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THE  
EAGLE'S  
FEATHER

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**THE EAGLE'S FEATHER**

*BY THE SAME AUTHOR*



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And, after all, life at the moment held happiness beyond measure ;  
she wanted nothing in all the world save Jan."

(Page 21-)

11/10/10

# The Eagle's Feather

BY  
EMILY POST  
AUTHOR OF "THE TITLE MARKET"

1

*Illustrated by B. Martin Justice*



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“So the struck eagle, stretched upon the plain,  
No more through rolling clouds to soar again,  
View'd his own feather on the fatal dart,  
And winged the shaft that quivered in his heart.”

—Byron.

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**THE EAGLE'S FEATHER**



## CHAPTER I

IT was in Paris—a particularly warm afternoon in early spring—one of those afternoons when the City of Summer and Sunshine seems to have laid aside her grey and unsuitable disguise of winter, and to have become her gay many-coloured self once more. A warm breeze fanned the chestnut leaves and made the sun flecks dance on the sidewalk; the drivers of the trundling cabriolets wore their tall white hats pushed back from their hot red faces, and parasols—like mushrooms grown in a single night—blossomed along the boulevard.

Under the awning of the Café Royal, the proprietor stood looking at the thermometer with utmost satisfaction. Assuredly it was lucky that such a favourable day should be the very one upon which his terrace was ready for the season. And he smiled complacently, for the hour of



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the *apéritif* was at hand—that mystical hour when the working spirit of the Parisian seems to fall asleep, and some new, tranquil other self possesses him; when, sitting at his accustomed table in his accustomed café, he drops all thought of the day's occupation and pledges fraternity with the whole of non-teutonic humanity.

Already some of the little tables, resplendent in new green paint, were occupied by habitués of the restaurant. Among these might be numbered nearly every name celebrated in the art and science of the day. Yet the wide white awning harboured, impartially, those of the ragged cuff and fervid eye, with those who were privileged to wear that visible sign of Fame's recognition, the badge of the Chevalier of the Legion of Honour; those born with a silver spoon, as well as those eager for a pewter one. So that a stranger would find it difficult to tell the great few, who had arrived at the top of the ladder of success, from the small many, who had not yet

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reached the first rung, or were not even trying to climb.

For instance, on this particular afternoon, in the front row, just beside the long, trough-shaped flower boxes freshly filled with bright geranium plants, the three distinguished-looking men were young fashionables of the gay world. But this much anybody would have known, because although the proprietor had welcomed them with no more effusiveness than he had shown to others, his little democratic French soul had revelled in the repetition, as he bobbed and bowed, of "*Oui, Monsieur le Comte*" and "*Parfaitment, Monsieur le Marquis!*" At the table to the right of them was a rich shopkeeper and his wife, and next to them were two ardent painters, who, on their hungry days, would have parted with everything they owned for almost any sum, but who, with a few francs in their pockets and bread in the cupboard, spurned the thought of drawing a line that was not inspired. A little farther along, just where the sun's rays

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reached under the awning and accentuated the hallowed touch of flame colour in his button-hole, his soft hands, crossed upon his heavy stick, supporting the entire weight of his shoulders, his sharp black rat-like eyes glancing under the brim of a huge felt hat, sat Herault, editor of the *Jour*. The man's personality was quite in keeping with the *Jour's* editorials; often lascivious, but written with the piercing sharpness of a pen dipped in vitriol. At the table behind Herault were two more aspirants of the paint brush; beside them, again, Rchette, the dry-point etcher, sipping orangeade with his little friend Collette.

But farther back from the street, near the wall of ivy that formed a screen between the Café Royal and the Yellow Boar, was a group of five men, to whom the reader ought, by all the rules of story-telling, to have been introduced without meandering from table to table by the way.

These five men, with one other, who had not

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yet arrived at the restaurant, formed a little brotherhood of inseparables, like many another such clique, famous in the chronicles of that foster-mother of talent, Paris. Of those now sitting at the table, the most conspicuous by far was the herculean blond giant, Paul Verney, the sculptor, noted for sweet-tempered straightness in all his dealings with both man and woman, for appreciative valuation of the achievements of others, and an unassumed modesty in regard to his own gifts and repute. He was loved by the whole quarter. Poor artists, sick dogs, broken-hearted women, or grieved children, drifted straight toward the haven of his big heart.

Next to Verney sat Marcel Bluet, the genre painter, easily remembered by his classically handsome face and loose, soft clothes. Then came an empty chair, and then Antoine de Navins, a young architect of much promise, something of a dandy in dress, with a diminutive waxed moustache twisted to needle points. Jules

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Charante, the editor of the *Revue du Monde*, was adjusting his monocle between the prominent bones of cheek and brow, as he listened to the last, but by no means least, member of the fraternity, Thomas Cadwallader Smith, an American. "Little Smith" he was called in the quarter—a man who painted with lavish use of energy and materials, but whose chief reason for living in Paris was that he loved it; and whose ambitionless, optimistic temperament made him popular everywhere.

In the act of letting his melting absinthe sugar fall in an opalescent cascade into a tall tumbler of water, Bluet jumped suddenly to his feet; and, snapping his fingers, with a circular wave, beckoned the sixth member of their brotherhood, who, at that moment, was entering beneath the awning.

This last arrival raised his chin and eyebrows a trifle in recognition, and at once began to zig-zag his way among the tables. He was slight, boyish, small-boned, and brown of colouring;

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an inconspicuous type, that might pass unnoticed in a crowd of strangers; yet interested looks and greetings met him on every side. The proprietor seemed to bow with still greater alacrity, even Herault shifted the ponderous weight of his shoulders upon one arm while he conferred an unctuous smile on the new-comer and waved a fat hand in welcome.

