hear it from my lips alone."

"That will be best," said Eustach, hastily reflecting that Rommingen could not yet have returned, "he can learn from me what occurred this afternoon. I will go to his rooms and wait for him; he will come there first."

She assented eagerly. Then, when he had gone, she sat down and again wept convulsively. Suddenly Frau von Bogdanoff stood before her, looking very pale in the twilight that had set in.

"Ferra," she said, and her voice betrayed no special emotion, "it was wrong of you not to be frank with me."

"Did you wish for confidence?" asked Ferra, leaning her weary head back on the lounge.

Maria Paulovna cleared her throat loudly,—the reproach went home. Then she approached Ferra and gently stroked back the hair from her burning forehead. "My child," she said, sadly, "the world is a strange mixture of indolence and cruelty. So long as

it can pretend ignorance it sanctions anything, everything, but as soon as it is forced to open its eyes, it coldly tears its poor victim into a thousand pieces. This latter case is yours. What shall we do?"

"Nothing," Ferra replied, hopelessly.

"To that I will not agree as yet; something may occur to me. But how will Rommingen take this insult?"

Ferra tossed her arms aloft with a gesture of agony. Maria Paulovna looked at her face and turned silently away. Suddenly she felt herself embraced, and: "How kind you are!" was whispered gratefully in her ear.

"Kind? I don't know that. But when I saw the whole herd rush at you, as it were, I had to make a stand for you. Who among them all does not quietly shoulder a burden of sin, and feel quite comfortable the while?—only let it be a private burden,—let not a word betray its existence. I have not yet done with her Highness, I fancy. And now, my dear, be reasonable."

Prince Dagobert and his adjutant came back from their excursion in the best of spirits, just as the crimson sun was sinking below the horizon. On the castle steps his Highness turned to Detlev: "The rest of the evening belongs to your lovely betrothed," he said, with a wave of his hand, "it would be cruel to require any other service of you."

Detlev bowed his thanks; he was indeed longing to

go to Ferra, but just as he was leaving the court-yard a breathless lackey overtook him. "Her Highness Princess Dagobert begs the favour of the Herr Count's society for a few minutes."

Involuntarily Detlev raised his eyes in surprise to the windows of the Princess's wing of the castle; he seemed to perceive a curtain move at one of them, as if some one had been watching him from behind it. He looked down irresolutely, and then at the waiting lackey.

"Does her Highness require my attendance immediately?"

"Immediately, Herr Count."

Detlev turned and walked hastily back to the castle. What could it be? Some commission, it was likely. Well, the sooner he received it the sooner he should be at liberty.

He found the Princess alone; even Fräulein von Nobbe was not present. The doors of the broad balcony that overhung the garden were open, the fresh spring air floated in caressingly, stirring the heavy curtains a little. The last glimmer of crimson in the west was reflected upon the strong, prickly leaves of the aloes in the bronze vases placed at intervals within the iron railing of the balcony. Detlev afterwards remembered it all, and the clear sky in which the evening star gleamed faintly, and the trees bursting into leaf; there was even a low murmur audible among their branches, as if the evening breeze were humming a lullaby there.

Sibylla offered him her hand. She looked agitated :
“Count Rommingen, I sent for you because I have something to say to you.”

Detlev bowed over the offered hand and felt annoyed. Whenever her Highness had something to say to him it was sure to be disagreeable.

“You fear what is to come,” Sibylla continued, with some bitterness, as she perceived his involuntary recoil. “Unfortunately, you are right. It is my fate to be forced to give you pain, nevertheless I do so with a hope that hereafter you may do me justice, although at the moment you may resent my action.”

Detlev gazed at the agitated face confronting him. Again he saw in the eyes that strange, eager expression which he had perceived first at the opera and had ascribed to the effect of the light. It could not be the light now, for the twilight was advancing.

“I am listening, your Highness.”

She laid her hand upon his arm. “I esteem you highly, Count Rommingen. Highly, as a woman of principle must esteem a man whose life is regulated according to principle. I cannot endure to see you deceived, linked to one unworthy of you.”

He started ; his lips were compressed. “Your Highness——”

She stopped him by a gesture, and her grasp upon his arm grew tighter : “First hear me out !” she said, commandingly. “Yes, I allude to the Princess Arbanoff,—your betrothed. You have been deceived

like the rest of us. Your plighted troth binds you no longer ; you are free, Rommingen !”

“ Free ?” he said, with his head haughtily erect. “ I do not choose to be so, for I love Ferra.”

Sibylla laughed drearily. “ What ? An adventures ? The mere knowledge of whom suffices to stain your scutcheon ?—No, no ! I rank you too high to doubt you for a moment.”

“ What, your Highness,”—Detlev spoke calmly and resolutely,—“ would love without faith be worth ? Your judgment, usually clear and kind, has been led astray ; you are acting under the conviction that you are right ; I, on the contrary, am my betrothed’s natural protector, and I cannot doubt her.”

“ You do not believe me ! I knew it would be so,” Sibylla murmured. “ But what will you say when I tell you that the Princess Arbanoff was bought of her parents in a cellar in the Rue Rochefort by a young man, whose palace was her home until the old Prince, beguiled by the beautiful swamp-flower, married her ? The commentary on the facts suggests itself even to those prone to think no evil.”

“ An infamous slander !” exclaimed Detlev.

“ Why has she suppressed all reference to her early life ? Why did she never speak of it to you or to Frau von Bogdanoff ? I can see you have had no suspicion of all this.”

“ No ; nor do I believe it now. Who is your Highness’s informant ? By heaven, he shall render me an account !”

“Do not ask me. I have given my word that no name shall be mentioned.”

Detlev laughed bitterly. “And am I to heed for an instant this stab in the dark?—a slander that shelters itself in the folds of your Highness’s robe? Never! Allow me to withdraw.”

Again the Princess laid her hand upon his arm, and came close to him: “My poor friend,” she said, in half-stifled accents, “I know too well the struggle that must be undergone to avoid belief in what degrades ourselves or one dear to us. I know it all, and I tell you it will avail nothing. Conviction will come, crushing, clear, irresistible. This very struggle bears witness that mind and heart are at variance. It is more eloquent than words. Rommingen, do not look so tortured! Be a man!”

“I am not tortured, nor am I in any wise convinced.” But as he spoke he was conscious of a vague and yet mortal anxiety which he could not banish.

“This afternoon at the Bazaar,” Sibylla began again, “I was forced to exclude Madame von Arbanoff from among those admitted to our circle. She made no resistance, no attempt to defend herself; there could no longer be any doubt of the truth of what I had heard. And you, Rommingen, you are one of those who prize integrity and honour beyond all the happiness that the world can confer,—happiness which without purity would be to you but bitterness. Our honour is all that we can absolutely call our own. No power,

no chance, not even death itself, can rob us of it if we choose to preserve it intact."

Her voice vibrated with a tone of the firmest conviction. It was impossible but that her words should find an echo in Rommingen's breast. He bit his lip until it bled in his effort to repress a groan of anguish. Night reigned within and around him, and like some pitiless fate Sibylla stood before him and continued to speak. "All agony can be borne if one but summons up the will to endure. You, too, will forget, Rommingen; it is a sad consolation, but a sure one. I have been cruel as is the surgeon when he applies the knife; but—it was to save you, and that thought gave me courage. The woman upon whom your choice has fallen could never bring you any enduring happiness. You need more—because you give more—"

Sibylla ceased to speak; emotion forbade further utterance. The shades of approaching night veiled the apartment in gloom. Through the open balcony door came flitting a large white moth, which noiselessly, as if wafted by the wind, flew hither and thither like some strayed fancy seeking egress. A narrow strip of moonlight edged with silver the broad leaves of a plant on a small table near a window; not a sound broke the silence. Suddenly Detlev felt his hand grasped: "Speak! Say one word!" Sibylla whispered.

He could not,—his voice refused to obey him.

"Oh, if I could but console you! I care so much—"

I—oh, my God! Shall I turn traitor to myself—only to show you how fate is cruel to all alike?"

"Madame!" Rommingen exclaimed, releasing his hand from her clasp. He could no longer misunderstand,—her words,—her voice,—her cold, trembling hand, spoke only too plainly.

"Is not the misery of a love quenched in one's own heart's blood as great upon a throne as in the meanest hovel?" she went on, still in a whisper, leaning upon his shoulder as if for support. "Oh, Rommingen, if you are wretched, I am still more so. Shall not that console us?"

She was so near him that he inhaled the odour of sandal-wood,—her favourite perfume: it seemed to confuse his apprehension for an instant, and then the scales fell from his eyes. He was the object of Sibylla's affection. Oh, the irony of fate! He could not help it, he laughed outright.

His laugh sounded ghastly in the intense quiet. Sibylla shuddered: "Have you no other reply for me?" she asked, struggling with tears and anger. What was she but a poor, weak woman after all!

"Forgive me," Detlev said, collecting himself; "this is all so strange—I need air—I must go—go——" he repeated, louder.

"And to her?"

"It may be."

"You must not!" Again her trembling hand grasped his arm. "She will spread fresh toils for

you, and I will not—listen!—I will not have one whom I have ranked so high given over to degradation.”

Her whole being seemed to dilate and glow with passion; her eyes flashed fire. It is not unusual for a nature long considered essentially cold to relieve itself by an outbreak of passion that startles and dismays those who witness it. Thus it was here; this outburst found Rommingen utterly incapable of action, or even of words, and in addition Sibylla began to sob and tremble so violently that, in spite of all the repugnance that he felt, he could not but put a supporting arm about her and conduct her to the lounge.

“I will summon Fräulein von Nobbe,” he said, glad of this pretext for leaving the room.

“No, wait for one moment; there is no need for any one save yourself to witness my weakness.”

By a great effort she suppressed her sobs. “Forget,” she murmured, almost inaudibly. He bent over her to distinguish her words, and suddenly felt his head clasped by two trembling hands, while ice-cold lips just touched his forehead. “Go,” Sibylla said, in a voice more like her own, “and let this hour be forgotten by each.”

He obeyed immediately and without a word. Sibylla listened as the door closed after him, a smile of infinite bitterness hovering upon her lips. Never in her life had she felt more keenly and painfully her powerlessness to charm.

When Fräulein von Nobbe entered the room shortly

afterwards, she found her Highness still lying motionless on the lounge. Thinking her asleep, she cautiously bent over her. Two lack-lustre eyes with dark rings around them gazed at her from a face that was ashy pale.

“Good heavens! is your Highness ill?”

“No, Amanda, only very cold.” Sibylla was shivering violently.

