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PRINCE ZILAH

By JULES CLARETIE

BOOK 3.

CHAPTER XXIV

A LITTLE PARISIAN ROMANCE

The very evening of the day when the package of letters had killed in Andras all happiness and all faith, the Hungarian prince presented himself in the Rue d'Aumale, to seek Michel Menko.

Menko! That boy whom he had loved almost as a brother, that man for whom he had hoped a glorious future, Michel, Michel Menko, had betrayed him, and struck him with the perfidy of a coward. Yes, at the door of the church, when it was too late, or rather, at a time when the blow would be surer and the wound more deadly--then Menko had said to him: "My dear Prince, the woman whom you love, the woman whom you have married, has been my mistress. Here, read, see how she loved me!"

Had Michel been before him, Andras would have seized the young man by the throat, and strangled him on the spot; but, when he reached the Rue d'Aumale, he did not find Menko.

"The Count left town yesterday," said the servant, in answer to his question.

"Yesterday! Where has he gone?"

"The Count must have taken the steamer to-day at Havre for New York. The Count did not tell us exactly where he was going, however, but to America, somewhere. We only know, the coachman Pierre, and myself, that the Count will not return again to Paris. We are still in his service,

however, and are to await his orders."

Hesitating a little, the servant added:

"Have I not the honor to speak to Prince Zilah?"

"Why?" asked Andras.

The valet replied with a humble but very sincere air:

"Because, if Monseigneur should hear from the Count, and there is any question of the package which I took to Maisons-Lafitte this morning for Monseigneur--"

"Well?" said Andras.

"Monseigneur would greatly oblige me if he would not let the Count know that I did not fulfil his orders last evening."

"Last evening? What do you mean? Explain yourself!" said the Prince, sternly.

"When he left yesterday, the Count expressly ordered me to take the package to Monseigneur that very evening. I beg Monseigneur's pardon; but I had an invitation to a wedding, and I did not carry out the Count's instructions until this morning. But, as Monseigneur was not at home, I took the train to Maisons-Lafitte. I hope that I did not arrive too late. The Count was very particular about it, and I should be very sorry if my negligence has done any harm."

Andras listened, gazing intently upon the face of the servant, who was a little discountenanced by this silent inquisition.

"So Count Menko wished the package to be delivered to me yesterday?"

"I beg Monseigneur not to tell the Count that he was not obeyed."

"Yesterday?" repeated Andras.

"Yes, yesterday, Monseigneur. The Count departed, thinking it would be done; and, indeed, he had a right to think so. I am very careful, Monseigneur, very careful; and if Monseigneur should some day have need of a--"

The Prince stopped the valet with a gesture. It was repugnant to Andras to have this man mixed up in a secret of his life; and such a secret! But the domestic was evidently ignorant what a commission Menko had confided to him: in his eyes, the package, containing such letters, was like any other package. Andras was persuaded of this by the attitude of the man, humiliated at having failed in his duty.

A word more exchanged with the valet, and Andras would have felt humiliated himself. But he had gained from the conversation the idea

that Menko had not wished to insult him in his happiness, but to reveal all to him before the ceremony had yet been celebrated. It was as atrocious, but not so cowardly. Menko had wished to attack Marsa, rather than Andras; this was visible in the express commands given to his valet. And upon what a trifle had it depended, whether the name of Zilah should be borne by this woman! Upon what? Upon a servant's feast! Life is full of strange chances. The hands of that low-born valet had held for hours his happiness and his honor--his honor, Andras Zilah's--the honor of all his race!

The Prince returned to his hotel, which he had left that morning thinking that he would soon bring there the woman he then adored, but whom he now despised and hated. Oh! he would know where Menko had gone; him he could punish; as for Marsa, she was now dead to him.

But where, in the whirlpool of the New World, would this Michel Menko disappear? and how could he find him?

The days passed; and Zilah had acquired almost the certainty that Menko had not embarked at Havre. Perhaps he had not quitted Europe. He might, some day or another, in spite of what the valet had said, reappear in Paris; and then--

Meanwhile, the Prince led the life of a man wounded to the heart; seeking solitude, and shutting himself in his hotel, in the Rue Balzac, like a wolf in his den; receiving no one but Varhely, and sometimes treating even old Yanski coldly; then, suddenly emerging from his retirement, and trying to take up his life again; appearing at the meetings of the Hungarian aid society, of which he was president; showing himself at the races, at the theatre, or even at Baroness Dinati's; longing to break the dull monotony of his now ruined life; and, with a sort of bravado, looking society and opinion full in the face, as if to surprise a smile or a sneer at his expense, and punish it.

He had, however, no right to complain of the sentiment which was felt for him, for every one respected and admired him. At first, it is true, society, and in particular that society of Parisian foreigners in which Prince Andras mingled, had tried to find out why he had broken so suddenly with the woman he had certainly married for love. Public curiosity, aroused and excited, had sought to divine the secret of the romance. "If it does not get into the newspapers," they said, "it will be fortunate." And society was even astonished that the journals had not already discovered the key to this Parisian mystery.

But society, after all as fickle as it is curious (one of its little vices chasing away the other), turned suddenly to another subject; forgot the rupture of Marsa and Andras, and saw in Zilah only a superior being, whose lofty soul forced respect from the frivolous set accustomed to laugh at everything.

A lofty soul, yes, but a soul in torment. Varhely alone, among them all, knew anything of the suffering which Andras endured. He was no longer the same man. His handsome face, with its kindly eyes and grave smile,

was now constantly overshadowed. He spoke less, and thought more. On the subject of his sadness and his grief, Andras never uttered a word to any one, not even to his old friend; and Yanski, silent from the day when he had been an unconscious messenger of ill, had not once made any allusion to the past.

Although he knew nothing, Varhely had, nevertheless, guessed everything, and at once. The blow was too direct and too cruelly simple for the old Hungarian not to have immediately exclaimed, with rage:

"Those were love-letters, and I gave them to him! Idiot that I was! I held those letters in my hand; I might have destroyed them, or crammed them one by one down Menko's throat! But who could have suspected such an infamy? Menko! A man of honor! Ah, yes; what does honor amount to when there is a woman in question? Imbecile! And it is irreparable now, irreparable!"

Varhely also was anxious to know where Menko had gone. They did not know at the Austro-Hungarian embassy. It was a complete disappearance, perhaps a suicide. If the old Hungarian had met the young man, he would at least have gotten rid of part of his bile. But the angry thought that he, Varhely, had been associated in a vile revenge which had touched Andras, was, for the old soldier, a constant cause for ill-humor with himself, and a thing which, in a measure, poisoned his life.

Varhely had long been a misanthrope himself; but he tried to struggle against his own temperament when he saw Andras wrapping himself up in bitterness and gloomy thoughts.

Little by little, Zilah allowed himself to sink into that state where not only everything becomes indifferent to us, but where we long for another suffering, further pain, that we may utter more bitter cries, more irritated complaints against fate. It seems then that everything is dark about us, and our endless night is traversed by morbid visions, and peopled with phantoms. The sick man--for the one who suffers such torture is sick--would willingly seek a new sorrow, like those wounded men who, seized with frenzy, open their wounds themselves, and irritate them with the point of a knife. Then, misanthropy and disgust of life assume a phase in which pain is not without a certain charm. There is a species of voluptuousness in this appetite for suffering, and the sufferer becomes, as it were, enamored of his own agony.

With Zilah, this sad state was due to a sort of insurrection of his loyalty against the many infamies to be met with in this world, which he had believed to be only too full of virtues.

He now considered himself an idiot, a fool, for having all his life adored chimeras, and followed, as children do passing music, the fanfares of poetic chivalry. Yes, faith, enthusiasm, love, were so many cheats, so many lies. All beings who, like himself, were worshippers of the ideal, all dreamers of better things, all lovers of love, were inevitably doomed to deception, treason, and the stupid ironies of fate. And, full of anger against himself, his pessimism of to-day sneering at his

confidence of yesterday, he abandoned himself with delight to his bitterness, and he took keen joy in repeating to himself that the secret of happiness in this life was to believe in nothing except treachery, and to defend oneself against men as against wolves.

Very rarely, his real frank, true nature would come to the fore, and he would say:

"After all, are the cowardice of one man, and the lie of one woman, to be considered the crime of entire humanity?"

Why should he curse, he would think, other beings than Marsa and Menko? He had no right to hate any one else; he had no enemy that he knew of, and he was honored in Paris, his new country.

No enemy? No, not one. And yet, one morning, with his letters, his valet brought him a journal addressed to "Prince Zilah," and, on unfolding it, Andras's attention was attracted to two paragraphs in the column headed "Echoes of Paris," which were marked with a red-lead pencil.

It was a number of 'L'Actualite', sent through the post by an unknown hand, and the red marks were evidently intended to point out to the Prince something of interest to himself.

Andras received few journals. A sudden desire seized him, as if he had a presentiment of what it contained, to cast this one into the fire without reading it. For a moment he held it in his fingers ready to throw it into the grate. Then a few words read by accident invincibly prevented him.

He read, at first with poignant sorrow, and then with a dull rage, the two paragraphs, one of which followed the other in the paper.

"A sad piece of news has come to our ears," ran the first paragraph, "a piece of news which has afflicted all the foreign colony of Paris, and especially the Hungarians. The lovely and charming Princess Z., whose beauty was recently crowned with a glorious coronet, has been taken, after a consultation of the princes of science (there are princes in all grades), to the establishment of Dr. Sims, at Vaugirard, the rival of the celebrated asylum of Dr. Luys, at Ivry. Together with the numerous friends of Prince A. Z., we hope that the sudden malady of the Princess Z. will be of short duration."

So Marsa was now the patient, almost the prisoner, of Dr. Sims! The orders of Dr. Fargeas had been executed. She was in an insane asylum, and Andras, despite himself, felt filled with pity as he thought of it.

But the red mark surrounded both this first "Echo of Paris," and the one which followed it; and Zilah, impelled now by eager curiosity, proceeded with his reading.

But he uttered a cry of rage when he saw, printed at full length, given

over to common curiosity, to the eagerness of the public for scandal, and to the malignity of blockheads, a direct allusion to his marriage--worse than that, the very history of his marriage placed in an outrageous manner next to the paragraph in which his name was almost openly written. The editor of the society journal passed directly from the information in regard to the illness of Princess Z. to an allegorical tale in which Andras saw the secret of his life and the wounds of his heart laid bare.

A LITTLE PARISIAN ROMANCE

Like most of the Parisian romances of to-day, the little romance in question is an exotic one. Paris belongs to foreigners. When the Parisians, whose names appear in the chronicles of fashion, are not Americans, Russians, Roumanians, Portuguese, English, Chinese, or Hungarians, they do not count; they are no longer Parisians. The Parisians of the day are Parisians of the Prater, of the Newski Perspective or of Fifth Avenue; they are no longer pureblooded Parisians. Within ten years from now the boulevards will be situated in Chicago, and one will go to pass his evenings at the Eden Theatre of Pekin. So, this is the latest Parisian romance: Once upon a time there was in Paris a great lord, a Moldavian, or a Wallachian, or a Moldo-Wallachian (in a word, a Parisian--a Parisian of the Danube, if you like), who fell in love with a young Greek, or Turk, or Armenian (also of Paris), as dark-browed as the night, as beautiful as the day. The great lord was of a certain age, that is, an uncertain age. The beautiful Athenian or Georgian, or Circassian, was young. The great lord was generally considered to be imprudent. But what is to be done when one loves? Marry or don't marry, says Rabelais or Moliere. Perhaps they both said it. Well, at all events, the great lord married. It appears, if well-informed people are to be believed, that the great Wallachian lord and the beautiful Georgian did not pass two hours after their marriage beneath the same roof. The very day of their wedding, quietly, and without scandal, they separated, and the reason of this rupture has for a long time puzzled Parisian high-life. It was remarked, however, that the separation of the newly-married pair was coincident with the disappearance of a very fashionable attache who, some years ago, was often seen riding in the Bois, and who was then considered to be the most graceful waltzer of the Viennese, or Muscovite, or Castilian colony of Paris. We might, if we were indiscreet, construct a whole drama with these three people for our *dramatis personae*; but we wish to prove that reporters (different in this from women) sometimes know how to keep a secret. For those ladies who are, perhaps, still interested in the silky moustaches of the fugitive ex-diplomat, we can add, however, that he was seen at Brussels a short time ago. He passed through there like a shooting star. Some one who saw him noticed that he was rather pale, and that he seemed to be still suffering from the wounds received not long ago. As for the beautiful Georgian, they say she is in despair at the departure of her husband, the great Wallachian lord, who, in spite of his ill-luck, is really a Prince Charming.

Andras Zilah turned rapidly to the signature of this article. The "Echoes of Paris" were signed Puck. Puck? Who was this Puck? How could

an unknown, an anonymous writer, a retailer of scandals, be possessed of his secret? For Andras believed that his suffering was a secret; he had never had an idea that any one could expose it to the curiosity of the crowd, as this editor of L'Actualite had done. He felt an increased rage against the invisible Michel Menko, who had disappeared after his infamy; and it seemed to him that this Puck, this unknown journalist, was an accomplice or a friend of Michel Menko, and that, behind the pseudonym of the writer, he perceived the handsome face, twisted moustache and haughty smile of the young Count.

"After all," he said to himself, "we shall soon find out. Monsieur Puck must be less difficult to unearth than Michel Menko."

He rang for his valet, and was about to go out, when Yanski Varhely was announced.

The old Hungarian looked troubled, and his brows were contracted in a frown. He could not repress a movement of anger when he perceived, upon the Prince's table, the marked number of L'Actualite.

Varhely, when he had an afternoon to get rid of, usually went to the Palais-Royal. He had lived for twenty years not far from there, in a little apartment near Saint-Roch. Drinking in the fresh air, under the striped awning of the Cafe de la Rotunde, he read the journals, one after the other, or watched the sparrows fly about and peck up the grains in the sand. Children ran here and there, playing at ball; and, above the noise of the promenaders, arose the music of the brass band.

It was chiefly the political news he sought for in the French or foreign journals. He ran through them all with his nose in the sheets, which he held straight out by the wooden file, like a flag. With a rapid glance, he fell straight upon the Hungarian names which interested him--Deak sometimes, sometimes Andrassy; and from a German paper he passed to an English, Spanish, or Italian one, making, as he said, a tour of Europe, acquainted as he was with almost all European languages.

An hour before he appeared at the Prince's house, he was seated in the shade of the trees, scanning 'L'Actualite', when he suddenly uttered an oath of anger (an Hungarian 'teremtete!') as he came across the two paragraphs alluding to Prince Andras.

Varhely read the lines over twice, to convince himself that he was not mistaken, and that it was Prince Zilah who was designated with the skilfully veiled innuendo of an expert journalist. There was no chance for doubt; the indistinct nationality of the great lord spoken of thinly veiled the Magyar characteristics of Andras, and the paragraph which preceded the "Little Parisian Romance" was very skilfully arranged to let the public guess the name of the hero of the adventure, while giving to the anecdote related the piquancy of the anonymous, that velvet mask of scandal-mongers.

Then Varhely had only one idea.

"Andras must not know of this article. He scarcely ever reads the journals; but some one may have sent this paper to him."

And the old misanthrope hurried to the Prince's hotel, thinking this: that there always exist people ready to forward paragraphs of this kind.

When he perceived 'L'Actualite' upon the Prince's table, he saw that his surmise was only too correct, and he was furious with himself for arriving too late.

"Where are you going?" he asked Andras, who was putting on his gloves.

The Prince took up the marked paper, folded it slowly, and replied:

"I am going out."

"Have you read that paper?"

"The marked part of it, yes."

"You know that that sheet is never read, it has no circulation whatever, it lives from its advertisements. There is no use in taking any notice of it."

"If there were question only of myself, I should not take any notice of it. But they have mixed up in this scandal the name of the woman to whom I have given my name. I wish to know who did it, and why he did it."

"Oh! for nothing, for fun! Because this Monsieur--how does he sign himself?--Puck had nothing else to write about."

"It is certainly absurd," remarked Zilah, "to imagine that a man can live in the ideal. At every step the reality splashes you with mud."

As he spoke, he moved toward the door.

"Where are you going?" asked Varhely again.

"To the office of this journal."

"Do not commit such an imprudence. The article, which has made no stir as yet, will be read and talked of by all Paris if you take any notice of it, and it will be immediately commented upon by the correspondents of the Austrian and Hungarian journals."

"That matters little to me!" said the Prince, resolutely. "Those people will only do what their trade obliges them to. But, before everything, I am resolved to do my duty. That is my part in this matter."

"Then I will accompany you."

"No," replied Andras, "I ask you not to do that; but it is probable that to-morrow I shall request you to serve as my second."

"A duel?"

"Exactly."

"With Monsieur--Puck?"

"With whoever insults me. The name is perfectly immaterial. But since he escapes me and she is irresponsible--and punished--I regard as an accomplice of their infamy any man who makes allusion to it with either tongue or pen. And, my dear Varhely, I wish to act alone. Don't be angry; I know that in your hands my honor would be as faithfully guarded as in my own."

"Without any doubt," said Varhely, in an odd tone, pulling his rough moustache, "and I hope to prove it to you some day."

CHAPTER XXV

THE HOME OF "PUCK"

Prince Zilah did not observe at all the marked significance old Yanski gave to this last speech. He shook Varhely's hand, entered a cab, and, casting a glance at the journal in his hands, he ordered the coachman to drive to the office of 'L'Actualite', Rue Halevy, near the Opera.

The society journal, whose aim was represented by its title, had its quarters on the third floor in that semi-English section where bars, excursion agencies, steamboat offices, and manufacturers of travelling-bags give to the streets a sort of Britannic aspect. The office of 'L'Actualite' had only recently been established there. Prince Zilch read the number of the room upon a brass sign and went up.

