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Rev. - Frank C. Wellson, May 12, 1958

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THE SERF.

CHAPTER I.

THE MERRIEST KNOT OF STUDENTS IN PARIS.—A DINNER AT VERY'S.—THE RUSSIAN'S INVASION.—HO! FOR THE OPERA!

WE go twenty years back, and to the queen-like city of the world, as the Lutetians declare their capital to be.

There's a glorious set of five young fellows rolling round a corner into the Palais Royale. They are only intoxicated with some mental draught, but that makes them no less excited than a bottle or two of champagne.

One strikes with his cane the umbrella over a fruit-stand, and throws a handful of coppers to the old woman, just as she begins to say, "Holy mother!"

Another offers to kiss an oyster-woman. A third calls a tall chap selling five-sous handkerchiefs his dearest friend and brother. The fourth and his comrade execute dancing figures of every extravagant kind, and not forgetting to sing out innumerable tra-la-las and lin-lon-leras.

At last they stopped, under the shelter of a carriage gateway, to deliberate.

"Come, Mistigris," said one, "you are treasurer. Let's go into the Cafe de Paris, and divide the eight hundred francs!"

"Let's divide!" chorussed all.

"Ah!" said Mistigris, "but how divide. Not equally, for the idea of the great picture that took the eight hundred francs. 'The Last of the Old Guard.' Ah! there's a subject!"

"Yes, Misti dear," broke in another, "but I painted the landscape and the smoke!"

"To be sure, Louis, but it is I, Chastel de Brillal-Leda that designed the figures!" cried a third.

"Your pardon!" interposed the man with the cane, "I—I suggested the drummer boy with both hands shot off, and holding the flag in his teeth."

"Yes, Laurentin's hints were invaluable," said the last, "but what would your great production have been, if I had not borrowed the uniforms from the Jew broker?"

"Ah! there's a good deal for each of us to put forward," said Mistigris, "and as the presiding officer of this joint stock notion, and holder of its reward, I propose a dinner——"

"Good!"

"And the Ball of the Opera to-night!"

"Bravo! Fifinette is dying to peep at it!" sighed Chastel.

"She shall have the finest box and the most magnificent fancy dress!" said Mistigris, "except my Rosinon!"

"And Lilas, my fair!"

"Agreed, then. Come on into the Rocher, and let's have oysters!"

"Fie, Louis!" said the treasurer, "when they have eight hundred, almost a thousand, look you, they don't dine on shell-fish!"

"Right. Let's have as many tarts as we can eat at Felix's in Panorama Alley!"

"Was that the illustrious descendant of the Brillats and Ledas that spoke so grossly," moaned Mistigris. "I declare for Very's new house over yonder."

"Oh! Misti, you are going it! Fifty francs a head, at the least," said Louis fearfully. "I've been promising old Gripard that I'd pay him a month or two's rent!"

Mistigris turned round to annihilate the speaker with a look.

"My dear fellow, we are going to the Grand Opera to-night. Do not disturb our harmony by a return to such worldly matters," said he. "Learn that there are no hopes, temporal or spiritual, for any man who pays his landlord!"

So the party crossed over to the famous restaurant, and marched in, bold as millionaires.

Their rather wild look as regarded the arrangement of their long locks, and their dress scarcely impregnable from fault-finders, led the waiters and guests to look at them closely.

The very thing the heroes wanted.

Oh! if they could only have heard some voice say: "There go the authors, whose united wits produced that new Leonardo da Vinci's 'Fight for the Standard,' that was given the first prize last night. 'The Last of the Old Guard'—don't you remember?"

That would have made them invite the speaker to dine with them.

They bestowed themselves under a window, and, while a waiter stood by, began a discussion over the bill of fare.

Louis was picking out the moderate delicacies, frogs, crabs, veal and salad, but Mistigris ruled the roast, decidedly.

That individual at last wrote down on his card a programme which was preserved for some eight years by the establishment as a curiosity.

To kill the time, the five friends began to propose new means of raising money, a new book, a new song, a new dance. Not a new picture. No! these butterflies of the "Latin Quarter" felt that no fresh attempt of theirs could ever outdo their recent victory.

Up came the soups at last, and the talkative party became wholly interested in the meal.

It is due to the merits of the concoctor of the "queen's soup" to say that Louis, after the first taste forgot the landlord of his.

The students were just recovering voice again, and murmuring, in a properly subdued tone, panegyrics on the reliefs, macaroni, filet of beef and turkey, when new comers took the next place from them.

The screen did not prevent their voices being fully audible.

This accession to the diners were three in number.

One was a tall, grave gentleman, looking older than the six-and-thirty years that he was. Like the other two, he was fair-complexioned, and with flowing red beard and moustache. His attire was very plain, but a diamond cravat-catch and the pearl buttons of his wristbands, besides his fine heavy watchchain, revealed the man of wealth. Indeed, his companions, when they chanced to name him in full, said, "Prince Fedor Khovalenski."

A Russian title, for he was of that nation, like his friends.

The younger of these was a light made man of some twenty-five years. He was not unhandsome of his kind, and his features tolerably regular. His eyes

were the worst of them, for, small, savage and piercing, their incessant restlessness and snaky glitter would have well carried out the Great Napoleon's saying how the Tartar underlies the Muscovite. His forehead was high enough, but you could see that the razor had been carefully at work at that.

He was appraised like a gentleman, and had plenty of jewels and glistening fine linen. His manner of speaking was very domineering and abrupt, even to his equals, suppressed though it was.

The last of the trio was of the same age as the one we have first commented upon. He seemed to be more of a favorite with him than Prince Fedor, probably from his obsequiousness. He answered to the name of Velski Medikoff, and was only the son of a very rich St. Petersburg merchant, and was without noble rank.

"A Russian invasion," muttered Mistigris, as the accent of the late arrivals struck him in their conference with the waiter.

"An idea!" cried Chastel. "An idea for the Almanac of Comicalities. You know we call the Paris executioner Charlot?"

"The vulgar do!" returned the Mistigris as he finished separating the slices of the broiled shad on its bed of picked sorrel.

"Well—I'll sketch a Muscovite headsman, and put under it Charlotte Russe!"

"Ha, ha! glorious! fine, fine!" said the students, as they turned to the side-dishes, while the second service was being brought.

The Russians did not overhear this.

"What's to be seen to-night," asked the youngest. "We must let nothing pass, for we are soon to go to Italy."

"Well, Count Karateff," answered Velski. "We must go to the Ball of the Opera to-night. I thought you had ordered dresses."

"Oh!" said Karateff, languidly, "so I did think something about going in character—as a—knight in armor, so I could wear my Ural gems in the helmet and on the sword-hilt, but it's such a bore, I won't do it."

"You needn't dress up, and mingle with the dancers," said Prince Fedor. "Go to look on only."

"Will there be any females there?" queried Karateff, caressing his red moustache.

"Of course," said the Prince, laughing. "A pretty ball, and all males!"

"Oh! but my lord means, will there be any women worth his looking at?" interposed the merchant's son.

"That's it," said Karateff, playing with his soup-spoon.

"My dear count," said Khovalenski laughing, "allow me to believe that in an assemblage of all sorts of beauties, from lorettes up to duchesses, even fastidious you will be suited. Here comes your delight—the pigeon outlets as entries! Fall to!"

So, in both compartments, the repasts were having justice done to them.

Now, although the students had sat down before the Russians, the greater length of their entertainment, and their conscientious attention to delicacies not their's every month even, made the two keep pace.

Mistigris's battalion were trifling with the trifles, and trying wines all around. The fizz of the breaking bubbles formed quite continuous music.

At last, even such a dinner had to have an end.

Mistigris settled the charge ("charge of dragoons" he called it) with the air of the "First Hebrew Baron" himself.

They all rose, Chastel and a couple more smuggling sweetmeats, wrapped up in their handkerchiefs, into their pockets.

It happened that, at the same time, that this party strutted forth, the three Russians marched down the front steps also.

Each of the young men eyed one another with a lingering of the feeling that had been so fierce in 1815 or so.

However, they passed one another, contented with puffing smoke into one another's eyes, quite unintentionally of course.

"I don't like the look of the youngest of the three," remarked Louis. "He has a beard like my venerable landlord's!"

"He looks like the enemy of mine that the enchantress of Good-children Street revealed to me in the tumbler of milk," said Mistigris. "But down with the Russians! Let's go and tell the fellows that we've dined at Very's, and that M. Thiers was in the next stall to us!"

"Huzza! and then for the Opera!"

"We'll go see if Ivan will come to-night," said Mistigris.

"Ivan," said one or two, "whos' he?"

"Not to know Ivan! the painter in Bigarrade Street, number 34!" said Mistigris, "shame! He's my friend! a real artist!"

"Oh! I remember," said Chastel, "the German that you had out with you last Sunday."

"He's no German. He's a Breton—isn't Ivan a Breton name?" said Mistigris. "But he's clever as an Italian of old."

"Hope he's as lucky as the Titians," observed Laurentin.

"Faith, he is! I can't get a sitter—I never have soared above grisettes, and she was free gratis! But Ivan has them in swarms. Whisper," said Mistigris in a confidential tone, probably made close by the "Clos Vougeot" he had imbibed.

All clustered around him to the annoyance of the passers-by.

"A real countess sits to Ivan! the Countess of Mauleon! one of the old blood! And more, she introduces him all round! Look at that! Are the e not hopes for the student, the man of mind, the hermit of arts, the one born under the Star of Genius!"

The party lifted their hats enthusiastically, and shook their long hair in the breeze.

"Honor to Ivan! may he win the prize!"

"May we be invited to the wedding-breakfast!"

"May it be as good as our dinner at VERY'S!" shouted Mistigris in the biggest kind of capitals.

He saw an acquaintance on the other side of the street, within earshot.

Arm-in-arm, taking up all the walk, the five stalked along, singing and chatting.

Their frenzy was damped, when they came to M. Ivan's residence, by the information that the young painter was out, and would not return that night. The portress added that her lodger had departed in such a toilette that she thought he was going to some great appointment.

"The Countess!" said Laurentin and Chastel in a breath.

"Hush!" said Mistigris, "confidence. I'll wager that he's gone to the Opera with little Dusselle of our street."

"You may dare us to bet, Misti, for you hold all the money!" observed Louis.

"Still harping on the landlord, Lou! Bah! Now, one, two, three! who's for dresses and the girls!"

"Joy! I'll go as Francis the First!"

"I as a monk!"

"He! he as a monk-ee!" cried the wittiest. "Keep your own costume then!"

"I'll be Aymon, and I'll get four girls for my sons!" shouted Mistigris.

"Come on! we'll dance the cancan in spite of the government."

"Down with every thing and up with ourselves!" roared the whole of them, rushing into the costumer's shop like the vanguard of Attila's army.

CHAPTER II.

THE FANCY DRESS BALL.—TOO MUCH CHAMPAGNE.—THE COST OF A KISS.—
TOSSED FROM THE GRAND TIER!

THERE are some brilliant assemblages got together at European capitals.

Berlin, Vienna, Florence, have done wonders in pleasing the senses.

London, no matter how much imported gaiety it may display, is ever cold, especially when exclusion is so often the order of the day.

Over the water, Columbia can sparkle with gems, with gold and silver of El Dorado, silks that her abundance has bought.

Yes, the Empire City has known with her grand balls, what splendor there can be when even the ennobled are away.

But Paris is still sovereign in such things as public festivities.

The French are immense on any kind of show, but the Parisians are above them again!

This ball was given in honor of some motion to benefit the people, which had passed in the House of Deputies.

All the theatres were free this night. But most preferred to pay, and be at the Opera.

The night was so clear and lovely, the sky streaked with mother-of-pearl bands, with silver clasps of moonshine, that it seemed that no interior could outlive its attraction.

But anyone that could appreciate a deluge of tasteful brilliancy, would not have begrudged leaving the outer air to join the throng in the vast hall.

The stage and ground floor of the auditorium had been thrown into one.

In the centre, raised up, was the large orchestra, several bands, military and other, replacing one another so that no pause should occur in the minstrelsy.

Around this place, the walls glowed with drapery and flags of all nations. Each column glared with gaudy brilliants like spiral minarets of a mosque in a Fata Morgana.

In the centre hung that immense chandelier, a perfect mountain, inverted though, of gems.

Arago had given his advice, and the gas treated by his method, gave a while radiance beautiful and softly luminous beyond description.

Candelabra and side-jets, bouquets of fire held by the caryatides, silver gilt torches planted here and there in every nook, dispersed such a flood of brightness that each form that one gazed at was seemingly encircled by a lustrous girdle.

The forms were worth gazing at too.

Some for ludicrousness, many for beauty.

Let the latter have preference.

And let the handsome men pass by.

For we would never have done if we merely catalogued the handsome women in the boxes looking down on the variegated human mosaic.

There were dames of crown-princes, dukes, barons, and what not, boasting power over thousands of fellow-creatures, and counting their riches (that they never earned) in sequins, louis, roubles, thalers, as the case might be.

Unabashed at sitting in front, unshaded by the dark curtains, sat a Spaniard.

One of her brown but smooth and full arms rested easily on the cushions. The other held the flowers she was slowly fingering.

Majestic and grave, her large eyes and her elegant figure appeared akin to royalty.

Not so then: not so for a score of years. Now she is the mother-in-law to

the Emperor Napoleon, it being her daughter, the Montejo, that he made his Eugenie.

In the next box to this lady, so little dreaming as she viewed the maskers, what a harlequinade her future son was to play in this same city, was a different picture.

A haughty Austrian, or a coarse Saxe-Hohenhausen.

Then, perhaps, quite a girl, sweetly simple and alluring in a rich dress that less became her than would a plainer.

By her again, a Turin belle, her face flushed, her black eyes shining as she saw men she coveted gleam in the maze. And her raven hair, loose already from its desire to curl as nature prompted, began to twist out of the golden jewelled clasps, and stray over cheek and neck.

There were faces brown as a berry, or creamy as Circassian's, or white as the bleached English girls. And hair of all shades, straw-color, jet, warm brown, in every mode. Now, classical, there bunched in clustering baby curls, again massed up and kneaded with jewels till its sheen and the gems shimmered in one all-hued glow.

But among all these—countenance to store up in the mind's gallery till some day of despair when you cry for an angel to cheer you—let me show you one pre-eminent.

Aye, they were such as you would dream of now and then.

But this, such as, once seen, you would have for all time in your view. And if it should vanish, you would miss its evanescent presence more than dearest friends.

Over body and skirt of white just tinted with pink, floats her dress of easy grey gauze. In this cloud, remotely recalling Aphrodite's elevation from the sea foam, is the lady.

Her well proportioned form is so exquisitely finished in every dimple, round and sweeping line, that it almost becomes delicately frail.

The plenty of lights all around, almost drove away every shadow, yet a little much paled, showed the outline of her side face, of her small mouth, and played gently under her chin and in the little indentation like a cup over the collar-bone for Cupid to sip at.

A smile, that would have rendered a less fair figure precious by its enticing gilding, excited by the scene beneath is ever on her features.

It increases, impossible the feat one would have imagined, when she turns often to the gentleman with her.

He keeps himself in the background. He only came forward to glance about him to secure some point for his sketches.

For he is busy, with no unpractised in making slight pencilings of the scenes in his tablets.

Another reason sways him, too.

It shall be no secret.

The lady is "Marguerite Augustinelle Querci Sainte Michelle de Mauleon," so the Yearbook of French Nobility says.

It is enough for us, she is Countess Marguerite de Mauleon, niece of the Baron de la Tremouille and patroness of Ivan the painter.

This latter personage, already mentioned in this veritable history, is her guard at present.

Can you not guess why he, comparatively poor, but noble-spirited, well hesitates to bring one eye to remark her condescension towards him by placing himself by her side.

Such daring on his part, might lead scandal to rise against her.

He respects her. Perhaps more than that, for she is, indeed, like the Queen

Marguerite of old France, enamored of whom were all her court from prince of the blood royal to little page that carried the gilt hem of her train.

Ivan was a young man of not more than three-and twenty. He was fair and had light hair wearing it long after the German and the students' fashion. He was well-formed and manly in all his bearing and every gesture. That if not revealing the finikin grace of the courtier-bred, was what would have recommended him to any one, man or women, that wanted a friend or a lover that would, need coming, die for them.

Of a sudden there was a species of general pause.

The bands had been hushed, the unfailing chatter had diminished.

In this semi-silence, there was heard for a few seconds, the confused murmur and rumble of metallic thunder.

"Hark!" said all. "Notre Dame and the rest singing out twelve."

Then the wilder dancers, the men with the flimsiest begarbed girls on their arms, shouted:

"The procession! the procession! the infernal gallop! and then we'll go down into la Courtille!"

The whole audience took up the cry for the procession.

Marshals to form the array were in profusion.

After awhile the line of battle was formed.

Ivan plied his pencil vigorously, but it was hard to keep pace with the never-fixed phases.

The procession was a long serpent, uncoiling from under the southern balcony, winding half around the orchestral box, finally crossed the stage to its farther end, and broke up.

By the wall, under the pair of wreathed caryatides, was erected a throne for a king and queen.

Ivan, using the countess's opera-glasses, examined the painted faces of these two royalties, and laughed.

"Is there something you see very, very amusing," said Madame de Mauleon, smiling herself. "Please point it out."

"Oh, only the mock monarch is a friend of mine, a brother artist, one Monsieur Charles Mistigris."

The lady looked at the enthroned ones, but more at his consort than he. Maybe, she was tempted to inquire if Master Ivan knew the girl also. But she did not; women rarely let words escape that they afterwards would call back.

Rosinon, a saucy, pretty-faced, plump-figured glove-sewer, was Sire Mistigris's mate. She was, in spite of her assurance, somewhat uneasy at her elevation.

But he, supported by the reminiscences of the dinner at Very's (Clos Vougeot dwells long on the palate), looked every inch a king.

Always excepting that he had on:

Primo: A sailor's red and white striped shirt.

Secondly: Buckskin breeches, once white.

Thirdly and fourthly: One high horseman's boot, and one yellow leather buskin.

On his head a crown, decorated with feathers, two feet tall, and of all imaginary hues and several hues utterly beyond imagination.

In one hand a gigantic paintbrush. In the other, a gilt axe, hybrid between a wood-chopper's and a tomahawk.

We prefer to say not a word of his exaggerated eyebrows and false nose and the tattooings on his cheeks. These decorations proved him unrivalled as a colorist, at all events.

Past him defiled the usual rout.

The sounds were, a base of laughter, and squeaks, screams, whistles, groans, cat-calls, imitations of birds and beasts.

The characters were the usual stock, knights of the saucepan and griddle, girls

as boys, men as women, white cockades, red, white, and blue rosettes, enlarged crabs nipping at Don Quixotes, Flying Islanders waddling beside Robinson Crusoes, and ever so many naughty girls, in black or red velvet tights and white frilled shirts, pinching supposed friends in the crowd.

As this parade bowed comically to King Mistigris, the view from above was almost beyond endurance from excess of mirthful qualities.

The most dignified of dames laughed like beggar girls at Punch.

The Countess de Mauleon, whom we should have said was but little past twenty, and quite girlish when excited, was beyond herself. She leant over the velveted sill, laughing, laughing till her whole frame shook with merriment. In clapping her hands at some indescribably ludicrous make-up, which would have made a Spanish duenna forget decorum, it chanced that her elbow threw her opera-glass one side and into the next box.

That was untenanted from the late inmates having gone home or else to join the tangled dancers on the other floor.

Ivan did not hesitate, therefore, to leave his lady for a second and go around, find the box-keeper, and recover the lorgnette.

The Countess, enwrapt in the enlivening scene, hardly understood Ivan's words and freely excused him.

While she was thus all alone, there came two persons around by the gallery to the rear of that box.

"I's somewhere he—hic—re!" stammered one; "Velski, I told you to mark where i' was!"

"Yes, count," said the merchant's son, who was not so far gone in liquor as his countryman. "But—but I am not so sure the lady was beckoning!"

"The lady—ha! ha!" laughed Count Karateff, drunkenly. "Some lorette—did you notice—there was no one with her!"

"I'm not so sure of that either. There seemed to be somebody behind. Oh, if my glass had not been stolen when that clown banged us with his sleeves! Confound costly Paris!"

"What's money?" growled the Count. "Is this—yes, this is the box——"

"Don't go in, count, for the sake of——"

"Le' go m' arm!" said Karateff, savagely.

He broke from the other, and stumbled into the box of the countess. Velski followed timidly.

Madame de Mauleon, intent on the varied panorama, did not hear this rude entrance.

"Good evening, mam—mam—selle!" faltered the Russian, catching at the back of a chair as he all but fell.

Now, his roughened voice was not to be mistaken for a variation in the continuous strains of melody from the bands.

The countess awoke as from a dream, and turned her head.

Her surprised look changed instantly into one half-affright at view of the intruder.

He, translating her start in a favorable way, balanced himself on the chair, and in his best French, attempted:

"I tender you all my most sincere homage——"

Half a dozen "hic's" interrupted the flowing language.

Marguerite rose. Her alarm disappeared under her air of dignity.

She looked around quickly as if she had never known what lack of protection was before.

Then she stepped forward to pass the intruder and reach the door.

Velski stood there in indecision.

But the count, presuming this to be a very plain reply to his implied "Come to my arms!" held out his hands.

She shrank back, drawing herself up proudly as she did so.

It was like a fawn, that, by chance, came upon a toad at its feet.

"Sir—this is a private box—you—I—" said she in the real terror growing upon her.

And a name that she had long dwelt upon and hoped to have ever beside her in moments of peril as in those of delight, was almost uttered by her parting lips.

The mute invocation ought to have been answered.

It was so.

For when a new incident occurred, there came a deliverer, as if dropped from the clouds.

The count, taking all the lady's confusion by his bemuddled brain, to be invitations, opened his arms once more, leaning forward, saying:

"One—only one—hic—kiss—my charmer!"

A shadow fell into the box.

Ivan, at last having been let into the next loge was just picking up the object of his search, when the strange voice came through the partition to him.

By looking around at the front, the intruders and the countess's attitude was seen by him.

Quick as thought, he grasped the bracket of the chandelier on the partition front between the two compartments. He mounted the sill, swung himself round, and leaped over the chairs between the lady and the Russian.

Such a quick appearance astonished even her who was praying for it.

The count, however, had already pressed the knot of ribbons on the Mauleon's shoulder with his hot lips.

Like vices, he felt Ivan's hands grasp his shoulders and thrust him back.

"Insolent!" said the painter, breathless with rage.

Karateff turned white as a ghost with passion as much as pain. He was considerably sobered too.

In a voice, broken with emotion more than with drink, he tried to shake himself loose, hissing one word only.

It was Russian.

The tone was insulting enough, whatever the syllables meant.

The painter appeared to guess, or know.

For his eyes and his face flamed up more even than previously.

"You dare to befoul the air that lady breathes with such a word!" thundered he. "By heaven, I'll send you to your level before you shall beg her pardon!"

With that, he changed his grip and put all his strength into lifting up the struggling "Russian."

Ere the lady could scream, ere Velski could make a move, both saw the count and a chair he had caught at, flying out of the box towards the great chandelier.

Describing a long curve, the flying man fell plumply upon the base of the throne, crowded with the subjects of Sire Mistigris.

The shriek of the Countess de Mauleon was the pilot-boat to a whole fleet of similar utterances from the female portion of the audience.

The crash that the descending count made, was next audible.

At that eventful moment, a troop of cavaliers on basket-horses were around the dais.

In among and upon goddesses, cupids, shepherds, Indians, and their peers, that novel projectile landed.

There was great destruction of Harlequin's sword, Little Bopeep's lances, plumes, and all the hats within touch were converted into "cocked" ones.

At first, it was thought to be a "dummy" and a "joke."

But Rosinon sagely remarked that the man, though speechless, was not a

mock dummy. And Mistigris, examining the insensible count, reported that an arm of his was broken anyhow, and, if that was a joke, it was undeniably a lame one.

Then uprose such a clamor among the injured for damages out of the perpetrators of this freak.

Meanwhile, Ivan had turned fiercely on the amazed and spell-bound Velski. "Do you prefer quitting this by the door or as your brother scoundrel went?" said he, advancing.

Velski prevented any misunderstanding relative to his intentions by backing out of the doorway.

Once in the lobby he took to his heels and never felt safe till surrounded by an avalanche of masks who were swarming up the stairs to seek the finisher of his companion.

While he ran, Ivan tried to calm himself.

As soon as he could master his speech, he offered his arm to the countess.

"I beg many pardons, Madame," said he. "I shall never forgive myself for having so carelessly left you exposed to that ruffian. Come to your carriage, if you will still honor me."

Marguerite lifted her eyes to the young man's flushed face. She took the arm, and left the box.

"Monsieur Ivan," she said in a voice that was all feeling. "It is I who will never be able to show sufficiently my gratitude for what you have done for me."

She shuddered, as she fancied she saw the offender crushed by the great fall. "I don't think he is too much hurt," said Ivan, divining her thought, as they went down the stairs opposite to them that were being ascended by the mob.

"I have studied many things, and I ever find that only the officer of the law has a hand fatal to cowards that assail women."

They had reached the carriage.

The news had already spread outside, and the mob, gathered there to see the ladies' dresses, were listening to garbled accounts.

"Beg pardon, Monsieur," said a lamplighter to a young sprig, dressed as a fish-wife, who had come out before Ivan. "May I ask what that accident is?"

"You may ask, Monsieur," returned the youth gaily. "It is a gentleman whose friends used him as a billiard ball and the pit as the pocket."

"What's that?" queried a puzzled apple-stand keeper.

"Only, Madame," said the disguised fish-wife, "a man has been flung from the Grand Tier on top of the people."

"Was he killed, sir?" inquired Ivan.

He had helped the Countess into the carriage.

"No, sir," responded the Masker, bowing, "he nearly killed Mistigris, though."

"You are sure?"

"Oh! quite. Faith of a Brillat-Leda, the foreigner—he is a foreigner—will get off all the same except for one of his arms that he snapped in falling on the head of one Monsieur Gripard, who was asking a friend of mine for a little bill of two years' rent—judgment on the landlord, don't you think, sir?"

Ivan smiled.

Chastel started.

"I hope you are not a proprietor of houses?" said he.

Ivan bowed.

"Oh, no, only a painter at the service of one whom he has often heard M. Mistigris, a mutual friend, speak most deservedly highly, I am sure."

The two exchanged cards on the spot.

Ivan rode off with the lady.

Chastel returned to the interior of the opera-house, gaining re-admission by a loud declaration that he was a "physician sent for to see the foreigner!"

Notice, he had just been put out of the other door for throwing an eggfull of flour in the face of a sergeant of the city police.

Count Karateff was speedily removed.

The bedlam broken loose, grew into a still wilder frenzy of forced pleasure.

And it was far into the morning before the parti-colored fantasticals left the house, where the dawning-light was beginning to blanch the rays from the chandelier.

CHAPTER III.

THE STUDIO.—THE PATRONESS.—LOVE THE LEVELER.—THE INTERRUPTION.

Number thirty-four Bigarrade Street was not a palace, but still it would do for a painter's needs.

Ivan had the whole of the first floor. The front room was his reception room.

The back parlor his studio. A little room on each side served him severally as a bed-chamber and as a kind of sitting-room.

For the painting-room was too crowded for much comfort to be taken in it.

The furniture consisted only of a sofa, a couple of chairs, one large velvet-covered armchair placed on a small thick Turkey carpet for sitters' use, the footstool that belonged to this, besides half-a-dozen small tables.

The tables were heaped up with portfolios, or crowded with gleaming statuettes snowy or creamily tinted, and flowers and a book or two.

The walls were hidden, almost every inch of them, by pictures on canvas, panel, metal plates, even earthenware. Most of these were the artist's own.

Gigantic copies of the Sistine Chapel anatomies loomed behind little children, with full laughs of delight ringing from the pouting ruddy lip, or with tears of tenderness pendant on the long lashes. Ivan had caught the very hues of that prismatic bow of infantine loveliness.

Apostles, severe and commanding, launching the divine punishment on Elymas and Ananias. Delphic sybils, martyred saints writhing on gibbets, at the stake, under darts and stones. Or a babbling of green fields, bright moons rising behind dark screens of foliage, watermills sending up foam and the waste water racing away.

Frolics of lambs, combats of sturdy beggarmen, monarchs in robes overlaid with jewels and the precious metals.

Then, on the floor, in the corners, under your feet, everywhere, casts of ancient torsos, limbs, and fingers even. Heads as lovely as Christian angels, masks of satyrs or satanic visages. Muscles of Hercules, long, lithe limbs of flying Mercury, voluptuous dimples of Venus.

In a word, so excellent were these copies, so fine the originals, that they did not seem to have come from Ivan's single hand.

But it was like a gallery where were heaps of Rembrandts frowning from the darkened walls, Rubens' glad gorgeous groups, Titians more rich and rare, Claudes always exquisite, sometimes beyond compare, Guido's endless cloying sweetness, the learning of Poussin and the Caracci, and Raphael's princely magnificence, crowning all.

Into this collection-room, one morning, a month after the previous events recorded, Mistigris familiarly entered. "Hillo, Ivan! Eh?" he exclaimed, interrupting himself. "He's not here."

He looked all around, and even behind a couple of easels as if he suspected some joker was being played on him.

"No, word of honor, no! Yet the old doorkeeperess below said he was in. Ah!"

He ran over to the door to the left.

The breathing of a sleeping man was audible within.

"Aha!" muttered Mistigris. "So he's been out late again. At the Countess de Mauleon's assembly; I wonder? She had a grand one last night, for I saw the carriages around the corner of the Rue Choiseul."

