THE NECKLACE OF THE NINE GEMS

AND OTHER STORIES

AMBROSE PRATT

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Ambrose Goddard Hesketh Pratt, 1874-1944
Australian author of more than 30 novels and 20 non-fiction books; journalist, and traveller

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Editor's Note:

The author was predominently a journalist and novelist. His novels ranged from colonial Australia to pre-revolutionary France. He wrote a small number of short stories, all of which are in this original collection. One source cites "The Iron Hand" as "horror"; it is not; and erroneously lists "Norfolk Island" (*The Bulletin* , 5 February 1898) as a short story; it is non-fiction article.

These stories were first published beween 1897 and 1934. Sources are included with the stories.

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1: A Question of Respect

The Bulletin, 19 Jun 1897

"IF ONLY men were Men!" sighed the woman.

The man looked tired and gazed abstractedly into the distance. "What do you want me to do?" he asked.

The woman became instantly energetic. "Do you want me?" sharply.

"You know I do," replied the man, aroused.

The woman went closer, placing both hands on his shoulders. "Would you really marry me after the—?" Her lips were white and she was trembling.

"Dear," said the man almost tenderly, " because *he* does not reverence you, please don't doubt me. I shall be honored in my wife no matter how she comes to me!"

The woman's eyes were brilliant, but she was not satisfied. "Do you respect me— although I am—?"

The man took all the necessary oaths.

"You are a *man*! Now l am happy!" said the woman.

THE INCUBUS, who had been listening throughout, hidden by the ivy tendrils and the dusk, stepped forward, curious.

"Do you really respect her?" he asked the man, pointing impolitely to the woman, who had started back, pale as death, from the man's arms. The man recovered himself with difficulty, and the Incubus repeated the question, but this time bowed to the woman instead of pointing.

"Yes!" answered the man confusedly, but sincerely.

"Ah, thank you," said the Incubus; "I was momentarily interested in ascertaining your predominant characteristic. I do not think you are much of a rogue!" He nodded and passed on down the path.

The woman had been eyeing the man and the Incubus with agony and apprehension. Amazement overcame her now. Recovering, she sprang down the path and faced the Incubus, less quickly followed by the man.

"What are you going to do?" she demanded.

"Nothing!"

"Which means—?"

"Anything but a divorce!" The Incubus laughed and struck a match on his leggings. Both sounds grated on the woman's nerves.

"Why? why? why?" she cried distractedly. "You hate me, why won't you let us both be free?"

The Incubus spoke deliberately. "I beg your pardon, madam. I neither like nor dislike you!"

"Then why—?"

He purposely misunderstood her. "Because, madam, any affection would argue a foundation of respect you cannot inspire, at least in *me*." He bowed ironically towards the man whose figure was sharply silhouetted against the sands of the bay.

The man stepped forward with clenched fists— he was very young. "Enough of this!" he said hoarsely. "I can't stand much more.

"I beg your pardon," said the Incubus with consummate courtesy, "I had forgotten your relationship to the lady. I beg to retract anything offensive my remarks contained!" And ne tie parted unopposed into the shadows.

The woman laughed hysterically, but drew back when the man would have taken her in his arms. "No! don't touch me! don't touch me! Ah, how cruel he is! No, keep from me. You men are all the same. He swore he loved me when he married me, and scarcely a month after our wedding he grew cold. It is coldness kills us women!"

She was sobbing, bitterly sobbing; pacing up and down; now pressing her hands to tier side, now wringing them in absolute despair.

The man was miserable, and almost crying, too. He was scarcely 23.

"I did nothing to change him!" moaned the woman— "only love him. My God, how I loved him!"

"But you love me now? " asked the man, passionately.

"I don't know," said the woman. "Don't ask me; I do not know!"

At breakfast next morning the Incubus was sipping coffee as he read the cables, when the woman entered, pale and purposeful, with dark-rimmed eyes. She held something tightly clutched in her left hand.

Rising, with old-fashioned courtesy, he waited till she was seated, then went on with the cables.

"Nearly sure to be a big European war," he said, absently; but recollecting, amiably offered her the paper.

She took it, and crushed it, with many rustles, into the chair beside her. "I want your attention!"

"It's so early— scarcely ten, he said, deprecatingly.

Something seemed to choke the woman, though eating nothing.

"Please be a little kind to me!" she said with a queer, catching voice, "I am only a woman. What are you going to do with me?"

"Where is—?" he asked presently. His voice was altered too.

"I have sent him away for ever! What will you do with me?"

"What do you deserve?"

"As God's above me, I've done you no dishonor. I'm fit to be your wife yet!"

"You are quite pretty enough," suggested the Incubus, "but"— brutally— "I've had to do with many such as you before my marriage. The pity is, with all my experience, I was unable to choose just what I wanted."

The woman slunk away as if he had been too close to her.

"Don't— you— believe— me?" she whispered.

"As I live, l am a pure woman. I swear—"

she stopped at the smile on her companion's face.

"Physically pure, yes," agreed the Incubus. "I suppose it's a fault in the training— all the others were the same. The intention is nothing with you women. Morally rotten, you are goddesses because physically intact. I congratulate you on your—"

The woman toyed with the something she had been holding in her hand.

"Will you give me some water?" she asked.

He handed her a glass with all the grace of a courtier.

The woman unscrewed the lid from the something, and emptied a white powder into the water.

"Poison?" asked the Incubus. "Pardon my curiosity, but I hate to see you suffer unnecessary pain, and arsenic or strychnine give the greatest agony. Women invariably use one or other. Absurd, too, considering there are painless modes of self-destruction available." He was watching her keenly, but appeared oblivious; her lips were moving as if in speech, and she raised the glass slowly to her mouth; her eyes half-closed, apparently seeing nothing.

"Stop!" said the man, sternly.

The woman looked at him, a passion of beseeching tenderness in her eyes. "Forgive me! Love me! I do not want to die!" It was a heart prayer.

The man took the glass gently from her and placed it out of reach with elaborate care, then suddenly stood up.

He took her in his arms and, bending back her head, looked into her eyes. "Swear by God in Heaven you will never do that again!"

A mad hope seized the woman. "I swear," she said. "Oh, dear love, love me a little! I cannot live without your love. I was mad last night. You make me mad when you despise me. Love me a little, dear!"

"I have been a fool," said the Incubus, ambiguously; "I have always loved you."

After a long, rapturous moment the woman looked up. "And you do respect me a little?"

"Everything in the world, dear," said the man foolishly.

THEY WENT arm in arm into the garden through the open French window, and lost themselves among the roses.

"Ah, dear!" said the woman suddenly, with a start of seeming horror, and hiding her face in her hands. "The poison! Someone may drink it!" She started toward the house.

"No, dear, I'll go," said the Incubus. "Wait here for me!"— authoritatively.

He ran with light steps into the breakfast-room and, going swiftly to the table, without hesitation drank the poison.

"I am not taking any risks, I think," he said cynically. "My respect for women will save me!"

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2: A Perverted Punishment

The Bulletin, 2 April 1898

"I CONTEND that any woman can deceive any man, if she has an ounce of brains, and get off scot free, too— no matter how clever the man may be. Why, Samson was a baby in Delilah's hands!"

The first woman delivered this speech insinuatingly, with a world of suggestion in her look and tones.

"But, Mrs. Norton, there's nothing to show that Samson was a giant intellectually. Now, my husband is a genius."

The second woman, who was thirty, and looked twenty-five, leaned back among her cushions with the air of a person who has said something peculiarly convincing. Mrs. Norton shrugged her shoulders, and prepared to depart.

"A man may have musical talent and yet be an arrant fool, for all that," was her Parthian shaft.

"I loathe that woman," murmured the other, cordially, to herself, as she heard the outside door shut. Her husband, entering just then, caught her words. He was a small, thin man with brilliant eyes, and long hair pushed back from his forehead and falling to his collar.

"Eh! you loathe her, my dear?" he said, enquiringly. "Then why the deuce do you see her? Just the way with you women, though. Loathe her, eh? and dose her with tea! Well, that's logical, I can't deny—though once your sex used somewhat swifter poisons for the friends they 'loathed.' "

The woman glanced up, annoyed. "I wish you could contrive to exempt me from the fire of your sarcasm!" she said, icily.

The man smiled, and, sitting down beside her, slipped an arm round her waist. "What is the matter, dear? Surely you know I was jesting!"

His voice was anxious, but his eyes were cold and abstracted.

The woman looked into his eyes a second and seemed to have made up her mind to something.

"Listen!" she said, imperiously. "Do you know what Mrs. Norton wanted me to do?"

"No," replied the man.

"She wanted me to deceive you." She looked at him as if she expected an outburst.

"Ah!" said the man, with a bewildered air; "deceive me? But what for— what about?"

The woman seemed disappointed. "How and when do wives usually deceive their husbands?" she asked, meaningly.

The man laughed easily. "Why, in a hundred different ways, and every day of their lives, dear!"

The woman's face flushed, and her eyes grew bright and hard. "You are very sure of me, George!"

"Yes, you are my wife!"

"Yes, I am your wife— but I am a woman, too, George." She was silent a moment, then suddenly burst into a passion of sobbing, hiding her face in her hands and throwing herself sideways among the cushions on the lounge.

The man looked annoyed, perplexed: he glanced first at his wife, then round the room till his eyes rested on a grand piano at the further corner, and the thought to calm his wife's nerves came to his musician's soul. He crossed the room on tip-toe, and, opening the instrument, touched the keys silently and lovingly for a moment with caressing finger-tips; then slowly and dreamily the music woke and whispered through the room.

But the woman started up and gazed at her husband as if she could not believe her eyes. She interpreted his action into the cruellest indifference to her tears. Suddenly she sprang up and crossed the room. "Stop!" she almost screamed.

The musician started and looked up at her, dazed; his soul was lost in the music; he had forgotten her presence completely.

"What is it?" he asked, absently.

"You ask me what is it!" she cried in a tempest. "You don't want to know. You'd be better pleased if I left you to your cursed music."

The man started and cowered— she had always said she loved music.

"But I'll not!— do you hear— I won't! Do you think I'm going to put up with your indifference ? I am not a stick or a stone. I am a woman. I want— oh, if you are a man, you know what I want!"

She stood before him splendid in her florid beauty, her eyes filled with passion and pride, her breast heaving, her red lips panting with the sobs she was struggling to restrain. The man stared stupidly at her. He was utterly unable to cope with the situation. Women were passionless beings to him; angels with soft voices that suggested perfect melodies. His wife's voice now was harsh and strident with anger, and it irritated him. He could not understand that she or any woman could be swayed by a passion that demanded response in kind. He felt disturbed and vexed by the whole occurrence, but put it down to his wife's "nerves"!

"My dear," he said, kindly, and quite sincerely, "I am afraid you are not well."

"I am well enough, thank you," said the woman. "Mrs. Norton was quite right— you are a fool."

The man was just a little nettled. "Did she say that?"

The woman leaned forward— "Yes, she gave that as a reason why I should be unfaithful to you."

"Well?" he asked, his face paling a little.

"And I told, her that your indifference was freezing me, killing my love for you; that I was commencing to hate you. I told her you were wrapped up in your music and utterly neglected your wife."

"Go on!" said the man, with a queer, strained voice.

The woman saw she had made him feel at last, and her mood urged her further. She told me she knew a man who worshipped me, and asked me why I didn't seek consolation from others."

"What reply did you give her!"

"I said you were too clever to be deceived. She said you were a fool. I was the one in the wrong."

She tapped the floor with her foot and watched the man covertly from the corners of her eyes. The man was roused. He paced about nervously, with clenched hands. Suddenly he turned and faced her.

"Having discovered l am a fool, what do you intend to do?"

"I am not going to put up with your treatment of me any more!"

"Which means?"

"Anything you like— I shall take my revenge."

"Good!" said the man quietly; "that leaves me free to return to the mistress I should never have deserted."

"Your wretched music!" sneered the woman as she swept from the room.

THE MAN locked the door after his wife had left, and sat down to think. All his life was disturbed, disarranged. Hours passed, and still he remained gazing into vacancy. By-and-bye the dark came, and servants tapped at the door, but he did not answer them. For hours he sat brooding over he knew not what. When midnight chimed he roused himself and went to the piano. Then, while his cheeks were still wet with tears of self-pity, the musical inspiration of his life came to him. Days passed, and the room became littered with scores. The man seldom left the piano for an hour, and his meals were taken irregularly and at long intervals. He grew thinner and even paler; but his eyes shone brilliantly, and he was filled with the ecstasy of creation.

Meanwhile, his wife attributed his pre-occupation and seclusion to grief at the loss of her. As the days passed she grew sad and lonely, and commenced to relent. One evening at twilight she slipped in with the servant as her husband unlocked the door. "George!" she whispered, her eyes full of love and

entreaty. But the musician looked at her as if he could not understand— he thought she had returned to him from her lover— from the dead.

"George— dear George!" said the woman tremulously. "I have come to tell you that I love you still, dear, and I forgive you. I want you to forgive me, too, dear, for making you suffer." She moved towards him, but he waved her off.

"You have come back!" was all he could say.

The woman commenced to protest. "I have never been away since I left you. I have never been out of the house or seen anyone. I'll cut Mrs. Norton if you like, dear. All I said the other day was just to punish you, George. You know you neglected me, George, and I wanted to punish you, but I didn't think you'd suffer so much, dear. I thought you cared more for your stupid old music than you did for me!"

The man shivered. "*Stupid old music*!" he repeated, but the woman thought he agreed with her.

"Yes, dear,'' she said. "I can see now how foolish I have been, and I want you to forgive me for being so cruel to you." She went close to him; he shivered again as she touched him, but permitted her to kiss him, and even returned her caresses.

Presently she glanced round at the untidy room, with its litter of papers.

"What are all these papers— music scores? How tremendously you must have been writing, George!" She picked up a loose sheet nearest her; by chance it was numbered "*One*," and across the top was scrawled an Italian phrase. The woman deciphered it with difficulty, then looked up and met her husband's eyes. "Is this the name of your opera?" she asked, pointing to the writing on the score.

"Yes,"he answered, miserably.

"I am not a linguist— will you tell me what it means?" she asked, with a terrible calmness.

The man stammered evasively, "It is just a name."

"Yes ; but what does it mean ? "

"*The Unfaithful Wife*," he answered desperately.

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3: The Punishment of Life

The Australian Magazine, 30 March 1899

A TAP came to Gil Peret's door.

"A note for M'sieur," said a servant, offering Gil Peret a letter on a salver.

Gil Peret, clad in a dressing-gown, was engaged in waxing his moustachios before a mirror. He paused, bending a little forward, while he softly rubbed one of the waxed ends between the forefinger of his right hand and the thumb of his left, in order to impart to it the proper curl.

He was a very handsome man, was Gil Peret, but, nevertheless, he was accustomed to leave nothing undone in the matter of toilet that could at all improve his appearance.

"You may leave it on the mantel," he remarked, after a moment, turning his head from side to side the while to better study the effect, which must have pleased him, from the satisfied expression of his face.

"But a gentleman waits below for an answer, said the servant.

"A gentleman?" queried Gil Peret, "or a lacquey?"

"A gentleman, M'sieur."

"So early;why, it is not yet twelve. Offer the gentleman some refreshment, Pierre, and ask him to wait. By-the-bye, who is he?"

"M. Fecamp, M'sieur."

"Tell M. Fecamp I shall not be long, Pierre."

Gil Peret removed his dressing-gown and stood up in shirt and trousers, a graceful willowy figure, approaching six feet high.

He had fixed a collar round his neck, and was busily engaged tying his cravat when a second tap came to the door.

"Come in," he said, easily; "you, Pierre, again;what s it?"

"M. Fecamp begs that you will read his letter at once, he very much desires to speak with you."

"A man must dress," grumbled Gil Peret, proceeding tranquilly with his cravat.

"I assure you M. Peret is but just dressing," said Pierre to someone just outside the door.

"M. Peret, I am sure, will admit said a deep bass voice.

Gil Peret raised his eyebrows and shrugged his shoulders;his gestures were very expressive, he told himself, for he still regarded his reflection in the mirror. "Pierre!" he called.

"M'sieur."

"Is it M. Fecamp's voice which I have just heard without?"

"Yes, m'sieur; it was."

"Be good enough to say to M. Fecamp that he will excuse my receiving him in my dressing-room: I shall be delighted to—"

"It is I who must ask you to excuse me for troubling you so far, M'sieur," interrupted the deep bass voice, and almost immediately a stoutly-built, middle-aged gentleman, with iron grey moustache and imperial and deep set but large black eyes entered the room, bowing profoundly to its master.

"I am charmed to see you, M. Fecamp," said Gil Peret languidly.

"Pierrre, a chair for M. Fecamp. That will do; you may go."

M. Fecamp sat down and glanced about him for some seconds, amazed at the fripperies of Gil Peret's toilet table with its quantities of cosmetics, scent pots, and powder puffs! and the gaudy feminine drapings on the walls. Gil Peret flushed a little— perhaps annoyed by the contemptuous glances of the older man.

"To what am I indebted for the honour of this visit, m'sieur?" he asked, with facile politeness.

"I have at length made up my mind," answered M. Fecamp, quietly.

"Ah indeed, that is very clever of m'sieur, doubtless: but may I ask a little more definiteness? I cannot see—"

"I shall explain," replied M. Fecamp. "You have, perhaps, suspected that l am aware of your relations with my wife?"

Gil Peret shot a quick look at M. Fecamp, but the other's face was impenetrable.

"My relations with Madame Fecamp?"

"Yes; the attentions you pay to Madame."

"Madame is most charming. I have for her a profound respect— an absolute esteem," said Gil Peret.

" That is Possible, m'sieur; I say nothing about that. I refer to your intimacy with Madame, my wife!"

Gil Peret regarded M. Fecamp with seeming amazement.

"lntimacy! that is too strong a word, m'sieur!" he said deprecatingly.

"You think so? I cannot believe you say quite what you mean—at least, you are deceiving yourself?"

"Does M. Fecamp insinuate that I have uttered an untruth?"

"I never insinuate anything, Msieur.

"Then I fail to understand you."

"What I wish to know, M. Peret, before we commence'the discussion which is before us, is whether or not you are aware that I am acquainted with the fact that you are my wife's lover?"

Gil Peret started back with an exclamation, and stared for several moments at his companion, a thousand thoughts chasing each other through his mind.

"But you are jesting, Monsieur— you are cool, calm, collected; your hand is not shaking, it rests on the tranquil as the wood itself. Your eyes stare at me without quivering an eyelid. Your face has its usual colour. Your lips are smiling like the lips of a painted picture. Ah, bah! Monsieur, you are jesting!"

"I am not jesting, Monsieur."

"If you were not jesting you would come to me with eyes on fire, thundering, bellowing, demanding satisfaction. That is not so— you are cool as ice, and you are smiling, are jesting, but it is a sorry joke, Monsieur."

"I assure you l am not joking, M. Peret. I have know for some three weeks that you are my wife s lover."

"You are mistaken, Monsieur. You do Madame Fecamp a grand injustice." .

"You are not serious, Monsieur?"

"I swear to you—"

"Do not swear, Monsieur. Is not that a painting of Madame beside your bed?"

"But, Monsieur, a circumstance so trivial— a mere painting! Did you come to my room to collect proofs foster your suspicions?"

Gil Peret looked perplexed. "If Monsieur would explain."

Fecamp nodded. "The house. No. 17, Rue de Cahors," he said quickly, looking piercingly at the other. Gil Peret threw out his hands, which trembled in spite of himself, in a gesture of entreaty.

"The 17th, 19th, and 23rd of April; the 3rd, 5th, 16th of May. To-day is the 17th May," went on Fecamp

"You have assuredly paid spies to watch Madame," said Gil Peret with a sneer.

"It is not unlikely," replied M. Fecamp tranquilly.

"Well?"

"I have experienced great difficulty in determining what is best to be done under the circumstances. That is what has prevented me from calling upon you before."

"Indeed."

"Yes. It is as I say. I presume you have been congratulating Madame on possessing a blind fool for a husband, M. Peret."

"Well, we were undecided whether you were blind or complaisant. L am relieved to find that though you are not blind you are at least complaisant, monsieur. I suppose a question of money. How much do you require?"

"You would doubtless pay a good sum to escape having your name connected with divorce proceedings, monsieur?"

"I am not a very rich man; do not be rapacious. How much do you want?"

"I am not in need of money, thank you, Monsieur."

"Good God! You intend then to sue for a divorce?"

"It would be an interesting diversion without doubt to hold up an honourable name to be pecked at by the jackdaws of the courts, Monsieur. But even the knowledge that so charming a gentleman as M. Gil Peret would most certainly share my infamy, cannot compensate me for certain disadvantages the system appears to me to possess."

Gil Peret regarded the tranquil countenance of M. Fecamp with an increased respect, striving in vain to gather a meaning from the fathomless eyes and imperturbable features before him.

"Do you wish to fight a duel with me, Monsieur?" he asked at length.

M. Fecamp smiled. "The thought occurred to me, it is true, and disturbed me for some time," he confessed. "But it seems to me that if I were to fight a duel with you I should voluntarily resign the advantage over you which I now possess— a proceeding which I cannot refrain from condemning as most foolish."

"What advantage over me do you possess?"

"You have injured me. I have a moral and legal right of redress from you."

"That is so. But it appears to me that a duel would exactly afford that redress."

"It is unlikely, monsieur, that you can have given this subject the amount of consideration which I have bestowed upon it," said M. Fecamp, drily. "You must understand that I have occupied myself with this matter alone for three weeks past."

"Is it possible? I congratulate Monsieur on his powers of deliberation. For me, I would have settled the matter in three minutes."

"What would M. Peret have decided upon?"

"A duel, undoubtedly."

"It is impossible that such a course could commend itself to one's reason, M'sieur, though I confess it might appeal strongly to one's instincts."

"I should consider myself a coward not to avenge a dishonour, or to die in the attempt," said Gil Peret, warmly.

"M. Peret is a younger man than I," observed M. Fecamp, "and he has hitherto impressed me as being possessed of intelligence."

"You flatter me, M'sieur."

"I have no such intention."

"M'sieur has not yet informed me of his objection to duelling as a means of satisfaction."

"A thousand pardons. It is briefly this: l am an indifferent swordsman, I have never used a pistol. M'sieur Peret has the reputation of being an expert with both."

"It vastly surprises me to know that M. Fecamp is afraid of me," said Gil Peret, with a sneer.