In the outer office there were only two or three clerks at work behind the grating. None of these had the right to reveal the names hidden under pseudonyms; they did not even know them. Zilch perceived, through an open door, the reporters' room, furnished with a long table covered with pens, ink, and pads of white paper. This room was empty; the journal was made up in the evening, and the reporters were absent.

"Is there any one who can answer me?" asked the Prince.

"Probably the secretary can," replied a clerk. "Have you a card, Monsieur? or, if you will write your name upon a bit of paper, it will do."

Andras did so; the clerk opened a door in the corridor and disappeared. After a minute or two he reappeared, and said to the Prince:

"If you will follow me, Monsieur Freminwill see you."

Andras found himself in the presence of a pleasant-looking middle-aged man, who was writing at a modest desk when the Hungarian entered, and who bowed politely, motioning him to be seated.

As Zilch sat down upon the sofa, there appeared upon the threshold of a door, opposite the one by which he had entered, a small, dark, elegantly dressed young man, whom Andras vaguely remembered to have seen somewhere, he could not tell where. The newcomer was irreproachable in his appearance, with his clothes built in the latest fashion, snowy linen, pale gray gloves, silver-headed cane, and a single eyeglass, dangling from a silken cord.

He bowed to Zilch, and, going up to the secretary, he said, rapidly:

"Well! since Tourillon is away, I will report the Enghien races. I am going there now. Enghien isn't highly diverting, though. The swells and the pretty women so rarely go there; they don't affect Enghien any more. But duty before everything, eh, Fremin?"

"You will have to hurry," said Fremin, looking at his watch, "or you will miss your train."

"Oh! I have a carriage below."

He clapped his confrere on the shoulder, bowed again to Zilah, and hurried away, while Fremin, turning to the Prince, said:

"I am at your service, Monsieur," and waited for him to open the conversation.

Zilah drew from his pocket the copy of L'Actualite, and said, very quietly:

"I should like to know, Monsieur, who is meant in this article here."

And, folding the paper, with the passage which concerned him uppermost, he handed it to the secretary.

Fremin glanced at the article.

"Yes, I have seen this paragraph," he said; "but I am entirely ignorant to whom it alludes. I am not even certain that it is not a fabrication, invented out of whole cloth."

"Ah!" said Zilah. "The author of the article would know, I suppose?"

"It is highly probable," replied Fremin, with a smile.

"Will you tell me, then, the name of the person who wrote this?"

"Isn't the article signed?"

"It is signed Puck. That is not a name."

"A pseudonym is a name in literature," said Fremin. "I am of the opinion, however, that one has always the right to demand to see a face which is covered by a mask. But the person who makes this demand should be personally interested. Does this story, to which you have called my attention, concern you, Monsieur?"

"Suppose, Monsieur," answered Zilah, a little disconcerted, for he perceived that he had to do with a courteous, well-bred man, "suppose that the man who is mentioned, or rather insulted, here, were my best friend. I wish to demand an explanation of the person who wrote this article, and to know, also, if it was really a journalist who composed those lines."

"You mean?--"

"I mean that there may be people interested in having such an article published, and I wish to know who they are."

"You are perfectly justified, Monsieur; but only one person can tell you that--the writer of the article."

"It is for that reason, Monsieur, that I desire to know his name."

"He does not conceal it," said Fremin. "The pseudonym is only designed as a stimulant to curiosity; but Puck is a corporeal being."

"I am glad to hear it," said Zilah. "Now, will you be kind enough to give me his name?"

"Paul Jacquemin."

Zilah knew the name well, having seen it at the end of a report of his river fete; but he hardly thought Jacquemin could be so well informed. Since he had lived in France, the Hungarian exile had not been accustomed to regard Paris as a sort of gossiping village, where everything is found out, talked over, and commented upon with eager curiosity, and where every one's aim is to appear to have the best and most correct information.

"I must ask you now, Monsieur, where Monsieur Paul Jacquemin lives?"

"Rue Rochechouart, at the corner of the Rue de la Tour d'Auvergne."

"Thank you, Monsieur," said Andras, rising, the object of his call having been accomplished.

"One moment," said Fremin, "if you intend to go at once to Monsieur Jacquemin's house, you will not find him at home just now."

"Why not?"

"Because you saw him here a few minutes ago, and he is now on his way to Enghien."

"Indeed!" said the Prince. "Very well, I will wait."

He bade farewell to Fremin, who accompanied him to the door; and, when seated in his carriage, he read again the paragraph of Puck--that Puck, who, in the course of the same article, referred many times to the brilliancy of "our colleague Jacquemin," and complacently cited the witticisms of "our clever friend Jacquemin."

Zilah remembered this Jacquemin now. It was he whom he had seen taking notes upon the parapet of the quay, and afterward at the wedding, where he had been brought by the Baroness Dinati. It was Jacquemin who was such a favorite with the little Baroness; who was one of the licensed distributors of celebrity and quasi-celebrity for all those who live upon gossip and for gossip-great ladies who love to see their names in print, and actresses wild over a new role; who was one of the chroniclers of fashion, received everywhere, flattered, caressed, petted; whom the Prince had just seen, very elegant with his stick and eyeglass, and his careless, disdainful air; and who had said, like a man accustomed to every magnificence, fatigued with luxury, blase with pleasure, and caring only for what is truly pschutt (to use the latest slang): "Pretty women so rarely go there!"

Zilah thought that, as the Baroness had a particular predilection for Jacquemin, it was perhaps she, who, in her gay chatter, had related the story to the reporter, and who, without knowing it probably, assuredly without wishing it, had furnished an article for 'L'Actualite'. In all honor, Jacquemin was really the spoiled child of the Baroness, the director of the entertainments at her house. With a little more conceit, Jacquemin, who was by no means lacking in that quality, however, might have believed that the pretty little woman was in love with him. The truth is, the Baroness Dinati was only in love with the reporter's articles, those society articles in which he never forgot her, but paid, with a string of printed compliments, for his champagne and truffles.

"And yet," thought Zilah, "no, upon reflection, I am certain that the Baroness had nothing to do with this outrage. Neither with intention nor through imprudence would she have given any of these details to this man."

Now that the Prince knew his real name, he might have sent to Monsieur Puck, Varhely, and another of his friends. Jacquemin would then give an explanation; for of reparation Zilah thought little. And yet, full of anger, and not having Menko before him, he longed to punish some one; he wished, that, having been made to suffer so himself, some one should expiate his pain. He would chastise this butterfly reporter, who had dared to interfere with his affairs, and wreak his vengeance upon him as if he were the coward who had fled. And, besides, who knew, after all, if this Jacquemin were not the confidant of Menko? Varhely would not have recognized in the Prince the generous Zilah of former times, full of pity, and ready to forgive an injury.

Andras could not meet Jacquemin that day, unless he waited for him at the office of 'L'Actualite' until the races were over, and he therefore postponed his intended interview until the next day.

About eleven o'clock in the morning, after a sleepless night, he sought the Rue Rochechouart, and the house Fremin had described to him. It was there: an old weather-beaten house, with a narrow entrance and a corridor, in the middle of which flowed a dirty, foul-smelling stream of water; the room of the concierge looked like a black hole at the foot of the staircase, the balusters and walls of which were wet with moisture and streaked with dirt; a house of poor working-people, many stories high, and built in the time when this quarter of Paris was almost a suburb.

Andras hesitated at first to enter, thinking that he must be mistaken. He thought of little Jacquemin, dainty and neat as if he had just stepped out of a bandbox, and his disdainful remarks upon the races of Enghien, where the swells no longer went. It was not possible that he lived here in this wretched, shabby place.

The concierge replied to the Prince, however, when he asked for Jacquemin: "Yes, Monsieur, on the fifth floor, the door to the right;" and Zilah mounted the dark stairs.

When he reached the fifth floor, he did not yet believe it possible that the Jacquemin who lived there was the one he had seen the day before, the one whom Baroness Dinati petted, "our witty colleague Jacquemin."

He knocked, however, at the door on the right, as he had been directed. No one came to open it; but he could hear within footsteps and indistinct cries. He then perceived that there was a bell-rope, and he pulled it. Immediately he heard some one approaching from within.

He felt a singular sensation of concentrated anger, united to a fear that the Jacquemin he was in search of was not there.

The door opened, and a woman appeared, young, rather pale, with pretty blond hair, somewhat disheveled, and dressed in a black skirt, with a white dressing-sack thrown over her shoulders.

She smiled mechanically as she opened the door, and, as she saw a strange face, she blushed crimson, and pulled her sack together beneath her chin, fastening it with a pin.

"Monsieur Jacquemin?" said Andras, taking off his hat.

"Yes, Monsieur, he lives here," replied the young woman, a little astonished.

"Monsieur Jacquemin, the journalist?" asked Andras.

"Yes, yes, Monsieur," she answered with a proud little smile, which Zilah

was not slow to notice. She now opened the door wide, and said, stepping aside to let the visitor pass:

"Will you take the trouble to come in, Monsieur?" She was not accustomed to receive calls (Jacquemin always making his appointments at the office); but, as the stranger might be some one who brought her husband work, as she called it, she was anxious not to let him go away before she knew what his errand was.

"Please come in, Monsieur!"

The Prince entered, and, crossing the entry in two steps, found himself in a small dining-room opening directly out of the kitchen, where three tiny little children were playing, the youngest, who could not have been more than eighteen months, crawling about on the floor. Upon the ragged oilcloth which covered the table, Zilah noticed two pairs of men's gloves, one gray, the other yellow, and a heap of soiled white cravats. Upon a wooden chair, by the open door of the kitchen, was a tub full of shirts, which the young woman had doubtless been washing when the bell rang.

The cries Zilah had heard came from the children, who were now silent, staring at the tall gentleman, who looked at them in surprise.

The young woman was small and very pretty, but with the pallor of fatigue and overwork; her lips were beautifully chiselled, but almost colorless; and she was so thin that her figure had the frail appearance of an unformed girl.

"Will you sit down, Monsieur?" she asked, timidly, advancing a cane-bottomed chair.

Everything in these poor lodgings was of the most shabby description. In a cracked mirror with a broken frame were stuck cards of invitation, theatre checks, and race tickets admitting to the grand stand. Upon a cheap little table with broken corners was a heap of New Year's cards, bonbon boxes, and novels with soiled edges. Upon the floor, near the children, were some remnants of toys; and the cradle in which the baby slept at night was pushed into a corner with a child's chair, the arms of which were gone.

Zilah was both astonished and pained. He had not expected to encounter this wretched place, the poorly clad children, and the woman's timid smile.

"Is Monsieur Jacquemin at home?" he asked abruptly, desiring to leave at once if the man whom he sought was not there.

"No, Monsieur; but he will not be long away. Sit down, Monsieur, please!"

She entreated so gently, with such an uneasy air at the threatened departure of this man who had doubtless brought some good news for her

husband, that the Prince mechanically obeyed, thinking again that there was evidently some mistake, and that it was not, it could not be, here that Jacquemin lived.

"Is it really your husband, Madame, who writes under the signature of Puck in 'L'Actualite'?" he asked. The same proud smile appeared again upon her thin, wan face.

"Yes, Monsieur, yes, it is really he!" she replied. She was so happy whenever any one spoke to her of her Paul. She was in the habit of taking copies of L'Actualite to the concierge, the grocer, and the butcher; and she was so proud to show how well Paul wrote, and what fine connections he had--her Paul, whom she loved so much, and for whom she sat up late at night when it was necessary to prepare his linen for some great dinner or supper he was invited to.

"Oh! it is indeed he, Monsieur," she said again, while Zilah watched her and listened in silence. "I don't like to have him use pseudonyms, as he calls them. It gives me so much pleasure to see his real name, which is mine too, printed in full. Only it seems that it is better sometimes. Puck makes people curious, and they say, Who can it be? He also signed himself Gavroche in the Rabelais, you know, which did not last very long. You are perhaps a journalist also, Monsieur?"

"No," said Zilah.

"Ah! I thought you were! But, after all, perhaps you are right. It is a hard profession, I sometimes think. You have to be out so late. If you only knew, Monsieur, how poor Paul is forced to work even at night! It tires him so, and then it costs so much. I beg your pardon for leaving those gloves like that before you. I was cleaning them. He does not like cleaned gloves, though; he says it always shows. Well, I am a woman, and I don't notice it. And then I take so much care of all that. It is necessary, and everything costs so dear. You see I--Gustave, don't slap your little sister! you naughty boy!"

And going to the children, her sweet, frank eyes becoming sad at a quarrel between her little ones, she gently took the baby away from the oldest child, who cried, and went into a corner to pout, regarding his mother with the same impudent air which Zilah had perceived in the curl of Jacquemin's lips when the reporter complained of the dearth of pretty women.

"It is certainly very astonishing that he does not come home," continued the young wife, excusing to Zilah the absence of her Paul. "He often breakfasts, however, in the city, at Brebant's. It seems that it is necessary for him to do so. You see, at the restaurant he talks and hears news. He couldn't learn all that he knows here very well, could he? I don't know much of things that must be put in a newspaper."

And she smiled a little sad smile, making even of her humility a pedestal for the husband so deeply loved and admired.

Zilah was beginning to feel ill at ease. He had come with anger, expecting to encounter the little fop whom he had seen, and he found this humble and devoted woman, who spoke of her Paul as if she were speaking of her religion, and who, knowing nothing of the life of her husband, only loving him, sacrificed herself to him in this almost cruel poverty (a strange contrast to the life of luxury Jacquemin led elsewhere), with the holy trust of her unselfish love.

"Do you never accompany your husband anywhere?" asked Andras.

"I? Oh, never!" she replied, with a sort of fright. "He does not wish it--and he is right. You see, Monsieur, when he married me, five years ago, he was not what he is now; he was a railway clerk. I was a working-girl; yes, I was a seamstress. Then it was all right; we used to walk together, and we went to the theatre; he did not know any one. It is different now. You see, if the Baroness Dinati should see me on his arm, she would not bow to him, perhaps."

"You are mistaken, Madame," said the Hungarian, gently. "You are the one who should be bowed to first."

She did not understand, but she felt that a compliment was intended, and she blushed very red, not daring to say any more, and wondering if she had not chatted too much, as Jacquemin reproached her with doing almost every day.

"Does Monsieur Jacquemin go often to the theatre?" asked Andras, after a moment's pause.

"Yes; he is obliged to do so."

"And you?"

"Sometimes. Not to the first nights, of course. One has to dress handsomely for them. But Paul gives me tickets, oh, as many as I want! When the plays are no longer drawing money, I go with the neighbors. But I prefer to stay at home and see to my babies; when I am sitting in the theatre, and they are left in charge of the concierge, I think, Suppose anything should happen to them! And that idea takes away all my pleasure. Still, if Paul stayed here--but he can not; he has his writing to do in the evenings. Poor fellow, he works so hard! Well!" with a sigh, "I don't think that he will be back to-day. The children will eat his beefsteak, that's all; it won't do them any harm."

As she spoke, she took some pieces of meat from an almost empty cupboard, and placed them on the table, excusing herself for doing so before Zilah.

And he contemplated, with an emotion which every word of the little woman increased, this poor, miserable apartment, where the wife lived, taking care of her children, while the husband, Monsieur Puck or Monsieur Gavroche, paraded at the fancy fairs or at the theatres; figured at the races; tasted the Baroness Dinati's wines, caring only for Johannisberg with the blue and gold seal of 1862; and gave to Potel and Chabot, in his

articles, lessons in gastronomy.

Then Madame Jacquemin, feeling instinctively that she had the sympathy of this sad-faced man who spoke to her in such a gentle voice, related her life to him with the easy confidence which poor people, who never see the great world, possess. She told him, with a tender smile, the entirely Parisian idyl of the love of the working-girl for the little clerk who loved her so much and who married her; and of the excursions they used to take together to Saint-Germain, going third-class, and eating their dinner upon the green grass under the trees, and then enjoying the funny doings of the painted clowns, the illuminations, the music, and the dancing. Oh! they danced and danced and danced, until she was so tired that she slept all the way home with her head on his shoulder, dreaming of the happy day they had had.

"That was the best time of my life, Monsieur. We were no richer than we are now; but we were more free. He was with me more, too: now, he certainly makes me very proud with his beautiful articles; but I don't see him; I don't see him any more, and it makes me very sad. Oh! if it were not for that, although we are not millionaires, I should be very happy; yes, entirely, entirely happy."

There was, in the simple, gentle resignation of this poor girl, sacrificed without knowing it, such devoted love for the man who, in reality, abandoned her, that Prince Andras felt deeply moved and touched. He thought of the one leading a life of pleasure, and the other a life of fatigue; of this household touching on one side poverty, and, on the other, wealth and fashion; and he divined, from the innocent words of this young wife, the hardships of this home, half deserted by the husband, and the nervousness and peevishness of Jacquemin returning to this poor place after a night at the restaurants or a ball at Baroness Dinati's. He heard the cutting voice of the elegant little man whom his humble wife contemplated with the eyes of a Hindoo adoring an idol; he was present, in imagination, at those tragically sorrowful scenes which the wife bore with her tender smile, poor woman, knowing of the life of her Paul only those duties of luxury which she herself imagined, remaining a seamstress still to sew the buttons on the shirts and gloves of her husband, and absolutely ignorant of all the entertainments where, in an evening, would sometimes be lost, at a game of cards, the whole monthly salary of Monsieur Puck! And Zilah said to himself, that this was, perhaps, the first time that this woman had ever been brought in contact with anything pertaining to her husband's fashionable life--and in what shape?--that of a man who had come to demand satisfaction for an injury, and to say to Jacquemin: "I shall probably kill you, Monsieur!"

