

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy, Prince Zilah, v1

Jules Claretie

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PREFACE

Arsene Arnaud Claretie (commonly called Jules), was born on December 3, 1840, at Limoges, the picturesque and smiling capital of Limousin. He has been rightly called the "Roi de la Chronique" and the "Themistocle de la Litterature Contemporaine." In fact, he has written, since early youth, romances, drama, history, novels, tales, chronicles, dramatic criticism, literary criticism, military correspondence, virtually everything! He was elected to the French Academy in 1888.

Claretie was educated at the Lycee Bonaparte, and was destined for a commercial career. He entered a business-house as bookkeeper, but was at the same time contributing already to newspapers and reviews. In 1862 we find him writing for the Diogene; under the pseudonym, "Olivier de Jalin," he sends articles to La France; his nom-deplume in L'Illustration is "Perdican"; he also contributes to the Figaro, 'L'Independence Belge, Opinion Nationale' (1867-1872); he signs articles in the 'Rappel; as "Candide"; in short, his fecundity in this field of literature is very great. He is today a most popular journalist and writes for the 'Presse, Petit Journal, Temps', and others. He has not succeeded as a politician. Under the second Empire he was often in collision with the Government; in 1857 he was sentenced to pay a fine of 1,000 francs, which was a splendid investment; more than once lectures to be given by him were prohibited (1865-1868); in 1871 he was an unsuccessful candidate for L'Assemblee Nationale, both for La Haute Vienne and La Seine. Since that time he has not taken any active part in politics. Perhaps we should also mention that as a friend of Victor Noir he was called as a witness in the process against Peter Bonaparte; and that as administrator of the Comedie Francaise he directed, in 1899, an open letter to the "President and Members of the Court Martial trying Captain Dreyfus" at Rennes, advocating the latter's acquittal. So much about Claretie as a politician!

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The number of volumes and essays written by Jules Claretie surpasses imagination, and it is, therefore, almost impossible to give a complete list. As a historian he has selected mostly revolutionary subjects. The titles of some of his prominent works in this field are 'Les Derniers Montagnards (1867); Histoire de la Revolution de 1870–71 (second edition, 1875, 5 vols.); La France Envahie (1871); Le Champ de Bataille de Sedan (1871); Paris assiege and Les Prussiens chez eux (1872); Cinq Ans apres, L'Alsace et la Lorraine depuis l'Annexion (1876); La Guerre Nationale 1870–1871', etc., most of them in the hostile, anti-German vein, natural to a "Chauvinist"; 'Ruines et Fantomes (1873). Les Femmes de la Revolution (1898)' contains a great number of portraits, studies, and criticisms, partly belonging to political, partly to literary, history. To the same category belong: Moliere, sa Vie et ses OEuvres (1873); Peintres et Sculpteurs Contemporains, and T. B. Carpeaux (1875); L'Art et les Artistes Contemporains (1876)', and others. Quite different from the above, and in another phase of thought, are: 'Voyages d'un Parisien (1865); Journees de Voyage en Espagne et France (1870); Journees de Vacances (1887)'; and others.

It is, however, as a novelist that the fame of Claretie will endure. He has followed the footsteps of George Sand and of Balzac. He belongs to the school of "Impressionists," and, although he has a liking for exceptional situations, wherefrom humanity does not always issue without serious blotches, he yet is free from pessimism. He has no nervous disorder, no "brain fag," he is no pagan, not even a nonbeliever, and has happily preserved his wholesomeness of thought; he is averse to exotic ideas, extravagant depiction, and inflammatory language. His novels and tales contain the essential qualities which attract and retain the reader. Some of his works in chronological order, omitting two or three novels, written when only twenty or twenty-one years old, are: 'Pierrille, Histoire de Village (1863); Mademoiselle Cachemire (1867); Un Assassin, also known under the title Robert Burat (1867); Madeleine Bertin, replete with moderated sentiment, tender passion, and exquisite scenes of social life (1868); Les Muscadins (1874, 2 vols.); Le Train No. 17 (1877); La Maison Vide (1878); Le Troisieme dessous (1879); La Maitresse (1880); Monsieur le Ministre (1882); Moeurs du Jour (1883); Le Prince Zilah (1884), crowned by the Academy four years before he was elected; Candidat!(1887); Puyjoli (1890); L'Americaine (1892); La Frontiere (1894); Mariage Manque (1894); Divette (1896); L'Accusateur (1897), and others.

It is, perhaps, interesting to know that after the flight of the Imperial family from the Tuileries, Jules Claretie was appointed to put into order the various papers, documents, and letters left behind in great chaos, and to publish them, if advisable.

Very numerous and brilliant have also been the incursions of Jules Claretie into the theatrical domain, though he is a better novelist than playwright. He was appointed director of the Comedie Francaise in 1885. His best known dramas and comedies are: 'La Famille de Gueux, in collaboration with Della Gattina (Ambigu, 1869); Raymond Lindey (Menus Plaisirs, 1869, forbidden for some time by French censorship); Les Muscadins (Theatre Historique, 1874); Un Pyre (with Adrien Decourcelle, Gymnase, 1874); Le Regiment de Champagne (Theatre Historique, 1877); Monsieur le Ministre, together with Dumas fils and Busnach (Gymnase, 1883); and Prince Zilah (Gymnase, 1885).

Some of them, as will be noticed, are adapted to the stage from his novels. In Le Regiment de Champagne, at least, he has written a little melodramatically. But thanks to the battles, fumes of powder, muskets, and cannons upon the stage the descendants of Jean Chauvin accept it with frenetic applause. In most of the plays, however, he exhibits a rather nervous talent, rich imagination, and uses very scintillating and picturesque language, if he is inclined to do so and he is very often inclined. He received the "Prix Vitet" in 1879 from the Academy for Le Drapeau. Despite our unlimited admiration for Claretie the journalist, Claretie the historian, Claretie the dramatist, and Claretie the art-critic, we think his novels conserve a precious and inexhaustible mine for the Faguets and Lansons of the twentieth century, who, while frequently utilizing him for the exemplification of the art of fiction, will salute him as "Le Roi de la Romance."

COMPTE D'HAUSSONVILLE
de L'Academie Francaise.

BOOK 1

CHAPTER I. THE BETROTHAL FETE

"Excuse me, Monsieur, but pray tell me what vessel that is over there."

The question was addressed to a small, dark man, who, leaning upon the parapet of the Quai des Tuileries, was rapidly writing in a note-book with a large combination pencil, containing a knife, a pen, spare leads, and a paper-cutter all the paraphernalia of a reporter accustomed to the expeditions of itinerant journalism.

When he had filled, in his running hand, a leaf of the book, the little man tore it hastily off, and extended it to a boy in dark blue livery with silver buttons, bearing the initial of the newspaper, L'Actualite; and then, still continuing to write, he replied:

"Prince Andras Zilah is giving a fete on board one of the boats belonging to the Compagnie de la Seine."

"A fete? Why?"

"To celebrate his approaching marriage, Monsieur."

"Prince Andras! Ah!" said the first speaker, as if he knew the name well; "Prince Andras is to be married, is he? And who does Prince Andras Zil "

"Zilah! He is a Hungarian, Monsieur."

The reporter appeared to be in a hurry, and, handing another leaf to the boy, he said:

"Wait here a moment. I am going on board, and I will send you the rest of the list of guests by a sailor. They can prepare the article from what you have, and set it up in advance, and I will come myself to the office this evening and make the necessary additions."

"Very well, Monsieur Jacquemin."

"And don't lose any of the leaves."

"Oh, Monsieur Jacquemin! I never lose anything!"

"They will have some difficulty, perhaps, in reading the names they are all queer; but I shall correct the proof myself."

"Then, Monsieur," asked the loungee again, eager to obtain all the information he could, "those people who are going on board are almost all foreigners?"

"Yes, Monsieur; yes, Monsieur; yes, Monsieur!" responded jacquemin, visibly annoyed. "There are many foreigners in the city, very many; and I prefer them, myself, to the provincials of Paris."

The other did not seem to understand; but he smiled, thanked the reporter, and strolled away from the parapet, telling all the people he met: "It is a fete! Prince Andras, a Hungarian, is about to be married. Prince Andras Zilah! A fete on board a steamer! What a droll idea!"

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Others, equally curious, leaned over the Quai des Tuileries and watched the steamer, whose tricolor flag at the stern, and red streamers at the mastheads, floated with gay flutterings in the fresh morning breeze. The boat was ready to start, its decks were waxed, its benches covered with brilliant stuffs, and great masses of azaleas and roses gave it the appearance of a garden or conservatory. There was something highly attractive to the loungers on the quay in the gayly decorated steamer, sending forth long puffs of white smoke along the bank. A band of dark-complexioned musicians, clad in red trousers, black waistcoats heavily embroidered in sombre colors, and round fur caps, played odd airs upon the deck; while bebies of laughing women, almost all pretty in their light summer gowns, alighted from coupes and barouches, descended the flight of steps leading to the river, and crossed the plank to the boat, with little coquettish graces and studied raising of the skirts, allowing ravishing glimpses of pretty feet and ankles. The defile of merry, witty Parisiennes, with their attendant cavaliers, while the orchestra played the passionate notes of the Hungarian czardas, resembled some vision of a painter, some embarkation for the dreamed-of Cythera, realized by the fancy of an artist, a poet, or a great lord, here in nineteenth century Paris, close to the bridge, across which streamed, like a living antithesis, the realism of crowded cabs, full omnibuses, and hurrying foot-passengers.

Prince Andras Zilah had invited his friends, this July morning, to a breakfast in the open air, before the moving panorama of the banks of the Seine.

Very well known in Parisian society, which he had sought eagerly with an evident desire to be diverted, like a man who wishes to forget, the former defender of Hungarian independence, the son of old Prince Zilah Sandor, who was the last, in 1849, to hold erect the tattered standard of his country, had been prodigal of his invitations, summoning to his side his few intimate friends, the sharers of his solitude and his privacy, and also the greater part of those chance fugitive acquaintances which the life of Paris inevitably gives, and which are blown away as lightly as they appeared, in a breath of air or a whirlwind.

Count Yanski Varhely, the oldest, strongest, and most devoted friend of all those who surrounded the Prince, knew very well why this fanciful idea had come to Andras. At forty-four, the Prince was bidding farewell to his bachelor life: it was no folly, and Yanski saw with delight that the ancient race of the Zilahs, from time immemorial servants of patriotism and the right, was not to be extinct with Prince Andras. Hungary, whose future seemed brightening; needed the Zilahs in the future as she had needed them in the past.

"I have only one objection to make to this marriage," said Varhely; "it should have taken place sooner." But a man can not command his heart to love at a given hour. When very young, Andras Zilah had cared for scarcely anything but his country; and, far from her, in the bitterness of exile, he had returned to the passion of his youth, living in Paris only upon memories of his Hungary. He had allowed year after year to roll by, without thinking of establishing a home of his own by marriage. A little late, but with heart still warm, his spirit young and ardent, and his body strengthened rather than worn out by life, Prince Andras gave to a woman's keeping his whole being, his soul with his name, the one as great as the other. He was about to marry a girl of his own choice, whom he loved romantically; and he wished to give a surrounding of poetic gayety to this farewell to the past, this greeting to the future. The men of his race, in days gone by, had always displayed a gorgeous, almost Oriental originality: the generous eccentricities of one of Prince Andras's ancestors, the old Magyar Zilah, were often cited; he it was who made this answer to his stewards, when, figures in hand, they proved to him, that, if he would farm out to some English or German company the cultivation of his wheat, corn, and oats, he would increase his revenue by about six hundred thousand francs a year:

"But shall I make these six hundred thousand francs from the nourishment of our laborers, farmers, sowers, and gleaners? No, certainly not; I would no more take that money from the poor fellows than I would take the scattered grains from the birds of the air."

It was also this grandfather of Andras, Prince Zilah Ferency, who, when he had lost at cards the wages of two hundred masons for an entire year, employed these men in constructing chateaux, which he burned down at the

end of the year to give himself the enjoyment of fireworks upon picturesque ruins.

The fortune of the Zilahs was then on a par with the almost fabulous, incalculable wealth of the Esterhazys and Batthyanyis. Prince Paul Esterhazy alone possessed three hundred and fifty square leagues of territory in Hungary. The Zichys, the Karolyis and the Szchenyis, poorer, had but two hundred at this time, when only six hundred families were proprietors of six thousand acres of Hungarian soil, the nobles of Great Britain possessing not more than five thousand in England. The Prince of Lichtenstein entertained for a week the Emperor of Austria, his staff and his army. Old Ferency Zilah would have done as much if he had not always cherished a profound, glowing, militant hatred of Austria: never had the family of the magnate submitted to Germany, become the master, any more than it had bent the knee in former times to the conquering Turk.

From his ancestors Prince Andras inherited, therefore, superb liberality, with a fortune greatly diminished by all sorts of losses and misfortunes half of it confiscated by Austria in 1849, and enormous sums expended for the national cause, Hungarian emigrants and proscribed compatriots. Zilah nevertheless remained very rich, and was an imposing figure in Paris, where, some years before, after long journeyings, he had taken up his abode.

The little fete given for his friends on board the Parisian steamer was a trifling matter to the descendant of the magnificent Magyars; but still there was a certain charm about the affair, and it was a pleasure for the Prince to see upon the garden-like deck the amusing, frivolous, elegant society, which was the one he mingled with, but which he towered above from the height of his great intelligence, his conscience, and his convictions. It was a mixed and bizarre society, of different nationalities; an assemblage of exotic personages, such as are met with only in Paris in certain peculiar places where aristocracy touches Bohemianism, and nobles mingle with quasi-adventurers; a kaleidoscopic society, grafting its vices upon Parisian follies, coming to inhale the aroma and absorb the poison of Paris, adding thereto strange intoxications, and forming, in the immense agglomeration of the old French city, a sort of peculiar syndicate, an odd colony, which belongs to Paris, but which, however, has nothing of Paris about it except its eccentricities, which drive post-haste through life, fill the little journals with its great follies, is found and found again wherever Paris overflows at Dieppe, Trouville, Vichy, Caunteret, upon the sands of Etretat, under the orange-trees of Nice, or about the gaming tables of Monaco, according to the hour, season, and fashion.