"I am distressed that you should take such a view of the case, M'sieur; it is— pardon me— so narrow-minded. You must confess that there is no obligation upon me to fight you, therefore if I choose to take my revenge in another way why should you call me a coward? Besides that I have pointed out my reasons to you— you must see that by fighting a duel with you, I resign the advantage given me by the right ot redress which is undoubtedly mine, and moreover at the same time I place my life at your disposal, to take at your pleasure. What I need is revenge. It seems to me that I should not be revenging myself by giving M'sieur the privilege of sticking a sabre in my loins, or driving a bullet into my brain without hope of retaliation. If M. Peret is a reasonable man he will withdraw his remark."

"I confess that what you say appears to be reasonable. I offer you my apologies," said Gil Peret.

M. Fecamp bowed gracefully. "I accept them," he replied.

"You announced to me some moments ago that you had made up your mind, M'sieur. You have said that you will not sue for a divorce, and that duelling does not please you. Is it that you intend to—er— er?" Gil Peret hesitated.

M. Fecamp smiled. "Kill you," he suggested.

"You alarm me, M'sieur," said Gil Peret, satirically.

"I had thought of arranging for your death, M'sieur, but reflection informed me that it would be difficult, nay, almost impossible, to escape detection, and I do not propose to execute a revenge that can rebound on myself."

Gil Peret appeared agitated; he gazed with a feeling of consternation on the stern countenance of M. Fecamp, amazed at the deliberate selfishness and deep calculations of his adversary.

"What is it, then, that you intend?" he cried.

"I had thought, M'sieur, of entrapping you and Madame in my chalet, and essaying on your bodies some mediaeval instruments of torture which I have collected. M'sieur is aware that I have studied archaeology?"

"No," muttered Gil Peret with a shudder.

"At first this idea pleased me," said M. Fecamp, reflectively, "especially as it offered facilities for wresting from you your wealth by inducing you to sign

necessary documents therefor under the influence, say, of the thumbscrew— or the boot."

Gil Peret gazed upon his companion, fascinated with horror at the cold cruelty and indifference of his tone and expression.

"I had thought, too," continued M. Fecamp, "of compelling each in turn to be the executioner of the other. First you of Madame, then Madame of you; giving the lady, as is becoming, the last word. I confess this attracted me for some time, to the exclusion of any other idea, involving, as it does, such excellent opportunities, as one proceeds, to improve upon and extend the delights of revenge from an experimental into an exact science. The advantages of such a system are so apparent that I need not detail them for M'sieur."

"You have given up this idea, M'sieur— why?" asked Gil Peret, with an involuntary shiver.

The calm and placid enunciation of M. Fecamp's schemes for revenge was fast unnerving the younger man. He tried to assure himself that his enemy was a visionary, a madman; that these arrangements which he had planned so viciously and so quietly were impossible of execution. But the expression of the steel-grey eyes bent so steadily upon him possessed nothing of the fire of lunacy, while it all too strongly evinced a settled hate and a depth of energy and purpose which promised beforehand the accomplishment of anything M. Fecamp might ultimately decide upon.

The older man shook his head in answer,

"I was unhappily forced by circumstances to abandon it, M'sieur, although the scheme had my entire sympathy. My confidential servant, upon whom I depended for assistance necessary in its accomplishment, I grieve to say died the day before yesterday."

Gil Peret gave a sigh of relief, but instantly the thought came to him, "What next?" and the look of anxiety re-appeared in his eyes. "May I offer you my condolences,

"M'sieur?" he asked affectedly, but the sneer could not settle, for his lips were twitching.

"Thank you," said Fecamp, gravely; "have I your permission to continue?"

Gil Peret nodded;he feared to speak lest his voice should tremble.

"This left me almost as I stood before," said M. Fecamp; "having unlimited ambition for an unexampled revenge I was annoyed to discover my means in any way limited. lat last determined to seek assistance, and yet I feared to make anything of my private affairs the property of another. Not only was there no one whom I could trust to assist me, but none of my acquaintances happen to be conspicuous for invention, nor could I depend upon them to

respect my wishes and prejudices. Suddenly it occurred to me that there is another person at least as interested as myself in the arrangements I have in contemplation, and this person, fortunately, happens to be already acquainted with the state of my domestic affairs, so that there would not even be the necessity to make a confidant of him. Moreover, he is a man whom I believe possesses a capital brain. I determined to go to him, and that is what I meant, M'sieur, when I informed you that I had made up my mind."

Gil Peret stared at M. Fecamp— dazed a little.

"That is what you meant when you said you had made up your mind?" he repeated, frowning nervously.

"M'sieur has grasped me perfectly."

"Why, who is this man?" demanded M. Peret, with a strange look.

M. Fecamp rose and bowed profoundly to his companion.

"His name is M. Gil Peret," he answered.

Gil Peret stared in the eyes of M. Fecamp as if he were magnetised, but no word came from his lips, and his hands grasped the sides of the chair upon which he was sitting with a force which was perhaps unconsciously exercised. Does not this plan commend itself to M'sieur? M'sieur is silent," said M. Fecamp.

Gil Peret roused himself with an effort, but a certain nervousness held sway over his muscles one and all.

"My God, how strange!" he muttered.

"Strange, strange, M'sieur? An unusual course to adopt, perhaps, but not unnatural. Anything which is done or can be done is at once removed from the province of un-natural. Pouf! this is done;therefore it is natural and proper and right. Do you follow me, M sieur?

"To come— to— me! My God— like—Ah!" Gil Peret raised his hands to place over his eyes, but they soon dropped to his sides again as if he had lost the power to use them, while always he gazed like a man in a trance into the marble countenance ot M. Fecamp.

"I am here," said M. Fecamp.

"Go from me. Go— go— go!" cried Gil Peret.

"Presently, presently; a little discussion at first, if you please; then we shall see."

"What do you want with me?"

"Your advice."

"Upon what?"

"Many things, M'sieur. I wish to learn from your own lips something of your character, in order that I may judge which, among the plans I have invented, may be best applied to your case. I feel sure M'sieur will help me."

"You are mad, utterly mad."

"M'sieur has made other statements which I have already disproved;this one I can only contradict, but M'sieur may rely upon my word that I am perfectly sane."

Gil Peret sprang to his feet and walked quickly towards the door, where a button was situated communicating with an electric bell at a distant portion of the house;he placed his finger upon this button. "M. Fecamp, he said, icily "I find that I have enjoyed your eccentric conversation long-' enough. I offer you a thousand apologies, but I must ask you now to excuse me, as a matter of business demands my attention."

M. Fecamp s keen eyes, following his enemy s movements unwaveringly, noted that Gil Peret had not yet pressed the button. "Sit down, I beg of you, M sieur," he said, calmly.

"You must excuse me."

"It is impossible."

"Pardon me, you must go.",

"I shall not move from here until we have understood each other."

Gil Peret's face flushed with a sudden passion, and he pressed the button.

"You are an uninvited guest; I shall compel you to leave me," he said, hotly, advancing towards the other.

M. Fecamp smiled a terrible smile, and put his clenched hand on the table beside him. "You see that hand, m'sieur?"

Gil Peret stopped and regarded the outstretched hand with an inexplicable feeling of dread and aversion. M. Fecamp's hand was white as that ot a lady, but its muscles were of iron, and closed as it was with a power seemingly abnormal, its sharp, strained outlines silently evidenced invincible determination in the mind that controlled it.

From M. Fecamp's hand Gil Peret's glance travelled slowly to his eyes, and with an immense effort of will he sneered in the other's face.

"Ah! bah!" he said, contemptuously.

"That hand, M'sieur, three weeks ago habitually grasped yours as a friend. Since then, by your own act, it has been endowed with a strength irresistible by you. It is your master— you are its slave." These words were accompanied by a glance so pitiless, so terrible, that Gil Peret felt a coldness touch his heart-strings as he gazed.

"Sit down, Monsieur," said M Fecamp, in a voice that rang like a trumpet through the room.

Gil Peret silently obeyed him

"You shall tell the servant who comes in answer to your ring that you must not be disturbed."

A tap came to the door, immediately followed by the entrance of Pierre

"You rang, M'sieur?" asked the servant.

"It was to inform you that I am out to all who may call," said Gil Peret, in a strange, subdued voice.

"To all, M'sieur?"

"To all!"

"Yes, M'sieur; and—?"

"That is all; you may go, Pierre."

The door slammed behind the retreating figure of the servant.

"It is well, M'sieur; I thank you," said M. Fecamp.

Gil Peret was silent.

"Do you fear death, M'sieur?" asked M. Fecamp.

Gil Peret shrugged his shoulders.

"You compel me to listen to you, M'sieur, but you cannot force me to answer your questions."

"I shall perhaps find a means. Do you fancy yourself in love with Madame my wife?"

Gil Peret was silent.

"Will you not answer me, M'sieur?"

Gil Peret was silent.

"If Madame were at this moment to present herself at your door wishing to inform you that your name— in full, M'sieur— has been branded by my orders in flaming irons across the fair skin of her breasts"

"My God!" cried Gil Peret, starting forward with flashing eyes.

"And is refused admittance according to the direction you have but just given to your servant," continued M. Fecamp,

"You devil!" cried Gil Peret, springing up with a bound, to be instantly forced into his seat again and held as in a vice by an iron hand.

"Softly, softly, M'sieur. Sit still, I entreat you," said M. Fecamp, in a mocking voice.

Gil Peret struggled vainly for a moment, then at last cried pantingly:

"For God's sake, M'sieur, tell me is this true?"

"One moment, M'sieur. Let me see; what question did I ask you first? Ah, yes! Do you fear death? I require a true answer, M'sieur."

"Yes, I fear death," said Gil Peret, brokenly, "but not if Madame— for God's sake, M'sieur, is Madame—?"

"The second question you refused to answer," said M. Fecamp, interrupting quietly, "was: do you love Madame my wife? Perhaps, M'sieur, you will give me an answer now?"

"My God, yes, I love her. Tell me, have you been so fiendish as you say? Ah, m'sieur, you torture me. Reply, I entreat you!"

M. Fecamp smiled. "I have not harmed madame so much as you have."

"But have you branded her with irons, as you said?"

"How absurd you are, m'sieur. You betray yourself; you admit the magnitude of the injury you have inflicted on madame," said M. Fecamp with a mocking laugh.

Gil Peret fell back hopelessly. "You do not know what love is or you could not be so cruel," he muttered despairingly.

"And yet it seems to me that I have loved my wife. You know so much about me, m'sieur, that I feel I can entrust you with more. L am not a demonstrative man, m'sieur, but none the less for that I have feelings— l have a heart. I loved madame. I loved her honourably, and I married her. I did not spend my time in whispering love-talk in her ear, but in my heart I felt it speaking to me all the while, and I feared to impart its secret often lest the shrine be sacrileged. My love was, ah, too sacred far for these vulgar tricks of speech, words; for these any lying tongue may use; and when my heart was tenderest I was oftenest silent. I fondly dreamed until three weeks ago that I was mated to a heart that loved and understood me." He paused.

"You will not, perhaps, understand what I have said, m'sieur, for you are of those whose love dissolves into words like butter in the sun," M. Fecamp concluded with a sneer.

"I understand," replied Gil Peret, with a strange look.

"You can imagine, then, that I was surprised to discover what a mistake I had made in my wife."

"Surprised," echoed Gil Peret.

M. Fecamp smiled. "Ay," he said, and stared before him at the wall.

You suffered," said Gil Peret, in a low voice.

"Ay, I suffered, and for every pang I have suffered I shall revenge myself a thousandfold!" He glared at Gil Peret with eyes filled with unquenchable hate, and his fist thundered on the table as he rose from his chair, overcome for a moment by the feelings he had held so long in check.

Gil Peret looked up at him without moving, a strange tender smile faintly touching his mobile lips, but like a flash M. Fecamp regained his self-control and silently reseated himself.

"You have come to me for revenge?" asked Gil Peret.

M. Fecamp nodded;he was still a little unnerved by his outbreak, and his face was white even to the lips.

"You shall have it then!" said Gil Peret, softly.

M. Fecamp glanced at his enemy enquiringly, and this time was met by eyes which encountered his through a mask of utmost softness.

"What do you mean?" he cried impatiently for the first time, a little baffled.

"I have injured you; revenge yourself! I shall not prevent you. You were right, m'sieur, to come to me for assistance. I promise it to you!"

Gil Peret bowed his head humbly to the other.

M. Fecamp passed his hand over his eyes. "You are not serious," he stammered."

"I am serious."

"Prove it to me."

"I am ready to do what you wish."

"Swear to me that you will obey me until my revenge is complete!"

"I swear."

"Even although by obeying me you should reach a felon's cell?"

"Even so, m'sieur."

"Even though by obeying me you should die?"

"Even so, m'sieur."

"Even though by obeying me you should kill yourself?—for should I kill you I should be punished. Will you kill yourself, m'sieur?"

"If that be your command, I shall obey you— but upon one condition."

"And that is?"

"That you will promise to take no revenge upon madame, your wife."

"Bah! she is a woman; I cannot touch her."

"Then shall I kill myself, m'sieur?"

M. Fecamp made no reply, but with his head buried in his arms thought deeply for some moments. At last he looked up.

"What has disposed you to be so suddenly submissive, m'sieur?" he asked, suspiciously.

"The knowledge that you love madame," answered Gil Peret.

"How has that affected you?"

"It has shown me— realised for me as nothing else could— the injury I have done you. It has overwhelmed me with shame for most wantonly destroying your happiness, most wantonly murdering your peace." Gil Peret's face betrayed an emotion full of pain.

"Wantonly, wantonly! What do you mean by that?"

"Alas! that I have indeed done these things without reason; I have not even love as an excuse. I have been madame's lover, but I never loved her."

"You are lying to me. Only a moment ago you said you loved madame."

"I lied to you then: it seemed necessary. I am not lying now. I repeat to you I have never loved madame."

A flash of joy passed over the face of M. Fecamp. He took two small vials from his pocket, and read their labels to himself.

These vials contain two different poisons," he said, slowly., ''One of them, when taken, causes death by agonising degrees, while its victim would writhe under tortures keener and more poignant than ever those inflicted by the thumbscrews or the rack. The other, an hour after it is taken, induces a peaceful sleep, in the midst of which death comes like the phantom of a dream and steals one's soul away to heaven— or— hell."

Gil Peret watched the two vials with a fascinated gaze, and a sudden horror of death made him feel cold, as if touched by an icy wind, so that he shivered. M. Fecamp regarded him mercilessly, smiling at his emotion.

"Will you keep your oath?"

Gil Peret gazed at him entreatingly;he could not speak.

"In consideration of the assistance you have promised me, and to encourage you to keep that promise, I intend to administer the painless poison only," said M. Fecamp, grimly, and as he spoke he smashed one of the vials into fragments on the wall. A strong odour of almonds immediately filled the room.

Gill Peret groaned.

"I am not prepared for death," he faltered.

"Who is?" asked M. Fecamp.

Gil Peret put his hands over his face.

M. Fecamp emptied the contents of the remaining vial into a glass which stood upon the table. "Pray!" he said, solemnly.

Gil Peret started up.

"What!" he cried, horrified. "Already?

"Pray!" repeated M. Fecamp.

"I cannot!" gasped the other.

M. Fecamp raised the glass up to the light. "That is a pity, m'sieur," he said. "I know no one else who ought to pray *for me*!"

"Pray for you! What is it that you say?" gasped Gil Peret.

M. Fecamp put the glass of poison to his lips, and swallowed its contents at one draught.

"That is precisely what I said, m sieur, he replied,

"My God, what have you done?" cried Gil Peret, dazed with surprise and horror at the other's act. "You have drunk the poison yourself!"

M. Fecamp laughed aloud— a strange, low laugh, filled with mockery and scorn of all things, even of himself. Then he leant back with a sigh, and, taking his watch from his pocket, held it open in his hand before him. "In two hours," he said slowly, "madame, my wife, will be a widow, possessing ample means.

In six months, to allow her a period to mourn her loss, she will marry again. I wish, m'sieur, that you shall contrive to be her second husband."

Gil Peret came forward swiftly, tears flowing from his eyes; entreaties, protestations from his lips. "It is I who should die, not you. My God! if I had only known you How unhappy l am! Ah, how noble you are. What a revenge."

"Be silent, slave that you are!" thundered M. Fecamp, whose eyes glittered with anger. He rose from his chair and put his hat on his head.

"Attention!" he shouted, as if he were an officer drilling a recruit.

Gil Peret stood before him frozen into submission, and unconsciously adopted the military attitude.

"Understand that I hate you, M'sieur Peret. My revenge is more far-reaching than you think. You will be marrying a woman you have confessed you do not love. She was unfaithful to me, who loved her. Shall she be any more true to you?"

Gil Peret shuddered.

"I go now," said M. Fecamp, "to find a convenient place to rest in. But a few moments more and the drug will commence to act, and I shall sleep— sleep— Ah, my God, when, where shall I awake?" he muttered to himself. He sighed deeply, then pulled himself together with a start and moved towards the door erect and soldier-like, pausing when he had opened it for a last look at Gil Peret.

"Remember your oath! Remember my orders!" he said, sternly.

Gil Peret saluted like a soldier his officer on parade M. Fecamp turned to descend the stairs.

"Stay!" cried Gil Peret.

"What is it?"

"Forgive me the wrong I have done you. For God's sake, M'sieur, forgive me! M'sieur, you are dying. As you hope for forgiveness hereafter, forgive me now!"

M. Fecamp glanced at his enemy, then burst forth into a peal of most horrible laughter, mirthless and musicless, which however, stopped suddenly as it had commenced.

"What a joke!" he muttered, almost inaudibly. "I forgive you! What a humourist you are, M'sieur, to ask me. Forgive you? Ha, ha!"

With a short repetition of his former hideous, scornful laughter, M. Fecamp shut to the door, and disappeared from other's view.

M. Peret staggered blindly forward, overcome with a painful excitement

"M'sieur!" he cried, "M'sieur!" then suddenly threw out his arms and pitched headlong to the floor.

4: The Story of a Wrong

The Australian Magazine, 30 May 1899

Short story set in 1860s colonial New South Wales.

THE HON. JOSEPH PEDEN, M.L.C., and Henry Pedley, Esq., M.L.A., were good friends five-and-thirty years ago, for all the fact of the wooden faces they wear when they pass each other in the street; that is to say, the wooden faces that they used to wear when they passed each other in the street up to last Saturday, for last Saturday they met face to face at Randwick after each had backed a "stiff-un," and a common, simultaneous impulse led them to shake hands. They looked at each other rather sheepishly for a while afterwards; then they laughed, also sheepishly each thinking of the same thing, the incident which had led them to pass each other with wooden faces in the street for five-and-thirty years.

"How are you, Joe?" asked Henry Pedley.

"Quite well, Harry," returned Joseph Peden. "Come 'n 'ave-a-drink." Then they linked arms and toddled off to the members' bar, to the amazement of several acquaintances who passed them on the way. Joseph Peden looked reflectively into his whiskey and soda as he raised it to his lips,

"What about that wrong, Hal?" he murmured with a twinkle in his eye.

Henry Pedley, for answer, poked his companion in the ribs with a long-forgotten gesture. "I never thought you d turn out such a d——d scoundrel," he chuckled. "You know I trusted you, Joe."

"Yes, and I trusted you," chuckled the other, "we were a fine pair, eh?"

And they laughed heartily, delighted both with the recollections of the past and the reconciliation of the present.

At King's School, Joe Peden and Hal Pedley were chums and inseparables; when they left they were chums still, but, of necessity, inseparables no longer.

Joe's father was a squatter, living close to Parramatta; Hal s uncle, his only living relative, was an auctioneer, whose business was conducted in the town itself. Joe left school to sub-manage his father's station, Hal to graft hard at a desk in the office of his uncle, who was both a hard nail in business and a martinet for discipline as regarded his clerks. The chums met once a week, however, at a little race meeting which they had themselves instituted among the ex-students of the college, and which soon became quite a popular institution throughout the district.

Now a word as to their characters and habits. Joe was a simple, open-minded lad, remarkable for a large trustfulness in human nature and a hearty admiration and affection for his friend; he bore the reputation of being a bit of

a fool, but he was a crack rider and could use his fists like a professional boxer— the two accomplishments most dear to the hearts of young Australians, so his simplicity was never actually thrown in his face, so to speak.

Hal, on the other hand, was a bit of a cynic, and a very smart fellow indeed. He liked his friend Joe Peden extremely, but he did not scruple to make use of him Possessing only a scanty salary himself, for which he worked some ten hours daily, he found Joe's perennially bulging purse a constant comfort and blessing, which he availed himself of frequently; but then Joe had more than he could spend and kept no account of his outgoings, so what did it matter?

Hal Pedley owned a mare, "Graybird," which was the envy of the district. 'ln the weekly Wednesday afternoon meetings on the old Parramatta course, Graybird invariably beat everything opposed to her. Even Joe Peden, with his long purse and all the station horses at his disposal, found it impossible to find a match for her. Graybird always scudded past the post an easy winner, and grass-fed she was, too, as everybody knew. But there was a secret behind that little fact. Graybird, for all her speed, was a rank weed. Take her off the grass half an hour before the race and she would gallop like a witch; stable-feed her for a week and she couldn't last a furlong. It was the ambition of Joe Peden's life to beat Graybird. After a dozen bad lickings at the hands, or rather heels, of his chum's mare, he would have given a finger to beat her in a fair race. Every week he brought a different horse to match the mare, but every week Graybird seemed to win more easily. It was not the money he lost to his friend that Joe cared about; it was the fact of himself, the best jockey for miles round, always being left at the post by a tyro in the saddle like Hal Pedley— for the friends always rode their own horses, and, truth to say, Hal Pedley knew little more about riding than the art of sticking on; but he won, he always won, when Graybird was his mount, and Joe Peden swore a vow that he'd find a horse to beat that mare or die trying.

One day he went to Kiss's stables in Pitt Street to attend a sale. Old Kiss, as he entered, was offering a bumble-footed thoroughbred chestnut, with an evil-looking eye, to the man who coufd ride her. Already the wild 'un had sent a couple of daring youngsters as high as gum trees, but Joe got on and stuck on in spite of everything the chestnut could do. He gave the crowd an exhibition of rough riding that brought forth rousing cheers, and finally rode home on his acquisition.

The following week it was whispered abroad that Joe had got a horse to beat Graybird at last. Joe trained the chestnut carefully for a while, then rode into Parramatta and showed her to his friend. Hal Pedley was a better judge of horse-flesh than a rider, and he noticed the bumble foot; so he took the wager offered, a level hundred, and smiled knowingly as he thought of Graybird. He

mentioned the matter also to his associates and townies, and tipped them that the chestnut was no good; he could win.