He took up a maul stick and rapped on the bedroom door with its muffled end.

"Ivan, Ivan!" cried he.

He stopped to listen.

"There he is, snoring away as if the day was not made for work! Heigh-ho! he may well slumber, for fortune comes to him when he is sleeping."

He glanced at one of the easels.

The other had a blank canvas on it. This held up a picture just begun, the back outwards. But as Mistigris was behind the three-legged supporter, of course he could see the painting. It was a female portrait. Though merely outlined and washed in, Mistigris recognised the subject.

For he sighed again, much more heavily even than before.

"O hum! lucky dog! of a lucky family too, I'll go bail. Though I never heard him speak of his birth, parentage, connections and all that, have I?"

He paused to cogitate upon his own question.

"No, by Jove! Ah, well, no matter; it is the genius that springs from nothing. Lanzo's father was not much, del Sarto's neither, nor is the sire of Charles Mistigris of much eminence—enough!"

He resumed the reveille on the door. But it was as fruitless as before.

He sat down on one of the tables, pushing some twenty portfolios on the floor.

"I give in. Look at that face there—and there—Hebe, Queen of Shebe, Andromeda, and here again as a matter-of-fact likeness—Countess de Mauleon—everywhere. And only remember t'other night!"

He laughed.

"He nearly killed me, pitching that fellow on my friends' heads! There's an adventure to elevate a man. Defender of my lady the Countess de Mauleon, niece of a de la Tremouille. I know the old baron."

Again he laughed.

The cunning dog had palmed off an aberation of a Bonapartist battle as that of some victory of the Lily flowers.

"Only had to alter the flags," chuckled Mistigris. "I called it 'Ancestor of the de la Tremouilles at Fontenay, leading the first charge of the Irish Brigade!' The old baron was deeply pleased, but remarked that he did not recollect an ancestor of his having been there. I merely answered that the records of the army, to be seen at the Royal Library, had the incident in full, and gave him a list of references. I don't think the old gentleman will find many of the authorities!"

He burst out into another laugh. It ought to have awakened the sleeper, if the knocking had not.

"So the baron, who is appointed ambassador to St. Petersburg, promises to recommend me as an attache! Good—if I get it!"

The painter's ardent fancy conjured up ever so many scenes of icebergs, snow, polar bears, furs, train oil and blue noses.

"Ivan! Ivan! Oh it's no use. I came to tell him of my little expectation. Well, sleep on, you rogue! I'll leave my card!"

Striding up to the black canvas, he picked a black crayon from the shelf-box, and dashed off a monstrous autograph.

He added a flourish under all. Then, seeing some room left, he executed three notes of exclamation.

"He'll be able to see that," said he, smiling. "And now for—"

The interruption came as the speaker opened the door to go out.

A curious interruptor, too.

The man that appeared on the threshold was as strange in personal appearance as in costume.

His dress was an outlandish one of sheepskin; notwithstanding the season.

It was composed of a round Armenian cap, long caftan belted round the waist, and a curved yataghan stuck in it. His breeches, of the same material, were long and flowing. At mid-leg, they entered into half boots of untanned leather.

This semi-savage wore a long white beard and moustache. His mien was very grave, and the deep lines of his forehead were fixed by some long settled thought. He walked slowly, almost as if, keeping pace to some solemn music.

Startled, as much awed as his levity would allow him to be, Mistigris recoiled.

Proportionably to his retreat, the stranger entered the room.

Mistigris could only look at the apparition, hardly crediting it to be human.

The new comer removed his cap, and bowed very low.

"Is not this Monsieur Ivan's, *monseigneur*?" he said.

Mistigris was puzzled at the distinction. It was as if, instead of saying "my sir," one said "my lord."

"My lord," muttered the painter. "He must take me for a nobleman—and an English one, at that! He looks like a wild Welshman or Highlander, in faith!"

Then he answered the questioner, who stood humbly, hat in hand.

"I am not, my lord, but this is Monsieur Ivan's, none the less. I suppose you have come to be drawn. Ahem! you would do for some subject. By Jove!"

To the amazement of the stranger, the impulsive Mistigris whipped out a note-book and dashed off a line.

"Don't mind me, old fellow," said he. "Only an idea struck me. Destruction of Jerusalem from a new point of view! I say, your beard would go in capital as a prophet! Do you sit for the head, bust, or extremities?"

The stranger's face wore an expression of complete bewilderment.

"You are open to an engagement with me?"

"I don't know, my lord," replied the other gravely.

"Oh! come now! I will be generous!"

Mistigris put out his hand to feel the old man's beard.

The latter repulsed him gently but firmly.

"Oh! word of honor, it isn't false, is it?"

"No, my lord," rejoined the man.

"Bother my lord. I am not a nobleman—no pampered aristocrat am I. Between us, I am Deputy Grand Master of the 'King-breakers and Democratic Friends.' A child of Paris!"

He flourished his arms to show how, at a word from him, a vast secret society might be set to work upsetting thrones.

The old man seemed to have come to the conclusion that the painter's eccentricities were harmless and not to be noticed.

"Is my lord a friend of Monsieur Ivan's?" he inquired.

"We are comrades! brothers in art!"

"And do all these fine things in this room belong to him?"

This the stranger said, as he surveyed almost with reverence the many works of art.

"Yes, all are of his handiwork! But enough of him, what do you say to my offer? One or two francs, is it?"

The old man only evinced lack of comprehension.

"Ivan never gives more than two," rattled on Mistigris. "You had better give me a call. Mistigris, with Charles before it, painter, sculptor, designer for

the cinq-centime romances, and depicior of the railroad disasters and 'artist on the spot' for the War in Algeria, of the Illustrated Sphere."

Not a sign of intelligence appeared on the listener's face.

Even Mistigris had to give it up. He went towards the door.

"Sorry for you," said he, as a parting volley to cover his retreat. "You'll lose by it. If you were to be in my Destruction of Jerusalem, you would be a profit to both of us."

Nodding, he left the room and ran down stairs.

There he wasted some minutes of precious time in lighting his cigar at the portress's charcoal fire, and asking her what nation the queer visitor of Monsieur Ivan was likely to be.

In the meantime, the old man was expressing his opinion of his late colloquist.

It consisted in the single bitter phrase.

"Talkative fool!"

This uttered, the mysterious and venerable intruder once again eyed the contents of the studio.

"So I am in Paris, ha, ha!" muttered he. "Old Khor in Paris, ha, ha! And all these marvels are Ivan's! all these beauties from his hand? What would the old boyard say if he could see these?"

A look of hate passed over Khor's wrinkled features. He smiled wickedly again.

"If Ivan only knows what is in store for him, will he leave this and follow old Khor back for the black bread and the whip? No, no, no!"

He chuckled at some hidden thoughts of his.

"No, he must not know. I was wrong to come here before I saw my Lord. I must see the count first."

He turned towards the door.

"Yes, it is well that Ivan is not here. I will take the news to the Count, and he will give me money for brandy, brandy!"

It was evident that the old sinner was not strictly "temperance" by his tone.

"Let old Khor go! leave these things for Ivan—no! they are held in the hand of old Khor! Ah!" chuckled he; "poor old Khor—sharp old Khor!"

Repeating encomiums on himself, the man in sheepskin left the room.

In his haste, he had closed the door rather rudely.

Ivan had really been sleeping during all this time. The termination of his slumber had arrived, and the sound that he heard coincided with the knocking of Mistigris.

He presumed that no other of his few acquaintances would have entered his apartments and attempted to arouse him.

So he called out sleepily:

"Yes! wait, Mistigris! I'll be out to you in a moment!"

As soon as he had put on his dress, he entered his studio. He was surprised to find it vacated.

"I could have sworn somebody knocked," thought Ivan after he had looked about him unsuccessfully.

Presently the scrawl on the white canvass met his eyes.

"Oh!" exclaimed he, smiling. "He has been here, and left his card. Now I've got to ply the turpentine to get that off, confound him!"

To remove the crayon marks was an easy matter.

That done, he had his toilette to complete.

The aristocratic sitters that he had secured, by means of his patroness's kindness, compelled him to work in an attire far from workman-like.

It was simple, though, as could be, for Ivan despised affectation.

It was dark pants that would not show stray drops of paint, light vest, and a loose blouse of dark velvet with open sleeves that gave his arms full play.

He had gone the rounds of the works of his that required touching up.

Then he stood for a moment indecisive.

There was, truth to tell, a couple of canvases that he might have gone on with just as well as not.

But it was the portrait on the easel, of the Countess de Mauleon as Mistigris had said, that compelled his attention.

He sat down before it, and turned it face outwards.

Only to look at it, at first.

Then he took up a brush and lightened up a bit of shadow. Then he had the palette in hand, and before he knew it, he was hard at work at it.

So enwrapt was he in the charming task, only looking off the colors into vacancy where the mental picture that he sighed to imitate ever shone, that he did not hear a faint tapping at the door.

A lady, in a morning dress of light stuff, her white lace veil down, and her lace "cloud" shrouding her, was at the entrance of the room.

As hard as her tender fingers dared to strike, she did knock on the panel.

The blows of a giant's mace might have failed to thrust the artist from his impassioned occupation.

The countess, with that gentle boldness that can exist with the perfection of delicacy, opened the door softly and stepped in.

On seeing the painter, whose face was from her, a smile, naturally arising, made her face (from which she threw back the veil) still sweeter by the pleasure it evinced.

Had he but seen that smile—he must have been a mole not to have divined the future.

Ivan, however, was rapidly using the brush, and not even a prompting betrayed the visitor to his heart.

"He is speaking," thought Marguerite.

She advanced cautiously, for words were indeed being formed by the artist's lips.

She suppressed the rustle of her dress by lifting it and the skirt beneath of lace, and revealing a tempting little foot, in a silk cage that some Parisian *artiste-chausseur* (if that is correct) probably claimed as a masterpiece of his.

Alas!

Nobody saw the allurement except the plaster Fawns and Satyrs, who leered and gloated at it in an ecstasy.

Bending forward to drink in every word, she remained.

"Oh!" just audibly mused Ivan. "If I could only paint as the sun does! at a flash! I would be willing to die young as Raphael then! Oh, how provoking!"

He changed his brush impatiently.

"No, no! there's a bloom upon her cheek that mocks the coarse colors!"

A laugh startled him, and sounded out the announcement of the countess like a herald's silver trumpet.

"There!" said she, "I hope you did not hear me come in, and said that on purpose out of flattery."

"Madame—"

"Thank you!"

"You here!"

He rose and bowed profoundly low.

"I came to see how you enjoyed last night!" said Marguerite, taking off her bonnet and putting it on a table, with her mantle.

"Oh, wherever the Countess of Mauleon is, all must be overjoyed."

She laughed again at this gallant response.

"Thank you once more. You seem to keep all your ill-humor to reproach yourself."

She was quietly assuming an easy position in the large, cosy arm-chair.

Ivan could not help regard her admiring.

There are some few women, you know, who charm in any little act as much in proportion as they transport us in noble deeds.

"Well, why don't you go on?" asked she. "Am I not in the right light—must I move? Oh, what tyrants you artists are."

"You are very well as you are," returned Ivan, absently plying the pencil.

"You left us rather early last night, Monsieur Ivan."

"Yes madam, I—I—a slight headache! gone quite now."

"I remarked that your trouble arose after some speech that disagreeable Chevalier Martin made. What was it, may I ask?"

"I'd rather not," responded Ivan hesitatingly.

His face flushed deeply.

"Why not? Come—I shall be angry if you keep it secret! I do delight in sharing the (annoyances) of my friends," said the lady.

"It was very little. Your uncle was so good as to praise my little pastoral scene that I did for you, and, in pointing out its excellences to the Chevalier Martin, he said that I could paint historical subjects still better—"

"Well, no harm so far. As a favor, continue," implored Marguerite.

But her desire sprang more from her pleasure in hearing the artist's full manly voice, sunk into that deep thrilling undertone so dear to woman, than from any great interest in his narrative.

"Monsieur Martin said that he believed that the death of the late Count de Mauleon—your husband, madame—"

Yes, yes—"

"Was very tragical, very romantic, and would be worthy my best talent."

Ivan stopped, keeping his eyes on the hearer.

She, at the point of saying there was nothing so terrible in that, caught an inkling of the truth.

People were beginning to remark her partiality, to give its mildest term, towards the young painter.

The Count de Mauleon, a week after marriage, had gone away to bear his blade like a man in the rash attempt at revolution that the Duchess of Berri had essayed to benefit her son, whom she called Henry the Fifth.

In a skirmish of the Vendéans with some scouts of General Dermoncourt, de Mauleon had been slain at the point of the bayonet.

The marriage had been as usual in France, so that the reader will have seen no grief marks on the enticing face of our widow of a week.

"Strange!" said she bitterly, to turn the conversation aside. "I wonder that the chevalier should have remembered my husband—that was two whole years since."

"Madame, the worthy are never forgotten," said Ivan, resolutely. "We live on the past, my lady—we who can give justice to all."

She did not appear to hear him, so profound was her meditation.

He turned to his canvas again, but only played with the brush at a corner of the drapery.

"You would represent Contemplation admirably," said he at last.

The silence had become awkward.

She started.

"I was thinking indeed. Some things impress us so. I fear me that I shall never forget that fearful night. That man—the struggle—the enforced leap—the crashing fall—the sickening sound below—oh!"

She pressed her hands over her eyes.

"You—you never have heard from him since?" she inquired, attempting to render her eager voice calm.

"Never," he replied.

She still looked inquiringly, and he went on.

"And never shall, I think. He was a coward. Enough, you have nothing to fear."

"I do not fear him, Yet I may not hope to always have such a defender as you within call."

Ivan bowed, but not too low. He had pride enough to know that he was not a mere one of the many.

"He was not a Frenchman, I am sure. A German, do you think?"

"I caught a word or two from him," replied the artist. "He was a Russian."

"Ah! a Russian. They say they are savage, uncontrollable in their cups."

"They are sufficiently bad at other times, madame. At least too many of the race, and especially those elevated above the common herd."

"Yes. What a country, they have slaves there."

"Yes, my lady. White slaves," answered Ivan gloomily.

"Brilliant despots, meanest serfs. I don't think I am a good hater, Monsieur Ivan," said the lady earnestly, "but I loathe a slave!"

Ivan started and dropped his brush. But when he rose from picking it up, his countenance was no longer convulsed by a momentary twinge.

"The Frenchmen were cruelly debased under cruel ancestors of my own. Yet they endured only till '96."

Ivan said nothing.

"But look at Russia. Spasmodic revolutions at every decease of a czar, and yet none of these risings are by the mass."

"Madame, you mistake. Your Jacques Bonhomme were down-trodden men, while the poor Muscovites are nothing more than—than serfs!"

He shuddered at the utterance of the last word, as if it choked him.

"Right," said the Mauleon bitterly.

Heaven knows that she who generally uses sugary speech, is a hundred-fold more biting when she does assume the cynic.

"Right," repeated the lady, "a slave is not a man!"

Ivan's cheeks glowed red with hot blood.

"But I see I am only wasting your time," said the countess rising. "Oh, I beg a multitude of pardons. I will go, and have the sitting some other day."

"No, stay, my lady," said the artist, half rising and putting out his hand.

"Well, I will. And—oh! you promised that I might look over your portfolio some time. No day like the present, our saying goes."

She took the first album on the nearest table.

The painter started and made as if to check her.

"My Russian studies," he muttered to himself.

He offered her another volume of drawings, but she had already opened the one she had.

"Yes, after I'm done this, I'll look through them all, if I keep my carriage at your door till night!" said she.

The painter had to console himself as best he could.

Marguerite turned over the sheets of vari-colored board, scenes of snow and sun, valley and hill, lonely or with figures.

"Why, they are Oriental," exclaimed she. "No! this is not Asiatic."

"They are Russian," said Ivan in reply to her looking over at him.

He was biting at his moustache the while, in great and warm uneasiness.

The Countess left off her employment for a moment.

"Dear me!" she ejaculated, "I have quite an interest in things Russian now."

Last week my uncle was appointed ambassador to St. Petersburg. Poor little me has no one else to care for me, and so he will have me go to the land of ice."

"You going to Russia?" breathed out Ivan, just audibly.

"Oh! yes. I have been planning out her dresses at a great rate. The baron says I will be wrapped up like 'baby-bunting' of the nursery tales. Oh, what is this? no name under it!"

She had been attracted by a drawing in white and black chalk on blue paper.

Ivan came to her, and standing by her side, looked down upon the book.

"What is the subject pray, Monsieur Ivan?" asked she, turning back her head and looking up at him.

That is an attitude, you know, that the coquettish are fond at having the chance to assume.

"That young girl is being led by an overseer to the whipping-post to be whipped. Some trifling fault. She has spoilt a curl of her mistress, perhaps."

"Flog women!" exclaimed Marguerite indignantly. "Oh, that is horrible."

"It is done, nevertheless."

The lady pointed to one side of the paper.

"And who is this young man—with an axe by his side—who seems so painfully interested?"

"The girl's brother. I tried to preserve the likeness."

"You have so, yes. Her brother," repeated Marguerite with intense feeling. "Monsieur Ivan, we weak women cannot rise to the sublimity of thought of you, lords of creation, but if I were that man I do believe that they might kill me—torture me—but that axe should be buried in the oppressor's brain."

"You do not know, Madame—"

"Human nature, oh, yes!"

"That country, only, my lady!"

"I see. As we said before, slaves are not men."

The painter turned away and crossed the room to his easel.

"Indeed, how we, who are given minds to appreciate such treasures as these—"

She glanced around at the copies of the wonders of ancient and modern art.

"How we should thank the good Giver that our lots have not been cast among such miserable creatures."

"Ah!" said Ivan, bitterly, "is it a boon or a curse to be thus placed? To see a beauty that we may not even hope for, not dare to pray for, trying hour by hour to reach to it! giving a life and when it is gone, still without the joy!"

"Oh, Monsieur Ivan, you are not all I believe. Genius never despairs!"

"Madame—"

"I said never!"

"But, if it hopes, it is presumptuous!"

"Nay, Genius may aspire to its own height!"

"How high!" said Ivan with a startling quickness.

It was like flame flying along a train of powder.

"As high as it can dream at the wildest!" said the Countess rising.

The painter leant forward.

"But," said he, "if the wings of love should second it—how lofty its flight! Could one like me trust in a return of my devotion to a lady of high birth?"

She was avoiding his ardent eyes. She dreaded the struggle that she had provoked, or rather the powerful genius that she had invoked.

"Certainly," returned she hurriedly. "But—but that has nothing to do with—with painting!"

In uttering this, she pretended to recur to her examination of the drawings, but her eyes saw nothing but the painter's burning eyes upon each leaf.

The artist had approached her.

He stood before her, nobly erect not bending. He expected his reward to come to him from a hand at the level of his own. From heaven alone would he accept a favor descending.

"You have spoken enough, lady," said he. "I pray heaven, not too much! Hear me, in turn. You are going away, Marguerite—I may say Marguerite?"

No reply. She avoided his gaze still.

"Marguerite, then, do you—"

"Sh!" said she. "I hear some one—"

But he had taken up one of her hands, that she had let loosely hang by her side.

"Say you love me!"

A knock came at the door.

It drowned the faint response barely moulded by the pretty lips, but Ivan had gained all he wanted.

Yet he persevered.

When will man be content?

The presence at the door compelled him, nevertheless to drop his voice into that low, deep, rolling tone so affecting when used with sufficient eloquence.

"Marguerite, I stand on the broad footing of mind and art—that kings cannot stride over at will! Does heart speak to heart, or is mine to break when it learns how it is self-deceived?"

The renewed knocking at the door betokened the impatience of the person there detained.

The countess started up.

"I have perhaps been unwomanly, Ivan," said she quickly. "But it is stronger than I. You have my answer. Let me go!"

If the knock had not arisen more loudly than before, the painter would have kissed the lady.

Unable to speak with the feelings thronging upon him, Ivan pointed to his little parlor.

The countess caught up the folds of her robe and darted out of sight into the designated room.

Be it mentioned in passing, that she had much ado to cool her cheeks by fanning at the open casement. And her hot lips burned with vexation, I fear because the contact of the lover's had not moistened them.

Ivan sank into his seat, picked up a brush, and managed to say!

"Walk in!"

The gentleman who at length was admitted, was most fastidiously attired.

He was our acquaintance, Prince Fedor Khovalevski.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DUEL PROPOSED. THE INTRUDER RECEIVES A LESSON.—OLD KHOR TURNS THE TABLE.—THE PROMISE OF LOVE.

On the Prince's entrance, the painter rose.

Each performed an elaborate bow.

Ivan remained standing, doing his best to recover calmness.

"I believe I have the honor of addressing Monsieur Ivan the artist?" inquired the prince.

"Yes," returned the other.

Then supposing that his visitor intended to speak of ordering pictures, he continued:

"At your service."

"I hardly know how to begin," said the other. "However, in a word, I am Prince Fedor Khovalenski, the friend of Count Karateff—a noble countryman of mine whom you——"

"I think I guess your errand. You are not a Russian by your name?"

"No! it is Polish, but we have long been about the czar. But, to the matter in hand. My friend is the gentleman whom——"

"I hardly know how to begin," said Khovalenski. "However, I am the friend of Count Karateff, a Russian noble whom you——"

"Whom I gave a lesson in common decency the other evening——"

"At the Opera, yes. But don't use harsh names. Let us say, he forgot himself and——"

I prevented an outrage which he scarcely began, and, nevertheless, went too far in!" said Ivan, his eyes flashing.

"Your prevention was couched in compelling him to take a summerset from the grand tier of the Opera," went on the prince. "Having somewhat recovered now, he has chosen me for the present office."

The painter took up his cap from a table.

"It is well," he said. "If you will be so good as to remain here a few moments, I will have the honor of presenting my friend to you."

He hesitated for an instant whether he should not make an excuse to see the countess, and put her on guard. But he thought otherwise the next minute and left the room.

He went straight to the lodgings of Mistigris.

All he found there was Rosinon in tears.

"My—my Misti," sobbed she, on being questioned, "is going off to Roosha! and they'll eat him up, the bears—so they will! Oh, oh!"

"Confound the Russians!" thought Ivan. "They are perpetually in my way."

He learnt that his friend was expected home hourly, so he left word that he was to come to Bigarrade Street first thing. After seeking him in several places of his general resort, Ivan retraced his steps.

While he had been gone, fresh complications had arisen in his little suite of rooms.

Left to himself, Prince Fedor had examined all the pictures and other works.

"Clever artist," said he, with the air of a judge. "There are copies there that are worth something. It will be a pity, a great loss to the fine arts, if he should fall in the duel. He's a fine fellow, too! I regret I was not nearer and saw so little of his affair with Karateff."

A pair of fencing irons thrust through their masks, lay on a stand.

The prince took one up and made a pass or two.

"Foins, eh?" muttered he. "I hope he practises well with them. I wouldn't mind if Karateff gets his arm pierced."

Suddenly he started.

He had seen the bonnet and lace cloud of the countess, which she had left behind under the confusion of the moment of her hasty exit.

Khovalenski smiled.

"My long detention at the door—I'll swear I heard two voices!—is rather suspicious, coupled with those articles."

He went to the table and eyed them more narrowly.

"Rather too good to be merely for lay-figures," said he critically.

He looked all around.

The portrait under way on the easel met his glance.

"Oh!" cried he, divining pretty much the real state of affairs. "The eyes, the face, the form of my new acquaintance, the Countess of Mauleon!"

There was no doubt of it. He had been introduced to the lady a few nights

before, for her uncle had been quite a host to the sons of the Czar since his ambassadorial appointment.

But the prince remembered her well, and the likeness had been seized by Ivan, notwithstanding the latter's repinings at his short-comings.

"Yes," muttered the Russian. "The Countess de Mauleon! Very faithful! but," added he sarcastically, "there is a softness about the eyes, a tempting freshness on the lips that I never saw—at all events when she looked at me."

While these comments upon her counterfeit presentment were being made, the lady in question had not been idle.

She had heard the two voices. Then some one had left the other room. She heard footsteps there still.

Thinking only of him, she conjectured that Ivan was there, alone again.

Afraid of the consequences, even after she had revealed so much, he was pacing the chamber, in nervous indecision.

At such times, women love to take the initiative.

So she softly opened the door and entered the studio, asking, eagerly:

"Is—is he gone?"

Prince Fedor turned. He recognised her, bowed, and, imagining, of course, that she referred to the painter, answered:

"Yes."

Recovering from her great surprise, the countess returned the gentleman's salute.

The bending of her head aided her to conceal her confusion.

"I—I was not aware, Prince, that you were an acquaintance of Monsieur Ivan," said Marguerite.

"It is only this moment I had the honor of forming it," was the reply.

She took her place in the sitter's chair and, in complete indecision what to do, trifled with the book of sketches again.

Khovalenski sat down by the easel, and occupied himself in comparing the original with the copy.

This pleasant occupation was interrupted by the lady's voice.

"I hope you are going to give the young artist a truly princely commission," were her words, accompanied by a smile.

"Why, no, I am sorry to say. My business rests on something far more serious and worldly than landscape or figure-pieces—I beg your pardon," said the prince, quickly.

His tone had caused her flushed cheeks to grow a little pale, so he thought. He was not in error, either.

"May I be inquisitive a little?" the countess wished to know.

"It is hardly for a lady's ears, however. Still—I believe you were at the grand ball some weeks ago at the Opera-house. There was a very remarkable accident and tumult, which you must have heard of, if still in the house at the time."

"I shall never blot it from my memory! Oh! the man inflamed with drink, the daring intrusion—the severe punishment that he met for touching me——"

"You!" cried Khovalenski.

He was all amazement.

"You, my lady!"

"I was the party offended, yes, prince."

"Indeed. That will alter the programme," murmured Khovalenski.

"I meant to ask you, who know all the Russians in town, if the person, as I fancied from his dress, was any one of note?"

"Yes, my lady. His mother is the Princess Bariatinski. He is Count Karateff."

"I see it all, then," said Marguerite. "You are the friend come to propose a duel?"

The Russian was about to reply.

"Do not attempt denial, prince. I understand your absurd code of honor."

"My lady, the duel that was in contemplation will not take place, do not fear. Neither he nor I were at all aware of the quality of the personage whom he affronted. I engage to put a stop to all."

"I accept the promise. This duel must not take place."

"It shall not, I repeat. May I be let bring Count Karateff as a penitent to your feet?"

"Yes, my lord," she replied with an effort.

There came a knock at the door.

The countess took up her bonnet and cloud this time.

"Remember, prince," said she, making a sign of allusion to their agreement.

Khovalenski bowed as she returned into the little sitting-room. Then he turned round.

"Come in," said he.

The day appeared to be pregnant with surprises.

For he that walked in was not Ivan as the prince had suspected.

Pale and haggard from the wrestlings of an evil spirit against the illness that had chained him to his bed, the sufferer by the portrait painter's strong arm was scarcely recognizable.

"In the name of goodness!" exclaimed Prince Fedor. "What brings you here, Count Karateff?"

"Oh! I am wretched, impatient, I don't know what," returned the noble, walking about like a caged tiger.

"He's been at the champagne already," thought Khovalenski.

"You have been longer than I hoped, and I have come to seek you."

"Be so good as to walk across the room," said the prince.

Karateff obeyed.

The other shook his head.

"He ain't drunk," said he in surprise.

"Not I," returned the count. "I am as cool as ice, but thirstier for his blood than ever I was for wine."

There was no mistaking the accent of hate in the tone. His enmity had become as deep rooted in that little month as a great tree in many years.

"Well," rejoined Prince Fedor calmly, "you will have to forego the sanguinary draught."

"What do you mean?"

"What I say."

"He won't accept?" cried Karateff.

"Oh, yes. He's willing enough, if that was all."

"Don't trifle with me, prince. I would rather swallow poison than be posed with enigmas."

"Guess whom the lady of that night was?"

"Lady, ha, ha!"

"It was *lady*, I said."

"Some lorette," said the count contemptuously.

"It was her ladyship the Countess Marguerite de Mauleon—"

The Russian gave a great start.

"Niece of the Baron de la Tremouille," went on the prince, "who has been so recently placed at the head of the representatives of France in our country."

"The devil!"

"The character you name may have some thing to do with it all! It is very pretty as it stands," observed Khovalenski lightly.

"No duel!"

"Precisely so."

"My desire is greater than ever!" muttered Karateff, as a twinge in the arm that had been broken told him that his hot blood did not advance the knitting of the bones.

"The thing is impossible. The ambassador will have the emperor's attention a little more easily than we."

"True. Hark—what's that?"

"The painter, bringing his second, no doubt."

Karateff moved over to one side carelessly.

It was Ivan alone that entered. He did not perceive the count, but said in quick tones to Prince Fedor.

"I am sorry to say that my friend was not at home, and—"

"His presence has become useless," interposed Karateff.

Ivan started. He bent a look of disgust and surprise on the speaker.

"You here? Do you not know that your presence, contrary to all rules, is a repetition of your cowardly offence!"

Karateff advanced menacingly.

"Look you!" began he, fiercely.

"Look you!" retorted Ivan, in a voice still more terribly threatening than the other's.

"Were I not suffering still from your brutal outrage," said the count, whose arm had been greatly pained by his sudden attempt to use it.

"Were you not—for I can pity even a maimed dog," said Ivan, "I would have removed you from my apartments—where you on no account should have dared to come—by a similar ejectment to that which precipitated you from the grand tier of the Opera!"

Count Karateff turned pale with passion.