“It is the draught. The door of the balcony is open. How imprudent!” said Fräulein von Nobbe, gently reproachful, as she hastened to close the door.

Sibylla had risen, and stood in the middle of the room, her hands clasped upon her breast. The silvery skies showed through the closed, glass door, and against their light the tall, black silhouette stood erect at first in clear outlines; then the head sank, the face was buried in the hands, and something like a faint moan escaped and died upon the air.

Fräulein von Nobbe approached her Highness with a troubled air, and said in an undertone, “His Highness Prince Dagobert.”

Sibylla stood erect again. “Bring lights,” she ordered, in her usual voice, and while the candles were being lighted she awaited her husband with calm indifference.

He must have been annoyed, for there was a dark frown upon his brow.

“I wish to speak with you alone,” he said, with an angry glance towards the maid of honour.

Amanda vanished noiselessly, and breathed more freely when she reached the anteroom, where nothing but an indistinct murmur of voices reached her ear.

Sibylla stood with one hand resting upon the table, waiting for her husband to speak, while he paced the room angrily.

"You have seen fit in my absence to offer an insult, to give rise to a scandal," he said at last, pulling at his long moustache. "Why did you do so? Was it necessary? I should have thought it far wiser first to sift your evidence."

"An insult? A scandal?" she repeated, deliberately. "You are mistaken, Dagobert; I merely availed myself of my right to banish from my circle what has no place there."

"And who knows that what has been told you is true? You have condemned hastily and without consideration because you chose to do so; pray who is the friend who happens to be so wonderfully well informed?" He paused before her and looked at her searchingly. She shrugged her shoulders.

"I shall not name him. Moreover, if you do not believe it why do you question me? Go to her and demand an explanation; but take care that she does not beguile you again with those eyes of hers. She seems well skilled in such arts,—this princess from the slums!" There was scorn and hatred in her tone; the Prince flushed angrily.

"You envy her and fear her! There lies the cause of your conduct," he began, with cool sarcasm; "but will you please to reflect that you have compromised us both,—the entire court? Do you not know that the newspapers will get hold of the affair and misrepresent and distort it until it is entirely unrecognizable? Did you forget that we, placed above the crowd as we are, owe a certain reserve to our position? that we——"

"And you tell me this?" she asked, with a sneering emphasis that gave each word the force of a blow. "Has this ever been your rule of action?"

"With us men it is a different affair," he went on, after a perceptible pause, occupied in twisting the ends of his moustache. "Moreover, with regard to the Princess Arbanoff I have nothing whatever to reproach myself with."

"Do not belie yourself; it was not your fault that she preferred another." Her tone, with the smile that accompanied her words, was one of extreme contempt.

"And you have estranged Rommingen entirely by your behaviour. He never will remain at court under the circumstances."

"He? What difference can it make to him after she leaves D——?"

"You imagine he will resign her?"

"Yes, I am quite sure of it."

Prince Dagobert looked his wife full in the face; she had grown very pale.

"The more fool he," he said, bluntly.

"Thank God there are still men who are willing to be fools for honour and duty!"

"Sibylla!" said Prince Dagobert, lifting his hands, "you are terrible! How differently you would act and think if your rigid virtue had ever been tried or tempted!"

For an instant Sibylla's eyes flashed; she made a hasty step forward: "Hush, Dagobert!" she gasped. Then, recovering herself, she passed her hands across her face: "Do not let us contend further," she said, with a struggle for composure, "we never, never shall be actuated by the same impulse; we simply cannot understand each other. What seems to you natural, revolts me, and what I deem right is sure to arouse your displeasure. Let us pursue our several paths as our nature shall point them out to us."

"And should these paths cross each other, Sibylla?" he asked, mistrustfully.

"Then let each act according to the dictates of conscience."

"Easily said; I, for example, am strongly tempted to say a few words to the Princess Arbanoff that shall pave the way for a reconciliation in case you find that you have been overhasty."

He looked at her inquiringly; every word, every glance of his testified to his disgust with the whole affair.

"If you should yield to this temptation," Sibylla remarked, coldly, "I should simply leave D—— on

the same day and return to my father. You would then have the pleasure of knowing our private affairs public property. You can do as you please."

Dagobert set his teeth; his heart filled with futile rage: "This cursed slavery!" he muttered, "if I were but a tradesman or a peasant! What a boon it would be to be able to act as one feels!"

Sibylla turned away with a shrug. "We are all slaves!" she said sententiously, thinking of her own poor heart, condemned to daily struggles.

Dagobert made no reply, but left the room without a word. Had it not been for the heavy *portières* and the lackeys lounging about, it is more than probable that he would have relieved his feelings by slamming the door after him. As it was, he was obliged to swallow his anger in silence, and it was a hard task.

CHAPTER XIX.

MARIA PAULOVNA'S PHILOSOPHY FAILS.

WHEN Detlev von Rommingen left the castle and went out into the cool night air he drew a long, deep breath, in hope, as it were, of some relief. But it was of no use; the terrible oppression weighing on heart and brain made connected thought almost impossible. Like malicious sprites, all the occasions when Ferra's behaviour had surprised him invaded his memory. He remembered the uneasy sensation he had sometimes experienced at the idea of such want of conventional conduct in his wife, and, strangely enough, he gave credit to what Sibylla had told him.

Did he not love Ferra then as he had believed he did? He sighed heavily at the thought. Involuntarily an aphorism occurred to him the truth of which he had strenuously denied a little while before: 'Friendship must be founded upon esteem; love does not demand it, for esteem can neither beget love, nor destroy it.' And now?—Ferra's image with all its exquisite charm arose before his mind; his heart beat fast, his pulses throbbed. Must he—could he resign her? The cold-blooded reflection of a moment since vanished; passion returned in full force.

To the right was the street leading to the Villa Bogdanoff. He must see her; but with the ardent desire for sight and sound of her came the consciousness that once in her presence all power, to judge would be lost, and that he should be a slave for life.

No!

Unconsciously his hand clutched the breast of his uniform as if thus to detain him. He felt like a drowning man when the waves are closing over him; he turned and walked towards his rooms. He would take counsel,—take counsel with his weary brain and sore heart. That meant a fierce conflict between two forces alike strong, sacred, and insistent; on one side honour, name, position, on the other,—his love!—his first and only love!

He mounted the stairs to his rooms hesitatingly, almost unwillingly, but before he had touched the latch the door was flung open, and Deuren stood on the threshold.

“Thank God you are here at last, Detlev!” he said, in a tone of relief, “I have been waiting for you a long while.”

Rommingen made no reply; he entered the room and mechanically closed the *portière*.

“Pray let me alone!” was all that he said.

Deuren watched him anxiously, dismayed by his pale face and unnatural air. “Detlev——” he began, with hesitation.

Rommingen had thrown himself into a cushioned

chair, and was beating time upon the arm of it with a tassel that hung from the back. "I am very busy," he said, in the same monotonous way in which he had first spoken.

Eustach went up to him and laid his hand on his shoulder. "Detlev, I have something to tell you."

"No need. I know."

Although the young officer was prepared for this, he could not forbear an exclamation of dismay. "Who could have told you——"

"Never mind; I know everything." The tassel waved to and fro with the regularity of a pendulum, otherwise Rommingen was motionless.

"And—and——"

"Do not ask me." Detlev interrupted him with such anguish in his tone that it went to the young fellow's heart, and he turned away.

"And yet I must ask you—in her name," he said at last, and there was a quiver in his voice, "Detlev! for sweet mercy's sake do not be precipitate; do not judge before you have yourself investigated; the world is so unjust——"

Detlev turned deliberately and looked at his friend as if to sound the depths of his soul: "Have you yourself any faith in the consolation you offer me?" he asked, deliberately.

Eustach avoided his glance. No, he had no faith in it. Had he not her own confession? Oppressed and wretched for his friend, he began again, timidly,

"Promise me, Detlev, that you will do nothing rash, —time effaces so much. I entreat you—oh, heavens!" he exclaimed, stamping his foot in despair, "what a miserable dolt I am, not even to be able to tell you all there is in my heart!"

"Be calm, my boy; I understand you." Yes, that was Detlev's dear old voice once more; it had so often admonished the young Hotspur. Rommingen's hand was on his shoulder now; he seemed as if about to ask a question for which courage failed him.

"What shall I say to her?" Deuren asked at last, in an undertone.

"Whatever you choose," Detlev replied, almost inaudibly; "but—I cannot see her! Not now; no, not now!"

"She is expecting you!"

"I cannot!" he groaned, in positive torture. "Do you not understand that if I saw her I should be weak? Passion is more victorious and eloquent than we dream before we learn to know it. Let me rest! give me solitude, Eustach! I must try to come to terms with myself. Go, my boy, it is late, and you must be on duty to-morrow; I am going to write my resignation to Prince Dagobert."

"Oh, Detlev! that too?"

"That before all else. Do you think I could remain here among these people? Impossible!"

The young officer spoke no word of remonstrance,

distressed as he was. "May not all still be well?" he asked, with a profound sigh.

Rommingen shook his head. "I must choose between a blot upon my scutcheon or——! it is best that the last Rommingen should die alone and unmourned."

"You will learn to forget, Detlev."

The adjutant smiled so strangely that Deuren could not comprehend him.

"Tell Ferra, if you see her, that I have loved her beyond everything in the world save honour. I am not angry with her; it would have been better, indeed, had she been frank with me, but I make no complaint. One must not ask too much. Farewell, Eustach."

He gently forced him towards the door, his eyes the while fixed earnestly upon the handsome, youthful face, in which a conflict of emotions was to be read so plainly.

"Must I really leave you alone?" the young fellow asked, wistfully.

"Yes. Good-night, Eustach."

"Good-night then, since you will have it so."

"Good-night,—farewell," came almost like a sigh from behind the *portière*.

The faint, melancholy sound thrilled the young officer to the heart, and with downcast head and faltering footsteps he slowly passed through the anteroom. On the stairs Friedrich, the Count's servant, was awaiting him. "What has happened, Herr Lieutenant?" the

old man asked, wringing his hands. "My young master never looked so before,—so terribly sad; 'tis pitiful! Be sure some woman is the cause, cursed creatures that they are!"

"I do not know, Friedrich."

"Ah, Herr Lieutenant," the old fellow whispered, confidentially, "come back again this evening. I don't quite trust my Count. Just so his father looked when, on the evening of the blessed Countess's funeral, he sent a bullet through his brains——"

"Good God!" thought Eustach; but he said nothing, only clinched his teeth beneath his blonde moustache.