This was the sort of assemblage which, powdered, perfumed, exquisitely dressed, invaded, with gay laughter and nervous desire to be amused, the boat chartered by the Prince. Above, pencil in hand, the little dark man with the keen eyes, black, pointed beard and waxed moustache, continued to take down, as the cortege defiled before him, the list of the invited guests: and upon the leaves fell, briskly traced, names printed a hundred times a day in Parisian chronicles among the reports of the races of first representations at the theatres; names with Slav, Latin, or Saxon terminations; Italian names, Spanish, Hungarian, American names; each of which represented fortune, glory, power, sometimes scandal one of those imported scandals which break out in Paris as the trichinae of foreign goods are hatched there.

The reporter wrote on, wrote ever, tearing off and handing to the page attached to 'L'Actualite' the last leaves of his list, whereon figured Yankee generals of the War of the Rebellion, Italian princesses, American girls flirting with everything that wore trousers; ladies who, rivals of Prince Zilah in wealth, owned whole counties somewhere in England; great Cuban lords, compromised in the latest insurrections and condemned to death in Spain; Peruvian statesmen, publicists, and military chiefs at once, masters of the tongue, the pen, and the revolver; a crowd of originals, even a Japanese, an elegant young man, dressed in the latest fashion, with a heavy sombrero which rested upon his straight, inky-black hair, and which every minute or two he took off and placed under his left arm, to salute the people of his acquaintance with low bows in the most approved French manner.

All these odd people, astonishing a little and interesting greatly the groups of Parisians gathered above on the sidewalks, crossed the gangway leading to the boat, and, spreading about on the deck, gazed at the banks and the houses, or listened to the czardas which the Hungarian musicians were playing with a sort of savage frenzy

beneath the French tricolor united to the three colors of their own country.

The Tzigani thus saluted the embarkation of the guests; and the clear, bright sunshine enveloped the whole boat with a golden aureole, joyously illuminating the scene of feverish gayety and childish laughter.

CHAPTER II. THE BARONESS'S MATCHMAKING

The Prince Zilah met his guests with easy grace, on the deck in front of the foot-bridge. He had a pleasant word for each one as they came on board, happy and smiling at the idea of a breakfast on the deck of a steamer, a novel amusement which made these insatiable pleasure-seekers forget the fashionable restaurants and the conventional receptions of every day.

"What a charming thought this was of yours, Prince, so unexpected, so Parisian, ah, entirely Parisian!"

In almost the same words did each newcomer address the Prince, who smiled, and repeated a phrase from Jacquemin's chronicles: "Foreigners are more Parisian than the Parisians themselves."

A smile lent an unexpected charm to the almost severe features of the host. His usual expression was rather sad, and a trifle haughty. His forehead was broad and high, the forehead of a thinker and a student rather than that of a soldier; his eyes were of a deep, clear blue, looking directly at everything; his nose was straight and regular, and his beard and moustache were blond, slightly gray at the corners of the mouth and the chin. His whole appearance, suggesting, as it did, reserved strength and controlled passion, pleased all the more because, while commanding respect, it attracted sympathy beneath the powerful exterior, you felt there was a tender kindness of heart.

There was no need for the name of Prince Andras Zilah or, as they say in Hungary, Zilah Andras to have been written in characters of blood in the history of his country, for one to divine the hero in him: his erect figure, the carriage of his head, braving life as it had defied the bullets of the enemy, the strange brilliance of his gaze, the sweet inflections of his voice accustomed to command, and the almost caressing gestures of his hand used to the sword all showed the good man under the brave, and, beneath the indomitable soldier, the true gentleman.

When they had shaken the hand of their host, the guests advanced to the bow of the boat to salute a young girl, an exquisite, pale brunette, with great, sad eyes, and a smile of infinite charm, who was half-extended in a low armchair beneath masses of brilliant parti-colored flowers. A stout man, of the Russian type, with heavy reddish moustaches streaked with gray, and an apoplectic neck, stood by her side, buttoned up in his frock-coat as in a military uniform.

Every now and then, leaning over and brushing with his moustaches her delicate white ear, he would ask:

"Are you happy, Marsa?"

And Marsa would answer with a smile ending in a sigh, as she vaguely contemplated the scene before her:

"Yes, uncle, very happy."

Not far from these two was a little woman, still very pretty, although of a certain age the age of embonpoint a brunette, with very delicate features, a little sensual mouth, and pretty rosy ears peeping forth from skilfully arranged masses of black hair. With a plump, dimpled hand, she held before her myopic eyes a pair of gold-mounted glasses; and she was speaking to a man of rather stern aspect, with a Slav physiognomy, a large head, crowned with a mass of crinkly hair as white as lamb's wool, a long, white moustache, and shoulders as

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broad as an ox; a man already old, but with the robust strength of an oak. He was dressed neither well nor ill, lacking distinction, but without vulgarity.

"Indeed, my dear Varhely, I am enchanted with this idea of Prince Andras. I am enjoying myself excessively already, and I intend to enjoy myself still more. Do you know, this scheme of a breakfast on the water is simply delightful! Don't you find it so? Oh! do be a little jolly, Varhely!"

"Do I seem sad, then, Baroness?"

Yanski Varhely, the friend of Prince Andras, was very happy, however, despite his rather sombre air. He glanced alternately at the little woman who addressed him, and at Marsa, two very different types of beauty: Andras's fiancée, slender and pale as a beautiful lily, and the little Baroness Dinati, round and rosy as a ripe peach. And he was decidedly pleased with this Marsa Laszlo, against whom he had instinctively felt some prejudice when Zilah spoke to him for the first time of marrying her. To make of a Tzigana for Marsa was half Tzigana a Princess Zilah, seemed to Count Varhely a slightly bold resolution. The brave old soldier had never understood much of the fantastic caprices of passion, and Andras seemed to him in this, as in all other things, just a little romantic. But, after all, the Prince was his own master, and whatever a Zilah did was well done. So, after reflection, Zilah's marriage became a joy to Varhely, as he had just been declaring to the fiancée's uncle, General Vogotzine.

Baroness Dinati was therefore wrong to suspect old Yanski Varhely of any 'arriere-pensee'. How was it possible for him not to be enchanted, when he saw Andras absolutely beaming with happiness?

They were now about to depart, to raise the anchor and glide down the river along the quays. Already Paul Jacquemin, casting his last leaves to the page of L'Actualite, was quickly descending the gangplank. Zilah scarcely noticed him, for he uttered a veritable cry of delight as he perceived behind the reporter a young man whom he had not expected.

"Menko! My dear Michel!" he exclaimed, stretching out both hands to the newcomer, who advanced, excessively pale. "By what happy chance do I see you, my dear boy?"

"I heard in London that you were to give this fete. The English newspapers had announced your marriage, and I did not wish to wait longer I ."

He hesitated a little as he spoke, as if dissatisfied, troubled, and a moment before (Zilah had not noticed it) he had made a movement as if to go back to the quay and leave the boat.

Michel Menko, however, had not the air of a timid man. He was tall, thin, of graceful figure, a man of the world, a military diplomat. For some reason or other, at this moment, he exhibited a certain uneasiness in his face, which ordinarily bore a rather brilliant color, but which was now almost sallow. He was instinctively seeking some one among the Prince's guests, and his glance wandered about the deck with a sort of dull anger.

Prince Andras saw only one thing in Menko's sudden appearance; the young man, to whom he was deeply attached, and who was the only relative he had in the world (his maternal grandmother having been a Countess Menko), his dear Michel, would be present at his marriage. He had thought Menko ill in London; but the latter appeared before him, and the day was decidedly a happy one.

"How happy you make me, my dear fellow!" he said to him in a tone of affection which was almost paternal.

Each demonstration of friendship by the Prince seemed to increase the young Count's embarrassment. Beneath a polished manner, the evidence of an imperious temperament appeared in the slightest glance, the least gesture, of this handsome fellow of twenty-seven or twenty-eight years. Seeing him pass by, one could easily imagine him

with his fashionable clothes cast aside, and, clad in the uniform of the Hungarian hussars, with closely shaven chin, and moustaches brushed fiercely upward, manoeuvring his horse on the Prater with supple grace and nerves like steel.

Menko's gray eyes, with blue reflections in them, which made one think of the reflection of a storm in a placid lake, became sad when calm, but were full of a threatening light when animated. The gaze of the young man had precisely this aggressive look when he discovered, half hidden among the flowers, Marsa seated in the bow of the boat; then, almost instantaneously a singular expression of sorrow or anguish succeeded, only in its turn to fade away with the rapidity of the light of a falling star; and there was perfect calm in Menko's attitude and expression when Prince Zilah said to him:

"Come, Michel, let me present you to my fiancée. Varhely is there also."

And, taking Menko's arm, he led him toward Marsa. "See," he said to the young girl, "my happiness is complete."

She, as Michel Menko bowed low before her, coldly and almost imperceptibly inclined her dark head, while her large eyes, under the shadow of their heavy lashes, seemed vainly trying to meet the gray eyes of the young man.

Andras beckoned Varhely to come to Marsa, who was white as marble, and said softly, with a hand on the shoulder of each of the two friends, who represented to him his whole life Varhely, the past; Michel Menko, his recovered youth and the future.

"If it were not for that stupid superstition which forbids one to proclaim his happiness, I should tell you how happy I am, very happy. Yes, the happiest of men," he added.

Meanwhile, the little Baroness Dinati, the pretty brunette, who had just found Varhely a trifle melancholy, had turned to Paul Jacquemin, the accredited reporter of her salon.

"That happiness, Jacquemin," she said, with a proud wave of the hand, "is my work. Without me, those two charming savages, so well suited to each other, Marsa and Andras Zilah, would never have met. On what does happiness depend!"

"On an invitation card engraved by Stern," laughed Jacquemin. "But you have said too much, Baroness. You must tell me the whole story. Think what an article it would make: The Baroness's Matchmaking! The romance! Quick, the romance! The romance, or death!"

"You have no idea how near you are to the truth, my dear Jacquemin: it is indeed a romance; and, what is more, a romantic romance. A romance which has no resemblance to you have invented the word those brutalistic stories which you are so fond of."

"Which I am very fond of, Baroness, I confess, especially when they are just a little you know!"

"But this romance of Prince Andras is by no means just a little you know! It is how shall I express it? It is epic, heroic, romantic what you will. I will relate it to you."

"It will sell fifty thousand copies of our paper," gayly exclaimed Jacquemin, opening his ears, and taking notes mentally.

CHAPTER III. THE STORY OF THE ZILAHS

Andras Zilah, Transylvanian Count and Prince of the Holy Empire, was one of those heroes who devote their whole lives to one aim, and, when they love, love always.

Born for action, for chivalrous and incessant struggle, he had sacrificed his first youth to battling for his country. "The Hungarian was created on horseback," says a proverb, and Andras did not belie the saying. In '48, at the age of fifteen, he was in the saddle, charging the Croatian hussars, the redcloaks, the terrible darkskinned Ottochan horsemen, uttering frightful yells, and brandishing their big damascened guns. It seemed then to young Andras that he was assisting at one of the combats of the Middle Ages, during one of those revolts against the Osmanlis, of which he had heard so much when a child.

In the old castle, with towers painted red in the ancient fashion, where he was born and had grown up, Andras, like all the males of his family and his country, had been imbued with memories of the old wars. A few miles from his father's domain rose the Castle of the Isle, which, in the middle of the sixteenth century, Zringi had defended against the Turks, displaying lofty courage and unconquerable audacity, and forcing Soliman the Magnificent to leave thirty thousand soldiers beneath the walls, the Sultan himself dying before he could subjugate the Hungarian. Often had Andras's father, casting his son upon a horse, set out, followed by a train of cavaliers, for Mohacz, where the Mussulmans had once overwhelmed the soldiers of young King Louis, who died with his own family and every Hungarian who was able to carry arms. Prince Zilah related to the little fellow, who listened to him with burning tears of rage, the story of the days of mourning and the terrible massacres which no Hungarian has ever forgotten. Then he told him of the great revolts, the patriotic uprisings, the exploits of Botzkai, Bethlen Gabor, or Rakoczy, whose proud battle hymn made the blood surge through the veins of the little prince.

Once at Buda, the father had taken the son to the spot, where, in 1795, fell the heads of noble Hungarians, accused of republicanism; and he said to him, as the boy stood with uncovered head:

"This place is called the Field of Blood. Martinowitz was beheaded here for his faith. Remember, that a man's life belongs to his duty, and not to his happiness."

And when he returned to the great sombre halls of the castle, whence in bygone days the Turks had driven out his ancestors, and whence, in their turn, throwing off the yoke of the conquerors, his ancestors had driven out the Turks, little Prince Andras found again examples before him in the giants in semi-oriental costumes, glittering in steel or draped in purple, who looked down upon him from their frames; smoke-blackened paintings wherein the eagle eyes and long moustaches of black hussars, contemporaries of Sobieski, or magnates in furred robes, with aigrettes in their caps, and curved sabres garnished with precious stones and enamel, attracted and held spellbound the silent child, while through the window floated in, sung by some shepherd, or played by wandering Tzigani, the refrain of the old patriotic ballad 'Czaty Demeter', the origin of which is lost in the mist of ages

*Remember, oh, yes! remember our ancestors! Brave, proud Magyars,
when you left the land of the Scythians, brave ancestors, great
forefathers, you did not suspect that your sons would be slaves!
Remember, oh, yes! remember our ancestors!*

Andras did remember them, and he knew by heart their history. He knew the heroism of Prince Zilah Sandor falling in Mohacz in 1566 beside his wife Hanska who had followed him, leaving in the cradle her son Janski, whose grandson, Zilah Janos, in 1867, at the very place where his ancestor had been struck, sabred the Turks, crying: "Sandor and Hanska, look down upon me; your blood avenges you!"