As for the painter, he subjoined in a cool tone, far more provoking than a heated one:

"The court-yard is forty feet below, and paved with granite."

The Russian, hardly restrained by the fear of going against the wish of the Countess de Mauleon.

Prince Fedor was as silent as he.

It was very pleasant to be the looker-on during such a scene.

Ivan stepped towards the door very slowly.

"As you have not the delicacy to withdraw, I will," said he. "If I stay longer, I may be overtempted and save any likelihood of our meeting in combat."

With these words and a steady look, he left the two Muscovites to themselves.

Prince Fedor drew a long breath.

"You see, count," observed he, "you have brought all of this on yourself by your hasty ways."

"Yes," replied the other impatiently. "But, confound his inscience, he would have enraged a saint by his placid defiance."

"However that may be, you must put off your intention for the present—"

"I will only defer them for the present."

Fedor turned away and, while the count recovered some of his not very calm equanimity, he looked out of the window upon the street.

Ivan was going up it in one direction. From the other, towards the house, were coming two men. One of these Khovalenski recognised.

"Here is Louis, your courier," said he. "And he has the queerest of figures with him."

The count was too full of his own thoughts to hear.

There was the knocking at the outer door, the colloquy with the portress, the coming up the stairs and the rapping at the door of the studio.

"Enter," said Khovalenski, as the count was still silent.

The first that came in was a man in a uniform of dark green, trimmed, laced, frogged with black. That and his cocked hat, adorned with a large rosette and tassels, and, more than them, a certain jaunty get-on-at-ive air proclaimed the courier attached to every rich or noble traveler.

"My lord count," said he, addressing Karateff, "one of your lordship's serfs, old Khor, by name, has brought news from Russia. He came to your lordship's residence, and I ventured to bring him to my lord."

Concluding with an elaborate bow, in which the large cocked hat had a great share.

"Khor," muttered the count. "I remember. An old fool of my father's. Some thing about the money I sent for. Oh, send him in," said he aloud.

The old man in the sheepskin suit appeared.

The courier bowed himself out, hat and all.

Khor, who had already removed his cap, came slowly and almost reverently to Count Karateff and, kneeling upon the floor, would have kissed the feet of the noble.

But the latter impatiently spurned him away.

"Enough, you dog! Rise," growled he. "Well, what amiable message do you bring from home?"

"Khor has come to lay the news at the feet of his lord. There is good news and bad news—that is good news and good-bad news—"

"A serf Sphynx," said Karateff. "In plain words, how are they all at home?"

"The mother of my lord is in health, which, may she ever enjoy is the prayer of Khor, the son of Khor!" whined the old slave dolefully.

"And my father-in-law?"

"His bones rest with his fathers'—"

"Eh?"

"A week before old Khor left the Princess Bariatinski, my lord's father died of an ailment which the great foreign doctor of the czar could not understand or cure."

A smile, instantly hidden, seemed to flit across the old man's face.

"God's ways are not to be understood," he added.

He drew from the inner pocket of his caftan a sheet of paper, inscribed with Russian characters, and wound round a cylinder of wood.

The count had cause for the smile of rejoicing that appeared on his visage to betray his feelings.

His mother had ever let him have his own way, and now that the father had died, the estates were as surely at his commands as if he had been proclaimed heir.

"What is this?" he inquired as Khor held out the roll towards him.

"The accounts of the estate, my lord."

"Ah!"

He ran his eyes over it.

"What rent do you pay, old Khor," asked he, comparatively good humoredly.

The old man heaved a sigh, as deep as if drawn from the depths of an artesian well.

"A hundred roubles, my lord. But oh! it takes flesh and blood, and bread and bones to pay it."

"Take your cottage and garden-patch rent free hereafter," said the noble.

Khor bowed to the ground at so much generosity.

"May all the saints pray for my lord and father," said he.

The count was examining the report of the land.

"Who is this—this—Ivan, who has nothing set against his name for all the years since four back?" inquired he.

"He is my son, my lord," replied the old man.

"Ah! But why has he not made any returns, if alive?"

"He lives, my lord. The old lord had him taught to read and write. He can make more money for my lord than any of us ignorant dogs."

"A slave read and write! laugh! upon such policy!" said Karateff contemptuously. "The old fool!"

"The old lord gave me this letter for my son, before he died," said Khor, showing another paper.

"Let me see."

He snatched the letter from the bearer, and broke the silken thread that ran through the seal, as unceremoniously as well could be.

While he is reading the contents, let us mention that Prince Fedor was looking at some sketches in a portfolio as unconcerned as he could.

"By St. George!" ejaculated Karateff.

The very first words of the letter had caused the outbreak.

"MY DEAR

He stopped to laugh in scorn.

"To a serf," sneered he.

Then he went on with the perusal to himself.

"MY DEAR IVAN! I am dying. Come back to your second father to receive his blessing and your freedom!"

"Driveling old idiot!" muttered the reader through his set teeth.

There was a pause.

"Am I to give my son the paper, my lord?" Khor ventured to ask.

"Where is he?"

"Here."

The strangely significant tone in which was uttered the monosyllable, puzzled Karateff.

"Here?" repeated he. "What do you mean by here?"

"Here, my lord," said the old serf once more.

"Oh! in Paris?"

"Yes. Here!"

"Not here, this room?" said Karateff, as quick as his eager breath could form the letters.

"Those paintings, all these things of wonderment are Ivan's, my lord, and Ivan is my lord's," rejoined the serf.

The count eyed him fixedly. He could see, though, that the truth had been spoke. There could be no doubt.

The very name of Ivan, too!

A discordant laugh burst from him, which a fiend might have plumed himself upon.

"Ha, ha!" cried he.

He crossed the apartment in three rapid steps, and embraced the prince in the Slavonic manner.

"Ha!" gasped he in his ecstasy of savage delight. "Do you hear, prince! Oh, Fedor, think! he is mine, mine! for my mother can refuse me nothing, and all is hers at last!"

When he recovered from this crowning of his hopes, he hastened to give several pieces of silver to the patient bearer of this gladsome information.

Khor thrust the money into his pocket with every appearance of thankfulness.

"Go," said Count Karateff. "Tell my steward that all is to be prepared for my departure for St. Petersburg by the first steamer."

"It is well, my lord."

He went slowly to the door. Stopping there, he timidly asked:

"May I not give my son his letter, my lord?"

"I will see to that, go!"

"My lord is right, and old Khor is wrong," replied the serf meekly. "My lord is all goodness. May he receive his reward!"

A captious mind might have fancied a secret sting to have lain in the last sentence so dubious.

The count, however, was in no mood for fault-finding.

"Khor can wait," said he, descending the staircase. "Khor can wait."

He was repeating this phrase for the fifth or sixth time as he turned the first corner in Bigarrade Street, when he struck against Ivan.

The latter was too full of the single purpose on his mind to notice him.

He, singular to note, despite his lately expressed anxiety to see his son, hung his head and passed on, seemingly congratulating himself that he had not been remarked by the painter.

Prince Fedor had listened to Khor's words with a smile.

"Touching effusion of gratitude—inspired by the hope of corn-brand!" said he carelessly.

The count was still wearing his holiday look of enjoyment.

"Come, Karateff, now you can promise the Countess de Mauleon her desire," said Khovalenski.

"Yes, oh, yes. But, prince——"

He whispered the rest in his ear:

"Do you think that he loves her?"

"Undoubtedly. I fancy you do—and you have not had her sit to you for a portrait," was the reply.

"But," went on the count in the same undertone, "Do you think that she loves him?"

"There you nonplus me. People say——"

"I know already what the rumor is. It has long been remarked I hear."

The prince shrugged his shoulders in a true Parisian style.

"Can she love a mere painter, a——"

"Hush!"

"Eh?"

"She is here?"

"Who?"

"The countess!"

"No!"

"Yes. Here, I say, or there, rather."

He pointed to the little side-room.

"I interrupted a sitting by my coming," continued Khovalenski.

"Oh, this is rare, this is rich," muttered the other, in a voice like a ghoul that was clawing a heart ere devouring it.

The prince, acquainted as he was with the nature of his estimable companion, felt displeased no little.

The sudden entrance of Ivan into the studio did not check the villanous mirth.

Ivan had again been fruitlessly seeking Mistigris.

"I cannot find my friend yet," said he to Khovalenski.

The count stepped between, with the smile on his face.

"It less matters than even before," he commenced.

"Sir," said Ivan, firing up at the speech, and interrupting fiercely, "I have already waived my right to decline your challenge, you had placed yourself out of the pale of society. I warn you that I cannot submit to another word from you."

"The question is not of my right to go upon the field of honor," answered the Russian. "I have found that the lady *was* a lady. Enough, I had determined to let the matter rest there."

"Oh, a coward as well as a bully!" taunted the painter.

The other bore the saying calmly.

"But if the person had not been the Countess de Mauleon——"

He paused to steep this remaining phrase still more intensely in gall.

"I still could not be expected to ennoble a serf by meeting him!"

"A serf!" cried Ivan, who had forgotten the word from his long freedom.

"How dare you——"

"I know all!"

The arm that the artist had raised, fell, as if weighted by lead, by his side. The blaze in his eyes grew dull, and so chilling was the cold that crept over him that it was like ice on his burning cheek.

"I know all, Ivan son of Khor," reiterated the noble.

The painter's head drooped upon his breast.

The sword that had been suspended over him so long as to have passed out of mind, gleamed fearfully brightly and threateningly now.

He remembered that saying of Marguerite's, so full of her earnest soul, "I loathe a slave!"

He was a slave.

All was compressed in that little word. No deadly shell ever held more misery and destruction in its iron round than it in its air-drawn circle.

The prince, the only witness of this strange and horrible species of duel between the two men, felt his heart wrung by so much agony exhibited on the painter's features. The count's was all hideous rapture.

It was Ivan that broke the silence.

"Sir," asked he in a tone no more than audible and nearly indistinct from internal struggling. "Sir, does the Countess de Mauleon know this?"

"Not yet," returned the Russian carelessly.

"You will not acquaint her?"

"Oh, I hardly know. Very likely," rattled on the count lightly.

"Oh! do not! I—I——"

"Well!"

"I love her!" murmured the artist.

"You dare—you a serf!"

"Hush! not so loud! she is in that room!"

He turned a tearful look in the direction.

"I know it. Beg her to step this way!" commanded he.

Ivan started, but repressed his tigerish impulse to fly at the tyrant's throat.

"You will not tell her——"

"Do you presume to question?"

"Oh, sir, my lord!" implored Ivan. "If I were a convict, you would hardly strip my chains bare and show my brand to the meanest woman I might love? See, I beseech you!"

He clasped his hands, while his eyes swam in tears.

The count was smiling, smiling all the time.

"Oh, my lord, despise me, strike me to the dust, spit upon me! But do not, do not inform her!"

The relaxation of no one muscle of the face, cut as on a *sardonyx* indeed, told that the count was affected by the despairing entreaty.

"She will hear you," was all he uttered, repeating the painter's words as if using his own weapon to wound him. "Are you going to obey?" said he harshly.

Ivan drew a long breath and exhaled it forcibly through his grinding teeth and dilated nostrils like a lion undecided whether to await the first charge or rend the tormentor on the spot.

"If I go," said Karateff, taking a step towards the sitting-room, "it will be to reveal all."

Ivan overcame his temptation, and slowly crossed the chamber

His heart was alternately swayed by the sanguinary impulses of the body and the nobler promptings of the mind.

At the door, with his hand on the knob, he looked appealingly at Count Karateff.

But the latter had in no wise altered his firmly set countenance. The expression was hateful, but otherwise impenetrable.

The prince could not behold this conquering the nobler antagonist without regret.

"He's pressing him too hard," was his thought.

In another instant, Ivan reappeared, ushering in the Countess de Mauleon. He had not dared to lift his eyes to her, much less to say anything beyond the simplest words.

Khovalenski hastened to take the lady's hand and motion to Count Karateff.

"I have the honor to present the Count Karateff to your ladyship," he said.

He thought it best not to add: "You have met before!"

While Karateff was bowing, the countess turned half away from him to inquire of the prince:

"You have acquainted his lordship with the terms upon which I overlook that occurrence?"

"I am happy to obey, my lady," Karateff hastened to say. "I am all anger at myself for having been blinded by what I rarely touch—hence its more powerful effect—and forgotten the respect due to your rank——"

"To my sex, my lord," corrected she piercingly.

"To your sex and rank and beauty," said he. "I am almost sorry that the condition has not been one of importance."

"Sir?"

"The contemplated affair is no longer likely to take place."

"How—I understand less than before," said Marguerite.

"Oh, this person has rendered a meeting impossible," answered the Russian, glancing condescendingly upon Ivan.

The painter was standing aloof from the group, with down cast eyes.

The countess evinced her wonder by her look.

"How?" queried she.

"Oh, by apologizing to me," coolly returned the count.

"He to you! Monsieur Ivan apologize to you?" repeated the Mauleon in amaze. "Why, what could induce that?" she added, half aloud.

"The usual cause is to be supposed," said Karateff, in his flippant tone.

"When one man refuses to fight, there is only one presumption to offer!"

The blood was deeply mantling the lady's cheek. In vain she glanced from one to the other of the parties in the room for an explanation of the enigma.

Ivan avoided her, the prince turned aside altogether, the count's features were as impenetrable as implacable.

"Count Karateff," said Marguerite haughtily, "pardon me! I do not know what influence has been brought to bear upon that gentleman——"

The Russian smiled sneeringly.

She repeated the title, observing it vexed him.

"That gentleman! There has been some agency at work, I can see. Well, I cannot believe that the person whom I have befriended has sunk so low as you would infer."

She waited for Ivan to speak. His lips were as sealed.

"It is not my place to say more. Sir," she went on, turning to Ivan, "are you not going to speak?"

"Oh! we don't ask even a coward to openly proclaim himself!" broke in the count.

He had not, by his overture, succeeded very well with the lady.

"Coward!" said Ivan.

But memory chained the first prompting again.

The Countess saw that what she had expected to provoke, had died away utterly, like a spark in wet sand.

Yet the struggle within Ivan was so poignant that the great swelling veins and the quick breathing did not reveal all its intensity.

Yet they even caused Prince Fedor to mutter,

"This is too much!"

The group was more worthy of a painter than any upon canvas in the room.

The hero subdued in unequal contest, the villain triumphant by the most Satanic malice, the loving woman wrung to the heart by a mystery her keen wit could not pierce.

"My carriage should be at the door," said the countess. "I will wait in the room there till it comes."

"It is before the door, my lady," said Khovalenski, "I heard it driven up not ten minutes since."

The count hastened to offer his arm to Marguerite. But she quietly turned to the prince, and took his.

"I will see you to the carriage," said Karateff, not to be wholly rebuffed.

She nodded very slightly in assent as she and the prince disappeared in the little parlor.

The count turned towards his prey, and surveyed him for a moment with pleasure.

He found a whole confession in the long look which the artist kept on the lady until the door had closed behind her.

The count went up to his side and said, in his ear, in an insinuating voice, neither all hateful nor all kindly, but meaning anything.

"You see I kept my word, I did not tell her."

The painter could not control himself to reply, or even to meet the other's eyes.

The latter pretended to remember.

"Oh, by the bye, you can read," said he most insultingly.

He drew from his fob the letter which old Khor had brought.

"I believe that's for you."

So saying, he tossed the paper upon the ground.

Ivan never moved.

The count shrugged his shoulders significantly and went to the door slowly.

Still his enemy was motionless, his head bowed on his breast, his arms hanging inert.

No more sport presenting itself after such a full victory, the count descended the stairs to bully the coachman of the Mauleon equipage.

When Ivan felt himself alone, he awoke like a man after having been stunned by a heavy blow.

He wondered that he should have had so much strength of mind as to have gone through the late torture, exquisite as Damien's so patiently. The only relief, as slight compared to the immense anguish as a little flash of lightning on a wide reaching storm-cloud, was the noble way in which Marguerite had defended him.

He almost acknowledged to himself that no woman should still love a man who had so proven himself unworthy, to all appearance.

In glancing about him, his eyes encountered the letter. He picked it up mechanically and in a spasm of anguish crushed it in his hand. The tears in his eyes prevented him from noting that his was not the first hand that had broken its binding.

When he recovered sufficient calmness to scan its lines, he felt hope rush back to the heart which it had left apparently forever.

"Come back!" read he. "Oh, my second father! freedom, you say! God bless you!"

A bright vision sprang up before him.

True, he could come back to France, and if ever he met the insulter, punish him as man's code of honor pronounced. Two things were possible in that event, the count's life, and the hand of Marguerite.

He must go to Russia at once. That was all his course. He almost rejoiced anew to think that whatever trials the day had yet in store, could be easily borne by him.

He saw the count return, with a calmness that he hardly would have dreamt to possess ten minutes before.

Karateff went to the little parlor and announced the waiting of the carriage.

The count was quite content with what he had gained. He exchanged a word or two with the countess, and retired to go to his hotel.

Prince Fedor, with much kindness, affected to study a copy of a Corregio in the farthest corner while waiting for the countess.

She did not let the opportunity escape.

It was Ivan that spoke first though.

"My lady, in three months, I promise you shall know all."

She nodded her head in acceptance of the pledge.

"Monsieur Ivan," she replied in quick yet well weighed terms. "Our family device is an anchor fast set in the deep. The motto. 'Hold true!' Ivan," she added still more lowly, and lovingly as could be, "Ivan, I will wait—"

He did not hear that her lips went farther than even so much, and modulated this word:

"Forever!"

The grating of carriage wheels followed by the rattle of it going off at full speed, aroused Ivan from the profound species of dream into which that murmur had floated him.

He ran to the window.

Too late to catch more than a glimpse.

His feelings were turbulent as the sands in a simoon, the waves in a whirlwind, they were past man's endurance.

What wonder that he, exhausted at last, reeled, swung round upon himself and fell full length upon the floor.

As great Julius at the base of his rival's image, he had sunk beneath the easel supporting Marguerite's presentiment.

And the night drew nearer. The satyrs and fauns grinned at the prostrate man, the very angels upon the wall faded beneath the veils of darkness, so vanished the goddesses, too. Nevertheless, while the shades grew thicker, the face on which he had expended so much toil, glowed brighter and still more bright.

If he dreamed of that, he was happy in his unconsciousness.

CHAPTER V.

THE "ADMIRAL NEVSKOI."—A "WESTER" ON THE NEVA.—THE CITY ON THE WAVES.—THE WRECK.—THE SAVER!

On the last day of November the steamer "Admiral Nevskoi," of the line from Dantzic to St. Petersburg was sighted by the looker-out at White Castle Point, at the entrance of the Neva.

At the Point, there was a station of pilots.

But at this late season, navigation was considered over for the year, and the steamer had not been expected.

Besides, the state of the weather prevented anybody going off to the new arrival.

The officers of the quarantine had spelled out the initials on her flag and, to save launching their galley in the heavy sea, prudently agreed to let her alone. If she should carry disease to the city, why, her captain and owners could be fined just as heavily a week after as at the moment.

For the last forty hours, there had been continued squalls of sleet, snow and cold rain. The heavens were perpetually veiled from view by the most dismal of clouds, either slate color or black.

The high winds had cleared the waters and airs of any sign of life, such as storm-birds, fishing fowls, and wild pigeons.

In the distance, luridly glimmered the gilt steeples and balls of the mosques and churches of the City of the Czar.

That is built mostly upon piles. It is ever in peril at such times as these, and now it seemed fated to be utterly submerged.

The waves which ran over the waste to dash against its wharves and their brittle breastwork of ice, had been amusing themselves by tossing the steam vessel already mentioned.

She was a powerful little bark, having been a seal-catcher and altered for steam-power to be applied. Thus built for such a climate, she bore the fierce brunt of the gales rather handsomely.

She was trying to reach the city, which lay on her lee, and yet had to be very cautious in the approach. There was no trusting to the capricious gusts, and one more violent than another might impel her upon the icy barriers much more powerfully than was desirable.

She had lost both her anchors in attempting to check her way a day before, in the outer harbor.

Her spare ones still were under hatches, the extreme violence of her pitching and heaving having prevented any attempt whatever to get them on deck.

When one had been more daring than the pilots or the quarantine officials, and had reached the buffeted craft, this is what he would see.

Boiling spray at her plunging prow and around her rudder, which shook against its pins and chains like a bonded giant.

Her fore-castle incessantly washed by the seas she took as her rather sharp front was driven into the surge by the mighty breath of the steam.

That element, puffing and hissing in the boilers and cylinders, kept the machinery in one endless clank. Every now and then there was a jar, followed by a harsh grating and grinding as a huge piece of ice floated in among the floats of the paddle-wheels.

But no stoppage resulted from any of these dangerous encounters.

Overhead, the inconstant tempest strained the bolt-ropes and rattled the ice-crust reef-lines of the only sails that they dared to show. The main-topsail and main-staysail, and a little rag of a jib for steering aid, all closely reefed, just dotted the skeletons of cordage and spars.

For a time, no one was upon deck except a few sailors and their officers.

These Tritons, crusted with the frozen drift, their mittened hands deep in their capacious monkey-jacket pockets, were leaning in the most sheltered spots they could find, warming their noses with their pipes like true Swedes and Danes.

Their conversation was very restricted, as whenever one opened his lips to speak, a sudden whirl of the rain-laden air would blow the whole sentence down the speaker's throat.

However, the snatches of dialogue run somehow thus.

"Ha, Jan Roost," said a stout fellow, as broad as he was long, some five feet each way, to his mate, "no sheepshead breeze this!"

"Right, bo'," returned the other, "if your head is better ballasted than your feet, you're like to be toes up among the fishes before night."

"Cheerful, you are," said a third. "Come, Jan, what if both bowers are gone and we're laboring here in this heavy sea-way, it's the engine that will take us in to dock right enough."

"Maybe so! P'raps you'll be glad if the canvas holds, let alone your new fangled boiling-water! I never thought much of it—hear it—fizz-zizz, huffer, snuffer, buzz!"

He turned away in disgust and went farther from the engine-room, although the movement led him nearer the water that came inboard forward.

Contrary to the old tar's grumbling, the storm was moderating, and the tumult on the long lines of white rollers was sensibly abating.

The course was altered a trifle now.

The captain gave over his original intention of attempting a mooring among the frozen-in shipping at the Romanoff Wharves. The "Admiral" was pointed to pass the first projection in the city front and seek shelter in the indentation there, much like a little bay.

Less caught now than before by the waves, the steamer rode easier.

There was no attempt made to set any more sail, for a man who had been sent up aloft, hurried down to report that sheet iron would not hold as high up as the top-gallant cross-trees.

The wind was raging in the heights of the air.

A quarter of an hour passed in this comparative calm.

At that moment, the old sailor Jan gave a great shout. Quick as lightning he leaped in the foremast, seized a rope's end there and swiftly wound it round him.

His warning cry was not needed.

All saw the peril.

It was already upon them.

Away off, at an immense distance, a current of air propelling a black cloud, swooped down upon the turbulent sea.

All grew obscure as night over three quarters of the heaven.

This current, once on the surface, began to rush forward, plunging the water before it, like Pegasus flying with the share.

The first mate, who happened to be forward, caught up a capstan-bar, and pounded loudly on the steerage hatchway:

"Ho! ho! all hands ho! tumble up, ye lubber!"

He had hardly uttered the appeal than the enemy was upon the craft.

There was a howl fit to split the ears, a crash.

An immense sheet of snow, water and hail enveloped the poor "Admiral" from the tip of her tallest mast to the lines of her copper revealed as she was borne down on her side.

Like exploding powder, the staysails were blown noisily from their fastenings, and splinters of the spars flew along with the severed ropes.

The whole three top-masts broke, at different lengths, and snapped every thread loose that should have held them.

There was one immense line of surge that culminated in a daring mass which clambered up the exposed side like a soldier of the forlorn hope.

It made matches of the house on deck, smitting it like a hammer, and then separated. Part found entrance in the centre hatch, which it had lifted, and part went to loosen the deadlights of the cabin.

In this assault of the elements, the clamor it made prevented the screams being audible of half-a-dozen seamen swept away with the shattered jolly-boat and the remains of the other destroyed portables.

For a space that seemed immensely long, the vessel balanced on her beam ends, groaning in every seam.

When she slowly fell back to her place, at least as nearly so as possible, for her cargo had shifted at the shock, the wet planks were covered fore and aft with all the tenants unseen before.

Seamen and poor passengers in the fore."

The latter were a few Russians returning home, a Polish Jew or two, an English boy who was going to some imperial shipyard or other, and a couple of women.

There was also a mysterious man, a kind of hermit, who had kept himself wrapped up in the hood of his ample cloak all through the voyage.

From the careful way in which he had always regarded the cabin passengers, his supposed business was guessed at.

Who but a government police spy would have done nothing, spoken to nobody, and only had eyes to observe every motion of the French Ambassador Baron de la Tremouille, his retinue, among which one Monsieur Mistigris was prominent, and his elegant niece the Countess de Mauleon?

Hence, under this supposition, our mysterious voyager was remarkably well treated by all his fellow-passengers.

He paid no attention to any of them, however.

To repeat, he only noticed the personages above alluded to, and another cabin passenger, Count Karateff.

Old Khor, who traveled as a servant of the latter, had been sick all the time. The sailors swore that the old dog had brought a case of French brandy aboard and had never been two hours sober since. Under these circumstances, we cannot say whether our mysterious man would have scrutinized the old serf as closely as he certainly did the countess, or not.

To resume.

After that powerful outbreak had subsided, the captain proceeded to ascertain the extent of the damages.

They were laconically reported to him.

"Engine-fire out,—chunk of ice bent the governor rods and split the red-hot pump-rod by its melting," said the engineer appearing covered with ashes, spray and snow.

"All the mastheads gone, and everything strained above the gunnel," said the mate. "The foremast is as loose in the socket as an old man's tooth."

"Making water fast, seems to be open in every seam near the keel," whispered the carpenter.

Meanwhile, the disabled vessel, her weather paddle wheel all strained out of shape and up in the air like a wounded bird's wing, drifted towards the city wharves.

Its outline was one row of white and dark green mounds.

The breakers thundering up upon the ice.

Although lessened considerably after its late manifestation, so nearly fatal, the farewell actions of the departing storm were distinguished by no gentle acts. By extreme violence, truth to say.

As a specimen, take this.

The seamen were trying to fasten one of the small signal guns, which had

broken loose partly from its holdings. A lurch of the ship jerked the heavy carriage up from the planks.

At the same time, a sailor missed his footing on the opposite of side the deck. As he rolled over on the incline, he slid rapidly under the gun carriage. Thus entrapped, they found on relieving him that his thigh was broken. The cabin passengers, the lady not excepted, had one and all refused to go below now.

"I prefer to meet death seeing it," said the old baron, holding Marguerite's hand. "It would be like burial alive, to be sunk while in the cabin."

"It's a pity," said Jan, eyeing the countess's resolute bearing admiringly, "a pity that the breakers yonder won't spare the fresh launched any more than the old hull."

"Are we in danger now," asked the mysterious man in the cloak, of Jan, "with land so near and the storm passed?"

Such a broad smile of wonderment as appeared on the ancient tarpaulin's mahogany phiz!

"Nothing to hold by and we a log!" responded the seaman. "The surf running there would squeeze the ribs together of a steel ship, s'posin' there was such a thing."

"Can't we keep off——"

"The device of a keep off," interrupted the sailor, "why this here breeze sends the bows in over head and ears as it is."

Disgusted at such greenhorn queries, he went to work at something, but as coolly as if he did not believe in his own dismal prophecies.

"If we do have to give up our berths," muttered he philosophically, "no skulking for old Jan Roost. I've only one thing to be afraid on, my only sin: an old sea-dog like me should have never shipped on a thing worked by a hot-water kittle!"

There appeared on the wharf upon which they were driving, a handful of men.

They were such 'longshoremen as had overcome the disagreeable facing of the weather in their humane desire to help the doomed ship.

The captain of the "Admiral," in default of other means, had had a drag made of a spare boom towed over the side to deaden the drift.

They tried a small kedge, but it would not hold. Either the flukes had broken or the bend straightened out on the strain.

Within hail of the projecting pier, they were undoubtedly going to sweep past it.

If the hulk was not checked then, all was over. She would be sure to bring up against the opposite wall, the massed ice piled against the other dock, and go to pieces, shattered as she was.

The new evil that had come to imperil her was this.

The water that filled the lower hold had so compressed the air that it had tried to lift up the deck on which was clamped and rested the heavy engine machinery.

This displacement of the planks had led to a very fearful event to be in all likelihood:

Merely the bursting of the massive cast iron axles, a weighty cylinder, or a huge beam through the side somewhere.

Such a brutal scuttling would cause the poor maltreated "Admiral" to go down like a perforated egg-shell.

In these moments of universal danger, the steerage passengers had followed the lead of the cloaked man, and gone to the after-deck.

The steamer was off the even keel, and no little down by the head.

Hence, it came that the captain's every word was heard by the whole body of passengers alike.

He had said:

"Prepare for the worst. In ten minutes, we must be forced against the break-water, and only heaven can save any one of us. The ship will be in splinters under our feet."

"Not the slightest chance, captain?"

The captain was in no mood to play the aristocrat.

So he answered:

"None. We cannot fling a line to the crowd on that dock. We have no boat. They cannot reach us. They will see us die."

"How much dead water does the ship make?" asked the cloak.

He pointed to the sort of placid expanse which extended inside the vessel, formed by her sheltering bulk.

"A dozen yards," answered the officer, a little interested.

"How near will we pass the wharf?" went on the cloaked stranger.