And gradually, before the spectacle of this profound love, of this humble and holy devotion of the unselfish martyr with timid, wistful eyes, who leaned over her children, and said to them, sweetly, "Yes, you are hungry, I know, but you shall have papa's beefsteak," while she herself breakfasted off a little coffee and a crust of bread, Andras Zilah felt all his anger die away; and an immense pity filled his breast, as he saw, as in a vision of what the future might have brought forth, a terrible

scene in this poor little household: the pale fair-haired wife, already wasted and worn with constant labor, leaning out of the window yonder, or running to the stairs and seeing, covered with blood, wounded, wounded to death perhaps, her Paul, whom he, Andras, had come to provoke to a duel.

Ah! poor woman! Never would he cause her such anguish and sorrow. Between his sword and Jacquemin's impertinent little person, were now this sad-eyed creature, and those poor little children, who played there, forgotten, half deserted, by their father, and who would grow up, Heaven knows how!

"I see that Monsieur Jacquemin will not return," he said, rising hurriedly, "and I will leave you to your breakfast, Madame."

"Oh! you don't trouble me at all, Monsieur. I beg your pardon again for having given my children their breakfast before you."

"Farewell, Madame," said Andras, bowing with the deepest respect.

"Then, you are really going, Monsieur? Indeed, I am afraid he won't come back. But please tell me what I shall say to him your errand was. If it is some good news, I should be so glad, so glad, to be the first to tell it to him. You are, perhaps, although you say not, the editor of some paper which is about to be started. He spoke to me, the other day, of a new paper. He would like to be a dramatic critic. That is his dream, he says. Is it that, Monsieur?"

"No, Madame; and, to tell you the truth, there is no longer any need for me to see your husband. But I do not regret my visit; on the contrary-- I have met a noble woman, and I offer her my deepest respect."

Poor, unhappy girl! She was not used to such words; she blushingly faltered her thanks, and seemed quite grieved at the departure of this man, from whom she had expected some good luck for her husband.

"The life of Paris has its secrets!" thought Zilah, as he slowly descended the stairs, which he had mounted in such a different frame of mind, so short a time before.

When he reached the lower landing, he looked up, and saw the blond head of the young woman, leaning over above, and the little hands of the children clutching the damp railing.

Then Prince Andras Zilah took off his hat, and again bowed low.

On his way from the Rue Rochecouart to his hotel he thought of the thin, pale face of the Parisian grisette, who would slowly pine away, deceived and disdained by the man whose name she bore. Such a fine name! Puck or Gavroche!

"And she would die rather than soil that name. This Jacquemin has found this pearl of great price, and hid it away under the gutters of Paris!

And I--I have encountered--what? A miserable woman who betrayed me!
Ah! men and women are decidedly the victims of chance; puppets destined
to bruise one another!"

On entering his hotel, he found Yanski Varhely there, with an anxious
look upon his rugged old face.

"Well?"

"Well-nothing!"

And Zilah told his friend what he had seen.

"A droll city, this Paris!" he said, in conclusion. "I see that it is
necessary to go up into the garrets to know it well."

He took a sheet of paper, sat down, and wrote as follows:

MONSIEUR:--You have published an article in regard to Prince Andras
Zilah, which is an outrage. A devoted friend of the Prince had
resolved to make you pay dearly for it; but there is some one who
has disarmed him. That some one is the admirable woman who bears so
honorably the name which you have given her, and lives so bravely
the life you have doomed her to. Madame Jacquemin has redeemed the
infamy of Monsieur Puck. But when, in the future, you have to speak
of the misfortunes of others, think a little of your own existence,
and profit by the moral lesson given you by--AN UNKNOWN.

"Now," said Zilah, "be so kind, my dear Varhely, as to have this note
sent to Monsieur Puck, at the office of 'L'Actualite' and ask your
domestic to purchase some toys, whatever he likes--here is the money--
and take them to Madame Jacquemin, No. 25 Rue Rochechouart. Three toys,
because there are three children. The poor little things will have
gained so much, at all events, from this occurrence."

CHAPTER XXVI

"AM I AVENGED?"

After this episode, the Prince lived a more solitary existence than
before, and troubled himself no further about the outside world. Why
should he care, that some penny-aliner had slipped those odious lines
into a newspaper? His sorrow was not the publishing of the treachery,
it was the treachery itself; and his hourly suffering caused him to long
for death to end his torture.

"And yet I must live," he thought, "if to exist with a dagger through
one's heart is to live."

Then, to escape from the present, he plunged into the memories of the

war, as into a bath of oblivion, a strange oblivion, where he found all his patriotic regrets of other days. He read, with spasmodic eagerness, the books in which Georgei and Klapka, the actors of the drama, presented their excuses, or poured forth their complaints; and it seemed to him that his country would make him forget his love.

In the magnificent picture-gallery, where he spent most of his time, his eyes rested upon the battle-scenes of Matejks, the Polish artist, and the landscapes of Munkacsy, that painter of his own country, who took his name from the town of Munkacs, where tradition says that the Magyars settled when they came from the Orient, ages ago. Then a bitter longing took possession of him to breathe a different air, to fly from Paris, and place a wide distance between himself and Marsa; to take a trip around the world, where new scenes might soften his grief, or, better still, some accident put an end to his life; and, besides, chance might bring him in contact with Menko.

But, just as he was ready to depart, a sort of lassitude overpowered him; he felt the inert sensation of a wounded man who has not the strength to move, and he remained where he was, sadly and bitterly wondering at times if he should not appeal to the courts, dissolve his marriage, and demand back his name from the one who had stolen it.

Appeal to the courts? The idea of doing that was repugnant to him. What! to hear the proud and stainless name of the Zilahs resound, no longer above the clash of sabres and the neighing of furious horses, but within the walls of a courtroom, and in presence of a gaping crowd of sensation seekers? No! silence was better than that; anything was better than publicity and scandal. Divorce! He could obtain that, since Marsa, her mind destroyed, was like one dead. And what would a divorce give him? His freedom? He had it already. But what nothing could give back, was his ruined faith, his shattered hopes, his happiness lost forever.

At times he had a wild desire to see Marsa again, and vent once more upon her his anger and contempt. When he happened to see the name of Maisons-Lafitte, his body tingled from head to foot, as by an electric shock. Maisons! The sunlit garden, the shaded alleys, the glowing parterres of flowers, the old oaks, the white-walled villa, all appeared before him, brutally distinct, like a lost, or rather poisoned, Eden! And, besides, she, Marsa, was no longer there; and the thought that the woman whom he had so passionately loved, with her exquisite, flower-like face, was shut up among maniacs at Vaugirard, caused him the acutest agony. The asylum which was Marsa's prison was so constantly in his mind that he felt the necessity of flight, in order not to allow his weakness to get the better of him, lest he should attempt to see Marsa again.

"What a coward I am!" he thought.

One evening he announced to Varhely that he was going to the lonely villa of Sainte-Adresse, where they had so many times together watched the sea and talked of their country.

"I am going there to be alone, my dear Yanski," he said, "but to be with you is to be with myself. I hope that you will accompany me."

"Most certainly," replied Varhely.

The Prince took only one domestic, wishing to live as quietly and primitively as possible; but Varhely, really alarmed at the rapid change in the Prince, and the terrible pallor of his face, followed him, hoping at least to distract him and arouse him from his morbidness by talking over with him the great days of the past, and even, if possible, to interest him in the humble lives of the fishermen about him.

Zilah and his friend, therefore, passed long hours upon the terrace of the villa, watching the sun set at their feet, while the grayish-blue sea was enveloped in a luminous mist, and the fading light was reflected upon the red walls and white blinds of the houses, and tinged with glowing purple the distant hills of Ingouville.

This calm, quiet spot gradually produced upon Andras the salutary effect of a bath after a night of feverish excitement. His reflections became less bitter, and, strange to relate, it was rough old Yanski Varhely, who, by his tenderness and thoughtfulness, led his friend to a more resigned frame of mind.

Very often, after nightfall, would Zilah descend with him to the shore below. The sea lay at their feet a plain of silver, and the moonbeams danced over the waves in broken lines of luminous atoms; boats passed to and fro, their red lights flashing like glowworms; and it seemed to Andras and Varhely, as they approached the sea, receding over the wet, gleaming sands, that they were walking upon quicksilver.

As they strolled and talked together here, it seemed to Andras that this grief was, for the moment, carried away by the fresh, salt breeze; and these two men, in a different manner buffeted by fate, resembled two wounded soldiers who mutually aid one another to advance, and not to fall by the way before the combat is over. Yanski made special efforts to rouse in Andras the old memories of his fatherland, and to inspire in him again his love for Hungary.

"Ah! I used to have so many hopes and dreams for her future," said Andras; "but idealists have no chance in the world of to-day; so now I am a man who expects nothing of life except its ending. And yet I would like to see once again that old stone castle where I grew up, full of hopes! Hopes? Bah! pretty bubbles, that is all!"

One morning they walked along the cliffs, past the low shanties of the fishermen, as far as Havre; and, as they were sauntering through the streets of the city, Varhely grasped the Prince's arm, and pointed to an announcement of a series of concerts to be given at Frascati by a band of Hungarian gipsies.

"There," he said, "you will certainly emerge from your retreat to hear those airs once more."

"Yes," replied Andras, after a moment's hesitation.

That evening found him at the casino; but his wound seemed to open again, and his heart to be grasped as in an iron hand, as he listened to the plaintive cries and moans of the Tzigani music. Had the strings of the bows played these czardas upon his own sinews, laid bare, he would not have trembled more violently. Every note of the well-known airs fell upon his heart like a corrosive tear, and Marsa, in all her dark, tawny beauty, rose before him. The Tzigani played now the waltzes which Marsa used to play; then the slow, sorrowful plaint of the "Song of Plevna;" and then the air of Janos Nemeth's, the heart-breaking melody, to the Prince like the lament of his life: 'The World holds but One Fair Maiden'. And at every note he saw again Marsa, the one love of his existence.

"Let us go!" he said suddenly to Yanski.

But, as they were about to leave the building, they almost ran into a laughing, merry group, led by the little Baroness Dinati, who uttered a cry of delight as she perceived Andras.

"What, you, my dear Prince! Oh, how glad I am to see you!"

And she took his arm, all the clan which accompanied her stopping to greet Prince Zilah.

"We have come from Etretat, and we are going back there immediately. There was a fair at Havre in the Quartier Saint-Francois, and we have eaten up all we could lay our hands on, broken all Aunt Sally's pipes, and purchased all the china horrors and hideous pincushions we could find. They are all over there in the break. We are going to raffle them at Etretat for the poor."

The Prince tried to excuse himself and move on, but the little Baroness held him tight.

"Why don't you come to Etretat? It is charming there. We don't do anything but eat and drink and talk scandal--Oh, yes! Yamada sometimes gives us some music. Come here, Yamada!"

The Japanese approached, in obedience to her call, with his eternal grin upon his queer little face.

"My dear Prince," rattled on the Baroness, "you don't know, perhaps, that Yamada is the most Parisian of Parisians? Upon my word, these Japanese are the Parisians of Asia! Just fancy what he has been doing at Etretat! He has been writing a French operetta!"

"Japanese!" corrected Yamada, with an apologetic bow.

"Oh, Japanese! Parisian Japanese, then! At all events, it is very funny, and the title is Little Moo-Moo! There is a scene on board a

flower-decked boat! Oh, it is so amusing, so original, so natural!
and a delightful song for Little Moo-Moo!"

Then, as Zilah glanced at Varhely, uneasy, and anxious to get away, the Baroness puckered up her rosy lips and sang the stanzas of the Japanese maestro.

Why, sung by Judic or Theo, it would create a furore! All Paris would be singing.

"Oh, by the way," she cried, suddenly interrupting herself, "what have you done to Jacquemin? Yes, my friend Jacquemin?"

"Jacquemin?" repeated Zilah; and he thought of the garret in the Rue Rochechouart, and the gentle, fairhaired woman, who was probably at this very moment leaning over the cribs of her little children--the children of Monsieur Puck, society reporter of 'L'Actualite'

"Yes! Why, Jacquemin has become a savage; oh, indeed! a regular savage! I wanted to bring him to Etretat; but no, he wouldn't come. It seems that he is married. Jacquemin married! Isn't it funny? He didn't seem like a married man! Poor fellow! Well, when I invited him, he refused; and the other day, when I wanted to know the reason, he answered me (that is why I speak to you about it), 'Ask Prince Zilah!' So, tell me now, what have you done to poor Jacquemin?"

"Nothing," said the Prince.

"Oh, yes, you have; you have changed him! He, who used to go everywhere and be so jolly, now hides himself in his den, and is never seen at all. Just see how disagreeable it is! If he had come with us, he would have written an account in 'L'Actualite' of Little Moo-Moo, and Yamada's operetta would already be celebrated."

"So," continued the Baroness, "when I return to Paris, I am going to hunt him up. A reporter has no right to make a bear of himself!"

"Don't disturb him, if he cares for his home now," said Zilah, gravely.

"Nothing can compensate for one's own fireside, if one loves and is loved."

At the first words of the Prince, the Baroness suddenly became serious.

"I beg your pardon," she said, dropping his arm and holding out her tiny hand: "please forgive me for having annoyed you. Oh, yes, I see it! I have annoyed you. But be consoled; we are going at once, and then, you know, that if there is a creature who loves you, respects you, and is devoted to you, it is this little idiot of a Baroness! Goodnight!"

"Good-night'." said Andras, bowing to the Baroness's friends, Yamada and the other Parisian exotics.

Glad to escape, Varhely and the Prince returned home along the seashore. Fragments of the czardas from the illuminated casino reached their ears above the swish of the waves. Andras felt irritated and nervous. Everything recalled to him Marsa, and she seemed to be once more taking possession of his heart, as a vine puts forth fresh tendrils and clings again to the oak after it has been torn away.

"She also suffers!" he said aloud, after they had walked some distance in silence.

"Fortunately!" growled Varhely; and then, as if he wished to efface his harshness, he added, in a voice which trembled a little: "And for that reason she is, perhaps, not unworthy of pardon."

"Pardon!"

This cry escaped from Zilah in accents of pain which struck Varhely like a knife.

"Pardon before punishing--the other!" exclaimed the Prince, angrily.

The other! Yanski Varhely instinctively clinched his fist, thinking, with rage, of that package of letters which he had held in his hands, and which he might have destroyed if he had known.

It was true: how was pardon possible while Menko lived?

No word more was spoken by either until they reached the villa; then Prince Zilah shook Yanski's hand and retired to his chamber. Lighting his lamp, he took out and read and reread, for the hundredth time perhaps, certain letters--letters not addressed to him--those letters which Varhely had handed him, and with which Michel Menko had practically struck him the day of his marriage.

Andras had kept them, reading them over at times with an eager desire for further suffering, drinking in this species of poison to irritate his mental pain as he would have injected morphine to soothe a physical one. These letters caused him a sensation analogous to that which gives repose to opium-eaters, a cruel shock at first, sharp as the prick of a knife, then, the pain slowly dying away, a heavy stupor.

The whole story was revived in these letters of Marsa to Menko--all the ignorant, credulous love of the young girl for Michel, then her enthusiasm for love itself, rather than for the object of her love, and then, again--for Menko had reserved nothing, but sent all together--the bitter contempt of Marsa, deceived, for the man who had lied to her.

There were, in these notes, a freshness of sentiment and a youthful credulity which produced the impression of a clear morning in early spring, all the frankness and faith of a mind ignorant of evil and destitute of guile; then, in the later ones, the spontaneous outburst of a heart which believes it has given itself forever, because it thinks it has encountered incorruptible loyalty and undying devotion.

As he read them over, Andras shook with anger against the two who had deceived him; and also, and involuntarily, he felt an undefined, timid pity for the woman who had trusted and been deceived--a pity he immediately drove away, as if he were afraid of himself, afraid of forgiving.

"What did Varhely mean by speaking to me of pardon?" he thought. "Am I yet avenged?"

It was this constant hope that the day would come when justice would be meted out to Menko's treachery. The letters proved conclusively that Menko had been Marsa's lover; but they proved, at the same time, that Michel had taken advantage of her innocence and ignorance, and lied outrageously in representing himself as free, when he was already bound to another woman.

All night long Andras Zilah sat there, inflicting torture upon himself, and taking a bitter delight in his own suffering; engraving upon his memory every word of love written by Marsa to Michel, as if he felt the need of fresh pain to give new strength to his hatred.

The next morning at breakfast, Varhely astonished him by announcing that he was going away.

"To Paris?"

"No, to Vienna," replied Yanski, who looked somewhat paler than usual.

"What an idea! What are you going to do there, Varhely?"

"Angelo Valla arrived yesterday at Havre. He sent for me to come to his hotel this morning. I have just been there. Valla has given me some information in regard to a matter of interest to myself, which will require my presence at Vienna. So I am going there."

Prince Zilah was intimately acquainted with the Valla of whom Varhely spoke; he had been one of the witnesses of his marriage. Valla was a former minister of Manin; and, since the siege of Venice, he had lived partly in Paris and partly in Florence. He was a man for whom Andras Zilah had the greatest regard.

"When do you go?" asked the Prince of Varhely.

"In an hour. I wish to take the fast mail from Paris this evening."

"Is it so very pressing, then?"

"Very pressing," replied Varhely. "There is another to whose ears the affair may possibly come, and I wish to get the start of him."

"Farewell, then," said Andras, considerably surprised; "come back as soon as you can."

He was astonished at the almost violent pressure of the hand which Varhely gave him, as if he were departing for a very long journey.

"Why didn't Valla come to see me?" he asked. "He is one of the few I am always glad to see."

"He had no time. He had to be away again at once, and he asked me to excuse him to you."

The Prince did not make any further attempt to find out what was the reason of his friend's sudden flight, for Varhely was already descending the steps of the villa.

Andras then felt a profound sensation of loneliness, and he thought again of the woman whom his imagination pictured haggard and wan in the asylum of Vaugirard.

CHAPTER XXVII

"WHAT MATTERS IT HOW MUCH WE SUFFER?"