"Speaking out does no harm; it relieves the heart," old Friedrich added, and in an instant Eustach was gone.

Like lightning it flashed upon him,—the thought to which Friedrich had given expression had haunted him persistently all the evening, but, like a coward, he had refused to confront it. He saw Detlev dead! dead!—no, by heaven, that should not be!—he would prevent it by all, by any means possible. For one moment he stood in the street uncertain, and then strode forward, on to the Villa Bogdanoff, where the lights were still bright.

With a long sigh of relief Detlev found himself at last alone. Every word, every look, every sigh of his young friend had pained him, and yet—it could alter nothing; Deuren, honest fellow, could only confirm

what Sibylla had said. There could be no doubt, no question, now.

He sat down at his writing-table and leaned his head upon his hand, his breast heaved with a long-drawn sigh. All was over then,—gone irrevocably,—his happiness, his hopes, his love. He wrote in a firm, clear hand his resignation from the Prince's service, never pausing until he had signed his name. At this he gazed long. This paper would be found here when he was dead and with him the name of Rommingen was extinct. Should he leave a farewell for Ferra also? He hesitated and faltered; his heart prompted it, his reason forbade it. Why deepen wounds already made? And then her having deceived him all this time had left a sting in his heart. The deepest love is one with perfect truth. Unquestionably she had loved him, but truth—she had lacked.

What if this discovery had come later, after she had become his wife? He shuddered. Then, too, there would have been but one solution,—a voluntary resignation of life. Could he endure to have his wife pointed at, the object of significant whispers, replied to by a shrug and that indefinable smile of aristocratic society, more sure to destroy than the axe of the executioner? The blood rushed to his head at the thought. He seemed to see the long line of his ancestors thronging about him with eyes bent in stern reproof upon the scion who had bestowed his love upon a dishonoured woman; and last came his mother, his boyhood's idol, with her pale,

sweet face, in which he read the question, 'Could she be my successor in your heart?'

With a groan his head sank upon his breast, and then, stirred by some invisible force, he suddenly looked up. Opposite him, on his writing-table, stood Ferra's portrait, painted by Laudin. Yes, it was her face, with all its beguiling charm; the smile, half wistful, half wayward, upon the ripe lips, the wondrous colour of the hair, and the still more wondrous magic of the eyes. With a tortured heart he turned the picture to the wall.

"I must not see her if I would still be worthy of you, mother," he whispered.

Then he arose hurriedly, opened the cabinet where he kept his weapons, and took from it an inlaid, ebony case containing a small revolver, with an ivory handle, a gift from the Prince. As he looked at it he grew very calm.

A slight pressure, and all would be over. Had he not known comrades who had spent a merry evening among friends pass out of life thus quietly, and for less cause,—debt, perhaps?

For him both present and future lay in ruins; the vacancy of life confronted him in all its barren desolation.

He took up the weapon; it was light as a feather in his hand, and yet had power to end his misery. The lamp-light shone upon the Prince's crest and initials. He raised it. Strange that he should feel so calm!

The instinct of life is surely strong, and a resolve to die is the opposite of this instinct; his repose of mind was a proof, then, of the dominion of will over natural instinct. Some such thoughts were floating vaguely through his brain as he raised the revolver.

“Detlev! Detlev!” It was no loud call or cry, only a horrified, half-stifled whisper in which his name was uttered, while two clasped hands were raised to him in entreaty. Before him, on her knees, lay Ferra.

With a gasp Rommingen started to his feet, overturning with a crash the heavy arm-chair in which he had been seated, and gazed down on the kneeling figure. No!—it was no illusion of his fancy,—it was she, but ah! so changed. There was no seductive brilliancy in the tear-veiled eyes that looked up at him. Her cheeks were ashy pale, her hair dishevelled; the white lace veil which she had carelessly wrapped around her head had fallen down about her shoulders. But a fresh charm, an unwonted, feminine grace, seemed to envelop her.

He closed his eyes with his hands. “Go! For the love of heaven, go!” he groaned.

Eustach von Deuren, who satisfied himself by a glance that they had come at the supreme moment, slipped noiselessly into the next room, and began to pace it to and fro in much agitation, assailed by wretched doubts. Had he done right? Oh, heavens! had he done right?

"You would condemn me without a hearing," Ferra persisted. "Is that just?"

"Would you see my weakness? Would you see me again a prey to the struggle between love and duty? Ah, you do not dream what it is!"

She shook her head and slowly rose. "You need not fear it,"—her tone was bitter,—"I know now that a man's love must be measured by a different gauge from any which can be used to estimate a woman's affection. Do you suppose I ever should have asked or cared to know where your ancestral castle stood? I loved you; that sufficed me."

"And yet you deceived me!"

"Yes, I did, because I would fain have spared you any struggle. I thought too lightly of such things. My punishment is heavy enough, and I conjure you, Detlev, not to make it more terrible! How can I live on with my conscience burdened with the thought that I—I have caused your death? I could not bear it. Here!" her voice grew more agitated, her face flushed and paled again, as her trembling fingers slowly drew off her betrothal ring, which, with down-cast eyes, she laid upon the table. "I have dreamed that you could not endure the knowledge of my past. I could not possibly stay here now. To-morrow I shall go back to Félicité, and you are free. All tie between us is severed; but live, Detlev,—you will forget,—live on, I implore you."

She looked at him with such entreaty in her eyes

that he was obliged to fold his arms, or he must have snatched her to his heart. The attitude gave him an air of repose which he was far from feeling.

"Do you know what you ask?" he said, with intense emotion, and his eyes seemed to glow like black lava. In all her misery Ferra was conscious of his manly beauty.

"Yes, I know; but, Detlev, is it not cruel to impose such a punishment upon me for what is no fault of mine? If you, in my place, had been born in the Rue Rochefort, and—and others had taunted you with it so bitterly——" Her voice broke, and the tears rolled down her cheeks.

He laughed. Harsh and discordant enough his laughter sounded. "Why speak of that? Why not refer at once to that which separates us? Your birth?—what do I care where you were born?"

She looked at him wide-eyed, her hand clasped to her heart. "Good God, Detlev!" she stammered.

"You yourself are to blame if I speak out." He grasped her arm as if he would fain crush it. Close to her own she saw his pale, agonized features, his fevered breath was on her cheek, while she held her own, all the force of her nature concentrated in her inquiring eyes, which were fixed upon his.

"What were you doing in the Palais Arbanoff—for months—alone with the young Prince Achille? Do you fancy that the world is so large that a woman's shame can be lost in it and leave not a trace?"

Then she thrust him from her with what was almost a shriek of indignation. Her gentle, pleading mood had utterly vanished. Horror and anger spoke in both voice and look.

“What! *you* could believe that, Detlev?—I did not wonder at the rest;—they do not know me;—they do not love me. But you!—you!” She turned away from him, a hard, unyielding expression on her face. While he——? with absolutely irresistible force the conviction came home to him that he had wronged her, and all remorse for such wrong, all other emotion, was drowned in a sensation of absolute bliss. He gazed at her for an instant, and then, with an inarticulate cry, he threw himself at her feet.

“Ferra, forgive! forgive!” And he hid his face in the folds of her dress. She looked down at him without a word.

Deuren, startled by the outcry, thrust his flushed face through the curtains of the *portière* and saw Detlev at Ferra's feet.

“Frailty, thy name is—man!” he murmured to himself, and vanished discreetly and noiselessly.

“Can you forgive me?” asked Detlev, with an upward glance that was as imploring as had been Ferra's own.

Beneath her foot lay the revolver, which had fallen from the table, as she said, with a world of reproach in her voice, “And you preferred death to asking me an honest question? Ah, why did you not come to me?”

“Because I was a madman; because I lent an ear to those vile insinuations,” he confessed, with shame. “A man’s nature, Ferra, is so prone to error that he may well lose faith in the true and pure, and be hasty and evil in his judgments! And you did nothing to gainsay, to explain,” he added, with more confidence. “Confess, Ferra, that the whole story is so wonderful, incredible——”

“That it has wellnigh cost you your life,” she said, bending over him with a dawning smile, for the sun was evidently beginning to break through the clouds, and Ferra, true to her nature, was ready to greet his light. “But you left out of the tale the dear old housekeeper, Clarisse. Why, Clarisse was a very model of virtue, and so strict, so——”

“But you were seen in the theatre. Your name was coupled with the young Prince Arbanoff’s——”

“True; but what of all that? Achille’s father married me afterwards,” she said, simply and with utter honesty. “It is true Alice was like you, and it made me very unhappy.” She sighed, remembering it. “The only one who never, never doubted me was Constantin; he alone truly loved me.”

“Ferra!”

“Yes,” she said, releasing herself from his embrace, “you do not really deserve that I should love you so. And,” she added, sadly, “it is best that we should part, Detlev. The phantom of the past would never be entirely laid, and that I could not endure.”

"Is there no means of banishing it forever?" he asked, for her words made him wince.

She shook her head. "Achille has hated me since my marriage, and my dear old Clarisse is dead."

"Have you any suspicion as to who first mentioned this vile slander here? The Princess Sibylla believes it."

"And if I have?"

"Could he have told it in good faith, or did he know better?"

"What would you do, Detlev, if I knew the last to be the case?"

"Kill him!"

She pressed her soft cheek to his. "Chance might make you the victim," she said, timidly.

"Then I should, at all events, die for you and for my honour."

She was a prey to a brief struggle. Knowing that Leroy would be pitiless, why should she expose her lover to his fury? Once more she was only a weak, timid woman, ready to suppress the truth rather than endanger him whom she loved. The stuff for a heroine was not in her.

"I cannot tell," she whispered. "Who repeated it to you?"

"The Princess Sibylla," he confessed with some hesitation.

"And did she not know who first spread abroad the slander?"

"She refused to tell me the name of her informant."

"Thank God!" Ferra thought, relieved, conscious for the first time of a feeling of gratitude towards the woman who had insulted her.

"Have you entire faith in me now?" she asked, looking at him once more with eyes in which shone the strange gleam that was all her own. For answer he clasped her in his arms and rained kisses on her lips and hair.

Meanwhile, the time passed slowly for Eustach in the next room; he drew aside the *portière*, and as he stood upon the threshold Detlev perceived him. The young hussar's fine face expressed extreme embarrassment.

"I really could not devise anything else," he murmured, "your Friedrich was afraid—as I was—it would have been such a pity, Detlev——" He glanced significantly towards the revolver on the floor.