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy, Prince Zilah, v1

There was not one of those men, whose portraits followed the child with their black eyes, who was not recorded in the history of his country for some startling deed or noble sacrifice. All had fought for Hungary: the greater part had died for her. There was a saying that the deathbed of the Zilahs was a bloody battleground. When he offered his name and his life to Maria Theresa, one of the Zilah princes had said proudly to the Empress: "You demand of the Hungarians gold, they bring you steel. The gold was to nourish your courtiers, the steel will be to save your crown. Forward!" These terrible ancestors were, besides, like all the magnates of Hungary, excessively proud of their nobility and their patriarchal system of feudalism. They knew how to protect their peasants, who were trained soldiers, how to fight for them, and how to die at their head; but force seemed to them supreme justice, and they asked nothing but their sword with which to defend their right. Andras's father, Prince Sandor, educated by a French tutor who had been driven from Paris by the Revolution, was the first of all his family to form any perception of a civilization based upon justice and law, and not upon the almighty power of the sabre. The liberal education which he had received, Prince Sandor transmitted to his son. The peasants, who detested the pride of the Magyars, and the middle classes of the cities, mostly tradesmen who envied the castles of these magnates, soon became attracted, fascinated, and enraptured with this transformation in the ancient family of the Zilahs. No man, not even Georgei, the Spartanlike soldier, nor the illustrious Kossuth, was more popular in 1849, at the time of the struggle against Austria, than Prince Sandor Zilah and his son, then a handsome boy of sixteen, but strong and well built as a youth of twenty.

At this youthful age, Andras Zilah had been one of those magnates, who, the 'kalpach' on the head, the national 'attila' over the shoulder and the hand upon the hilt of the sword, had gone to Vienna to plead before the Emperor the cause of Hungary. They were not listened to, and one evening, the negotiations proving futile, Count Batthyanyi said to Jellachich:

"We shall soon meet again upon the Drave!"

"No," responded the Ban of Croatia, "I will go myself to seek you upon the Danube!"

This was war; and Prince Sandor went, with his son, to fight bravely for the old kingdom of St. Stephen against the cannon and soldiers of Jellachich.

All these years of blood and battle were now half forgotten by Prince Andras; but often Yanski Varhely, his companion of those days of hardship, the bold soldier who in former times had so often braved the broadsword of the Bohemian cuirassiers of Auersperg's regiment, would recall to him the past with a mournful shake of the head, and repeat, ironically, the bitter refrain of the song of defeat:

Dance, dance, daughters of Hungary!
Tread now the measure so long delayed.
Murdered our sons by the shot or the hangman!
In this land of pleasure, oh! be not dismayed;
Now is the time, brown daughters of Hungary,
To dance to the measure of true hearts betrayed!

And then, these melancholy words calling up the memory of disaster, all would revive before Andras Zilah's eyes the days of mourning and the days of glory; the exploits of Bem; the victories of Dembiski; the Austrian flags taken at Goedolloe; the assaults of Buda; the defence of Comorn; Austria, dejected and defeated, imploring the aid of Russia; Hungary, beaten by the force of numbers, yet resisting Paskiewich as she had resisted Haynau, and appealing to Europe and the world in the name of the eternal law of nations, which the vanquished invoke, but which is never listened to by the countries where the lion is tearing his prey. And again, Zilah would remember the heroic fatherland struck down at Temesvar; the remnants of an armed people in refuge at Arad; and Klapka still holding out in the island of Comorn at the moment when Georgei had surrendered. Then, again, the obscure deaths of his comrades; the agonies in the ditches and in the depths of the woods; the last despairing cries of a conquered people overwhelmed by numbers:

Dance, dance, daughters of Hungary!

All this bloody past, enveloped as in a crimson cloud, but glorious with its gleams of hope and its flashes of victory, the Prince would revive with old Varhely, in the corner of whose eye at intervals a tear would glisten.

They both saw again the last days of Comorn, with the Danube at the foot of the walls, and the leaves of the trees whirling in the September wind, and dispersed like the Hungarians themselves; and the shells falling upon the ramparts; and the last hours of the siege; and the years of mournful sadness and exile; their companions decimated, imprisoned, led to the gallows or the stake; the frightful silence and ruin falling like a winding-sheet over Hungary; the houses deserted, the fields laid waste, and the country, fertile yesterday, covered now with those Muscovite thistles, which were unknown in Hungary before the year of massacre, and the seeds of which the Cossack horses had imported in their thick manes and tails.

Beloved Hungary, whose sons, disdainful of the universe, used proudly to boast: "Have we not all that man needs? Banat, which gives us wheat; Tisza, wine; the mountain, gold and salt. Our country is sufficient for her children!" And this country, this fruitful country, was now covered with gibbets and corpses.

CHAPTER IV. "WHEN HUNGARY IS FREE!"

All these bitter memories Prince Andras, in spite of the years that had passed, kept ever in his mind one sad and tragic event the burial of his father, Sandor Zilah, who was shot in the head by a bullet during an encounter with the Croats early in the month of January, 1849.

Prince Sandor was able to grasp the hand of his son, and murmur in the ear of this hero of sixteen:

"Remember! Love and defend the fatherland!"

Then, as the Austrians were close at hand, it was necessary to bury the Prince in a trench dug in the snow, at the foot of a clump of fir-trees.

Some Hungarian 'honveds, bourgeois' militia, and Varhely's hussars held at the edge of the black opening resinous torches, which the wintry wind shook like scarlet plumes, and which stained the snow with great red spots of light. Erect, at the head of the ditch, his fingers grasping the hand of Yanski Varhely, young Prince Andras gazed upon the earthy bed, where, in his hussar's uniform, lay Prince Sandor, his long blond moustache falling over his closed mouth, his blood-stained hands crossed upon his black embroidered vest, his right hand still clutching the handle of his sabre, and on his forehead, like a star, the round mark of the bit of lead that had killed him.

Above, the whitened branches of the firs looked like spectres, and upon the upturned face of the dead soldier fell flakes of snow like congealed tears. Under the flickering of the torch-flames, blown about by the north wind, the hero seemed at times to move again, and a wild desire came to Andras to leap down into the grave and snatch away the body. He was an orphan now, his mother having died when he was an infant, and he was alone in the world, with only the staunch friendship of Varhely and his duty to his country to sustain him.

"I will avenge you, father," he whispered to the patriot, who could no longer hear his words.

The hussars and honveds had advanced, ready to fire a final salvo over the grave of the Prince, when, suddenly, gliding between the ranks of the soldiers, appeared a band of Tzigani, who began to play the March of Rakoczy, the Hungarian Marseillaise, the stirring melody pealing forth in the night-air, and lending a certain mysteriously touching element to the sad scene. A quick shudder ran through the ranks of the soldiers, ready to become avengers.

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy, Prince Zilah, v1

The national hymn rang out like a song of glory over the resting-place of the vanquished. The soul of the dead seemed to speak in the voice of the heroic music, recalling to the harassed contestants for liberty the great days of the revolts of the fatherland, the old memories of the struggles against the Turks, the furious charges of the cavaliers across the free puszta, the vast Hungarian plain.

And while, with long sweeps of his arm, the chief of the Tzigani marked the measure, and the 'czimbalom' poured forth its heartrending notes, it seemed to the poor fellows gathered about that the music of the March of Rakoczy summoned a whole fantastic squadron of avengers, horsemen with floating pelisses and herons' plumes in their hats, who, erect in their saddles and with sabres drawn, struck, struck the frightened enemy, and recovered, foot by foot, the conquered territory. There was in this exalted march a sound of horses' hoofs, the clash of arms, a shaking of the earth under the gallop of horsemen, a flash of agraffes, a rustle of pelisses in the wind, an heroic gayety and a chivalrous bravery, like the cry of a whole people of cavaliers sounding the charge of deliverance.

And the young Prince, gazing down upon his dead father, remembered how many times those mute lips had related to him the legend of the czardas, that legend, symbolic of the history of Hungary, summing up all the bitter pain of the conquest, when the beautiful dark girls of Transylvania danced, their tears burning their cheeks, under the lash of the Osmanlis. At first, cold and motionless, like statues whose calm looks silently insulted their possessors, they stood erect beneath the eye of the Turk; then little by little, the sting of the master's whip falling upon their shoulders and tearing their sides and cheeks, their bodies twisted in painful, revolted spasms; the flesh trembled under the cord like the muscles of a horse beneath the spur; and, in the morbid exaltation of suffering, a sort of wild delirium took possession of them, their arms were waved in the air, their heads with hair dishevelled were thrown backward, and the captives, uttering a sound at once plaintive and menacing, danced, their dance, at first slow and melancholy, becoming gradually active, nervous, and interrupted by cries which resembled sobs. And the Hungarian czardas, symbolizing thus the dance of these martyrs, kept still, will always keep, the characteristic of contortions under the lash of bygone days; and, slow and languishing at first, then soon quick and agitated, tragically hysterical, it also is interrupted by melancholy chords, dreary, mournful notes and plaintive accents like drops of blood from a wound—from the mortal wound of Prince Sandor, lying there in his martial uniform.

The bronzed Tzigani, fantastically illumined by the red glare of the torches, stood out against the white background like demons of revenge; and the hymn, feverish, bold, ardent, echoed through the snow-covered branches like a hurricane of victory. They were wandering musicians, who, the evening before, had been discovered in a neighboring village by some of Jellachich's Croats, and whom Prince Sandor had unceremoniously rescued at the head of his hussars; and they had come, with their ancient national airs, the voice of their country, to pay their debt to the fallen hero.

When they had finished, the wintry night-wind bearing away the last notes of their war-song, the pistols of the hussars and the guns of the honveds discharged a salute over the grave. The earth and snow were shovelled in upon the body of Sandor Zilah, and Prince Andras drew away, after marking with a cross the place where his father reposed.

A few paces away, he perceived, among the Tzigani musicians, a young girl, the only woman of the tribe, who wept with mournful sobbings like the echoes of the deserts of the Orient.

He wondered why the girl wept so bitterly, when he, the son, could not shed a tear.

"Because Prince Zilah Sandor was valiant among the valiant," she replied, in answer to his question, "and he died because he would not wear the talisman which I offered him."

Andras looked at the girl.

"What talisman?"

"Some pebbles from the lakes of Tatra, sewn up in a little leather bag."

Andras knew what a powerful superstition is attached by the people of Hungary to these deep lakes of Tatra, the "eyes of the sea," where, say the old legends, the most beautiful carbuncle in the world lies hidden, a carbuncle which would sparkle like the sun, if it could be discovered, and which is guarded by frogs with diamond eyes and with lumps of pure gold for feet. He felt more touched than astonished at the superstition of the Tzigana, and at the offer which, the evening before, Prince Sandor had refused with a smile.

"Give me what you wished to give my father," he said. "I will keep it in memory of him."

A bright, joyous light flashed for a moment across the face of the Tzigana. She extended to the young Prince the little bag of leather containing several small, round pebbles like grains of maize.

"At all events," exclaimed the young girl, "there will be one Zilah whom the balls of the Croats will spare for the safety of Hungary."

Andras slowly detached from his shoulder the silver agraffe, set with opals, which clasped his fur pelisse, and handed it to the gypsy, who regarded it with admiring eyes as it flashed in the red light.

"The day when my father is avenged," he said, "and our Hungary is free, bring me this jewel, and you and yours come to the castle of the Zilahs. I will give you a life of peace in memory of this night of mourning."

Already, at a distance, could be heard a rapid fusillade about the outposts. The Austrians had perhaps perceived the light from the torches, and were attempting a night attack.

"Extinguish the torches!" cried Yanski Varhely.

The resinous knots hissed as they were thrust into the snow, and the black, sinister night of winter, with the cries of the wind in the branches, fell upon the troop of men, ready to die as their chief had died; and all disappeared vision, phantoms the Tzigani silently taking refuge in the sombre forest, while here and there could be heard the rattle of the ramrods as the honveds loaded their guns.

This January night appeared now to Andras as an almost fantastic dream. Since then he had erected a mausoleum of marble on the very spot where Prince Sandor fell; and of all the moments of that romantic, picturesque war, the agonizing moment, the wild scene of the burial of his father, was most vivid in his memory the picture of the warrior stretched in the snow, his hand on the handle of his sword, remained before his eyes, imperishable in its melancholy majesty.

CHAPTER V. "MY FATHER WAS A RUSSIAN!"

When the war was over, the Prince roamed sadly for years about Europe Europe, which, unmindful of the martyrs, had permitted the massacre of the vanquished. It was many years before he could accustom himself to the idea that he had no longer a country. He counted always upon the future; it was impossible that fate would forever be implacable to a nation. He often repeated this to Yanski Varhely, who had never forsaken him Yanski Varhely, the impoverished old hussar, the ruined gentleman, now professor of Latin and mathematics at Paris, and living near the Prince off the product of his lessons and a small remnant he had managed to save from the wreck of his property.

"Hungary will spring up again, Yanski; Hungary is immortal!" Andras would exclaim.

"Yes, on one condition," was Varhely's response. "She must arrive at a comprehension that if she has succumbed, it is because she has committed faults. All defeats have their geneses. Before the enemy we were not a unit. There were too many discussions, and not enough action; such a state of affairs is always fatal."

The years brought happy changes to Hungary. She practically regained her freedom; by her firmness she made the conquest of her own autonomy by the side of Austria. Deak's spirit, in the person of Andrassy, recovered the possession of power. But neither Andras nor Varhely returned to their country. The Prince had become, as he himself said with a smile, "a Magyar of Paris." He grew accustomed to the intellectual, refined life of the French city; and this was a consolation, at times, for the exile from his native land.

"It is not a difficult thing to become bewitched with Paris," he would say, as if to excuse himself.

He had no longer, it is true, the magnificent landscapes of his youth; the fields of maize, the steppes, dotted here and there with clumps of wild roses; the Carpathian pines, with their sombre murmur; and all the evening sounds which had been his infancy's lullaby; the cowbells, melancholy and indistinct; the snapping of the great whips of the czikos; the mounted shepherds, with their hussar jackets, crossing the plains where grew the plants peculiar to the country; and the broad horizons with the enormous arms of the windmills outlined against the golden sunset. But Paris, with its ever-varying seductions, its activity in art and science, its perpetual movement, had ended by becoming a real need to him, like a new existence as precious and as loved as the first. The soldier had become a man of letters, jotting down for himself, not for the public, all that struck him in his observation and his reading; mingling in all societies, knowing them all, but esteeming only one, that of honest people; and thus letting the years pass by, without suspecting that they were flying, regarding himself somewhat as a man away on a visit, and suddenly awaking one fine morning almost old, wondering how he had lived all this time of exile which, despite many mental troubles, seemed to him to have lasted only a few months.