Two hours after Varhely had gone, a sort of feverish attraction drew Prince Andras to the spot where, the night before, he had listened to the Tzigana airs.

Again, but alone this time, he drank in the accents of the music of his country, and sought to remember the impression produced upon him when Marsa had played this air or that one, this sad song or that czardas. He saw her again as she stood on the deck of the steamer, watching the children on the barge as they threw her kisses of farewell. More troubled than ever, nervous and suffering, Zilah returned home late in the afternoon, opened the desk where he kept Marsa's letters, and one by one, impelled by some inexplicable sentiment, he burned them, the flame of the candle devouring the paper, whose subtle perfume mounted to his nostrils for the last time like a dying sigh, while the wind carried off, through the window into the infinite, the black dust of those fateful letters, those remnants of dead passion and of love betrayed--and the past was swept away.

The sun was slowly descending in an atmosphere of fire, while toward Havre a silvery mist over the hills and shore heralded the approach of chaste Dian's reign. The reflections of the sunset tinged with red and orange the fishing boats floating over the calm sea, while a long fiery streak marked the water on the horizon, growing narrower and narrower, and changing to orange and then to pale yellow as the disk of the sun gradually disappeared, and the night came on, enveloping the now inactive city, and the man who watched the disappearance of the last fragments of a detested love, of the love of another, of a love which had torn and bruised his heart. And, strange to say, for some inexplicable reason,

Prince Andras Zilah now regretted the destruction of those odious letters. It seemed to him, with a singular displacement of his personality, that it was something of himself, since it was something of her, that he had destroyed. He had hushed that voice which said to another, "I love you," but which caused him the same thrill as if she had murmured the words for him. They were letters received by his rival which the wind carried out, an impalpable dust, over the sea; and he felt --such folly is the human heart capable of--the bitter regret of a man who has destroyed a little of his past.

The shadows crept over him at the same time that they crept over the sea.

"What matters it how much we suffer, or how much suffering we cause," he murmured, "when, of all our loves, our hearts, ourselves, there remains, after a short lapse of time--what? That!" And he watched the last atom of burned paper float away in the deepening twilight.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE STRICKEN SOUL

His loneliness now weighed heavily upon Andras. His nerves were shaken by the memories which the czardas of the Tzigani musicians had evoked; and it seemed to him that the place was deserted now that they had departed, and Varhely had gone with them. In the eternal symphony of the sea, the lapping of the waves upon the shingle at the foot of the terrace, one note was now lacking, the resonant note of the czimbalom yonder in the gardens of Frascati. The vibration of the czimbalom was like a call summoning up the image of Marsa, and this image took invincible possession of the Prince, who, with a sort of sorrowful anger which he regarded as hatred, tried in vain to drive it away.

What was the use of remaining at Sainte-Adresse, when the memories he sought to flee came to find him there, and since Marsa's presence haunted it as if she had lived there by his side?

He quitted Havre, and returned to Paris; but the very evening of his return, in the bustle and movement of the Champs-Elysees, the long avenue dotted with lights, the flaming gas-jets of the cafe concerts, the bursts of music, he found again, as if the Tzigana were continually pursuing him, the same phantom; despite the noise of people and carriages upon the asphalt, the echoes of the "Song of Plevna," played quite near him by some Hungarian orchestra, reached him as upon the seashore at Havre; and he hastened back to his hotel, to shut himself up, to hear nothing, see nothing, and escape from the fantastic, haunting pursuit of this inevitable vision.

He could not sleep; fever burned in his blood. He rose, and tried to read; but before the printed page he saw continually Marsa Laszlo, like the spectre of his happiness.

"How cowardly human nature is!" he exclaimed, hurling away the book.
"Is it possible that I love her still? Shall I love her forever?"

And he felt intense self-contempt at the temptation which took possession of him to see once more Maisons-Lafitte, where he had experienced the most terrible grief of his life. What was the use of struggling? He had not forgotten, and he never could forget.

If he had been sincere with himself, he would have confessed that he was impelled by his ever-living, ever-present love toward everything which would recall Marsa to him, and that a violent, almost superhuman effort was necessary not to yield to the temptation.

About a week after the Prince's return to Paris, his valet appeared one day with the card of General Vogotzine. It was on Andras's lips to refuse to see him; but, in reality, the General's visit caused him a delight which he would not acknowledge to himself. He was about to hear of hey. He told the valet to admit Vogotzine, hypocritically saying to himself that it was impossible, discourteous, not to receive him.

The old Russian entered, timid and embarrassed, and was not much reassured by Zilah's polite but cold greeting.

The General, who for some extraordinary reason had not had recourse to alcohol to give him courage, took the chair offered him by the Prince. He was a little flushed, not knowing exactly how to begin what he had to say; and, being sober, he was terribly afraid of appearing, like an idiot.

"This is what is the matter," he said, plunging at once in medias res.
"Doctor Fargeas, who sent me, might have come himself; but he thought that I, being her uncle, should--"

"You have come to consult me about Marsa," said Andras, unconsciously glad to pronounce her name.

"Yes," began the General, becoming suddenly intimidated, "of--of Marsa. She is very ill--Marsa is. Very ill. Stupor, Fargeas says. She does not say a word--nothing. A regular automaton! It is terrible to see her--terrible--terrible."

He raised his round, uneasy eyes to Andras, who was striving to appear calm, but whose lips twitched nervously.

"It is impossible to rouse her," continued Vogotzine. "The, doctors can do nothing. There is no hope except in an--an--an experiment."

"An experiment?"

"Yes, exactly, exactly--an experiment. You see he--he wanted to know if --(you must pardon me for what I am about to propose; it is Doctor Fargeas's idea)--You see--if--if--she should see--(I suppose--these are

not my words)--if she should see you again at Doctor Sims's establishment --the emotion--the--the--Well, I don't know exactly what Doctor Fargeas does hope; but I have repeated to you his words--I am simply, quite simply, his messenger."

"The doctor," said Andras, calmly, "would like--your niece to see me again?"

"Yes, yes; and speak to you. You see, you are the only one for whom--"

The Prince interrupted the General, who instantly became as mute as if he were in the presence of the Czar.

"It is well. But what Doctor Fargeas asks of me will cause me intense suffering."

Vogotzine did not open his lips.

"See her again? He wishes to revive all my sorrow, then!"

Vogotzine waited, motionless as if on parade.

After a moment or two, Andras saying no more, the General thought that he might speak.

"I understand. I knew very well what your answer would be. I told the doctor so; but he replied, 'It is a question of humanity. The Prince will not refuse.'"

Fargeas must have known Prince Zilah's character well when he used the word humanity. The Prince would not have refused his pity to the lowest of human beings; and so, never mind what his sufferings might be, if his presence could do any good, he must obey the doctor.

"When does Doctor Fargeas wish me to go?"

"Whenever you choose. The doctor is just now at Vaugirard, on a visit to his colleague, and--"

"Do not let us keep him waiting!"

Vogotzine's eyes brightened.

"Then you consent? You will go?"

He tried to utter some word of thanks, but Andras cut him short, saying:

"I will order the carriage."

"I have a carriage," said Vogotzine, joyously. "We can go at once."

Zilah was silent during the drive; and Vogotzine gazed steadily out of the window, without saying a word, as the Prince showed no desire to

converse.

They stopped before a high house, evidently built in the last century, and which was probably formerly a convent. The General descended heavily from the coupe, rang the bell, and stood aside to let Zilah pass before him.

The Prince's emotion was betrayed in a certain stiffness of demeanor, and in his slow walk, as if every movement cost him an effort. He stroked his moustache mechanically, and glanced about the garden they were crossing, as if he expected to see Marsa at once.

Dr. Fargeas appeared very much pleased to see the Prince, and he thanked him warmly for having come. A thin, light-haired man, with a pensive look and superb eyes, accompanied Fargeas, and the physician introduced him to the Prince as Dr. Sims.

Dr. Sims shared the opinion of his colleague. Having taken the invalid away, and separated her from every thing that could recall the past, the physicians thought, that, by suddenly confronting her with a person so dear to her as Prince Zilah, the shock and emotion might rouse her from her morbid state.

Fargeas explained to the Prince why he had thought it best to transport the invalid from Maisons-Lafitte to Vaugirard, and he thanked him for having approved of his determination.

Zilah noticed that Fargeas, in speaking of Marsa, gave her no name or title. With his usual tact, the doctor had divined the separation; and he did not call Marsa the Princess, but, in tones full of pity, spoke of her as the invalid.

"She is in the garden," said Dr. Sims, when Fargeas had finished speaking. "Will you see her now?"

"Yes," said the Prince, in a voice that trembled slightly, despite his efforts to control it.

"We will take a look at her first; and then, if you will be so kind, show yourself to her suddenly. It is only an experiment we are making. If she does not recognize you, her condition is graver than I think. If she does recognize you, well, I hope that we shall be able to cure her. Come!"

Dr. Sims motioned the Prince to precede them.

"Shall I accompany you, gentlemen?" asked Vogotzine.

"Certainly, General!"

"You see, I don't like lunatics; they produce a singular effect upon me; they don't interest me at all. But still, after all, she is my niece!"

And he gave a sharp pull to his frock-coat, as he would have tightened his belt before an assault.

They descended a short flight of steps, and found themselves in a large garden, with trees a century old, beneath which were several men and women walking about or sitting in chairs.

A large, new building, one story high, appeared at one end of the garden; in this were the dormitories of Dr. Sims's patients.

"Are those people insane?" asked Zilah, pointing to the peaceful groups.

"Yes," said Dr. Sims; "it requires a stretch of the imagination to believe it, does it not? You can speak to them as we pass by. All these here are harmless."

"Shall we cross the garden?"

"Our invalid is below there, in another garden, behind that house."

As he passed by, Zilah glanced curiously at these poor beings, who bowed, or exchanged a few words with the two physicians. It seemed to him that they had the happy look of people who had reached the desired goal. Vogotzine, coughing nervously, kept close to the Prince and felt very ill at ease. Andras, on the contrary, found great difficulty in realizing that he was really among lunatics.

"See," said Dr. Sims, pointing out an old gentleman, dressed in the style of 1840, like an old-fashioned lithograph of a beau of the time of Gavarni, "that man has been more than thirty-five years in the institution. He will not change the cut of his garments, and he is very careful to have his tailor make his clothes in the same style he dressed when he was young. He is very happy. He thinks that he is the enchanter Merlin, and he listens to Vivian, who makes appointments with him under the trees."

As they passed the old man, his neck imprisoned in a high stock, his surtout cut long and very tight in the waist, and his trousers very full about the hips and very close about the ankles, he bowed politely.

"Good-morning, Doctor Sims! Good-morning, Doctor Fargeas!"

Then, as the director of the establishment approached to speak, he placed a finger upon his lips:

"Hush," he said. "She is there! Don't speak, or she will go away." And he pointed with a sort of passionate veneration to an elm where Vivian was shut up, and whence she would shortly emerge.

"Poor devil!" murmured Vogotzine.

This was not what Zilah thought, however. He wondered if this happy hallucination which had lasted so many years, these eternal love-scenes

with Vivian, love-scenes which never grew stale, despite the years and the wrinkles, were not the ideal form of happiness for a being condemned to this earth. This poetical monomaniac lived with his dreams realized, finding, in an asylum of Vaugirard, all the fascinations and chimeras of the Breton land of golden blossoms and pink heather, all the intoxicating, languorous charm of the forest of Broceliande.

"He has within his grasp what Shakespeare was content only to dream of. Insanity is, perhaps, simply the ideal realized:"

"Ah!" replied Dr. Fargeas, "but the real never loses its grip. Why does this monomaniac preserve both the garments of his youth, which prevent him from feeling his age, and the dream of his life, which consoles him for his lost reason? Because he is rich. He can pay the tailor who dresses him, the rent of the pavilion he inhabits by himself, and the special servants who serve him. If he were poor, he would suffer."

"Then," said Zilah, "the question of bread comes up everywhere, even in insanity."

"And money is perhaps happiness, since it allows of the purchase of happiness."

"Oh!" said the Prince, "for me, happiness would be--"

"What?"

"Forgetfulness."

And he followed with his eyes Vivian's lover, who now had his ear glued to the trunk of the tree, and was listening to the voice which spoke only to him.

"That man yonder," said Dr. Sims, indicating a man, still young, who was coming toward them, "is a talented writer whose novels you have doubtless read, and who has lost all idea of his own personality. Once a great reader, he now holds all literature in intense disgust; from having written so much, he has grown to have a perfect horror of words and letters, and he never opens either a book or a newspaper. He drinks in the fresh air, cultivates flowers, and watches the trains pass at the foot of the garden."

"Is he happy?" asked Andras.

"Very happy."

"Yes, he has drunk of the waters of Lethe," rejoined the Prince.

"I will not tell you his name," whispered Dr. Sims, as the man, a thin, dark-haired, delicate-featured fellow, approached them; "but, if you should speak to him and chance to mention his name, he would respond 'Ah! yes, I knew him. He was a man of talent, much talent.' There is nothing left to him of his former life."

And Zilah thought again that it was a fortunate lot to be attacked by one of these cerebral maladies where the entire being, with its burden of sorrows, is plunged into the deep, dark gulf of oblivion.

The novelist stopped before the two physicians.

"The mid-day train was three minutes and a half late," he said, quietly:

"I mention the fact to you, doctor, that you may have it attended to. It is a very serious thing; for I am in the habit of setting my watch by that train."

"I will see to it," replied Dr. Sims. "By the way, do you want any books?"

In the same quiet tone the other responded:

"What for?"

"To read."

"What is the use of that?"

"Or any newspapers? To know--"

"To know what?" he interrupted, speaking with extreme volubility.

"No, indeed! It is so good to know nothing, nothing, nothing! Do the newspapers announce that there are no more wars, no more poverty, illness, murders, envy, hatred or jealousy? No! The newspapers do not announce that. Then, why should I read the newspapers? Good-day, gentlemen."

The Prince shuddered at the bitter logic of this madman, speaking with the shrill distinctness of the insane. But Vogotzine smiled.

"Why, these idiots have rather good sense, after all," he remarked.

When they reached the end of the garden, Dr. Sims opened a gate which separated the male from the female patients, and Andras perceived several women walking about in the alleys, some of them alone, and some accompanied by attendants. In the distance, separated from the garden by a ditch and a high wall, was the railway.

Zilah caught his breath as he entered the enclosure, where doubtless among the female forms before him was that of the one he had loved. He turned to Dr. Sims with anxious eyes, and asked:

"Is she here?"

"She is here," replied the doctor.

The Prince hesitated to advance. He had not seen her since the day he had felt tempted to kill her as she lay in her white robes at his feet.

He wondered if it were not better to retrace his steps and depart hastily without seeing her.

"This way," said Fargeas. "We can see through the bushes without being seen, can we not, Sims?"

"Yes, doctor."

Zilah resigned himself to his fate; and followed the physicians without saying a word; he could hear the panting respiration of Vogotzine trudging along behind him. All at once the Prince felt a sensation as of a heavy hand resting upon his heart. Fargeas had exclaimed:

"There she is!"

He pointed, through the branches of the lilac-bushes, to two women who were approaching with slow steps, one a light-haired woman in a nurse's dress, and the other in black garments, as if in mourning for her own life, Marsa herself.

Marsa! She was coming toward Zilah; in a moment, he would be able to touch her, if he wished, through the leaves! Even Vogotzine held his breath.

Zilah eagerly questioned Marsa's face, as if to read thereon a secret, to decipher a name--Menko's or his own. Her exquisite, delicate features had the rigidity of marble; her dark eyes were staring straight ahead, like two spots of light, where nothing, nothing was reflected. Zilah shuddered again; she alarmed him.

Alarm and pity! He longed to thrust aside the bushes, and hasten with extended arms toward the pale vision before him. It was as if the moving spectre of his love were passing by. But, with a strong effort of will, he remained motionless where he was.

Old Vogotzine seemed very ill at ease. Dr. Fargeas was very calm; and, after a questioning glance at his colleague, he said distinctly to the Prince:

"Now you must show yourself!"

The physician's order, far from displeasing Zilah, was like music in his ears. He was beginning to doubt, if, after all, Fargeas intended to attempt the experiment. He longed, with keen desire, to speak to Marsa; to know if his look, his breath, like a puff of wind over dying ashes, would not rekindle a spark of life in those dull, glassy eyes.

What was she thinking of, if she thought at all? What memory vacillated to and fro in that vacant brain? The memory of himself, or of--the other? He must know, he must know!

"This way," said Dr. Sims. "We will go to the end of the alley, and meet her face to face."

"Courage!" whispered Fargeas.

Zilah followed; and, in a few steps, they reached the end of the alley, and stood beneath a clump of leafy trees. The Prince saw, coming to him, with a slow but not heavy step, Marsa--no, another Marsa, the spectre or statue of Marsa.

Fargeas made a sign to Vogotzine, and the Russian and the two doctors concealed themselves behind the trees.

Zilah, trembling with emotion, remained alone in the middle of the walk.

The nurse who attended Marsa, had doubtless received instructions from Dr. Sims; for, as she perceived the Prince, she fell back two or three paces, and allowed Marsa to go on alone.

Lost in her stupor, the Tzigana advanced, her dark hair ruffled by the wind; and, still beautiful although so thin, she moved on, without seeing anything, her lips closed as if sealed by death, until she was not three feet from Zilah.

He stood waiting, his blue eyes devouring her with a look, in which there were mingled love, pity, and anger. When the Tzigana reached him, and nearly ran into him in her slow walk, she stopped suddenly, like an automaton. The instinct of an obstacle before her arrested her, and she stood still, neither recoiling nor advancing.

A few steps away, Dr. Fargeas and Dr. Sims studied her stony look, in which there was as yet neither thought nor vision.