Uneasy rumours came to him during the next few days, however. His cronies, who, relying on his well-known smartness, had all backed Graybird down to their last copper, commenced to drop in and tell alarming tales of trials in which the chestnut had shown a miraculous turn of speed, in spite of his bumble foot. Then came news of a timed trial that eclipsed all former efforts, and it became plain that the chestnut was a tough nut to crack. Hal Pedley and his cronies held a conference. Times were compared, comparisons made, financial matters discussed It was confessed that one and all would be ruined if the chestnut beat Graybird. It was solemnly declared that Graybird must win, but the chestnut's last trial stared them in the face like a grim spectre prophesying defeat. Hal Pedley rose to the occasion:

"Money's nothing to Joe," he remarked.

"Nothing," agreed his pals.

"But it's everything to us."

"Rather," chorussed the others.

"Well," said Hal, "in face of that trial which you fellows saw and timed for yourselves, it's all up with Graybird."

"And our money," added his pals, dolefully.

"I have a powder in the drawer of my desk," observed Hal, tentatively.

His pals looked at one another enquiringly.

"What's the effect?" demanded one.

"If the chestnut were to take it the morning of the race Graybird would win, trial or no trial."

The cronies looked at each other again, thoughtfully.

"But," said one, "that's just the difficulty; how can we get a chance? Joe will only bring the chestnut into town the morning of the race, and you bet your boots he'll look after her."

"He always puts up at the Wool Pack; easy bribe a groom," suggested another.

"Bosh," cried a third; "you ought to know Joe better than that; he always tends his horse himself, and you bet he'll watch the chestnut for all he's worth on Wednesday."

"I have provided for that," said Hal Pedley.

The others waited eagerly: "Go on," they cried.

"Well," said Hal, "Wednesday morning you fellows all keep out of the way. Joe will bring the chestnut in about ten, the race is at two; I'll have to work in the office till one, as you know. About eleven I'll send a clerk round for Joe, and tell him that I can't go myself, and I've no one I can trust to send out to the

paddock for Graybird, as all the fellows have backed his mount, see ! I'll ask him to get a horse at the pub and ride out and get Graybird himself, else there'll be no race. He's soft as putty, and he'll like being trusted. He'll go like a shot, and while he's away— do you tumble?"

The crowd tumbled, and congratulated their captain heartily on his smartness.

All befell as it was arranged. Hal sent for Joe at eleven o'clock on Wednesday, and confided to him his difficulty.

"You see, Joe," he said, "all the fellows here have seen your trials, and they've all backed the chestnut, so I dare not let any of them go out to fetch Graybird, for there's none of 'em I can really trust; they might dose the mare on the way, see?"

"Why can't you go yourself?" asked Joe doubtfully.

Hal shook his head: "I can't," he answered; "Uncle is in the devil's own scot this morning; he won't let me out of his sight two secs., and if I took French leave he'd sack me like a shot. If you don't go, Joe, there'll be no race; for straight wire, old chap, you're the only man I'd trust to bring Graybird in this morning."

Joe felt much touched by this proof of his friend's confidence.

"All right, old man," he replied, "I'll get her for you; but I warn you I'll beat Graybird to-day, he added.

Hal smiled: "Not you," he answered, "Graybird will win in a canter," and he meant what he said.

Joe Peden rode out to the paddock thinking all the way what a fine fellow was Harry Pedley.

"It's great to think, he mused, " that although we're running against each other for all we're worth in this race, it don't interfere with our friendship one scrap. He trusts me, and I trust him, and we like each other better than ever."

The paddock was a fairly large one, but he soon drove Graybird into the stockyard and put the halter on her easily.

"Do you hear that, Graybird— not a dog's chance?"

Graybird was in the pink of condition, and looked fit to run for a kingdom. She was a long-barrelled, flea-bitten grey, with great muscular shoulders and slender tapering legs, the very model of a racer; but her lack of breeding showed in the big ugly head and a certain slight narrowness in the chest.

Joe, being in no great hurry, sat on a rail and watched her meditatively for a while, examining her points with the eye of a practised connoisseur. The narrowness of her chest did not escape him. Presently he addressed the mare aloud:

"Now, he said, "if some rascal of a fellow had come out here to fetch you instead of me, old girl, and he were to take it into his head to send you full belt round this paddock a couple of times, do you know you'd have no chance against my chestnut this afternoon at all? Do you hear that, Graybird, not a dog's chance; you're grass fed, and you've no wind to brag about at the best of times, do you mind that, Graybird?"

The mare, an intelligent brute, feeling herself addressed, answered to the best of her ability. She cocked up her ears and snorted, staring straight into Joe Peden's face.

Joe took off his hat and scratched his head; then he looked forth at the paddock, which was surprisingly level all round the fence and quite free from obstructions, save for one small creek a hundred yards away, which any horse could jump in its stride.

"Just as good as any training track," said Joe aloud, and he looked at Graybird again; she was in aggressively good condition.

"Wonder it the beggar can do me," muttered Joe to himself; "I don't believe she's ever shown her best speed yet, she's always won so blanky easily." He went up to her and felt her all over; she was tough and firm to the touch as if she'd been in training for half a dozen months.

Joe eyed her and eyed her; then he put on a big sneer and addressed her again:

"Pooh," he said, contemptuously, "You're only a weed after all; I'll beat you as easily as that"— he snapped his fingers— "blood will tell, Graybird, you mark my words, blood always tells."

The mare didn't like his tone and backed away from him nervously. Joe brought her up with a snap of the halter and stepped down from the fence.

"Come on," he said, and led her to the outer slip-rails. There he paused and looked about him. The place was a desert as far as human beings were concerned. He turned to Graybird curiously: "I wonder if the beggar can jump?" he asked himself aloud; "for two pins I'd try her over that creek."

No one offered him the two pins, but apparently Joe did not really need them, for he led the mare and his own horse back into the stockyard together and shifted the saddle and bridle in a jiffy. Then he mounted Graybird and rode her slowly to the creek.

"I'm bound to find out whether you can jump, old girl," he said; "now you've seen it, back we go a bit, now, turn, come on," he touched her with his heels to a gallop. "Over!"

The mare cleared the gully at a bound, and pulled up at the other side. Joe bent over the saddle and patted her neck:

"Not bad for a first attempt," he cried, with sparkling eyes; "try it again!" Over they went once more. "Again!" cried Joe, and this time he did not pull up, but sent her at a stretching gallop round and round the paddock once, twice, thrice, four times. He pulled up when he reached the creek the fifth round, for the mare was badly blown. She had galloped a good six miles, and stood reeking with sweat, trembling all over, and puffing like a steam engine.

"If anyone, soliloquised Joe, "had told me I could ever be such a damned scoundrel, I'd have broken his neck." He looked all round to see if, perchance, his rascality had been observed, but still not a soul was in sight.

"It cuts me to the heart to think that I've turned out such a rogue," was his next remark, as he dismounted and surveyed his work; but his heartache did not prevent a humorous smile from playing round his lips, nor a glint of triumph from visiting his eyes, as he marked the mare's distended flanks and quivering limbs.

"Do you know," he observed presently, reflectively addressing the empty air, "this poor brute is simply dying for a drink. I know jolly well if I were to run a hundred yards I'd want a wet; blow me if I don't let her have a mouthful; I can't bear to see a horse in trouble."

He took Graybird to the creek, and when he led her afterwards to the stockyard, it was the same as leading a half-filled water-cart, for the rumbling noises behind him were distinctly audible for yards around. Arrived at the yard he changed the saddles again, and rubbed the mare vigorously all over with a wisp of grass until the saddle and girth marks were removed and no trace of sweat remained. Then he mounted his own horse and led Graybird by the halter at a slow walk townwards. This walk gave him plenty of time for meditation, and, to tell the truth, before he was half way to Parramatta Joe's conscience properly woke up and remorse commenced to prick at his heartstrings. He handed the mare to Hal Pedley as the clocks were striking one, with a suspiciously criminal effusiveness, but Hal was similarly effusive in his thanks for the service rendered.

"She was a bit hard to catch," said Joe, "and very dirty when I caught her, so I gave her a wash in the creek and rubbed her down a bit."

"It was awfully good of you Joe, old boy," said Hal, scarcely glancing at Graybird, who was not too presentable even then, "you're a true pal."

"We ought to have a good race," said Joe, moving off.

"I reckon I'll get a bit of lunch now."

"Hold on," cried the other, "do you want to put any more money on the chestnut?"

Joe was tempted, the apple had been offered to him earlier in the day, and he did eat thereof; it was easier to fall a second time. Joe fell.

"How much?" he asked.

"Say another tenner?"

"You'll lose it, Hal."

Pedley's eyes gleamed as he saw his fish taking the bait.

"I'm willing to risk that," he answered, "is it a go?"

Joe said "Yes," and went to his lunch feeling very mean in the certainty of winning, in all, some two hundred pounds; this same certainty interfered with his appetite, and his training fare of tea and toast seemed more unattractive than usual to him that day.

The course was crowded long before the great race, but Joe found to his surprise, considering what his friend had told him the same morning, that Graybird was a hot favourite. The books were laying three to one against the chestnut. Joe booked a great number of bets, and when the bell rang dressed quickly and went to look at his horse, which he found already saddled. The chestnut seemed a bit sleepy and coughed incessantly; his eyes, too, were dull and heavy.

"The brute's sick!" cried Joe, aghast.

The groom wore a most concerned face, but could throw no real light on the matter. "He do look sick, sir," he confessed. "I can't make out what's come over him, he's been coughing ever since his last feed. I fancy a bit of chaff must ha' got among his oats, and it's gone the wrong way."

"Run and get me a bottle of brandy," said Joe, quickly, "take the cork out at the bar, look sharp!"

When the groom returned, Joe poured the brandy down the chestnut's nose; he gave him the whole bottle, and the spirit brightened the creature wonderfully. Joe mounted and rode to the starting post, for the first time glad that he had done what he had done earlier in the morning.

The race was to be a full mile and the start was a good one. Joe forced the running from the jump on his chestnut, to Hal Pedley's wild amaze. For two furlongs he rode as if it was a five furlong race, and Hal was compelled to follow his lead and urge Graybird on. At the quarter mile post they were close together. Joe looked at Graybird and saw, to his delight, that she was galloping her hardest, and already showing signals of distress. At the half mile post the mare was done; Pedley was already using whip and spur. Joe chuckled softly to himself and touched the chestnut with his heels, but the brute did not respond. He used the pricks, but apparently the horse was doing his best; he was then slightly in the lead, but nothing to speak of. For the first time Joe paid earnest attention to his own mount, and discovered that the chestnut was going groggily, every stride an effort. He sat down to ride then, and nursed his horse as only a splendid jockey can. Graybird crept up and passed him under

the lash. "You d—— rogue," cried Hal, as he came abreast, "what did you do to my mare this morning?"

Like a flash of light it occurred to Joe that his own horse's sudden sickness might not have been all an accident.

"What have you been doing to my chestnut?" he shouted.

Hal half turned his head, and his face wore a smile of triumph, for Graybird was forging fast ahead.

"What do you think, you fool?" he cried, and settled down to hard work with whip and spur. But before the three-quarter mile post was passed, Graybird was completely done, and the utmost flogging Hal could administer could not extract more than a laboured gallop, hardly faster than a pony's canter. The chestnut was very little better, but as yet his rider had not used the whip, and Joe nursed him along carefully, a half-dozen lengths behind the mare. In the last furlong the breeding of the chestnut told. Under the whalebone he sprang forward in a big final effort, which Joe had almost delayed too long, and won by two short lengths from the panting Graybird. The mile had taken four and a half minutes to accomplish. The friends walked their horses into the paddock side by side, amidst a wild babel of cheers and hootings from the crowd. Joe had been thinking hard during the last part of the race, and he took the initiative in the abuse which he foresaw must follow. "Hal," he said solemnly, "you nobbled my chestnut, while I was away getting Graybird for you. I swear I never thought you could play me such a dirty trick."

"Joe," said Hal, "you're a damned scoundrel. I trusted you with Graybird, and you went back on me— you must have knocked the devil out of her."

"You sent me to fetch her, so as to get me out of the way while you dosed the chestnut," cried Joe.

Hal was on the verge of giving Joe the lie direct, but he remembered his friend's prowess with the gloves, and refrained in time. He was wildly angry, but he managed to control himself, and assumed the expression of a hero of melodrama addressing the stage villain, and even that with an effort; for he possessed a keen sense of the ridiculous, and in spite of his defeat, his rage, and everything, the humour of the situation so appealed to him, that a lurking smile almost spoiled his affectation of pathos. "Say no more, say no more," he spoke, with a grand air, and a stately wave of his hand, "you have done me a great wrong, Joe, but I forgive you."

"Well, you've got a cheek," gasped Joe, "I've done you a wrong, have I?" He was too overcome to speak further, but Hal was quite self-possessed.

"Yes," he repeated, "you've done me a great wrong, Joe, you've hurt my faith in my own judgment"— he leaned forward confidentially; "up to five

minutes ago, I'd have taken my oath anywhere that you were the biggest fool in Parramatta."

Which speech made, Joe Peden immediately realised the limitations of the English language. For, however much he spluttered and stuttered, and tried to speak, not a word could he find fit to express his feelings.

5: Saintin's "Madame"

The Australian Magazine, 17 Aug 1899

SHE WENT every evening at nine to the Cafe Surat, and, arrived there, drank her small cup of steaming, black coffee with all the nonchalance and indifference to criticism of a man. The long, low-ceiled basement room, with its countless small tables and still more innumerable high-backed, quaintly-carved chairs, interested and charmed her; while the vague light from the multi-coloured lamp shades, the blue-wreathed clouds of smoke rising constantly from the tables of the smokers, and the waving green leaves of the great brown-stemmed fan palms spread here and there, lent an air of irresponsible Bohemian freedom to the scene. She loved to revel in it and speculate upon it in lazy dream fashion, lolling back in her leathern cushions as was her custom, a fragrant Egyptian cigarette held lightly between her scarlet lips. The habitués of the place knew her and passed her by with a half nod, on their way to their favourite places, or as they went, on leaving, to pay their scores to the little Arab proprietor who stood so constantly behind the stained old mahogany counter by the stairs. Newcomers and visitors stared at her and sometimes addressed her, but she neither answered them no r took particular notice of their curiosity; so that at last she became known as "the beautiful mute,"— for beautiful she certainly was in strange outlandish fashion, with her slant Oriental eyes and clear olive skin; and mute she seemed to be, for never had she opened her lips to a soul in the cafe, nor had any one ever seen her arrive at, or leave, the basement save alone.

For months she had seldom failed a single night to present herself with airy grace and insouciant manner before the entrance of the room, always pausing a moment to ascertain if the special table she affected was unoccupied, then gliding down the tiled floor to her accustomed chair, alone, yet self-possessed as a fairy, graceful as a sprite.

The little Arab proprietor had come to regard her as one of his best customers, and never failed to bid her a smiling good-night in execrable French as she departed, sometimes even attempting a conversation. This, however, she invariably avoided though her smile made ample amends for her silence; for her smile was expressive as a thousand words and made her face friendly, affectionate, polite or contemptuous as the very thoughts themselves, which flitted and wandered so carelessly and rapidly behind her sparkling, intelligent eyes.

The poets who frequented the table in the darkest corner spoke often of her among themselves, describing her to each other for some psychological reason, unknown to outsiders, as "Madame," a nickname which gradually

spread to the journalists' table, then to the artists', and finally to the whole cafe. The poets had each written several poems to her and about her. Besides "Madame" they called her "the mysterious unknown;" and the prettiest verse-writer of the lot had managed to discover a romantic and marvellous past history for Madame from the depths of her eloquent eyes, during a contemplative glance she had once favoured him with as he regarded her. Ever after that glance he raised his hat to her as he passed, instead of nodding, as did the others; and presently he affected an intimacy with her totally unshared by his companions. The journalists, being more daring and assertive than the self-conscious poets, had one by one attempted to make acquaintance with Madame, but each had immediately been politely snubbed for his pains: so they took the only revenge on her unresponsiveness in their power, and one and all made copy of her for their different magazines.

Du Cluoet, for instance, satirised her as a *demi mondaine* made respectable by marriage, yet retaining her old free-lance longings for Bohemianism. He entitled his article "A Converted Courtesan."

M. Lemaire descanted at length, in his column in the *Gloire*, on the potency for evil in cigarettes when affected by the gentler sex, making special reference to Egyptian cigarettes, and citing instances in support of his assertions.

Ronfort, writing with acidulous pen, drew a cruel comparison between the manners of a married woman of society and a lady of the *demi-monde*, reversing their positions and putting one in the every day circumstances of the other; needless to say his irony left little to choose between the two.

All these and many other attacks were made upon Madame sometimes containing references to her so pointed that a poet would occasionally remonstrate with a writer whom he knew— a circumstance which intensely delighted the author, containing intrinsic evidence as it did that the remonstrator, at all events, beyond doubt, had read his effusions.

Madame alone seemed unconscious of the discussions she had created, and the journalists writhed like worms beneath her indifference. It was impossible that she could have neither noticed nor understood the significance of their remarks, they argued, for had not each of them left marked copies of their papers with the little Arab proprietor for Madame with his compliments— and Madame had always borne away with her these monuments of their genius, sometimes even thanking them with a fleeting smile for their attentions.

"She is a clever little actress," they agreed, with knowing smiles— "she affects indifference, but she suffers in silence," yet, nevertheless, this same indifference and silence were very real worries to the gentlemen who had attacked Madame. The artists had each taken many sketches of her in his note-

book, and already several fairly good likenesses of Madame had appeared in some of the illustrated weeklies of the city. She was an excellent model, for her face was strikingly quaint; and, besides, she sat always so still; but, above all, she was a cheap sitter and never dunned them for her fees. It is probable, therefore, that Madame was most popular in the Cafe Surat among its artistic patrons.

One evening the poet who had been affecting the extraordinary intimacy with Madame was invited to the artists' table to explain himself. He settled himself uncomfortably in an arm-chair and combed his long hair with ten bony fingers, a sign of more than slight embarrassment with him.

"What we want to know is, do you really know Madame?" said a red-haired artist, inquisitorially.

An affirmative series of "Yes's" passed around the table.

The poet, for answer, slowly shook his head; having a powerful imagination, he hated actually to speak the truth; it was hard enough to signify it, in that fashion even, except that he fancied he could rely on his present audience to misinterpret a denial of such a description; for artists, being essentially men of the world, believe only what they wish.

The artists gave incredulous sniffs, as the poet had hoped, and, in fact, anticipated.

"We are all comrades here, there can be surely no harm in telling us," said the red-haired one, insinuatingly.

The poet shook his head again, but his eyes wore a far-away look, as if he were composing a poem or a romance.

" Several others know all about it already. Ramus tells us she is an old friend of yours. You tell him, you don't tell us," lied the red-haired one, reproachfully. Ramus was another poet, absent that evening, a fact which the red-haired one had been careful to ascertain before making use of his name.

The poet could not be expected to withstand such a temptation to leave the barren hedgerows of truth and enter the fruitful bye-lanes and jungles of perjury. All his instincts impelled him in the one direction.

"Ramus should not have told you; it is a secret," he declared, plunging headlong into vice, it must be confessed, however, with some tremors of conscience; for the man was a poet, and every poet possesses a conscience as well as an, imagination. In fact, it is the possession of these two attributes combined that alone constitutes a man a poet.

"A secret," chorused the artists, settling themselves comfortably to listen (the red-haired one mentally congratulating himself on the success of his mendacity), for, having confessed a thing to be a secret, there is always but one course to be pursued by the penitent, namely to disclose it.

"Precisely; a secret," whispered the poet, looking with apprehensive eyes towards the table which ought soon to accommodate Madame.

"Yes, yes," said the artists, encouragingly, drawing their chairs closer.

"You must promise never to mention it to anyone in the world."

"Of course," cried the artists, contemptuously; "a secret is an affair of honour."

" There is a mystery about her," announced the poet impressively.

The artists were glad to be assured of a fact they already knew, and gazed admiringly on the storyteller.

"A mystery," they said, appreciatively.

"Madame is the wife of the Baron von Beulenstein," whispered the poet. The artists gasped for breath. Here was a mystery indeed, for the Baron must have been unknown to them all, being indeed a man created, and so distinguished, for their diversion that instant by the poet himself.

"Why does one never see the Baron?" asked the red-haired one, more for the sake of saying something than else.

The poet regarded him with fine contempt. "Is it possible you do not know where the Baron is?" he asked superciliously.

The other artists condemned their friend instantly, lest they should be similarly despised for ignorance of the Baron's whereabouts. "Do not interrupt again, Jean, if you please, and M. Saintin will perhaps inform you," they said, indignantly. "Pray proceed, M. Saintin."

The poet turned to the now crushed and humble red-haired artist. "M. the Baron for the present immures himself constantly in his castle on the Rhine," he said. "Is it possible that you have not heard of his romantic marriage with the beautiful daughter of the Princess of Nikof and the German Ambassador of Japan, whom he met in Yeddo on his travels! I imagined that all the world well knew the circumstances of this marriage, although I alone am acquainted with the tragic end of the romance." He turned to the other artists. "You, gentlemen, assuredly have heard of the Baron Von Beulenstein's marriage!"

The artists hastened to re-assure M. Saintin. "Of course, we have heard," they said. "Jean must carry his head in the clouds— why, it was in all the papers."

"I never read it then— and I read the papers," said the red-haired one, trying to defend himself.

"Absurd," cried the others. " You must skim them only, Jean."

The poet smiled a superior smile of gratified vanity, and drained his cup. "Waitress! more coffee for all," cried Jean, willing to atone for his ignorance by his liberality. The artists waited in breathless silence while a pretty girl filled their cups from an iron can, whose spout was situated underneath and which

was worked by a tap; but the poet masterfully utilised the period to his best advantage in perfecting the details of his plot.

"M. the Baron brought his pretty wife to Europe," he continued presently, "and introduced her to the gay world of Paris, London, Vienna, Berlin."

"Yes," said the artists.

"She was much admired."

"Assuredly," said the artists.

"Artists, leading artists," emphasised the poet cruelly, "were commissioned to paint her portrait in all the great cities."

"Yes," said the artists, humbly.

"I was commissioned to write a poem in her praise," said the poet, grandly.

"Ah!" cried the artists, gazing with a sudden reverence at the great man.

"M. le Baron happened to read a poem of mine in the *Gloire*, and happily it pleased him, hence he employed me," went on the poet. "He paid me a large sum, which I squandered afterwards with Celeste in Brussels. You remember Celeste, gentlemen?"

"Ah yes, poor Celeste! what has become of her?" asked the artists.