"We resemble," he said to Varhely, "those emigrants who never unpack their boxes, certain that they are soon to return home. They wait, and some day, catching a glimpse of themselves in a glass, they are amazed to find wrinkles and gray hairs."

No longer having a home in his own country, Prince Andras had never dreamed of making another abroad. He hired the sumptuous hotel he inhabited at the top of the Champs Elysees, when houses were rather scattered there. Fashion, and the ascensional movement of Paris toward the Arc de Triomphe, had come to seek him. His house was rich in beautiful pictures and rare books, and he sometimes received there his few real friends, his companions in troublous times, like Varhely. He was generally considered a little of a recluse, although he loved society and showed himself, during the winter, at all entertainments where, by virtue of his fame and rank, he would naturally be expected to be present. But he carried with him a certain melancholy and gravity, which contrasted strongly with the frivolous trivialities and meaningless smiles of our modern society. In the summer, he usually passed two months at the seashore, where Varhely frequently joined him; and upon the leafy terrace of the Prince's villa the two friends had long and confidential chats, as they watched the sun sink into the sea.

Andras had never thought of marrying. At first, he had a sort of feeling that he was doomed to an early death, ever expecting a renewal of the struggle with Austria; and he thought at that time that the future would bring to him his father's fate a ball in the forehead and a ditch. Then, without knowing it, he had reached and passed his fortieth year.

"Now it is too late," he said, gayly. "The psychological moment is long gone by. We shall both end old bachelors, my good Varhely, and spend our evenings playing checkers, that mimic warfare of old men."

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy, Prince Zilah, v1

"Yes, that is all very well for me, who have no very famous name to perpetuate; but the Zilahs should not end with you. I want some sturdy little hussar whom I can teach to sit a horse, and who also will call me his good old Yanski."

The Prince smiled, and then replied, gravely, almost sadly: "I greatly fear that one can not love two things at once; the heart is not elastic. I chose Hungary for my bride, and my life must be that of a widower."

In the midst of the austere and thoughtful life he led, Andras preserved, nevertheless, a sort of youthful buoyancy. Many men of thirty were less fresh in mind and body than he. He was one of those beings who die, as they have lived, children: even the privations of the hardest kind of an existence can not take away from them that purity and childlike trust which seem to be an integral part of themselves, and which, although they may be betrayed, deceived and treated harshly by life, they never wholly lose; very manly and heroic in time of need and danger, they are by nature peculiarly exposed to treasons and deceptions which astonish but do not alter them. Since man, in the progress of time, must either harden or break to pieces, the hero in them is of iron; but, on the other hand, their hearts are easily wounded by the cruel hand of some woman or the careless one of a child.

Andras Zilah had not yet loved deeply, as it was in his nature to love. More or less passing caprices had not dried up the spring of real passion which was at the bottom of his heart. But he had not sought this love; for he adored his Hungary as he would have loved a woman, and the bitter recollection of her defeat gave him the impression of a love that had died or been cruelly betrayed.

Yanski, on the whole, had not greatly troubled himself to demonstrate mathematically or philosophically that a "hussar pupil" was an absolute necessity to him. People can not be forced, against their will, to marry; and the Prince, after all, was free, if he chose, to let the name of Zilah die with him.

"Taking life as it is," old Varhely would growl, "perhaps it isn't necessary to bring into the world little beings who never asked to come here." And yet breaking off in his pessimism, and with a vision before his eyes of another Andras, young, handsome, leading his hussars to the charge "and yet, it is a pity, Andras, it is a pity."

The decisions of men are more often dependent upon chance than upon their own will. Prince Andras received an invitation to dinner one day from the little Baroness Dinati, whom he liked very much, and whose husband, Orso Dinati, one of the defenders of Venice in the time of Manin, had been his intimate friend. The house of the Baroness was a very curious place; the reporter Jacquemin, who was there at all times, testing the wines and correcting the menus, would have called it "bizarre." The Baroness received people in all circles of society; oddities liked her, and she did not dislike oddities. Very honest, very spirituelle, an excellent woman at heart, she gave evening parties, readings from unheard-of books, and performances of the works of unappreciated musicians; and the reporters, who came to absorb her salads and drink her punch, laughed at her in their journals before their supper was digested.

The Prince, as we have said, was very fond of the Baroness, with an affection which was almost fraternal. He pardoned her childishness and her little absurdities for the sake of her great good qualities. "My dear Prince," she said to him one day, "do you know that I would throw myself into the fire for you?"

"I am sure of it; but there would not be any great merit in your doing so."

"And why not, please?"

"Because you would not run any risk of being burned. This must be so, because you receive in your house a crowd of highly suspicious people, and no one has ever suspected you yourself. You are a little salamander, the prettiest salamander I ever met. You live in fire, and you have neither upon your face nor your reputation the slightest little scorch."

"Then you think that my guests are"

"Charming. Only, they are of two kinds: those whom I esteem, and who do not amuse me often; and those who amuse me, and whom I esteem never."

"I suppose you will not come any more to the Rue Murillo, then?"

"Certainly I shall to see you."

And it really was to see her that the Prince went to the Baroness Dinati's, where his melancholy characteristics clashed with so many worldly follies and extravagances. The Baroness seemed to have a peculiar faculty in choosing extraordinary guests: Peruvians, formerly dictators, now become insurance agents, or generals transformed into salesmen for some wine house; Cuban chiefs half shot to pieces by the Spaniards; Cretes exiled by the Turks; great personages from Constantinople, escaped from the Sultan's silken bowstring, and displaying proudly their red fez in Paris, where the opera permitted them to continue their habits of polygamy; Americans, whose gold-mines or petroleum-wells made them billionaires for a winter, only to go to pieces and make them paupers the following summer; politicians out of a place; unknown authors; misunderstood poets; painters of the future—in short, the greater part of the people who were invited by Prince Andras to his water-party, Baroness Dinati having pleaded for her friends and obtained for them cards of invitation. It was a sort of ragout of real and shady celebrities, an amusing, bustling crowd, half Bohemian, half aristocratic, entirely cosmopolitan. Prince Andras remembered once having dined with a staff officer of Garibaldi's army on one side of him, and the Pope's nuncio on the other.

On a certain evening the Baroness was very anxious that the Prince should not refuse her latest invitation.

"I am arranging a surprise for you," she said. "I am going to have to dinner"

"Whom? The Mikado? The Shah of Persia?"

"Better than the Mikado. A charming young girl who admires you profoundly, for she knows by heart the whole history of your battles of 1849. She has read Georgei, Klapka, and all the rest of them; and she is so thoroughly Bohemian in heart, soul and race, that she is universally called the Tzigana."

"The Tzigana?"

This simple word, resembling the clank of cymbals, brought up to Prince Andras a whole world of recollections. 'Hussad czigany'! The rallying cry of the wandering musicians of the puszta had some element in it like the cherished tones of the distant bells of his fatherland.

"Ah! yes, indeed, my dear Baroness," he said; "that is a charming surprise. I need not ask if your Tzigana is pretty; all the Tzigani of my country are adorable, and I am sure I shall fall in love with her."

The Prince had no notion how prophetic his words were. The Tzigana, whom the Baroness requested him to take in to dinner, was Marsa, Marsa Laszlo, dressed in one of the black toilettes which she affected, and whose clear, dark complexion, great Arabian eyes, and heavy, wavy hair seemed to Andras's eyes to be the incarnation, in a prouder and more refined type, of the warm, supple, nervous beauty of the girls of his country.

He was surprised and strangely fascinated, attracted by the incongruous mixture of extreme refinement and a sort of haughty unconventionality he found in Marsa. A moment before, he had noticed how silent, almost rigid she was, as she leaned back in her armchair; but now this same face was strangely animated, illumined by some happy emotion, and her eyes burned like coals of fire as she fixed them upon Andras.

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy, Prince Zilah, v1

During the whole dinner, the rest of the dining-room disappeared to the Prince; he saw only the girl at his side; and the candles and polished mirrors were only there to form a sparkling background for her pale, midnight beauty.

"Do you know, Prince," said Marsa, in her rich, warm contralto voice, whose very accents were like a caress, "do you know that, among all those who fought for our country, you are the one admiration of my life?"

He smiled, and mentioned more illustrious names.

"No, no," she answered; "those are not the names I care for, but yours. I will tell you why."

And she recalled, in a voice vibrating with emotion, all that Prince Zilah Sandor and his son had attempted, twenty years before, for the liberty of Hungary. She told the whole story in the most vivid manner; had her age permitted her to have been present at those battles, she could not have related them with more spirited enthusiasm.

"I know, perfectly, how, at the head of your hussars, you wrested from the soldiers of Jellachich the first standard captured by the Hungarians from the ranks of Austria. Shall I tell you the exact date? and the day of the week? It was Thursday."

The whole history, ignored, forgotten, lost in the smoke of more recent wars, the strange, dark-eyed girl, knew day by day, hour by hour; and there, in that Parisian dining-room, surrounded by all that crowd, where yesterday's 'bon mot', the latest scandal, the new operetta, were subjects of paramount importance, Andras, voluntarily isolated, saw again, present and living, his whole heroic past rise up before him, as beneath the wave of a fairy's wand.

"But how do you know me so well?" he asked, fixing his clear eyes upon Marsa Laszlo's face. "Was your father one of my soldiers?"

"My father was a Russian," responded Marsa, abruptly, her voice suddenly becoming harsh and cutting.

"A Russian?"

"Yes, a Russian," she repeated, emphasizing the word with a sort of dull anger. "My mother alone was a Tzigana, and my mother's beauty was part of the spoils of those who butchered your soldiers?"

In the uproar of conversation, which became more animated with the dessert, she could not tell him of the sorrows of her life; and yet, he guessed there was some sad story in the life of the young girl, and almost implored her to speak, stopping just at the limit where sympathy might change into indiscretion.

"I beg your pardon," he said, as she was silent, with a dark shadow overspreading her face. "I have no right to know your life simply because you are so well acquainted with mine."

"Oh! you!" she said, with a sad smile; "your life is history; mine is drama, melodrama even. There is a great difference."

"Pardon my presumption!"

"Oh! I will willingly tell you of my life, if the existence of a useless being like myself can interest you; but not here in the noise of this dinner. It would be absurd," with a change of tone, "to mingle tears with champagne. By-and-bye! By-and-bye!"

She made an evident effort to appear gay, like the pretty women who were there, and who, despite their prettiness, seemed to Andras perfectly insignificant; but she did not succeed in driving away the cloud of sadness which overshadowed her exquisite, dark face. And in the ears of the Prince rang again the bitter accents of that voice saying in a harsh, almost revolted tone:

"Yes, a Russian! My father was a Russian!"

CHAPTER VI. A GYPSY PRINCESS

The mystery which seemed to envelop Marsa, the flash of anger with which she had spoken of the Russian who was her father, all attracted the Prince toward her; and he experienced a deliciously disquieting sentiment, as if the secret of this girl's existence were now grafted upon his own life.

She seemed to have no wish to keep her secret from him. At their first meeting, during the conversation which followed the dinner and the musical exhibition given by extraordinary musicians with long, unkempt locks, Marsa, trusting with a sort of joy to the one whom she regarded as a hero, told Prince Andras the story of her life.

She related to him the assault made by soldiers of Paskiewich upon the little Hungarian village, and how her grandfather, leaving his czimbalom, had fired upon the Russians from the ranks of the honveds. There was a combat, or rather a butchery, in the sole street of the town, one of the last massacres of the campaign. The Russians destroyed everything, shooting down the prisoners, and burning the poor little houses. There were some women among the Hungarians and Tzigani; they had loaded the guns of the wounded, comforted the dying and avenged the dead. Many of them were killed. One of them, the youngest and prettiest, a gypsy, was seized by the Russian officer, and, when peace was declared soon after, carried off by him to Russia. This was Tisza Laszlo, Marsa's mother. The officer, a great Russian nobleman, a handsome fellow and extremely rich, really loved her with a mad sort of love. He forced her to become his mistress; but he tried in every way to make her pardon the brutality of his passion; keeping her half a captive in his castle near Moscow, and yet offering her, by way of expiation, not only his fortune but his name, the princely title of which the Tcheretteffs, his ancestors, had been so proud, and which the daughter of wandering Tzigani refused with mingled hatred and disgust. Princess? She, the gypsy, a Russian princess? The title would have appeared to her like a new and still more abhorrent stigma. He implored her, but she was obdurate. It was a strange, tragic existence these two beings led, shut up in the immense castle, from the windows of which Tisza could perceive the gilded domes of Moscow, the superb city in which she would never set her foot, preferring the palace, sad and gloomy as a cell. Alone in the world, the sole survivor of her massacred tribe, the Russians to her were the murderers of her people, the assassins of the free musicians with eagle profiles she used to follow as they played the czardas from village to village.

She never saw Prince Tcheretteff, handsome, generous, charming, loving her and trembling before her glance although he had ruthlessly kidnapped her from her country, that she did not think of him, sword in hand, entering the burning Hungarian village, his face reddened by the flames, as the bayonets of his soldiers were reddened with blood. She hated this tall young man, his drooping moustache, his military uniform, his broad figure, his white-gloved hands: he represented to the imprisoned Tzigana the conqueror and murderer of her people. And yet a daughter was born to them. She had defended herself with the cries of a tigress; and then she had longed to die, to die of hunger, since, a close prisoner, she could not obtain possession of a weapon, nor cast herself into the water. She had lived, nevertheless, and then her daughter reconciled her to life. The child which was born to her was all in all to Tisza. Marsa was an exact reproduction, feature by feature, of her mother, and, strange to say, daughters generally resembling the father, had nothing of Tcheretteff, nothing Russian about her: on the contrary, she was all Tzigana Tzigana in the clear darkness of her skin, in her velvety eyes, and her long, waving black hair, with its bronze reflections, which the mother loved to wind about her thin fingers.