Still enveloped in her stupor, she stood there, her eyes riveted upon Andras. Suddenly, as if an invisible knife had been plunged into her heart, she started back. Her pale marble face became transfigured, and an expression of wild terror swept across her features; shaking with a nervous trembling, she tried to call out, and a shrill cry, which rent the air, burst from her lips, half open, like those of a tragic mask. Her two arms were stretched out with the hands clasped; and, falling upon her knees, she--whose light of reason had been extinguished, who for so many days had only murmured the sad, singing refrain: "I do not know; I do not know!"--faltered, in a voice broken with sobs: "Forgive! Forgive!"

Then her face became livid, and she would have fallen back unconscious if Zilah had not stooped over and caught her in his arms.

Dr. Sims hastened forward, and, aided by the nurse, relieved him of his burden.

Poor Vogotzine was as purple as if he had had a stroke of apoplexy.

"But, gentlemen," said the Prince, his eyes burning with hot tears, "it will be horrible if we have killed her!"

"No, no," responded Fargeas; "we have only killed her stupor. Now leave her to us. Am I not right, my dear Sims? She can and must be cured!"

CHAPTER XXIX

"LET THE DEAD PAST BURY ITS DEAD"

Prince Andras had heard no news of Varhely for a long time. He only knew that the Count was in Vienna.

Yanski had told the truth when he said that he had been summoned away by his friend, Angelo Valla.

They were very much astonished, at the Austrian ministry of foreign affairs, to see Count Yanski Varhely, who, doubtless, had come from Paris to ask some favor of the minister. The Austrian diplomats smiled as they heard the name of the old soldier of '48 and '49. So, the famous fusion of parties proclaimed in 1875 continued! Every day some sulker of former times rallied to the standard. Here was this Varhely, who, at one time, if he had set foot in Austria-Hungary, would have been speedily cast into the Charles barracks, the jail of political prisoners, now sending in his card to the minister of the Emperor; and doubtless the minister and the old commander of hussars would, some evening, together pledge the new star of Hungary, in a beaker of rosy Crement!

"These are queer days we live in!" thought the Austrian diplomats.

The minister, of whom Yanski Varhely demanded an audience, his Excellency Count Josef Ladany, had formerly commanded a legion of Magyar students, greatly feared by the grenadiers of Paskiewisch, in Hungary. The soldiers of Josef Ladany, after threatening to march upon Vienna, had many times held in check the grenadiers and Cossacks of the field-marshal. Spirited and enthusiastic, his fair hair floating above his youthful forehead like an aureole, Ladany made war like a patriot and a poet, reciting the verses of Petoefi about the camp-fires, and setting out for battle as for a ball. He was magnificent (Varhely remembered him well) at the head of his students, and his floating, yellow moustaches had caused the heart of more than one little Hungarian patriot to beat more quickly.

Varhely would experience real pleasure in meeting once more his old companion in arms. He remembered one afternoon in the vineyards, when his hussars, despite the obstacles of the vines and the irregular ground, had extricated Ladany's legion from the attack of two regiments of Russian infantry. Joseph Ladany was standing erect upon one of his cannon for which the gunners had no more ammunition, and, with drawn sabre, was rallying his companions, who were beginning to give way before the enemy. Ah, brave Ladany! With what pleasure would Varhely grasp his hand!

The former leader had doubtless aged terribly--he must be a man of fifty-five or fifty-six, to-day; but Varhely was sure that Joseph Ladany, now become minister, had preserved his generous, ardent nature of other days.

As he crossed the antechambers and lofty halls which led to the minister's office, Varhely still saw, in his mind's eye, Ladany, sabre in hand, astride of the smoking cannon.

An usher introduced him into a large, severe-looking room, with a lofty chimney-piece, above which hung a picture of the Emperor-King in full military uniform. Varhely at first perceived only some large armchairs, and an enormous desk covered with books; but, in a moment, from behind the mass of volumes, a man emerged, smiling, and with outstretched hand: the old hussar was amazed to find himself in the presence of a species of English diplomat, bald, with long, gray side-whiskers and shaven lip and chin, and scrupulously well dressed.

Yanski's astonishment was so evident that Josef Ladany said, still smiling:

"Well, don't you recognize me, my dear Count?" His voice was pleasant, and his manner charming; but there was something cold and politic in his whole appearance which absolutely stupefied Varhely. If he had seen him pass in the street, he would never have recognized, in this elegant personage, the young man, with yellow hair and long moustaches, who sang war songs as he sabred the enemy.

And yet it was indeed Ladany; it was the same clear eye which had once commanded his legion with a single look; but the eye was often veiled now beneath a lowered eyelid, and only now and then did a glance shoot forth which seemed to penetrate a man's most secret thoughts. The soldier had become the diplomat.

"I had forgotten that thirty years have passed!" thought Varhely, a little saddened.

Count Ladany made his old comrade sit down in one of the armchairs, and questioned him smilingly as to his life, his friendships, Paris, Prince Zilah, and led him gradually and gracefully to confide what he, Varhely, had come to ask of the minister of the Emperor of Austria.

Varhely felt more reassured. Josef Ladany seemed to him to have remained morally the same. The moustache had been cut off, the yellow hair had fallen; but the heart was still young and without doubt Hungarian.

"You can," he said, abruptly, "render me a service, a great service. I have never before asked anything of anybody; but I have taken this journey expressly to see you, and to ask you, to beg you rather, to--"

"Go on, my dear Count. What you desire will be realized, I hope."

But his tone had already become colder, or perhaps simply more official.

"Well," continued Varhely, "what I have come to ask of you is; in memory of the time when we were brothers in arms" (the minister started slightly, and stroked his whiskers a little nervously), "the liberty of a certain man, of a man whom you know."

"Ah! indeed!" said Count Josef.

He leaned back in his chair, crossed one leg over the other, and, through his half-opened eyelids, examined Varhely, who looked him boldly in the face.

The contrast between these two men was striking; the soldier with his hair and moustache whitened in the harness, and the elegant government official with his polished manners; two old-time companions who had heard the whistling of the same balls.

"This is my errand," said Varhely. "I have the greatest desire that one of our compatriots, now a prisoner in Warsaw, I think--at all events, arrested at Warsaw a short time ago--should be set at liberty. It is of the utmost importance to me," he added, his lips turning almost as white as his moustache.

"Oh!" said the minister. "I fancy I know whom you mean."

"Count Menko."

"Exactly! Menko was arrested by the Russian police on his arrival at the house of a certain Labanoff, or Ladanoff--almost my name in Russian. This Labanoff, who had lately arrived from Paris, is suspected of a plot against the Czar. He is not a nihilist, but simply a malcontent; and, besides that, his brain is not altogether right. In short, Count Menko is connected in some way, I don't know how, with this Labanoff. He went to Poland to join him, and the Russian police seized him. I think myself that they were quite right in their action."

"Possibly," said Varhely; "but I do not care to discuss the right of the Russian police to defend themselves or the Czar. What I have come for is to ask you to use your influence with the Russian Government to obtain Menko's release."

"Are you very much interested in Menko?"

"Very much," replied Yanski, in a tone which struck the minister as rather peculiar.

"Then," asked Count Ladany with studied slowness, "you would like?--"

"A note from you to the Russian ambassador, demanding Menko's release. Angelo Valla--you know him--Manin's former minister--"

"Yes, I know," said Count Josef, with his enigmatical smile.

"Valla told me of Menko's arrest. I knew that Menko had left Paris, and I was very anxious to find where he had gone. Valla learned, at the Italian embassy in Paris, of the affair of this Labanoff and of the real or apparent complicity of Michel Menko; and he told me about it. When we were talking over the means of obtaining the release of a man held by Muscovite authority, which is not an easy thing, I know, we thought of you, and I have come to your Excellency as I would have gone to the chief of the Legion of Students to demand his aid in a case of danger!"

Yanski Varhely was no diplomat; and his manner of appealing to the memories of the past was excessively disagreeable to the minister, who, however, allowed no signs of his annoyance to appear.

Count Ladany was perfectly well acquainted with the Warsaw affair. As an Hungarian was mixed up in it, and an Hungarian of the rank and standing of Count Menko, the Austro-Hungarian authorities had immediately been advised of the whole proceeding. There were probably no proofs of actual complicity against Menko; but, as Josef Ladany had said, it seemed evident that he had come to Poland to join Labanoff. An address given to Menko by Labanoff had been found, and both were soon to depart for St. Petersburg. Labanoff had some doubtful acquaintances in the Russian army: several officers of artillery, who had been arrested and sent to the mines, were said to be his friends.

"The matter is a grave one," said the Count. "We can scarcely, for one particular case, make our relations more strained with a--a friendly nation, relations which so many others--I leave you to divine who, my dear Varhely--strive to render difficult. And yet, I would like to oblige you; I would, I assure you."

"If Count Menko is not set at liberty, what will happen to him?" asked Yanski.

"Hmm--he might, although a foreigner, be forced to take a journey to Siberia."

"Siberia! That is a long distance off, and few return from that journey," said Varhely, his voice becoming almost hoarse. "I would give anything in the world if Menko were free!"

"It would have been so easy for him not to have been seized by the Russian police."

"Yes; but he is. And, I repeat, I have come to you to demand his release. Damn it! Such a demand is neither a threat nor a *casus belli*."

The minister calmed the old hussar with a gesture.

"No," he replied, clicking his tongue against the roof of his mouth; "but it is embarrassing, embarrassing! Confound Menko! He always was a feather-brain! The idea of his leaving diplomacy to seek adventures! He must know, however, that his case is--what shall I say?--embarrassing, very embarrassing. I don't suppose he had any idea of conspiring. He is

a malcontent, this Menko, a malcontent! He would have made his mark in our embassies. The devil take him! Ah! my dear Count, it is very embarrassing, very embarrassing!"

The minister uttered these words in a calm, courteous, polished manner, even when he said "The devil take him!" He then went on to say, that he could not make Varhely an absolute promise; he would look over the papers in the affair, telegraph to Warsaw and St. Petersburg, make a rapid study of what he called again the "very embarrassing" case of Michel Menko, and give Varhely an answer within twenty-four hours.

"That will give you a chance to take a look at our city, my dear Count. Vienna has changed very much. Have you seen the opera-house? It is superb. Hans Makart is just exhibiting a new picture. Be sure to see it, and visit his studio, too; it is well worth examining. I have no need to tell you that I am at your service to act as your cicerone, and show you all the sights."

"Are any of our old friends settled here?" asked Varhely.

"Yes, yes," said the minister, softly. "But they are deputies, university professors, or councillors of the administration. All changed! all changed!"

Then Varhely wished to know if certain among them whom he had not forgotten had "changed," as the minister said.

"Where is Armand Bitto?"

"Dead. He died very poor."

"And Arpad Ovody, Georgei's lieutenant, who was so brave at the assault of Buda? I thought that he was killed with that bullet through his cheek."

"Ovody? He is at the head of the Magyar Bank, and is charged by the ministry with the conversion of the six per cent. Hungarian loan. He is intimately connected with the Rothschild group. He has I don't know how many thousand florins a year, and a castle in the neighborhood of Presburg. A great collector of pictures, and a very amiable man!"

"And Hieronymis Janos, who wrote such eloquent proclamations and calls to arms? Kossuth was very fond of him."

"He is busy, with Maurice Jokai, preparing a great book upon the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, a book patronized by the Archduke Rudolph. He will doubtless edit the part relative to the kingdom of Saint Stephen."

"Ha! ha! He will have a difficult task when he comes to the recital of the battle at Raab against Francis Joseph in person! He commanded at Raab himself, as you must remember well."

"Yes, he did, I remember," said the minister. Then, with a smile, he

added: "Bah! History is written, not made. Hieronymis Janos's book will be very good, very good!"

"I don't doubt it. What about Ferency Szilogyi? Is he also writing books under the direction of the Archduke Rudolph?"

"No! no! Ferency Szilogyi is president of the court of assizes, and a very good magistrate he is."

"He! an hussar?"

"Oh! the world changes! His uniform sleeps in some chest, preserved in camphor. Szilogyi has only one fault: he is too strongly anti-Semitic."

"He! a Liberal?"

"He detests the Israelites, and he allows it to be seen a little too much. He embarrasses us sometimes. But there is one extenuating circumstance--he has married a Jewess!"

This was said in a light, careless, humorously sceptical tone.

"On the whole," concluded the minister, "Armand Bitto, who is no longer in this world, is perhaps the most fortunate of all."

Then, turning to Yanski with his pleasant smile, and holding out his delicate, well-kept hand, which had once brandished the sabre, he said:

"My dear Varhely, you will dine with me to-morrow, will you not? It is a great pleasure to see you again! Tomorrow I shall most probably give you an answer to your request--a request which I am happy, very happy, to take into consideration. I wish also to present you to the Countess. But no allusions to the past before her! She is a Spaniard, and she would not understand the old ideas very well. Kossuth, Bem, and Georgei would astonish her, astonish her! I trust to your tact, Varhely. And then it is so long ago, so very long ago, all that. Let the dead past bury its dead! Is it understood?"

Yanski Varhely departed, a little stunned by this interview. He had never felt so old, so out of the fashion, before. Prince Zilah and he now seemed to him like two ancestors of the present generation--Don Quixotes, romanticists, imbeciles. The minister was, as Jacquemin would have said, a sly dog, who took the times as he found them, and left spectres in peace. Well, perhaps he was right!

"Ah, well," thought the old hussar, with an odd smile, "there is the age of moustaches and the age of whiskers, that is all. Ladany has even found a way to become bald: he was born to be a minister!"

It little mattered to him, however, this souvenir of his youth found with new characteristics. If Count Josef Ladany rescued Menko from the police of the Czar, and, by setting him free, delivered him to him, Varhely, all was well. By entering the ministry, Ladany would thus be at least useful

for something.

CHAPTER XXX

"TO SEEK FORGETFULNESS"

The negotiations with Warsaw, however, detained Yanski Varhely at Vienna longer than he wished. Count Josef evidently went zealously to work to obtain from the Russian Government Menko's release. He had promised Varhely, the evening he received his old comrade at dinner, that he would put all the machinery at work to obtain the fulfilment of his request.

"I only ask you, if I attain the desired result, that you will do something to cool off that hotheaded Menko. A second time he would not escape Siberia."

Varhely had made no reply; but the very idea that Michel Menko might be free made his head swim. There was, in the Count's eagerness to obtain Menko's liberty, something of the excitement of a hunter tracking his prey. He awaited Michel's departure from the fortress as if he were a rabbit in its burrow.

"If he is set at liberty, I suppose that we shall know where he goes," he said to the minister.

"It is more than probable that the government of the Czar will trace his journey for him. You shall be informed."

Count Ladany did not seek to know for what purpose Varhely demanded, with such evident eagerness, this release. It was enough for him that his old brother-in-arms desired it, and that it was possible.

"You see how everything is for the best, Varhely," he said to him one morning. "Perhaps you blamed me when you learned that I had accepted a post from Austria. Well, you see, if I did not serve the Emperor, I could not serve you!"

During his sojourn at Vienna, Varhely kept himself informed, day by day, as to what was passing in Paris. He did not write to Prince Zilah, wishing, above everything, to keep his errand concealed from him; but Angelo Valla, who had remained in France, wrote or telegraphed whatever happened to the Prince.

Marsa Laszlo was cured; she had left Dr. Sims's institution, and returned to the villa of Maisons-Lafitte.

The poor girl came out of her terrible stupor with the distaste to take up the thread of life which sometimes comes after a night of forgetfulness in sleep. This stupor, which might have destroyed her, and the fever which had shaken her, seemed to her sweet and enviable now compared to this punishment: To live! To live and think!

And yet--yes, she wished to live to once more see Andras, whose look, fixed upon her, had rekindled the extinct intellectual flame of her being. She wished to live, now that her reason had returned to her, to live to wrest from the Prince a word of pardon. It could not be possible that her existence was to end with the malediction of this man. It seemed to her, that, if she should ever see him face to face, she would find words of desperate supplication which would obtain her absolution.

Certainly--she repented it bitterly every hour, now that the punishment of thinking and feeling had been inflicted upon her--she had acted infamously, been almost as criminal as Menko, by her silence and deceit--her deceit! She, who hated a lie! But she longed to make the Prince understand that the motive of her conduct was the love which she had for him. Yes, her love alone! There was no other reason, no other, for her unpardonable treachery. He did not think it now, without any doubt. He must accuse her of some base calculation or vile intrigue. But she was certain that, if she could see him again, she would prove to him that the only cause of her conduct was her unquenchable love for him.

"Let him only believe that, and then let him fly me forever, if he likes! Forever! But I cannot endure to have him despise me, as he must!"

It was this hope which now attached her to life. After her return to Maisons-Lafitte from Vaugirard, she would have killed herself if she had not so desired another interview where she could lay bare her heart. Not daring to appear before Andras, not even thinking of such a thing as seeking him, she resolved to wait some opportunity, some chance, she knew not what. Suddenly, she thought of Yanski Varhely. Through Varhely, she might be able to say to Andras all that she wished her husband--her husband! the very word made her shudder with shame--to know of the reason of her crime. She wrote to the old Hungarian; but, as she received no response, she left Maisons-Lafitte and went to Varhely's house. They did not know there, where the Count was; but Monsieur Angelo Valla would forward any letters to him.

She then begged the Italian to send to Varhely a sort of long confession, in which she asked his aid to obtain from the Prince the desired interview.

The letter reached Yanski while he was at Vienna. He answered it with a few icy words; but what did that matter to Marsa? It was not Varhely's rancor she cared for, but Zilah's contempt. She implored him again, in a letter in which she poured out her whole soul, to return, to be there when she should tell the Prince all her remorse--the remorse which was killing her, and making of her detested beauty a spectre.

There was such sincerity in this letter, wherein a conscience sobbed, that, little by little, in spite of his rough exterior, the soldier, more accessible to emotion than he cared to have it appear, was softened, and growled beneath his moustache

"So! So! She suffers. Well, that is something."