"Yes, you are a loyal friend," said Ferra, offering him her hand. "He knows now, of course, Herr von Deuren, how wrong he was."

"My dear boy," Detlev shook him warmly by the hand, "it is all right. We were all wrong," he whispered, "to my shame be it spoken. But, Eustach, I am inexpressibly happy again."

The young officer fairly glowed with delight. "And now to convince the rest of the world!" he exclaimed. "Oh, ways and means can be found, and we shall make

this herd of gossiping scandal-mongers uncomfortable enough,—the Princess Sibylla first of all.”

“The Princess?” Ferra laughed. “You are very ungrateful, Detlev. Do you not know why she has persecuted and calumniated me? Because she loves you herself.”

“Impossible!” exclaimed Deuren. “Why should you think so, madame?”

“My intuition is sure,” Ferra persisted. “Poor Princess Sibylla! I am the victor after all.”

Detlev was silent, knowing what he did, and he glanced with an expression of relief towards his letter of resignation that lay on the table. Eustach observed it. “Is that necessary, Detlev?” he asked, nodding towards it.

“Yes, I must belong to my wife alone. When we are married we shall go to my home,—to Erdenflueh. Shall it not be so, Ferra?” Smiling, she put her hand in his.

In the blue drawing-room of the Villa Bogdanoff Maria Paulovna was restlessly pacing to and fro. She would not admit to herself that she was anxious. “What under the sun are other people’s affairs to me?” she had repeated to herself with every possible emphasis again and again, but her heart would not be quieted by such scraps of philosophy. After listening vainly at the window, she stepped up to a tall mirror and looked into it. Her sallow little face showed traces of

agitation, and, with a pathetic attempt to attain her former state of indifference, she gave herself a pinch on the ear. "Come, you hard-hearted, unfeeling vivisector of sensitive souls," she said contemptuously to her own reflection, "you look precisely as if you yourself were under the knife. After all, paradisiacal repose is possible only in solitude; put two people together and there is an end of it. Poor child! Pshaw! she will forget him,—thank God, human beings do not remember even tragedies forever. I'll go with her—whithersoever she chooses!—to Kamschatka, for all I care. At all events, we will turn our backs upon this precious D——. And Rommingen! A bloodless saint, who values his inherited prejudices beyond life and happiness,—I have very little hope of him."

As she soliloquized thus, Maria Paulovna looked so distressed that, observing her face in the mirror more closely, she burst into a laugh.

"You are a crazy old creature," she said, shaking her forefinger at her image. "Your philosophy has gone by the board now, just as your youth and your illusions went long ago. Give it up, I tell you. Constantin Arbanoff was the only sensible one among us, what would have become of the little girl from the Rue Rochefort but for him? Ruined—dead! As for you, my fine M. Leroy, just wait; it is ill making an enemy of Maria Paulovna."

She clinched her small hands, sparkling with rings, and shook them in the air. "Just wait,—the day

of reckoning will come!—let me only know first what is to become of Ferra——”

And the double-dyed aristocrat was again aware of the pang of pity in her heart which made her so restless. What was happening? Deuren had looked so unhappy.

“God grant that all may end well, although it is hard indeed to believe that it can.” She sighed profoundly as she sank into an arm-chair.

The door opened at that moment, and Ferra, on Rommingen's arm, and followed by Eustach, stood before the little Russian. Her melancholy mood changed on the instant. “Why, this is really you!” she said, with an ironical glance, to Rommingen, “I never supposed you had so much sense.”

“Oh, Mietza!” Ferra entreated. “Do not speak of it! It was all so horrible!”

“What have you decided to do? For I take it for granted that you have found time enough to think and act like reasonable beings.”

“We are going to Erdenflueh as soon as possible.”

“Indeed?” said Maria Paulovna, sarcastically,—“according to the well-known method of the ostrich, you mean to go, Ferra, before you are indemnified here for the insult offered you?”

“If he chooses. He believes in me, Mietza.”

“I am precisely of your mind,” said Deuren confidentially to the little Russian, whose sharp tongue generally kept him at a distance. “Princess Sibylla

must be brought to apologize, if only for Detlev's sake, for the scandal she has authorized. Hey, Detlev?"

But Ferra was whispering to her betrothed, and he did not hear.

"All lovers are fools," said Frau von Bogdanoff, with a shrug, "you and I are the only ones here possessed of a grain of sense. Listen: I have telegraphed to Achille Arbanoff, and have begged him to come to us,—he will soon destroy this Hydra with all its heads."

"What have you done?" asked Ferra.

"Sent for Achille."

"He will not come,—he hates me," she said, sadly.

The little Russian tossed her head. "And if he were your mortal enemy," she said, with dignity, "you might be sure that no word of his would be lacking to vindicate your honour. The Arbanoff blood flows in the veins of honourable men, thank God! I would pledge my life that he will obey my summons,—and then let this rabble come and sue for forgiveness. With clear consciences, we can defy calumny to harm us, even superficially. What will you wager that Prince Dagobert does not give you away at the altar?"

The lovers, in the consciousness of their newly-recovered happiness, smiled at Maria Paulovna's enthusiasm. Eustach alone entered into all her schemes with eagerness.

"Detlev does not undervalue them," he said, de-

cidedly ; " only at present he has no time to think of them. It is not easy to live burdened with unexplained mysteries, even the greatest happiness might well totter beneath such a weight. Therefore, let us do what we can."

" That we may be able hereafter to shake off the dust from our feet," said Frau von Bogdanoff, with a sigh of resignation. " I tell you, my dear young friend, all combinations that can be devised on this blessed earth are folly. You will perhaps quote me against myself when you hear what is my unalterable resolve with regard to the next week or ten days, but it is like the laws of the Medes and Persians, and I care not a jot whether you are displeased or not. You must know that my doors are to be closed to everybody."

" Not to me ?" Rommingen asked, in amazement.

" To you first of all. Of course, Ferra is ill. You will be on duty at the castle."

" I have sent in my resignation."

" That's your affair. Kill time, in God's name, as seems best to you ; within my doors you do not come."

" Mietza !"

The little Russian clapped her hands upon her ears. " No, I tell you ! I am not to be bribed ! I know perfectly well what I am about. And now good-night. After such a day as this has been we all need rest."

CHAPTER XX.

ACHILLE TO THE RESCUE.

A FEW days afterwards as Erdman von Nobbe was walking in the park he met Leroy. After an instant's reflection he approached and greeted Anatole, who had not perceived him.

"I was thinking of paying you a morning visit," said the lieutenant, "I have not seen you anywhere."

Leroy started: "Has anything happened?"

"On the contrary. I only hear what goes on at the castle, and that is little enough; the Princess is ill,—that is, they say she is,—and the Prince is furious."

"And Madame von Arbanoff?"

"I know nothing about her. Rommingen is relieved from duty for the present, and Deuren has taken his place as personal attendant upon the Prince. They say, moreover, that Rommingen means to resign."

"Ah! That looks as if the betrothal were dissolved, does it not?" asked Leroy, very pale, and with an almost imperceptible tremor in his voice.

"I really don't know; I suspect so. You know what the report is?"

"That the Princess Arbanoff intends returning to Russia."

“And that Frau von Bogdanoff has obstinately closed her doors to all the world, and is only waiting until Madame von Arbanoff’s health is so far restored as to allow her to travel.”

“How cruel !”

“But very natural ; it was a colossal row.”

“I too mean to leave D——,” the diplomat remarked, carelessly, lighting a cigarette, “there is no field here for an active intellect. I need occupation and excitement.”

Nobbe lifted his eyebrows and shrugged his shoulders. “There may be two opinions as to that ; certainly the past season has been more like a spark in a powder-cask than anything else.”

“But what does it amount to ?” Leroy looked after the light cloud of smoke from his cigarette, and built a lofty castle in the air. Ferrà crushed and wretched at *Félicité*,—he her consoler. He had been most cautious : his name had not been mentioned ; he might soon exult in his victory. If he could only hear something more from the Villa Bogdanoff ! Even Nobbe knew nothing. The only positive fact was that the ladies were seen nowhere ; they were said to be ill.

So occupied was he with his thoughts that he was first recalled to the present by his companion’s lifting his hat.

“To whom did you bow ?” he asked, seeing a carriage which had just passed them vanish behind a hedge.

"To Frau von Bogdanoff."

"Was she alone?"

"Of course. The sallow little Russian may not have an immaculate past, who knows? At all events, she is not so stupid as to run any risk for the sake of the follies of others," said Nobbe, sententiously.

At this very time Ferra was alone in her own drawing-room.

"You have condemned me to absolute imprisonment," she had complained to Maria Paulovna, who bade her farewell when she went to take her drive. "You must see that Achille is entirely out of the question. Why should he disturb himself? He never answered your telegram nor took any notice of your letter. What can you expect?"

"Himself," was the laconic reply.

"And how long shall you expect him?"

"Men are hardly to be reckoned upon where they are obliged to subject themselves to inconvenience," she said, already on the threshold of the door. "Do not grow weary, *ma petite!*"

Ferra sighed impatiently. She plucked a rose from the jardinière and inhaled its fragrance. Through the green net-work of ivy and the embroidered shade at the window the sunshine lit up her golden head and fell in a broad band around her, enveloping her entire figure. She leaned back and closed her eyes; Detlev filled all her thoughts. Roused by the entrance of the servant with a card, she took it from his tray, interested

to know who, in spite of Frau von Bogdanoff's prohibition, had found his way to the villa, where callers had been rare.

"Achille Arbanoff," she read under the engraved coronet.

A cry escaped her as she started to her feet. He was standing in the door-way, his slender figure somewhat bent, but not so languid and loosely knit as formerly; the deep-set, dark eyes were still veiled and weary, but there was not a trace of fatigue on the pale, aristocratic features.

"I may come in, may I not?" his low, gentle voice asked as he advanced towards her. "Maria Paulovna's despatch did not find me at home, I was in Madrid. I have travelled day and night since I received it; I hope I am not too late?"

With the languid grace natural to him he sank into an arm-chair, his eyes fixed intently the while upon Ferra's lovely, blushing face.

"How you have changed!" he said at last. "And how like you are to that picture which so enchanted me years ago! You are grown more beautiful, Ferra. Who could have foreseen it all!"

"And I owe it all to you!" she exclaimed, as she took his hand with the eager impulsiveness that characterized her, and for which she had been so criticised.

"To me! Yes, it is true I was the tool of which your destiny made use. I learned, moreover, from Frau von Bogdanoff's letter that you are thinking of marrying again—my beautiful step-mother!"