"Sixty to seventy feet."

"Can't a man bear a line to them?"

The captain started.

But his inspiration of joy was short lived.

Ice-cold water was not the element for the enterprise that was proposed to be easily gone through.

"No man can," muttered he, shaking his head.

"But a man that will try——"

"He would freeze!"

"This man will not freeze!"

"Who will do it?"

"I!"

"You?"

"I, if your crew does not number the more capable and willing."

The captain, after the colloquy, which had passed more quickly than we have been able to write it, went forward.

He briefly put the idea to the men in seamen's way.

Old Jan alone offered himself.

Yet he did so, more because he did not want to be behind hand in daring than from any deep belief in the practicability of the proposal.

But the cloaked man interposed then.

"I see," said he, "that this brave fellow is not so confident as I."

He took the thin, strong line that Jan had got ready from him.

"I will do it!" said he.

As he spoke, he fastened one end round his body just under his arm-pits. He did this under the cloak.

He had kept himself muffled up more than ever since they had all joined the cabin passengers.

"Captain," said he, as a last word, when all was ready. "I only ask you," he whispered, "to save that lady if it can be."

He leaped up on the lee-gunnel and balanced himself by the main-shroud, all slack from the wreck aloft.

"All ready?"

"All clear!"

"Good-bye!"

"Good luck!"

With an athlete's spring he cleft the air and presently the curdling water.

When he rose he was far from the ship's side.

The people on the pier saw all this. They knew the intention. They stood ready with coils of rope and the long shafted boathooks.

The swimmer, for the first time, had cast from him the wide covering which had hitherto been his.

In the transient glimpse that his form presented, those who looked, all from lady to cabin-boy, could see that he was a young man.

After he had begun to swim, with a vigor that promised well to forward the undertaking, they could also see his face, but dimly.

Vague though its features showed, through the scowling atmosphere of the vanishing storm, there was something in it that made Mistigris start.

But his eyes were only the friend's.

The countess, from that moment, clasped her hands in prayer for some one. Her eyes were on the gallant swimmer, who bore the frail thread on which hung many lives, more precious to lead them out of that maze of dangers than Ariadne's of old.

The vessel forged past the pier-head.

Then they saw that the man in the water had under-estimated the benumbing influence of the frigid water.

He could not reach the dock unaided.

With that seaman's skill that equals the Comanche with his lariat, one of the men upon the dock had launched a coil of cord at the swimmer.

A dozen rings encircled his head and shoulders.

He dropped his arms down by his side, trod water till he felt that he was surely held, and gave a shout of joy.

It was too full of delight to have been merely for his own salvation. He must have meant gladness because his life was ransoming the others'.

In two minutes more he was hauled up on the pier.

He was insensible, for the revulsion of over-wrought nature had come. They took him up the wharf to the tavern.

While he was being cared for, the task that he had successfully begun, was continued.

The line was quickly drawn in. A hawser followed it. The bight of this instantly passed over a spile.

Thus was the ship stopped while entering the jaws of annihilation.

All precaution were taken to prevent the cable chafing and within an hour, a second one was got on shore. Thus secured, the disabled steamer could wait till the cessation of the blow enabled communication to be established with the land.

Luckily, notwithstanding her excessive leakage, the "Admiral Nevskoi" found her level, and floated, despite her depth of water.

Next morning the French Ambassador's first act was to offer a large reward to the stranger who had saved him and his fellow passengers.

Weeks passed.

Yet neither his promise nor the exertion of the police could unearth the stranger who had so nobly devoted himself.

He had recovered at the tavern, and had left it. That was the last seen of him.

CHAPTER VI.

KALOUGA.—KHOR AMONG HIS FELLOWS.—THE RIPE FRUIT OF REVOLT—A RUSSIAN BEAUTY.

ON the banks of the Dneiper, at very nearly the line where it runs northward into the government of Smolensk, was situated the Vyksounsky Estates.

These belonged, since the decease of her husband, to the Princess Bariatinski.

She was the mother of the amiable Count Karateff.

This part of Russia is subject to strange alterations in the weather.

Although the snow was on the ground to no little depth, still the afternoon on which we visit Kalouga was not unpleasant.

It was even warm to those dressed in furs, as the season prescribed.

The sun was within a couple of hours of going down.

A courier, however, had brought some intelligence from Smolensko, which had induced the princess to give some little holiday to the serfs.

Assembled in the vale, in which were clustered the huts of the peasants, they were rudely enjoying themselves.

They well might be up-roarious on such chance occasions. For this is their life:

Taking a ploughman, he goes out at dawn of day, driving the oxen to the field to be there yoked to the rude plough. No matter how severe the weather, he dares not remain in his miserable hut for fear of his lord's overseer. At night only may he end his tribulation by a short repose. Even that is liable to be broken into by any whim of the absolute master.

No wonder a sullen spirit of opposition lurks in them.

They are loaded with taxes, for any charge that falls on their master is always wrung out of them.

Their little goods, their outside earnings, the fruits of any labour in the scanty over-time, cannot be held safe by them.

Looked upon as no better than cattle, such contempt has led them to be fearful instruments to those who have been able to wield them in uprisings.

But their previous fighting has always been for others than themselves.

When they learn that they are "the people," and that is a happy land where the people are free and the only sovereigns—well, a history, that our pen is too feeble to hint at, may be in store for the them.

But to return from the irresistible digression.

The scene was quite alluring.

The river appeared not far off, in patches of silver on the snowy robe.

The thick growing trunks and tangled branches of black pine, cedar, larch and linden trees, were glittering in coats of mail of ice. The slight breeze stirring made the icicles rattle and fall down on the river or into the snow, with a strange sound as they penetrated the crust.

There were other sounds than these.

The peasants, some eighty in number, men and women, and not including the children of all ages, were chatting in low voices. A few were singing the old monotonous ballad of the King of the Frost and the Daughter of the Gnome of the Mine, so well known to lovers of Slavonic legends.

One man was thrumming on a cithern a rude strain, which had much of the rhythm of a military march.

Indeed it was that musical marking-time which traditionally has preserved the Pyrrhic dance, perhaps.

Inspired by the sound, two of the serfs got up from the snow, on which they had lain, very much like bears, in their shaggy suits of skins of sheep, rabbits and hares.

They borrowed bracelets and other ornaments of the women to array themselves more martially. One took a large sheet of bark for a shield. Each fortified himself with a hearty draught of birch wine.

The play then commenced.

They were supposed to be chiefs or captains, selected like the Horatian brothers to represent their several clans.

With a preliminary whoop, they came towards one another in a most furious way, and made a great fight in the heroic style, musical time, stamping of feet, and turning of backs. The slow activity, if one may so express it, which they showed in leaping from side to side in the constrained position in which men with knives fight, seemed very remarkable.

The splinter of pine which each brandished represented a short sword or a dagger.

This opening was hailed with applause for both "Osip" and "Yatchka."

The littler of the two was Osip. According to the poetical justice, he was likely to be the victor.

After a while Osip, who had contrived to be the hero of the scene, finding himself evenly matched, commenced, in pantomime, to make spikes under cover of his shield.

These spikes consisted of little lengths split off his dagger, and used, as miniature javelins to annoy his foe.

The latter, being without a shield was considerably puzzled by this.

Osip charged upon this, and, in the end was successful, and his foe, lame and helpless, was dispatched after a courageous *pas seul* upon one leg. Then ensued a wild fandango of triumph round the body, while the single cithern was played so energetically that a whole orchestra seemed to be present.

Presently, amid the yells of the serfs, Osip tore off his enemy's head—that is Yatchka's wolfskin cap—and danced about with it. On more attentive examination, the miserable man recognized the features of his brother, and howled. After simulating grief and horror, much as it is done at an Opera, he adopted a bold resolution, seized his brother's shoulders, spat furiously into the cap, and thrust it upon the dead man's head. Upon which the brother leapt to his feet, and the two executed a *'pas de congratulation.'*

The serfs were so overcome by the excellence of this last idea, that their applause was something tremendous.

The appearance on the road coming down into their theatre, so to say, of a stranger caused them to pause.

It was from fear that the overseer was this new comer.

But a glance at the long white beard which had made Mistigris regret his inability to have the owner pose for an hour, led to instant recognition.

Shouts, as loud as the late ones acclaiming the excellence of the dance, rung out.

"Old Khor! welcome, welcome home, Khor!"

Men and women clustered around the old serf to shake his hands.

A wild "hooraw!" not unlike the Cossacks' charging cry rang about him.

It was clear that the venerable man was looked upon as quite a patriarch from his being the oldest serf on the domains.

From the hardness of their life, few of the men escape being prematurely aged at about forty.

Khor was comparatively hale, and he was past sixty.

He replied profusely to their good wishes, and took a seat on a pile of skins.

"Glad to see you so well, my children. I trust the new mistress has made you all joyful."

Not a very vehement assent was given to this query.

Khor did not notice this, however. He was looking around carefully.

"But where is my girl—where is Acoulina?"

At the call, a young girl who had fallen asleep on the lap of an elderly woman awoke. She had hardly seen the old man, than she bounded like an antelope towards him. He seemed excessively pleased to enfold her in his arms.

He exhausted over her all the words of endearment that the Russian tongue permits.

"Do I kiss you once more, my darling," said he. "My dove! my wood-pigeon! my blossom of the strawberry tree!"

Then he drew from his pocket one of those necklaces which are to be bought for a few sous at any little toyseller's stall on the boulevards.

"There," cried he, holding it up in the sun. "See what I have brought for my Acoulina all the way from Paris."

That was very nearly equivalent to saying that he had procured it in the moon.

Simple and unaffected as a babe, Acoulina took the present in gladsome amazement.

She went to show it to all the girls, and, finding them lukewarm in praise of finery that was not for them, she continued to gloat over it all to herself.

She found time however to ask her father:

"Did you see Ivan in Paris, father?"

"Not exactly. But he was there and well."

"Isn't he coming home?" continued she very eagerly.

"I believe so," answered Khor.

And he added to himself: "I hope so."

"When?"

"I don't know."

"Soon?"

"I can not tell."

Thus rebuffed, she lifted her pretty, rounded shoulders, and went away to her father's hut.

She said, to prepare his supper. I am afraid that the necklace had more parading before the little fragment of broken glass that formed her mirror, than the corn-cake and can of bitter beer.

In the meantime, Khor had been deeply pondering over the thoughts which Acoulina's questions upon her brother's whereabouts had evoked.

The serfs had gathered around him, this time bidding the women to keep aloof.

Each was nudging his neighbor to be the spokesman. They evidently had some important communication to make to the old man, for they said:

"Ask Khor! You!"

"No, you," each put off the other with.

The object of all this subdued clamor could not fail to be struck by it.

Perhaps his keen if aged eyes had espied something in their manner, that chimed in with his musings. May be a promise of the seed he had scattered within the last few years, yielding harvest at last.

"Well what is it?" inquired he. "Something you want to ask old Khor?"

They nodded.

"Come, out with it!"

"There has been nothing but misery since the old lord's death," said Yatchka at last.

Khor smiled at the prelude.

"Every day is worse than that which went before."

"Is the princess so cruel?" asked Khor.

"If she is not," said Osip, "Steinhardt is."

"Who is he?"

"Oh, you have never seen him."

"Who is he, I ask?"

"The new overseer. A Pole, and their love for the Russians is great, heaven and the saints know!" groaned Yatchka.

"The rations are reduced," Osip resumed, "but our tasks doubled, we may not draw water or hew wood for ourselves."

"I told you so," almost chuckled Khor. "After feeding you on cucumbers, they'll bring you down to munching the peelings alone and grass."

"Yes, but what shall we do?" cried all.

"What can you do, stupids? Have you not heard me speak before! I who have heard my fathers tell of the rising in olden time. My children," said he, almost eloquently, "I have been to Paris, and I have seen the place where a king, as great as our father the czar, was imprisoned like a thief—"

"Ah!" murmured the serfs, licking their lips.

"And I've stood on the spot where that king and his queen lost their heads, no less easily than their crowns. My sons, they had boyards rich as ours in that country, and peasants poor as we."

"Yes!" said all eagerly.

"But the peasants joined hands one night, just as we may do."

"Aye."

"And their brothers in the city just as miserable, were told of it, and they knew their friends. In a word, the slaves have been free men ever since!"

"Free, free!" muttered the hearers, rolling the word on their tongues as luxuriously as the opium-eater his ball of the enchanting drug.

"Who do you make the whip for?" asked Khor.

"For the overseer."

"Who does he use it on?" sneered Khor again.

Osip gave a significant twitch to his back.

"On us, worse luck!" said he.

"It is as easy to make a lance-pole as a whip-stock," resumed the old man. "Axes that will fell great oaks will surely cleave our little great men! and pine splints will kindle the fire to consume the palaces."

There was no loud outcry at this. The knitting of brows in determination showed that the insurrectionary teachings were heard, however.

"Old Khor is right," muttered they.

At this juncture, one of the women began singing.

"Silence," said Khor. "There's Youla's wife giving us the warning."

The person who interrupted the conference by appearing in view, walked with an air that betrayed how high was his own opinion of his consequence.

He was a tall, burly ruffian, in pretty good dress of black cloth edged with black fur. On his head a fur cap, studded with wild beast's teeth as ornament. At the other extremity, high boots. In his belt was stuck, ostentatiously, a whip of several lashes and with a short handle.

He was the new overseer, Master Coghlan Steinhardt.

He was not in a bad humor, for a wonder.

"Oh!" said he. "So this is the celebrated old Khor that my lady speaks so highly of! Ah! So you could not keep away from your kind mistress, eh?"

"Nor from my master Steinhardt," rejoined Khor, bending low.

The fellow was pleased by the humility. He had had a fear that the old serf was going to be a rival in favoritism about the grounds.

However, he could not long keep in temper.

He turned roughly on the nearest man.

"Here, Osip," said he, you will be wanted up at the great house to-morrow morning to fetch wood. Noble company is expected."

He gave a crack of his cat-o'-nine-tails significantly.

"But I have my wood to bring in, master superintendent!" remonstrated the luckless fellow.

"Do you dare argue? Is my lord and his guests to be cold while your cottage roasts with cedar? Do as you are bid."

"But look you, good overseer—"

"Not a word."

The serf had stepped up to him and not very secretly slipped a coin into his hand.

Steinhardt felt that it was a silver rouble. He calmly stowed it away and motioned Osip to be off.

"Well," said he, "now that I come to think of it, Yatchka may as well bring in the faggots instead of you."

Yatchka felt his pockets in despair.

"Have you anything to say?" said Steinhardt.

"No!" replied the serf, adding to himself, "not a *grevenik*, not a copper!"

"You see," observed the intendant complacently, as he balanced himself on his long legs, "I'm not such a hard driver after all!"

"Oh, no!" chorussed all servilely.

"Indeed no," chimed in old Khor; "did you mark how Osip convinced him with a single word?"

"Ah! ah! the intendant's the man!"

"See here, broke out the object of this adulation, "my lord's coming home. There is to be no more of your loitering and grumbling. If I catch you at any more mummery, any more singing and dancing."

He finished the phrase by action. The kick that he gave the cithern sent it from the holder's hands half a dozen yards off.

"Oh!" moaned the latter, picking up the split pieces, "you have broken my poor guitar!"

"Your poor head will be broken if you try your caterwauling again," returned the overseer. "Put on smiling faces, you dogs, for lords and ladies are coming this night. If you don't look happy and cheerful, ware the whip!"

And he let the lashes out at the nearest of the peasants.

The females and children of the gathering had dispersed and gone into their cabins.

The men were stealing away also.

Khor watched the bullying manners of the new superior with quite a pleased air.

The train of his thoughts would have revealed whence came his delight.

"Ah!" mused he, "they are being ground down to that extent that their wits are sharp. I like the promise of things. Thanks to Ivan, I will have a young soul to my old body at last! He will come, he must come! Then we will see if old Khor was not right in waiting!"

As he mused, a little hand was thrust into his.

"Are you going home, father," said Acoulina, "or are we to stay to see the lords and ladies?"

"No! get you home, and keep yourself shut up! would you go among wolves! they are worse than wolves!" said old Khor in a fierce undertone.

Its intensity alarmed the young girl. Still she obeyed and retraced her steps in silence.

The old serf went to join the group that Steinhardt was just parting from. He gave them a threat as farewell.

"Yes, go!" repeated Khor to them, when Steinhardt was out of hearing.

"Go, put on your clean shirts, ye that have them! ye without, button up your caftans! And mind and be in smiles if you never wear merry faces again. The lords and ladies must see pretty peasants! Go, my lambs! go, my sheep!"

Then he altered his tone to one of deepest bitterness.

"Go, my dogs!" thundered he.

A few instants after the place was deserted.

A little before dark, the notes of a courier's bugle called all of them out of their huts.

They ranged themselves on either side of the road, while half-a-dozen sleighs jingled by.

In them were the Countess de Mauleon, Mistigris, Prince Fedor Khowalenski, and the servants accompanying them, in this visit of the Princess Bariatinski.

It was Karateff that had proposed the excursion, and he had put the invitations in such a way that the Countess de Mauleon had been compelled to yield to it and her uncle's assent.

The count intended to come on next day or so.

"Well," said Mistigris to the countess when they were inside of the great house. "What does my lady think of the country?"

"The snow hides it, I should say, yet it is picturesque," said Marguerite. "I only had a glance or two at those serfs that cheered us—their attire is just the thing for an artist, is it not?"

"Oh, very much so," responded Mistigris, "I shall be busy sharpening crayons while I stay. I don't suppose you noticed a very, very sweet face in the doorway of one of the huts we glided by."

"Oh, no! A woman?"

"Yes, a mere girl. I only had a glimpse, and she drew back on meeting my eyes."

"What was she like, pray?"

"I meant to sketch her. She—she was the true country maid, freshness of health blooming on her nicely rounded cheeks. Her large brown eyes were bright and yet peaceful, her forehead sweetly intelligent—"

"What a love of a child!" interrupted the countess smiling.

"In a word, I never saw such rich development in such youthfulness, giving an artist the idea of complete beauty! my lady of Mauleon excepted," concluded he.

The reader will see why we left the painter to draw Acoulina's portrait, and did not attempt it ourselves.

CHAPTER VII.

IVAN AT HOME.—BROTHER AND SISTER.—LOVER AND LOVED.—THE SHATTERED HOPES.

ABOUT the middle of the following day, the same young man, in the same cloak and hood that had marked the savior of the "Admiral Nevskoi," was slowly approaching the Vyksonnsky Estates.

At times, he walked with feverish celerity. At others, he scarcely moved forward at all, as though some forbidding phantom was waving him back. He stopped on the summit of the hill overlooking the serfs' village.

"Ah!" said he, gazing about him. "The place looks little changed since I was playing in my father's cottage, there below, and called little Ivan the Serf."

The gilt dome of a church in the distance attracted his view.

"Oh! St. George's still unscathed by lightning or time," said he, "I wonder whether the good Priest, Papa Polonius, is still alive. He taught me to read and write. Blessing or curse to me, I owe him purest gratitude for the gift."

He descended into the valley slowly.

Strange to say, some forboding oppressed Ivan's mind. At the threshold of the settlement to his hopes, he dreaded to cross it, and know all.

Yet what had he to fear? Nothing had told him of the facts, and as much as he knew was entirely in his favor.

A few serfs only were met by him as he proceeded through the peasants' quarter.

His muffled up face and shrouded form hardly caused them to bestow a glance upon him.

A half dozen wolf-dogs, mongrels and strays about the cabin, skulked up near him. A few were puppies. They were setting up a snarl, when their elders, more experienced, gave them a nip or two, which, in dog's language seemed to mean, "keep quiet."

The old dogs remembered him, beyond a doubt.

"I could paint my 'Ulysses and the dog Argus,' now," muttered Ivan.

He sighed, and added in a melancholy tone, like ashes to the sparkle of his former speech:

"Shall I ever hold palette again?"

He had reached the small but neat hut, in which Mitigris had espied Acoulina the previous night.

Ivan regarded it with something of a smile.

"I suppose father is safely here and dear little sister! She must be a great girl now! She promised to be pretty."

A shudder crept over him.

"Oh, heaven, grant my wish, if only that I may snatch her from this life!"

As he murmured this prayer, he familiarly lifted the latch and entered the cottage.

The only person in the room was Acoulina.

She was sitting by the fire, her back towards the door, which she had not heard open.

"Ah, there she is!" exclaimed Ivan.

The cold air that accompanied the artist's entrance brought the sound of his words to her ears.

She sprang to her feet, blushing extremely and only delighted with one thing. She had the new necklace on. Seeing the handsome young man, for he had thrown his mantle open, she concluded it could only be the new lord.

"This is your house, my pretty peasant," said Ivan, guessing the true cause of her embarrassment.

"My father's, my lord."

With a profound courtesy.

"Is he not the peasant named Khor?"

"Yes, my lord."

"And have you not a brother?"

"Ivan, my lord."

"I bring news of him."

"Oh, my lord!" ejaculated she. "Have you seen Ivan, is he well, is he coming back?"

"I have seen him, he is well and is coming home."

"Soon, my lord?"

"To-day!"

"Oh!"

"And don't I deserve a kiss for the news?" Ivan said advancing.

"My lord!" she cried, retreating from his open arms.

But he was more active than she, and embraced her warmly.

She still fluttered like a netted dove, and screamed.

"My lord! oh, let me go, you mustn't! what will my father say?"

"Why, don't you know me, Acoulina! Don't know Ivan your brother?"

She burst out with laughter at her fears, and no longer restrained from returning the kisses that had covered her lips.

"Oh, Ivan come home! I must run tell father! oh, you dear!"

And after a dozen kisses more, she plucked herself from the painter's arms and rapidly darted out of the hut.

As Ivan looked out of the window at her flight, he saw a group of several persons that Acoulina had to pass.

They were all muffled up in furs, and the distance prevented him distinguishing their features.

One of the men, there were two, and two females, turned his head and looked after Acoulina, when she had passed them.

"The yoke sits but lightly on her," muttered Ivan. "But in a year or so she would learn all the misery. I will wait till I see father, and then I will hasten to the mansion to see my other father. He has the most to give me: Freedom!"

In that word was comprised everything dear to his heart.

The four persons whom he had descried through the window, were slowly walking that way.

One, a short, stout woman, in very rich sables, who did not seem to relish the pedestrian exercise, was the pilot of the little party.

She was the Princess Bariatinski.

The younger lady, in a dark robe, and with a mantle and cap trimmed with ermine, was the Countess de Mauleon. Her eyes, through her veil, were feasting on the quiet loveliness of the snow carpeting all around.

Mistigris and Prince Fedor formed the escort.

"There, my dear, this is the last of the serf's houses," said the princess, pointing to Khor's dwelling. "Suppose we go up to the house now. My son has ordered the flower garden to be blooming magnificently to please you expressly."

"I prefer to see the serfs," answered Marguerite.

"How singular! prefer such things to blossoms!"

Marguerite smiled.

"The human form divine, you know! and then serfs have souls, and flowers do not."

The princess set the poetic speech down as some Parisian idea beneath or above her ken.

"But do not let me detain you from the house," went on the Mauleon. "I will excuse the prince. Monsieur Mistigris will keep me company. I shall want him to sketch me that old snow-laden tree or that cluster of icicles."

"Pleasant sketching with great bearskin gloves on," said Mistigris not very enthusiastically to himself.

After this, the princess, even if her inclination that way had been less, could hardly have remained beside the countess. She took Khevalenski's arm, and they proceeded towards the mansion.

"My dear Mistigris," said Marguerite, do not forget that you are artist to the embassy, and that I act for my uncle."

"Oh, I am ever at your ladyship's command."

"Well, as a favor and an order, do go and sketch that little ruined stone cross in the hollow there. I will come to you when you finish."

It was equivalent to declaring that she could dispense with his company, also.

"I understand," thought Mistigris to himself. "I suppose she imagines all those servants up at the house are spies on her, and she wishes to commune with herself."

He withdrew.

"I may meet that pretty girl again," said he, going away. "Some consolation there, at all events."

He had guessed correctly. The countess felt sure that some little hint, perhaps, in Count Karateff's letters to his mother, related to herself.

The bearing of the maids that she had been forced to have in addition to her own, convinced her that every word she let drop was borne to their mistress.

Except the hours of sleep, this moment was the very first of solitude that she had.

She was alone now.

The hut of Khor was to all appearance deserted.

She gave free course to her thoughts, as she sat down in the seat in its porch.

They were many and diverse, and yet all flowed from one source: Love, and to one end, Ivan.

Was it he that had plunged into the waves to save her and her companions? It was like him to have voyaged with her, unknown, unsuspected, so as to be ever beside her if danger should arise. She was happy to believe this.

He had fixed a time after which he was to reveal to her the mysterious cause of his appearing a poltroon under her very eyes.

The space was now nearly over.

She felt that her passion was too lasting to bind him to a Shylock's strictness in keeping the bond.

If he had left Paris and attached himself to her wanderings, where was he now? Might he not be near her, somewhere in Russia, in St. Petersburg, why not nearer still?

Love finds a way.

"Oh, that he were by me only for an instant, just till I breathed one word, and drank in a gladdening syllable of his!"

As though her wish had been formed of the magician's words of power, she beheld a form, unfolding a cloak about it, reveal itself to her.

Ivan stood in the doorway of the cottage by her very side.

Each started as if they were spectres.

"You?"

"You?"

"Ivan!"

"The countess!"

They had to recover from their exceeding surprise.

"Ivan, the period is ended that you laid down," said the lady at last, somewhat reproachfully.

"It is indeed nearly gone, my lady. This very day I shall end the painful doubts weighing on me," said the painter. "I am here for that purpose."

The countess was unaware of the speaker's precise meaning. Otherwise, she would have been the instrument to wound him with a crushing revelation.

"I ask you, lady, for a little space longer."

"My promise to wait is extended, at your wish."

"Tell me, then, my lady, if—when I shall have found that my hopes are answered—I will also find that you are the same Marguerite that blessed me with that avowal in Paris."

"No, not the same."

Ivan looked at her in anxiety. But she was smiling, a little sadly or rather solemnly.

"Not the same Marguerite," the countess continued. "The weeks that have passed between have given me a lesson each day. I hope I have profited by them, and will carry out the teachings as a loving woman loving a worthy man should!"

Ivan bowed.

"It was you that saved all those poor people on the ship?"

"Under God, yes. For love of you—"

"Not only. You risked your life in a cause which was far more precious than my single existence."

"As you will."

"Ivan, your hand."

His fingers enclasped hers.

Singular to say, and yet truthfully, this was the first time that their hands, ungloved, had come in contact.

Etiquette and their mutual secret had prevented so intimate a contact.

Ivan felt the tormenting misgivings flee from him as the little white mouse nestled within his larger grasp.

"Ivan, I am sure that life will be as without the sun if you are not my companion."

"Ever yours, through life till death, Marguerite!"

As their hands exchanged the pressure, and their eyes a look, the voice of Acoulina rang out a little way off.

"Ivan!" she called.

"Some one is calling you!" said the countess.

She withdrew her hand and thrust it into the ermine gauntlet again.

"Ivan!" arose the appeal again.

"A woman," said Marguerite, not without a tinge of questioning.

"Yes a—a friend!" replied the painter.

"All fortune attend you!"

"Yes, Marguerite, pray for me! I have need of prayers."

As he said this, he darted away in the direction where his sister cried out.

He found her extremely agitated. But on inquiry, her whole alarm had sprung from the fact that Mistigris, espying her while drawing, had called out for her to keep the attitude she was in. But her ignorance of French and the appearance of a stranger, brandishing crayon-holder and sketch-book had induced her to take to flight.

Ivan led her to the cabin.

Acoulina had imparted the intelligence to her father.

Ivan laughed at her encounter with the artist. He guessed, from her description, what the formidable armament of the unknown was.

"We'll make you accustomed to chalk and brush ere long," said he laughing.

Khor came in at this moment. The father and son embraced with no little warmth.

Acoulina soon left them alone, while she busied herself preparing dinner in the other room of the dwelling.

At last, Ivan rose.

"I must hasten to the great house, father, and see the prince. I only delayed to give you the proper salutation first."

Khor smiled in his mysterious way.

"Prince Bariatinski is not up at the house."

"No! Provoking. Where is he?"

"By St. George's Church."

"Ah, gone to see Papa Polonius. Oh, then his stay will be short."

"It will be till the earthquake of the Last Day comes!"

"Father! what do you mean?"

"The old lord rests in a grave under the southern wall. Even the dead boyards must not be cold in their tombs!" added Khor, in a biting tone.

Ivan paid that no attention. It was as if the suspended blade had fallen and pierced his heart.

"Dead, dead," he repeated, with bloodless lips.

"He died about five days before I left home to go abroad."

"Ah! So it was you that was the old sick man always in the cabin of the 'Admiral Nevskoi,' father?"

"Yes, how did you know anything about that?"

"Never mind. Oh! I am out of my mind! I am like a wolf in a pitfall, unknowing which way to turn."

Khor still kept that unaccountable smile on his wrinkled face.

"But his widow—oh, a woman cannot resist my appeal!"

Ivan was pacing the floor in anguish.

"I will go to her!"

"Stay. Although she is mistress according to law," said Khor coldly, "the real master is her son."

"Is there a child? Oh, a boy of three or four, that cannot matter."

"A son by a former marriage, Ivan. A man."

"What kind of a man?"

"Hark!"

Khor flung open the door.

The loud cheering of the serfs betokened the arrival at last of the new lord.

"He comes."

The shouts increased in loudness. The serfs were escorting their master who had alighted from his sledge, to walk up the road.