He answered Marsa that he would return when he had finished a work he had vowed to accomplish; and, without explaining anything to the Tzigana, he added, at the end of his letter, these words, which, enigmatical as they were, gave a vague, inexplicable hope to Marsa "And pray that I may return soon!"

The day after he had sent this letter to Maisons-Lafitte, Varhely received from Ladany a message to come at once to the ministry.

On his arrival there, Count Josef handed him a despatch. The Russian minister of foreign affairs telegraphed to his colleague at Vienna, that his Majesty the Czar consented to the release of Count Menko, implicated in the Labanoff affair. Labanoff would probably be sent to Siberia the very day that Count Menko would receive a passport and an escort to the frontier. Count Menko had chosen Italy for his retreat, and he would start for Florence the day his Excellency received this despatch.

"Well, my dear minister," exclaimed Varhely, "thank you a thousand times. And, with my thanks, my farewell. I am also going to Florence."

"Immediately?"

"Immediately."

"You will arrive there before Menko."

"I am in a hurry," replied Varhely, with a smile.

He went to the telegraph office, after leaving the ministry, and sent a despatch to Angelo Valla, at Paris, in which he asked the Venetian to join him in Florence. Valla had assured him that he could rely on him for any service; and Varhely left Vienna, certain that he should find Manin's old minister at Florence.

"After all, he has not changed so much," he said to himself, thinking of Josef Ladany. "Without his aid, Menko would certainly have escaped me. Ladany has taken the times as they are: Zilah and I desire to have them as they should be. Which is right?"

Then, while the train was carrying him to Venice, he thought: Bah! it was much better to be a dupe like himself and Zilah, and to die preserving, like an unsundered flag, one's dream intact.

To die?

Yes! After all, Varhely might, at this moment, be close to death; but, whatever might be the fate which awaited him at the end of his journey, he found the road very long and the engine very slow.

At Venice he took a train which carried him through Lombardy into Tuscany; and at Florence he found Angelo Valla.

The Italian already knew, in regard to Michel Menko, all that it was necessary for him to know. Before going to London, Menko, on his return from Pau, after the death of his wife, had retired to a small house he owned in Pistoja; and here he had undoubtedly gone now.

It was a house built on the side of a hill, and surrounded with olive-trees. Varhely and Valla waited at the hotel until one of Balla's friends, who lived at Pistoja, should inform him of the arrival of the Hungarian count. And Menko did, in fact, come there three days after Varhely reached Florence.

"To-morrow, my dear Valla," said Yanski, "you will accompany me to see Menko?"

"With pleasure," responded the Italian.

Menko's house was some distance from the station, at the very end of the little city.

The bell at the gate opening into the garden, had been removed, as if to show that the master of the house did not wish to be disturbed. Varhely was obliged to pound heavily upon the wooden barrier. The servant who appeared in answer to his summons, was an Hungarian, and he wore the national cap, edged with fur.

"My master does not receive visitors," he answered when Yanski asked him, in Italian, if Count Menko were at home.

"Go and say to Menko Mihaly," said Varhely, this time in Hungarian, "that Count Varhely is here as the representative of Prince Zilah!"

The domestic disappeared, but returned almost immediately and opened the gate. Varhely and Valla crossed the garden, entered the house, and found themselves face to face with Menko.

Varhely would scarcely have recognized him.

The former graceful, elegant young man had suddenly aged: his hair was thin and gray upon the temples, and, instead of the carefully trained moustache of the embassy attache, a full beard now covered his emaciated cheeks.

Michel regarded the entrance of Varhely into the little salon where he awaited him, as if he were some spectre, some vengeance which he had expected, and which did not astonish him. He stood erect, cold and still, as Yanski advanced toward him; while Angelo Valla remained in the doorway, mechanically stroking his smoothly shaven chin.

"Monsieur," said Varhely, "for months I have looked forward impatiently to this moment. Do not doubt that I have sought you."

"I did not hide myself," responded Menko.

"Indeed? Then may I ask what was your object in going to Warsaw?"

"To seek-forgetfulness," said the young man, slowly and sadly.

This simple word--so often spoken by Zilah--which had no more effect upon the stern old Hungarian than a tear upon a coat of mail, produced a singular impression upon Valla. It seemed to him to express unconquerable remorse.

"What you have done can not be forgotten," said Varhely.

"No more than what I have suffered."

"You made me the accomplice of the most cowardly and infamous act a man could commit. I have come to you to demand an explanation."

Michel lowered his eyes at these cutting words, his thin face paling, and his lower lip trembling; but he said nothing. At last, after a pause, he raised his eyes again to the face of the old Hungarian, and, letting the words fall one by one, he replied:

"I am at your disposal for whatever you choose to demand, to exact. I only desire to assure you that I had no intention of involving you in an act which I regarded as a cruel necessity. I wished to avenge myself. But I did not wish my vengeance to arrive too late, when what I had assumed the right to prevent had become irreparable."

"I do not understand exactly," said Varhely.

Menko glanced at Valla as if to ask whether he could speak openly before the Italian.

"Monsieur Angelo Valla was one of the witnesses of the marriage of Prince Andras Zilah," said Yanski.

"I know Monsieur," said Michel, bowing to Valla.

"Ah!" he exclaimed abruptly, his whole manner changing. "There was a man whom I respected, admired and loved. That man, without knowing it, wrested from me the woman who had been the folly, the dream, and the sorrow of my life. I would have done anything to prevent that woman from bearing the name of that man."

"You sent to the Prince letters written to you by that woman, and that, too, after the Tzigana had become Princess Zilah."

"She had let loose her dogs upon me to tear me to pieces. I was insane with rage. I wished to destroy her hopes also. I gave those letters to my valet with absolute orders to deliver them to the Prince the evening before the wedding. At the same hour that I left Paris, the letters should have been in the hands of the man who had the right to see them, and when there was yet time for him to refuse his name to the woman who

had written them. My servant did not obey, or did not understand. Upon my honor, this is true. He kept the letters twenty-four hours longer than I had ordered him to do; and it was not she whom I punished, but I struck the man for whom I would have given my life."

"Granted that there was a fatality of this sort in your conduct," responded Varhely, coldly, "and that your lackey did not understand your commands: the deed which you committed was none the less that of a coward. You used as a weapon the letters of a woman, and of a woman whom you had deceived by promising her your name when it was no longer yours to give!"

"Are you here to defend Mademoiselle Marsa Laszlo?" asked Michel, a trifle haughtily.

"I am here to defend the Princess Zilah, and to avenge Prince Andras. I am here, above all, to demand satisfaction for your atrocious action in having taken me as the instrument of your villainy."

"I regret it deeply and sincerely," replied Menko; "and I am at your orders."

The tone of this response admitted of no reply, and Yanski and Valla took their departure.

Valla then obtained another second from the Hungarian embassy, and two officers in garrison at Florence consented to serve as Menko's friends. It was arranged that the duel should take place in a field near Pistoja.

Valla, anxious and uneasy, said to Varhely:

"All this is right and proper, but--"

"But what?"

"But suppose he kills you? The right is the right, I know; but leaden bullets are not necessarily on the side of the right, and--"

"Well," interrupted Yanski, "in case of the worst, you must charge yourself, my dear Valla, with informing the Prince how his old friend Yanski Varhely defended his honor--and also tell him of the place where Count Menko may be found. I am going to attempt to avenge Zilah. If I do not succeed, 'Teremtete!'" ripping out the Hungarian oath, "he will avenge me, that is all! Let us go to supper."

CHAPTER XXXI

"IF MENKO WERE DEAD!"

Prince Zilah, wandering solitary in the midst of crowded Paris, was

possessed by one thought, one image impossible to drive away, one name which murmured eternally in his ears--Marsa; Marsa, who was constantly before his eyes, sometimes in the silvery shimmer of her bridal robes, and sometimes with the deathly pallor of the promenader in the garden of Vaugirard; Marsa, who had taken possession of his being, filling his whole heart, and, despite his revolt, gradually overpowering all other memories, all other passions! Marsa, his last love, since nothing was before him save the years when the hair whitens, and when life weighs heavily upon weary humanity; and not only his last love, but his only love!

Oh! why had he loved her? Or, having loved her, why had she not confessed to him that that coward of a Menko had deceived her! Who knows? He might have pardoned her, perhaps, and accepted the young girl, the widow of that passion. Widow? No, not while Menko lived. Oh! if he were dead!

And Zilah repeated, with a fierce longing for vengeance: "If he were dead!" That is, if there were not between them, Zilah and Marsa, the abhorred memory of the lover!

Well! if Menko were dead?

When he feverishly asked himself this question, Zilah recalled at the same time Marsa, crouching at his feet, and giving no other excuse than this: "I loved you! I wished to belong to you, to be your wife!"

His wife! Yes, the beautiful Tzigana he had met at Baroness Dinati's was now his wife! He could punish or pardon. But he had punished, since he had inflicted upon her that living death--insanity. And he asked himself whether he should not pardon Princess Zilah, punished, repentant, almost dying.

He knew that she was now at Maisons, cured of her insanity, but still ill and feeble, and that she lived there like a nun, doing good, dispensing charity, and praying--praying for him, perhaps.

For him or for Menko?

No, for him! She was not vile enough to have lied, when she asked, implored, besought death from Zilah who held her life or death in his hands.

"Yes, I had the right to kill her, but--I have the right to pardon also," thought Zilah.

Ah, if Menko were dead!

The Prince gradually wrought himself into a highly nervous condition, missing Varhely, uneasy at his prolonged absence, and never succeeding in driving away Marsa's haunting image. He grew to hate his solitary home and his books.

"I shall not want any breakfast," he said one morning to his valet; and, going out, he descended the Champs-Elysees on foot.

At the corner of the Place de la Madeleine, he entered a restaurant, and sat down near a window, gazing mechanically at this lively corner of Paris, at the gray facade of the church, the dusty trees, the asphalt, the promenaders, the yellow omnibuses, the activity of Parisian life.

All at once he was startled to hear his name pronounced and to see before him, with his hand outstretched, as if he were asking alms, old General Vogotzine, who said to him, timidly:

"Ah, my dear Prince, how glad I am to see you! I was breakfasting over there, and my accursed paper must have hidden me. Ouf! If you only knew! I am stifling!"

"Why, what is the matter?" asked Andras.

"Matter? Look at me! I must be as red as a beet!"

Poor Vogotzine had entered the restaurant for breakfast, regretting the cool garden of Maisons-Lafitte, which, now that Marsa no longer sat there, he had entirely to himself. After eating his usual copious breakfast, he had imprudently asked the waiter for a Russian paper; and, as he read, and sipped his kummel, which he found a little insipid and almost made him regret the vodka of his native land, his eyes fell upon a letter from Odessa, in which there was a detailed description of the execution of three nihilists, two of them gentlemen. It told how they were dragged, tied to the tails of horses, to the open square, each of them bearing upon his breast a white placard with this inscription, in black letters: "Guilty of high treason." Then the wretched General shivered from head to foot. Every detail of the melodramatic execution seemed burned into his brain as with a red-hot iron. He fancied he could see the procession and the three gibbets, painted black; beside each gibbet was an open ditch and a black coffin covered with a dark gray pall. He saw, in the hollow square formed by a battalion of Cossack infantry, the executioner, Froloff, in his red shirt and his plush trousers tucked into his boots, and, beside him, a pale, black-robed priest.

"Who the devil is such an idiot as to relate such things in the newspapers?" he growled.

And in terror he imagined he could hear the sheriff read the sentence, see the priest present the cross to the condemned men, and Froloff, before putting on the black caps, degrade the gentlemen by breaking their swords over their heads.

Then, half suffocated, Vogotzine flung the paper on the floor; and, with eyes distended with horror, drawing the caraffe of kummel toward him, he half emptied it, drinking glass after glass to recover his self-control. It seemed to him that Froloff was there behind him, and that the branches of the candelabra, stretching over his heated head, were the arms of

gibbets ready to seize him. To reassure himself, and be certain that he was miles and miles from Russia, he was obliged to make sure of the presence of the waiters and guests in the gay and gilded restaurant.

"The devil take the newspapers!" he muttered.

"They are cursed stupid! I will never read another! All that stuff is absurd! Absurd! A fine aid to digestion, truly!"

And, paying his bill, he rose to go, passing his hand over his head as if his sword had been broken upon it and left a contusion, and glancing timidly into the mirrors, as if he feared to discover the image of Froloff there.

It was at this moment that he discovered Prince Zilah, and rushed up to him with the joyful cry of a child discovering a protector.

The Prince noticed that poor Vogotzine, who sat heavily down by his side, was not entirely sober. The enormous quantity of kummel he had absorbed, together with the terror produced by the article he had read, had proved too much for the good man: his face was fiery, and he constantly moistened his dry lips.

"I suppose it astonishes you to see me here?" he said, as if he had forgotten all that had taken place. "I--I am astonished to see myself here! But I am so bored down there at Maisons, and I rust, rust, as little--little--ah! Stephanie said to me once at Odessa. So I came to breathe the air of Paris. A miserable idea! Oh, if you knew! When I think that that might happen to me!"

"What?" asked Andras, mechanically.

"What?" gasped the General, staring at him with dilated eyes. "Why, Froloff, of course! Froloff! The sword broken over your head! The gallows! Ach! I am not a nihilist--heaven forbid!--but I have displeased the Czar. And to displease the Czar--Brr! Imagine the open square--Odessa--No, no, don't let us talk of it any more!" glancing suddenly about him, as if he feared the platoon of Cossacks were there, in the restaurant, come to drag him away in the name of the Emperor. "Oh! by the way, Prince," he exclaimed abruptly. "why don't you ever come to Maisons-Lafitte?"

He must, indeed, have been drunk to address such a question to the Prince.

Zilah looked him full in the face; but Vogotzine's eyes blinked stupidly, and his head fell partially forward on his breast. Satisfied that he was not responsible for what he was saying, Andras rose to leave the restaurant, and the General with difficulty stumbled to his feet, and instinctively grasped Andras's arm, the latter making no resistance, the mention of Maisons-Lafitte interesting him, even from the lips of this intoxicated old idiot.

"Do you know," stuttered Vogotzine, "I, myself, should be glad--very glad--if you would come there. I am bored-bored to death! Closed shutters--not the least noise. The creaking of a door--the slightest bit of light-makes her ill. The days drag--they drag--yes, they do. No one speaks. Most of the time I dine alone. Shall I tell you?--no--yes, I will. Marsa, yes, well! Marsa, she is good, very good--thinks only of the poor-the poor, you know! But whatever Doctor Fargeas may say about it, she is mad! You can't deceive me! She is insane!--still insane!"

"Insane?" said Andras, striving to control his emotion.

The General, who was now staggering violently, clung desperately to the Prince. They had reached the boulevard, and Andras, hailing a cab, made Vogotzine get in, and instructed the coachman to drive to the Bois.

"I assure you that she is insane," proceeded the General, throwing his head back on the cushions. "Yes, insane. She does not eat anything; she never rests. Upon my word, I don't know how she lives. Once--her dogs--she took walks. Now, I go with them into the park--good beasts--very gentle. Sometimes, all that she says, is: 'Listen! Isn't that Duna or Bundas barking?' Ah! if I wasn't afraid of Froloffyes, Froloff--how soon I should return to Russia! The life of Paris--the life of Paris wearies me. You see, I come here today, I take up a newspaper, and I see what? Froloff! Besides, the life of Paris--at Maisons-Lafitte--between four walls, it is absurd! Now, acknowledge, old man, isn't it absurd? Do you know what I should like to do? I should like to send a petition to the Czar. What did I do, after all, I should like to know? It wasn't anything so horrible. I stayed, against the Emperor's orders, five days too long at Odessa--that was all--yes, you see, a little French actress who was there, who sang operettas; oh, how she did sing operettas! Offenbach, you know;" and the General tried to hum a bar or two of the 'Dites lui', with ludicrous effect. "Charming! To leave her, ah! I found that very hard. I remained five days: that wasn't much, eh, Zilah? five days? But the devil! There was a Grand Duke--well--humph! younger than I, of course--and--and--the Grand Duke was jealous. Oh! there was at that time a conspiracy at Odessa! I was accused of spending my time at the theatre, instead of watching the conspirators. They even said I was in the conspiracy! Oh, Lord! Odessa! The gallows! Froloff! Well, it was Stephanie Gavaud who was the cause of it. Don't tell that to Marsa! Ah! that little Stephanie! 'J'ai vu le vieux Bacchus sur sa roche fertile!' Tautin--no, Tautin couldn't sing like that little Stephanie! Well," continued Vogotzine, hiccupping violently, "because all that happened then, I now lead here the life of an oyster! Yes, the life of an oyster, of a turtle, of a clam! alone with a woman sad as Mid-Lent, who doesn't speak, doesn't sing, does nothing but weep, weep, weep! It is crushing! I say just what I think! Crushing, then, whatever my niece may be--cr-r-rushing! And--ah--really, my dear fellow, I should be glad if you would come. Why did you go away? Yes, yes, that is your affair, and I don't ask any questions. Only--only you would do well to come--"

"Why?" interrupted Andras, turning quickly to Vogotzine.

"Ah! why? Because!" said the General, trying to give to his heavy face an expression of shrewd, dignified gravity.

"What has happened?" asked the Prince. "Is she suffering again? Ill?"

"Oh, insane, I tell you! absolutely insane! mad as a March hare! Two days ago, you see--"

"Well, what? two days ago?"

"Because, two days ago!--"

"Well, what? What is it? Speak, Vogotzine!"

"The despatch," stammered the General.

"What despatch?"

"The des--despatch from Florence."

"She has received a despatch from Florence?"

"A telegram--blue paper--she read it before me; upon my word, I thought it was from you! She said--no; those miserable bits of paper, it is astonishing how they alarm you. There are telegrams which have given me a fit of indigestion, I assure you--and I haven't the heart of a chicken!"