Her beauty, faded by long, slow sorrow, Tisza found again in her child, a true daughter of Hungary like herself;

and, as Marsa grew up, she told her the legends, the songs, the heroism, the martyrdom, of Hungary, picturing to the little girl the great, grassy plain, the free puszta, peopled with a race in whose proud language the word honor recurs again and again.

Marsa grew up in the Muscovite castle, loving nothing in the world except her mother, and regarding with frightened eyes the blond stranger who sometimes took her upon his knees and gazed sadly into her face. Before this man, who was her father, she felt as if she were in the presence of an enemy. As Tisza never went out, Marsa rarely quitted the castle; and, when she went to Moscow, she hastened to return to her mother. The very gayeties of that noisy city weighed upon her heart; for she never forgot the war-tales of the Tzigana, and, perhaps, among the passers-by was the wretch who had shot down her grandfather, old Mihal.

The Tzigana cultivated, with a sort of passion, a love of far-off Hungary and a hatred for the master in the impressionable mind of her daughter. There is a Servian proverb which says, that when a Wallachian has crossed the threshold the whole house becomes Wallachian. Tisza did not wish the house to become Hungarian; but she did wish that the child of her loins should be and should remain Hungarian.

The servants of Prince Tcheretteff never spoke of their mistress except as The Tzigana, and this was the name which Marsa wished to bear also. It seemed to her like a title of nobility.

And the years passed without the Tzigana pardoning the Russian, and without Marsa ever having called him father.

In the name of their child, the Prince one day solemnly asked Tisza Laszlo to consent to become his wife, and the mother refused.

"But our daughter?" said the Prince.

"My daughter? She will bear the name of her mother, which at least is not a Russian name."

The Prince was silenced.

As Marsa grew up, Moscow became displeasing to the Prince. He had his daughter educated as if she were destined to be the Czarina. He summoned to the castle a small army of instructors, professors of music and singing; French, English, and German masters, drawing masters, etc., etc. The young girl, with the prodigious power of assimilation peculiar to her race, learned everything, loving knowledge for its own sake, but, nevertheless, always deeply moved by the history of that unknown country, which was that of her mother, and even her own, the land of her heart and her soul—Hungary. She knew, from her mother, about all its heroes: Klapka, Georgei, Dembiski; Bem, the conqueror of Buda; Kossuth, the dreamer of a sort of feudal liberty; and those chivalrous Zilah princes, father and son, the fallen martyr and the living hero.

Prince Tcheretteff, French in education and sentiment, wished to take to France the child, who did not bear his name, but whom he adored. France also exercised a powerful fascination over Marsa's imagination; and she departed joyously for Paris, accompanied by the Tzigana, her mother, who felt like a prisoner set at liberty. To quit Russian soil was in itself some consolation, and who knew? perhaps she might again see her dear fatherland.

Tisza, in fact, breathed more freely in Paris, repeating however, like a mournful refrain, the proverb of her country: Away from Hungary, life is not life. The Prince purchased, at Maisons-Lafitte, not far from the forest of Saint-Germain, a house surrounded by an immense garden. Here, as formerly at Moscow, Tisza and the Prince lived together, and yet apart the Tzigana, implacable in her resentment, bitterly refusing all pardon to the Russian, and always keeping alive in Marsa a hatred of all that was Muscovite; the Prince, disconsolate, gloomy, discouraged between the woman whom he adored and whose heart he could not win, and the girl, so wonderfully

beautiful, the living portrait of her mother, and who treated him with the cold respect one shows to a stranger.

Not long after their arrival in Paris, a serious heart trouble attacked Marsa's father. He summoned to his deathbed the Tzigana and her daughter; and, in a sort of supreme confession, he openly asked his child, before the mother, to forgive him for her birth.

"Marsa," he said, slowly, "your birth, which should make the joy of my existence, is the remorse of my whole life. But I am dying of the love which I can not conquer. Will you kiss me as a token that you have pardoned me?"

For the first time, perhaps, Marsa's lips, trembling with emotion, then touched the Prince's forehead. But, before kissing him, her eyes had sought those of her mother, who bowed her head in assent.

"And you," murmured the dying Prince, "will you forgive me, Tisza?"

The Tzigana saw again her native village in flames, her brothers dead, her father murdered, and this man, now lying thin and pale amid the pillows, erect, with sabre drawn, crying: "Courage! Charge! Forward!"

Then she saw herself dragged almost beneath a horse's hoofs, cast into a wagon with wrists bound together, carried in the rear of an army with the rest of the victor's spoils, and immured within Russian walls. She felt again on her lips the degradation of the first kiss of this man whose suppliant, pitiful love was hideous to her.

She made a step toward the dying man as if to force herself to whisper, "I forgive you;" but all the resentment and suffering of her life mounted to her heart, almost stifling her, and she paused, going no farther, and regarding with a haggard glance the man whose eyes implored her pardon, and who, after raising his pale face from the pillow, let his head fall back again with one long, weary sigh.

CHAPTER VII. THE STORY OF MARSAS

Prince Tcheretteff left his whole fortune to Marsa Laszlo, leaving her in the hands of his uncle Vogotzine, an old, ruined General, whose property had been confiscated by the Czar, and who lived in Paris half imbecile with fear, having become timid as a child since his release from Siberia, where he had been sent on some pretext or other, no one knew exactly the reason why.

It had been necessary to obtain the sovereign intervention of the Czar that Czar whose will is the sole law, a law above laws to permit Prince Tcheretteff to give his property to a foreigner, a girl without a name. The state would gladly have seized upon the fortune, as the Prince had no other relative save an outlaw; but the Czar graciously gave his permission, and Marsa inherited.

Old General Vogotzine was, in fact, the only living relative of Prince Tcheretteff. In consideration of a yearly income, the Prince charged him to watch over Marsa, and see to her establishment in life. Rich as she was, Marsa would have no lack of suitors; but Tisza, the half-civilized Tzigana, was not the one to guide and protect a young girl in Paris. The Prince believed Vogotzine to be less old and more acquainted with Parisian life than he really was, and it was a consolation to the father to feel that his daughter would have a guardian.

Tisza did not long survive the Prince. She died in that Russian house, every stone of which she hated, even to the Muscovite crucifix over the door, which her faith, however, forbade her to have removed; she died making her daughter swear that the last slumber which was coming to her, gently lulling her to rest after so much suffering, should be slept in Hungarian soil; and, after the Tzigana's death, this young girl of twenty, alone with Vogotzine, who accompanied her on the gloomy journey with evident displeasure, crossed France, went to Vienna, sought in the Hungarian plain the place where one or two miserable huts and some crumbling walls alone marked the site of

the village burned long ago by Tcheretteff's soldiers; and there, in Hungarian soil, close to the spot where the men of her tribe had been shot down, she buried the Tzigana, whose daughter she so thoroughly felt herself to be, that, in breathing the air of the puszta, she seemed to find again in that beloved land something already seen, like a vivid memory of a previous existence.

And yet, upon the grave of the martyr, Marsa prayed also for the executioner. She remembered that the one who reposed in the cemetery of Pere-Lachaise, beneath a tomb in the shape of a Russian dome, was her father, as the Tzigana, interred in Hungary, was her mother; and she asked in her prayer, that these two beings, separated in life, should pardon each other in the unknown, obscure place of departed souls.

So Marsa Laszlo was left alone in the world. She returned to France, which she had become attached to, and shut herself up in the villa of Maisons-Lafitte, letting old Vogotzine install himself there as a sort of Mentor, more obedient than a servant, and as silent as a statue; and this strange guardian, who had formerly fought side by side with Schamyl, and cut down the Circassians with the sang-froid of a butcher's boy wringing the neck of a fowl, and who now scarcely dared to open his lips, as if the entire police force of the Czar had its eye upon him; this old soldier, who once cared nothing for privations, now, provided he had his chocolate in the morning, his kummel with his coffee at breakfast, and a bottle of brandy on the table all day left Marsa free to think, act, come and go as she pleased.

She had accepted the Prince's legacy, but with this mental reservation and condition, that the Hungarian colony of Paris should receive half of it. It seemed to her that the money thus given to succor the compatriots of her mother would be her father's atonement. She waited, therefore, until she had attained her majority; and then she sent this enormous sum to the Hungarian aid society, saying that the donor requested that part of the amount should be used in rebuilding the little village in Transylvania which had been burned twenty years before by Russian troops. When they asked what name should be attached to so princely a gift, Marsa replied: "That which was my mother's and which is mine, The Tzigana." More than ever now did she cling to that cognomen of which she was so proud.

"And," she said to Zilah, after she had finished the recital of her story, "it is because I am thus named that I have the right to speak to you of yourself."

Prince Andras listened with passionate attention to the beautiful girl, thus evoking for him the past, confident and even happy to speak and make herself known to the man whose life of heroic devotion she knew so well.

He was not astonished at her sudden frankness, at the confidence displayed at a first meeting; and it seemed to him that he had long been acquainted with this Tzigana, whose very name he had been ignorant of a few hours before. It appeared to him quite simple that Marsa should confide in him, as he on his side would have related to her his whole life, if she had asked it with a glance from her dark eyes. He felt that he had reached one of the decisive moments of his life. Marsa called up visions of his youth—his first tender dreams of love, rudely broken by the harsh voice of war; and he felt as he used to feel, in the days long gone by, when he sat beneath the starry skies of a summer night and listened to the old, heart-stirring songs of his country and the laughter of the brown maidens of Budapest.

"Prince," said Marsa Laszlo, suddenly, "do you know that I have been seeking you for a long time, and that when the Baroness Dinati presented you to me, she fulfilled one of my most ardent desires?"

"Me, Mademoiselle? You have been seeking me?"

"Yes, you. Tisza, of whom I spoke to you, my Tzigana mother, who bore the name of the blessed river of our country, taught me to repeat your name. She met you years ago, in the saddest moment of your life."

"Your mother?" said Andras, waiting anxiously for the young girl to continue.

"Yes, my mother."

She pointed to the buckle which clasped the belt of her dress.

"See," she said.

Andras felt a sudden pang, which yet was not altogether pain, dart through his heart, and his eyes wandered questioningly from the buckle to Marsa's face. Smiling, but her beautiful lips mute, Marsa seemed to say to him: "Yes, it is the agraffe which you detached from your soldier's pelisse and gave to an unknown Tzigana near your father's grave."

The silver ornament, incrusting with opals, recalled sharply to Prince Zilah that sad January night when the dead warrior had been laid in his last resting-place. He saw again the sombre spot, the snowy fir-trees, the black trench, and the broad, red reflections of the torches, which, throwing a flickering light upon the dead, seemed to reanimate the pale, cold face.

And that daughter of the wandering musicians who had, at the open grave, played as a dirge, or, rather, as a ringing hymn of resurrection and deliverance, the chant of the fatherland—that dark girl to whom he had said: "Bring me this jewel, and come and live in peace with the Zilahs" was the mother of this beautiful, fascinating creature, whose every word, since he had first met her a few hours before, had exercised such a powerful effect upon him.

"So," he said, slowly, with a sad smile, "your mother's talisman was worth more than mine. I have kept the lake pebbles she gave me, and death has passed me by; but the opals of the agraffe did not bring happiness to your mother. It is said that those stones are unlucky. Are you superstitious?"

"I should not be Tisza's daughter if I did not believe a little in all that is romantic, fantastic, improbable, impossible even. Besides, the opals are forgiven now: for they have permitted me to show you that you were not unknown to me, Prince; and, as you see, I wear this dear agraffe always. It has a double value to me, since it recalls the memory of my poor mother and the name of a hero."

She spoke these words in grave, sweet accents, which seemed more melodious to Prince Andras than all the music of Baroness Dinati's concert. He divined that Marsa Laszlo found as much pleasure in speaking to him as he felt in listening. As he gazed at her, a delicate flush spread over Marsa's pale, rather melancholy face, tingeing even her little, shell-like ears, and making her cheeks glow with the soft, warm color of a peach.

Just at this moment the little Baroness came hastily up to them, and, with an assumed air of severity, began to reproach Marsa for neglecting the unfortunate musicians, suddenly breaking off to exclaim:

"Really, you are a hundred times prettier than ever this evening, my dear Marsa. What have you been doing to yourself?"

"Oh! it is because I am very happy, I suppose," replied Marsa.

"Ah! my dear Prince," and the Baroness broke into a merry peal of laughter, "it is you, O ever-conquering hero, who have worked this miracle."

But, as if she had been too hasty in proclaiming aloud her happiness, the Tzigana suddenly frowned, a harsh, troubled look crept into her dark eyes, and her cheeks became pale as marble, while her gaze was fixed upon a tall young man who was crossing the salon and coming toward her.

Instinctively Andras Zilah followed her look. Michel Menko was advancing to salute Marsa Laszlo, and take with affectionate respect the hand which Andras extended to him.

Marsa coldly returned the low bow of the young man, and took no part in the conversation which followed. Menko remained but a few moments, evidently embarrassed at his reception; and after his departure, Zilah, who had noticed the Tzigana's coldness, asked her if she knew his friend.

"Very well," she said, in a peculiar tone.

"It would be difficult to imagine so from the way in which you received him," said Andras, laughing. "Poor Michel! Have you any reason to be angry with him?"

"None."

"I like him very much. He is a charming boy, and his father was one of my companions in arms. I have been almost a guardian to his son. We are kinsmen, and when the young count entered diplomacy he asked my advice, as he hesitated to serve Austria. I told him that, after having fought Austria with the sword, it was our duty to absorb it by our talents and devotion. Was I not right? Austria is to-day subservient to Hungary, and, when Vienna acts, Vienna glances toward Pesth to see if the Magyars are satisfied. Michel Menko has therefore served his country well; and I don't understand why he gave up diplomacy. He makes me uneasy: he seems to me, like all young men of his generation, a little too undecided what object to pursue, what duty to fulfil. He is nervous, irresolute. We were more unfortunate but more determined; we marched straight on without that burden of pessimism with which our successors are loaded down. I am sorry that Michel has resigned his position: he had a fine future before him, and he would have made a good diplomatist."