"I must go and join in the greetings," said Khor.

Darting a scrutinizing look at his son, he left the hut.

In a few moments, the rich dress of a gentleman appeared among the tumultuous gathering of whooping savages in sheepskin and furs.

Ivan saw the face, and he turned pale.

A voice that he knew as well as the countenance, was audible.

"That will do, my joyful but odoriferous friends," it said. "Keep out of the wind!"

"Count Karateff!" cried Ivan, clutching at the door to save him from falling.

"Lord have mercy on me! She is lost to me! I am lost!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TRIUMPH OF EVIL.—A TORTURE OF THE DAMNED.—KHOR POURS OIL ON THE SMOULDERING EMBERS.—THE OUTBREAK.—LASHED UNDER HER EYES!

THE count, as we have said, appeared to the applause of his "enthusiastic but odoriferous friends," to quote from his own speech.

His mother and her party had espied his arrival from the portico.

Steinhardt had introduced himself to the count.

Karateff saw at the first glance that he was a fellow to his taste, and received his obeisance very graciously.

Karateff examined the faces around him.

"Khor," said he, "you say your son is here. Where?"

Khor motioned to his hut.

"Go bring him forth."

But Ivan had heard the order.

He opened the door and stepped out. His face was pale, it was true. That implied anything but cowardice.

His air was that courageous determination to bear even the tortures of the damned soul, which is worn by the stern frontiersmen when chained to the Indian's stake.

Karateff was full of joy.

The prey had been lured into the trap.

In Paris, he could have been met with haughty defiance.

Here, on his grounds, his slightest word was equal to an imperial ukase.

"Is this the bearing of a serf before his master?" he involuntarily exclaimed.

Steinhardt stepped up to Ivan, who never flinched.

He lifted his hand to strike the hat from Ivan's head, and did it, too, but the look that met his made him quail, and almost repent the act.

"Is this the garb of a serf," continued Karateff, "Khor, have you not an old caftan. Také your son in, and let me see him next attired as befits him."

Slowly Khor led away his son.

The count laughed inwardly as they entered the cottage.

"Ah! this is revenge of the right vintage at last," murmured he.

Full of his enjoyment, he resumed his progress to the house, escorted as before.

At the portico, his mother and the rest received him.

At the sight of the countess, Karateff suddenly whispered something to Steinhardt.

The overseer went back on the road towards Khor's dwelling.

The sun lay hot upon the front of the house, and the party did not immediately enter.

"I have a little present to make your ladyship," observed Karateff, smiling.

"Oh! you overwhelm the dear countess with your kindness," said the Princess Bariatinski.

"Yes," went on the count; "see!"

Khor, accompanied by his daughter, and his son, who wore the coarse serge frock and rough leggins of twisted straw and willow bark, had been brought hither by the intendant. "Come here," said Karateff to Acoulina. "This girl will be your maid, my lady. She is Ivan's sister, by the bye!"

Marguerite caught her underlip between her teeth in her sudden start.

"Oh! I forgot," said the count, with a pretended frankness, "you did not know the true standing of the fellow you condescended to patronize. Ivan the serf, you see him!"

Although Ivan did not dare to look towards the lady at this moment, nevertheless his glance was lofty and noble. So noble that he, in his rough attire, seemed a hundred times more the prince than he who domineered over him so cruelly.

Mistigris could hardly contain his indignation.

"You see we have the laugh terribly against you, countess."

The elements of weakness existing in the Countess de Mauleon, as in every woman, told her, urged her, that she must now subdue the passion which had sprung from belief in the true worth of its object.

But one of her blood to be enamoured of a slave, a clod, a sort of human cattle!

Perchance her ancestresses, in the days when the manners of Maintenons and Dubarrys were aped, had let rumor couple their names with those of stalwarth footmen and handsome lackeys.

But never had they dreamt of marriage, of misalliance with "such things."

Should a sentiment, however powerful, drag a Mauleon down to the level of a groveler in the Russian dust and sleet?

Yet the love that she almost scorned now to entertain, bade her gain time.

She forced a smile, assumed a dignity always at her beck, and glanced at Ivan in a mode that seemed to bury him in oblivion from that moment.

"You are right, count," said she.

She approached him confidentially.

"Of course, you will not mention my absurd—my absurd caprice to your mother," whispered she.

"You may rely on me."

"My mistake was so natural, count," continued Marguerite emphatically, "the peasant always conducted himself like a gentleman, so strange! he never forgot himself once."

Karateff pretended to see nothing important in this sentence or two. But it was evident that the allusion had struck him.

"Come, confess that we have the laugh terribly against you, countess. The French say that open confession makes the heart glad."

"I acknowledge it," said she.

But she added to herself:

"The French also say that they laugh best, who laugh last!"

Oh, that Ivan had caught that remark of hers. Its tone was full of trust in the future that he had renounced.

Karateff had turned to Steinhardt.

"Overseer," said he, "see that this man is put to work to-day. I except him from the holiday. He has been wrongly brought up, and it is quite time he was taught his place."

"Oh, my lord," intervened Marguerite, bestowing an appealing smile on Karateff, "please consider. You humiliate me in punishing him in my presence."

She laid her hand on the count's arm.

That little action won her the battle.

"Never mind, Stienhardt," said Karateff. "I will give you orders to-morrow. I see my mother has gone in. May I have the honor?"

She took his arm. She durst not glance towards Ivan.

"Acoulina, follow us; your things will be brought up to the house to-night. See to that, Stienhardt. Come, my lady."

They entered the house. Mistigris and Acoulina brought up the rear. The former had tried to exchange a sign with Ivan, but in vain.

"I'll get his pretty sister to teach me Russian," muttered he. "That will be some consolation."

The serfs went off to enjoy their feast of millet and quass, a generous gift in honor of the holiday.

"Go," said Steinhardt, driving them before him. "Go to cram your bellies! But, are you not going to give a farewell shout to the noble master that lets you make brutes of yourselves for nothing! Roar your thanks for the liquor, dogs!"

They raised a feeble cheer.

"Do you call that gratitude?" cried the intendant, lifting his whip.

He gave poor Yatchka a cut that made him jump ten feet, and emit a bellow like a bull's.

"That's something like; another for your lord and father."

Khor plucked Ivan by the sleeve. The young man had remained in the same statuesque position, half calmness, half defiance.

He let himself be led along the road.

He had been in a kind of stupor ever since the mask had been stripped off him in her dear presence. He had dimly seen her pride offended, her almost caressing of his hateful enemy. What was all the misery before him, now, as compared to that torment.

Serf, serf!

It kept tolling in his ear, like the knell over his departed hopes.

In time, under the rude usage of his future life, he would no doubt become debased like his fellow-slaves. There was the wish for that degrading springing up in him. Debarred from thought of her, such blotting out of his mind would be a mercy. Better the boor blissful in ignorance than the enchained freedman who had tasted of liberty's fount.

Khor had not interrupted his son's reflections. He had formed a rather just estimate of the struggle going on in that brain.

They reached the hut.

Ivan flung himself upon a stool, and leaning on the table, buried his face in his hands.

If he could have wept, the bitter tears might have relieved him. But his excessive grief was past sobs or tears.

Khor took a bottle and horn out of a secret nook in the cupboard. He tapped his son on the shoulder.

Ivan looked up wildly.

The old man presented the filled up horn to him.

He shook his head.

"Take it, child. It will comfort you."

"Comfort, father? No! what kind of comfort may the slave have?"

"This," the old man said, pressing it on him. "The slave's only comfort." It might drive the demons crucifying that love, still alive though bleeding, within him.

Ivan snatched the cup, emptied, and another and another. Khor drained the bottle himself.

For a brief space the fury-stuff lay like water in his stomach. Then it began to act as powerfully as became so large a dose upon one usually temperate.

Like so much laudanum, it called up visions composed of all the beauties stored up in the artist's mind.

Again he slowly strolled through the Vatican, the Louvre, the palaces of Florence, the galleries of Berlin and Munich.

The erotic representations, by a phenomenon easily to account for, principally shone before him.

There was the snowy swan thrusting its silvery neck along the roseate bosom of Leda; there the nymph changing into the laurel under the ardent embrace of Apollo. Here the lithe serpentine of Venus to approach Adonis, or the leap of a Bacchante into a Satyr's arms.

Or the rudely plastered walls opened into endless vistas of glowing canvas.

Sunlit vales where lovers rambled; moonlit hills where sat the enamoured.

Then, through the thronging figures, now imbued with life, glided a form that surpassed them all, one by one, or all in one.

A halo of purity around her, loveliness in every feature, admirable in every gesture, it was the adorable Marguerite that was queen of those glorious and splendid phantasies.

And Khor, who had watched the young man's kindling eyes and flushed cheeks, saw him spring to his feet.

He held out his arms to the phantom, and cried:

"Marguerite! darling of mine forever more! oh, pearl of my heart!"

In seeking to detain the vision, he rushed forward. He fell over the stool, and his head striking the wall he measured his length in senselessness.

Old Khor went to pick him up, with a grim smile.

"A man that can find so much in a bottle of brandy, will be mine after all," he said.

Ivan had cut his head on the floor. The outlet of blood restored him in some part to sobriety. It perhaps saved his life, as well.

In about an hour, he could listen intelligently to his father's discourse.

It was most important.

"In a word, father," said Ivan at length, "you propose to give me a command in an insurrection?"

"Yes. There is only that road out of this misery."

"No! I will not do it."

"You have tasted of the cup—can you submit to draining it? Oh, Ivan, I do not know you. I thought that you, brought up among freemen, would not bow down to this."

"Father, it is because I have seen the world that I speak thus. Good never can come from such a rising as ours would be. It would only be massacre of many inoffensive and defenceless, fire to the roof—"

"Yes, yes—"

"But then would come the inevitable reflux. The emperor would join hands with his nobles, troops would be brought and we would be hunted down like wild beasts."

"Is not that a better death than ours?"

"A quicker that is all."

"But the revolution may be controlled," striking at the opening in his son's argument.

"Controlled!"

He laughed heartily.

"Controlled! Can he who sets the snowball rolling at the top of the hill, check it when, grown to colossal size, it thunders down the slope?"

Khor was silent for a few minutes.

"So you will not join us?"

"No, father! I would readily throw myself into any gulf, but I will not push men like our brother slaves into certain death and intenser wretchedness."

"Drink again."

Ivan took another draught mechanically.

Old Khor studied its effect upon him once more.

But Ivan let his head drop upon his arm and seemed to sleep.

"I'll have him," muttered Khor. "We have arms but no head like his. I am too old, too old. Yes, Ivan must belong to the band."

Hours passed, and each in his unchanged position, had not exchanged another syllable.

There entered rudely into the hut, Steinhardt and Osip and another serf.

The overseer was come to have the wardrobe of Acoulina transferred to the master's house.

Khor told them that a rude heavy oaken chest in the corner held the girl's all.

It was too weighty for the three men to move along.

Steinhardt disdained to lift a hand.

He noticed Ivan sleeping, and gave him a hearty slap on the shoulder.

"Here, idler," cried he brutally, "pass that rope over your shoulders and pull, will you?"

Ivan started up with flashing eyes.

"Who are you that dares bid men do the work of brutal beasts!" cried he.

"I'll show you who I am!" returned Steinhardt, delivering a sweeping cut of his whip at the speaker.

Ivan sprang at him, and was within his guard in an instant, wrenching the whip away.

The liquor, the pent-up fire, the ignominy of the blow, all converted him into a giant of fierceness and strength. He felled the overseer to the ground on the instant.

The sledge-drivers outside rushed in.

"Seize him!" roared the intendant, scrambling to his feet.

Ivan snatched the short axe from the belt of Osip, and held them at bay.

But every moment brought reinforcements to the overseer.

Some few of the serfs, like Khor, did not interfere.

At last they disarmed the young man, bound him, and held him firm.

Steinhardt was wild with pain and rage.

"Bring him along, men," said he. "The sun lies still on the ground under my lord's window. Run before, two of you, and set up the whipping-post!"

Under the window of the grand reception room, over which again were Count Karateff's apartments, the prisoner was attached to a stake.

At the confusion attending the proceedings, Mistigris opened the double windows of the parlor.

"Ivan! good heavens!" exclaimed he.
 The countess rushed to his side.
 She did not feel the frost that presented such a contrast to the heat of the room.
 The central figure in the group of savage forms met her pained eyes.
 "Hold!" cried she, with queenly command.
 Steinhardt laughed.
 "I only take orders from my mistress!" returned he, lifting his knout.
 "Release that man!"
 The first strokes fell on the captive's back as if to prove how powerless was her interposition.
 "Oh, God!" cried Marguerite, "must I see this!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE MIDNIGHT GATHERING.—THE DEATH-CAVES OF ST. GEORGE'S.—THE SISTER OF THE SHADES.—THE DOOM OF THE FALSE BROTHER.

The country about Kalouga is rich with metals.
 The mines have been worked time out of mind.
 The extensive excavations near the Church of St. George's had been used for the depository of a vast number of victims in the epidemic that raged through Russia in 1802.
 Some villagers who had gone down into this species of catacombs had reported that the anatomies had not absolutely decayed, but still remained in heaps.
 Their accounts of the frightful spectacles these piles of still-existing skeletons presented, had woven a thick shroud of superstitious dread about the place.
 No one dared to go near the quarries after dark.
 On occasions, like midnight masses and the services of Christmas, those who went to the church either remained there till daybreak or returned home by a road opposite to that passing the line of terror.
 Rumor went still farther and told of the number of shadows that had been seen often stealing about the tabooed district.
 An old woman, who had appeared in the villages now and anon for many years, had been traced towards the vaults. She had always disappeared near them.
 She was known by the single appellation: The Sister of the Shadows.
 On the night during which the Countess de Mauleon sobbed herself to sleep like a child in loneliness, Mistigris dreamt of Acoulina, Acoulina sorrowed over her magnificent new lodgings less agreeable than the wretched home, and Count Karateff drank in rejoicing till he could no longer lift the wine-cup, old Khor stole secretly from his house.
 It had no charms for him now, truth to say.
 Ivan, released, after a second blow, from his punishment, by order of Count Karateff, who had his plans laid down, had gone away no one knew whither.
 Khor, on leaving the serf's village behind him, halted.
 In a few minutes a man approached him.
 "That you, Yatchka?" challenged Khor.
 "Yes. Osip's here."
 Within half an hour all of twenty men had collected around the old man.
 They waited for a score more. Then all struck across country, straight as possible for the catacombs of St. George's.
 On approaching the spot, covered with mounds, great clefts and gaps, some

choked with snow and ice, the large body was challenged by men posted like regular sentries.

After running this gauntlet of carefulness, the party descended, by steps hacked in the ice, some thirty feet down an opening, much like the mouth of a well.

There extended before them a tunnel, turning twice and running a little downwards for some forty feet.

Then they were within a vast rotunda, partly natural, partly enlarged by hand of man.

It was lit up by fires of fat-wood, that is, resin knots and pine branches.

The walls were of calcareous material, streaked with iron, salt of mercury, and other metallic oxides.

The splendid stalactites were of the most varied form and hung from the white as marble ceiling.

Some of the pendent columns had the semi-transparency of alabaster, others the glassy glitter of crystal.

All the kinds looked beautifully in the red light.

But amid all this splendor, as if in mockery, were, in deep cavities and niches of the walls, the remains of the plague-stricken.

Soon after their immurement, the water, impregnated with cinabar and arsenic, had commenced to preserve them, more successful as nature's chemists than professional embalmers.

All the defuncts were in disorder.

A child's wasted face seemed still to smile over the shoulder of a withered sexagenarian. Men and women were intermingled shamelessly.

Some skeletons were perfectly so, a pair of endless cavities represented eyes and glowed down at the bleached teeth.

Some of the mummies were of dark hue, some yellow as parchment, some white as chalk, thanks to the diverse action of the agents they were the prey of.

The hair clung in many instances to the heads, yet, elsewhere again, the bald scalps had fallen over the foreheads and left the head bare.

We should hasten to say that half of these receptacles of the hideous were hidden by planks and boards which were piled up like a wall all around the hall.

That supplementary enclosure, signifying a log-house, meant, in the symbolical language of the Charcoal burner, that this was a lodge.

The party that Khor presided over, were not the only occupants of the place.

There were more than fifty serfs there already.

On several blocks of stone which formed the seats, at the farther end of the chamber, were seated three persons.

Khor went to instal himself beside them.

In a deep silence, the recruits that Khor had brought were, one after another, initiated into the first order, that of the "grinders of axes."

When this had been done, all were assembled into the hall once more.

Khor was the chief this time, occupying the central seat. One superior was absent, five being the full number.

To his left was a woman, the Sister of the Shadows.

Her face, besides from the effects of her fifty years, had been disfigured accidentally, no doubt, by some powerful agent. Her own mother would not have recognized her.

She kept the hood of her robe well wrapped about her head, however, so her visage attracted no attention.

Khor's right hand men were serfs, aged like himself, their faces were uncovered, in all boldness.

Khor lifted his voice amid the silence.

"Bring before us Kiev and Novgoro," ordered he.

Two couples drag each a man from a side-recess.

One was terrible in fear. The other, a little man with foxy muzzle and white moustache bristling like a brush, was as self-possessed as could be.

"Kiev!" said the old serf, "on May the nineteenth, 1792, did you not sell to the Marquis de Boissy, a Parisian aristocrat, the secret of Danton the patriot's house, well-knowing that the royalists contemplated the great man's murder?"

It was evident that Khor had not been idle while he had been abroad.

The prisoner was a little relieved in mind, it was evident, but only a little. However, he answered quite firmly.

"No!"

"You were in Paris at that time?"

"About that year. I forget, it is so long back."

"I have been told that you did make that bargain."

"Some mistake or a lie, brother."

"Do not call me brother. A member accused is no longer a brother. To come down to a period not so remote, were you or were you not in Smolensko last Tuesday?"

"Yes. My lord the boyard of Valdesoi sent me there to pay three hundred roubles to a merchant."

"You did nothing else?"

"I? No!"

There was a tremor in his voice, nevertheless.

"Brothers," said old Khor, "look your last on this traitor, who sold a great chief in other days, and who would sell us now."

The eyes of all turned upon the prisoner in no encouraging manner.

But Master Kiev was one of those first-class rascals, cast in brass, and he bore the visual ordeal very well.

"Anybody may be accused," said he audaciously, "but blaming a man with out proofs is a shame. Where are any?"

Khor waved his hand.

"Zarko, Teodor, speak."

"I saw Kiev, on last Tuesday, enter the office of the commissary of secret police in the Little Perspective, Smolensko."

"I saw Kiev and heard him confer with the commissary. I was hidden in the next house, by order of the Sister of Shadows."

The gaunt, cowed female arose.

"I have suspected Kiev for over two years back. I posted Teodor where he says. I have the full report. It agrees with another sent me by the clerk of the commissary, one of the brothers granted unconditional permission not to come to the lodge."

Her voice, deep toned, thrilling, sent a shiver over the traitor.

The carbonari, standing close around him, were waiting impatiently.

In the stillness, the drops of water could have been counted that trickled off the stalactites upon the dead bodies.

Khor had conferred with his associates.

He rose from his seat again.

"Novgoro, you have been the constant companion of that false brother for a long time. His actions must have excited your suspicions. Yet we have had no warning word from you."

"Save my life," shrieked Novgoro, "and I will confess all!"

"You have confessed too much by that exclamation alone. Learn that we chiefs spare no pains to gain all knowledge that will aid us to lead the faithful to the great aim of our lives."

He turned to his associates.

"What do you pronounce," he asked.

"Death," said each in his turn.

"Death!" said the Sister of the Shadows.

And "Death!" was the syllable that ran awfully around that vault, where so many embodiments of the word grinned and mowed at the living who were going to add to the number.

"Do the brothers confirm the judgment?"

Not a single voice was in the dissentient party.

The culprits moaned.

"Search them," said Khor.

Not only were the pockets of the two turned inside out, but their garments were ferreted into every seam. Some papers were found secreted in Kiev's coat. They were passed up to the presiding four.

"Confirmation of the previous testimony," said one of the judges, who appeared to be a priest by his look.

This man rose.

"Brothers, when our Lord Jesus——"

All bowed the head.

"Came upon earth to preach peace and good-will unto all men, which can only exist among the free, Judas sold Him for thirty pieces of silver. Our Judas would sell the spirit of our society and the heads of this Lodge of the Interior Beacon, for ten thousand roubles."

A general clamor of fury and threats raged around the culprits.

The woman stood up.

"Let the scholars speak, till we see if they have remembered their lesson."

Young men, for what are we hand in hand?"

Those initiated that night, hastened to chorus:

"To drive the wolves from the forest!"

"Right," said the lugubrious woman. "Kiev, what if a wolf slips into the fold?"

He trembled like a leaf and could not stammer a word.

"You are one under the sheepskin of honest folk," went on the Sister. "Woe to you for having forgotten that oath sworn over the flame!"

"Mercy!" gasped the two wretches.

"You swore," resumed the woman, "to accept death and shame if you betrayed one jot of our rules."

"In the name of your mothers, children, all!" moaned Kiev.

"You would have dragged them down with our ruin. We are so mighty that we might be merciful, but this is not your first crime. We hear of your treachery in France from Khor. We suspect that it was you also that our Polish agent is coming with the proofs against, for having caused the execution of several of the Slaying Band."

A loud murmur ran around the rotunda.

"Our next meeting is three days hence," went on the female judge in her steady voice. "You are condemned to be shut up in this lodge. If you, by God's, or man's, or devil's help, are living when we next come here, you shall preserve your miserable life."

"Oh, pity!"

"Let the hope support you!" thundered she. "It will be all that will be left you."

The villain was subdued at last. He fell like a lump, in a coiled up mass at the feet of his captors.

"As for you, Novgoro," said Khor taking the woman's place. "Your death is to be by the dagger."

There was a pause.

The culprit did not dare to interrupt by begging for mercy.

The Sister of the Shadows opened a book.

"Number Seven-and-thirty," read off she.

The priest stood up.

"I" said he.

"You are to kill your man."

"It is well."

An hour after this, the only living inmate of that part of the catacombs, was the doomed Kiev.

Without light, food, other water than the salt and poisonous distillations, his howls to the unhearing vacancy were as vain as any efforts he might make.

Not to have to return to him again, we state that, when the lodge was open once more, he was found dead on a heap of the skeletons.

He had flung them about in some fight or dance that he had apparently held with them.

Madness had preluded his death.

CHAPTER X.

THE DEATH-STRUGGLE.—THE BOND OF HATE.—THE DOUBLE FALL.—THE CONFESSION.

In breaking up the meeting of that night, the dispersing members carried with them the bound Novgoro, and also one of the more perfectly preserved corpses.

This was to add to the mystery and horror of attending the body of the traitor, if it should chance to be discovered.

On the edge of one of the many quarry holes, they left the priest, the bound man and the anatomy.

The priest waited till the serfs had all disappeared in the darkness.

A small stunted pine inclined over the gap. It was but a stump, for lightning had split off its branches in the Autumn.

At the foot of this, the captive lay.

The priest dragged the man out to the end of the projecting trunk, and hung him, so to say, across it.

Then he returned for the mummy. With great care he interwove the bony fingers so that they would unite the arms in a loop. This he passed over Novgoro's head, so that the horrid object was slung on his back by this means.

Round the feet of the prisoner, the priest twisted the shrivelled but still tough sinews and ligatures of the corpse's limbs.

Like an enlarged death's-head moth, the captive bore the skeleton upon his back.

The priest removed the gag that had hitherto compelled his prey to maintain silence.

The peasant, superstitious, affected profoundly by the fright of the night's incidents, cried for mercy.

The tormentor, having finished the preparations, only smiled.

"Death, death, a sudden death!" cried the serf.

"If the fall kills you."

"But it may not."

"God may release you."

"Oh, no, no! For I am guilty of sacrilege to His temple. I robbed your Church of St. George's at the Czar's Birthday."

"You, was it?"

"Yes, Papa Polonius! I—I! Kill me!"

"Wretch, what have you done with all those papers! They are the lives of our agents and brothers."

"Kill me!" shrieked the man, almost rejoiced at having so exasperated his torturer.

He saw the steel flash in the latter's hand.

The knife at the end of its swift descent, smote the prostrate man on the breast,

The sufferer yelled with pain, but the next instant with joy.

By chance, the blade, its point only running along a rib, had severed three of the cords, encompassing the serf.

Novgoro made such an effort as was only possible to a man in his situation.

To the surprise of the priest, he saw his prisoner lift both his arms. The snapped cords hung from them.

A second stab came down upon the rising serf.

Better directed than that delivered before, the blade ran through the flesh up to the hilt, and the warm jet of liquid flooded the hand, and glued it to the handle.

At the same instant, Novgoro glided off the pine.

But he had caught at the hands of his enemy in so doing.

The dagger fell down into the pit-hole.

The priest was of great strength however.

Although he was compelled to follow the traitor in the fall, yet he had joined his feet in bestriding the tree.

With a shock that made the blasted pine shake to the roots, the two men were left hanging.

Novgoro encircled the priest's fingers with a pressure that drove the blood out of them and all but broke them.

Polonius, head downwards, held by his legs intertwined above him as we have said.

A minute passed, only having its silence broken by the hurried breathing of each.

"Tell where the papers are," said Polonius, "and I will save you."

Novgoro, who was losing his blood by both wounds, said nothing.

"You may keep the vessels of the church, and shall go free as a Cossack," said Polonius.

"Curse you—Come!"

Papa Polonius felt a redoublement of the weight suspended by him.

Novgoro was raising himself up by sheer strength of arms.

When his head had reached the elevation of his hands and the papa's, so interwoven, the priest felt teeth on each side of his left wrist, trying to meet through bone and sinew.

"Devil!" yelled he.

He wrenched his right hand from the other's gripe, and struck wildly at the serf.

The latter, whose act had been the last of his fading despair, was only retained by his teeth above the hand which both his held.

But both grasp and bite relaxed in a moment.

A dull crash was audible presently as the body fell, the grinning corpse still attached, to the depths of the chasm.

Polonius united his efforts in an attempt to rise.

The blood had descended to his head, dizziness had seized him, and something like paralysis had fastened on his legs which had so long upheld a weight so fatiguing.

But he managed to bend upwards and clutch at the tree. Little by little, he reached the firm ground. Once there, he flung himself down at full length, to recruit after the expense of energy.

The aching of his bleeding hand, recalled him to himself. Binding it up roughly, Polonius left the quarries and hastened to his house, situated by the neighboring church.

On the way, close to it, a man, with the step and air of a maniac, rushed by him.

He challenged him in the secret way of carbonari, but the stranger had passed him without seeming to see him.

This unknown went down the road past the quarries, but, although the fact was singular on account of no serf being known to venture there at the late hour, the priest was too intent upon matters more important to pay further heed.

As he entered his dwelling, the stranger had gone far down the road.

In the midst of the solitude and darkness, he stopped.

It was Ivan.

Ivan, who, burning all over with the marks of the whip on his shoulders, inflicted in her presence, had wandered off he knew not where.

That he resembled one insane was nothing strange. For but a thin partition divided his besieged intellect from one wholly conquered by despair.

In the whirlwind of emotions, the sway of each had short-lived reigns. Now hate bade him apply the torch to the tyrant's palace, and the steel to his throat.

Hopelessness counseled a plunge into the Dneiper. All he had to do was to fold his arms in the dive, and soon the ice would close over him.

No blush of shame would then arise at sight of him by Marguerite.

But the tragedies played by revengeful fancies in the theatre of his thought, are more easily imagined than tediously detailed.

He was startled from his reverie by a voice, an appeal in agony akin to his own.

Sufferers are brothers.

He pushed aside his meditations to listen.

Again and again, a heart-rending, but feeble complaint reached him.

The repose of the night and the clearness of the frosty air helped the faint sound to float to him.

He moved instinctively towards the spot.

On sending up a shout in answer, the appeals grew louder.

Over the dangerous way full of crevices, pits, snowdrifts, hills of ice, Ivan came to the brink of a hollow.

In its depths, the weak moans continued.

Despite the darkness, he slid and stumbled down the rugged sides till he found himself beside a ghastly sight.

Novgoro and the mummy, both shattered and yet both embracing still.

In a few minutes, with his hands alone, Ivan removed the bonds.

But the serf was past human aid.

He would not let the Samaritan leave him.

"I am Novgoro, serf of the Boyard of Lazova. Buried in my hut, to the left of the fire-place, is some money. It is yours for this kindness."

"You have no one more worthy and better founded in claims on it?"

"I am alone in the world. Take the money, as I say. There are, in the same hiding-place, some silver and golden plate, vessels of the church. Don't shrink from me. I am punished for the sacrilege."

"No one shall know of it, by me, at least. You shall be buried in holy ground all the same. Father Polonius is a friend of mine, he will yield to my request," said Ivan, to cheer the sufferer.

"Papa Polonius your friend," almost screamed the other. "Are you—"

He made a sign. But he could see, by Ivan's completely perplexed expression, that his suspicion was unfounded. The painter was not a member of the secret order, it was clear.

"Who are you?" asked he, changing his tone.

"Ivan Khorvitch!"

"Ivan the son of Khor! the serf that the old prince treated as a son?"

This the man spoke in a very strange tone.

"Yes, yes. Well?"

Novgoro was muttering to himself.

"Yes. I shall be avenged on that old wretch Khor, at least. A serf makes the hardest serf-driver! Ha, ha!" he laughed.

Ivan fancied that the dying man was in delirium.