"Go on! Marsa? This despatch? Whom was it from? What did Marsa say?"

"She turned white as a sheet; she began to tremble--an attack of the nerves--and she said: 'Well, in two days I shall know, at last, whether I am to live!' Queer, wasn't it? I don't know what she meant! But it is certain--yes, certain, my dear fellow--that she expects, this evening, some one who is coming--or who is not coming, from Florence--that depends."

"Who is it? Who?" cried Andras. "Michel Menko?"

"I don't know," faltered Vogotzine in alarm, wondering whether it were Froloff's hand that had seized him by the collar of his coat.

"It is Menko, is it not?" demanded Andras; while the terrified General gasped out something unintelligible, his intoxication increasing every yard the carriage advanced in the Bois.

Andras was almost beside himself with pain and suspense. What did it mean? Who had sent that despatch? Why had it caused Marsa such emotion?

"In two days I shall know, at last, whether I am to live!" Who could make her utter such a cry? Who, if not Michel Menko, was so intimately connected with her life as to trouble her so, to drive her insane, as Vogotzine said?

"It is Menko, is it not? it is Menko?" repeated Andras again.

And Vogotzine gasped:

"Perhaps! anything is possible!"

But he stopped suddenly, as if he comprehended, despite his inebriety, that he was in danger of going too far and doing some harm.

"Come, Vogotzine, come, you have told me too much not to tell me all!"

"That is true; yes, I have said too much! Ah! The devil! this is not my affair!--Well, yes, Count Menko is in Florence or near Florence-- I don't know where. Marsa told me that--without meaning to. She was excited--very excited--talked to herself. I did not ask her anything-- but--she is insane, you see, mad, mad! She first wrote a despatch to Italy--then she tore it up like this, saying: 'No, what is to happen, will happen!' There! I don't know anything but that. I don't know anything!"

"Ah! she is expecting him!" cried Andras. "When?"

"I don't know!"

"You told me it was to be this evening. This evening, is it not?"

The old General felt as ill at ease as if he had been before a military commission or in the hands of Froloff.

"Yes, this evening."

"At Maisons-Lafitte?"

"At Maisons," responded Vogotzine, mechanically. "And all this wearies me--wearies me. Was it for this I decided to come to Paris? A fine idea! At least, there are no Russian days at Maisons!"

Andras made no reply.

He stopped the carriage, got out, and, saluting the General with a brief "Thank you!" walked rapidly away, leaving Vogotzine in blank amazement, murmuring, as he made an effort to sit up straight:

"Well, well, are you going to leave me here, old man? All alone? This isn't right!"

And, like a forsaken child, the old General, with comic twitchings of his eyebrows and nostrils, felt a strong desire to weep.

"Where shall I drive you, Monsieur?" asked the coachman.

"Wherever you like, my friend," responded Vogotzine, modestly, with an appealing look at the man. "You, at least, must not leave me!"

CHAPTER XXXII

THE VALE OF VIOLETS

In the Prince's mind the whole affair seemed clear as day, and he explained the vague anxiety with which he had been afflicted for several days as a mysterious premonition of a new sorrow. Menko was at Florence! Menko, for it could be no other than he, had telegraphed to Marsa, arranging a meeting with her. That very evening he was to be in the house of Marsa Laszlo--Marsa who bore, in spite of all, the title and name of the Zilahs. Was it possible? After the marriage, after this woman's vows and tears, these two beings, separated for a time, were to be united again. And he, Andras, had almost felt pity for her! He had listened to Varhely, an honest man; drawing a parallel between a vanquished soldier and this fallen girl--Varhely, the rough, implacable Varhely, who had also been the dupe of the Tzigana, and one evening at Sainte-Adresse had even counselled the deceived husband to pardon her.

In a state bordering on frenzy, Zilah returned to his hotel, thinking:

"He will be with her this evening!"

This was worse than all the rest. How could he punish her?

Punish her?

Why not? Was not Marsa Laszlo his wife? That villa of Maisons-Lafitte, where she thought herself so safe, was his by law. He, the husband, had a right to enter there at any hour and demand of his wife an account of his honor.

"She wished this name of Zilah! Well! she shall know at least what it costs and what it imposes upon her!" he hissed through his clenched teeth. He walked nervously to and fro in the library of his hotel, his excitement increasing at every step.

"She is Princess Zilah! She--a princess! Nothing can wrest from her that title which she has stolen! Princess be it, then; but the Prince has the right to deal out life or death to his wife--to his wife and to the lover of his wife!" with a spasmodic burst of laughter. "Her lover is to be there; Menko is to be there, and I complain! The man whom I have sought in vain will be before me. I shall hold him at my mercy, and I do not thank the kind fate which gives me that joy! This evening! He will be at her house this evening! Good! Justice shall be done!"

Every moment added to his fever. He would have given ten years of his life if it were already evening. He waited impatiently for the hour to come when he could go and surprise them. He even thought of meeting Menko at the railway station on his arrival from Italy: but what would be

the use? Menko would be at Maisons; and he would kill him before her face, in a duel if Menko would fight, or like a thief caught in the act if he attempted to fly. That would be better. Yes, he would kill him like a dog, if the other--but no! The Hungarian, struck in the presence of the Tzigana, would certainly not recoil before a pistol. Marsa should be the sole witness of the duel, and the blood of the Prince or of Menko should spatter her face--a crimson stain upon her pale cheek should be her punishment.

Early in the evening Andras left the hotel, after slipping into the pocket of his overcoat a pair of loaded pistols: one of them he would cast at Menko's feet. It was not assassination he wished, but justice.

He took the train to Maisons, and, on his arrival there, crossed the railway bridge, and found himself almost alone in the broad avenue which runs through the park. As he walked on through the rapidly darkening shadows, he began to feel a strange sensation, as if nothing had happened, and as if he were shaking off, little by little, a hideous nightmare. In a sort of voluntary hallucination, he imagined that he was going, as in former days, to Marsa's house; and that she was awaiting him in one of those white frocks which became her so well, with her silver belt clasped with the agraffe of opals. As he advanced, a host of memories overwhelmed him. He had walked with Marsa under these great lindens forming an arch overhead like that of a cathedral. He remembered conversations they had had in the evening, when a slight mist silvered the majestic park, and the white villa loomed vaguely before them like some phantom palace of fairyland. With the Tzigana clinging to his arm, he had seen those fountains, with their singing waters, that broad lawn between the two long lines of trees, those winding paths through the shrubbery; and, in the emotion aroused by these well-remembered places, there was a sensation of bitter pain at the thought of the happiness that might have been his had fate fulfilled her promises, which increased, rather than appeased, the Prince's anger.

As his steps led him mechanically nearer and nearer to the house where she lived, all the details of his wedding-day rose in his memory, and he turned aside to see again the little church, the threshold of which they had crossed together--she exquisitely lovely in her white draperies, and he overflowing with happiness.

The square in front of the sanctuary was now deserted and the leaves were beginning to fall from the trees. A man was lying asleep upon the steps before the bolted door. Zilah stood gazing at the Gothic portal, with a statue of the Virgin Mother above it, and wondered whether it were he who had once led there a lovely girl, about to become his wife; and the sad, closed church produced upon him the effect of a tomb.

He dragged himself away from the contemplation of the stone threshold, where slept the tired man--drunk perhaps, at all events happier than the Prince--and proceeded on his way through the woods to the abode of Marsa Laszlo.

There was, Zilah remembered well, quite near there, a sort of narrow

valley (where the Mayor of Maisons was said to have royally entertained Louis XIV and his courtiers, as they were returning from Marly), a lovely spot, surrounded by grassy slopes covered with violets, a little shady, Virgilian wood, where he and Marsa had dreamed away many happy hours. They had christened it The Vale of Violets. How many memories were in that sweet name, each one of which stabbed and exasperated Zilah, rising before him like so many spectres.

He hastened his steps, repeating:

"He is there! She is waiting for him! Her lover is there!"

At the end of the road, before the villa, closed and silent like the old church, he stopped. He had reached his destination; but what was he about to do, he who--who up to this time had protected his name from the poisonous breath of scandal?

He was about to kill Menko, or to be killed himself. A duel! But what was the need of proposing a duel, when, exercising his rights as a husband, he could punish both the man and the woman?

He did not hesitate long, however, but advanced to the gate, saying, aloud:

"I have a right to enter my own house."

The ringing of the bell was answered by the barking of Duna, Bundas, and Ortog, who tore furiously at their iron chains.

A man presently appeared on the other side of the gate. It was a domestic whom Andras did not know and had never seen.

"Whom do you wish to see?" asked the man.

"The Princess Zilah!"

"Who are you?" demanded the man, his hand upon the inner bolt of the gate.

"Prince Zilah!"

The other stood stock-still in amazement, trying to see, through the darkness, the Prince's face.

"Do you hear me?" demanded Andras.

And, as the domestic opened the gate, as if to observe the appearance of the visitor, the Prince gave it a nervous push, which threw the servant backward; and, once within the garden, he came close to him, and said:

"Look well at me, in order that you may recognize me again. I am master here."

Zilah's clear eye and imperious manner awed the man, and he bowed humbly, not daring to speak.

Andras turned on his heel, mounted the steps, and entered the house; then he stopped and listened.

She was with him. Yes, a man was there, and the man was speaking, speaking to Marsa, speaking doubtless of love.

Menko, with his twisted moustache, his pretty smile and his delicate profile, was there, behind that door. A red streak of light from the salon where Marsa was showed beneath the door, which the Prince longed to burst open with his foot. With anger and bitterness filling his heart, he felt capable of entering there, and striking savagely, madly, at his rival.

How these two beings had played with him; the woman who had lied to him, and the coward who had sent him those letters.

Suddenly Marsa's voice fell upon his ear, that rich, contralto voice he knew so well, speaking in accents of love or joy.

What was he waiting for? His hot, feverish hand sought the handle of his pistol, and, striding forward, he threw open the door of the room.

The light from an opal-tinted lamp fell full upon his face. He stood erect upon the threshold, while two other faces were turned toward him, two pale faces, Marsa's and another's.

Andras paused in amazement.

He had sought Menko; he found--Varhely!

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE DUEL

"Yanski!"

Marsa recoiled in fear at hearing this cry and the sudden appearance of the Prince; and, trembling like a leaf, with her face still turned toward that threshold where Andras stood, she murmured, in a voice choked with emotion:

"Who is there? Who is it?"

Yanski Varhely, unable to believe his eyes, advanced, as if to make sure.

"Zilah!" he exclaimed, in his turn.

He could not understand; and Zilah himself wondered whether he were not the victim of some illusion, and where Menko could be, that Menko whom Marsa had expected, and whom he, the husband, had come to chastise.

But the most bewildered, in her mute amazement, was Marsa, her lips trembling, her face ashen, her eyes fixed upon the Prince, as she leaned against the marble of the mantelpiece to prevent herself from falling, but longing to throw herself on her knees before this man who had suddenly appeared, and who was master of her destiny.

"You here?" said Varhely at last. "You followed me, then?"

"No," said Andras. "The one whom I expected to find here was not you."

"Who was it, then?"

"Michel Menko!"

Yanski Varhely turned toward Marsa.

She did not stir; she was looking at the Prince.

"Michel Menko is dead," responded Varhely, shortly. "It was to announce that to the Princess Zilah that I am here."

Andras gazed alternately upon the old Hungarian, and upon Marsa, who stood there petrified, her whole soul burning in her eyes.

"Dead?" repeated Zilah, coldly.

"I fought and killed him," returned Varhely.

Andras struggled against the emotion which seized hold of him. Pale as death, he turned from Varhely to the Tzigana, with an instinctive desire to know what her feelings might be.

The news of this death, repeated thus before the man whom she regarded as the master of her existence, had, apparently, made no impression upon her, her thoughts being no longer there, but her whole heart being concentrated upon the being who had despised her, hated her, fled from her, and who appeared there before her as in one of her painful dreams in which he returned again to that very house where he had cursed her.

"There was," continued Varhely, slowly, "a martyr who could not raise her head, who could not live, so long as that man breathed. First of all, I came to her to tell her that she was delivered from a detested past. Tomorrow I should have informed a man whose honor is my own, that the one who injured and insulted him has paid his debt."

With lips white as his moustache, Varhely spoke these words like a judge delivering a solemn sentence.

A strange expression passed over Zilah's face. He felt as if some

horrible weight had been lifted from his heart.

Menko dead!

Yet there was a time when he had loved this Michel Menko: and, of the three beings present in the little salon, the man who had been injured by him was perhaps the one who gave a pitying thought to the dead, the old soldier remaining as impassive as an executioner, and the Tzigana remembering only the hatred she had felt for the one who had been her ruin.

Menko dead!

Varhely took from the mantelpiece the despatch he had sent from Florence, three days before, to the Princess Zilah, the one of which Vogotzine had spoken to Andras.

He handed it to the Prince, and Andras read as follows:

"I am about to risk my life for you. Tuesday evening either I shall be at Maisons-Lafitte, or I shall be dead. I fight tomorrow with Count M. If you do not see me again, pray for the soul of Varhely."

Count Varhely had sent this despatch before going to keep his appointment with Michel Menko.

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It had been arranged that they were to fight in a field near Pistoja.

Some peasant women, who were braiding straw hats, laughed as they saw the men pass by.

One of them called out, gayly:

"Do you wish to find your sweethearts, signori? That isn't the way!"

A little farther, Varhely and his adversary encountered a monk with a cowl drawn over his head so that only his eyes could be seen, who, holding out a zinc money-box, demanded 'elemosina', alms for the sick in hospitals.

Menko opened his pocketbook, and dropped in the box a dozen pieces of gold.

"Mille grazie, signor!"

"It is of no consequence."

They arrived on the ground, and the seconds loaded the pistols.

Michel asked permission of Yanski to say two words to him.

"Speak!" said Varhely.

The old Hungarian stood at his post with folded arms and lowered eyes, while Michel approached him, and said:

"Count Varhely, I repeat to you that I wished to prevent this marriage, but not to insult the Prince. I give you my word of honor that this is true. If you survive me, will you promise to repeat this to him?"

"I promise."

"I thank you."

They took their positions.

Angelo Valla was to give the signal to fire.

He stood holding a white handkerchief in his outstretched hand, and with his eyes fixed upon the two adversaries, who were placed opposite each other, with their coats buttoned up to the chin, and their pistols held rigidly by their side.

Varhely was as motionless as if made of granite. Menko smiled.

"One! Two!" counted Valla.

He paused as if to take breath: then--

"Three!" he exclaimed, in the tone of a man pronouncing a death-sentence; and the handkerchief fell.

There were two reports in quick succession.

Varhely stood erect in his position; Menko's ball had cut a branch above his head, and the green leaves fell fluttering to the ground.

Michel staggered back, his hand pressed to his left side.

His seconds hastened toward him, seized him under the arms, and tried to raise him.

"It is useless," he said. "It was well aimed!"

And, turning to Varhely, he cried, in a voice which he strove to render firm:

"Remember your promise!"

They opened his coat. The ball had entered his breast just above the heart.

They seated him upon the grass, with his back against a tree.

He remained there, with fixed eyes, gazing, perhaps, into the infinite, which was now close at hand.

His lips murmured inarticulate names, confused words: "Pardon-- punishment--Marsa--"

As Yanski Varhely, with his two seconds, again passed the straw-workers, the girls saluted them with:

"Well, where are your other friends? Have they found their sweethearts?"

And while their laughter rang out upon the air, the gay, foolish laughter of youth and health, over yonder they were bearing away the dead body of Michel Menko.

.....

Andras Zilah, with a supreme effort at self-control, listened to his old friend relate this tale; and, while Varhely spoke, he was thinking:

It was not a lover, it was not Menko, whom Marsa expected. Between the Tzigana and himself there was now nothing, nothing but a phantom. The other had paid his debt with his life. The Prince's anger disappeared as suddenly in proportion as his exasperation had been violent.

He contemplated Marsa, thin and pale, but beautiful still. The very fixedness of her great eyes gave her a strange and powerful attraction; and, in the manner in which Andras regarded her, Count Varhely, with his rough insight, saw that there were pity, astonishment, and almost fear.

He pulled his moustache a moment in reflection, and then made a step toward the door.

Marsa saw that he was about to leave the room; and, moving away from the marble against which she had been leaning, with a smile radiant with the joy of a recovered pride, she held out her hand to Yanski, and, in a voice in which there was an accent of almost terrible gratitude for the act of justice which had been accomplished, she said, firmly:

"I thank you, Varhely!"

Varhely made no reply, but passed out of the room, closing the door behind him.

The husband and wife, after months of torture, anguish, and despair, were alone, face to face with each other.

Andras's first movement was one of flight. He was afraid of himself. Of his own anger? Perhaps. Perhaps of his own pity.

He did not look at Marsa, and in two steps he was at the door.

Then, with a start, as one drowning catches at a straw, as one condemned

to death makes a last appeal for mercy, with a feeble, despairing cry like that of a child, a strange contrast to the almost savage thanks given to Varhely, she exclaimed:

"Ah! I implore you, listen to me!"

Andras stopped.

"What have you to say to me?" he asked.

"Nothing--nothing but this: Forgive! ah, forgive! I have seen you once more; forgive me, and let me disappear; but, at least, carrying away with me a word from you which is not a condemnation."

"I might forgive," said Andras; "but I could not forget."

"I do not ask you to forget, I do not ask you that! Does one ever forget? And yet--yes, one does forget, one does forget, I know it. You are the only thing in all my existence, I know only you, I think only of you. I have loved only you!"

Andras shivered, no longer able to fly, moved to the depths of his being by the tones of this adored voice, so long unheard.

"There was no need of bloodshed to destroy that odious past," continued Marsa. "Ah! I have atoned for it! There is no one on earth who has suffered as I have. I, who came across your path only to ruin your life! Your life, my God, yours!"