"Too good, perhaps," interrupted Marsa, dryly.

"Ah, decidedly," retorted the Prince, with a smile, "you don't like my poor Menko."

"He is indifferent to me;" and the way in which she pronounced the words was a terrible condemnation of Michel Menko. "But," added the Tzigana, "he himself has told me all that you have said of him. He, on his side, has a great affection and a deep veneration for you; and it is not astonishing that it should be so, for men like you are examples for men like him, and "

She paused abruptly, as if unwilling to say more.

"And what?" asked the Prince.

"Nothing. 'Examples' is enough; I don't know what I was going to say."

She made a little gesture with her pretty hand as if to dismiss the subject; and, after wondering a moment at the girl's singular reticence after her previous frankness, Andras thought only of enjoying her grace and charm, until the Tzigana gave him her hand and bade him good-night, begging him to remember that she would be very happy and proud to receive him in her own house.

"But, indeed," she added, with a laugh which displayed two rows of pearly teeth, "it is not for me to invite you. That is a terrible breach of the proprieties. General!"

At her call, from a group near by, advanced old General Vogotzine, whom Zilah had not noticed since the beginning of the evening. Marsa laid her hand on his arm, and said, distinctly, Vogotzine being a little deaf:

"Prince Andras Zilah, uncle, will do us the honor of coming to see us at Maisons–Lafitte."

"Ah! Ah! Very happy! Delighted! Very flattering of you, Prince," stammered the General, pulling his white moustache, and blinking his little round eyes. "Andras Zilah ! Ah ! 1848! Hard days, those! All over now, though! All over now! Ah! Ah! We no longer cut one another's throats! No! No! No longer cut one another's throats!"

He held out to Andras his big, fat hand, and repeated, as he shook that of the Prince:

"Delighted! Enchanted! Prince Zilah! Yes! Yes!"

In another moment they were gone, and the evening seemed to Andras like a vision, a beautiful, feverish dream.

He sent away his coupe, and returned home on foot, feeling the need of the night air; and, as he walked up the Champs–Elysees beneath the starry sky, he was surprised to find a new, youthful feeling at his heart, stirring his pulses like the first, soft touch of spring.

CHAPTER VIII. "HAVE I NO RIGHT TO BE HAPPY"

There was a certain womanly coquetry, mingled with a profound love of the soil where her martyred mother reposed, in the desire which Marsa Laszlo had to be called the Tzigana, instead of by her own name. The Tzigana! This name, as clear cut, resonant and expressive as the czimbaloms of the Hungarian musicians, lent her an additional, original charm. She was always spoken of thus, when she was perceived riding her pure–blooded black mare, or driving, attached to a victoria, a pair of bay horses of the Kisber breed. Before the horses ran two superb Danish hounds, of a lustrous dark gray, with white feet, eyes of a peculiar blue, rimmed with yellow, and sensitive, pointed ears Duna and Bundas, the Hungarian names for the Danube and the Velu.

These hounds, and an enormous dog of the Himalayas, with a thick, yellow coat and long, sharp teeth, a half–savage beast, bearing the name of Ortog (Satan), were Marsa's companions in her walks; and their submission to their young mistress, whom they could have knocked down with one pat of their paws, gave the Tzigana reputation for eccentricity; which, however, neither pleased nor displeased her, as she was perfectly indifferent to the opinion of the public at large.

She continued to inhabit, near the forest of Saint–Germain, beyond the fashionable avenues, the villa, ornamented with the holy Muscovite icon, which Prince Tchereteff had purchased; and she persisted in remaining there alone with old Vogotzine, who regarded her respectfully with his round eyes, always moist with 'kwass' or brandy.

Flying the crowded city, eager for space and air, a true daughter of Hungary, Marsa loved to ride through the beautiful, silent park, down the long, almost deserted avenues, toward the bit of pale blue horizon discernible in the distance at the end of the sombre arch formed by the trees. Birds, startled by the horses' hoofs, rose here and there out of the bushes, pouring forth their caroling to the clear ether; and Marsa, spurring her thoroughbred, would dash in a mad gallop toward a little, almost unknown grove of oaks, with thickets full of golden furze and pink heather, where woodcutters worked, half buried in the long grass peppered with blue cornflowers and scarlet poppies.

Or, at other times, with Duna and Bundas bounding before her, disappearing, returning, disappearing again with yelps of joy, it was Marsa's delight to wander alone under the great limes of the Albine avenue shade over her head, silence about her and then slowly, by way of a little alley bordered with lofty poplars trembling at every breath of wind, to reach the borders of the forest. In ten steps she would suddenly find herself plunged in solitude as in a bath of verdure, shade and oblivion. The sweet silence surrounding her calmed her, and she would walk on and on though the thick grass under the great trees. The trunks of the giant oaks were clothed in robes of emerald

moss, and wild flowers of all descriptions raised their heads amid the grass. There was no footstep, no sound; a bee lazily humming, a brilliant butterfly darting across the path, something quick and red flashing up a tree a squirrel frightened by the Danish hounds; that was all. And Marsa was happy with the languorous happiness which nature gives, her forehead cooled by the fresh breeze, her eyes rested by the deep green which hid the shoes, her whole being refreshed by the atmosphere of peace which fell from the trees.

Then, calling her dogs, she would proceed to a little farmhouse, and, sitting down under the mulberry trees, wait until the farmer's wife brought her some newly baked bread and a cup of milk, warm from the cows. Then she would remain idly there, surrounded by chickens, ducks, and great, greedy geese, which she fed, breaking the bread between her white fingers, while Duna and Bundas crouched at her feet, pricking up their ears, and watching these winged denizens of the farmyard, which Marsa forbade them to touch. Finally the Tzigana would slowly wend her way home, enter the villa, sit down before the piano, and play, with ineffable sweetness, like souvenirs of another life, the free and wandering life of her mother, the Hungarian airs of Janos Nemeth, the sad "Song of Plevna," the sparkling air of "The Little Brown Maid of Budapest," and that bitter; melancholy romance, "The World holds but One Fair Maiden," a mournful and despairing melody, which she preferred to all others, because it responded, with its tearful accents, to a particular state of her own heart.

The girl was evidently concealing some secret suffering. The bitter memory of her early years? Perhaps. Physical pain? Possibly. She had been ill some years before, and had been obliged to pass a winter at Pau. But it seemed rather some mental anxiety or torture which impelled the Tzigana to seek solitude and silence in her voluntary retreat.

The days passed thus in that villa of Maisons-Lafitte, where Tisza died. Very often, in the evening, Marsa would shut herself up in the solitude of that death-chamber, which remained just as her mother had left it. Below, General Vogotzine smoked his pipe, with a bottle of brandy for company: above, Marsa prayed.

One night she went out, and through the sombre alleys, in the tender light of the moon, made her way to the little convent in the Avenue Egle, where the blue sisters were established; those sisters whom she often met in the park, with their full robes of blue cloth, their white veils, a silver medallion and crucifix upon their breasts, and a rosary of wooden beads suspended at their girdles. The little house of the community was shut, the grating closed. The only sign of life was in the lighted windows of the chapel.

Marsa paused there, leaning her heated brow against the cold bars of iron, with a longing for death, and a terrible temptation to end all by suicide.

"Who knows?" she murmured. "Perhaps forgetfulness, deep, profound forgetfulness, lies within these walls." Forgetfulness! Marsa, then, wished to forget? What secret torture gave to her beautiful face that expression so bitter, so terrible in its agony?

She stood leaning there, gazing at the windows of the chapel. Broken words of prayers, of muttered verses and responses, reached her like the tinkling of far-off chimes, like the rustling of invisible wings. The blue sisters, behind those walls, were celebrating their vesper service.

Does prayer drive away anguish and heartrending memories?

Marsa was a Catholic, her mother having belonged to the minority of Tzigani professing the faith of Rome; and Tisza's daughter could, therefore, bury her youth and beauty in the convent of the blue sisters.

The hollow murmur of the verses and prayers, which paused, began again, and then died away in the night like sighs, attracted her, and, like the trees of the forest, gave her an impression of that peace, that deep repose, which was the longed-for dream of her soul.

Immortals Crowned by the French Academy, Prince Zilah, v1

But, suddenly, the Tzigana started, removed her gaze from the light streaming through the blue and crimson glass, and hurried away, crying aloud in the darkness:

"No! repose is not there. And, after all, where is repose? Only in ourselves! It can be found nowhere, if it is not in the heart!"

Then, after these hours of solitude, this longing for the cloister, this thirsting for annihilation and oblivion, Marsa would experience a desire for the dashing, false, and frivolous life of Paris. She would quit Maisons, taking with her a maid, or sometimes old Vogotzine, go to some immense hotel, like the Continental or the Grand, dine at the table d'hote, or in the restaurant, seeking everywhere bustle and noise, the antithesis of the life of shade and silence which she led amid the leafy trees of her park. She would show herself everywhere, at races, theatres, parties as when she accepted the Baroness Dinati's invitation; and, when she became nauseated with all the artificiality of worldly life, she would return eagerly to her woods, her dogs and her solitude, and, if it were winter, would shut herself up for long months in her lonely, snow-girt house.

And was not this existence sweet and pleasant, compared with the life led by Tisza in the castle of the suburbs of Moscow?

In this solitude, in the villa of Maisons-Lafitte, Andras Zilah was again to see Marsa Laszlo. He came not once, but again and again. He was, perhaps, since the death of Prince Tcheretteff, the only man General Vogotzine had seen in his niece's house, and Marsa was always strangely happy when Andras came to see her.

"Mademoiselle is very particular when Prince Zilah is coming to Maisons," said her maid to her.

"Because Prince Zilah is not a man like other men. He is a hero. In my mother's country there is no name more popular than his."

"So I have heard Count Menko say to Mademoiselle."

If it were the maid's wish to remove all happiness from her mistress's face, she had met with complete success.

At the name of Menko, Marsa's expression became dark and threatening. Prince Andras had noticed this same change in the Tzigana's face, when he was speaking to her at Baroness Dinati's.

The Prince had forgotten no detail of that first fascinating interview, at which his love for the Tzigana was born. This man, who had hardly any other desire than to end in peace a life long saddened by defeat and exile, suddenly awoke to a happy hope of a home and family joys. He was rich, alone in the world, and independent; and he was, therefore, free to choose the woman to be made his princess. No caste prejudice prevented him from giving his title to the daughter of Tisza. The Zilahs, in trying to free their country, had freed themselves from all littleness; and proud, but not vain, they bore but slight resemblance to those Magyars of whom Szechenyi, the great count, who died of despair in 1849, said: "The overweening haughtiness of my people will be their ruin."

The last of the Zilahs did not consider his pride humiliated by loving and wedding a Tzigana. Frankly, in accents of the deepest love and the most sincere devotion, Andras asked Marsa Laszlo if she would consent to become his wife. But he was terrified at the expression of anguish which passed over the pale face of the young girl.

Marsa, Princess Zilah! Like her mother, she would have refused from a Tcheretteff this title of princess which Andras offered her, nay, laid at her feet with passionate tenderness. But Princess Zilah!

She regarded with wild eyes the Prince, who stood before her, timid and with trembling lips, awaiting her reply. But, as she did not answer, he stooped over and took her hands in his.

"What is it?" he cried; for Marsa's fingers were icy.

It cost the young girl a terrible effort to prevent herself from losing consciousness.

"But speak to me, Marsa," exclaimed Andras, "do not keep me in suspense."

He had loved her now for six months, and an iron hand seemed to clutch the heart of this man, who had never known what it was to fear, at the thought that perhaps Marsa did not return his love.

He had, doubtless, believed that he had perceived in her a tender feeling toward himself which had emboldened him to ask her to be his wife. But had he been deceived? Was it only the soldier in him that had pleased Marsa? Was he about to suffer a terrible disappointment? Ah, what folly to love, and to love at forty years, a young and beautiful girl like Marsa!

Still, she made him no answer, but sat there before him like a statue, pale to the lips, her dark eyes fixed on him in a wild, horrified stare.

Then, as he pressed her, with tears in his voice, to speak, she forced her almost paralyzed tongue to utter a response which fell, cruel as a death-sentence, upon the heart of the hero:

"Never!"

Andras stood motionless before her in such terrible stillness that she longed to throw herself at his feet and cry out: "I love you! I love you! But your wife no, never!"

She loved him? Yes, madly—better than that, with a deep, eternal passion, a passion solidly anchored in admiration, respect and esteem; with an unconquerable attraction toward what represented, to her harassed soul, honor without a blemish, perfect goodness in perfect courage, the immolation of a life to duty, all incarnate in one man, radiant in one illustrious name Zilah.

And Andras himself divined something of this feeling; he felt that Marsa, despite her enigmatical refusal, cared for him in a way that was something more than friendship; he was certain of it. Then, why did she command him thus with a single word to despair? "Never!" She was not free, then? And a question, for which he immediately asked her pardon by a gesture, escaped, like the appeal of a drowning man, from his lips:

"Do you love some one else, Marsa?"

She uttered a cry.

"No! I swear to you no!"

He urged her, then, to explain what was the meaning of her refusal, of the fright she had just shown; and, in a sort of nervous hysteria which she forced herself to control, in the midst of stifled sobs, she told him that if she could ever consent to unite herself to anyone, it would be to him, to him alone, to the hero of her country, to him whose chivalrous devotion she had admired long before she knew him, and that now—And here she stopped short, just on the brink of an avowal.

"Well, now? Now?" demanded Andras, awaiting the word which, in her overstrung condition, Marsa had almost spoken. "Now?"

But she did not speak these words which Zilah begged for with newly awakened hope. She longed to end this interview which was killing her, and in broken accents asked him to excuse her, to forgive her but she was really ill.

"But if you are suffering, I can not, I will not leave you."

"I implore you. I need to be alone."

"At least you will permit me to come to-morrow, Marsa, and ask for your answer?"

"My answer? I have given it to you."