"Ivan," said the latter earnestly. "You know the upper room, next the belfry, of the bell-tower of Kalouga."

"Well. It was my studio in my young days."

"Right. There are a quantity of rubbish, canvas and marbles, there. Ivan, if you would rise above your highest hopes, swear to obey me."

"I will do anything that is reasonable. Take my word. I need not swear, for I am not at any one's disposal from one hour to the next."

The reflections on suicide had not quitted the artist, it was plain.

"Go to that room," said Novgoro, in his weak voice of death. "Under the window-sill in the northern wall, search. My accomplice, one of your master's serfs, hid his share of the plunder there. I slew him since—never mind that, now. Listen to me."

His breath was shorter and shorter.

Ivan stooped over him.

"I could read a little—I opened one packet of papers—your life—your future is there—forgive! one good act—pardons—oh!"

The revelation, merely hinted at, expired with him.

Yet the indication was instantly seized upon by hope.

Ivan rose from receiving the traitor's last words, not so lost a man as before.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BALL-ROOM.—MISTIGRIS RECEIVES AN APPOINTMENT AND MAKES ONE.—
IVAN ON THE SEARCH.—KHOR AND REVENGE.

The ball that Count Karateff was giving to celebrate his return was a great success.

His mother's term of mourning not being ended, she had not given it in her name. She appeared in a dark robe, in token of her recent bereavement, but it was so brightened with jewels that its gloom acted merely as a foil.

The rooms were heated and perfumed so that the atmosphere was as temperate as that under a Syrian sun.

The guests were the gentry and nobility of the vicinity.

At one end of the hall the servants were admitted to view the splendor. Acoulina and others of good personal appearance, carried refreshments and ices to the dancers.

Mistigris was in his glory. He had, with a quickness only his, actually acquired a smattering of Russian and, helping it out with his natural pantomimic gifts (inherent to Frenchmen) could make the domestics understand him. Most of the guests, though, spoke French after a fashion.

In one of the young painter's flights about the room, he stopped to exchange some compliments with the Countess de Mauleon.

She was almost completely confined to the attentions of the host.

But, taking advantage of a momentary absence of Count Karateff, Marguerite made a sign to Mistigris. She slipped a note into his hand and whispered: "with caution."

Mistigris withdrew to a side-chamber and eagerly perused the communication. "Come in an hour, to the second story of the bell-tower of the eastern wing. They tell me it is never entered. No better place can be for the interview sought with you by _____ de M."

Mistigris felt his brain whirl.

Here was an adventure to cap the climax!

Not knowing the lady as well as we, he formed the surmise natural to his ignorance and his tastes.

An intrigue with that beautiful dame was all he could see in the engagement.

Ah, would he not be able now to hold up his head among his old flames and comrades.

A love affair with a real countess!

While indulging in rapturous anticipations, a supplementary project entered his head.

To carry it out he made several philosophical inquiries among the Russian girls, and then drew Acoulina aside.

Within the hour, Mistigris had disappeared from the ball-room. Soon after the Countess de Mauleon found that her robe had been torn by her careless rising while her chair was on her founce. Of course, Karateff had to excuse her.

Annoyed by her continued absence, he refused any other partner and, having wandered into the anti-chamber, indulged in the wines.

While so engaged, two of the domestics, unaware of his proximity, leaning against the wall, were chatting.

He heard every word of the following dialogue:

"Basil," said one, "what did the Frenchman ask you?"

"What was the Russian for 'bell-tower'?"

"And he gave me a rouble for telling him what 'two hours hence' was. He must be making a dictionary."

Ha, ha! Very like. But, whisper, he'll not progress very fast if he gives so much time to pretty Acoulina."

They went away.

Karateff rose to his feet.

The "pretty Acoulina" was Ivan's sister! Ivan had fled. She was in his hands. His cunning could understand what Mistigris had been planning.

"Oh, French fox," muttered he, "beware of the Russian wolf. He is afloat to snatch away your game."

In the meanwhile, Mistigris had climbed up the tower stairs.

It had two entrances, one from outside, one from the wing of the house.

The latter was used by the Frenchman.

The bell was rung to direct the serfs in their labors, and for any sudden alarm, such as fire, and so forth.

Hence there were no fastenings to the doors on the ground floor.

The Parisian had not long to wait in the chill yet bearable air of the tower.

The countess came up the steps.

She had a pelisse over her ball dress.

"Ah, good, you are here!" exclaimed she eagerly.

"Yes, of course, my lady."

"Let us not lose a moment."

Mistigris was a little amazed at this alacrity.

However, he acquiesced to her desire.

"Monsieur Mistigris," says she, "the cause of my making this appointment lays deep on my heart."

"And on mine, my lady."

She took his gallant tone for one of fervency.

"I thought so. So, like me, you will do anything for your friend?"

"Eh?"

"Is not Ivan your friend?"

The mask had fallen. The Parisian, in all justice be it said, stifled his chimeras on the spot.

"Oh yes. So it is Ivan in question, eh?"

"Ivan, of course."

"What a fool I was," muttered the young man. "Well, my lady, what can I do?"

"All that I cannot. He is in the hands of one who will show him no mercy. He must fly."

"He has fled, they say."

"Monsieur Mistigris, I believe he is nearer us than you or they think."

"Nearer me!" she should have said.

"Here is some money to aid his escape."

"Good," said Mistigris, receiving a pocket book. "I am ready to aid my friend with head and purse—but both are somewhat light."

"But I have no passport," continued Marguerite. "You carry yours, no doubt?"

"Oh, yes, I always keep it on me. You see, my lady, the gens d'armes can rarely distinguish between artists and vagabonds."

He produced the paper in request.

"It will do," murmured she.

"Yes," he coincided. "It is rather vague. Eyes so-so, nose unnoteworthy, mouth passable—altogether more faint than flattering."

"You will find him, and give him these. He may be able to reach some country where his troubles cannot follow."

"But am I to say —"

"Whence come they? No! Take the gratitude to yourself. You deserve it. He must not know that I had a hand in this. Monsieur Mistigris, I am to be as one dead to him."

"As you will my lady. But do not believe that you can ever be forgotten."

There was truth in the tone of his compliment.

"His path cannot cross mine again. We have spoken our farewell."

She gave her hand to her ally, pressed his, and rapidly left the room and the tower.

Mistigris, the money and the paper in his hands, remained confounded.

"Not exactly my expectancy!"

That was his comment on the interview.

He was a good fellow at heart, though.

The question was, how could he find the fugitive.

He was revolving this problem of a needle in a hay-stack, when he felt an arm thrown around him, and a hand at his throat.

"A sound—and you die!" said a fierce voice.

"Heaven! Ivan!" gasped the Frenchman half choked.

"Mistigris! A thousand pardons!"

He released him.

Ivan had entered the tower by the outer door. He was coming to verify the last words of the traitor carbonari. He had seen the Frenchman in the obscurity, and grappled him as we have said.

"By Saint Mistigris! if there be one," said the Parisian, recovering from the violence of the attack and his astonishment. "Here is a lucky meeting."

In a few words, he imparted to him the plan of evasion. To his unutterable amazement, Ivan would not accept the passport or the bank bills.

"No, my friend," said he, "partner in that glorious art in which I shall never more struggle. I mean to stay here, on the battle-field where I fancy the contest is to be fought out. The only person that I could have lived for, has turned from me—"

"Oh, no, I——"

"Not you——"

Mistigris guessed all. But he did not like to betray the countess.

"I thank you from the depths of my soul," said Ivan. "I cannot, I repeat, accept your kindness. A shake of the hand."

They embraced, in the French manner, and as the knights of old sealed their friendship.

With a pain at his heart that he rarely had known, Mistigris left the serf alone.

Ivan flung himself down by the barred window, and on the foot of the stairs leading to the upper room.

"The friend so faithful," sighed he. "The loved one so untrue! I came to this place, in spite of myself. I peeped in at the windows, unseen. I saw, through the double glaze, Marguerite, more lovely than ever, amid all the brilliancy. Karateff was by her side. She talked with him, smiled on him. Not an instant did she seem to think of me."

Why should she think of him now. She had seen him treated as a dog. She had pitied him, true. Would she not have pitied the hound chastised cruelly? The appeal told of kindness, but not necessarily of love.

The darkness seemed to grow thicker about him.

It was only the vanishing of his most cherished dream.

At intervals, the strains of music flowed from the ball-room, and came even to him.

Its sweetness but increased his anguish.

It was the same air to which he and Marguerite had wound through the prescribed figures, in her uncle's at Paris. Her breath on his cheek, her hair on his breast, her form in his arms!

He ground his teeth and felt the tears come to his eyes, as such pictures presented themselves.

So enwrapped was he that he did not see that a figure had entered the room and was beside him.

Ivan's face was towards the doorway, and the apparition had not come through it.

Indeed, one of a pair of statues of the saints Gabriel and George, the only ornaments in the chamber, had worked on a pivot so as to unmask a trap in the floor.

These images had been wrought for the church of Vyksomsky by a foreign artist. But as the Greek church admits no images in its precincts, Prince Bariatinski had bought them of the sculptor, who had made such a mistake, and had them set up in this tower.

In his life-time, the edifice had been used for an astronomical observatory.

His taste for learning had indirectly conduced to Ivan's superior education.

The man, who had made use of this unsuspected means of ingress, clapped his hand on Ivan's shoulder.

"Ivan my son!" said he.

"My father, here!"

He looked around puzzled.

"I did not see you come," said he. "How did you enter?"

"How does the rat enter whenever he would? Khor is a rat!"

"A truce to enigmas. Leave me to myself. I thought this would be solitude."

"So did I. But I am glad at having found you."

"Why so?"

"Humph! a secret."

"What! have you a secret from your son?"

"Can slave father ever trust slave son?" queried the old man bitterly.

"As you please; I am in no humor to be a confidant."

"Do you hope for nothing?"

"Father, the woman I loved has abandoned me. I did not know I loved her so much. Father, my grief is so, that I have not room for hope!"

"You are young. I am old, yet I hope. I saw the woman I loved outraged by a man I hated, yet I lived and hoped. There's a lesson, profit by it."

"Your old words, father. I do not care to have *his* life even. If I must be a murderer, it will be in injuring his detested race."

"Right!" cried Khor, in a joyous tone. "You are with me, then, at last."

"What can we do—dust of the earth?"

"Ivan, my old withered hand holds in its grasp all those lives that are merry at this moment!"

The music came to the tower loudly, laughter of the revelers mingling with it.

"All are mine!" repeated Khor.

"What do you mean?"

In a voice, steady with his fixed design, Khor told his son what we repeat, in substance.

In the disastrous Russian campaign of Napoleon, part of his division "the guard of the emperor," composed of fragments of every arm of the service, threatened to take Kalouga in their line of march.

Prince Bariatinski, who had disbanded a regiment that he had raised on a false rumor of the French being elsewhere, found himself likely to be visited by the legion.

He could destroy his house by fire and rob the foe of that shelter, like the people of Moscow had done.

But he preferred a more murderous plan.

He, Khor and a few other serfs had stowed away in the vault under the tower and the eastern wing, a quantity of powder, intended for his regiment.

By leaving the house standing, the French would no doubt rush into it, such a thing as a roof over them being a marvel. Then, in the night, while the great soldier of fortune become emperor, with his braves, should be snatching a little sleep, a daring hand might fire the slow match.

Chance willed otherwise.

The French passed the district without the delay, which would have been so fatal to them.

"All in the secret are dead except me," said Khor. "Ivan! will not the tyrants die in the same fire that would not have spared the foreigner?"

"Do you alone know this?" asked Ivan abruptly.

Khor laughed slyly.

"Not such a fool," said he. "I belong to a band of men sworn to attain freedom. We have no secrets of such importance from one another."

Ivan seemed to give over some intention, that he had suddenly formed.

"You see the rope there,"

A knotted cord hung down the stair-case well and dangled in plain sight.

"Yes," said the younger serf. "To the bell above."

"Right. Under the vaults of the house are twenty of my friends. In the serfs' village are many more, our weapons are rude, but will kill, all the same."

All that is to be done is give three strokes on the bell, ten seconds interval between each, and—"

He made a sign.

"The match will be lighted, and the tyrants will end their night's amusement in the fate designed for the Frenchman!"

"Oh, my father! there are women and children—"

"Cubs and she-wolves," said Khor. "Women who order their maids, our daughters and sisters to be scourged! Children, who have great men tortured at their least whim! No mercy for such!"

"But, father, there is one lady that must not die!"

He rose.

"Must not, do you hear?"

The old serf only smiled.

"Oh?" cried Ivan, maddened at the other's mocking deviltry. "Spare her, and I am at your beck!"

"What?" caught up Khor with quickness of thought. "Will you join our league, and be the leader we seek?"

"I will!"

"Your hand on it!"

"There—on one condition!"

"Condition?"

"That she lives!"

"I don't know—"

"I will go in among the wretches, and denounce you all to my enemy even!"

"And, ere your lips reveal one word! you and that hated one, and your loved one, will waste away like wax in the furnace."

"It will be something to die with her!"

"But do not fear," said Khor. "Your life is so precious to us that you may ransom hers. Stay here. I will return."

He went to the statue, touched some hidden mechanism, and it wheeled to one side.

"I bear your acceptance to the chiefs," said he.

He laughed, and pointed to the trap, into which he descended.

"See! the rat's hole!"

The statue rolled into its place over his head.

CHAPTER XII.

THE STOLEN PAPERS.—THE FRUSTRATED OUTRAGE.—THE LEAP TO A SISTER'S AID.—MISTIGRIS HAS A DELIGHTFUL DUEL ON HIS HANDS.

The menace of his father had stunned the serf.

The thought of death sleeping under the feet of the countess, ready to annihilate all in its path, was tremendous.

This new turn of affairs made him forget the purpose of his visit to the tower. More to relieve his mind, condemned to wait for his father, compelled to rely on his vague promise, Ivan ascended the stairs slowly.

It was lighter in the upper story.

The apartment was a mere lumber-room. In one corner were dimly outlined several heaps of canvases, blocks of marble just shaped for the chisel, and others of Ivan's boyish attempts.

It made him sigh, the recollection of the petty triumphs which had first brought the attention, and then the affection of the former lord to be expended on him.

He had the end of a candle. By striking the point of his knife on the wall, he caught sparks on a rag of his clothes, and, blowing it into a light, ignited the taper.

This feeble illumination, he carefully veiled.

Then he examined the northern wall, under the window.

In fulfillment of Novgoro's words, a stone was loose. Behind, in a cavity, was a large packet of papers, an empty money bag, and a couple of silver candlesticks battered out of shape.

He hurriedly opened the papers. They were important, but not to him at that moment.

They related to the secret order, being lists of the affiliated, rules of assembly, copies of orders, accounts of agents. All were signed by Polonius, as clerk.

They explained why that priest had been so eager to obtain them from Novgoro.

Suddenly Ivan's eyes glistened.

A number of folded sheets bore this endorsement:

"The Important Confession made to me, April 20th, 1819, by Khor, serf to Prince Bariatinski."

After a cross on a seal, was "Michael Polonius'" signature.

Ivan opened the bundle avidly.

But he had not found which was the first page of the many, and had only perceived that his name occurred throughout, when an interruption of the most serious nature came.

To explain we must go back to the room below.

With a fluttering of the heart which she could not account for, Acoulina, judging that the two hours had elapsed, left the other servants clandestinely.

She proceeded to the tower, as Mistigris had appointed.

She found the chamber empty. Ivan had but recently vacated it.

"Going to take my portrait, he says he is," murmured Acoulina. "Ivan told me it was nothing to hurt me, and I am sure that the Frenchman is very kind, always smiling. My lord the count is always smiling on me too, but not the same way as my lord Mistigris."

A step on the stairs was audible.

"Dear me, I am so frightened!" said the little one. "Here he is!"

With an unsteady step that betrayed the depth of his potations, Count Karateff staggered into the room.

His bloodshot eyes brightened at the sight of the girl.

She recoiled at this apparition, alarming in all sooth to one less innocent and gentle than she.

"Ah, my little lass," said Karateff, toying with his red beard in drunken ungracefulness. "You forgot to render your duty to your lord. Don't you know that you ought to kiss his hand?"

"Oh, no, my lord," faltered Acoulina.

She receded to the other end of the room, while he followed.

"But I will excuse you from that and salute your cheek, showing you homage."

She shrank from him still. She had reached the wall.

The darkness added to her terror. She could only dimly see the count, but his enflamed eyes shone like a tiger-cat's.

"Oh, my lord!" moaned she.

"One kiss, my charmer!"

She eluded his embrace.

"No, my lord! help!"

He pursued her fiercely.

He caught her as she reached the doorway and clasped her tightly.

"One kiss, my dear!"

"No! my father would kill me!"

"A fig for your old knave of a father! here! you must!"

"Help!"

It was this struggle that Ivan heard.

He recognized the tones of his sister's voice.

He did not wait to descend the stairs, but caught at the bell-rope and swung himself by the gigantic leap down the staircase well-hole.

Like a thunderbolt he landed by the side of the man and woman. Like a thunderbolt, too, he dashed the count from the girl.

But like a man it was that he seized the scoundrel by the throat, bent him back on his knee and proceeded to stifle him.

At the uproar, Mistigris, a lantern in his hand, and the Countess de Mauleon appeared on the threshold.

The lady, on hearing that Ivan had refused her gift, determined to befriend his sister. To spirit her away, in a word. Mistigris, well aware where Acoulina was, had guided the countess to the spot.

Mistigris had the pleasure of catching the swooning peasant girl in his arms.

"Count Karateff!" exclaimed Marguerite.

At the sound of her voice, Ivan flung his enemy away from him.

Karateff, sobered, tried to recover his coolness.

"Yes, my lady," said he in a husky voice, effects of drink and the throttling.

"One has to defend one's self even when a hound springs at one's throat."

Ivan disdained to touch him.

"You may thank this lady for having preserved your life. You look surprised, madam, went on he, sarcastically, that a slave should presume to defend his sister. Yes, a serf, my lady. I am *his* serf—but her brother!"

He embraced Acoulina tenderly.

"Count Karateff," said Marguerite, "I am new to Russia, and I have seen many things already that fill me with pain. In such a place, I fear, that even my rank will be no protection. I had previously erred in believing that to a gentleman, woman's helplessness was her best defence. I beg leave to stay no longer under your roof."

"I am ever at your ladyship's orders," returned the Russian. "You may depart when you will."

He lowered his voice to add:

"My mother?"

"She shall not hear for my lips, what would make her blush for her son!"

Karateff bowed, a little to conceal his smile in the belief that a flirtation with a serf-girl would much grieve his parent.

During this time, Ivan had rapidly and in low tones communed with Mistigris. He implored him to leave the palace and go to the cottage of his father Khor, and stay there till morning. Mistigris at first demured, but finally promised. He observed to himself, however, that there was no harm in promising.

The rough voice of Steinhardt broke in upon the party.

"In the devil's name, who's this kicking up a disturbance here?" shouted he.

At the view of the party, revealed by Mistigris's lantern and that of the overseer, the latter altered his accent.

"I beg your pardon, my lord," said he doffing his cap, "and my lady the Countess."

"Steinhardt," commanded the count, "you will have horses put to my lady's sleigh at once."

"Yes, my lord."

In Russian, and in a quick undertone, Karateff subjoined:

"Have the runner braces sawn three parts through."

"I understand, my lord," rejoined the overseer, leaving the room.

The count motioned away Ivan and Acoulina.

"So," said he. "Your reckoning is to come."

Ivan drew himself up proudly.

"May you be as able to meet yours, when yours comes," he deigned to retort.

The next instant, consoling his sister, who hung upon his arm, he quitted the tower.

The countess, not daring to look at or speak to Ivan, prepared to go away also. But she could not resist throwing a screen more or less feeble between her lover and him who so hated him.

"My lord, remember that I am niece to the Ambassador of France. I shall take care that whatever may befall those unhappy people within your power, shall be known at St. Petersburg. You are aware that the Emperor rarely overlooks those cases of cruelty which foreigners have inadvertently witnessed."

The count merely bowed. He had taken his precautions.

The countess stretched out her hand towards Mistigris. But he did not offer his arm.

"If you could do me the greater honor of descending alone," said he. "I—I have a little business to go through here."

She understood. Love sharpens our discernment of another's love. She accordingly found her way out of the tower alone.

"Am I at least to have the honor of M. Mistigris' company," asked the count affecting a carelessness not his.

"For a while," rejoined the Parisian.

"Ah! and finish the portrait of pretty Acoulina?"

"No!" responded Mistigris to the sneer. "I should not like to trace her figure when I should see the sardonic visage of a fiend in the background."

The count started, but he did not drop his ill-boding smiles.

"That face would bear a very resemblance to Count Karateff."

The Russian said nothing.

"In fact," went on Mistigris, like a physician puncturing a wound to see where the most pain was received. "I do not know in whom else I could find such a perfect Mephistopheles."

"Indeed! And do you feel eager to play the part of Valentine?" said the Count.

"He was a brave soldier, a character for any man to be proud to essay."

"Remember that Mephistopheles killed Valentine," said the noble.

"Yes," quickly retorted the Frenchman, "by a foul thrust in the back! that is an action quite natural to one that would attempt the outrage of a girl in the presence of her brother—quite natural to a Count Karateff, to be brief."

"You mean to fight!"

"Of course—parbleu! Unless such a man is so deeply a coward that I must prefer Ivan's plan."

He motioned towards the large barred windows.

"It is about as high as the grand tier of the opera," concluded he.

"You may spare your wit, sir," said the Russian. "When shall it be?"

"Oh, after supper."

"Where?"

"Why—a—why not here? We can lock the door against intruders."

"Pistols?"

"As you please."

"I will go find a friend."

"Khovalski will act for me," said Mistigris.

They exchanged a bow of the most exquisite character. Upon this the count left the tower.

Mistigris stood regarding himself before the lantern he had brought.

"Adventures are heaped upon me," he mused. "The countess' imbroglio has not resulted quite as charmingly as I was led to fancy, but then this is a delightful duel to have on my hands. 'It shall appear in 'Galignani' and the 'Mercure Francais,' with my name in full, never you fear!'"

He went to the door.

"I've only to bind Khovalski, and put him up to the affair. Then lock the door."

"An easy matter, only that there was no key in the lock.

The painter remembered that he had seen the old housekeeper jangling a bunch of antediluvian keys at her girdle. In all likelihood she would be able to find one for this door in the collection.

At the foot of the stairs he met Ivan, to his surprise.

"You will not forget your promise, my friend," said the serf.

"Oh, no, I never forget promises."

He added mentally:—"It is the fulfillment of them that usually escapes me."

"Shall I promise again?" asked he willingly.

"Go to my father's cottage, I tell you, and stay there till morning."

"All right, my dear fellow. Good bye. I'll see you again, and maybe have good news for you."

He alluded to his contemplated "winging" of the count.

Ivan smiled sadly, shook the other's and hand they parted.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BREAK-DOWN.—THE COUNTESS'S RETURN.—ENGAGED!—THE AVOWAL AT THE BRINK OF DEATH.

WITH loud whoops of the driver and amid much rattling of the trace chains and jingling of bells on the high collars of the half-wild horses, the sledges containing the countess and her two French maids, started off from the mansion.

The speed equalled that of the passing before Marguerite's eyes of all the panorama of pleasant thoughts in which the abandoned Ivan had had a part.

A hollow murmur that was in the air, grew deeper and the scene darker. A fall of snow was adding to the mantle upon the ground.

They had reached the serf village, when the countess's sleigh, leaned to one side, and at another leap of the horses, fell altogether.

The driver jumped off into the snow bank and extricated the lady.

Instantly all the train stopped. The runner of the sledge, most singularly, had snapped off under its light load, and yet those carrying the two maids and the baggage had born their heavier burdens well.

They proposed that the lady should go into one of the serfs' cottages until a new vehicle should be brought.

She left her women to do that. But she, from an unaccountable urging, resolved to turn back to the mansion, whose windows were marked out in misty glimmering on its dark mass.

She mounted one of the sleigh horses, sitting on the doubled up furs which served as saddle, in a style that showed that her equestrian skill displayed in Longchamps or the Bois had been founded on more than mere elegance.

Disdaining an escort, she rode rapidly on the backward direction.

In that short gallop, a thousand apprehensions assailed her.

The seemingly natural accident perplexed her.

The dread of something unknown impending, of which the check in her departure was but a link, caused her to hesitate on approaching the mansion.

The horse had "balled" his hoofs and his steps emitted no sounds on the snow. But the bells in his collar would have signalled her coming. With difficulty she alighted, tied the horse to the stump of a large tree near the beaten track, and went forward on foot.

The only person on whom she could rely was Mistigris.

Her late confidence in him had made them quite intimate. She felt that he had divined her passion in all its extent and that his friendship for Ivan, apart from any feeling of adoration he might have had for her, would cause the Frenchman to defend her.

Afraid to enter the palace by its main porch, where a cluster of servants gilt-laced and bedizened were stared at by the serfs, she made a circuit.

In doing so she had to push through the soft snow in more than one place where she quitted the track, being blotted out by the falling snow.

She grew bewildered, fancied that she heard voices calling her this way or that, as if the flakes were enchanted like the speaking stones of the Arabian Nights.

She staggered, fell twice, and, by miracle only, found her hand on the door of the tower.

Mistigris had last been seen by her there. He might be there now.

Scarcely pausing to shake off the snow on her cloak and furred high boots, she dashed up the stair-cases in spite of the darkness.

She stopped once.

A dull cavernous roar, like the rumbling of a subterraneous river, mournfully boomed out under her feet.

It was not repeated, and she set down to a fresh fancy of hers.

But it was really a low assent of the many serfs harbored in the vault, to the proposition that Khor had brought to them. To have Ivan in their ranks, they would spare the Frenchwoman's life, all the more easily from her not being a Russian.

When the Countess de Mauleon, breathless with her exertion, came into the room of the second story, she found herself in darkness, except on one side. There the bars of the window formed black squares on the leaden snow-filled sky.

"Mistigris! Monsieur Mistigris!" she called in louder and louder accents as each appeal was unnoticed.

The sound of steps overhead, and the glimmer of a light at the head of the stairs, warned her that some one there had heard her at length.

It was a mutual surprise that the two had.

For it was Ivan, the candle end in his hand, a handful of paper in the other, that appeared on the steps.

Hardly re-commencing the document, he had been thus a second time called off from the perusal.

His look had been a settled one of blank despair, for he had seen the sledges leaving the palace, and watched the countess disappear, without a turn of her head or a rearward glance evincing any recollection of him.

His look now as painful surprise.

She had never been fairer than in this dim light. It imparted a dreamy lustre to her that was irresistibly alluring.

Her eyes were full of tender, melting joy at the meeting. They were widely opened in their astonishment.

She had lost her fur cap, and her hair had broken from its net and braids and was flowing down upon her shoulders. Her dress was shining with half-dis-

solved snow, but here and there a sparkling unthawed flake was like a lily star on the dark folds. Some of the icy particles glittered like diamonds on the curls around her forehead.

Ivan descended the stairs hurriedly.

"Oh, madame! you here! how comes it! I thought you happily away!"

He had spoken so harshly to battle against the enchantment of her ravishing presence.

A thrill of agony ran through him as he remembered what an infernal outburst lay beneath those walls ready to be unloosed at any moment.

She paused to assume a tone as far from her natural bent as his.

Neither heard the sharp but faint grinding of a key in the lock of the door which Marguerite had flung to, behind her.

With a smile, Mistigris was performing that operation. He had found the implement.

"There!" said he to himself as he returned to the ball-room. "The place is secure from any intruders."

When Marguerite could trust herself to speak, it was in rather proud, dispassionate tones.

"Sir! I returned on account of an accident arriving to my vehicle. I suffered myself to be needlessly alarmed perhaps. I do not wish to remain here."

"No! you must not!" cried, Ivan setting down the light on the pedestal of one of the statues. "Oh, madame, for your own sake, begone from here at once."

He crossed the room at a bound, and caught at the handle of the door to fling it open for her egress.

She was frightened by his frantic accents.

"Oh! what means this," exclaimed the serf, abruptly. "The door fastened on us!"

In vain he tugged.

The clumsy Russian lock held firm.

"Ah!" almost screamed the lady. "Is this some treachery?"

A vague suspicion burned her brain. How like Count Karateff to have her dishonored by the serf whom her conduct might have exasperated to that point, and then seal her lips upon the subject of his crime, by the threat of publishing her enforced shame.

She shrunk away from Ivan.

He guessed at her dread.

"I deceive—I betray you!"

It needed only that.

"I!" repeated he reproachfully. "Let my actions speak against this plot I never dreamed of."

He relinquished his fruitless exertions against the door. There was not a splinter of wood in the room for a battering-ram.

He rushed to the window.

The bell-rope struck his cheek.

He caught hold of it eagerly.

"See, madame, I can lower you down to the ground. You must escape now, if only to clear my fame in your eyes."

Suddenly, he started back.

The gratings over the window were only now perceived by him. He grasped one in both hands, and put forth all his strength.

The iron held firm as a lignum vitae bough to its trunk.

He exhausted himself in efforts. Once a mighty tug, Titanic, Herculean, made the bar bend. But the lozenge was only a little widened. A dog's head would scarcely have gone through.

He sank upon one knee, panting heavily. He lifted his eyes, full of tears of rage and wretchedness on her.

She interpreted it rightly as meaning:

"You see! I am a man who loves you—but I can do nothing."

Still another chance presented itself. He rushed to the image of St. George and laid hands upon it rudely.

The serfs were below, Khor had said, wherever that concealed trap-hole led.