She looked at him with worshipping eyes, as believers regard their god.

"You have not suffered so much as the one you stabbed, Marsa. He had never had but one love in the world, and that love was you. If you had told him of your sufferings, and confessed your secret, he would have been capable of pardoning you. You deceived him. There was something worse than the crime itself--the lie."

"Ah!" she cried, "if you knew how I hated that lie! Would to heaven that some one would tear out my tongue for having deceived you!"

There was an accent of truth in this wild outburst of the Tzigana; and upon the lips of this daughter of the puszta, Hungarian and Russian at once, the cry seemed the very symbol of her exceptional nature.

"What is it you wish that I should do?" she said. "Die? yes, I would willingly, gladly die for you, interposing my breast between you and a bullet. Ah! I swear to you, I should be thankful to die like one of those who bore your name. But, there is no fighting now, and I can not shed my blood for you. I will sacrifice my life in another manner, obscurely, in the shadows of a cloister. I shall have had neither lover nor husband, I shall be nothing, a recluse, a prisoner. It will be well! yes, for me, the prison, the cell, death in a life slowly dragged out! Ah! I deserve that punishment, and I wish my sentence to come from you;

I wish you to tell me that I am free to disappear, and that you order me to do so--but, at the same time, tell me, oh, tell me, that you have forgiven me!"

"I!" said Andras.

In Marsa's eyes was a sort of wild excitement, a longing for sacrifice, a thirst for martyrdom.

"Do I understand that you wish to enter a convent?" asked Andras, slowly.

"Yes, the strictest and gloomiest. And into that tomb I shall carry, with your condemnation and farewell, the bitter regret of my love, the weight of my remorse!"

The convent! The thought of such a fate for the woman he loved filled Andras Zilah with horror. He imagined the terrible scene of Marsa's separation from the world; he could hear the voice of the officiating bishop casting the cruel words upon the living, like earth upon the dead; he could almost see the gleam of the scissors as they cut through her beautiful dark hair.

Kneeling before him, her eyes wet with tears, Marsa was as lovely in her sorrow as a Mater Dolorosa. All his love surged up in his heart, and a wild temptation assailed him to keep her beauty, and dispute with the convent this penitent absolved by remorse.

She knelt there repentant, weeping, wringing her hands, asking nothing but pardon--a word, a single word of pity--and the permission to bury herself forever from the world.

"So," he said, abruptly, "the convent cell, the prison, does not terrify you?"

"Nothing terrifies me except your contempt."

"You would live far from Paris, far from the world, far from everything?"

"In a kennel of dogs, under the lash of a slavedriver; breaking stones, begging my bread, if you said to me: 'Do that, it is atonement!'"

"Well!" cried Andras, passionately, his lips trembling, his blood surging through his veins. "Live buried in our Hungary, forgetting, forgotten, hidden, unknown, away from all, away from Paris, away from the noise of the world, in a life with me, which will be a new life! Will you?"

She looked at him with staring, terrified eyes, believing his words to be some cruel jest.

"Will you?" he said again, raising her from the floor, and straining her to his breast, his burning lips seeking the icy ones of the Tzigana.

"Answer me, Marsa. Will you?"

Like a sigh, the word fell on the air: "Yes."

CHAPTER XXXIV

A NEW LIFE

The following day, with tender ardor, he took her away to his old Hungarian castle, with its red towers still bearing marks of the ravages of the cannon--the castle which he never had beheld since Austria had confiscated it, and then, after long years, restored it to its rightful owner. He fled from Paris, seeking a pure existence, and returned to his Hungary, to the country of his youth, the land of the vast plains. He saw again the Danube and the golden Tisza. In the Magyar costume, his heart beating more proudly under the national attila, he passed before the eyes of the peasants who had known him when a child, and had fought under his orders; and he spoke to them by name, recognizing many of his old companions in these poor people with cheeks tanned by the sun, and heads whitened by age.

He led Marsa, trembling and happy, to the door of the castle, where they offered him the wine of honor, drank from the 'tschouttora', the Hungarian drinking-vessel, the 'notis' and cakes made of maize cooked in cream.

Upon the lawns about the castle, the 'tschiko' shepherds, who had come on horseback to greet the Prince, drank plum brandy, and drank with their red wine the 'kadostas' and the bacon of Temesvar. They had come from their farms, from their distant pusztas, peasant horsemen, like soldiers, with their national caps; and they joyously celebrated the return of Zilah Andras, the son of those Zilahs whose glorious history they all knew. The dances began, the bright copper heels clinked together, the blue jackets, embroidered with yellow, red, or gold, swung in the wind, and it seemed that the land of Hungary blossomed with flowers and rang with songs to do honor to the coming of Prince Andras and his Princess.

Then Andras entered with Marsa the abode of his ancestors. And, in the great halls hung with tapestry and filled with pictures which the conquerors had respected, before those portraits of magnates superb in their robes of red or green velvet edged with fur, curved sabres by their sides and aigrettes upon their heads, all reproducing a common trait of rough frankness, with their long moustaches, their armor and their hussar uniforms--Marsa Laszlo, who knew them well, these heroes of her country, these Zilah princes who had fallen upon the field of battle, said to the last of them all, to Andras Zilah, before Ferency Zilah, before Sandor, before the Princesses Zilah who had long slept in "dull, cold marble," and who had been no prouder than she of the great name they bore:

"Do you know the reason why, equal to these in devotion and courage, you

are superior to them all! It is because you are good, as good as they were brave.

To their virtues, you, who forgive, add this virtue, which is your own: pity!"

She looked at him humbly, raising to his face her beautiful dark eyes, as if to let him read her heart, in which was only his image and his name. She pressed closely to his side, with an uneasy, timid tenderness, as if she were a stranger in the presence of his great ancestors, who seemed to demand whether the newcomer were one of the family; and he, putting his arm about her, and pressing to his beating heart the Tzigana, whose eyes were dim with tears, said: "No, I am not better than these. It is not pity which is my virtue, Marsa: it is my love. For--I love you!"

Yes, he loved her, and with all the strength of a first and only love. He loved her so that he forgot everything, so that he did not see that in Marsa's smile there was a look of the other side of the great, eternal river. He loved her so that he thought only of this woman, of her beauty, of the delight of her caresses, of his dream of love realized in the air of the adored fatherland. He loved her so that he left without answers the charming letters which Baroness Dinati wrote him from Paris, so far away now, and the more serious missives which he received from his compatriots, wishing him to utilize for his country, now that he had returned to it, his superior intelligence, as he had formerly utilized his courage.

"The hour is critical," wrote his old friends. "An attempt is being made to awaken in Hungary, against the Russians, whom we like, memories of combats and extinct hatreds, and that to the profit of a German alliance, which is repugnant to our race. Bring the support of your name and your valor to our cause. Enter the Diet of Hungary. Your place is marked out for you there in the first rank, as it was in the old days upon the battlefield."

Andras only smiled.

"If I were ambitious!" he said to Marsa. Then he added: "But I am ambitious only for your happiness."

Marsa's happiness! It was deep, calm, and clear as a lake. It seemed to the Tzigana that she was dreaming a dream, a beautiful dream, a dream peaceful, sweet, and restful. She abandoned herself to her profound happiness with the trustfulness of a child. She was all the more happy because she had the exquisite sensation that her dream would have no awakening. It would end in all the charm of its poetry.

She was sure that she could not survive the immense joy which destiny had accorded her; and she did not rebel against this decree. It seemed to her right and just. She had never desired any other ending to her love than to die beloved, to die with Andras's kiss of forgiveness upon her lips, with his arms about her, and to sink with a smile into the eternal sleep. What more beautiful thing could she, the Tzigana, have wished?

When the Prince's people saluted her by that title of "Princess" which was hers, she trembled as if she had usurped it; she wished to be Marsa to the Prince, Marsa, his devoted slave, who looked at him with her great eyes full of gratitude and love. And she wished to be only that. It seemed to her that, in the ancient home of the Zilahs, the birthplace of soldiers, the eyrie of eagles, she was a sort of stranger; but, at the same time, she thought, with a smile:

"What matters it? It is for so short a time."

One day Prince Zilah received from Vienna a large sealed envelope. Minister Ladany earnestly entreated him to come to the Austrian capital and present, in the salons of Vienna and at the imperial court, Princess Zilah, of whose beauty the Austrian colony of Paris raved.

Marsa asked the Prince what the letter contained.

"Nothing. An invitation to leave our solitude. We are too happy here."

Marsa questioned him no further; but she resolved that she would never allow the Prince to take her to that court which claimed his presence. In her eyes, she was always the Tzigana; and, although Menko was dead, she would never permit Zilah to present her to people who might have known Count Michel.

No, no, let them remain in the dear old castle, he living only for her, she breathing only for him; and let the world go, with its fascinations and its pleasures, its false joys and its false friendships! Let them ask of life only what truth it possesses; an hour of rest between two ordeals, a smile between two sobs, and--the right to love each other. To love each other until that fatal separation which she felt was coming, until that end which was fast advancing; her poor, frail body being now only the diaphanous prison of her soul. She did not complain, as she felt the hour gently approach when, with a last kiss, a last sigh, she must say to Andras, Adieu!

He, seeing her each day more pale, each day more feeble, was alarmed; but he hoped, that, when the winter, which was very severe there, was over, Marsa would regain her strength. He summoned to the castle a physician from Vienna, who battled obstinately and skilfully against the malady from which the Tzigana was suffering. Her weakness and languor kept Marsa, during the cold months, for whole days before the lofty, sculptured chimney-piece, in which burned enormous logs of oak. As the flames gave a rosy tinge to her cheeks and made her beautiful eyes sparkle, Andras said to herself, as he watched her, that she would live, live and be happy with him.

The spring came, with the green leaflets and the white blossoms at the ends of the branches. The buds opened and the odors of the rejuvenated earth mounted subtly into the soft air.

At her window, regarding the young grass and the masses of tender verdure

in which clusters of pale gold or silvery white gleamed like aigrettes, Marsa said to Andras:

"It must be lovely at Maisons, in the Vale of Violets!" but she added, quickly:

"We are better here, much better! And it even seems to me that I have always, always lived here in this beautiful castle, where you have sheltered me, like a swallow beaten by the wind."

There was, beneath the window, stretching out like a ribbon of silver, a road, which the mica dust caused, at times, in the sunlight to resemble a river. Marsa often looked out on this road, imagining that she saw again the massive dam upon the Seine, or wondering whether a band of Tzigani would not appear there with the April days.

"I should like," she said one day to Andras, "to hear again the airs my people used to play."

She found that, with the returning spring, she was more feeble than she had ever been. The first warmth in the air entered her veins like a sweet intoxication. Her head felt heavy, and in her whole body she felt a pleasant languor. She had wished to sink thus to rest, as nature was awakening.

The doctor seemed very uneasy at this languidness, of which Marsa said:

"It is delicious!"

He whispered one evening to Andras:

"It is grave!"

Another sorrow was to come into the life of the Prince, who had known so many.

A few days after, with a sort of presentiment, he wrote to Yanski Varhely to come and spend a few months with him. He felt the need of his old friend; and the Count hastened to obey the summons.

Varhely was astonished to see the change which so short a time had produced in Marsa. In seven months her face, although still beautiful, had become emaciated, and had a transparent look. The little hand, white as snow, which she gave to Varhely, burned him; the skin was dry and hot.

"Well, my dear Count," said Marsa, as she lay extended in a reclining-chair, "what news of General Vogotzine?"

"The General is well. He hopes to return to Russia. The Czar has been appealed to, and he does not say no."

"Ah! that is good news," she said. "He must be greatly bored at Maisons; poor Vogotzine!"

"He smokes, drinks, takes the dogs out--"

The dogs! Marsa started. Those hounds would survive Menko, herself, the love which she now tasted as the one joy of her life! Mechanically her lips murmured, too low to be heard: "Ortog! Bundas!"

Then she said, aloud:

"I shall be very, glad if the poor General can return to St. Petersburg or Odessa. One is best off at home, in one's own country. If you only knew, Varhely, how happy I am, happy to be in Hungary. At home!"

She was very weak. The doctor made a sign to Andras to leave her for a moment.

"Well," asked the Prince anxiously of Varhely, "how do you think she is?"

"What does the doctor say?" replied Yanski. "Does he hope to save her?"

Zilah made no response. Varhely's question was the most terrible of answers.

Ensnared in an armchair, the Prince then laid bare his heart to old Varhely, sitting near him. She was about to die, then! Solitude! Was that to be the end of his life? After so many trials, it was all to end in this: an open grave, in which his hopes were to be buried. What remained to him now? At the age when one has no recourse against fate, love, the one love of his life, was to be taken away from him. Varhely had administered justice, and Zilah had pardoned--for what? To watch together a silent tomb; yes, yes, what remained to him now?

"What remains to you if she dies?" said old Yanski, slowly. "There remains to you what you had at twenty years, that which never dies. There remains to you what was the love and the passion of all the Zilah princes who lie yonder, and who experienced the same suffering, the same torture, the same despair, as you. There remains to you our first love, my dear Andras, the fatherland!"

The next day some Tzigana musicians, whom the Prince had sent for, arrived at the castle. Marsa felt invigorated when she heard the czimbalom and the piercing notes of the czardas. She had been longing for those harmonies and songs which lay so near her heart. She listened, with her hand clasped in that of Andras, and through the open window came the "March of Rakoczy," the same strains which long ago had been played in Paris, upon the boat which bore them down the Seine that July morning.

An heroic air, a song of triumph, a battle-cry, the gallop of horses, a chant of victory. It was the air which had saluted their betrothal like a fanfare. It was the chant which the Tzigani had played that sad night when Andras's father had been laid in the earth of Attila.

"I would like," said Marsa, when the music had ceased, "to go to the

little village where my mother rests. She was a Tzigana also! Like them, like me! Can I do so, doctor?"

The doctor shook his head.

"Oh, Princess, not yet! Later, when the warm sun comes."

"Is not that the sun?" said Marsa, pointing to the April rays entering the old feudal hall and making the bits of dust dance like sparks of gold.

"It is the April sun, and it is sometimes dangerous for--"

The doctor paused; and, as he did not finish, Marsa said gently, with a smile which had something more than resignation in it--happiness:

"For the dying?"

Andras shuddered; but Marsa's hand, which held his, did not even tremble.

Old Varhely's eyes were dim with tears.

She knew that she was about to die. She knew it, and smiled at kindly death. It would take away all shame. Her memory would be to Andras the sacred one of the woman he adored. She would die without being held to keep that oath she had made not to survive her dreamed-of happiness, the union she had desired and accepted. Yes, it was sweet and welcome, this death, which taking her from Andras's love, washed away all stain.

She whispered in his ear the oft-repeated avowal:

"I love you! I love you! I love you! And I die content, for I feel that you will love me always. Think a moment! Could I live? Would there not be a spectre between you and your Marsa?"

She threw her arms about him as he leaned over the couch upon which she lay, and he made a gesture of denial, unable to speak, for each word would have been a sob.

"Oh, do not deny it!" she said. "Now, no. But later, who knows? On the other hand, you see, there will be no other phantom near you but mine, no other image but mine. I feel that I shall be always near you, yes, always, eternally, my beloved! Dear death! blessed death! which renders our love infinite, yes, infinite. Ah, I love you! I love you!"

She wished to see once more, through the open window, the sunny woods and the new blossoms. Behind those woods, a few leagues away, was the place where Tisza was buried.

"I should like to rest by her side," said the Tzigana. "I am not of your family, you see. A princess, I? your wife? I have been only your sweetheart, my Andras."

Andras, whiter than the dying girl, seemed petrified by the approach of the inevitable grief.

Now, as they went slowly down the white road, the Tzigani played the plaintive melancholy air of Janos Nemeth, that air impregnated with tears, that air which she used so often to play herself--
"The World holds but One Fair Maiden!"

And this time, bursting into tears, he said to her, with his heart breaking in his breast:

"Yes, there is but thee, Marsa! but thee, my beloved, thee, thee alone !
Do not leave me! Stay with me! Stay with me, Marsa, my only love!"

Then, as she listened, over the lovely face of the Tzigana passed an expression of absolute, perfect happiness, as if, in Zilah's tears, she read all his forgiveness, all his love, all his devotion. She raised herself, her little hands resting upon the window-sill, her head heavy with sleep--the deep, dreamless sleep--and held up her sweet lips to him: when she felt Andras's kiss, she whispered, so that he barely heard it:

"Do not forget me! Never forget me, my darling!" Then her head drooped slowly, and fell upon the Prince's shoulder, like that of a tired child, with a calm sweet smile upon her flower-like face.

Like the salute they had once given to Prince Sandor, the Tzigani began proudly the heroic march of free Hungary, their music sending a fast farewell to the dead as the sun gave her its last kiss.

Then, as the hymn died slowly away in the distance, soft as a sigh, with one last, low, heart-breaking note, Andras Zilah laid the light form of the Tzigana upon the couch; and, winding his arms about her, with his head pillowed upon her breast, he murmured, in a voice broken with sobs:
"I will love only, now, what you loved so much, my poor Tzigana. I will love only the land where you lie asleep."

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

An hour of rest between two ordeals, a smile between two sobs
Anonymous, that velvet mask of scandal-mongers
At every step the reality splashes you with mud
Bullets are not necessarily on the side of the right
Does one ever forget?
History is written, not made.
"I might forgive," said Andras; "but I could not forget
If well-informed people are to be believe
Insanity is, perhaps, simply the ideal realized
It is so good to know nothing, nothing, nothing
Let the dead past bury its dead!

Man who expects nothing of life except its ending
Not only his last love, but his only love
Pessimism of to-day sneering at his confidence of yesterday
Sufferer becomes, as it were, enamored of his own agony
Taken the times as they are
Unable to speak, for each word would have been a sob
What matters it how much we suffer
Why should I read the newspapers?
Willingly seek a new sorrow

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