"The devil alone knows," answered the poet, piously. "She was a constant inspiration, was Celeste, so variable, so charming. Alas, she went off with an Englishman last, I believe. However, to resume our story: After three months spent in flitting from capital to capital, M. the Baron brought his wife to reside in our Paris. Here the lady met with much admiration from a certain officer of artillery, a gentleman of noble birth, but little means. He contrived, nevertheless, to see a great deal of her. I was often at the house at this time, for M. the Baron was so kind as to take a great fancy for my society, and his dinners pleased me; his wines were particularly good," said the poet with a reflective air, combing his hair the while meditatively with his fingers.

"And Madame?"

"Madame, I must admit, scarcely noticed me," confessed the poet; "All her attentions were devoted to the young captain. M. the Baron as well as I noticed this, although he pretended to see nothing. However, one night a plan was laid by the lovers but, unhappily, it succeeded badly, and M. the Baron suddenly removed his wife with him to his castle on the Rhine. The young captain at the same time disappeared from Paris, and has not since, I believe, been heard of."

"But you, of course, know what became of him," suggested the artists.

The poet shook his head mysteriously. "It is possible that he still lives shut up in some dark dungeon of M. the Baron's castle," he answered, "but in that case he would be more fortunate to be dead; you must know that a German nobleman has vast powers in his own demesne."

The artists were profoundly impressed, and regarded the poet with a respect bordering upon veneration.

"But Madame— is Madame (indicating the vacant table with his finger) the wife of M. le Baron von Beulenstein?" asked the red-haired one after a while.

"She is no one else," answered the poet solemnly.

"How did she contrive to escape?" chorused the artists.

The poet shrugged his shoulders. "She is a woman," he replied, and his audience appeared quite satisfied with that explanation.

" What I cannot understand," observed the red-haired one, " is that Madame speaks to no one at all; indeed it is a fact that we have never even heard her voice."

"Perhaps I can explain that," suggested the poet.

"Yes, yes," cried the artists enthusiastically.

"M. le Baron on one occasion, when I was dining *tête-à-tête* with him at his house— assured me that he feared nothing so much as a woman's tongue."

"Ah!" chorused the artists sympathetically.

"We were speaking at the time about the constancy of women," said the poet; " I had observed that it was impossible at any time to be absolutely satisfied of one's mistress's fidelity— and M. le Baron agreed with me. 'If you find a woman in the act of being unfaithful and you should happen to be in love with her,' said he, ' there is but one means left for you to take to prevent yourself from being soon convinced that your eyes have deceived you, a condition into which you will inevitably be persuaded if you are rich enough to be of consequence to the lady.'

" 'What means is that?' I questioned.

" 'Cut her tongue out of her mouth before she has time to say a word ' replied M. le Baron."

The artists looked shocked. "What a scoundrel!" cried the red-haired one indignantly. "Poor Madame, and so that is the reason of her silence!"

"What a fate!" chorused the others.

Whilst they were absorbed in contemplating M. le Baron's barbarity, Madame herself had been descending the stairs and now stood with her accustomed vivacious air scanning the cafe from the entrance. Presently she sauntered down the tiled floor with graceful undulating tread to her usual seat, to rest in a moment with her profile turned towards the men who had been discussing her and who now regarded her in a flutter of sympathy and commiseration.

"There is no possibility you could be mistaken— she is certainly Madame the Baroness von Beulenstein?" asked the red-haired artist.

"Is it likely I could mistake the woman over whom I have spent hours in composing so many madrigals and sonnets?" demanded the poet.

"A thousand pardons, but it seemed so strange," apologised the red-haired one.

"Truth is stranger than fiction," replied the poet sententiously, and he rose to return to the table of the poets who were now clamouring for him.

From that night forward the poet, M. Saintin, enjoyed a reputation and a reflected glory which delighted him. Each of the artists had immediately confided the secret which had been so artistically disclosed to him, to his own set of intimates, of course under a similar pledge of secrecy; so that in a week the entire literary and artistic population of the city knew intimately all Madame's past history, a history which certainly lost nothing in the process of repetition. The poet at that time thought it necessary to publish in a widely read weekly journal, a set of verses inscribed "To the Baroness von B—" and shortly after they appeared, Paris went wild with enthusiasm over the loves and sufferings of the unfortunate Baroness. The Cafe Surat became each night more thronged with people curious to glut their eyes on the features of Madame, and as to do this it was necessary to drink coffee in excuse for their impertinence, the little Arab proprietor drove a roaring trade and thought his fortune was made. The editors of various journals sent for the poet, making him lucrative offers for the information he possessed ; but the poet only nibbled at these baits as a means of working off at fabulous prices on the enquiring journals whole volumes of verses which they had been impertinent enough to reject before. It was his boom. He rode along at the top of his notoriety with an air of melancholy in public, but a smile often turned the corners of his lips when no one happened to be by, and soon he opened an account at a bank. Fancy a poet with a banking account! What an idea!

Meanwhile Madame began to be disturbed at the amount of attention she was receiving. So many people stared at her and ogled her in the cafe that she seriously contemplated seeking another form of entertainment altogether, and resigning to the next one the seat which she had affected so long, She determined at last to absent herself for at least a week.

The first night she remained away the disappointment of the vast audience who waited for her was intense, crowds actually lingering on until the cafe was closed. The second night many were reduced to tears, for a report had spread that M. le Baron had been seen in Paris— and it was not unlikely that he would try to recapture his wife. The third night the poet, M. Saintin, was called upon to make a speech to quiet the fears of the people.

The fourth night a thousand persons waited around the doors of the cafe, unable to gain admittance, and the Arab proprietor tore his hair and volubly

cursed the day he was born in three languages because his accommodation was so inconsiderable as not to be able to contain the whole city. Of these crowds who waited there was not one who would not gladly have assisted in tearing M. le Baron limb from limb had he come along, as they foolishly expected and hoped that he would.

The fifth night saw Madame, who had grievously missed her hour at the cafe, return to the bosom of her admirers. A lane was formed by the crowd for her to pass to the stairs, and she found on entering the cafe that although the room was elsewhere densely packed, her table was waiting unoccupied for her. A long sigh of relief went up from the people as she seated herself, just as though some great weight had been lifted from the public mind.

"See how pale she looks," they whispered one to another.

"She has been hiding from him, afraid to come out."

A man passing to the stairs brushed against her chair.

"A thousand pardons, Madame the Baroness von Beulenstein," he entreated humbly in French. Madame smiled and bowed, and the crowd almost cheered, so enthusiastic were they to observe that she had actually recognised her title.

At that instant a young Englishman piloted by a friend forced his way down the steps of the stairs, trying to see through the haze of the smoke.

"They say she has come back— she is here to-night," said his friend, a little volatile Frenchman with a *tire-bouchon* moustache and beard.

A bystander who waved an empty cup in his hand turned to the pair. " Poor child— yes, she has returned," he said to them, with tears in his eyes.

"These effervescent French, one would think this woman was the favourite daughter of every one of them instead of a little jilt of a creature who has probably vilely treated her husband," muttered the Englishman.

The little Frenchman, agile as a monkey, meanwhile climbed the banisters, and from his elevated position peered over the heads of those who surrounded him.

"*Mon Dieu*, I see her," he whispered excitedly, "she is lighting her cigarette."

"Ah," sighed all those who could not see Madame, with a burst of intense sympathy.

"She puffs her cigarette!" cried the Frenchman.

"The poor child," sighed the crowd.

"She sips her coffee."

"God bless her," said the crowd fervently.

"It is an Egyptian cigarette," announced the Frenchman.

"I can tell, because it is so fat."

"Can it be true?" asked the crowd.

"She appears to be thinking!"

"Is it possible?" cried the crowd.

The announcement of these exciting details might have continued for the entire evening but for the action of the Englishman who, getting impatient, lifted his friend bodily from his perch to the floor. "I want to have a look at her myself," he exclaimed to the indignant little gentleman, who hated to be interrupted.

"What a beast!" cried the crowd, eyeing the Englishman unfriendlily.

"He is an Englishman," exclaimed the little Frenchman.

"*Sacre ros-bif*," observed the crowd.

The Englishman, unheeding, climbed on to the banister and peered through the smoke wreaths to the table where sat Madame. Her face was turned towards him, and was easily distinguishable against the dark chocolate colour of the wall behind her, so that he had an excellent opportunity to observe her. The Englishman gazed at her as if he could not believe his eyes, then gave an excited exclamation and descended quickly. He seized his friend by the arm and whispered something in his ear.

"Nonsense," replied the little Frenchman amazed, "it is impossible, I assure you."

"It is a fact," replied the Englishman.

"Is it possible— but no, you are dreaming!"

"I tell you I am sure of it— absolutely sure."

The little Frenchman appeared staggered: "What strange people you English are," he cried, shrugging his shoulders. "Let us go then to Madame."

"Not me," said the Englishman, "I'll wait for her outside. I don't want a scene."

"At your pleasure," said the other, shrugging his shoulders again, and they ascended the stairs arm in arm.

Presently Madame la Baroness von Beulenstein rose and made her way out of the cafe. Her departure resembled a triumphal march until she reached the street, where her admirers, too polite to follow her, gradually drifted away. The Englishman who had visited the cafe to get a look at Madame presently sauntered up alone with lifted hat. Madame gave a start and turned a little red.

"Hello, Charlie! where have you come from?" she asked in good English.

"Cafe Surat. Where have you been?" he asked.

"Why?" asked the lady.

"I just wanted to know. "

Madame examined the man's face a little before she replied.

" Did you see me at the Cafe Surat? " she asked.

" I did,'' replied the man.

"Well!"

"I think you should have an escort, my dear, if you want to go to places like that; in fact you should always have some one with you in Paris after dark "

"I guess I can take care of myself, thank you," said Madame in accents which strongly indicated an American origin.

"What did you go there at all for ?" asked the man magisterially.

"Now, look here, Charlie, don't you put on airs, there's a good boy. I just want to get a good French accent to take home with me, and you yourself said the best way to acquire it is to go to a cafe for an hour a day and listen to the people talking ; and you bet that's just what I've been doing.

The Englishman's face relaxed into a smile. "You little scamp," he said softly. "Don't do it again, that's all, or I'll divorce you."

Madame laughed heartily. "Why, you silly boy, it's a man's cafe, women are not allowed there; it cost me a little mint to buy over the old Arab. I knew I couldn't come to any harm in a man's place, and I haven't: they've all been as polite as pie to me, wait on me like a lot of servants, and I haven't spoken a word to one of them yet. I'm frightened of my French yet, you see. All the *litterateurs* of Paris go there, so it's the place of places to pick up the accent— now ain't it?"

The man smiled still, but persisted. "Don't go there again, pet— by yourself, at all events," he said.

"Very well, dear. Of course, I won't if you don't like it," replied Madame, with a pout, and this promise was destined to lay Paris desolate for quite nine days thereafter; for never again did the Baroness von Beulenstein visit the Cafe Surat, spite of all the sighs which her admirers sent supplicatingly to Heaven for her return.

Many reports were invented to account for the disappearance of the ill-fated lady—but it was finally universally conceded that her ogreish husband had recaptured her, and this belief became certainty when the *Gloire Magazine* published some verses signed "Saintin," which described with tenderest pathos the sad reunion before death of two lovers in a dungeon on the castled Rhine.

M. Saintin, whose reputation as a poet is on the increase, is now, upon the authority of a certain Parisian journal, whose business it is to chronicle the doings of celebrities, engaged upon a tragic poem of some magnitude, which it is expected will establish for its author a fame similar to that of Corneille. "This poem," writes this journal, "is composed upon the loves, sufferings and romantic death of the late celebrated Baroness von Beulenstein, whom many

of our readers will recollect to have seen during her recent sojourn in Paris and remember as one of the most beautiful and unfortunate of her sex."

De mortuis nil nisi bonum— this is a maxim which is fast becoming powerless to protect even the perfect dead. The journalists who had been snubbed by the unfortunate Baroness upon being assured of her death, now attempted to cast aspersions upon her character; and before long there were not wanting many aspirants for notoriety, who in spite of Madame's well-known blameless conduct affirmed that they had been specially favoured by the dead lady's regard. A certain little Frenchman there was also who submitted personally an article written by himself to all the editors in Paris, in which article he stated that Madame la Baroness was an American lady who was mute merely on account of a poor acquaintance with the French tongue; but this person was always rightly treated as a swindler, or a madman, and indignant editors, annoyed at such bare-faced conduct, sometimes even materially assisted his exit from their little kingdoms, so that he presently desisted from his efforts to obtain a publisher for so absurd a narrative.

A monument, always, however, against her traducers, at all times ready to testify to the virtue, the beauty and the fame of his creation, the Baroness von Beulenstein, and (winning golden opinions from the world for his steadfast loyalty to her memory extending even after death, stands the now famous poet M. Auguste Victor Aloysius Jean Saintin.

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6: An Idyll of the Stalls

The Bulletin, 1 Jun 1901

THE MAN first became interested in the woman beside him because of the uncommon color of her great, tranquil eyes, whose deep liquid brown, with golden streaks converging towards the pupils like the rays of the setting sun, gave, from their very strangeness, a weird effect to all her face; while the very spirit of reflection seemed to brood and slumber under her dark, level brows.

Later, the man noticed that this woman's companion, on the other side, a woman also, never addressed her at all. He wondered at this, for the woman, who seemed to be a lady, was richly and tastefully dressed in an exquisite evening gown, and it seemed strange that she should be alone. Yet alone she evidently was— and through the play she sat and dreamed and seemed to listen to the dialogue on the stage with face unmoved and attitude unchanged. It was a five-act play, and at the end of the third act the man hesitated to go outside, wondering if, by remaining, he could learn anything of this woman. His interest in her had developed into curiosity.

Undecided, he half rose, then re-seated himself His action attracted the woman's attention. She glanced at him, and evidently recognised something that appealed to her in his strong, earnest face, for, meeting his eyes, she smiled softly before she looked away. The man blushed slightly, unused perhaps to such a situation. He felt called upon to address her, and sought-about helplessly for something to say, not caring to use the commonplace assumption of previous acquaintance, for he felt that it was no ordinary woman who sat beside him.

"You don't appear very much interested m the play," he hazarded at last, a little confusedly and almost in an undertone.

The woman courteously inclined her head towards him.

"Dramas of this kind are so much alike," she answered. " There is the hero and the villain in every one, and then the inevitable injured innocent. I could put up with the others, but the innocent!" A shrug of the shoulders and a slight lifting of her brows accompanied the words.

"Plays are never naturally realistic, though they pretend to be," said the man; "they exaggerate too much."

"Where I quarrel with them is that they prolong an incident until it becomes the history of several lives. Now look at this one; a real villain would have tired of dogging the poor hero like this all round the world long ago; indeed, he'd have been only too glad to escape undetected from the consequences of his first crime; a crime is, after all, nothing but an incident, isn't it?"

The man smiled. "I don't know— there are crimes and crimes " he answered.

"What constitutes a crime?" asked the woman.

"The intention."

"Ah, what a criminal then am I!"

"A very beautiful one," said the man, softly sending forth this remark as an explorer on an unknown sea.

The woman understood him thoroughly, and her eyes, meeting his, told him as much, and told him, too, that she would ignore his remark because he was handsome and interesting and unknown to her.

"Did you ever commit a crime?" she asked after a moment.

"I think most of us have at one time or another in our lives, or if we haven't already, sooner or later we will," answered the man.

The woman was silent a while thinking, then she asked: "What crime was it you committed— a great one?"

"The worst kind of crime —it related to a woman.

"Ah! did you love her?"

"Why do you ask that?"

"Because I have noticed that often men treat worst the woman they love."

The man rose from his seat hastily, "Will you come to the balcony and have some coffee before the curtain rises?"

The woman stood up and let him fold her shoulders with a wrap; then she took his arm, and they left the stalls together.

Presently they were seated among the cushions at each corner of a lounge, with fragrant cups beside them. The woman leaned back luxuriously and watched her companion light a cigarette.

"You have not answered my question," she said at last.

The man blew many smoke-wreaths before him before he replied.

"I sometimes think I loved her, he said.

"Did she care for you? Ah, but I need not ask that question; you could not have hurt her if she had not. Where is she now? "

"She is dead," answered the man. Let us talk of something else."

"What shall we talk about?"

"Ourselves," answered the man, quietly. "I have often wanted to meet a woman like yourself, whom I had never seen before, and talk with her of myself and her, quickly— at once— before we could get used to each other, and lose our first keen impressions, outlines of each other. Do you know what I mean? "

The woman looked up interested. "Ah, yes— so that we might see our own souls for a second as in a looking-glass. Is that what you mean?"

"Exactly," said the man, with beaming eyes. "How sympathetic you are— tell me quickly of myself."

"You are grave, strong, eager— you are full of longing," said the woman, gazing into the man's eyes. "You are longing for a woman's love, longing for the power to love a woman you have not met— and the longing will not let you rest, though you are weary; and, oh, you are curious; you are burning to know everything— everything— you would go all lengths, do anything, to know."

The man sighed deeply. "Yes," he said;

"Yes."

"You have a beautiful soul, but it is so envious and so curious it will not be beautiful always."

The woman moved in her cushions and looked away. "What have I been saying?" she asked.

"I feel a little foolish, as if I have been talking nonsense. Have l?"

"I don't think so," answered the man, dreamily.

"Now, tell me what you think of me?" demanded the woman.

The man met her eyes, and stared into their strange-colored depths ; then he turned away— silent, ashamed and embarrassed.

"Tell me," said the woman again.

"I can't; I am treating you unfairly," answered the man. "Instead of trying to read you, I have been thinking only of myself, and wondering at

the things you have said, and when I look into your eyes I feel somehow that you are right, that what you have said is true."

The woman laughed a low ripple of sweet-sounding mirth.

"How like a man to get the best of the bargain. But, come now —although I can't know your first impression, still half a loaf is better than no bread— tell me what you think of me now?"

The man glanced at her again. "You are sympathetic, and clever, and beautiful," he said.

" How commonplace! What a cheat you are! Why didn't you add goodness to my other virtues, and purity and sweetness?" sneered the woman.

The man recoiled a little from the sneer.

"I owned-up I treated you unfairly; you've no right to attack me about my second thoughts of you."

"Yes I have; you promised to tell me about my soul, and you tell me about my body. Never mind, we won't quarrel over it; our acquaintance is too short."

"What age do you think l am?'

"Thirty."

"And four years. I tell you that because I am rather a curiosity ; I have lived all those years without ever once falling in love, or even finding out what love means?"

"Why do you tell me that?"

"I don't know; perhaps because you read me so truly. I never told anyone else before."

"Wasn't it strange our talking to each other and becoming immediately so intimate," said the woman; "we must be queer people. Listen! The audience is clapping; the curtain must have gone up long ago."

" There is nothing worth watching on the stage, and I know no one in the house," said the man.

"And it is more comfortable here."

"And more interesting?"

"Perhaps," smiled the woman.

"I have told you twice, now, that you are beautiful. Each time you have ignored me. Why?"

"Because a compliment like that is usually the prelude to an attempt at love-making."

"Wouldn't you care to be made love to?"

"What an opening you give me to absolutely crush you ! What if I replied, 'Not by you?' "

The man laughed. "We each seem to have tacitly agreed not to take umbrage at anything the other may say. I would not have been offended."

"Well, no," said the woman, I don't care about being made love to. I'm so used to it, I suppose."

" Are you a good woman?" asked the man, suddenly.

"What a question!" cried the woman, flushing hotly. "Where are your manners?"

"It isn't a question of manners."

"Yes, it is. Every woman is supposed to be good, and it's the worst of manners to even suggest that there could be a doubt about her.

"I didn't imply a doubt," persisted the man. "I asked you to decide for me."

The woman regarded him curiously. "By that question did you mean to ask me am I one of those poor creatures of passion who live by what is called 'sin,' or a woman, of the class I flatter myself I appear to belong to, who has 1 sinned ' ?

"The latter is nearly what I meant," answered the man. . . .

"Then it is rather my status you are inquiring into than my morals. I think you have made a slight mistake."

"Status and morals both," said the man; "more morals than status. I don't want to know who you are, only what you are— you seem to be a lady; but I can't tell whether you are good or not; you puzzle me."

"You are very frank. I shall be equally so. I hope l am a lady. I believe l am good."

"Then why did you speak to me in there so readily; that was unconventional, surely?"

The woman laughed a long, sweet, low laugh full of mirth.

"Fancy! so you are prejudiced and narrow-minded, too. I swear I'll never meet a man that isn't. Can't a woman do an unconventional thing without being immediately thought unladylike and her morals brought into question. Listen— tell me, do you consider me attractive?"

"Yes."

"Has not my unconventionality attracted you more powerfully and made you more intimate with me than a long conventional acquaintance would?"

"Yes; I think it has."

"And yet you think that if I am a lady and good, I have done something very much beneath me; and although you participated in, and were, in fact, responsible for, my conduct, you imagine you have a right to scold me for it."

"I don't think you should have done it," said the man, gravely.

The woman leaned forward seriously, her chin on her hand, her eyes shining brilliantly.

"Do you know what you and others like you are doing?" she said. "You are confining within very narrow limits the attractions of virtue, while you allow every privilege and give every encouragement to the allurements of vice. You say that an innocent thing is evil, and frown at it if a good girl does it, but you take great pleasure in encouraging and applauding a bad girl in the very same thing. Applause— bah!— yes, that's the word! —man's applause ! It's what all women, by force of circumstances, are compelled to strive for, good women as well as bad. It's our only reward, whatever we may do."

The man watched the woman gravely while she spoke, and was silent for a moment after she had ceased.

"We only respect good women," he said at last.

"Respect! pooh! How do you distinguish— you pretend to respect the others, too; at any rate, in nine cases out of ten you prefer their society."

"You seem to have studied the subject."

"And why not. Is a girl forbidden to use her brains?"

"How bitter you are!"

"Am I ? Can you deny anything I have said?"

"Surely there must be some line of conduct to mark the difference between good and bad?"

"And yet a while ago you asserted that it is the intention which constitutes the crime?"

"You are very clever; it is conduct, though, we are speaking of now, not crime."

"A distinction only," cried the woman.

"What is it you want?" asked the man. "You surely don't wish to invade the territory of the bad woman, do you ?"

"I want fair play," answered the woman. "You men favor bad women too much. I want to invade their territory to drive, not the bad women, but you gods of men out of it. If it is a bad thing for good women to be there, it surely is not the best place for you, who pretend to the position of our instructors, our judges ?"

"Of course my position is indefensible," admitted the man, very seriously.

The woman broke out into a rippling peal of laughter, then stretched forward and patted the man's face lightly and familiarly with her hand.

" Ha, ha, ha! Poor boy; there, it won't do it any more. Did it scold 'oo, the nasty thing?"

The man started back aghast, looking at her in such evident amaze and consternation that she laughed again and again.