He held her hand in his, and gently stroked the delicate, taper fingers.

"Yes," she said, and her breath came quick, "that is, if everything is explained. Detlev must have evidence that my past was blameless. I choose that he should."

"Bah! Of what consequence is it, since he has you?"

"But it is my will," she said, eagerly. "No shadow must rest upon me. He must be perfectly happy."

"You love him so very much, then?"

"I cannot tell you how much,—you would not understand me." She leaned towards him, her eyes sparkling, as she laughed. "It is, perhaps, because I was born in the Rue Rochefort that I never can learn to be calm and cold-blooded, like your aristocrats."

"'Tis a pity!" he said, thoughtfully, adding no explanation as to what his words referred to. "Well, Ferra," he began again, "you could not desire more than I can easily give you, and that is—truth. But tell me, who can have tried to traduce you? Have you any idea who it is?"

"Leroy!" she said, indignantly.

"Leroy here? What a strange freak of fate!" Achille's voice suddenly sounded hoarse; his brown, half-veiled eyes looked as if a candle had been lighted behind them, so transparent and brilliant did they become. "Did he ever presume to you?"

She looked up irresolute.

“You surely ought to confide in me,” he said, with a gentle smile. “Did I not always honestly play the father to you?”

He was still holding her hand, looking down at its tracery of blue veins. Ferra blushed again, then tossed back her head, and without faltering told of Leroy’s persecution of her. Not by word, look, or gesture did Achille interrupt her. He was silent for a few moments after she had ended, and then he said, “It is well for you that you are to have a strong arm to protect you, Ferra, you would else have the whole world against you,—women—and men too.”

She shook her head, smiling, as if she doubted his words. The next instant Frau von Bogdanoff swept into the room like a whirlwind. “Aha! I thought so,” she exclaimed in shrill tones, shaking Achille by the hand, “here you are at last. Rommingen is sent for; I despatched a messenger for him as soon as I found your card in my drawing-room.”

Ferra blushed again as Achille said, “I am exceedingly glad, my dear cousin, that you at least believed in my step-mother——”

“Nonsense!” she interrupted him. “No one can accuse me of credulity; and on the other hand I am often false and malicious in self-defence; but I believed in her without a question, as I did also in Constantin’s honour. Now she shall be brilliantly acquitted.”

“I shall request an audience with Prince Dago-bert.”

"That is well. Rommingen will take you to Deuren, and he can arrange it. Between ourselves, Prince Dagobert himself is a very good fellow, but the Princess——" Here Maria Paulovna was seized with a fit of coughing, and when she had recovered from it she asked, "How long do you mean to stay here, Achille?"

"Until I have fulfilled a mission," he said, gravely, looking into vacancy with half-closed eyes. "But I imagine it will not take long."

Maria Paulovna understood his words as bearing reference to Ferra, and nodded assent.

"We shall see you often?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "I never dispose of my time beforehand; it paralyzes my will."

Rommingen was announced and with a cry of joy Ferra hastened to meet her lover, her face radiant with the delight of reunion after the dreary days of waiting; Achille looked on with a smile.

"Let me congratulate you, Count," he said, in his gentle, languid way. "I see you hold fast to your own, in spite of the world's falsehood."

"The world is false always," Maria Paulovna interposed, "or so often that it is not worth while to heed it. Come, Ferra, let us leave these gentlemen alone for a moment."

"I was always an unwelcome burden to him," Ferra said to her cousin as she left the room with her. Old times were very vivid in her memory to-night.

As soon as Achille found himself alone with Detlev

he began : " My coming hither, Count Rommingen, is surely the most complete refutation of the slander which has been an insult to my father's memory, to my own honour, and to that of my step-mother. Is there another word required between us ? "

" Most certainly not." Achille saw the light in Rommingen's eyes, and sighed gently :

" It is my destiny always to let slip the right moment. I was about to offer my name and my hand to my *protégée* as an atonement for the wrong I had done her in the eyes of the world by my own thoughtless vanity, and under the influence of false friends, but I delayed too long, and my father, more youthful in heart than I, his son, forestalled me ! I do not think that Ferra lost by the exchange."

Detlev held out his hand to the speaker. " I thank you, Prince Arbanoff," he said, with involuntary esteem ; " I thank you cordially."

" Yes, so it was. Men are fools, and their folly is their own worst punishment. Strange, that this knowledge always comes too late," Achille remarked, with a melancholy smile.

" And now the slanderer must be called to account." Detlev stood erect and his eyes flashed.

" Do you know who he is ? "

" Not yet, but I shall surely discover him. I will not call Ferra mine until I shall have avenged the wrong done her."

" Let me tell you that I know the man whom you

seek, but between him and myself there is an old score to settle. Give me the precedence, I will not interfere between you afterwards. Now I am going to the castle."

They shook hands once more ; there was no need of further words ; as men of honour they understood each other.

"Deuren, Prince Dagobert's adjutant, will procure you an immediate audience as soon as he learns your wishes. May I give you a few lines informing him of them ?"

"Thanks."

Detlev wrote a few words upon the back of one of his cards, and while he was thus engaged Achille stepped to the window. On the opposite side of the street lay the park, with its velvet turf, and its quivering greenery, through which the bright sun was shining. Suddenly Achille's face grew hard and stony. Along the broad promenade two men were sauntering, one tall and ungainly, the other shorter and elegant in figure ; they looked curiously over at the villa, and then turned into a side-path leading into the depths of the park. In one of them, even at that distance, Achille recognized Anatole Leroy.

His characteristic languor gone, he took the card which Detlev handed to him, and, with a very brief farewell both to Rommingen and to the ladies, he left the villa.

"*Au revoir,*" Maria Paulovna called after him. He

only raised his hat, and then Ferra, surprised, saw him cross the street and vanish among the trees of the park. His figure was erect, his step light and elastic as that of a hunter sure of his game.

"How changed he is!" said Ferra, turning away from the window.

Achille Arbanoff had not been mistaken. Before him, in the pathway that, gradually narrowing, penetrated the depths of the park, and at no great distance, he perceived the two figures whom he was pursuing. They were sauntering slowly along; they could easily be overtaken. He walked quickly, and his eyes brightened; he held his head erect; something of the lost vigour and freshness of youth seemed to return to him. Just as he reached the pair they unexpectedly turned, and Achille Arbanoff and Anatole Leroy confronted each other, measureless contempt in the eyes of one, hatred and dismay in those of the other. The Frenchman took out his handkerchief and passed it across his brow, as if to banish some phantom of the brain, but the figure before him kept its place.

"Vicomte Anatole Leroy," said Achille, and, although he spoke in a low voice, every word sounded trumpet-tongued in the ears of him whom he addressed, "I have followed you because I wish to speak with you."

The tall lieutenant made a motion as if to withdraw,

after he had stared at the speaker long enough to be quite sure that he was an equal in rank. Achille perceived it, and with a quick gesture detained him. "Let me beg you to remain. The matter that brings me here may perhaps require a witness."

"Wherefore, Achille? What we have to say to each other had best be said with no one by," said Leroy, recovering his self-possession by an effort. "My dear Herr von Nobbe——"

Erdman touched his cap, glad to go. The stranger's face wore a menacing expression; the affair might be disagreeable; Leroy was evidently disturbed. Why should he be compromised? He had half turned away when the stranger spoke again.

"My name is Achille Arbanoff; and I am here for the purpose of settling a small account with this gentleman. Have the kindness to remain, Herr Lieutenant."

"Ah—ah—with pleasure!" stammered Nobbe, feeling rather uncomfortable.

"Vicomte Leroy, who as my friend was constantly in my house, and was perfectly well aware of all that went on there, has dared to assail my father's widow by the basest of slanders."

"Who says that it was I?" Anatole interposed, contemptuously.

"Do you deny it?" Achille had drawn off one glove, and held it lightly in his hand. Nobbe looked in much surprise at his former friend.

“Permit me——” he murmured.

“To distort facts for the purpose of injuring another,”—the cool, quiet voice went on,—“especially when that other is a defenceless woman, is, in my estimation, the act of a scoundrel, and one which I feel called upon to chastise on the part of my father, the deceased Prince Arbanoff; on the part of my step-mother, the Princess Arbanoff; and on the part of an old account as well as of this new one.” With the pearl-gray kid glove Achille lightly struck Anatole Leroy in the face, just as though he were brushing away some noxious insect.

For a second there was a silence so profound that the falling from a tree of a dead twig was audible. Erdman von Nobbe, looking in his friend’s face, was horrified. The blue veins showed plainly in its ghastly pallor, the lips were compressed, and the pupils of the eyes contracted to a minute black point, from which there flashed such cruel, intense hatred as but rarely informs the human countenance. For a moment it looked as if he were about to hurl himself upon his enemy, but he controlled himself.

“You are right, Achille Arbanoff,” he said, hoarsely, clinching his right hand. “I have hated you as poverty hates wealth; as labour hates idleness. If I could have wrought my will you should have been given over to ruin. Have a care of yourself in this quarrel!”

Achille shrugged his shoulders indifferently. “You will find me at my hotel this evening at eight, when

preliminaries can be arranged," he said to Nobbe. "I am a stranger here, and it is a question whether I can find a second before then ; I shall not, however, attach any importance to such formalities ; I am ready for anything." He lifted his hat, turned on his heel, without deigning another glance towards Leroy, and was gone.

As if released from a spell, the two whom he had left looked after him. The sun lay bright on the distant gravelled walk, the birds were singing, and there was a low rustle among the tree-tops. As Achille's figure gradually diminished in the distance, Nobbe touched the Frenchman on the arm, "What does it all mean?" he said, with a perplexed glance at the other's pale face.

"It means"—Anatole laughed so discordantly that a little bird above his head flew away startled—"that I can throw up the cards ; I have lost the game."

He sat down on the nearest bench ; the lieutenant stood before him, feeling very uncomfortable.

"You are my second, Nobbe?"

Erdman hesitated. The Vicomte riveted upon him his cold steel-gray eyes, the pupils of which were still strangely contracted. "That is a matter of course," he said, sharply.

Nobbe dropped his eye-glass and picked it up again, with a very long face : "Certainly ; that is a matter of course," he repeated.

"Since you are to blame for it all," Leroy com-

pleted the sentence. "If you had held your tongue the Princess would have heard nothing——"

"What more can you ask, Vicomte? I am quite ready to serve you," the officer interrupted him, irritably. "But let us discuss arrangements, for it will shortly be my hour for going on duty."

He sat down beside Anatole, and after a brief conference returned to town by another path, walking very slowly and looking much depressed. "An infernal affair,—infernal!" he muttered angrily to himself.