"No! No! I do not accept that refusal. No! you did not know what you were saying. I swear to you, Marsa, that without you life is impossible to me; all my existence is bound up in yours. You will reflect there was an accent in your voice which bade me hope. I will come again to-morrow. Tomorrow, Marsa. What you have said to-day does not count. Tomorrow, to-morrow; and remember that I adore you."

And she, shuddering at the tones of his voice, not daring to say no, and to bid him an eternal farewell, let him depart, confident, hopeful, despite the silence to which she obstinately, desperately clung. Then, when Andras was gone, at the end of her strength, she threw herself, like a mad woman, down upon the divan. Once alone, she gave way utterly, sobbing passionately, and then, suddenly ceasing, with wild eyes fixed upon vacancy, to mutter with dry, feverish lips:

"Yet it is life he brings to me happiness he offers me. Have I no right to be happy I? My God! To be the wife of such a man! To love him to devote myself to him—to make his existence one succession of happy days! To be his slave, his thing! Shall I marry him? Or shall I kill myself? Kill myself!" with a horrible, agonizing laugh. "Yes, that is the only thing for me to do. But but I am a coward, now that I love him a coward! a coward! a miserable wretch!" And she fell headlong forward, crouching upon the floor in a fierce despair, as if either life or reason was about to escape from her forever.

CHAPTER IX. "O LIBERTY! O LOVE! THESE TWO I NEED!"

When Zilah came the next day he found Marsa perfectly calm. At first he only questioned her anxiously as to her health.

"Oh! I am well," she replied, smiling a little sadly; and, turning to the piano at which she was seated, she began to play the exquisitely sad romance which was her favorite air.

"That is by Janos Nemeth, is it not?" asked the Prince.

"Yes, by Janos Nemeth. I am very fond of his music; it is so truly Hungarian in its spirit."

The music fell upon the air like sighs like the distant tones of a bell tolling a requiem a lament, poetic, mournful, despairing, yet ineffably sweet and tender, ending in one deep, sustained note like the last clod of earth falling upon a new-made grave.

"What is that called, Marsa?" said Andras.

She made no reply.

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Rising, he looked at the title, printed in Hungarian; then, leaning over the Tzigana till his breath fanned her cheek, he murmured:

"Janos Nemeth was right. The world holds but one fair maiden."

She turned very pale, rose from the piano, and giving him her hand, said:

"It is almost a madrigal, my dear Prince, is it not? I am going to be frank with you. You love me, I know; and I also love you. Will you give me a month to reflect? A whole month?"

"My entire life belongs to you now," said the Prince. "Do with it what you will."

"Well! Then in a month I will give you your answer," she said firmly.

"But," said Andras, smiling beneath his blond moustache, "remember that I once, took for my motto the verses of Petoeffi. You know well those beautiful verses of our country:

O Liberty! O Love!
These two I need.
My chosen meed,
To give my love for Liberty,
My life for Love.

"Well," he added, "do you know, at this moment the Andras Zilah of 'forty-eight would almost give liberty, that passion of his whole life, for your love, Marsa, my own Marsa, who are to me the living incarnation of my country."

Marsa was moved to the depths of her heart at hearing this man speak such words to her. The ideal of the Tzigana, as it is of most women, was loyalty united with strength. Had she ever, in her wildest flights of fancy, dreamed that she should hear one of the heroes of the war of independence, a Zilah Andras, supplicate her to bear his name?

Marsa knew Yanski Varhely. The Prince had brought him to see her at Maisons-Lafitte. She was aware that Count Varhely knew the Prince's most secret thoughts, and she was certain that Andras had confided all his hopes and his fears to his old friend.

"What do you think would become of the Prince if I should not marry him?" she asked him one day without warning.

"That is a point-blank question which I hardly expected," said Yanski, gazing at her in astonishment. "Don't you wish to become a Zilah?"

Any hesitation even seemed to him insulting, almost sacrilegious.

"I don't say that," replied the Tzigana, "but I ask you what would become of the Prince if, for one reason or another "

"I can very easily inform you," interrupted Varhely. "The Prince, as you must be aware, is one of those men who love but once during their lives. Upon my word of honor, I believe that, if you should refuse him, he would commit some folly, some madness, something fatal. Do you understand?"

"Ah!" ejaculated Marsa, with an icy chill in her veins.

"That is my opinion," continued Yanski, harshly. "He is wounded. It remains with you to decide whether the bullet be mortal or not."

Varhely's response must have had great weight in Marsa Laszlo's reflections, full of anguish, fever, revolt and despair as they were, during the few weeks preceding the day upon which she had promised to tell Prince Andras if she would consent to become his wife or not. It was a yes, almost as curt as another refusal, which fell at last from the lips of the Tzigana. But the Prince was not cool enough to analyze an intonation.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "I have suffered so much during these weeks of doubt; but this happiness makes amends for all."

"Do you know what Varhely said to me?" asked Marsa.

"Yes, I know."

"Well, since the Zilahs treat their love-affairs as they do their duels, and risk their whole existence, so be it! I accept. Your existence for mine! Gift for gift! I do not wish you to die!"

He did not try to understand her; but he took her burning hands between his own, and covered them with kisses. And she, with trembling lip, regarded, through her long eyelashes, the brave man who now bent before her, saying: "I love you."

Then, in that moment of infinite happiness, on the threshold of the new life which opened before her, she forgot all to think only of the reality, of the hero whose wife she was to be. His wife! So, as in a dream, without thinking, without resisting, abandoning herself to the current which bore her along, not trying to take account of time or of the future, loving, and beloved, living in a sort of charmed somnambulism, the Tzigana watched the preparations for her marriage.

The Prince, with the impatience of a youth of twenty, had urged an early day for their union. He announced his engagement to the society, at once Parisian and foreign, of which he formed a part; and this marriage of the Magyar with the Tzigana was an event in aristocratic circles. There was an aroma of chivalrous romance about this action of Prince Andras, who was rich enough and independent enough to have married, if he had wished, a shepherdess, like the kings of fairy tales.

"Isn't it perfectly charming?" exclaimed the little Baroness Dinati, enthusiastically. "Jacquemin, my dear friend, I will give you all the details of their first meeting. You can make a delicious article out of it, delicious!"

The little Baroness was almost as delighted as the Prince. Ah! what a man that Zilah was! He would give, as a wedding-gift to the Tzigana, the most beautiful diamonds in the world, those famous Zilah diamonds, which Prince Joseph had once placed disdainfully upon his hussar's uniform when he charged the Prussian cuirassiers of Ziethen, sure of escaping the sabre cuts, and not losing a single one of the stones during the combat. It was said that Marsa, until she was his wife, would not accept any jewels from the Prince. The opals in the silver agraffe were all she wanted.

"You know them, don't you, Jacquemin? The famous opals of the Tzigana? Put that all in, every word of it."

"Yes, it is chic enough," answered the reporter. "It is very romantic, a little too much so; my readers will never believe it. Never mind, though, I will write it all up in my best manner."

The fete on board the steamer, given by the Prince in honor of his betrothal, had been as much talked of as a sensational first night at the Francais, and it added decidedly to the romantic prestige of Andras Zilah. There was

not a marriageable young girl who was not a little in love with him, and their mothers envied the luck of the Tzigana.

"It is astonishing how jealous the mammas are," said the Baroness, gayly. "They will make me pay dearly for having been the matchmaker; but I am proud of it, very proud. Zilah has good taste, that is all. And, as for him, I should have been in love with him myself, if I had not had my guests to attend to. Ah, society is as absorbing as a husband!"

Upon the boat, Paul Jacquemin did not leave the side of the matchmaker. He followed her everywhere. He had still to obtain a description of the bride's toilettes, the genealogy of General Vogotzine, a sketch of the bridegroom's best friend, Varhely, and a thousand other details.

"Where will the wedding take place?" he asked the Baroness.

"At Maisons-Lafitte. Oh! everything is perfect, my dear Jacquemin, perfect! An idyl! All the arrangements are exquisite, exquisite! I only wish that you had charge of the supper."

Jacquemin, general overseer of the Baroness's parties in the Rue Murillo, did not confess himself inferior to any one as an epicure. He would taste the wines, with the air of a connoisseur, holding his glass up to the light, while the liquor caressed his palate, and shutting his eyes as if more thoroughly to decide upon its merits.

"Pomard!" would slowly fall from his lips, or "Acceptable Musigny!" "This Chambertin is really very fair!" "The Chateau Yquem is not half bad!" etc., etc. And the next morning would appear in the reports, which he wrote himself under various pseudonyms: "Our compliments to our friend Jacquemin, if he had anything to do with the selection of the wines, in addition to directing the rehearsals of the Baroness's operetta, which latter work he most skilfully accomplished. Jacquemin possesses talents of all kinds; he knows how to make the best of all materials. As the proverb says, 'A good mill makes everything flour.'"

Jacquemin had already cast an eye over the menu of the Prince's fete, and declared it excellent, very correct, very pure.

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The steamer was at last ready to depart, and Prince Zilah had done the honors to all his guests. It started slowly off, the flags waving coquettishly in the breeze, while the Tzigani musicians played with spirit the vibrating notes of the March of Rakoczy, that triumphant air celebrating the betrothal of Zilah, as it had long ago saluted the burial of his father.

CHAPTER X. "IS FATE SO JUST?"

"We are moving! We are off!" cried the lively little Baroness. "I hope we shan't be shipwrecked," retorted Jacquemin; and he then proceeded to draw a comical picture of possible adventures wherein figured white bears, icebergs, and death by starvation. "A subject for a novel, 'The Shipwreck of the Betrothed.'"

As they drew away from Paris, passing the quays of Passy and the taverns of Point-du-jour, tables on wooden horses were rapidly erected, and covered with snowy cloths; and soon the guests of the Prince were seated about the board, Andras between Marsa and the Baroness, and Michel Menko some distance down on the other side of the table. The pretty women and fashionably dressed men made the air resound with gayety and laughter, while the awnings flapped joyously in the wind, and the boat glided on, cutting the smooth water, in which were reflected the long shadows of the aspens and willows on the banks, and the white clouds floating in the clear sky.

Every now and then a cry of admiration would be uttered at some object in the panorama moving before them, the slopes of Suresnes, the black factories of Saint-Denis with their lofty chimneys, the red-roofed villas of Asnieres, or the heights of Marly dotted with little white houses.

"Ah! how pretty it is! How charming!"

"Isn't it queer that we have never known anything about all this? It is a veritable voyage of discovery."

"Ladies and gentlemen," cried, above the other voices, Jacquemin, whom Zilah did not know, and to whom the Baroness had made him give a card of invitation, "we are now entering savage countries. It is Kamtschatka, or some such place, and there must be cannibals here."

The borders of the Seine, which were entirely fresh to them, and which recalled the pictures of the salon, were a delightful novelty to these people, accustomed to the dusty streets of the city.

Seated between the Prince and the Japanese, and opposite Varhely and General Vogotzine, the Baroness thoroughly enjoyed her breakfast. Prince Andras had not spared the Tokay that sweet, fiery wine, of which the Hungarians say proudly: "It has the color and the price of gold;" and the liquor disappeared beneath the moustache of the Russian General as in a funnel. The little Baroness, as she sipped it with pretty little airs of an epicure, chatted with the Japanese, and, eager to increase her culinary knowledge, asked him for the receipt for a certain dish which the little yellow fellow had made her taste at a dinner given at his embassy.

"Send it to me, will you, Yamada? I will have my cook make it; nothing gives me so much pleasure as to be able to offer to my guests a new and strange dish. I will give you the receipt also, Jacquemin. Oh! it is such an odd-tasting dish! It gives you a sensation of having been poisoned."

"Like the guests in Lucrezia Borgia," laughed the Parisian Japanese.

"Do you know Lucrezia Borgia?"

"Oh, yes; they have sung it at Yokohama. Oh! we are no longer savages, Baroness, believe me. If you want ignorant barbarians, you must seek the Chinese."

The little Japanese was proud of appearing so profoundly learned in European affairs, and his gimlet eyes sought an approving glance from Paul Jacquemin or Michel Menko; but the Hungarian was neither listening to nor thinking of Yamada. He was entirely absorbed in the contemplation of Marsa; and, with lips a little compressed, he fixed a strange look upon the beautiful young girl to whom Andras was speaking, and who, very calm, almost grave, but evidently happy, answered the Prince with a sweet smile.

There was a sort of Oriental grace about Marsa, with her willowy figure, flexible as a Hindoo convolvulus, and her dark Arabian eyes fringed with their heavy lashes. Michel Menko took in all the details of her beauty, and evidently suffered, suffered cruelly, his eyes invincibly attracted toward her. In the midst of these other women, attired in robes of the last or the next fashion, of all the colors of the rainbow, Marsa, in her gown of black lace, was by far the loveliest of them all. Michel watched her every movement; but she, quiet, as if a trifle weary, spoke but little, and only in answer to the Prince and Varhely, and, when her beautiful eyes met those of Menko, she turned them away, evidently avoiding his look with as much care as he sought hers.

The breakfast over, they rose from the table, the men lighting cigars, and the ladies seeking the mirrors in the cabin to rearrange their tresses disheveled by the wind.

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The boat stopped at Marly until it was time for the lock to be opened, before proceeding to Maisons-Lafitte, where Marsa was to land. Many of the passengers, with almost childish gayety, landed, and strolled about on the green bank.

Marsa was left alone, glad of the silence which reigned on the steamer after the noisy chatter of a moment ago. She leaned over the side of the boat, listening idly to the swish of the water along its sides.

Michel Menko was evidently intending to approach her, and he had made a few steps toward her, when he felt a hand laid upon his shoulder. He turned, thinking it was the Prince; but it was Yanski Varhely, who said to the young man:

"Well, my dear Count, you did right to come from London to this fete. Not only is Zilah delighted to see you, but the fantastic composition of the guests is very curious. Baroness Dinati has furnished us with an 'ollapodrida' which would have pleased her husband. There is a little of everything. Doesn't it astonish you?"

"No," said Michel. "This hybrid collection is representative of modern society. I have met almost all these faces at Nice; they are to be seen everywhere."