"You've been fooling me," he said angrily.

Dave I? There ; never mind, my dear: I won't do it any more. What a boy you are, for all your thirty-four years!"

"Thank you for the compliment," said the man, grimly. "I'm damned if you didn't sell me right down to the ground."

"Hush," said the woman, "someone may hear you. You wouldn't have said that 'damn' a moment ago, would you? Did it relieve your feelings?"

"Not adequately. I'd like to swear some more."

"Go on, then. Don't mind me. What a bore a good woman must be to a man accustomed to swear! "

"There's no such thing as a good woman, in my opinion."

"I don't consider you a judge. Look at the mistakes you've made to-night. I know one good woman, at least."

"*Mistakes*! I only made one mistake," sneered the man, coarsely. "I did not take you for a good woman when you spoke to me— though I admit you fooled me afterwards."

The woman rose and, drawing her wraps closer around her, moved towards the for the audience was evidently departing. The man followed her to the door.

"May I escort you? " he asked,

The woman stopped. "No, thank you," she answered, "I shall do very well alone." Then, as he bowed and turned away, she motioned him to stay. "You said you have made only one mistake," she said to him with a curious smile. "Are you sure you are right? I have not said that l am a bad girl; how can you be really sure that l am anything but good? We shall not meet again I think, so how can you ever be sure?"

The man looked at her mutely, utterly bewildered.

"No, you are not fit to be a woman's judge, although you are a man," continued the woman smilingly as she moved away.

"Stay just one moment!" cried the man imploringly, but the woman, still smiling inscrutably, shook her head and disappeared in the crowd.

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7: Scum of the Earth: No Liability

The Bulletin 8 Dec 1904

JULIUS SACHMEYER, the Hollander, and Manoel Yallejo, the Spaniard, attended to the air-pump; Nicholas, the Greek (he had another name, but it is long and unpronounceable), dived for shells; while Felice Trapero, the Italian, captained the boat, and mellifluously cursed and slave-drove his crew of one— Inch'i Chen (a poor hybrid cripple and a dreamer of dreams, half Cantonese, half Malay), whose services the partners rewarded with a pittance which provided him with just sufficient rice and chupatti to enable his shrunken flesh and bones to hang together.

Thursday Island, in bar and billiard-room, dubbed the partnership "The Scum of the Earth No Liability Company." The name fitted to a charm.

The other pearlers called their boat, in spite of *Calypso* bravely written on its bows, *The Raven*, because it had once been painted black and because it always croaked as it moved. It was so old, so disreputably smellful, and so cranky that it was a disgrace to the fleet.

When ashore, the partners lived rent-free in a dilapidated yellow bungalow that was perched on the beach, just outside the town. Its builders and former occupants had died of some malignant fever, and on that account it had been deserted and given over to decay, until the partners arrived at the island. But its evil reputation did not frighten them. They took possession at once, and in time they effected certain improvements in accord with their several dispositions. For instance, Manoel Vallejo, a modest man, plastered sheets of richly-greased brown paper over the windows of the room that he shared with his wife. Sachmeyer stopped up the crevices in the wall of his crib with mud; he had a weak chest and detested draughts. Nicholas, a second Hercules, loved fresh air, and despised the elements. He smashed the few of his window panes that had remained intact.

Felice Trapero, who had acquired a taste for art while serving as a model in his younger days for various Roman daubers and female American art-students, covered his walls with crude representations of nude women drawn in charcoal. His work was much applauded by the others. But he smiled in a superior fashion when they praised him. He was not a vain man, and his ignorance was a form of wisdom when compared with theirs.

Sachmeyer, on the other hand, was prodigiously conceited. He thought himself deserving of men's attention and women's worship. He boasted that he had been imprisoned in three European capitals for bigamy. He was forty-seven years old, and he still feared, or hoped, to be imprisoned somewhere or other for bigamy again. He declared and believed it to be a noble crime,

because he had heard somewhere that thousands of women die spinsters every year.

Inch'i Chen was never permitted to enter the house. He slept behind a ruined fish-basket in a corner of the verandah which the termites had not yet attacked.

Juanita Vallejo kept house for the partners, She was a kind-hearted woman, and, when opportunity offered of doing so without being observed, she fed Ineh'i Chen with stale scraps from her pantry. Her husband beat her whenever he caught her defrauding the partnership in such a fashion. Trapero and Sachmeyer, unable or unwilling to visit their resentment on Juanita, kicked Inch'i Chen. Nicholas was no less parsimonious than his companions, but he was lazier than they, and never kicked Inch'i Chen unless the cripple got in his way. His indolence, however, was improperly interpreted by the half-breed. Inch'i Chen was foolish enough to imagine that the giant spared him out of pity, and he loved him in consequence with the devotion that a dog bears to its master; his affection being constantly fed by contemplation of the enormous size an d strength of Nicholas.

"For," thought he, "this man might kill me at a blow, and though I anger him he does not touch me!"

Being a dreamer of dreams, he set up a stick on a lonely part of the beach, which he ornamented with rags and feathers as the Malays do their fetish-poles, and this he worshipped by the name of Nicholas. Inch'i Chen was a fool; but he alone of all the party was not a scoundrel.

Sachmeyer's record has been described. Manoel Vallejo had poisoned his wife's lover at Valencia, for he was not even sufficiently courageous (although a Spaniard) to creep upon his rival in the dark and stab him in the back. Felice Trapero was wanted by the police of Colombo, Singapore, and other places, for various jewel robberies which he had engineered; while Nicholas had wound up his career as a music-hall strong man by crushing his manager almost to death in Montreal. That was seven years ago, and three of these years he had served in gaol. Most of the balance he had employed in searching the world for the man whom he had failed to kill. But Providence had favored his enemy, and Nicholas had at length abandoned the quest in the hope of making a fortune out of pearls. Sachmeyer had picked him up somewhere in the Persian Gulf after he had served his apprenticeship, and had already acquired fame as one of the best divers on the coast. But Nicholas had there been working for a master at a wage, and the wily Hollander persuaded him to try Thursday Island, as his partner. On the way thither the pair had fallen in with Vallejo and Trapero, whom Sachmeyer had induced to buy into the venture, and so had the Scum of the Earth Company been formed.

Juanita Vallejo was sallow, lean, and thirty, but her eyes were magnificently large and languorous, and nothing blacker has been seen in this world, except perhaps her hair. Before they had been settled a month on the Island her husband's partners were in love with her, in varying degrees, Sachmeyer wanted her because he was of lusty habit and she was the only white woman on the Island placed within his range or reach. He did not care for Japanese women. All others of European origin had insultingly flouted his advances. Even the ugly barmaid at the Hotel had on one occasion requested him to stand to leeward of her while he sipped his rum and when he failed to comply she pinched her nostrils be tween disdainful thumb and forefinger, wondering audibly why "furriners " always smelt of rancid grease. The fact is Sachmeyer was afflicted with a mad dog's aversion to water. It was not said he, that he was naturally filthy, but his father had perished of heart-disease under a shower, and he had taken the warning to heart.

Trapero's passion for Juanita was sincere and in some measure disinterested. He was ready to elope with her at any moment, and marry her after the divorce or not, as she preferred. He was, however afraid of Vallejo, and not wishing to share her former lover's fate, he honored her husband's hearth-stone and bided his time.

Nicholas was least in love of all three, and for that reason Juanita liked him the best. That was at first; but as the weeks passed, his magnificent proportions and god-like strength made her mad for him, and there were occasions when she felt she could not wait. Nicholas one night returned from their common drinking den in advance of his companions. It was so hot that he had thrown off his coat and bared his breast in order to obtain the full benefit of what breeze there was. Juanita behaved like a silly girl in her teens. The sight of his white marble-tinted skin thrilled her with such long-forgotten tremors that she swooned. When she recovered it was to find Vallejo dashing water in her face. Heaven, how she hated him! The difficulties that encompassed her intensified her hatred for the one man and inflamed her desire for the other.

The partners were always together. For one reason, they were despised and ostracised by the people amongst whom they dwelt. For a second, they profoundly distrusted each other, and their steadily accumulating stock of pearls and money was concealed in a spot known to all four. They could not bear to remain out of each other's sight for longer than ten minutes at a time. But Juanita had the cunning of her sex.

Three evenings later she skilfully contrived to persuade the partners that she had fallen a victim to the dreaded plague. Vallejo and Sachmeyer, overcome with terror, fled immediately to the saloon in order to pickle their

interiors with rum against infection. Trapero, who truly cared for her, rushed hot-foot for a doctor. Nicholas, whose character she had studied with great success, did not move immediately. He was tired from his day's work, and his natural indolence detested the thought of seeking other quarters, although he recognised the necessity, and intended to desert the stricken woman soon. Before, however, he had collected energy to depart, the other men had vanished, and the woman stood before him with dishevelled streaming hair, laughing like a siren.

He believed she was mad, that the plague had already affected her brain, and, shaking with coward fears, he attempted to elude her. She tried to explain, but he would not listen. She followed, and finally she flung her arms around him, but he struck her to the ground and dashed away as though pursued by Furies.

The blow sealed the woman's love. After that she would have waded to his side through seas of blood. But Inch'i Chen saved her the trouble.

One day he took Nicholas a message, and that night the Greek treated his partners so lavishly to gin and rum that they suspected his generosity was the result of a mild sunstroke. But they drank all that he gave them, and when the sun arose Vallejo, Trapero, and Sachmeyer were still sleeping like drunken pigs, while Nicholas and Juanita, screaming with laughter, splashed each other's gleaming bodies in the surf, a hundred yards away.

Nicholas was a Greek; Juanita— a woman. The intrigue, therefore, was not suspected by the others for several months ; by which time the Scum of the Earth Company had amassed a considerable store of pearls, thanks to the wonderful strength and skill of the diver Nicholas.

Felice Trapero was the discoverer. His passion made him watchful and jealous, even of glances. Of those he intercepted several exchanged between the pair. Juanita, moreover, suddenly adopted the habit of occasionally repairing by night to the house of a Japanese woman in the neighborhood, for company's sake, she said. The Japanese lady was married and respectable.

Vallejo rested tranquilly indifferent; but Trapero was a lover. He noticed that Nicholas always retired earlier than usual on such occasions, and he knew that the window of Nicholas' room was nought but an open frame. He played the spy.

As he was an Italian, of mountain peasant origin he soon wished to kill his rival. But Nicholas was a giant, he a weakling. Unwilling to trust the issue to his unaided dagger, he awaited his opportunity, and the next time that Nicholas sneaked away to keep an assignation with Juanita, Trapero confided his discoveries to Vallejo and Sachmeyer.

Vallejo merely shrugged his shoulders. "Nicholas is our diver," he observed.

Sachmeyer, however, much to Trapero's delight, viewed the affair less philosophically. "He is a cursed villain; a treacherous rascal, unfit to live!" the Hollander declared.

In fact, Sachmeyer was furious. He had been stabbed in his weakest spot—self-love. For twelve months he had vainly endeavored to accomplish Juanita's seduction. The news, then, of the Greek's success filled his soul with gall.

"He is our diver," repeated Vallejo. "He has made us rich, and he will make us richer!"

"Are you or are you not a man of honor?" snapped Sachmeyer.

"As your friend, Manoel, whatever help I can give is yours to command," said Trapero. "My knife is at your disposal."

Vallejo blushed. He cared nothing for his wife. He had tired of her years ago, but he did not wish to appear contemptible. Moreover, the disinterested devotion of his friends touched him.

"I meant but to postpone my revenge for your sakes," he replied, with dignity.

Trapero brushed the suggestion aside. "We have enough," he said. "Besides, Nicholas is not the only diver in the world."

"I have some poison left," said Vallejo.

But Sachmeyer shook his head. "There is the woman and the law," he muttered, sagely. "She would know, and inform on you! These English doctors cut up corpses— no, that is too dangerous!"

Vallejo looked relieved. "Why should I not appeal to the law?" he demanded. "I could make him pay, I think!"

"Bah!" cried Trapero, "if it is money you want, there is his share of the treasure. Let us first kill him, and then divide it among us!"

"But how?"

"Come closer to me, you two, and I will breathe it in your ears ! "

Inch'i Chen, who had been listening throughout, feigning sleep, heard no more, for the remainder of the colloquy was conducted in whispers. But even had he heard all, the cripple would have been very little the wiser, for they spoke in the Lingua Franca of the Levant, and he could only understand a word here and there of that bastard tongue. Instinct, however, taught him that there was a plot afoot against his beloved giant, and when the conspirators retired he quietly rose and slipped into the night. Ten minutes later he tried in his pigeon-English to make Nicholas understand that his life was imperilled. Juanita was greatly disturbed.

"There leaves a steam-boat to-morrow morning, *mio caro*," she said tenderly. "Let us kill them all to-night, rob them and depart! "

But Nicholas laughed loudly and kissed her on the lips. "I can take care of myself," he replied. "We will kill and rob them anon; they are not worth the trouble yet."

He was a pig-headed man, obstinate as a mule; and Juanita, who knew him as well as her mirror, said no more. But she thought of the spot where the partners' treasure lay hid— she had, herself unseen, watched them bury it— and she began to dream of the pleasures it could buy for her in Paris or Madrid. Juanita was growing rather tired of Nicholas. He was so lazy that he took no pains to keep her passion for him alive. He never even beat her.

On the next day, five minutes after Nicholas, clad in his immense, unwieldy helmet and diving-dress, had climbed over the boat side and sunk into the deep, his partners resumed their plotting.

Sachmeyer and Trapero wished to dispose of him forthwith, but Vallejo, animated with the soul of a skinflint, kept stolidly working at the pump, repeating ever and anon in answer to the protests of the others— "*Mañana, mañana*. He has not yet given us the signal to pull him up!"

Vallejo desired to make his victim slave until the last second. "Who knows?" thought he; "in his last hour he may send us a thousand pounds in pearls! "

Therefore, while Sachmeyer and Trapero fretted and chafed, anxious to get their ghastly business concluded, Vallejo toiled bravely at the pump, showing his white teeth in grins of wide triumphant malice each time a basket of shells was hauled aboard the dirty craft. But he often sighed ; Nicholas was a great diver. It was a cruel pity to lose him.

At length, however, the long-expected signal was given. Vallejo suppressed a groan of disgust. He had silently offered up three "Aves" for just one more basket— in vain!

His companions cried "At last!", and looked into each other's eyes.

Vallejo left the pump reluctantly and took a seat to face them.

"We shall never get another diver like him!" he muttered, dismally.

Inch'i Chen stared at his masters like one dazed. He did not at once understand what they were waiting for. But he saw the signal-rope jerk twice most violently, and he knew that Nicholas was asking for more air.

"Work de pum'— de pum'!" he cried, excitedly, his eyes starting almost out of his head— "Tuan Nick— he wan' air— air!"

Trapero gave him a look of warning. "Sit down!" he commanded.

But Inch'i Chen was desperate— the rope had jerked again. "You bad orang!" he shouted, and darted forward towards the pump.

Trapero stood up, and, lifting his hand, which held an iron bar, laid the cripple senseless in the thwarts. He sat down again and the others nodded

approval. The faces of Vallejo and Trapero were set in fixed, wolfish grins. Now that the die was cast, both were enjoying themselves. Sachmeyer, however, looked unhappy. It was his first murder, and, callous as he was, he could not help pitying his victim.

Meanwhile Nicholas, standing on the ooze of the sea bed, had ceased jerking the signal-rope. He had realised his doom. Placing his crowbar between his knees, he stretched out his arms and, fumbling above his head, turned the stop cock of the pipe, so as to keep within his helmet what little air remained.

Nine out of ten would have already despaired or lost consciousness. Nicholas was the tenth. He had often held his breath for two minutes at a time in order to win trifling wagers. To save his life he might hold it for three. Seizing the life-line, he began surely but slowly to haul himself up. He knew that the murderers would never dare to cut that, because of the inquest that must inevitably be held on his remains and into the cause of death. He rather admired his partners. They were certainly clever scoundrels. His corpse would merely show that he had died of heart-failure or the breakage of some blood-vessel.

His corpse! But would it? Clever as his partners were, they had failed to reckon with his giant strength. Terribly weighted as he was, he rose, steadily, steadily. Not once did the rope slip through his desperately clutching fingers. He always rose. Finally his head, his monstrously encumbered head, emerged from the element, under the counter of the boat. Nicholas had already accomplished a feat worthy of Achilles. But it had brought him only a step farther from the grave. His helmet would as certainly accomplish his destruction as ever unless he could remove it. But without an assistant that was impossible.

Yes, he was doomed! His face, although he did not know it, was purple. In another second or two, or three, some artery must burst! Holding to the rope with one hand, he dashed his other, clenched, against the glass sight-piece of the helmet. In vain ! Then he remembered his crowbar. It was still tightly clutched between his knees. Stretching down he caught and drew it up. In another instant the glass shivered in his face; his left eye was destroyed for ever, his lips were slashed across, his nose was almost severed— but he breathed!

"What is that?" cried Vallejo, Sachmeyer and Trapero.

They sprang erect and instinctively drew their knives. The noise made by the breaking of the glass, had aroused them from a reverie. Nicholas caught the gunwale of the boat in his left hand and drew himself, with a sudden awful laugh, into their view. His right hand clutched his crowbar.

"*Caramba*!" shouted the Spaniard. Nicholas had swept his arm. Vallejo fell to the boards, howling frightfully; the bone of his right leg was splintered into fragments.

Nicholas swept his arm again.

"*Donnerwetter*!"shrieked the Hollander. He said no more, for he had been struck in the pit of the stomach, and he was dead.

For a third time Nicholas swept his arm. But Trapero, yelling with terror, stumbled backwards, and, in trying to avoid the bar, fell overboard. Unable to swim, he sank like a stone, just as Nicholas, with a last supreme effort, drew himself over the side and rolled into the bottom of the boat, where for the next hour he lay in a stupor of exhaustion beside the insensible body of the Spaniard. By that time Inch'i Chen, awaking from the effects of the blow with which Trapero had felled him, went to the Greek's assistance, and toilfully removed his helmet.

Nicholas thanked his benefactor with a scowl, and curtly ordered him to work the boat ashore. There arrived, they lifted out the unconscious Vallejo, and bore him between them to the yellow bungalow. "It might be dangerous," thought the Greek, "to leave him in the boat. He might awake and call for help and be heard!"

"Juanita!" shouted Nicholas.

There was no reply. Nicholas dropped the Spaniard on the verandah, and, watched timidly by Inch'i Chen, entered the house.

Juanita was not there. Impelled by a sort of brutish prescience, he rushed out into the compound where grew a little clump of banana trees. In the midst of the plantation the partners had buried their treasure. Nicholas came presently on an open hole, freshly dug. It was empty.

He staggered to the verandah, pale as death, trembling in every limb. Then, shading his uninjured eye with his open palm, he looked seawards. Along and across a section of the horizon trailed a long line of sooty vapor. At the point where the smoke abruptly halted he saw the top of a funnel and a slender stick.

"Juanita!" he gasped. "Juanita!"

"Tuan! Oh, Tuan!" sighed Inch'i Chen, who had divined all, and was watching his master with eyes of anguished pity and affection.

But the giant had a grievance, and something to trample upon was at hand, revealed by the cripple's foolish sigh. Nicholas turned on the half-breed like a hunger-maddened beast.

"Take that!" he shrieked. "And that!"

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8: A King's Word

Observer (Adelaide) 16 May 1908

HENRI IV arose from the couch whereon he had been seated beside the beautiful Gabrielle D'Estrees, and with an embarrassed frown returned the salute of the great Sully, who, accompanied by half a dozen of his captains, had burst unceremoniously into the apartment.

"Has Spain declared war upon us, or has Paris, taken fire?" he demanded curtly.

"Sire," said Sully. "Spain impotently hates us still, and Paris sleeps in peace, yet my abrupt intrusion is not without excuse. Your Majesty's greatest enemy is in the city."

"Mayenne?" cried Henri.

"Aye," said Sully. "The Duke of Mayenne, that proud and contumacious rebel who has succeeded for so long in preventing Your Majesty from enjoying the full fruits of your heritage, and who, although defeated in four pitched battles, is still the most powerful noble in the kingdom."

Henri's eyes flashed and his right hand fell upon his sword hilt.

"What does he here?" he asked, "and how is he attended?"

"He has come disguised and alone, ostensibly to comfort the last hours of his widowed daughter, the Countess de Montfaucon, but without doubt, sire, to have speech with others of his kidney, and to foment a new and dangerous rebellion in your very capital."

"Where is he lodged?"

"At the Hotel de Coutras."

"How have you discovered this?"

"Sire, he was recognised by a female servant of the Countess, who brought me the news a moment since. The woman waits in another room to be examined by Your Majesty, if such be your pleasure"

"You have questioned her?"

"Ay, and am satisfied she speaks the truth."

"What would you have me do?" demanded Henri.

Sully made a gesture of astonishment.

"With the Duke de Mayenne?" he cried.

"Speak!" said Henri.

"Arrest and execute him, Sire."

"And you, gentlemen— what is your opinion?" asked Henri, turning abruptly to the captains.

"He deserves a dozen deaths," answered the Marquis de Couvreur.

"Ay, ay, indeed!" exclaimed the rest.

"While he lives your Majesty will never know true peace," added Sully.

Henri, however, after a moment's deep reflection shook his head.

"I have always found him a brave and honourable enemy," he said slowly, "and even though it should be proved that he has come here to conspire against me, he shall have the trial that is due to his reputation and his rank."

Sully exchanged anxious glances with his , captains, glances which said plainly, "We guessed how it would be," Then he asked, in a tone of indignation he could not conceal:

"At least, Sire, you permit us to arrest him?"

"I permit you to close and guard the gates of Paris," answered Henri, sternly. "My further pleasure I will make known to you to-morrow morning."

Sully flushed to the roots of his hair; the captains angrily lowered their eyes; but no one ventured to oppose a syllable in remonstrance to the cold voice that at the same time rejected their counsel and dismissed them. For Henri of Navarre, in the mood his tone and look evinced, was a person his dearest friend durst not cross, nor even argue with.

When the door closed upon the constable and his satellites, the King turned with a rueful smile to his lovely mistress. "And now," said he, "you, too, will tell me, am I wrong?"

"No, Henri," said Gabrielle, demurely, "not that you are wrong, but that Sully was right. His advice in my poor opinion was prompted by the purest policy. Mayenne is your most powerful and deadly enemy, he has twice contemptuously refused, although defeated, to be reconciled with you. He reigns like a, king over a great part of your kingdom which all your skill and valour has been unable to reduce; and while he lives, even though , you hold him prisoner, and load him with chains, he will never lack a champion among the disaffected to wage war with you; and his people will never acknowledge your dominion."