Achille Arbanoff sent for a carriage and was driven directly to the castle. All trace of agitation had vanished from the languid face; he might have been supposed to have just returned from a walk. The scene in the park had balanced an account for him, and he was quite satisfied with the remainder. He had despised Anatole Leroy ever since his eyes had been opened to the shameful manner in which this false friend had made use of him,—had made every effort to degrade him morally; not openly gratifying hatred and envy, but working in a secret, underhand fashion, sure to be the most successful in the end. To-day he had coldly and calmly hurled in the Vicomte's face the contempt he felt for him, and he could now quietly await the result.

Arrived at the castle, he asked for Deuren, and was immediately conducted to the small, square apart-

ment looking out upon the court-yard, where the officers in attendance were wont to perform the business of the day, or to amuse themselves in hours of leisure.

Eustach von Deuren was seated on a corner of the writing-table, which looked very tidy and cleared up,—there was positively nothing to do for the present,—and was bored to death. Since he had been adjutant he had smoked a double quantity of cigars and cigarettes, had yawned twice as often as usual, and had despatched to heaven thousands of sighs from his ‘place of solitary confinement,’ as he called this small apartment, where he knew the pattern of the wall-paper by heart, and where there was absolutely nothing to be seen from the windows. How much more delightful was the life of liberty which he had led hitherto! But he kept this to himself, confessing it to no one save Detlev. With the rest of the world he posed as an object of envy, gladly as he would have resigned his honours.

Achille Arbanoff’s visit, heralded by Detlev’s card, enchanted him. He went to the door to receive his visitor, and begged him to be seated, apologizing for the darkness and dreariness of the apartment.

“The matter that brings me here can be disposed of very briefly.” Achille took a seat and explained to the young officer the purpose of his visit. Eustach listened with sparkling eyes, nothing more satisfactory could be imagined. He was as delighted as if Detlev’s case had been his own, and with eager

enthusiasm he begged Achille to wait for a moment. "When the Prince hears of the nature of your errand he will instantly appoint a time to receive you; *entre nous*, Prince Dagobert was made very angry by the scandal,—he respected the Princess Arbanoff thoroughly."

Achille nodded. "She is every way worthy to be respected. I should like to have my interview with the Prince an hour hence, for my time here is limited."

With jingling spurs Eustach hurried away, to return very shortly with the intelligence that his Highness would receive the Prince within an hour.

"I refrained from any precise explanation," the young fellow said, laughing, "but nevertheless they all looked very eager. His Excellency Neukirch, and even his Highness himself, could not restrain a certain curiosity; in an hour, then, I shall have the honour of seeing you again."

As Eustach was escorting his visitor to the door of the room Achille paused. "Herr von Deuren," he said, "I have a little private affair to settle here; may I request your assistance?"

One glance at Achille's calm, haughty face, and Eustach declared, "I am entirely at your service, Prince."

"The affair to which I allude is a duel. Will you be my second?"

Eustach was startled. "Here, in D——?" he asked, doubtfully.

"Yes. Let me explain it all fully. It is my intention and my right to chastise the malicious slanderer who, notwithstanding his thorough knowledge of the wrong he did, calumniated my father's widow."

"You know who it was?" Eustach asked, breathlessly.

"Viconte Leroy. But my reckoning with him is of older date, therefore I alone must settle it; may I depend upon you?"

"With all my heart."

"The affair may have disagreeable consequences for one in your position."

"Pshaw!" Deuren stood erect. "My convictions, my sympathies, assert themselves in spite of petty considerations. Command me to the utmost, Prince."

As he stood there, so young, honest, and enthusiastic, ready to sacrifice his heart's blood for his convictions, Achille looked at him and gave a little sigh. The frank, handsome face had all the charm of youth, of a youth which still has faith in truth, magnanimity, and justice, which still aspires after ideal excellence and can bewail its illusions. Had he ever been so young? Yielding to an impulse inexplicable even to himself, he suddenly held out his hand to the young officer, who grasped it cordially.

"Pray make every arrangement," Achille requested. "Shots are to be exchanged until one or both are mortally wounded. Leroy's second is a tall, slender infantry officer."

"Nobbe, of course," said Eustach, contemptuously.

"And let me beg you to observe the greatest caution with regard to the whole affair. I would not have it come to the ears of Count Rommingen or his betrothed. If I fall, you can take it upon yourself to bring the scoundrel to punishment, since you know who he is, or you can do just as you please. One thing more: the sooner the better for me. *Au revoir*, Herr von Deuren."

Achille had gone. His perfect repose of manner had hitherto had a soothing effect upon Eustach, but upon his departure the adjutant's excitement became intense, so absorbing his every thought that the ensuing hour passed with lightning rapidity.

Prince Dagobert was walking restlessly to and fro in his library. Much as his wife's treatment of the Princess Arbanoff had displeased him from the very beginning, much as he thought she had been to blame, he still felt himself called upon to defend her conduct to others, and in no wise to compromise her.

To this he was incited, it is true, only by his sense of duty and of the outward respect due to Sibylla; his heart had no share in the feeling.

Still, under these circumstances he received Achille graciously, but with an amount of reserve. He informed him that, painfully as he had felt what had occurred, he could not exonerate Frau von Bogdanoff, as well as Ferra, from blame.

"The only one to blame is, in fact, myself," said Achille, in his quiet way. "I did not consider the consequences which result from every act of ours, nor the iron laws and barriers behind which all born in the higher ranks of life entrench themselves. Let it be some excuse for me that I intended to make Ferra Doutrange my wife."

"Ah!" exclaimed Dagobert, much surprised.

"Does not that seem to you a sufficient warranty for the purity of my intentions?"

"Certainly, most certainly. It is a pity that my wife could not have heard what you have just said."

"I am perfectly willing to repeat it to her Highness."

The Prince hastily touched a little bell upon the table. "Inquire if her Highness is prepared to receive the Prince Arbanoff and myself," he said to the lackey who appeared.

Of one thing Prince Dagobert was sure, and this he was always ready to acknowledge,—namely, that Sibylla, however her conduct might annoy him, possessed the courage of her opinions, and never would condescend to shelter herself behind any convenient sophistry. On this occasion she instantly consented to receive her visitors.

"Prince Arbanoff brings us the desired explanation," said the Prince, with a wave of his hand towards his companion.

"Indeed?" The word was a protest against what

she was to hear. Sibylla was resolved to believe nothing.

Achille repeated here what he had now said so often. The Princess merely bowed her head.

"I understand. It is your father's wife of whom you speak," she said, as if she had been quite prepared for all that she heard.

"Your Highness is mistaken. Even in the interest of my kindred I should not allow a falsehood to pass my lips."

"Ah, you acknowledge principles, then, Prince?" The words were spoken scornfully enough, and the smile that curled Sibylla's thin lips as she uttered them was not pleasant to see.

"I do, your Highness, and foremost of all those which would lead me to accord sympathy and esteem to a defenceless and innocent woman. And be sure that I shall chastise according to his deserts the man who has dared in defiance of his better knowledge to sully what is sacred to me."

"When you discover who it was," Sibylla said, with a sneer.

"I know who it was, your Highness. He will not escape punishment." His words sounded cool and indifferent; his whole air was languid and weary. The Princess might have smiled, but that there was an indefinable something about this man that made her shudder.

"If I had not found the Princess Arbanoff fettered

by other and most happy ties I should not have hesitated an instant to offer her my hand," he continued; "but, under the circumstances, I must content myself with remaining her loyal friend. A late repentance is seldom of any use."

"But the Princess Arbanoff is now free," Sibylla said, with a sudden turn of her head. "I hear that Count Rommingen has resigned all pretension to her hand."

"Your Highness has been misinformed. The betrothed pair, as I can testify, are thoroughly united, and very happy."

"Ah!" Sibylla twisted her lace handkerchief into an ugly knot. "You have seen this?"

Achille bowed.

"Rommingen is perfectly right," said Dagobert. "He would have been a fool had he acted otherwise."

"A fool indeed," Achille added.

Sibylla alone kept silence. She felt that she would rather die than say one kind word with regard to her enemy.

When Achille had departed, the Prince confronted her in high displeasure. "You ought to have done everything in your power to atone for the mischief you caused," he said, angrily. "What am I to do now? Invite myself to Rommingen's marriage that I may carry them my congratulations in person? It will be some small satisfaction for them,—very small, it is true."

“Do whatever you are inclined to do,” the Princess said, contemptuously. Never had all men seemed to her so petty and pitiable as since she had been informed of Rommingen’s degeneracy.

Far in the depths of the park, scarcely a quarter of a league from the most frequented of the city gates, there is a fairy-like spot. The green turf extends to the very edge of a little lake, the waters of which are deep blue, flecked with sunlight, and tossed at times into tiny, silver waves by the winds of spring. A pair of swans glide to and fro upon its surface; one shore is bordered by trees whose branches dip low into the water. They are still feathery in their foliage, and the leaves are more easily stirred than when hardened and darkened by summer’s dust and heat, the sun glistens upon them, the birds twitter and sing, grass and shrubs are sparkling with dew, and the deep-blue skies laugh down upon it all.

Not far from the shore, in the centre of the bit of lawn, two swords are stuck upright in the sod,—they quiver slightly with their own weight,—and behind each stands a faultlessly-dressed gentleman. The seconds have made their arrangements, and the first of the words of command has been uttered, when Achille Arbanoff makes a prohibitory gesture with his hand and advances a step or two towards his antagonist, his pistol in his right hand, which hangs by his side. “Anatole Leroy,”

he says, and, although his voice is not loud, every word falls upon the air clear and harmonious as the stroke of a bell, "one of us at least must never leave this place alive; we fight to the death; there can be no mercy, no magnanimity: either you or I fall!"

Leroy makes one hasty movement as if to shoot on the instant, but his murderous impulse is controlled, and Achille takes up his position again. The signal is given, and the pistols are discharged simultaneously.

To the seconds the antagonists seem to waver a little, but a shake of the head is the only answer of each to an anxious inquiry. As they confront each other thus, all Anatole's silent, nameless hatred, all Achille's supreme contempt, are intensified tenfold. Leroy compresses his lips. Achille is seized with a disgust for mankind—for existence itself.

The swans, who had fled at the sound of the first shots, glide near the shore again curiously. Again the signal is given.

Again two small blue clouds float upwards in the sunlit air. The double shot, although not very loud, scares away the swans again. Achille and Leroy are both lying on the ground, and the grass beneath them is slowly reddening.