What of that?

Could an army of even such desperate men, check him, stop him, when he, though unarmed, should be bearing Marguerite on his arm?

But the statue and pedestal were as immovable as if again the solid rock out of which they had been hewn. He bethought him of the secret spring which must exist. His fingers traveled rapidly over every square inch, but no responsive yielding was given to their pressure.

Again he had to rest from so much toil of body, so much disappointed anxiety of mind.

The countess had beheld all his gigantic attacks upon the oak, the iron, and the stone, with admiration, but with bewilderment.

"But what is the meaning of this? Oh, Ivan! you will not let them harm the woman that loved—that lov——"

"The meaning!" cried he. "Oh! that it were not so! Learn, madame, that death is beneath our feet—aye, death, sudden, horrible, terrible!"

"Oh, help!"

"A volcano is ready to blaze at the will of a host of desperate men! slaves! Yes, their hands are chained, free only to destroy!"

"Oh! help! help!" she shrieked hysterically.

The walls beat back her cries. A faint peal of the minstrelsy arose and fluttered through the iron bars and through the broken pane of coarse glass, which gap Ivan had made.

It was the merry march to which the guests were proceeding to the supper-saloon.

The anguish of the countess made Ivan repent that he had revealed the terrible truth.

There had ever been something gentle and child-like in her endearing ways, there was something child-like in her fear of the unseen, indistinct death.

"So young, so young to die!" she murmured of herself. "Ivan!" she cried in a louder voice, "ever my preserver, save my ungrateful self again."

He only shook his head, and dashed away his tears.

"What can I do—for you, even?"

"When you, a brave man, can so despair, I may well believe I am lost."

She took a sudden resolution.

"On the verge of the grave, oh, Ivan!" she said, drawing nearer him. "I may surely fling etiquette, petty doubts, miserable rules, aside."

She paused to clear her voice of sobs.

"I have borne myself shamefully towards you, my noble sir!" she resumed, "I tried to crush the passion that had entirely absorbed my heart, and thought that I had stifled it forever. Yet I labored for you, even after that—to make amends for such cowardice. I descended to the meanest wiles of my sex, to deceive Count Karateff, and relieve your misery."

That explained her smiles upon the noble, witnessed furtively by Ivan and nearly driving him mad.

"But the farther I withdrew myself from you, the stronger became my love! Ivan, forgive me! love me a little in return! If you have suffered most, still I have suffered much! and I am only a woman—all woman now that the titles and riches are nothing before death!"

She had insensibly come to him, he had gradually inclined to her.

He was holding her in his arms, almost before he knew it

It was a moment of such bounteous reward for their individual woes, that the past disappeared like the frost on a pane of glass at a warm breath.

She nestled by his side, her right breast feeling his great heart beating, not wildly, but grandly with the supreme joy. The serf's rough sleeve hung down from her shoulder against her left side. His other hand was holding one of hers.

Sobbing on his breast, not caring to hear verbal acceptance of herself when his embrace declared it, she, no more than he, heard the sole sound in the chamber.

The St. George was slowly wheeling round as if imbued with life and overcoming the dragon once more.

It might have seemed, to poetic eyes, an embodiment of their love conquering the personation of worldly venom.

They did not hear Khor enter, nor see the rage follow the surprise on his face.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SIGNAL OF DESTRUCTION.—THE GRAPPLE.—THE DEATH OF KHOR.—THE REVELATION.—THE DEAD ALIVE.

"That woman here!" muttered Khor wrathfully.

At the least, he felt sure that his son would claim another delay.

He darted up the steps and caught at the bell-rope.

The first boom of the all-important tocsin awoke the loving couple from their engrossing, blissful dream.

The countess coupled the melancholy clang with the peril said to be in embryo, but knew nothing certain.

On the other hand, Ivan swiftly tore himself from her clasp, and pursued the old serf.

A second stroke went forth before Ivan could catch hold of the old man.

"Hands off!" cried he struggling to recover the cord.

Ivan dragged him down to the foot of the stairs.

Strange to say, no appeal to affection's bond came from Khor.

He drew his knife fiercely, more like a savage over a foe than the Abraham over Isaac, immolated to carry out his dream of liberty.

They fell.

Khor, with a sudden effort that one so old could hardly have been believed capable of, rose uppermost.

The countess, overcoming her fright, dashed forward to intervene between her lover and the falling steel.

At that fatal juncture, a key made a rapid turn in the door, and it flew open.

Mistigris, Prince Fedor, another Russian and Count Karateff rushed in.

Two carried candlesticks.

Mistigris had a pistol in his hand.

Karateff snatched its mate from the open box that his second carried.

The two weapons rang out as one.

The countess shrieked and fell as if dead.

One of the combatants had also measured his length.

But Ivan was the one that stood erect.

Mistigris had fired to save his friend, but his ball had flown harmlessly between the two. It was the count's bullet, meant for Ivan, that had buried itself in old Khor's cheek.

The serf did not rise but kept on moaning.

"Ah! my child! let me see my child ere I die! my child!"

Ivan had lifted up the countess, only swooned. He turned to the wounded man.

"I am here, father," said he.

The serf repulsed him.

"My child! my Acoulina!" groaned he.

Mistigris darted from the chamber.

A number of servants, and Stienhardt the overseer, hearing the double shot, came into the tower and on the scene.

One of them, who examined Khor's wound, confirmed the injured man's own opinion. It was mortal.

Acoulina, found in her father's cottage, was soon brought to the tower by the Frenchman.

Khor embraced her eagerly, and he poured out over her all the caresses, all the fond words that a dying parent might conceive of in the way of farewell to living child.

Marguerite, who had bestowed on him many cares, ventured to hint that his son needed his adieu no less than the daughter.

At the remonstrance all could see on the aged face, convulsed by pain of the wound, an expression of a mental contest far surpassing that of physical agony.

He conquered in the end, for a smile, more becoming his aged countenance, appeared on it. He rose to his feet, supported by the serfs.

"Know, all ye," said he in steady voice, "that Ivan here is not my son—not of my blood in remotest way."

All were astounded at this preamble of the man in the grave.

"Know that the Prince Bariatinski seduced my wife, Mavrouska years ago—you know that serf-girls are toys for noble children! In revenge, I changed our offspring, my boy went to his wife's cares, his to the coarse and rugged lot of a serf. I killed Mavrouska, but all believed my tale that she had been drowned in the great flood."

The auditors stood aghast, and drew the circle around the narrator more closely not to lose a word from his paling lips.

"I waited ere I slew the prince—for I wished to live for my great purpose. But last year, a poison of my preparation took him on the road even boyards must travel."

Ivan pulled the papers from the secret receptacle, out of his bosom, and handed them, with a sign of care to Mistigris. Ivan was all of a tremour with emotion.

"So, peasants, behold in Ivan the heir to this house. Obey him, serve him, for he knows what your life is. He will be a master to love."

Thus far, Count Karateff had kept silence, like all the rest. He could contain himself no longer.

"Steinhardt!" yelled he, "seize the babbler! He may be a murderer, but nothing more of his tale can be believed."

Ivan leaped before the daring man and thrust back the overseer.

"Back!" cried he, with a majestic gesture, "back before the truth of dying words!"

The command was eloquent, but habit had made the serfs more obedient to Count Karateff or the whip-master.

In spite of Mistigris, of Prince Fedor and of the countess, all might have been smothered of the important revelation.

But the interposition of another personage gave justice its field.

The rebels, finding the signal only two thirds made could only surmise that Khor had come to some harm, or that a fresh combination had changed his plan. They waited for a space.

He did not return, and hence, after the example of the mountain and Mahomet, they came by the secret way to find him.

So, when a woman's voice cried out:

"Stay! he dies who lays hand on the true lord!"

The serfs and the nobles were amazed to find a line of grim guards drawn around them.

The light glanced from an ugly array of Toulas guns, knives, hatchets and scythe-blades and reaping-hooks set on poles.

The leader of the force had advanced fearlessly as an Amazon between Ivan and those who manaced him.

"Strangers," said Mistigris. "If you will see justice done, let me read this paper aloud."

"We are sons of justice, of free and equal law to all," said a man in a black gown, who seemed the woman's lieutenant.

"Papa Polonius!" cried Ivan, recognizing him.

They shook hands.

"We are all the more attentive," said the priestly slayer of Novgoro, "and I all the more eager to hear, for that the document you hold, sir, is one that I know of."

Mistigris read the parchment. Khor, too weak to speak, nodded his assent to every paragraph.

It was a formal confession of what he had already spoken. Polonius, sworn not to divulge the avowal, could, of course, offer no opposition to its perusal when in hands not possessing it by any breach in his sacred faith.

It annihilated any hopes that Karateff might have had.

Ivan stooped by the dying man's side, and solemnly pardoned him in the name of his father and himself and of his mother, who had gone to her early grave in mourning at the death of a babe, only hers by fraud.

Acoulina, with tear-streaming eyes, was about to imitate that example, and condole with her criminal father for her mother's death.

But the woman-chief of the league interposed.

She too knelt by Khor's side, and began to whisper in Russian to him.

Ivan and Acoulina, the only ones who understood what they were near enough to hear, listened to a strange story then.

Mavrouska had not died from the effects of her husband's hate. Wounded and thrown into the Dnieper, she had been saved by some fishers. She had lived with them for a year and more. She found that her love for Khor was great. She disguised herself, and, as she cared no longer to be admired by man, she had had the courage to alter her visage by burns and cuts.

Then she had returned to her native place, to be near her husband.

One night, following him too closely, the secret assemblage had been surprised by her, or, rather, they had surprised her. She so boldly argued her cause, that they let her join the band. Her energy had led them never to regret the innovation.

Khor had much to repent for. He had the consolation of knowing that one of his victims had escaped, preserved that he might die in her arms.

* * * * *

"My Marguerite," said Ivan, as he entered the palace, the countess on his arm, "I see that Acoulina is smiling again at last."

"Yes," replied the lady, "she poured out all her tears till she sank to slumber on my breast, and she smiled, as if the same truth had been impressed on her, as upon us, that—

"LOVE LEVELS ALL!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE LAST.

THOSE who have gone so far on the path that we have pointed out before them, will not thank us if we, in matter-of-fact terms, try to measure the incalculable happiness of the Prince Bariatinski, Count de Mauleon, and de la Tremouille in France, and his partner. Form your brightest wish, and give it them instead of that of our cold pen.

But we may trace another thread or two that ran, knotted and twined, through the skein unraveled.

Twenty years nearly have gone by.

In a hospital within Sebastopol, bearing still the Russian and the yellow hospital flags that were soon to fall before the allies' red and tri-color, were many of the French wounded in a late assault.

In a corner, set apart for those of rank, a major of chasseurs de Vincennes was slowly passing from life to death.

Several wounds, either fatal, were covered by the bandages on forehead, shoulder, and breast.

By his side, a Sister of the Greek Church Charity of Bomansund, was taking her place as watcher.

At the first look of any duration that she had given the wounded man, she started. But, giving up following the searches for the grounds of her surprise, she calmly went on with her duty. It was simply to drop cool water on the linen and keep the wounds from the fever that would else make the soldier's decease, one of pain.

The longer she kept at the task, the more oppressive became the worldly thought which her acquired habits had bidden her drive away.

When, after an hour, the major moved and spoke in semi-delirium, the sister could be impassive no more.

Not of war were his mutterings, but of sweeter things which made his face be all sunlit with smiles.

He had murmured indistinctly of "Ivan, comrade in art," of a "countess to make our fellows stare! a real countess of the old blood—word of honor!"

Then he shuddered as if the cold of death had touched him.

He breathed a playful malediction, "on the frigid Saint Russia that always freezes Frenchmen sharper than the natives!" He mumbled of balls, of a bell-tower, of a duel. Then his smile grew so brilliant that his face seemed twenty years younger.

He opened his eyes. They fell upon the nurse, and never quitted her from that first look.

"Acoulina!"

She grasped the hand that groped feebly for hers, in answer to the appeal.

Mistigris' lips unconsciously assumed that peculiar shape, seen on children who mutely implore a kiss.

The sister glanced down the ward. No one was noticing her. She bent over the bed, so that her large hood completely curtained the soldier's head.

So cold were his lips, even though the little life left in heart and brain flew to meet hers on their edge, that Acoulina felt a pang in her bosom as though a shiver of ice had been driven into it.

* * * * *

In one of the Crimean correspondents' letters to the Paris "Debats" appeared this paragraph:

"The very loud detonation of a new piece of ordnance in the British camp caused all that had telescopes in hand to level them on the city. The shot was seen to go far beyond the former limit of the English range.

"The immense ball was the first fired from the 'Lancaster' or 'sailors' gun,' it being under charge of a crew of picked artillerists from the British fleet.

"We only learnt to-day the effect of the projectile.

"It passed over the left abutment of the Redan, entered the town, passed through a stone house where some Russian officers of Gortschakoff's staff were dining, and only ended its flight by killing the driver of a country cart and a *Sister of Charity* in the same conveyance.

"Among the officers who died, was: that captain of the Polish Legion, who, it will be remembered, had that affair with Major Mistigris (14th Chasseurs de Vincennes). The major seems to have been right in declaring the man no Pole, but one Count Karateff of Russia, as he deserted to avoid the duel, and now he is slain in the ranks of the enemy. A proof as plain as one can have them, is it not?"

THE END.

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.

"AWAKE, master dear, and hearken to the bad news I'll be telling you," were the first sounds that broke on the slumber of Gerald O'Donnell, one bleak November morning, as he lay on his somewhat circumscribed couch, in a small apartment of the *Caserne* at St. Germain.

"Who's that?" cried the young soldier, starting up, and shaking off the stout arm which had been applied to his shoulder.

"Who is it but meself, your own Lanty M'Carthy, that has made so bould as to rouse you, that you may get out of this with speed."

"*Mille diables!* what fool's errand are you come on now?"

"Whisht! master, darlint! or they'll hear us colloquing, and enter without sans ceremonie."

"Golly! the Grand Monarque, Louis the Superb, or my own King James could not break in on the privacy of an officer of the Irish Brigade."

"Much them devils below cares if you were the commander of his Holiness the Pope's army, they'd walk in, and make you walk out, and away wid you to that sweet place they call the Consurgery. I wonder which of the bla'guards that you dealt wid in Paris—and sartainly we left in such a hurry, I hadn't time to go and settle wid 'em, even if you'd had the means, so the fault was in the sudden order we got, and not yours;—I wonder which of them has demaned himself by sending the civil officers to take the body of one of the Boddy-guards?"

"M'Carthy, we must manage to avoid them to day, at all hazards; it is my tour of duty at the palace, and to be absent from my post would cost me my commission."

"Och, then, good luck to them chaps, serjeants as they call themselves, you're safe, my jewel, for the next four-and-twenty hours, anyway; they can't take you whilst on King's guard, so I'll lead them off the scent, whilst you get drest and make the best of your way to the parade. Onct there, and I'd like to see the murdering villian of a catch-pole that would dare put the tip of his ill-looking little finger on the fringe of your epaulette!"

Away hurried the faithful Lanty to mislead the myrmidons of the law, and

as he belonged to a nation, celebrated, in a thousand stories, for bothering bailiffs, his master was enabled to reach the parade ground without being interrupted.

Gerald O'Donnell was a cadet, belonging to one of the oldest families in Ireland.

Their adherence to the cause of James had deprived them of their paternal acres.

The head of the house, Sir Theophilus, after witnessing the fall of two of his sons on the memorable battle-field, near Boyne Water, had followed his exiled master to France.

Unable to support his youngest boy, he had gladly accepted for him a commission in the Irish Brigade, and shortly after sought a refuge from worldly cares in the monastery of St. Denis.

Better would it have been had he watched over his high-spirited son, who with all the impetuosity of youth, soon involved himself in debt in "the good city of Paris," his handsome person and gaiety of manner easily obtaining credit from divers tailors, cutlers, hatters, plumassiers, glovers, and tradesmen generally.

Little did he dream, or little did he heed, that these obliging Messieurs, who protested that "they were only too much honored in receiving the commands of such a gentleman as *the O'Donnell*," would ever become the most inexorable duns.

Still less, indeed, did he imagine that they would become so attached to their gallant cavalier, as to desire to have him in safe custody, that they might occasionally gratify their eyes by peeping at the fine bird through the bars of his stone cage.

There was an air of triumph in his look and step, as O'Donnell marched his men to the Corps of the Guard, that attracted the notice of many of the spectators, who had assembled, as was customary, to see the parade at the usual hour.

None knew the cause of this excitement, or guessed that the proud, almost haughty bearing would be humbled on the following morning, by a sourvy bailiff.

Left to himself, he struggled to shake off the painful thoughts attendant on his situation, and gladly caught at any object which was likely to divert him from contemplating the degrading fate his past imprudence now threatened him.

The arrival of a cumbersome *caleche*, which drew up at a small door near the grand entrance of the palace, could not fail in his present mood, to attract his attention.

But when he beheld descend from the carriage a lovely girl, whom he had seen at a ball given by Louis XIV., in honor of James' birthday, he hastened to the spot to gaze upon that beauteous face, which had so often appeared in his dream.

An old man, muffled in a cloak, observing the advance of O'Donnell, drew the arm of his fair charge through his own, and hurried away toward the postern.

But ere they disappeared, a glance from a pair of brilliant eyes went to the heart of the young Irishman, and left him transfixed to the spot, gazing after the conquering fair, as though his looks could pierce the solid carve-work of the oaken door.

How long he would have retained this statue-like position it is impossible to tell.

Fortunately, the cry of "*Aux armes!*" roused him from his trance, and he hastened to tender military honors to the exiled King, who, attended by one gentleman only, left the palace on foot.

For many an hour the fair form O'Donnel had gazed on, banished from his thoughts the dreaded morrow; so absorbed, indeed, was he in delicious reveries, as to be scarcely conscious of the entrance of Lanty, and the various preparations he made for "the master's dinner."

"Shure and I thought I'd never get shut of them devils incarnate, but lave me alone in the long run."

"Oh, those eyes!" sighed O'Donnel.

"By me soul you may say that! I'll engage they'll not be able to see out of them till day's dawn to-morrow, for I've sewed 'em up."

"And what a form—!"

"They're both lying on the same form, at the caberay where I gave them the treat."

"And such a foot!"

"By Jagurs, but I got the length of it, any way," continued Lanty; "there now, I'll engage there's as pretty a guard-room dinner as heart can desire. A nice tureen of pottage de ver, solfrit, and a rotee, but whither it's made of beef or pig, meself don't know, but I'll engage it smells elegant!"

"*Charmante fillette!*" sighed O'Donnel.

"Is it a fillet of vale?" asked Lanty. "Ah now, sit down and try."

"I've no appetite," languidly answered the stricken deer. "After such a feast!"

"Och then, the divil a mouthful you've tasted this blissed day, for to my sartin knowledge we hadn't the vally of a tas dee caffey, or a petty pang in the house; but here, the dinner's purvided by the noble Louis: he ought to have been born in ould Ireland for that same ginorous notion. Musha, what ails you, master dear? take your nourishment;" and he poured out a bumper of Hermitage: "that's a fine glass of wine, I'll be bail, and will cheer your heart; pitch sorrow to ould Seratch, and don't think of them two."

"I can think of nothing else—one of them at least."

"Your mighty particular, any way!—och, I see, sure you mane the principal, and don't care for the follower; but your soup's cooling."

With a sigh deep enough to make a furnace ashamed of itself, the unhappy O'Donnel took his seat, and for a man over head and ears in debt, and steeped from crown to sole in love, contrived to make a very tolerable dinner, Lanty plying him with the generous wine, and saying with a look of delight:

"Two bottles is the riglar allowance, but I persuaded the mayter hotel to let me have an extra one, that I may make you a cup of spiced drink the last thing at night, to prevent your drowsing about those you don't want to think on; so Master Gerald dear, tho' I'll clear away and lave you, don't be in Oh dissypwar while you're vissy vee by yourself, but drink your wine, whilst I go look after them sleeping beauties, the curse o' Crummel on their carkishes."

The shades of evening fell on the palace of St. Germain's, O'Donnel had drawn his chair closer to the rude hearth, watching the crackling logs, and thinking on those bright eyes whose fire had proved so dangerous to his peace, when Lanty re-appeared with a face of bedevilment and mystery, whispering to his master.

"There's one without that has to spake to your honor, says its on pressing business, and only to yourself?"

"Is it man or woman?" demanded O'Donnel, with some undefined hope springing to his heart.

"Why then, it's nayther the one nor the other, for by the same token it's a friar."

"Maybe a message from my father, or perhaps some half-starved monk craving charity—Lanty, admit the poor devil."

"The holy father is anything but starved, an plase your honour, by the size of his girdle, but you will judge for yourself." Lanty opened the door, continuing, "Step this way, your riv'ence, the master will have speech wid you."

A tall and burly figure, clothed in the habit of the Franciscan order, advanced towards O'Donnel, and throwing back his cowl, exhibited a face redolent of good humour and good living; there was no trace of fast or penance upon its round oily surface; a tint of crimson spread over his capacious cheeks and hanging jowl, whilst the deeper hue of the mulberry invaded a nose somewhat resembling, in shape, the fruit from which the colour seemed derived.

"Benedicite, my son!" said the fat churchman, "I crave a short audience with you."

O'Donnel signed for Lanty to retire.

"Is it meself, such a night as this, to lave you widout something to drink? Shure the holy father would like the least taste in life, to keep the could from the heart of him, whilst he's discoorsing wid you."

Speedily he placed on table the cheering beverage, saying, "Shure did 'nt I tould you, the extrey bottle would be convenient?" and left his master to learn the tidings the priest had to communicate.

"My son," said the friar, with an air of mock solemnity, as he filled his glass, "you are blest in a servant—a religious turn of mind can never be better evinced than by a consideration for the comforts of the clergy." After talking the lengthened draught, he continued, "I am but a few days from our dear island, and have made this visit at the express desire of the jovial, open-hearted, hospitable lady Honeria, now with the saints."

"Dear old Aunt Norah dead!" said Gerald, smiling through tears at her pleasant image. "Then my father and myself are all now left upon this earth of the once powerful house of O'Donnel."

"Cheer up, my son, in you that house will revive, for you look, to say the least, a marrying man; but listen; your aunt intrusted me to deliver to you these two packets; the one contains a small bequest in gold; good soul! 'twas all she could save or spare after her donations to holy church; and the other, the only vestige left of the former glories of your race, the large diamond ring, which has for centuries been the ornament of the O'Donnel family, and which she, with much risk, secured about her own person, when the house of her fathers was given up to pillage, to those children of Sathan, the followers of Orange William. 'Tell Gerald,' were her parting words, 'to guard this ring in memory of days gone by.'"

"Her injunction shall be obeyed," said the young soldier, placing his hand affectionately on the casket, containing this unexpected treasure.

"My son," said the friar, "I now go to seek his sacred Majesty, with news from Ireland that will joy his heart. William of Nassau will not long usurp the seat of the anointed James Stuart. My mission to you is fulfilled, but my glass is not."

Replenishing his goblet, the friar drained it with a parting blessing on his countrymen, and took his leave.

"Surely never did money arrive more apropos: my debts in Paris do not exceed a hundred and seventy louis-d'or, and my poor aunt's supply amounts to a couple of hundred; and then this ring; it is indeed magnificent, and doubtless of great value. I'll wear it the moment I've paid those harpies. I'll wear it under her window to-morrow; they say there is an attraction in diamonds that ladies seldom resist."

Such was the cogitations of O'Donnel, whose heart was lightened of a load of care.

Lanty was half frantic when he learned his master's unexpected good fortune, called on all the saints in the calender to bless the Lady Honeria; and before the turret clock struck eight on the following morning, he had set off to Paris, in company with his troublesome friends of yesterday, empowered by his master to arrange the various claims existing against him.

O'Donnel, relieved from his duty, devoted more than usual attention to his toilet, and spite of the absence of his *valet de chambre*, sallied forth for a promenade in his best suit, his newest plume, and his easiest gauntlets; these he preferred, as he could not resist the pleasure of occasionally pulling off the left hand glove, to contemplate the sparkling ornament that adorned his little finger.

Defying the sharp air, and unwilling to conceal his finely formed figure in a cloak, O'Donnel paced up and down in front of the apartment he imagined to be occupied by the enslaver of his heart; but not a glimpse of her could he obtain.

Still he persevered in confining his walk to this portion of the terrace, and was somewhat annoyed at having his solitary promenade broken upon by a party of his brother officers, who joined him.

After exchanging his courteous salutations, without which, in these days friends could not meet, the new comers expressed their surprise at finding him so near the guard-room, after having been condemned to pass the last four-and-twenty hours within its walls.

He did not deign to comment on their various conjectures at his selection of so dull a *quartier*, but with a natural and pardonable vanity accepted a proffered *prise de tabac* for the express purpose of dazzling the eyes of his comrades.

No sooner did the pure water of this splendid *bague* glisten in the wintry sunbeams, than various exclamations of astonishment burst from the lips of his brother soldiers.

"Superbe!" "Magnifique!" "Lucky fellow!" "Won at play?" "A woman's cadeau?" "Plunder?" were the interjections and interrogations that beset him.

"*Ni l'une ni l'autre*," said O'Donnel, with an air of nonchalance; "part of my family jewels;" and walked away.

"He'd better pay that poor devil Monsieur Dechet, the *marchand des gands*, in the Rue St. Martin," said one of the group, "than strut about with his 'family jewels.'"

"Or get a decent chair or two, and a spare table, put into his quarters: the old ones have been burnt for lack of the price of fuel, and all that he may be better dressed than the rest of us. Such vanity and misery forsooth!"

These, and similar remarks, followed the departure of our hero.

Fortunately for the speakers they did not reach the subject of them, or they would have learned that he was the last man breathing who would suffer his name and character to be made a theme for levity; though having now the power to tell his accidental, unintentional, and unconscious slanderers, "By this time, gentlemen, my rascally creditors are all satisfied"—he might have contented himself with cautioning his friends not to meddle with his affairs in future.

Their observations overheard the day before *must* have been *punished*, for *then* they would have been *unpardonably true*.

Before sunset the honest Lanty returned from the capital, having executed his mission; he recounted to his master how completely he had astonished the various tradesman by his voluntary discharge of debts they had feared could only be procured by legal process.

It was whilst rendering an account of his stewardship that the eyes of the faithful domestic first fell upon the diamond ring.

"Saints preserve us! Master, jewel, but that is a magnificent *bag*. I'll engage Lewy Catose hasn't got such a one to wear on high days and holidays and bonfire nights; but oh, what a thing it would be, if by bad luck you were to lose it, or have it stolen from you, either by man or woman! My heart would break at such a misfortunate loss. Get a big iron box, Master Gerald, and lock

it up, as though 'twas the apple of your eye—or—I have a scheme that will preserve it from harm's way, if you'll take a fool's advice."

"Out with it, Lanty!"

"Get one made as like it as one pea is to the other, only of false stones, and you can wear the rare thing by day, and the substitution at night. Devil a one will ever discover the differ; besides, you may be pushed for the ready coin some day, and you can raise a big sum upon that beauty, and yet make the world believe that 'tis still on the finger of ye."

Lanty so harped upon the expedience of having a fac-simile ring made, that his master acceded to the proposition, and sent the original to Paris for that purpose.

The next day found him traversing the terrace, full of the hope that he should get a glimpse of his charmer, but the same ill fortune befel him as before, she was invisible.

Day succeeded day, and still he failed in obtaining another sight of her whose image haunted his thoughts.

In due time his ring and its double reached him; the imitation was admirable, and the literal Lanty, on hearing his master express his satisfaction at the paste counterfeit, said:

"I wonder was it by baking or boiling they found out the knack of making such sparkling stones out of flour and water?"

The palace clock had chimed six, and Lanty was puzzling his brain with various conjectures as to what could detain his master so long from his dinner, when Gerald entered his barrack-room, his countenance bearing evidence of some recent excitement.

"Musha, then, 'tis meself that is glad to see you safe back this dark evening—but what ails you entirely? Something has happened to you, and oh, holy Paul, the ring's not on your finger; tell me, master, what's gone of it, and what's come of you, that your cheeks are like damask roses, and your eyes glisten like—what's lost for ever I'm thinking."

"Fear nothing, Lanty, you shall know all. I was sauntering in the forest, this morning, tempted by the clear sky and frosty air, when I encountered his Majesty, alone; he greeted me with the most gracious condescension, and signified his pleasure to speak on a matter of some moment. It appears that the good Father who had brought me the late news from Ireland has given such details to the Royal James as renders the return of the Friar an object of the greatest consequence; but one obstacle prevented—the limited means of the Monarch did not enable him to dispatch the Friar on this important mission; and his Majesty, in lamenting the state of his coffers, without reserve inquired if I could devise some means to assist him in this emergency. Lanty, I have lent King James my ring."

"You'd better say gave, Master Gerald, dear, for sorrow the sight you'll ever get of it again."

"Psha! I have the sacred promise of James, that, as soon as Louis opens his treasury in his behalf, it shall be restored; and as a proof of especial favour, I have received a command to attend his Majesty this evening."

"The laste he could do, I'm thinking; you'll get a petty soupy, or maybe only a bisky and a glass of Osacray, for what was worth a hundred million of Ecuses."

Our young Hibernian was received with unusual distinction by the Monarch he had served.

A brilliant assemblage filled the suite of rooms, and as O'Donnel surveyed the various groups, he saw the face of her he had so often sought in vain.

The especial notice bestowed on him by the King induced the nobleman who acted as Chamberlain, in the little court of St. Germain, to proffer his services,

should they be required, to obtain O'Donnel a partner for the dance, which would shortly commence.