"And if I kill him Gabrielle— what then?"

"His son will be your servant, and you will gain a province at the cost of one proud rebel's life. Policy—"

"Ah!" interrupted Henri, "Policy, policy. It gets into the way of every noble thought and generous impulse, it is dinned, into my ear from morn till night, now. *Ventre Saint Gris*! find you, Gabrielle, using it to urge me to commit a crime."

"Henri!" cried the girl. "A crime to take advantage of the rashness of your enemy and serve him as, heaven be my witness, he would serve you, if your positions were reversed."

"Hold!" cried Henri, in tones that rang out through the chamber like the clash steel on steel. "I forbid you to suggest that Mayenne, rebel as he is, and deeply as he hates me, could ever be a murderer."

And heedless of the tears that rose at once to Gabrielle's bright eyes, he swung on his heel and strode, frowning, from the room.

SOME hours later two figures, masked and cloaked, issued from a private door of the Palace of the Louvre, and keeping well within the shadows of the walls, sped silently north-west. Very soon, however, they crossed the road and plunged into a maze of dark and dirty streets with which they seemed familiar, and turning and twisting, finally emerged into the Rue St. Honoré. There, for the first time, their progress met a cheek. The second house which they essayed to pass opened suddenly its doors and belched forth on the street a bar of light and a herd of shouting roysterers. The two night birds drew back instantly into the dark, but were as instantly detected.

"Ho! Ho there!" cried one of the revellers immediately, more sharp-eyed than his fellows. "What brigands have we here. Take care, Francois, or that shade will spit you."

The man named Francois started back and half drew his sword.

"A shade," he shouted, drunkenly. "It is a man and masked!"

"Two men," cried the first, "and food my friends, for frolic, by our Lady. Stand forth, fellows, and disclose your business. Do you know that this is an hour when all honest citizens should be abed. *Ma foi*! it is past midnight."

The mob, shouting with laughter, drew together, facing and half compassing the masks. These stepped forthwith from the doorway of their lurking place, and one, the taller, said—

"I pray you, friends, suffer us to pass on our way, and God be with you."

"God is with us already, retorted the reveller, "for we have just confessed ourselves to the wine cask of a Jesuit, but you, my pigeon, are not so happily devout, I fear, for you are sober— and your speech smacks strongly of the south. Unmask before we take and treat you for a Huguenot."

"Unmask! Unmask!" howled the mob, and swords flashed out on instant.

"Gentlemen, defend yourselves— the watch!" cried suddenly the second mask. The effect was instantaneous. The whole crowd turned, and not too soon, for a flashing front of lights and pikes was charging down upon them at the run. In five seconds the mob had scattered, and not the last to show their heels to the watch were the two masked wanderers. These halted a minute in the middle of a side street, breathless, yet alone and safe.

"A close shave— by Saint Denis!" gasped one.

"*Ventre St. Gris*!" panted the other. "I have not run so quickly or so far on foot since I chased the Grammont in the woods of Bearn.''

"Sire! Sire!" said the first; "I beg you to resign your purpose and return. He has sent you this adventure as a warning. I feel certain. For God's sake, be advised— your life belongs to France— and it is little short of madness, Sire, to risk it thus. Those men the watch dispersed were of your enemies "

"Peace, Guizon!" interrupted the King, for it was he. "When have you known me turn my back upon an undertaking once resolved upon? Lead on— and be silent!"

Guizon shrugged his shoulders and obeyed. Ten minutes afterwards, without further mishap, the journey ended. Guizon stopped and pointed to a tall and gloomy looking building with his hand.

"The Hotel de Coutras, Sire," he whispered.

Henri surveyed the house for a while without reply, then he turned to his companion.

"In one hour," he said, "if I have not returned, make haste to Sully; but not before the hour is up."

Guizon bowed silently, and Henri, without hesitation, marched across the road. A few seconds later his loud summons on the door sent iron echoes sounding and resounding through the quiet street. There ensued a silence deep as death, but at length a window in the building ratt'ed overhead, and a voice hissed out—

"Who knocks?"

"Hist!" cried Henri. "A friend with important news for Monsieur, the guest of Madame de Montfaucon."

"Madame has no guest," replied the voice.

"Fool!" cried Henri. "Would you have your master taken like a rat in a trap? Open, I say! Open at once!"

The window slammed shut and the former silence repeated itself. Nevertheless, before 10 might be eouated, a door in the wall opened softly on a chain, and a voice commanded, in a strident whisper, the midnight prowler to approach.

"And come alone, as you value your life!" it concluded.

Henri stepped forward and was suddenly confronted with a thin dagger shaft of light.

"Unmask!" said the voice.

Henri smiled and complied.

"God save" us!" gasped the unseen doorkeeper. "The King!'

"Ay! Monsieur de Mayenne, your king," said Henri, and with the speed of thought he thrust his foot within the door.

"You shall not take me alive!" hissed the other. "Stand back— or die!" The point of a naked blade menaced the King, but he did not yield an inch.

"Monsieur," he said, "on the honour of a Prince, I am alone. I have come here to speak to you in private. I command you to believe me and admit me."

There was a frightful pause; then the bright steel very slowly was retracted. The light went out, and a chain rattled.

''Enter," said the voice.

Without hesitation the King pushed into the ink-black passage. He heard the door clang behind him, and a strong baud gripped his arm.

"You are a brave man," said the voice— "even braver than I thought."

"It is an honour to be commended on the score of courage by Monsieur de Mayenne!" replied the King.

"Permit me to guide you," said the Duke.

Henri suffered himself to he led along the gloomy passage and into a room at the end. There the Duke struck a light and ignited the taper that he still held in his hand.

"I, too, am alone," he said.

Henri looked his enemy in the eye. "Alone?" he repeated.

"My daughter died an hour since," answered the Duke coldly. "What have you to say to me?"

"But you have your servants in the house?"

"My daughter's servants are all women, sire."

"Sire?" said Henri, with a bitterly ironic smile.

"You are the King— you have made yourself King in spite of me."

"And you have come to Paris absolutely unattended. Why?"

"I had a daughter, Sire,"

Henri saw the lips of the haggard-faced Duke involuntarily twitch and quiver.

"You loved her?" he murmured.

"As much as I hate you, Sire!"

"Monsieur," said the King; "my friends believe that you have come to Paris to conspire against my life."

"With whom ?"

"Will you tell me?"

"I cannot— for your friends are wrong."

"I almost told them so."

"Ah!"

"I found it hard to fancy that a man so proud and fearless as Mayenne could stoop to fill the role of assassin."

"Sire, I thank you!"

"What follows?"

"What would you, Sire?"

"We are two gentlemen, alone together with a mortal enmity between us!" The King stepped back and drew his sword. The Duke eyed him with a gloomy frown.

"Draw, Monsieur!" said the King, "and may God defend the right!"

"I cannot fight the King," said Mayenne, coldly. "What you propose is impossible. Sire— noble, perhaps, but—" he shrugged his shoulders— "theatrical as well. Your friends, moreover, know I am in Paris. I cannot, therefore, escape, and if you fell I should be torn to pieces."

"This ring," said Henri, "will enable you to pass the gates. You may take it from the finger of my corpse."

Mayenne noddled. "The alternative?" he asked.

"Arrest— imprisonment— execution!"

Mayenne smiled and put his taper on the table.

"A last question. Sire. What is the meaning of this amazing condescension, this more than princely generosity?"

"*Ventre St Gris*!" cried Henri. "You are as full of questions as an egg is of meat— but since you have promised this to be the last, I shall answer you. Learn then that I did not cease to be a man when I became the lung of France. Should you be arrested, I shall be compelled by policy to cut off your head. We have, however, been adversaries in arms so long that I prefer, since we must contend to the last, to stick my sword through your body. I should sleep badly were it otherwise."

Mavenne bowed gravely and drew his sword.

"A last word," said the King. "Cuizon waits me in the street. He will wait an hour. I brought him to outmatch a thought of treachery. If you win, depart by the postern— lest he sees you."

"Sire," said the Duke. "It will be a pleasure to kill so thoughtful and chivalrous a gentleman."

Next instant the swords crossed. Henri believed himself as good a blade as might be found in France, and he had never till that moment been obliged to alter his opinion. But with the first pass and parry, he knew that he had met, his match, and with the second he felt that he had found his master.

"You fence well, Sire," observed the Duke, as for the third time they disengaged, "but you grip your hilt too tightly. It is a fault— that— for it robs your wrist of half its suppleness."

Beads of perspiration stood on the King's brow. He foresaw defeat already, ay, and death, but he set his teeth and fought on doggedly with all his strength and courage, hoping against hope. The Duke, on the contrary, appeared to be

fencing for the pastime of an idle moment. Calm, cool, and perfectly collected, his lips were parted in a contemptuous smile, and each savage thrust lie parried, he commented upon or criticised with the detached interest of a mere spectator.

"Have done!" cried the tortured King at last. "Be courteous, and cease this mockery. I cannot reach you."

"Well, well!" replied the Duke;. "You have taught me to he generous, I shall pleasure you."

For sixty seconds only the rasping of the blades was heard, then came a dull crash. The King uttered a cry, and his right hand fell to his side, half paralysed and weaponless. His sword flashed overhead behind him. The Duke's point pricked his throat.

"Strike!" gasped Henri.

Mayenne laughed raucously.

''For once I have beaten you in a fight," he said, "your life is at my mercy."

"Strike!" repeated the King.

The Duke for answer stepped back and sheathed his blade.

"Monsieur," said Henri, "I would have killed you."

"Sire," said Mayenne, "I am too poor to despise the ransom you will pay me. Hermit me to restore your sword."

Henri bit his lips and; frowned, but he took the blade and sent it rattling back into its scabbard.

"This ransom?" he muttered hoarsely.

"Give me the ring upon your finger."

Henri, still frowning, held, forth the ring. Mayenne received it with a mocking smile.

"What else?" demanded the King.

"Sire," said the Duke, "I shall tell you at another time and place. Permit us to escort you to the street."

"*Mordieu*!" cried Henri. "When we leave this room I shall be king again—remember that!"

"Sire," said Mayenne. "Five thousand lances wait me at Montreuil. I have yet to pass the gates!"

"You tell me that!"

"Man here," sneered the Duke. "King yonder. " Take your choice. Guizon can forestall me at the gates; yourself may early collect sufficient troops by daylight to surprise my force and overwhelm it. Behold yourself thenceforth a king indeed."

"Devil!" hissed the King. "Wherefore do you tempt me? Your trouble is in vain!"

"We shall see to-morrow." Mayenne gritted the words through his teeth.

'But now get hence. A greater king than you holds judgment here to-night, and I must pay my court to him before I go."

"Death," said Henri.

"You were kind to my daughter— so she said— hence you live still," said the Duke, "but get hence— for she is dead— and I am desperate— the only being that I loved!"

Tears were coursing down Mayenne's furrowed cheeks, but strange to say they only made his face more glistening, hard, and cruel, and implacable. The King sighed, and with a gesture full of sadness and compassion, stepped into the passage. Mayenne followed with the taper. Suddenly a loud unearthly wail rang through the building.

"*Mon Dieu*!" gasped Henri, and stopped, thrilled with superstitious fear.

"It is her dog," said the Duke, and a strangled groan broke from his lips.

The King shuddered, and passed out into the street. The door closed behind him with a mournful, muffled clang, and Guizon hurried from the shadows opposite to meet him.

"Thank God, Sire, you are safe," he cried. "The hour appeared a century."

But Henri did not answer him, for there was that swelling in the throat which rendered speech impossible.

NEXT morning came Sully and an armed following to the Louvre. Henri awaited them in the throne room surrounded by his Court.

"Sire," said Sully, "I have the honour to announce that the Duke of Mayenne has been apprehended. An hour before daylight he attempted to pass the Porte Saint Gervais with a ring which bears a strange resemblance to Your Majesty's private signet. Fortunately, however, the officer on duty detected the imposture,"

Henri listened with a face of stone. "Where is he?" he demanded.

"Without, Sire, attended by my guard."

"Have him brought here at once."

Sully saluted and withdrew. There followed a period of breathless stillness. The courtiers maintained the silence of absolute amazement; Henri, of reflection; the Queen, of dreams.

Marguerite and Mayenne had fought against the King together more than once. She wondered what manner of revenge her lord and master, who disdained to punish women, would wreak upon a man. She was soon to see. The tramp of soldiers and the clash of trailing weapons broke the silence, waking loud echoes in the corridors without that did not hesitate to insolently to penetrate the Hall of Justice. A moment later, Mayenne appeared, walking

with measured steps between his guard. When he saw the King, he threw back his head and laughed scornfully. His face was livid and haggard for the want of sleep, with care and age and grief. But his dauntless eyes, the bearing of his tall thin figure, and the strong set of his grim square jaws, proclaimed his proud and gallant spirit careless of the march of time, and disdainfully indifferent to fate and misfortune.

Henri returned his glance with an inscrutable, chill smile.

"Monsieur de Mayenne," he said, "your scabbard lacks a sword."

"Aye, Sire," replied the Duke on instant. "it is as hollow as a King's word."

Henri sprang to his feet as if overcome with rage and flashed his own blade bare.

"Sire!" cried Sully, in alarm.

"Monsieur de Mayenne," said Henri, disregarding him, "a king's word can be redeemed as easily as your scabbard can be filled. This is a good sword, it must be for it conquered you at Ivry."

"Ah!" cried the duke, his eyes kindled with anger at the insult.

Henri descended the steps of the throne.

"Monsieur," said he, smiling with a right royal kindliness, "wear it for my sake, at since 'tis I who give it, let this remembrance dull the memoried sting of that defeat."

Mayenne flushed scarlet, then turned pale as death. His eyes tried to read the king heart, but the king's eyes, though he to they should have mocked and hated, seemed to bless him.

"Sire— sire," he stammered, in amaze, "what is this you say to me?"

"*Ventre St. Gris*," laughed Henri, "are you deaf, man? Come," and he put the sword into the duke's hand.

Mayenne's fingers half involuntarily close upon the hilt. "Take care, sire, you arm an irreconcilable, a prisoner," be cried.

Sully stepped forward, and terrified by the duke's look of menace drew his on sword as he moved.

But Henri laughed again.

"I never arm a prisoner," he said, "as for the rest, you sure that you and I cannot be reconciled. Think, monsieur!"

"I— I—am free?" demanded Mayenne.

"As air," said the king.

Mayenne stared about him stupidly. Sully, his face dark as night, hastily approached the king.

"Sire," he began. "I have news of a thousand of Mayenne's lances camped Montreuil. Is it possible that—"

But the king held up his hand.

"Silence!" he commanded. "Wait!"

Mayenne was the cynosure of eyes.

Slowly, very slowly, he recovered his composure, and his worn face, which had been working strangely, grew calm again and rigid. He put the king's sword in his scabbard, and pointed to the throne.

"There is your place," he said.

Henri nodded, and mounting the date sat down upon the throne.

Mayenne strode with bent bead to the lowest step, stood there for a space of seconds, and then looking up, full into his king's face, he sank upon his knee.

"Sire, I would kiss your hand!" he muttered, in a hollow whisper,

But Henri sprang afoot again, his countenance transfigured.

"Not thus, Mayenne, but to my heart," he said, and clasped his life-long enemy within his arms.

On the next morning the Duke of Mayenne was appointed by royal Letters patent Governor of the Isle of France— the most coveted domestic post in the king's gift, and second only in importance to that of Constable of the Kingdom, then occupied by the great Sully himself.

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9: The Sonata Appassionata

The Lady's Realm, (UK) Vol. 25 1908; p. 446

KASPER LUCILIO VON KRUSENTERN, the world-famed pianist, was ill. Incessant work extending unremittingly from early childhood into manhood, and culminating in a two years' triumphant procession through the capitals of Europe, had exhausted his vitality. He was sick of the plaudits of the crowd. Each recital that he gave left him the more bankrupt of nervous energy, and the more feebly but passionately resentful of the insatiable demands of his worshippers upon his dwindling strength. Each day he grew more weak and irritable. He thought of the long series of engagements before him with an ever-increasing horror, and he began to abhor his profession and to detest his beloved music. He quarrelled with his friends, and insulted his men of business. He attempted to break his contracts. He longed with all his heart for peace and rest. His physicians prescribed a tonic. He threw the medicine out the window.

One evening, without warning, he disappointed an immense audience at Covent Garden. Next morning his irate manager appeared, tapping a sealed contract. Kasper twined his long white fingers around the man's throat, but swooned in time to save himself from crime. He felt he was going mad. That night he disguised himself, and, taking his mother's name, as Lucilio Manini, he fled to France.

His disappearance caused a nine days' wonder, but his friends hushed it up. They announced a dangerous illness which necessitated a period of unbroken tranquillity, and meanwhile they searched for him. Their spies traversed Europe, but for many weeks their quest was unsuccessful. It was because they searched for a musician and a lover of music. Kasper had become a hater of the very name of music. He wandered from place to place like a [ ] seeking a refuge where the strains of music might not enter. It was sufficient for him to hear an aria whistled by a workman in the street to be driven in a state bordering on frenzy, from the city, town, or village where his ears were so offended.

At length he took shelter in a tiny cabaret in the heart of the Tyrol, which was occupied alone by a very old couple, both of whom were almost deaf. There he remained for several weeks, hiding like a wounded beast, and drinking in great health giving draughts of the pure mountain air. He spent his time roaming through the lonely pine forests, communing half-unconsciously with nature. His health gradually returned. His erstwhile unalleviated pallor was replaced with a sun-kissed flush. He grew stronger daily and more vigorous. But his horror of music continued unabated, and his mind appeared

to be asleep. He acquired a habit of uttering his thoughts aloud. They were such quaint and childish thoughts. He babbled like a little child to the birds and squirrels he encountered in his rambles. The old couple who attended to his wants grew to love him dearly. He was so frank, so handsome, so simple, and so kind. They invented him the hero of some curious romance; they spoke of him as "the young prince," and they waited on him like a pair of slaves, quarrelling with one another to transact his little services.

Kasper had never been so happy in his life. There was nobody to rate him for his languid idleness; nobody to browbeat him for wasting the golden hours of opportunity, and for burying the talents of his genius. There were no shouting crowds to appal his sensitive nerves with their harsh, unlovely acclamations; and no gleaming-eyed, half-hysterical girls lurked in his path to terrify his shrinking modesty with bold requests and the clacking of their foolish tongues. On the contrary, all was peace and calm and benison. His life was one long, deep, delicious dream. And how beautiful the world was! The great sighing The great sighing pines almost dazed him with their majestic, melancholy loveliness. The grand, full sweep of mountain and of valley filled his soul with awe. The dazzling sunlight sent shafts of amber radiance quivering through the leafy branches that fretted into exquisite patterns the shadows on his path. Sunbeam fingers pointed him the way to look and wander, and from the elfin crag, where most of his daytime hours were lingered through a dream, he could see the silent castle of San Salvo towering in keeps and battlemented wards, like a veritable Palace of Romance, beneath his feet. He had no curiosity to explore its mysteries. It was more beautiful unknown. He pictured it filled with knights in gilded armour, and lovely ladies passing, slow and languorous, in their jewelled beauty, ever and for ever down softly echoing halls and corridors, under lances plumed with silken banners, listening to the gentle sighs of their dark-mailed adorers— an endless pageantry of unseen beauty and of unheard vows of love.

But one evening, on returning in the gloaming to his little cabaret, Kasper was destined to have his dream shattered and his mind awakened. Drawn up before the inn was a carriage with two stalwart outriders. Kasper was on them before he was aware. He drew up startled and breathless, then ere either of the men, who looked surprised to see him, could speak, he slunk shadow-like into the house and hurried to his room.

His enemies were upon him, he thought. Hastily collecting his belongings, he thrust them into his valise. He took gold from his purse to pay his reckoning and flung it on the bed. His one idea was to escape. Valise in hand, he crept to the door and tiptoed down the passage. But a door opened suddenly, and he came face to face with the innkeeper and a tall, slender, black-robed girl.

Kasper involuntarily bowed, although he shivered as he made the inclination, for he feared women as he feared a plague. But there was nothing in this woman's face that could dismay his second glance, although Kasper knew that she was lovely as he looked. She was very pale and very sad, and she seemed to have been weeping.

The old innkeeper began talking quickly and volubly before either Kasper or the lady could move.

"This is the young man, Highness," he said in his aged-cracked treble— "the young man your Highness has come to seek. I do not know if he will suit your Highness's purpose; but this I know, that he is good and kind, and will serve your Highness if it lies within the compass of his power."

In answer to the lady's sad, inquiring glance, Kasper bowed again. Somehow he could not speak.

"My name is Lucia di San Salvo," the girl said, in a low, deep-toned contralto that set a name so musical to a music even richer than its own. "I had heard that an Italian gentleman was resting here, and I came to ask such a one, of my necessity, a favour that his courtesy might grant. But you, young sir— are you Italian?"

"My name, madam, is Lucilio Manini," said Kasper very faintly. His valise fell to the floor at his feet as he spoke.

"Ah!" cried the girl, "it is a name that gives me leave to hope. I must tell you, señore, that my father, the Marchesi di San Salvo, lies yonder in the castle at the point of death. He is in the grasp of a most cruel delirium, and always and always his poor brain craves for an unguent it has not yet been within my power to procure. I have sent messengers post haste to Milano, but the physicians tell me that he will die before they can return unless his wish is given him forthwith. Señore, you are my last hope."

"I, señora," gasped Kasper. "How is that possible?"

"Senore," said the girl, "my father is a great musician. He is ill— sick to death— and weaker than a babe. But he cannot sleep. Only one thing can give him rest- the music that night and day he pleads for—"

"Music!" cried Kasper, starting painfully.

"For God's sake, señore, do not tell me that you, an Italian gentleman, are not a musician?"

Kasper was silent, but his agitation was acute.

The girl, who had clasped her hands, looked at him with eyes of the most passion- ate entreaty. "Señore, but one thing can make my father sleep, and perhaps restore his life to me. It is that you should play Beethoven's *Sonata Appassionata* in his hearing. Señore, can you, will you, do this thing for me?"

Kasper hated her on a sudden as unreasonably and violently as he hated music. He had a mind to twist his fingers round her lithe, white neck. But just as suddenly as it came his senseless anger fled. It was because he saw two large tears overflow from the girl's sad eyes and trickle down her pallid cheeks. In one second all his old wild musical devotion had returned, and accompanied with a new mysterious force that he did not pause to try to understand. His cheeks flushed hotly. His eyes filled with light. In a sort of passion he caught the girl's hand and half led, half dragged her to the door of the cabaret. He helped her into the carriage, and, his thoughts in a seething, inextricable whirl, he mounted the box and gave frantic and almost inarticulate directions to the outriders to make haste.