They are lifted and laid beneath a spreading oak. The duel is ended. Anatole breathes heavily,—the bullet has penetrated his lungs, and each breath brings him nearer the end. The surgeon raises his head, "no hope!" he says to Nobbe.

‘No hope!’ The dying man hears the words; he shivers, his eyes wander from side to side; death seems horrible to him.

Achille’s thread of life is also spun; he too must die, as he has, perhaps, foreseen. With a shake of his head he refuses all assistance; his fine face is as placid and unmoved as ever.

Nobbe leans over Leroy. “Arbanoff is dying,” he whispers, as if by way of consolation.

Anatole grows restless, his coolness suddenly forsakes him; the next life with all its terrors is at hand. By an effort he tries to turn so that he can see Achille, he would fain make peace with some one, for the catalogue of his sins seems to lengthen as his eyes grow dim.

“Achille,” he gasps,—“death—reconciles—let us—eternity—your hand, Achille.” He almost shrieks the last words; the blood wells from his wound; with a last effort he moves his hand.

Achille looks at him with eyes wide open, then turns his back upon him. Implacable!

One convulsive shudder, and Leroy’s limbs straighten. He is dead!

Achille’s eyes call his young second to his side. “I die gladly,” he whispers, “my life has been useless—worthless—it leaves no gap.—See that Ferra—hears nothing—of my death—it might alloy her happiness.—For me everything—was too late—too late!”

The sun plays among the leaves of the oak and upon

the turf beneath; the dead and the dying are flecked with its light. Achille looks fixedly abroad upon the fresh beauty of the place, and the longer he looks the larger his eyes seem to grow; their lids lift, and his face wears an intently listening expression. Above him, in the tree, a thrush is trilling; the spring breeze, laden with fragrance, fans his pale forehead; an unearthly light gleams in his open eyes; a peaceful smile settles upon his face. No one about him moves. The thrush trills on, the swans describe majestic circles on the little lake, and amid sunshine and the airs of spring Achille Arbanoff ceases to live. But the smile never leaves his face.

CHAPTER XXI.

CONCLUSION.

ALL D—— was in a state of excitement quite indescribable.

Great as was the pains that had been taken to keep secret the duel that had cost two human beings their lives, the report of it spread like the wind. The only one who knew nothing of it, and who was yet bitterly reproached as the cause of it, was Ferra herself. Rommingen, Eustach, and Frau von Bogdanoff all conspired to keep her in ignorance of the tragedy. She wondered that Achille did not come to bid her farewell before returning to Madrid, but she consoled herself with the knowledge of his eccentricity, and Detlev's devotion prevented her from attaching any great importance to it. She seemed for the first time to hold the heart of her lover in her absolute keeping; the mysterious something that had formerly at times come between them and had caused Detlev uneasiness was explained. He saw how her adaptation to his modes of thought and opinion would surely come with time; and he himself was more patient with her small weaknesses after they had each proved the strength of their love and had seen that nothing could ever separate them.

Eustach von Deuren submitted with haughty self-complacency to arrest and temporary confinement, as the penalty for his share in the duel, and then resigned his position as adjutant, assuring Detlev that, so far as he was concerned, he would have nothing different that had occurred, so proud was he of his share in the victory of truth which Achille Arbanoff had purchased with his life.

Frau von Bogdanoff rubs her hands with a shiver, shakes her head, and declares that existence is growing absolutely terrible.

In the castle, Fräulein von Nobbe is in violent hysterics. Not only must her beloved brother undergo the penalty for his share in the duel, but Erdman von Nobbe has been transferred, by special order of his Royal Highness, to an infantry regiment in the provinces, with no prospect of return from such an exile.

"It is all Neukirch's fault," Amanda declares, amid floods of tears, as she entreats her Highness to use her influence in Erdman's favour.

Prince Dagobert listens to his wife's intercession without interrupting her, and then says, quietly, "You are at perfect liberty, Sibylla, to dispose of your ladies-in-waiting as you see fit, but you must permit me the same freedom with regard to my officers. Send Fräulein von Nobbe away with her brother if she cannot live without him."

The Princess is indignant, but is obliged to grieve her cherished confidante by declining to interfere fur-

ther, and Erdman von Nobbe has abundant leisure to discover that he has overrated his sister's influence.

Otherwise all remains much the same at the court of D——. The gulf between the princely pair is not to be bridged over. Perhaps the Princess grows gradually more yielding in the absence of such constant tale-bearing as Erdman von Nobbe's, while the Prince, on the other hand, is more intimate than ever with his old Excellency Neukirch, who has not suffered to the extent of one wrinkle the more, or of one more gray hair, from the tempests that have swept over the court.

Society has amply justified Frau von Bogdanoff's estimate of it. Visits and attentions of every description are showered from all sides upon Ferra and herself,—the villa is besieged.

"A pitiable world!" Maria Paulovna remarks, contemptuously. "It must all be bought in one way or another; there is no such thing as real independence to be found anywhere."

Contrary to the expectations of all D——, Count Rommingen's marriage is celebrated very quietly. Very few people were invited to be present; among them, however, was Eustach von Deuren, graciously released for the occasion by Prince Dagobert, who, shortly before the ceremony, made his appearance himself at the villa with a magnificent bouquet, which he presented to Ferra. "My best wishes go with you both," he said, cordially, pressing her beautiful hand to his lips, "you will be very happy, and I—will not envy you,

but rejoice in your joy." A sigh was smothered behind the long, tawny moustache.

"And yet, your Highness, the much-courted Princess Arbanoff has bestowed her hand upon a simple country squire. In fact, Ferra, that is precisely what I am," Detlev says, gayly, looking down at his civilian's dress.

"The country squire cannot hide my Detlev," she whispers, as the Prince turns away.

Maria Paulovna is very quiet and even sad. She cannot bear to have Ferra leave her, and for the first time in her life the thought of solitude dismays her. The small, oblique eyes are positively filled with tears, although no power on earth could force her to admit it, when she bids Ferra farewell. D—— is entirely ruined for her; she is resolved to travel.

"Come with us, Mietza," Ferra entreats her, but Frau von Bogdanoff shakes her head decidedly.

"Frightful idea, playing third to a newly-married couple!" she says, with an effort to appear thoroughly self-interested, "but in a year, perhaps,—yes, in a year!"

The following spring three persons are together upon the castle terrace at Erdenflueh. Detlev and Ferra are standing close by the balustrade, overshadowed by the ancient oaks of the park, and in the background at a little table sits Maria Paulovna partaking of some small refreshment. She has been here for a month,

and is so content that every morning she holds forth at some length upon the necessity of her departure in a few days. But Detlev and Ferra—good children—will not hear of anything of the kind.

“Dearest,” says the young Countess, putting her hand within her husband’s arm and satisfying herself by a glance over her shoulder that her cousin is too busy to attend to them, “I want to confess something to you.”

Detlev smiles. He knows his wife’s way of introducing some scheme of hers which she will not carry out without his entire approval. “What have you been doing now?” he asks.

“I am so happy!” There are tears in the beautiful eyes raised to his. “And to whom do I owe my happiness? To Achille Arbanoff alone; what—where should I have been but for him? So I have been writing to him this afternoon to tell him so, and to beg him to pay us a visit here at Erdenflueh. The letter is on my writing-table. Will you read it?”

Detlev does not reply immediately, but looks before him into the depths of the park. Ferra puts her hand on his shoulder and continues: “If he does not come, he will, at all events, know that I am grateful to him, and that may please him; do you not think so, Detlev?”

Count Rommingen slowly shakes his head. “No, my darling,” he says, drawing his young wife closer to his side, “do not send your letter. It never will reach Achille.”

"Why not? If he is away from home it will follow him; I want him to know that we remember him."

"Achille, Ferra, has gone to that unknown country whence none ever return."

"Dead? And I never knew it!"

"It was his wish that you should not be told. He died when he was in D——."

"Oh! oh!" she exclaims in horror. "He did not die. He was killed! Leroy killed him! Was it not so?"

"You are right. He fell in a duel with Leroy."

"Villain!"

"He, too, is dead, Ferra."

She trembles, and leans her head upon his breast, his arm is thrown tenderly around her. "Do not take it so heart, my dearest," he says, soothingly.

"All on my account! All on my account!" she sobs. "Poor Achille! His whim made me prosperous and happy, but his life was the forfeit. Poor Achille!"

"Do not struggle with your tears," Detlev says, stroking her golden curls. "They honour both yourself and him."

Maria Paulovna, perceiving something wrong, comes hurrying up, recklessly trailing her lace train over the flags of the terrace. Detlev signs to her not to be distressed.

"Poor Achille!" Ferra says again; and then, ob-

seeing her cousin's approach, she says to her, her eyes still streaming with tears, "I never can forgive myself."