"To me," retorted Yanski, in his guttural voice, "these people are phenomena."

"Phenomena? Not at all. Life of to-day is so complicated that the most unexpected people and events find their place in it. You have not lived, Varhely, or you have lived only for your idol, your country, and everything amazes you. If you had, like me, wandered all over the world, you would not be astonished at anything; although, to tell the truth" and the young man's voice became bitter, trenchant, and almost threatening "we have only to grow old to meet with terrible surprises, very hard to bear."

As he spoke, he glanced, involuntarily perhaps, at Marsa Laszlo, leaning on the railing just below him.

"Oh! don't speak of old age before you have passed through the trials that Zilah and I have," responded Varhely. "At eighteen, Andras Zilah could have said: 'I am old.' He was in mourning at one and the same time for all his people and for our country. But you! You have grown up, my dear fellow, in happy times. Austria, loosening her clutch, has permitted you to love and serve our cause at your ease. You were born rich, you married the most charming of women"

Michel frowned.

"That is, it is true, the sorrow of your life," continued Varhely. "It seems to me only yesterday that you lost the poor child."

"It is over two years, however," said Michel, gravely. "Two years! How time flies!"

"She was so charming," said old Yanski, not perceiving the expression of annoyance mingled with sadness which passed over the young man's face. "I knew your dear wife when she was quite small, in her father's house. He gave me an asylum at Prague, after the capitulation signed by Georgei. Although I was an Hungarian, and he a Bohemian, her father and I were great friends."

"Yes," said Menko, rapidly, "she often spoke of you, my dear Varhely. They taught her to love you, too. But," evidently seeking to turn the conversation to avoid a subject which was painful to him, "you spoke of Georgei. Ah! our generation has never known your brave hopes; and your grief, believe me, was better than our boredom. We are useless encumberers of the earth. Upon my word, it seems to me that we are unsettled, enfeebled, loving nothing and loving everything, ready to commit all sorts of follies. I envy you those days of battle, those

magnificent deeds of 'forty-eight and 'forty-nine. To fight thus was to live!"

But even while he spoke, his thin face became more melancholy, and his eyes again sought the direction of Prince Andras's fiancée.

After a little more desultory conversation, he strolled away from Varhely, and gradually approached Marsa, who, her chin resting on her hand, and her eyes lowered, seemed absorbed in contemplation of the ceaseless flow of the water.

Greatly moved, pulling his moustache, and glancing with a sort of uneasiness at Prince Andras, who was promenading on the bank with the Baroness, Michel Menko paused before addressing Marsa, who had not perceived his approach, and who was evidently far away in some day-dream.

Gently, hesitatingly, and in a low voice, he at last spoke her name:

"Marsa!"

The Tzigana started as if moved by an electric shock, and, turning quickly, met the supplicating eyes of the young man.

"Marsa!" repeated Michel, in a humble tone of entreaty.

"What do you wish of me?" she said. "Why do you speak to me? You must have seen what care I have taken to avoid you."

"It is that which has wounded me to the quick. You are driving me mad. If you only knew what I am suffering!"

He spoke almost in a whisper, and very rapidly, as if he felt that seconds were worth centuries.

She answered him in a cutting, pitiless tone, harsher even than the implacable look in her dark eyes. "You suffer? Is fate so just as that? You suffer?"

Her tone and expression made Michel Menko tremble as if each syllable of these few words was a blow in the face.

"Marsa!" he exclaimed, imploringly. "Marsa!"

"My name is Marsa Laszlo; and, in a few days, I shall be Princess Zilah," responded the young girl, passing haughtily by him, "and I think you will hardly force me to make you remember it."

She uttered these words so resolutely, haughtily, almost disdainfully, and accompanied them with such a flash from her beautiful eyes that Menko instinctively bowed his head, murmuring:

"Forgive me!"

But he drove his nails into the palm of his clenched hand as he saw her leave that part of the boat, and retire as far from him as she could, as if his presence were an insult to her. Tears of rage started into the young man's eyes as he watched her graceful figure resume its former posture of dreamy absorption.

CHAPTER XI. A RIVER FETE

Close alongside of the Prince's boat, waiting also for the opening of the lock, was one of those great barges which carry wood or charcoal up and down the Seine.

A whole family often lives on board these big, heavy boats. The smoke of the kitchen fire issues from a sort of wooden cabin where several human beings breathe, eat, sleep, are born and die, sometimes without hardly ever having set foot upon the land. Pots of geranium or begonia give a bit of bright color to the dingy surroundings; and the boats travel slowly along the river, impelled by enormous oars, which throw long shadows upon the water.

It was this motionless barge that Marsa was now regarding.

The hot sun, falling upon the boat, made its brown, wet sides sparkle like the brilliant wings of some gigantic scarabee; and, upon the patched, scorched deck, six or seven half-naked, sunburned children, boys and girls, played at the feet of a bundle of rags and brown flesh, which was a woman, a young woman, but prematurely old and wasted, who was nursing a little baby.

A little farther off, two men—one tough and strong, a man of thirty, whom toil had made forty, the other old, wrinkled, white-haired and with skin like leather, father and grandfather, doubtless, of the little brats beyond were eating bread and cheese, and drinking, turn by turn, out of a bottle of wine, which they swallowed in gulps. The halt was a rest to these poor people.

As Marsa watched them, she seemed to perceive in these wanderers of the river, as in a vision, those other wanderers of the Hungarian desert, her ancestors, the Tzigani, camped in the puszta, the boundless plain, crouched down in the long grass beneath the shade of the bushes, and playing their beautiful national airs. She saw the distant fires of the bivouac of those unknown Tzigani whose daughter she was; she seemed to breathe again the air of that country she had seen but once, when upon a mournful pilgrimage; and, in the presence of that poor bargeman's wife, with her skin tanned by the sun, she thought of her dead, her cherished dead, Tisza.

Tisza! To the gipsy had doubtless been given the name of the river on the banks of which she had been born. They called the mother Tisza, in Hungary, as in Paris they called the daughter the Tzigana. And Marsa was proud of her nickname; she loved these Tzigani, whose blood flowed in her veins; sons of India, perhaps, who had descended to the valley of the Danube, and who for centuries had lived free in the open air, electing their chiefs, and having a king appointed by the Palatine a king, who commanding beggars, bore, nevertheless, the name of Magnificent; indestructible tribes, itinerant republics, musicians playing the old airs of their nation, despite the Turkish sabre and the Austrian police; agents of patriotism and liberty, guardians of the old Hungarian honor.

These poor people, passing their lives upon the river as the Tzigani lived in the fields and hedges, seemed to Marsa like the very spectres of her race. More than the musicians with embroidered vests did the poor prisoners of the solitary barge recall to her the great proscribed family of her ancestors.

She called to the children playing upon the sunbeaten deck: "Come here, and hold up your aprons!"

They obeyed, spreading out their little tattered garments. "Catch these!" she cried.

They could not believe their eyes. From the steamer she threw down to them mandarins, grapes, ripe figs, yellow apricots, and great velvety peaches; a rain of dainties which would have surprised a gourmand: the poor little things, delighted and afraid at the same time, wondered if the lady, who gave them such beautiful fruit, was a fairy.

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The mother then rose; and, coming toward Marsa to thank her, her sunburnt skin glowing a deeper red, the poor woman, with tears in her tired eyes, and a wan smile upon her pale lips, touched, surprised, happy in the pleasure of her children, murmured, faltering and confused:

"Ah! Madame! Madame! how good you are! You are too good, Madame!"

"We must share what we have!" said Marsa, with a smile. "See how happy the children are!"

"Very happy, Madame. They are not accustomed to such things. Say 'Thank you,' to the beautiful lady. Say 'Thank you,' Jean; you are the oldest. Say like this: 'Thank-you-Ma-dame.'"

"Thank-you-Ma-dame" faltered the boy, raising to Marsa big, timid eyes, which did not understand why anybody should either wish him ill or do him a kindness. And other low, sweet little voices repeated, like a refrain: "Thank-you-Ma-dame."

The two men, in astonishment, came and stood behind the children, and gazed silently at Marsa.

"And your baby, Madame?" said the Tzigana, looking at the sleeping infant, that still pressed its rosy lips to the mother's breast. "How pretty it is! Will you permit me to offer it its baptismal dress?"

"Its baptismal dress?" repeated the mother.

"Oh, Madame!" ejaculated the father, twisting his cap between his fingers.

"Or a cloak, just as you please," added Marsa.

The poor people on the barge made no reply, but looked at one another in bewilderment.

"Is it a little girl?" asked the Tzigana.

"No, Madame, no," responded the mother. "A boy."

"Come here, Jean," said Marsa to the oldest child. "Yes, come here, my little man."

Jean came forward, glancing askance at his mother, as if to know whether he should obey.

"Here, Jean," said the young girl, "this is for your baby brother."

And into the little joined hands of the boy, Marsa let fall a purse, through whose meshes shone yellow pieces of gold.

The people of the barge thought they were dreaming, and stood open-mouthed in amazement, while Jean cried out:

"Mamma, see, mamma! Mamma! Mamma!"

Then the younger bargeman said to Marsa:

"Madame, no, no! we can not accept. It is too much. You are too good. Give it back, Jean."

"It is true, Madame," faltered his wife. "It is impossible. It is too much."

"You will cause me great pain if you refuse to accept it," said Marsa. "Chance has brought us together for a moment, and I am superstitious. I would like to have the little children pray that those I love that the one I love may be happy." And she turned her eyes upon Prince Andras, who had returned to the deck, and was coming toward her.

The lock was now opened.

"All aboard!" shouted the captain of the steamer.

The poor woman upon the barge tried to reach the hand of Marsa to kiss it.

"May you be happy, Madame, and thank you with all our hearts for your goodness to both big and little."

The two bargemen bowed low in great emotion, and the whole bevy of little ones blew kisses to the beautiful lady in the black dress, whom the steamer was already bearing away.

"At least tell us your name, Madame," cried the father. "Your name, that we may never forget you."

A lovely smile appeared on Marsa's lips, and, in almost melancholy accents, she said:

"My name!" Then, after a pause, proudly: "The Tzigana!"

The musicians, as she spoke, suddenly struck up one of the Hungarian airs. Then, as in a flying vision, the poor bargemen saw the steamer move farther and farther away, a long plume of smoke waving behind it.

Jacquemin, hearing one of those odd airs, which in Hungary start all feet moving and keeping time to the music, exclaimed:

"A quadrille! Let us dance a quadrille! An Hungarian quadrille!"

The poor people on the barge listened to the music, gradually growing fainter and fainter; and they would have believed that they had been dreaming, if the purse had not been there, a fortune for them, and the fruit which the children were eating. The mother, without understanding, repeated that mysterious name: "The Tzigana."

And Marsa also gazed after them, her ears caressed by the czardas of the musicians. The big barge disappeared in the distance in a luminous haze; but the Tzigana could still vaguely perceive the little beings perched upon the shoulders of the men, and waving, in sign of farewell, pieces of white cloth which their mother had given them.

A happy torpor stole over Marsa; and, while the guests of the Baroness Dinati, the Japanese Yamada, the English heiresses, the embassy attaches, all these Parisian foreigners, led by Jacquemin, the director of the gayety, were organizing a ballroom on the deck, and asking the Tzigani for polkas of Fahrbach and waltzes of Strauss, the young girl heard the voice of Andras murmur low in her ear:

"Ah! how I love you! And do you love me, Marsa?"

"I am happy," she answered, without moving, and half closing her eyes, "and, if it were necessary for me to give my life for you, I would give it gladly."

In the stern of the boat, Michel Menko watched, without seeing them, perhaps, the fields, the houses of Pecq, the villas of Saint-Germain, the long terrace below heavy masses of trees, the great plain beside Paris with Mont Valerien rising in its midst, the two towers of the Trocadero, whose gilded dome sparkled in the sun, and the

bluish-black cloud which hung over the city like a thick fog.

The boat advanced very slowly, as if Prince Andras had given the order to delay as much as possible the arrival at Maisons-Lafitte, where the whole fete would end for him, as Marsa was to land there. Already, upon the horizon could be perceived the old mill, with its broad, slated roof. The steeple of Sartrouville loomed up above the red roofs of the houses and the poplars which fringe the bank of the river. A pale blue light, like a thin mist, enveloped the distant landscape.

"The dream is over," murmured Marsa.

"A far more beautiful one will soon begin," said Andras, "and that one will be the realization of what I have waited for all my life and never found love."

Marsa turned to the Prince with a look full of passionate admiration and devotion, which told him how thoroughly his love was returned.

The quadrille had ended, and a waltz was beginning. The little Japanese, with his eternal smile, like the bronze figures of his country, was dancing with a pre-raphaelite English girl.

"How well you dance," she said.

"If we only had some favors," replied the Japanese, showing his teeth in a grin, "I would lead the cotillon."

The boat stopped at last at Maisons-Lafitte. The great trees of the park formed a heavy mass, amid which the roof of the villa was just discernible.

"What a pity it is all over," cried the Baroness, who was ruddy as a cherry with the exercise of dancing. "Let us have another; but Maisons-Lafitte is too near. We will go to Rouen the next time; or rather, I invite you all to a day fete in Paris, a game of polo, a lunch, a garden party, whatever you like. I will arrange the programme with Yamada and Jacquemin."

"Willingly," responded the Japanese, with a low bow. "To collaborate with Monsieur Jacquemin will be very amusing."

As Marsa Laszlo was leaving the boat, Michel Menko stood close to the gangway, doubtless on purpose to speak to her; and, in the confusion of landing, without any one hearing him, he breathed in her ear these brief words:

"At your house this evening. I must see you."

She gave him an icy glance. Michel Menko's eyes were at once full of tears and flames.

"I demand it!" he said, firmly.

The Tzigana made no reply; but, going to Andras Zilah, she took his arm; while Michel, as if nothing had happened, raised his hat.

General Vogotzine, with flaming face, followed his niece, muttering, as he wiped the perspiration unsteadily from his face:

"Fine day! Fine day! By Jove! But the sun was hot, though! Ah, and the wines were good!"