The carriage dashed into the valley well-nigh at a gallop. Kasper always urged the riders on. It was dark when they reached the castle, but Kasper's surging emotions took no heed of time. The hour of journeying seemed now a moment, now a year. He saw nothing except a girl's eyes drowned in tears. He heard nothing save the fairy strains of an angelic orchestra, which none but he could hear.

He knew nothing, appreciated nothing, realised nothing, except that he had been conveyed by some fantastical enchantment into an immense taper-lighted chamber.

An old, old man was lying on a high regal couch. He was muttering ceaselessly, and his poor thin fingers were tapping, tapping on the coverlet. It was all a dream. Kasper saw dimly other figures of men and women, but they were only dream-shadows. Nothing was real but the grand piano before which the mystery had seated him, and the tearful eyes that seemed to look to him for salvation from their pain. Independently of his will, his hands sought the keyboard, and his fingers stretched and swept and trembled noiselessly upon the ivory keys.

A whisper came— "The Sonata Appassionata!"

Kasper heard, and as he heard a spirit from the outer space possessed his soul. It was the spirit of the master— the master of all great musicians, dead and living. He listened entranced to the music that the spirit made with his quick, willing fingers. He had never played like that. He looked up into the girl's face. He wished to tell her so, to forbid her gratefulness attributing to him the magic of the unseen angel who was guiding him. But her look of ecstasy forbade his speech, and, more than that, it opened wide the doors of his imperfect understanding, and showed him realms beyond of unimagined tenderness and beauty.

The long stillness that followed the conclusion of Beethoven's masterpiece was broken with a whispered word: "He sleeps." to Kasper, in a sort of trance, was guided a room that blazed with a multitude of sparkling wax-lights.

A tall and courtly gentleman bowed before him.

"I had thought, señore," he said softly, "that no greater musician lived and breathed than Krusentern, but beside your genius Krusentern is beggared."

Lucia di San Salvo was coming towards him, all aglow with gratitude and pride and joy, and love perhaps.

Kasper gazed into her eyes and said as if in answer to the man.

"I am Krusentern." But the girl heard that in his voice which informed her that she had been told her destined lover's name. Slowly, inevitably, she approached him and gave him both her hands. Man and woman were encompassed by the same mysterious, all-compelling wave of feeling. He drew her, unresisting, in his arms and pressed his lips upon her forehead. The whole world might have been their audience, but neither cared nor heeded.

Kasper left the castle bearing in his hand a rose.

Two months later he left the castle again, but not in the dead of night, and not only with a rose. He bore with him a wife and the Marchesi di San Salvo's blessing.

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10: Poetic Justice

The Lone Hand, 1 April 1910

THE officers composing the court-martial, with one exception—Captain Vance, who was in command of a detachment of the Fourth West Australian Light Horse— were English regulars.

Vance hated the business; but the regulars were inexorable and had to be obeyed. The prisoner was an Australian, and could not be legally tried unless the Court contained at least one Australian officer; and for the moment there was no other within a hundred miles. But the worst part of the affair to Vance was that the prisoner— although a private trooper— had been his friend.

The Englishmen were decorously grave, even sombre, for the offence was capital. But Vance's quivering sensibility divined, beneath their cold and serious exterior, supercilious reflections that no Englishman had been arraigned on such a charge throughout the war. He could almost hear the silent sneers that the three directed at the colonial irregulars in his command, his brothers-in-arms and fellow-countrymen. Vance took his place and sat rigidly erect, with grim lips; tingling with resentful shame and smouldering defiance. Yet, when the prisoner entered, Vance forthwith lost all sense of self in deeply pained astonishment. In place of a devil-may-care, big, handsome soldier, whose phlegmatic coolness under fire, whose acts of dash and clever daring had made him the darling and hero of a regiment of reckless Australian riders, Vance saw a pale, careworn creature, with unstrung jaws and dull, brooding eyes. Something had gone out of the man. The mainspring of him was unkeyed, broken. He dragged his feet as he walked; and, when halted by the guard, his shoulders fell and his chin sank upon his chest. It seemed to Vance that the man had positively shrunk and shortened.

He listened to the reading of the charges with dull indifference. He remained sullenly silent when required to plead. It was only when the second witness was sworn that he exhibited a spark of interest.

Then, however, on a sudden, he raised his head and listlessly addressed the President.

"I'll save you the trouble of going through with all this farce, Colonel. I plead guilty," he said.

There was a little silence; then the President inquired, "To all the charges, prisoner? Think well; your life hangs in the balance."

A smile that was an epitome of all the human countenance may express in saturnine self-contempt and melancholy

humor crossed the prisoner's face. "To all," he answered; and his voice was resonant and firm.

The President nodded. He dismissed the witness who had been sworn, and wrote something in his book. In the electric stillness of the room the scratching of his pen became to Vance a poignant irritation. The President looked up.

"Prisoner," he said sternly, "have you any statement to make before the Court considers and pronounces its judgment? "

"None," replied the prisoner.

The President turned to the Court.

"Shall we retire, gentlemen?" he asked in an undertone.

Vance could endure it no longer. Five months earlier this shambling criminal had faced an inferno to drag him, stunned and bleeding, from under a heap of dead on the banks of the Modder; had put him on his wounded horse and led him back to safety across a zipping fire-swept plain, walking sturdily beside him all the way, holding him in the saddle, and roaring a rollicking song the while to rouse and cheer him. This man, a deserter before the enemy and a traitor! Vance knew that the evidence was overwhelming, but it was not in him to believe it.

He started forward, gripping his chair hard with both hands, breathing like a runner,

"Jim !" he cried. "Speak, man!— for the sake of the boys— for mine. We've a right to know the truth."

The prisoner started. His eyes were drawn involuntarily to the eyes of Vance. Then a slow, red flush came into his

cheeks. "You've a right to ask me, Capt'n," he said dully. "I'll tell you how it was, if you want, and you think the boys'd care to know."

"Colonel," pleaded Vance, turning to the President. "You— you won't refuse? "

He was too moved to be conscious of his neglect of formalism. The President frowned.

"The Court will hear any statement the prisoner may choose to make," he announced, as stiffly and jerkily as his limpid Oxford accent would permit.

"It's for your sake— and the boys," began the prisoner, staring fixedly at Vance. "I didn't want to disgrace the colors. I— I couldn't help myself. You see, I was out here before the war— long before, and I'd got into the Boers' ways. I'd got to think a good deal like them. They'd found the country and made it what it is. It was theirs, and they reckoned they'd a right to keep it, and if outsiders wanted to come in— well, the Boers thought it's up to 'em to be civil when they get here. Seemed sort of reasonable to me, and I figured out they wasn't asking more'n a fair thing. They treated me well, too— all round.

Australians couldn't 'a been whiter. Then the war started, and things got different. You see, I couldn't go for to fight against the British, kind as the Boers had been to me. But, somehow, they seemed to think I oughter; and so we got not so friendly. Then the Australian contingents came along; and knowing I was Australian the Boers gave me a bad time, an' took to watching me besides. They didn't mind the English so much. But they reckoned they'd done nothin' to hurt the Australians; and they thought it wasn't a square deal for fellow colonists, as it were, to stick in their spade, and come 'way over seas to help to down 'em. They reckoned it was dog eatin' dog, and I felt like that too. I didn't blame 'em so much for turnin' round on me, I—"

"Prisoner," interrupted the President sharply, "confine yourself to the issue. Your reflections are both grossly unpatriotic and irrelevant."

The prisoner saluted, but he did not move his eyes from Vance's tense, sad face.

"I— I was on with a Boer girl," he mumbled on. "Her name was Lisbeth Reiter. We'd made it up to get married, just about the time the war started. But the war put us back; and when the Australians came over, her people made her chuck me once for all. They married her to a Boer. I was pretty sick and loony for a bit; but I got well and I lit out for Portuguese territory. Then I came round to Durban, intending to get back home to Queensland and see my people. I hadn't seen 'em for years. But I couldn't get away at once; and after a while I met some West Australian boys I knew; and they kidded me to join.

"I felt I was a skunk doing it; but I'd got dead bitter against Lisbeth, and I didn't seem to care much what I did or what became o' me. And so I got to fightin' the Boers with the rest of the boys. An' the more I fought the more I didn't care somehow, and the more I wanted to fight.

"Then one day about four weeks ago me and six others was ordered out from the detachment, with a sergeant, to forage a way-out farm. We struck some Boers there; and they held us off a bit and got us mad by impeding one of our boys. Then they cleared out. There was only a couple, but they was too well mounted for us to catch with our tired neddies; and so me bein' the only marksman o' the crowd, the sergeant ordered me to try and bring 'em down as they was goin'."

The prisoner stopped. His mouth seemed to have dried up. He put out his tongue several times to moisten his lips. Then he gave a queer, harsh little laugh.

"I missed the first," he went on. "He got clean away. But I got the second. The sergeant said it was the best shot he ever seen. As we was ridin' up to search his pockets an' get his rifle, I was quite puffed up an' proud, and I was

sayin' to the boys that it was a d—n bad day for the Boers when they broke friendship with me—"

He paused, and again his ugly little laugh rang out.

"Then we came up to the body, Capt'n— and soon as I looked at it I figured out there was only one thing left for me to do; and that was to go right back to the Boers an' tell 'em how I'd fought against 'em after me promisin' never to lift a hand against 'em— an' how many of 'em I'd killed, an' then let 'em do just what they liked about it. First chance I got I tried to keep my word. I lit out as you all know, and I was goin' over to 'em just before the last big fight. But I was caught, and here I am— and now you'd best shoot me pretty quick; for, by God, Capt'n, if you don't I'll have to do for myself. It ain't possible for me to live much longer."

"Jim," cried Vance in a shaking voice, "that Boer you killed at the farm— It was—" But he could not speak the word.

The prisoner put up his hands to his throat, and pulled at his collar as though he found it difficult to breathe. "You know, Capt'n," he muttered hoarsely. "You've heard tell o' poetic justice— haven't you?" Then he nodded twice and grinned sourly.

Vance looked deep into the man's blood-shot, anguished eyes, his heart melting within him.

"It was a woman," he said.

"It was Lisbeth," said the prisoner.

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11: The Iron Hand

The Lady's Realm, (UK) June 1911

"THE Hon. Augustus Sibthall," announced the valet.

John Custer nodded genially to his visitor, but did not rise from the stiff couch on which his large muscular figure reposed. Sibthall helped himself to a glass of spirit and a cigarette, then sat astride a chair and stared speculatively at his host.

"It is all arranged," he said; "she will slip out at eight o'clock to-morrow morning and I am to be waiting for her in your motor car at the corner of Eldon Avenue. Well, what!"

John Custer shook his head. "You invert all my notions of romance," he observed disgustedly. "An early morning elopement! The idea is absurd. If no man can be brilliant before breakfast it is very certain that no woman can be amorous-amorous enough at all events to throw herself away on a penniless young jackanapes like you. Mark my words, Sibthall, this affair will fall through."

Sibthall coloured hotly.

"That's rather uncalled for, don't you think?" he demanded.

Custer smiled. "Adverse criticism is never called for in my experience," he returned. "But seriously, Sibthall, I am greatly disappointed in you."

"Why?" Marjory Lake was pointed out to me yesterday for the first time, and I examined her very attentively. She is no beauty, my friend—"

"What the deuce does that matter to you?" interrupted the other.

Custer held up an admonishing hand. "Pray permit me to explain. She is no beauty. You, on the contrary, are the very handsomest specimen of the male animal I have ever met. It is true that your mouth is rather querulous, your chin rather weak, but on the whole you are brilliantly good-looking. Now for Heaven's sake, Sibthall, don't simper or I'll despise you. I'm not intending to pay you a compliment, I do assure you."

"You big brute" cried the younger man, “I never suspected you of that."

Custer smiled again. "To resume my argument. She is no beauty. You are. You are also a lover of the beautiful. The conclusion is inevitable— you adore, not the young lady— but her shekels."

"In other words " said Sibthall, speaking through his teeth, "I am a fortune-hunter or a cad. Thanks, Custer. Thanks, indeed. I have every reason to feel glad and grateful to have sought your friendly offices, and thrown myself unreservedly upon—"

John Custer crashed his feet to the floor and sat erect.

"That will do, Sibthall," he interrupted sternly; "your sarcasms are out of place. You sought my assistance for no other reason than that I am the only one of your acquaintances who has not long since been wearied out by your importunities. And yet I believe I am your largest creditor."

Sibthall wilted visibly.

"I did not mean to offend you, old chap" he protested anxiously. "I acknowledge that you've been most awfully good to me. But you must see that what you said just now was— er— well it was rather over the gate, wasn't it?"

"Was it— was it?" demanded Custer. "Let us examine the question a little. You want me to help you elope with one of the richest young women in the country— whom you propose to carry off against the wishes of her people. For this purpose you need my motor car and a further loan of £500 to carry you over the honeymoon."

"I'll pay it back and all the rest I owe you as soon as I'm married," said Sibthall eagerly. "Really, Custer, I'm not all the bad hat that you make out. I've had a lot of beastly luck, but I've a chance now of making good and squaring up all round, and, 'pon my soul, that's really why I'm so keen on— er— on—”

"On marrying Marjory Lake's money bags," said Custer drily.

'Oh! put it that way if you like!" cried Sibthall in a tone of infuriated exasperation. "I can see that you are bent on making me out a mere rotter, so do it if it pleases you."

"Do you love the girl? Answer me as man to man."

"I—"

"Look me in the eye, please!"

"Well, I'm not raving mad about her, but I like her well enough. You needn't think I won't make her a good husband, Custer. She's fond of me and I'm fond of her. I've thoroughly made up my mind to turn over a new leaf and settle down and all that kind of thing. Fact is I'm dead tired of knocking about, old chap."

Custer waved his hand.

"An excellent resolution— but I must trouble you to answer me one more question; it is one I have a right to ask in view of the service you require at my hands."

"Fire away!" said Sibthall frowningly. "Is the girl aware of your financial circumstances?"

Sibthall laughed triumphantly.

"My boy," he cried, "her people never did me a better turn than when they played that card. She liked me before she knew, but when they told her I was a pauper with the usual frillings, why she just flung herself at my head."

Custer nodded. "I'm not a bit surprised," he remarked reflectively. "I thought when I saw her yesterday that she was just that type of woman. Well, young man, you are to be congratulated."

"You'll let me have the motor, Custer?"

"Yes."

"And— er—”

"The money? Certainly. Call here promptly at seven-thirty to-morrow and you will be supplied."

"Custer, you are a brick. I don't know however I'll be able to thank you properly. You've been better than a brother to me— I—"

"That will do, Sibthall. Run away and play. I have work to do. *Au revoir*."

"Until to-morrow!" said Sibthall, and he left the room, treading on air.

THE CLOCKS were chiming the half-hour after seven on the following morning when Sibthall once again presented himself at the door of Custer's flat. At the first knock it opened wide. Sibthall entered, humming a gay tune in under- breath. The valet closed the door, then stealing behind the visitor, who was half across the room, he suddenly leaped forward and pinioned Sibthall's arms to his sides. The young man uttered a startled cry, but before it could be repeated Custer appeared and hurried to his servant's assistance.

Sibthall was quickly gagged and bound. His captors carried him to the sofa and laid him down at full length. He was furious, but completely helpless and perforce silent. Custer smilingly addressed him.

"Sorry to treat you like this, my son," he began, "but your imprisonment won't last longer than an hour or two. I'm going to meet Miss Marjory Lake in your place. I want a little chat with her. I need to be sure that she knows what she is doing, because, otherwise, if this marriage turned out badly I'd feel responsible. If she satisfies me that her happiness really depends on becoming Mrs. Sibthall I'll bring her straight here to you. If not I'll take her back to her home. In any event we shall meet again before ten o'clock: *à bientôt*.”

He waved his hand to Sibthall, nodded to his valet, and strode out of the room. At the street door a large and splendidly appointed motor car stood waiting. Custer gave a direction to the chauffeur, stepped in and took his seat. The car rolled away and a few minutes later drew up at the rendezvous in Eldon Avenue.

Custer descended, lighted a cigar, and began leisurely to pace the square. His cigar was not quite consumed when a young woman clad in white appeared, walking from the right direction. Custer recognized her figure, and when she had approached near enough for his action not to be obtrusively remarkable to other wayfarers he went to meet her, hat in hand.

"Miss Marjory Lake, I believe," he said. She surveyed him with apprehensive and inquiring eyes.

"I am a friend of Mr. Sibthall," he supplemented quickly.

"Oh!" cried the girl, and she halted abruptly.

"Rest tranquil," said Custer. "Mr. Sibthall is in the best of health, but he has been unavoidably detained for a little while, and I have, deputed myself his ambassador of explanation."

The girl blushed crimson under his steady but piercing regard.

"You have deputed yourself!" she asked, her tones a little tremulous but very clear; "what has detained him? You are Mr. Custer, are you not?"

Custer bowed gravely. "John Custer, at your service," he replied. "To answer your other questions, I must confess at once that I am solely responsible for Mr. Sibthall's detention."

"You!"

"Yes, Miss Lake. He is lying at this moment upon a couch in my dressing room gagged and bound. I gagged and bound him. I did so because I desired the privilege of a short conversation with you before entering into partnership with him in a responsibility the gravity of which he alone at present is in a position to appreciate."

The girl was stricken dumb with surprise. Custer waited patiently for her to recover, but perceiving that her confusion was likely to continue he proceeded to explain:

"You are no doubt aware, Miss Lake, that Sibthall has applied to me to finance the proposed elopement. I am very willing to do so, but I must be assured beforehand that you perfectly understand what you are doing, and that no advantage has been taken of your worldly inexperience. My methods are blunt; you may call them brutal, if you will. But I am constrained by my natural limitations. I never beat about the bush. I cannot. I always have to go straight to the point. Yet I assure you that my intentions are entirely kind."

"I think," faltered the girl," that you are most rude and insulting. You have treated Mr. Sibthall abominably, and your conduct to me is— indescribable. I wish you good morning."

"You will return to your home?"

"My movements need not concern you, sir," she retorted frigidly; "Pray let me pass!" Custer shook his head.

"My dear young lady," he replied, “in attempting thus to punish me you are only penalising Sibthall. You overlook the fact that his fate is in my hands."

"You would not dare to-to hurt him!" she declared indignantly. Custer's eyes flashed.

"I beg your pardon," he said grimly, " my disposition is not as delicate as you imagine. Sibthall has apparently deceived me. He led me to suppose that you set him high above the world in your affection. Such a falsehood deserves condign chastisement."

"It— it— it is not a falsehood," she gasped, her face as scarlet as a peony. Oh-how dare you? I— I— hate you. You are simply odious."

Custer smiled. "Well," he said, "I am glad Sibthall did not lie to me in that. It only remains now to discover if he has been properly candid in all respects with you."

"What can you mean?"

"He is heavily in debt."

The girl put up her hands to hide her burning cheeks.

"I know," she murmured.

Custer bowed to her very gravely. "You command my admiration," he assured her. "You are a sterling woman. I thought so yesterday when unobserved I watched you from a distance and sought to estimate your character. Now I am sure. Beyond all question I am justified in saving you from mating with such a mean little person as my extremely handsome young friend, Augustus Sibthall."

Miss Lake put down her hands and faced him quietly, for the first time self-collected and at ease. The call had been made to defend her lover, and all her soul arose in arms.

"Explain yourself! she commanded coldly.

"You are rich in your own right," said Custer.

"Yes."

"You are not a beautiful woman, Miss Lake!"

She went white to the lips, but she answered gallantly, "I have a mirror, sir."

"Ay," said Custer, "but no true one in your lover's eyes as interpreted by his lips— or I am doing him a ghastly wrong. But you will tell me if I am. Has he wooed you by praising your money bags?"

"Monster!" gasped the girl.

"Or, rather, by striving to convince you he believes you beautiful?— Nay, do not answer, madam. Sibthall is a cad— I know him well. Yesterday he confessed to me that you are less beautiful than rich. He adjured my help with the bait that you would pay the sum he owes. It was then I determined to undo him. I am a man. You a woman. Our sexes are usually at war, but complete human beings should always unite to defeat the machinations of half-baked human rats and moles of either sex. Sibthall vows he would turn over a new leaf and make you a good husband. I deny his capacity. You know that I am

right. You will now return home and be miserable— yet not for long, I hope and trust. It would ill become a noble mind like yours to waste itself on sorrow for a self-deception. For the rest be easy as to Sibthall's fate. I have robbed him of one fortune. I am a millionaire, and will supply him with another. To-morrow he will leave the country."

"You are the cruellest man in the whole wide world," the girl cried sobbingly.

"Nevertheless, a true man, Miss Lake, and as truly as I stand here before you now I tell you that because you are the true woman that you are, and because I like you better than any other I have ever known, I intend to marry you. In three days I shall call upon you to discuss this question at greater length. I have the honour to wish you *au revoir*."

The girl seemed not to hear. She turned and went back the way she had come, half blinded with tears.

John Custer stepped into his motor car and returned swiftly to his flat. On the following morning the Hon. Augustus Sibthall set out on a tour of the world.

Three months later John Custer and Marjory Lake became man and wife.

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12: The Necklace of the Nine Gems

Manuscripts: a Miscellany of Art and Letters (Geelong), Feb 1933

SURINDA RAMA, 27th Sultan of Yannan, had no sooner been invested at Ayudhia with the Sacred and Auspicious Order of the Nine Gems (which as everybody knows is exclusively conferred upon reigning Buddhist princes) than he scandalized the Buddhist world by paying a visit to Surasthra, the apostate Sultan of Malangor who, no more than six months earlier, and repudiated the Lotus-Crowned and espoused the Mohammedan faith.

A few easy-going Pramats here and there were disposed to make excuses for Surinda Rama, knowing him a young man of feeble character entirely dominated by his chief wife—a sister of the Sultan of Malangor. But the majority of Buddhists turned aside or veiled their faces when Surinda's name was mentioned and when, on the third day of his sojourn at Latongkha, Surasthra's capital, it was announced that Surinda's necklace of the Nine Gems had been stolen from the Royal Palace, twenty million followers of the Lord Gautama were soon busily muttering that a divine and well-deserved judgment had befallen the Sovereign of Yannan.

The British population of Latongkha, however, voted the divine judgment a nuisance, for suspicion fell presently upon a member of their nation, a young carpenter named Anson, who had been carrying out some repair work at Surasthra's Palace at the time of the theft; and when Anson proved his innocence these suspicions, by reason of the oblique processes of Oriental reasoning, were promptly transferred to all other members of the white race living in, or within fifty miles of, the capital— including the British Resident himself.