Gerald eagerly inquired if his new friend knew the name of the lady leaning on the arm of an old gentleman of most forbidding aspect, and learnt that she was the niece of Monsieur Fernet, one of Louis XIV.'s private bankers; that Mademoiselle Angelique was well known to the Chamberlain, and that he would introduce O'Donnel to her for the first cotillon.

This was beyond the lover's most sanguine expectation.

The beautiful Angelique was led to the *salon de danse* by the enraptured soldier, and whether or no gratitude interfered with justice in the decision of James, as far as the cavalier was concerned, we cannot determine, but Gerald and Angelique he declared were the handsomest couple in the assembly.

We shall not attempt a description of what passed between the young people; we need scarcely say that O'Donnel, being an Irishman, made the best use of his time, and that the fair Angelique, without confessing that she had surrendered the citadel of her heart to the gallant besieger, permitted his applying to her uncle for an entree at their house, where he might try his chance of winning her favour.

Gerald was not the man to let a purpose cool; the following morning found him in the apartment of the banker; a passionate avowal of his love, and demand of leave to address Angelique, was received with the same cold blank look by the man of wealth as though two hearts were not concerned in the affair.

"Monsieur O'Donnel," said the banker, "a Lieutenant in the Irish Brigade, whose only wealth consists in a ring of some inconsiderable value, is not the match for my niece. I am surprised that you retain that bauble, learning, as I have done, that you are, or have been, encumbered with debt. Should you ever feel disposed to part with it, perhaps you will permit me to become the purchaser; but on the other subject I must decline communication with you."

"Will you not allow me to receive my dismissal from Maam'selle Angelique? surely she should be the party to crush my hopes, and not you."

"Maam'selle Angelique is a giddy girl: her fortune is at her own disposal, 'tis true—that is"—he added, endeavouring to withdraw so important an admission—"that is, when she comes of age—with my consent: beside which, her respect for my judgment and knowledge of the world would at all times induce her to consult my wishes on a matter of importance. However, to change the subject—I've taken a fancy to your ring."

"Psha!" said O'Donnel, irritated by the manner of Fernet; "why talk about such a thing as this when a jewel beyond price is what I seek to possess?"

"Once more, pray let me beg your silence on that theme; for the rest, a thousand crowns must be of more consequence to you than a mere toy; at that price it is mine."

"That price," rejoined O'Donnel, "were about as much too low for the diamond this *appears* as it is too high for—*paste*."

"Paste, indeed!" echoed old Fernet; "come, come, I happen to know better. Why King James wanted me to advance him a certain sum on that identical ring, but I never lend even on such terms."

"Well," laughed Gerald, "you may be a better lapidary than either his Majesty or myself; of course we know that no one would suspect *him* of an attempt to raise money on a paste ring—yet, if you really believed this *diamond*, why did you refuse the royal request? and why do you now offer me so mean a sum?"

"Perhaps," drily retorted the banker, "to bribe you out of your silly suit to my niece."

"You would fail, then, if you forced a diamond mine on me, in exchange for this—*paste* ring."

"Ha, ha," sneered Fernet, "you adhere to that story, fearful of being robbed of your only treasure; trust me it will be safer in my custody."

"At least *you* will not rob me of it, if you pay one thousand crowns."

"Which I will do," promptly answered the *millionaire*, eager to overreach this *inconsequent*; he seized a pen, and wrote, adding, "Give me your *paste*, and this order on my house in Paris is yours."

"My servant waits without, let him and one of your people witness the transaction," said O'Donnel, gravely.

"With pleasure," suggested Fernet, calling in a clerk devoted to his interest, at the same moment that Gerald summoned Lanty.

"Here, Lucas," said the banker, "I give Monsieur O'Donnel one thousand crowns for the ring of which I told you."

The man smiled his felicitations at his master.

"Which *I* say is paste, Lanty," firmly uttered Gerald.

"Mark that, Mounseers," cried Lanty; "divil a harm to the master's character, if he takes the gould *now*—though 'tisn't as much as I'd say by his as offers, if the thing *should* be rale."

"That's my affair," said Fernet.

"*Bien*," added Gerald, mischievously; "then let grasping obstinacy find out the mistake at leisure."

"When *I* call it paste," concluded Fernet, hastily withdrawing the ring from our soldier's finger, "then you may claim my niece and her dower, Sir; take my order.—Lucas, I have made a bargain!"

"May you always be as content with it as I am!" said O'Donnel; and pocketing the order, he walked away—followed by the exultant Macarthy.

That very evening Gerald was again sent for by the King. Louis, learning the strait into which his royal brother had been driven, had gently chidden him for not having applied to the friendship of France, and forced on him an addition to his usual allowance, which enabled James at once to reclaim and return the O'Donnel ring.

Next day, Gerald, again chatting with his fellow-soldiers, was joined by old Fernet:—our hero, aside, and in English, bade one of his friends rally him on the loss of his ring.

"Ha," commented the banker, rubbing his hands, "that diamond, Lucas was taken to a Paris jeweller, from whom I expect, every moment, to receive *rather* more than I gave you, Monsieur."

"More or less," said O'Donnel, "I told you it was paste."

"You did, knowing no better."

"Knowing, at least, that *this* answers my purpose quite as well," said the young soldier, withdrawing his glove.

"*Diable!*" exclaimed Fernet; "two rings, exactly alike?"

"In all but value," quoth Gerald: "one for my King and myself, the other for Monsieur Fernet; and, considering the obligations under which his manner of receiving my proposal for his niece has laid me, it is natural to conclude that I should part with my *family* jewel to *him* for a *third* of its worth, with pleasure. The amount he offered did credit to his integrity; he scorns to take advantage of a brave man's poverty, at the very moment when he is baffling that man's dearest hopes."

"What mean you?" demanded Fernet; but ere Gerald could reply, Lucas, on his way home, and closely followed by Lanty, accosted his master with,

"Oh, Monsieur, you have been insulted in my person, by that accursed jeweller; he says the ring is—"

"Paste," chorused Gerald, Lanty, and the bevy of officers.

"Paste?" repeated the dismayed Avaro.

"Yes, paste!" articulated Lucas.

"Bless me!" said Gerald, coolly; "were you young, and a man of rank, Sir, I ought to take satisfaction for this doubt of my word, given you before two witnesses. As it is, I suppose you know that your attempt at—I may call it—defrauding me of my diamond, here, has placed *your* reputation entirely at *my* mercy."

"That it has!" chimed in the O'Donnellites.

"Och, the negur!" shouted Lanty, "cotched in his own trap."

"Of course!" continued Gerald, "I shall feel it my duty to apprise both our sovereigns of the facts, lest they should imagine *me* capable of passing counterfeits. It will be nothing new for a grey *negociant*, a *marchand*, to have attempted a miserly transaction; but the name of an officer of the Irish Brigade must not suffer unjustly."

"Certainly not," coincided Gerald's amused compeers, while Fernet and Lucas stood

"Meet statues for the Court of Fear."

"It is paste, then," sighed the aged man.

"If you admit that," took up the lover, "you know what follows; you said, before your own man and mine, that when *you* called it so I might claim your niece and her dower."

"You did that, ould Jew—as I am ready to testify," said Lanty.

"Poo," cried one of Gerald's friends, "the *canaille* care nothing for breaking their words; if they were men of honour no witnesses were needful."

"Monsieur O'Donnell," pleaded Fernet, attempting to laugh, "I own that even in your candour you have been too deep for me; honesty, it seems, is the best policy, after all. I assure you my only wish was to procure, at the highest sum I could afford, a present fit for my dear Angelique—what I have purchased of you is unworthy of her acceptance."

"Oh, sir," said Gerald, "this statement accords but ill with that of your having striven to sell the ring. Its original shall be Angelique's when she is mine; pray wear the copy yourself, for my sake."

The merriment of the juvenile hearers was now so boisterous that the uncle was fain to retreat, leaning on the arm of the lover—and hoped to hush up a story so little to his own advantage, by bestowing Angelique and her fortune on the gallant son of Erin; but no sooner was she the "fast married" Madame O'Donnell, than Lanty, and wags of a higher grade, including Louis XVI. himself, revived the tale, to the constant annoyance of Monsieur Fernet, who, to his dying day, had to bear the *sobriquet* of THE DIAMOND MERCHANT.

THE YOUNG HEIRESS.

"HENRIETTA! this is the last conversation I will have with you for a long time—for years—few or many, I know not, and that will depend upon yourself—"

"Speak, Maurice, speak!" was the rejoinder. "If we must part, if I can shorten the time that will separate us, you know with what an intense will I would do so."

"What I have to say is of great moment," continued Maurice: "it is a serious matter, and as such it must be seriously argued. I have ceased to be a boy, and as I have a man's part to play, and a man's difficulties to meet, I must speak of them as a man ought to do;" and the youth took hold of the beautiful girl's hand, and for a moment gazed anxiously into her face.

"You are now, Henrietta, beginning to stand upon perilous ground. You are about to leave nature for the world. Life, which has been actual to you, which has been no shadow, but the passing along as one traverses an enchanted valley filled with flowers, streams, and odours, will be all artificial to you. It will be glittering, but evanescent: brilliant, but its surface will be as water. It will be homage, and flattery, which you will find all false—all one lie, unless, indeed, you—as many others, pure, innocent, and strong of heart and resolution, be drawn into the vortex, and believe that *then* you are happy, and that the past has been delusion."

"Oh! no, Maurice," interrupted the lady, ardently; "I cannot think so of the past."

"You have not yet been presented at Court. To-morrow you go there when perhaps thoughts will be totally different;" and Maurice paused.

"In what manner?—how do you mean?"

"I cannot tell you the precise way. That which is now mere curiosity may become passion:—but enough of this, and now of ourselves."

"Ah! yes, let us speak of ourselves, Maurice," she exclaimed, with an earnest gesture; "for when you speak of other things, of other people, your voice grows deep and bitter. Speak of yourself, Maurice: it will please me best."

"You are very beautiful, Henrietta," said the young man with an impulse of overpowering affection, laying his hand upon her head and stroking the bright tresses with an inimitable—a superb grace of action: it so well became his heroic-looking frame. "You are young and beautiful, and you are worth one hundred thousand pounds, and have fifteen thousand a-year. Do you comprehend your power?" and he bent his eyes keenly upon her noble frank face.

"My ideas of the power you hint at are very indistinct, Maurice," was her reply; and a shade darkened her lovely face.

"You will soon be taught better," this he said with such a sudden fierceness as to startle her.

"But you Maurice, are called Lord Gower; you have estates, and mansions, and great wealth, too. Do *you* comprehend *your* power?"

"Better, far better," he answered, "than you do the question you put."

Before very long others than myself will know it too; the world will know it, and I shall be laughed at for a fool."

Henrietta drew back half affrighted. He went on:—"You are young, rich, and noble. You have been taught that these are the greatest of earthly blessings; that they are the privileges of the favored few, that to be thus situated is the great end and aim of life. If you say to me you do not think so, I reply it is because you are at the moment unconscious of the prejudices which have been instilled in you from your mother's breast."

"But surely, Maurice, to be thus, to strive to be thus rich and noble cannot be a sin in your eyes?"

"Yea, but it is, though." His reply was bold, quick, and distinct. "For my part, I hold these nominal ancestral honours in the deepest—the most unspeakable contempt. I have no respect for that muddy stream of descent which men trace up with such persevering adoration to the conquest, and when they have got hold of some robber whose large hand was more grasping, whose soul had more cupidity than that of others, they take his name; the herald tortures his confused brain in order to discover symbols and sentences more or less expressive of this bandit quality. I loath, I abhor with all the might and power of my soul, the fustian dignities which your paneled carriages and emblazoned arms indicate;—and even when arriving at the conquest, why pause, there? Trace your ancestors farther and you discover a set of barbarians with intellects murkier than the night, beggarly braggarts who, in trampling down the peasant or the artizan by the iron gripe of power, only retarded the divine light, which

human nature of itself, when unrestrained, will shed throughout the world. Give me the man whose honours spring from himself, and I myself will be his herald."

"But you—your name, noble, unstained——"

"Why, how can I tell," was his rough interjectionary exclamation. "Do you imagine that I will swear to the immaculate virtues of every lady of my house who held office at any Queen's chamber?—or that my sire's sires were open-handed, just, or liberal? No. It is sufficient for me to know that my mother was good, pious, and kind; that my father killed her, and that the poor wept when she was laid in the dust——"

"Your father—killed—her!" she gasped out.

"I speak metaphorically. What was my father's character——"

"Courteous, learned, lofty, esteemed, and honoured by all who knew him," answered Henrietta.

"Behold the contrast!" exclaimed Maurice, bitterly. "Now, I call it cold, selfish, and arrogant: cringing to the King, haughty and proud to his equals, a demi-god shrouded in his cold, icy manners to the low. Such he was, in reality; but the world beheld him not in his own house. To my mother he was a monarch; and because she embellished his name, he tolerated her, and regarded the decencies of life; but on human fondness, no spark of affection, no flash of that blessed passion which God has implanted in every heart—except, indeed, in hearts stately, artificial, and arid as my father's was ever shown towards her; for me, first I feared him, then I despised him. Who respects him now?"

"Maurice, you torture and you alarm me. All that knew him esteemed him, and I have heard that many—many lamented his decease."

"They lied, then!" Maurice had grown a perfect savage. "Henrietta, listen to me," he continued. "Those who mourn him, speak the set language usual on these occasions. He is missed in the cabinet; his intellect was powerful; his talents great; his vote always useful;—above all, his powers of diplomacy were equal to any emergency. You do not know what diplomacy means: it is anything but honesty. But for every one who pretends to mourn him there are scores who despise, detest, and have cause to curse him——"

"Merciful heaven!" she ejaculated, in a sort of fright; "you cannot mean all this."

"He lived extravagantly. The country paid him enough, heaven knows; but he went beyond this. He lived—and tradesmen must supply his wants. Their bills were not paid. They made others pay for him while they could, and then became bankrupt. In the 'Bench' a few days ago, I beheld eight or ten men with large families dependent upon them who had been ruined by his prodigal rapacity. He obtained goods on credit, and did not pay. What call you this?"

"But surely he had wealth enough to cancel all these debts," suggested Henrietta, daunted at the shocking picture Maurice drew.

"Horse-racing and the gaming-table received the greater portion of his ready gold year by year. He was a fine old English nobleman. Pah! the foolery of all this. He was beggared. He died a beggar. I am going to pay all his debts. It is by the sacrifice of my birthright that his name at least, shall not be cursed in the grave."

"It is noble of you," said Henrietta, with a gesture of admiring fondness.

"True!" he replied; "but wait a little, and you shall hear men speak differently." There ensued a long pause, which Maurice broke after having mustered his emotions. His tone was now tender and low.

"Henrietta, I have been endeavoring to tell you how fervidly—how mightily I love you; and I can find no words sufficiently strong to express that love. How we first met; how we first plighted troth; how you have comprehended a

nature strange beyond anything you will find in 'life,' I do not know, and I do not care to find reasons for. You have told me that you loved me—for the last time before parting I ask, do you repeat it?"

"I do, Maurice." There was a sublime devotedness in the manner of her reply that heightened the flush in his cheeks.

"I am rich—I shall be miserably poor," he continued. "Will you love me then?"

"It cannot make a difference to me. Then and now, once and for ever."

"You will not join the world in mocking the fortunes of the 'broken lord; you will not find in his shrunken pomp food for wit and laughter?"

"No, Maurice—never;" and Maurice believed her.

The following scene took place about a year after the last conversation, at a "diplomatic" party, given by Lady Phillis Doricourt, a well-known leader of London "ton." All was splendid, all lied glibly in blue and scarlet, in gold and decorations;—and finally, to tell this colossal lie—all made up of little ones, till the apex was like that of a pyramid,—all the world was there.

"Have you heard the news?" asked the Hon. Caspar Haggard, a long-whiskered, lugubrious-looking gentleman. "But here comes Lady Phillis Doricourt. How charming her ladyship looks this evening;" and he rose up from his chair.

A tall, handsome, but bold and even impudent-looking woman, in *full dress*, approached them. Her walk was majestic, but it was that of art, not nature.

"Ah! you naughty creatures," said she, flirting her fan at Mr. Vincent Howard, who was very rich for a commoner, and the lady had an unmarried daughter, "laying your heads together to plot treason."

"Not against your ladyship, be assured," was the reply of that gentleman.

"But shall we not see your lovely ward this evening?"

"All in good time," was the lady's reply, who felt a little piqued that Mr. Howard did not show more anxiety regarding her accomplished and very eligible daughter.

"Is it really true," demanded the Hon. Caspar Haggard, in a half whisper, "that the proposed union, so much talked of, between Lord Maurice Gower and the Lady Henrietta is to be broken off?"

"Why, you don't suppose she can marry such a fool," said the lady, scornfully. "I could not allow my ward to be bound by promises to a ruined man. She understands her worth far too well."

The Hon. Caspar Haggard shook his head. He *had* thought that she might marry him. He was no fool, but still he mused.

"The man's about to subvert the existing institutions of the country," continued the lady, "He is going to cut off the detail, sell the property, and pay his father's debts—there's a Goth!"

"It's almost incredible," murmured Mr. Howard. "I presume this was what our friend was going to inform me"—the other bowed—"and if it did not come from your unimpeachable authority I should have doubted it."

"Oh! rest assured, my dear Mr. Howard, that it is true. Those disagreeable lawyers are already gone to him to some out-of-the-way castle in a bleak island off the coast of Scotland, where he lives something like the master of Ravenswood, in Sir Walter Scott's romance!" and the lady looked remarkably warm upon the subject.

"I thought he had been abroad these two years," said the Hon. Caspar Haggard.

"Why, so he has been," was the lady's reply; "but the dance is beginning—permit me to offer you my arm." And they moved with a slow and stately step to the upper end of the vast chamber.

In the meantime, beautiful, proud, and haughty, the majestic form of Henrietta appeared, her dress blazing with jewels, and her hair flashing with starry brilliants. Nothing could be conceived more superbly lovely. Nothing more delightful than her ease of conversation, her grace of carriage, nothing more magnetic than the prestige of her wealth. She drank in adulation and flattery, with an avidity that showed it to have become an almost morbid disease to her, and even while she despised that glittering throng, she lost no murmur of the admiration so many expressed.

She had been consigned to most dangerous guardianship—that of an intriguing, fashionable woman—offended at the rumours which went abroad of Maurice, being continually told that his lavish absurdity in ridding himself of his possessions was to be replaced by her wealth, told too, repeatedly, in what a crippled state her life, now all splendour and variety, would be passed, she began to believe that past protestations were the absurdities of youth, and that under no circumstances whatever could she be bound by the romantic ties of her earlier years; and therefore it is no marvel, that with the examples and temptations surrounding her, she became as witty, as charming, as insincere, and as morbidly sad by turns as a woman can when better feelings come across her, and with a sort of remorse, fill her soul till in the giddy vanities of life all are forgotten.

The schemes too, set in action by her assiduous friend, the lady Phillis Doricourt, were no less effective; Maurice was being forgotten.

Truly it was a bleak and stormy habitation where Maurice Lord Gower now dwelt; for the castellated turrets stood on the verge of the rugged cliffs, and the winds and waters of the sea sung for ever one huge paean of rejoicing around the hoary walls. Like a man who shunned his kind, brooding over dreams that were impracticable, communing with the elements, wearing out his soul in the ardent devotion he felt for Henrietta, so for many months had passed away the life of Maurice.

For he loved her as the strong-love the weak, as the poet the beautiful, as a strong, deep-hearted man alone can love the woman on whom he has bestowed the purest, most passionate impulses of his heart. He had already taken the step which was to strip him of all his possessions, having nothing more left of his once enormous revenues and wealth to come between him and the sublimity

which reigned around. His love grew like a proud unbrageous tree, fostered by thoughts which were never known at the *soirees* of the Lady Phillis Doricourt, at all events.

He knew where Henrietta was. He knew well the hollow and artificial nature of the woman under whose care and guardianship she was placed. He well comprehended the insidious temptations which surrounded her—the danger over which she hung, and he would make no effort to save her.

"No," he exclaimed, "if she loves me she will be as deaf as the adder; if she love me not, she will not be to me worth reclaiming. I would sacrifice her and myself to principle. She hath sworn deeply—let me see whether beggary hath the power to change my form and features to her, whether there be such a thing as intense love and truth in woman's heart. If it be as I fear, I can feel no greater torture than my doubts have piled upon me, and before many months pass I shall know the worst."

One morning while musing on the cliffs he beheld a beautiful pleasure yacht making for the little haven at the foot of the lofty crag where Gower House stood. It had by this time cast anchor, and a fashionably-dressed party of ladies and gentlemen were being landed from it. Having merely glanced upon them with something like an impatient gesture, he walked away; and entering the stately but ruined pile, he gave orders to his domestics to offer the strangers all the hospitality the place afforded, if they should offer to require it, which was probable, as there was no other habitation near; he then retired into his own chamber.

Casting his eyes through the casement that overlooked the sheltered garden, which was in a state of the most beautiful preservation, very high walls on the north and east protecting the fruits and flowers from the inclemency of that latitude, he beheld within a few yards of him, leaning familiarly upon a gentleman's arm, a form, that having once seen, it could never be forgotten. It was Henrietta! She turned round and he beheld her face! To describe what Maurice felt would be impossible.

"Lord, my dear!" exclaimed a voice, that of Lady Phillis Doricourt, coming towards them: "can you possibly imagine anything more dismal—more barbarous—than this place?"

"I protest," was Henrietta's reply, "that if it were not for the notoriety which a northern tour will give us the ensuing season, I should be frightened to death at the aspect of such a repulsive spot."

"It is the spot," murmured Maurice to himself, with a dreadful sickness at the heart, "where I have invited her to come. She might then go to summer lands. Henrietta, thou art lost!"

"It is decidedly of a very Gothic cast, and remarkably well adapted for the study of metaphysics," said the Hon. Caspar Haggard; "but here comes that Duke of Derwentwater;" and a smile brightened the face of the beautiful young lady, as a handsome, feppishly-dressed young man advanced.

"Of all people in the world, who do you think this place belongs to?" asked the Lady Phillis.

"It's Lord Gower's," replied Henrietta, at once. "I knew that before we started."

"My dear Henrietta," exclaimed her duenna, with a start, "were you not afraid of meeting with Maurice?"

"Oh, as for that," was the answer, "he is man of the world enough to know that everything changes in time. We are not children now."

The Earl of Derwentwater glanced upon the fair speaker for a moment with an expression of misgiving; but what can we say of Maurice—how felt he? It would have been humiliating to witness the great anguish that wrung groans

forth from his deep heart at her light words—at her heartless manner. Maurice deplored this change in her more than he would her death.

She knew the spot—she who had his letter even then in her bosom—she even knew Maurice was at hand! Years that had past, the vows long since spoken, the hours spent together, were evidently annihilated.

“A man who contemns wealth and rank—who despises his own lofty class, and looks with scorn upon nobility—must be at least devoid of common sense.”

It was Henrietta who spoke thus, still in the hearing of Maurice.

“You know not half the delight I feel, madam,” said the Earl of Derwentwater, gallantly lifting up her hand to kiss, “in knowing that I am a member of that order, when I hear it defended by lips like yours.”

This was at the least a plebeian compliment, and the lips of Maurice curled with fierce bitterness. “And she can listen to words like those? Well.” Henrietta *did*, however, and smiled radiantly.

“Oh, my lord,” said she, “you have no idea how much my opinion of the peerage has risen of late. I must confess that the assiduities of Lady Phillis Doricourt have done much to eradicate many false tastes which an old companion used to instil into my bosom;” but as Henrietta uttered this, the paleness that overspread her cheeks made her feel the falsehood of her own words.

In the meantime, with a proud, stately step, Maurice, who had descended to the garden came forward to meet them.

His magnificent face had that wordless calm of despair which impressed the beholder with the idea that he had suffered the agonies of death, and that by a supernal power he yet lived and moved about. When the two stood face to face, Henrietta’s soul *heard* that of Maurice speak to her in a language that was never obliterated from her brain.

With a stately, cold courtesy, he did the honors of his house, and without reference to the past an hour or two went away, and they parted.

* * * * *

It was the height of the London season. The Lady Phillis Doricourt was giving one of her most splendid reunions. The marriage also between the Duke of Derwentwater and the lady Henrietta was not only talked of, but preparations upon the most magnificent scale were going forward.

The Duke of Derwentwater was speaking in a low tone to some friends, and in the embrasure of the window sat Henrietta, beautiful as ever, but pale, haggard and worn.

The lawyer at last said that all was ready, and the lady Phillis was summoned. They were going to sign deeds of settlement regarding the marriage.

Since her last interview with Maurice a change had fallen over her spirit.

A deep, settled sorrow was at her heart, and night and day there was unrest around her.

When the lawyer spoke, she started with a shudder, and then advanced to the table. The Lady Phillis gazed with some apprehension upon her, and the Duke of Derwentwater also seemed to be ill at ease. The Lady Henrietta took up a pen, when the lawyer again said, “we require a witness.”

“I will act as one,” was uttered in a deep impressive voice that made all start, and drew a repressed scream from Henrietta. Turning round they all recognised the form and face of Maurice Lord Gower.

With a faint moan, expressive of intense pain. Henrietta laid her hand upon her side, while gazing, almost glaring upon him; but there was such a dull and vague meaning in her look, that no one could have attributed any particular expression to it. Maurice stood confronting her.

He was booted and spurred, and his dress was splashed and soiled as if he had ridden hard. His long and dark hair was matted on his brow that was of an unnatural whiteness.

Henrietta waited for him to speak; but his lips were closed. She then tottered to the table and scrawled her name on the parchment; but so blinded was she with tears, she saw not what she did. The Duke of Derwentwater had already signed. The Lady Phillis, with an air of terror and surprise, signed hers; and breaking the spell of stillness and silence that bound him, Maurice advanced, and, taking the pen, signed his name also.

“It is now completed,” said he, in a broken voice. “Henrietta, I thought at the eleventh hour you would have hesitated!”

“Is it *now* you speak to me?” was her response. “Good heavens! had you nought to say before it was too late?”

“I!” echoed Maurice. “Wherefore should I? Had I not done all that a man could, or should do? Was it not all in your own hand?”

“I have been walking blindfold,” she murmured. “My feet have been stumbling hither and thither in darkness: there was none to guide me, and you—where were you?”

“I thought, I dreamed, I hoped with all the ardour of my soul that some memory of the past full of might and saving power would awaken within your breast. I hoped that you would have appreciated the value of a man whose wealth lay in his own sense of magnanimity alone. You have been told that your wealth was too great a sacrifice for you to make—that to heal the breach of my broken fortunes it would have been as ridiculous in the eyes of the world, as I have made myself when rescuing my father’s name from the infamy of depriving his creditors of their just rights. You, who have no heart,” he continued, with bitter anger, “knew not the value of mine. I left you to your own choice; nor would I by the weight of a feather have influenced you either way; but had you appreciated me—my feelings—my affection, it would have lifted you to a height so infinitely lofty, that the degrading depth into which you have now fallen, bears no proportion to it.”

“I left you to yourself, and dwelt in my own proud poverty, which you—once so kind, once so noble, in falling in with the paltry conventions of rank, joined in despising. You insulted me—laughed at my ruined home—found food for mirth in my scanty means; and all this I bore because I thought you required only thought and courage to allow your better nature to break forth, and say to me when the great crisis of your fate and mine came, ‘Maurice, I have wronged you; but I love you still!’”

Henrietta sank half-fainting to a chair. The soul-crushing certainty that she had sealed the eternal misery of both—the awful sense of desolation and of future woe, pressing upon her like the hand of death. The duke, the Lady Phillis, began to remonstrate.

“Peace!” said Maurice; “what I have to say must be said, and after that I will trouble you no more. I would rather have been born a peasant, and with my two hands tilling the soil, than repossess all I ever had of those lordly lands, which I have cast aside as if they were so much dross; but in *her* I thought I should have found a peerless reward for all. She *has* come to know the extent

of her powers—the value of her wealth. Let her then remain on this false eminence of state, let her be flattered too, and lied too, and have every fulsome adulation paid to her; for the dark and dreary hour *will* come when she, too, will be left lonely and neglected. A marriage of convenience, my lord duke,” he added, turning to her betrothed husband, “has ever these sure results; and when she *does* find herself so, I would then, and not else, have her think of me, so that she shall feel for a single instant a portion of the fire she has heaped upon my head.”

Henrietta rose up, and with uplifted hands fell at his feet. “Maurice!” she gasped out, “have pity on me—do not crush me utterly. It was in your power when I was in your house to have checked me—the words of sorrow and repentance were on my lips; but you did not—you might have commanded, you did not even solicit. From your pride, I derived mine; but you should have known the differences of our natures better. I have signed my own death-warrant, I know; but I could die easier than retract; forgive me, then, before you leave me, or curse me that I may shelter my humiliation under some cloak!”

The Duke of Derwentwater paused. His heart was moved, and the evident repugnance of Henrietta to the union was so manifest that he did not hesitate. Taking up the parchment, he cut the signature out with his knife before any could prevent him, and said, “Lady, you are free,” and turning to Maurice, added, “My lord, you are bolder in your broken fortunes than I. If in resigning my claim, in retiring from a rivalry where even to win would be no gain, I can confer on her the happiness so nearly being wrecked, I shall be happy;” and gently raising Henrietta from the ground, he placed her hand in that of Maurice and she was elapsd in that fond embrace which told that everything was not forgotten.

THE END.

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