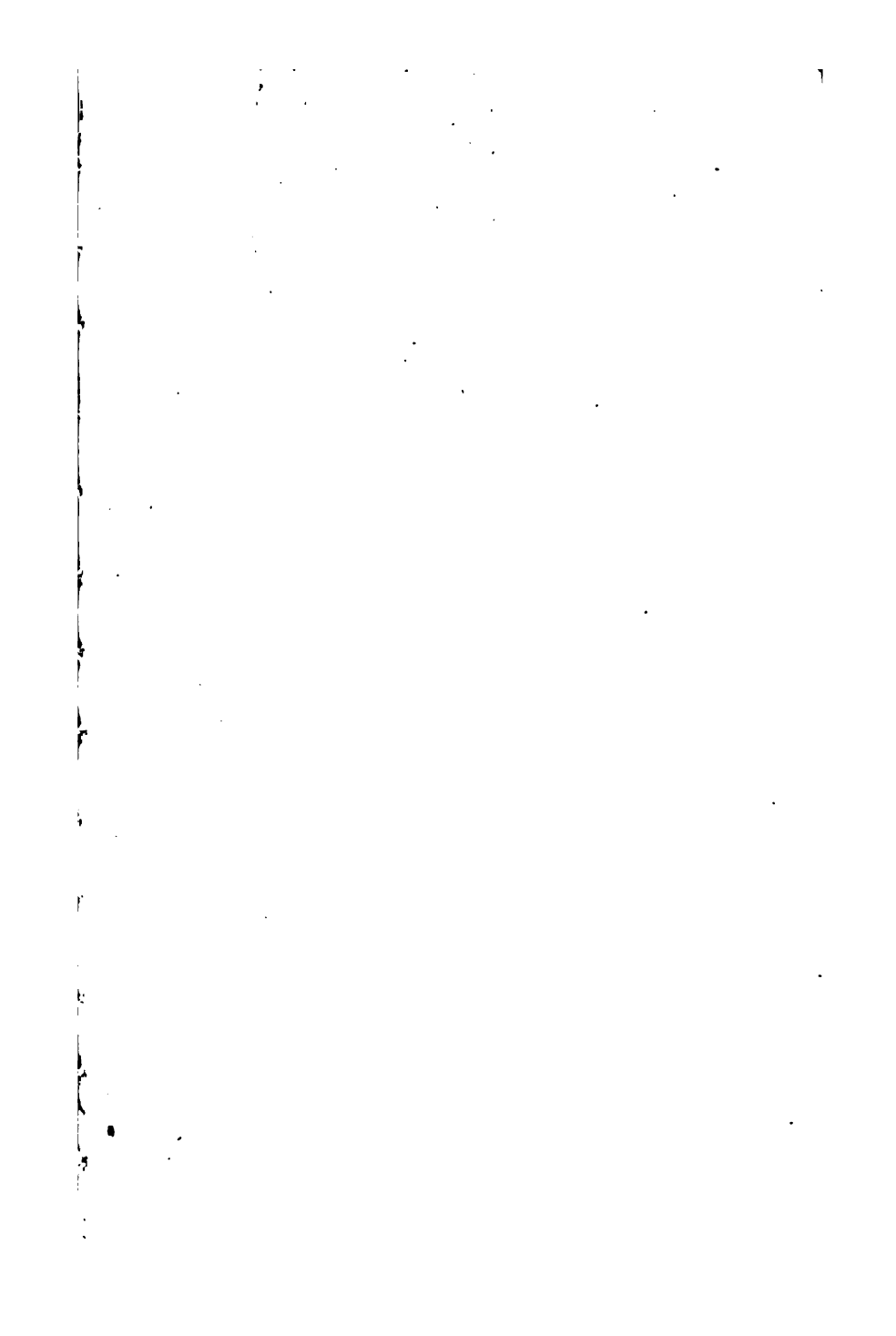
Frau von Bogdanoff kisses her heartily. "Nonsense!" she says, in her old hasty fashion, "we are not masters of the consequences of our acts. One rises, another falls; it is the lot of mortals. Let us keep his memory green, and that will be more than falls to the share of most people."

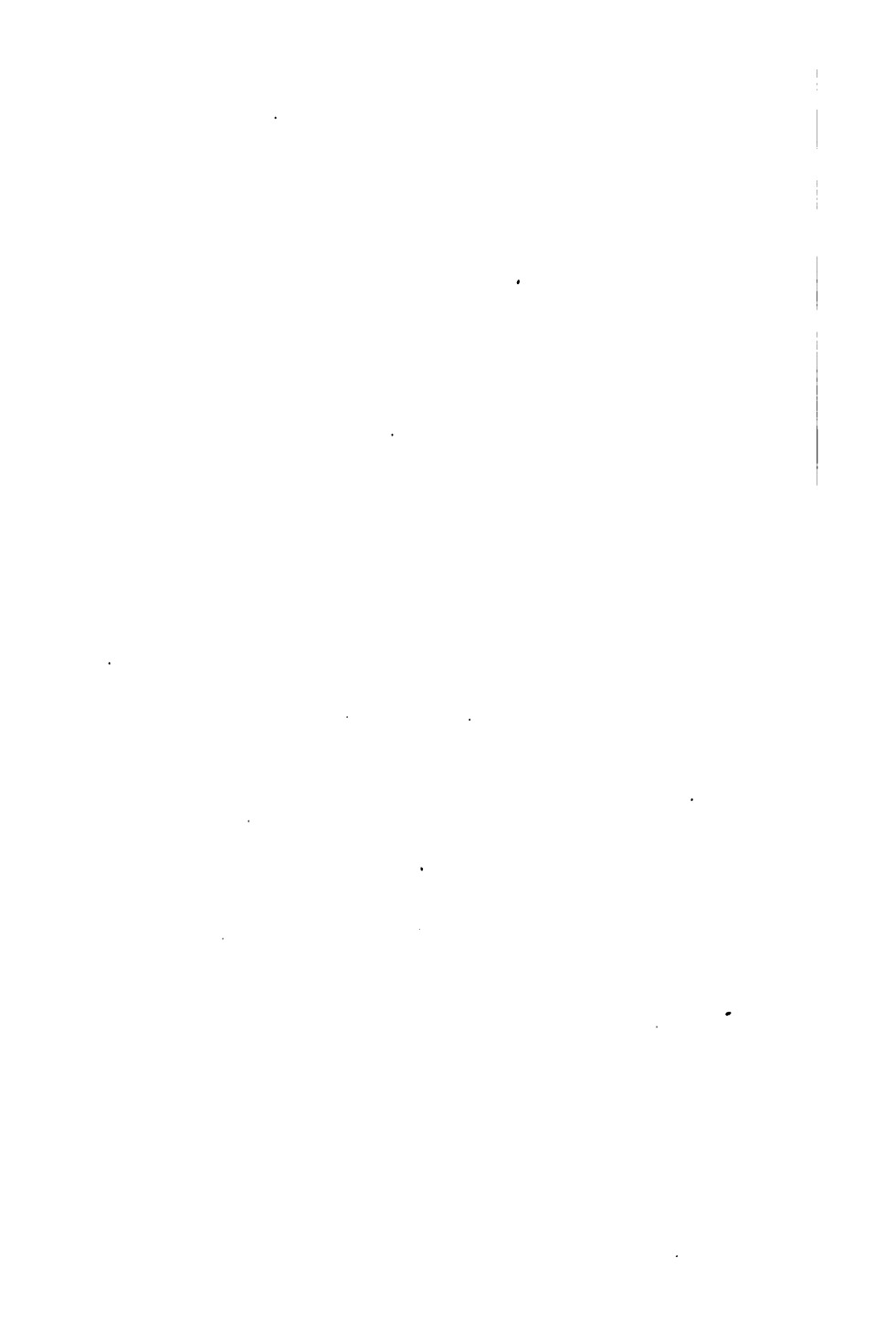
"Indeed we will," Ferra says, gently, and Detlev clasps closer the little hand in his.

OF NEW YORK.

THE END.

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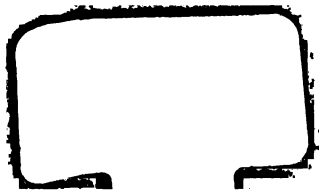
1. The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions and activities. It emphasizes that proper record-keeping is essential for transparency and accountability, particularly in the context of public administration and government operations. The text notes that without reliable records, it becomes difficult to track the flow of funds and resources, which can lead to inefficiencies and potential misuse.

2. The second section addresses the challenges associated with data collection and analysis. It highlights that while modern technology offers powerful tools for data management, the quality and consistency of the data itself remain significant concerns. The document suggests that standardized protocols and regular audits are necessary to ensure the integrity of the information being collected. Additionally, it points out that training personnel in data handling procedures is crucial for maximizing the utility of the data.

3. The third part of the document focuses on the role of communication in organizational success. It argues that clear and consistent communication is not just a supportive function but a core component of effective management. The text describes how regular updates and open channels of communication help in aligning the organization's goals and ensuring that all team members are working towards the same objectives. It also mentions that good communication can help in resolving conflicts and fostering a collaborative work environment.

4. The final section discusses the importance of continuous learning and improvement. It states that in a rapidly changing world, organizations must be willing to adapt and learn from their experiences. The document encourages the implementation of feedback loops and regular training sessions to keep the workforce updated with the latest industry trends and best practices. It concludes by noting that a commitment to learning and improvement is what sets successful organizations apart from their competitors.

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1. The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions and activities. It emphasizes that proper record-keeping is essential for ensuring transparency and accountability in the organization's operations. This section also outlines the various methods and tools used to collect and analyze data, highlighting the need for consistency and reliability in the information gathered.

2. The second part of the document focuses on the implementation of internal controls and risk management strategies. It details the specific measures taken to identify potential risks and mitigate their impact on the organization's financial health and operational efficiency. This section also discusses the role of management in overseeing these processes and ensuring that all employees are aware of and adhere to the established protocols.

3. The third part of the document addresses the importance of regular communication and reporting. It describes the various channels and formats used to disseminate information to stakeholders, including internal reports, press releases, and public statements. This section also emphasizes the need for timely and accurate reporting to ensure that all parties involved have the most up-to-date information available to them.

4. The fourth part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining a strong relationship with external stakeholders, including suppliers, customers, and regulatory bodies. It outlines the various strategies used to engage with these groups and ensure that their needs and expectations are met. This section also discusses the importance of staying up-to-date on industry trends and regulations to ensure that the organization remains competitive and compliant.

5. The fifth part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining a strong financial position and ensuring that the organization has sufficient resources to meet its obligations. It outlines the various strategies used to manage the organization's finances, including budgeting, forecasting, and capital management. This section also discusses the importance of maintaining a strong credit rating and ensuring that the organization is able to secure financing when needed.

6. The sixth part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining a strong reputation and ensuring that the organization is perceived as a responsible and ethical entity. It outlines the various strategies used to manage the organization's reputation, including public relations, social media, and corporate social responsibility initiatives. This section also discusses the importance of being transparent and honest in all communications and ensuring that the organization's actions align with its stated values and mission.

7. The seventh part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining a strong workforce and ensuring that the organization has the necessary talent and skills to succeed. It outlines the various strategies used to attract, develop, and retain top talent, including recruitment, training, and performance management. This section also discusses the importance of creating a positive work environment and ensuring that all employees are treated fairly and with respect.

8. The eighth part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining a strong relationship with the community and ensuring that the organization is a positive force in the local area. It outlines the various strategies used to engage with the community, including philanthropy, volunteerism, and social responsibility initiatives. This section also discusses the importance of being responsive to the needs and concerns of the community and ensuring that the organization's actions benefit the local area.

9. The ninth part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining a strong relationship with the government and ensuring that the organization is compliant with all applicable laws and regulations. It outlines the various strategies used to engage with government officials, including lobbying, public relations, and compliance programs. This section also discusses the importance of staying up-to-date on government policies and regulations and ensuring that the organization is able to adapt to any changes.

10. The tenth part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining a strong relationship with the media and ensuring that the organization's message is effectively communicated. It outlines the various strategies used to engage with the media, including press releases, interviews, and social media. This section also discusses the importance of being transparent and honest in all communications and ensuring that the organization's actions align with its stated values and mission.