The High Ones in the Palace were less foolish than the whisperers in the bazaars, but when they had thrice whipped their body servants without result the affair assumed a mysterious complexion, and white and brown alike began to feel uncomfortable. When no houses in the city remained to be searched, the British Resident sent to Singapore for a detective, who debated the matter wisely for the space of three days, and then departed whence he came, leaving behind him the trite counsel that if Surinda Rama desired to recover his necklace he must offer absolution and a great reward!

Thus it came about that a proclamation printed in three languages was posted along the highways of Malangor proffering 50,000 ticals to any ''finder" of the Nine Gems and promising immunity from punishment should the finder chance to be the thief.

Next morning, soon after dawn, two men in khaki emerged from a narrow jungle track on the southern outskirts of Latongkha and were about to cross

the Pei Ho Road to plunge into the forest beyond, when their attention was attracted by the poster. Arthur Timms, an out-of-luck Australian mining engineer, then serving as an assistant surveyor to the contractors for the new railway from Latongkha to Lahine, read the proclamation with wide-eyed astonishment. "An elephant of a reward to offer for a necklace with only nine gems!" he exclaimed. "In round figures £5,000 sterling! Must be some gems, what?"

His companion and employer, John Frome, an elderly person with hard eyes and a permanently sneering mouth, shrugged his shoulders. "Probably paste," he said drily; "but sacred paste. The necklace has a religious significance far above its market value. The Sultan would stand shamed before his subjects if he returned to Yannan without it. Enough of loitering, Timms, get a move on or we shall find all the coolies asleep in the rentice."

Plodding at the heels of his boss, Arthur Timms gave himself up to vain and rather acrid thoughts. Were it his luck to find Sultan Surinda's necklace he would be able to discard an odious job, to rid himself of a tyrannical taskmaster and to return to God's own country and the sweetest girl on earth. Five years toiling in the jungles of Malaya and on the hot plains of Saigon had imbued him with a smouldering detestation of the tropics; and five weeks of service in John Frome's construction camp had filled his cup of bitterness to overflowing. He became acutely conscious of two master passions as he trudged along the dank and dripping path: love of Mary Wharton, and hatred of John Frome— whose cynical face he longed to strike as often as he looked upon it. Vaguely he contrasted these emotions and not for the first time realized that for several days past the first had held the second in restraint. But would it always function as a brake? John Frome was growing nastier in proportion as the monsoon season receded, and he had begun of late to use a tone to his subordinates difficult for any but a hardy sycophant to brook. No doubt fever was to some extent responsible— anyone could see that the fellow was sick— but not even sickness could excuse his constant taunting references to Timms' subservient position, and the gratitude owed to one who had given employment to another and a failure, out of charity. Timms had been sincerely grateful to Frome once; but it seemed centuries ago. The older man's recent conduct had completely blotted out the sentiment.

Suddenly they passed into a wide clearing, formerly a cultivated settlement, that was now being rapidly submerged by secondary jungle. Near the opposite boundary of the still open space forty-odd natives were squatting or lolling in the shade of a mighty rain tree.

"What did I tell you!" barked Frome, halting in his stride to glare back at his assistant. "Let me see you use the rotan, Timms! Sons of bitches, they are

lazier than— lizards— or Australians. Hey, what the hell are you up to, Timms?”

The younger man had turned abruptly from the path and was standing before a dense thorn tree at which he stared intently, apparently oblivious of his master’s voice. Following his glance, Frome saw a flutter of black and white amid the foliage.

"I felt sure when we passed here last night it was a bird,” Timms called. "The poor thing is caught among the thorns. Looks as though it has been stuck there for days. At its last gasp, I’d say; but it’s still alive.”

"Easy on, old chap.” He was now speaking to the imprisoned bird. "I’ll have you out in a brace of shakes.”

John Frome saw red. "Timms,” he yelled, "I don’t pay you to waste my company’s time tending sick birds in thorn bushes. You heard me give you an order. Get to it pronto, or take your time!”

Timms also saw red. "I’ll take my time all right, you blasted wolf hound,” he retorted unamiably.

"Call at the camp this evening for your cheque, you rotten waster, and don’t ask me for a reference!”

"I will so, Frome, and I’ll pay what I owe you when I come.”

Frome scornfully swung on his heel and moved off towards the coolies who were all now working as diligently as ants.

Timms, shaking with wrath, turned to the bird to find he had sacrificed his job for a dying crow: nay, for a crow already dead, for when presently he drew its body from the prickly branches it had gasped forth its last breath. But Timms was too excited to philosophize. He held in his hands not merely the corpse of a crow, but that which had ensnared the bird in the thorn tree and sentenced it to a lingering death— a slender chain of platinum and gold, starred with nine large greenly glinting gems.

Timms forbore to call at the construction camp for his wages. He was afraid of what he might say or do to Frome. He experienced no difficulty in collecting the Sultan’s reward, and the next outgoing boat from Penang conveyed him, a happy passenger, to Australia, where he eventually married one Mary Wharton, and is doing so well in business that he sometimes contemplates indulging the luxury of a coat of arms. The design, naturally, would include a crow, couchant, in a field of emerald.

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13: A Compound Felony

Wagga Wagga Express (NSW) 28 April 1934

THE EXILED GRAND DUKE Dimitri Michaelovski and the beautiful young Marchioness of Ogilvy, from the moment of their meeting in the casino of the Hotel of La Haye Sainte, at Pau, became friends. The Marchioness, who was intimately acquainted beforehand with the Grand Duke's romantic history, pitied him because of his banishment and of his comparative poverty; but, above all, because of the recent death of the charming though lowly born lady for whose sake he had braved the uncompromising anger of the greatest potentate on earth.

The Grand Duke liked the Marchioness because she was an American, and her conversation amused him. He cultivated her friendship, and endured her crabby old husband, because she was a millionairess in her own right and because of the wonderful jewels she wore each evening, jewels that in another setting might have adorned an emperor's crown.

Pau shrugged its shoulders at the intimacy, and behind gloves, cigars, and fans whispered uncharitable or insincerely sympathetic speeches concerning the doting Marquis. The friends were alive to the interest they excited, but the lady, who detested all conventions, was perfectly indifferent, while the Grand Duke, all his life habituated to notoriety, would have keen disappointed had no notice been taken of his so far innocent flirtation.

One evening, on entering the gambling hall of the casino rather later than usual, he perceived the marchioness seated beside her husband at a certain table. Her hair, throat, and shoulders were ablaze with diamonds, and her hands, as they moved in play, described glittering arcs of multi-coloured light. That she was winning was evident for her expression was triumphant and a considerable mound of notes and golden coins were heaped up before her.

The Grand Duke gazed at the lady in rapt silence for a while, his eyes meditatively following the flashing changes of her jewels.

"They must he worth £50,000," he muttered softly to himself; then slowly crossing the chamber, he took up a position immediately behind her chair. He watched her stake a large sum and lose, whereupon, stooping, he whispered in her ear:

"The luck has changed, my child. Be wise, and risk no more. Let us take a stroll in the gardens."

The Marchioness gave him a dazzling smile.

"See me break the bank first,"' she replied, and even as she spoke, with a sweeping movement of her hands she pushed the whole mass of her remaining winnings on to a certain square. The spectators tittered loud

exclamations of amazement, for of a certainty not one of them had ever seen so considerable a sum staked upon a single turn of fortune's wheel.

The Marquis of Ogilvy, who had the reputation of a miser, was gambling with five-franc pieces, and when he observed the extent of his wife's recklessness he could not contain his indignation. Turning pale with fury, he twisted in his chair, and faced his consort.

"Are you mad?" he demanded in English, his tones shrill with anger.

"*Faites votre jeux, mesdames et messieurs*!" called out the croupier. "*Faites votre jeux*!"

The Marchioness smiled in her husband face. "Nothing venture, nothing win," she replied.

"And nothing lose!" snapped the Marquis.

But in the short interval of their preoccupation fate had spoken, and a chorus of startled sighs and cries made them swiftly turn. The croupier was silently and with curiously grim looks counting the money risked by the Marchioness, and for every livre that she had staked he placed ten before her on the table.

The Marquis, hardly able to believe his eyes, stared stupidly at the rapidly increasing rows of coins, his face the colour of old parchment, his mouth fallen wide open.

"My God, you've won!" he murmured presently in a gasping voice.

"What did I tell you?" cried the lady. "Nothing venture, nothing win. You see!"

But the Marquis was too overcome to retort, and the Marchioness, perceiving her victory, raised her eyes in search of further conquests. She was surrounded by a dense throng of eager chattering people, who had deserted the other tables in order to witness her good fortune, but even in the full flush of her triumph the glances she encountered chilled her. Not a countenance could she see that was not disfigured with an expression of hungry covetousness and savage greed. The eyes that gazed at her might have been the eves of starving animals watching through bars another feeding.

The impervious soul-mask of imperturbability had been momentarily allowed to slip from each of the faces about her, and the Marchioness felt her heart contract with a sort of terror at the sight of the naked and hideous passions so revealed. She turned with a little shudder for comfort, and perhaps for sympathy, to the Grand Duke, who stood behind her chair; but to her dismay she found him feverishly absorbed in contemplation of the croupier's still unfinished task. Nay, more, he was reckoning up the fortune she had won.

She heard him mutter under his breath certain numerals— one, two, three, four ten. She watched him with surmise and measuring eyes, for she had not dreamed of such a weakness in his character— the love of gold.

"*Et tu Brute*!" she whispered presently. He heard, and repressing a start. His expression quickly changed. Looking down at her with a sudden smile, he said. "My child, you have won almost two hundred thousand francs. It is a fortune!"

"So much?" she exclaimed.

The croupier at that moment stood up, and on his face was fixed a mirthless grin.

"*Mesdames et Messieurs*," he announced, "*la banque est fermee pour ce soir*."

For a moment there was silence; then followed a perfect storm of astonished cries, expostulating murmurs and plaudits, strangely intermingled. The Marchioness became aware that at least six harpies were addressing her at the same time, and all with requests for a trifling loan. With a gesture of disgust she waved them aside and got to her feet.

"My dear," cried the Marquis, who was trembling with excitement and suffering agonies of apprehension lest some part of the treasure should be stolen, "what are you going to do with the money?"

The Marchioness gave him a look of contempt.

"You had better take charge of it," she answered, and with insolent and magnificent indifference she swept down the hall and passed thence into the gardens , without a single backward glance, The Marquis, uttering an inarticulate cry, swooped like a hawk upon the treasure.

The Grand Duke observed him for a moment in evident amusement, then lighting a cigar, he strolled off in the direction taken by Lady Ogilvie.

He found her, after a long search, standing in the open moonlight before the stone balustrade of the lower terrace. She was gazing out over the landscape with a rapt commemorative look, and her pose was statuesque.

" *'At length I saw a lady within call. Stiller than chiselled marble standing there*!' " quoted the Grand Duke. " *'A daughter of the gods, divinely tall. And most divinely fair*!'— Your name is Helen, too," he added softly.

The Marchioness turned slowly about and looked straight into his eyes.

"I know you better to-night than ever before," she said. "You are only a little better than the others, and you are of Royal blood! Why do you love money so much? You are not poor?"

"Ah!" he smiled. "Did I show it so plainly as that, my child?"

"You looked"— she shivered— "like a thief!"

"What an honest little woman it is," he said, smiling still. "So I looked like a thief, eh? But tell me, my child, did I look like a coward too?"

"I beg your pardon!"

"All men are thieves at heart. Helen; but I am a coward as well."

"Your Highness!" she cried, "How can you say such a thing?"

"Your straightforwardness has inspired the confession, little friend. Do you know what is in my mind at this moment?"

"No."

"A too ardent admiration of these baubles, child!"

He touched gently, as he spoke, one of the splendid chains that fell from her neck in a sparkling stream across her bosom, "and not because of their beauty either, though they are very beautiful. Really, my friend, you are reckless to adorn yourself so richly— and most unwise to trust yourself in these gardens without protection."

"You are here," she retailed.

"True," he said gravely, "and as I am a coward you are safe enough from me, and because of my presence from bolder thieves."

The Marchioness looked hurt. "I do not like that sort of jesting," she exclaimed.

He shrugged his shoulders. "You call it jesting."

"Are you— in need of money?" she demanded suddenly. He uttered a low, musical laugh, then bowed and answered "Yes."

"But how can that be? You receive the income from your estates, although you are in exile."

"My estates are heavily encumbered, child; but there, let us change the topic; we cannot possibly find another so unpleasant, I fancy. What are your plans for to-morrow, madame?"

The lady sighed— "I have made none yet. I wish I could understand you."

"And I," murmured the Grand Duke, echoing her sigh, "I wish that I were dead, or that you were a widow. Pardon!" he added quickly, as she frowned, but the Marchioness raised her hand.

"What has come over you tonight?" she demanded; "you are pleased to forget our compact."

"Do you think I am trying to flirt? You are wrong."

"What then?"

"I don't know. My mood is reckless; if it continues I may forget I am a coward"

"And then—" He stroked this moustache. "We would hear of a daring robbery at the hotel— or an elopement. Come! I shall leave the matter in your

hands. In either case you are likely to be the sufferer, for are you not my friend? Which shall it be, madame?— Choose!"

The lady gave him a penetrating glance, but his eyes were inscrutable, and presently, against her will, a flush of blood suffused her cheeks.

"Will your Highness permit me to speak plainly," she asked, "as a woman might to a man a mere man?"

"Permit!" he echoed. "I beg you to do so."

"You see," she explained, "to the exalted rank of a Grand Duke such a term as 'cad' would be outrageously inapplicable, but—"

"But to a man— a mere man?" he queried, smiling.

"What is your opinion?" she asked softly.

"Yours," he shrugged. "I am thoroughly ashamed of myself, my child."

She moved a step forward, and placed a tremulous hand upon his arm.

"We have been perilously near a quarrel, Duke," she murmured. "Don't you think it would have been better to have trusted me? Are we not friends?"

"But, yes."

"Then tell me as a friend how much you need."

He started back and bit his lip. "Oh! oh!" he muttered. "That is going too far. I merely jested— it was in bad taste, I admit, but—"

"But," she interrupted, "whatever you may wish me to think now, there is no need to — pardon me — to prevaricate. It would, as well, be useless, for I saw your eyes. These jewels I am wearing are worth some twenty thousand pounds. Will you let me lend you that amount?"

His Highness's face went crimson, then white as death. He bit his cigar in two, then tossed the ends over the balustrade. Finally, he faced the Marchioness and forced himself to speak.

"Impossible," he muttered hoarsely. "Rather the other. I— I love you, madame. It is with absolute respect, I tell you so, madame—"

"Wertheimer is right," said the Marchioness, in tones of great bitterness. "Platonic love exists, but only between husband and wife."

The Grand Duke fell on his knees before her. "I swear to you," he cried with passion , "that nothing less than your generous offer and the desperate position I am in would have extracted the confession from my lips. And even so, I swear to you that I spoke with absolute respect."

"Nevertheless, our friendship is at an end."

"I bow myself to your decree."

"Please arise, Duke. The situation is ridiculous— we may be observed."

He obeyed and stood with bowed head before her. She gazed at him awhile, her expression gradually softening. At length she said "A little while

since you asked me my plans for to-morrow. I know them now— I shall leave Paul!"

"You mean that?" he cried.

"Yes. You must not follow me. At least that. Do you understand?"

"You need not fear," he muttered .

"I could not eyen if I would."

"What! You are penniless?"

"Not quite, I have a rouleau left, but I am terribly in debt!"

He threw out his hands with a sudden tragic gesture. "To-morrow I shall once more dice with fate; if fortune flouts me— then— Bah! What am I saying? How beautiful the moonlight is, madame."

"Is it not?" she answered quietly. "Did your Highness mean to suggest a possibility of someone committing suicide?"

"You cannot despise me, child, more than I despise myself. But what would you?"— he shrugged his shoulders. "I have nothing to live for any more— not even your friendship."

"Certainly not that," said the lady icily. "But remember there are other women in the world, and the sort of friendship you seek can readily he bought."

"Your words are very cruel— but they are inconclusive. Even were your intention just, money would be indispensable."

"Money!" her lip curled. "I have offered it to you."

"And I have refused," he answered eagerly.

"You have refused to borrow, not to steal."

"You believe me capable of that?"

"If you will follow me, I shall give you an opportunity of proving my opinion false."

"Come then!" He offered her his arm, but with a gesture of disdain she declined to accept it.

Side by side, but separated by the space of a yard, they moved off in the direction of the hotel. They found the great vestibule deserted, for the hour was late, and the guests were assembled with very few exceptions, in the casino. In unbroken silence the Grand Duke and the Marchioness ascended the stairs and traversed a wilderness of corridors.

The lady paused at last before a certain door, which very softly she unlocked. A moment later, in obedience to a gesture, her companion followed her into a brilliantly lighted room, which one glance showed to be a bed-chamber. Crossing the apartment on tip-toe, the Marchioness approached a distant cabinet and therefrom withdrew a small black leather case. This she

opened upon the bed, and after a little search she took out and lifted to the light a crystal phial and a white square of woollen padded cloth.

"Come!" she whispered, pointing to an inner door and placing a finger to her lips.

The Grand Duke was trembling with excitement and curiosity, but like a shadow he attended her. Noiseless as phantoms they passed through a dark ante-room into a second bed-chamber that was faintly illuminated by a tinted glow lamp swinging from the ceiling. Upon the bed, lying on his right side, was the Marquis of Ogilvy, asleep. The clothes were drawn up to his ohm, and his head was covered with a linen nightcap. In repose his weazened and wrinkled face looked uncannily old and eerie. He was breathing with long, deep respirations like a child.

The Marchioness approached her husband with an undulating, soundless motion; pausing beside him she uncorked the phial and poured its contents on the wadding. A second later she leaned over the bed and held the wadding beneath the old man's nostrils. The Marquis stirred uneasily and turned over in the bed, but the lady's hand followed him remorselessly. He began to pant and fight for air, yet without awakening, for the fumes had already drugged his senses. Very soon the Marchioness pressed the wadding to his face, and after one or two convulsive shudders he lay still.

Satisfied that her task was achieved, Lady Ogilvy drew herself erect, but next instant she again stooped, over the bed and fumbled beneath the pillow on which her husband's head reposed. The Grand Duke, who had observed all that had passed in a sort of spell-bound stupor, saw the lady presently turn about, holding in her right hand a bunch of keys. Without a glance in his direction she crossed the room and halted before a small fireproof safe that stood against the further wall.

The Grand Duke saw upon the floor of the safe a neatly arranged mass of treasure in notes and gold. He made no doubt it was the money which Lady Ogilvy had won that evening and given into her husband's keeping.

The Marchioness unpinned from her shoulder a silken scarf, which she spread out carefully upon the floor. Then stretching out her hands, she swiftly but quietly transferred the money from the safe until all was laid upon the scarf. Afterwards, with a series of rapid gestures, she tore the jewels that she wore from her hair and throat, and allowed them to fall upon the money. At length she turned and faced her companion.

"If the money were stolen and the diamonds left, Lord Ogilvy would perhaps suspect me," she said. "He is a most suspicious man, your Highness."

Having spoken she moved some paces off, and then pausing, stood gazing at her husband with her back to the other, motionless as a statue The Grand

Duke looked from her to the treasure, and slowly he grasped the full significance of her actions and intention. She wished him to take and use the treasure— but at the expense of her respect for him! His face was very pale, hut his eyes gleamed brilliantly.

"She loves me," he thought, "and she wished at any cost to be my benefactress."

His glance embraced the woman, but presently it wandered, and alighting on the jewels rested long, detained by a sort of fascination. He was thinking now of what the money meant to him. He was also beginning to realise that he was I tempted, and to wrestle with a torturing fear of consequence.

"Make haste!" said the woman, of a sudden. "He will mot remain I unconscious for ever."

"Helen," said the Grand Duke, "my honour is at stake— not only here, but elsewhere. Unless I find a large sum immediately shall be posted. I owe Lord Effingham ; £20,000— a gambling debt. You know what that means."

"Make haste!" she repeated.

"Have pity on me!" he cried. "My life is in your hands. I could not survive public disgrace? You are tempting me to live!"

"Oh be quick!" said the Marchioness.

He bit his lips and wrung his hands.

"I can't," he groaned.

"Coward!" said Lady Ogilvy.

The Grand Duke flushed scarlet. "I understand," he muttered. Striding forward suddenly, he sank on his knees before the safe, and, gathering up the ends of the scarf, knotted them above the coins and precious stones.

The Marchioness watched him over her shoulder without his cognisance, and in her eyes was a look of pain and indescribable bewilderment. Unconsciously she sighed, and the Grand Duke started guiltily and glanced up; but too late, she had turned again.

"Make haste!" she said in a strained voice. He sprang to his feet, holding the treasure in his hand. She was pointing silently to the outer door of the apartment that opened on the corridor.

"God bless you," he muttered, and forthwith obeyed the gesture.

As the door closed behind his retreating figure the Marchioness sighed again, and softly went over to her insensible husband's side.

Removing the wadding from his face she took up the phial and passed out of the apartment into her own bedchamber. A moment later she had restored the bottle to its place, and locked up the medicine chest within the cabinet. She turned then, and caught her breath with a sudden gasp at seeing the Grand Duke .

"I have returned— because l could not go— without a word!" he muttered. "I want you to tell me why you have done— this?"

"Surely, to help you," she whispered, her hand pressed tightly to her side. "And— and— "Because I was lately fool enough to worship a clay idol. Do not mistake me; I regret nothing, for you have taught me wisdom. But"— she paused a second and her lip curled scornfully— "go now, your Highness! I pray to God we shall never meet again!"

His face went pale as chalk. "I shall repay you in full— one day!" he muttered. "And— and— I shall love you to the last hour of my life!"

She gave him a look before which his eyes fell abashed and shamed.

"Go!" she repeated.

"Helen — Helen!" cried out at that instant a groaning voice from the Marquis's bed chamber.

"You hear?" asked Lady Ogilvy.

The Grand Duke bowed, and darting to the door slipped out into the corridor. The Marchioness tore off her clothes, and turning out the electric light, got softly into her bed.

"Helen!" cried her husband's voice again.

"What is the matter?" she demanded in tones of simulated drowsiness.

A loud shriek answered her.

"I have been robbed— robbed!" screamed Lord Ogilvy. "Robbed! do you hear?" There followed the sound of a heavy fall, and the Marchioness a moment later found her husband lying insensible before his rifled safe.

Next morning all Europe rang with the news of the most daring, successful, and mysterious robbery of modern times, but the first person in Pau to sympathise with the victims thereof was his Highness the Grand Duke Dimitri Michaelovski.

End