At the table of his five friends he was received with a general shout of "Ah, here thou art!" "At last, *mon vieux!*"

The new arrival dropped into the vacant chair and took off his hat. His smile was bright, like that of a boy, and his brown hair, brushed straight off his high forehead and sleekly following the outline of his small skull, added to the impression of naïveté, of youth. His eyes were dark, and, like his face, constantly changing expression. He had no particular physical trait that marked his nationality, but it was probably the brownness of his skin—partly natural, partly tan—that made strangers often

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take him for an Italian. His walk and his clothes suggested his being English—or possibly an American. As a matter of fact, he was a Pole, and none other than Jan Piotrovski.

The attention of the group remained centred upon him, as though waiting for his news. As he said nothing, Verney asked: "Have you been all this time at rehearsal? How does it go?"

"Very well, I think," Piotrovski answered half absently and as though the subject were entirely impersonal. "Donnay is the wonder of managers. *La Gioconde* is going to excel herself this time—the part suits her admirably."

At this Bluet, carried away by sudden enthusiasm, cried: "Then bravo, Jan! Paris is surely to have a treat to-night. Come, friends, a toast! To Jan, our Jan, and his greatest creation, 'Le Fidèle!'"

Piotrovski started out of his preoccupation, as though in sudden fright; and, restraining the raised glasses on either side of him, cried: "Ah,

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don't—my good friends, *don't!* Drink to our friendship, if you like—and call me your Jan—I love that—or drink to Donnay or La Gioconde! But don't drink to 'Le Fidèle' as my greatest creation. You dishearten me!”

All the light went out of his face. So might have sat the brooding image of hopeless failure. Certainly no one would have supposed him the greatest dramatic poet of the day on the eve of fresh success.

“Jan, Jan, truly thou art too much!” exclaimed Little Smith. “As for me, I fervently thank the gods for the great privilege which is given me of being able to touch the coat sleeve of genius; of being able, when they speak of Piotrovski, to pipe up merrily and wave my handkerchief, and cry: ‘I know him!’ I wonder what the multitude, who burn incense before his picture, and scramble for *editions de luxe* of anything he chooses to write, would say if they could see him now? Here he sits, the picture of woe, because to-morrow he will be



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celebrated by one more success. One poor—great—little success!” He whimpered the last as though lamenting.

The others, apparently, agreed with Little Smith—all except Verney. He leaned across the tiny table, and put his huge hand on Piotrovski's shoulder; with the other he raised his glass. “To ‘Ysulinde,’” he said quietly.

Piotrovski raised his head, and a wave of radiance passed over his features, as quickly followed by wistfulness as he looked up at the gigantic figure of his best friend.

“If I only could—if I only could!” he said, in a low, tense voice. But the next moment, as though ashamed of his seeming want of gratitude, he half stammered: “Thank you—all of you! It is not that I am ungrateful, it is only that—don't you see?—it makes me feel”—he broke out helplessly—“as though I were obtaining benefits on false pretences!” He threw his hands out in a way he had, with the first and

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second finger more widely separated than the others—Verney put them like this in his statue of Inspiration, also in his Endymion. “I know what it will be: They will hunt all over for me to-night until they find me, and I shall be dragged before the curtain. The house will ring full of bravos—God alone knows why, except that I happen to be the vogue—and I shall bow and try to look pleased, and stammer some senseless words that have no meaning to me. But”—he leaned over the table, with his hands clasped tight, his face now glowing with enthusiasm—“some day I shall give my beloved, indulgent Paris something worthy of her! Some day, when I finish ‘Ysulinde’!” Again his expression changed, all boyishness seemed to have vanished, and a suggestion almost of fanaticism gleamed in the shadowed depths of his eyes. He spoke very slowly: “Ah, my friends, you all know I have but one hope, one thought, one purpose. All my life revolves around that one effort—that one I cannot finish—which was to

have been, which I pray with all my soul may be, a really great tragedy.”

Not one in the little circle around him thought of smiling, none doubted for a moment the possibility of his knowing—what not one man in a thousand does know—which of his own work is best. His voice had been so low that those at the nearest table could not have heard what he said; the intensity of his feelings was revealed only to this little group of his intimates. That he should consider his dramas insignificant, and his success the stroke of luck—as he himself put it, like attracting the notice of a capricious woman because of a fantastic necktie—seemed to them incomprehensible. They did, however, do him the justice of believing in his sincerity; no one who knew him could doubt that, so they all marvelled at the genius, loved the man, and let it go at that. Verney alone, understood as well as believed. But then the others did not know whole pages of “Ysulinde” by heart, as he did.

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They dropped the subject of the new play, and talked instead of the coming Salon. But even then Piotrovski remained the central personage.

“Will you sit for me to-morrow, Jan?” asked Bluet eagerly. “There is an expression I need urgently for my poet.”

Verney at the same time was observing Piotrovski closely, he took out a pad and pencil, and sketched.

Piotrovski laughed good-naturedly. “But, of course, my friend, if I can be of use, by all means!”

After the hour for a sitting had been arranged, the conversation turned again, and they all teased de Navins, declaring he was in love. De Navins sighed and looked appropriately sentimental.

“Here is a philanthropic idea—I give it to you gratis,” suggested Charante. “Have a deep love affair, a veritable grand passion, and make

Jan your confessor. He says he can't do love scenes."

"Jan would better have a love affair himself," returned de Navins.

For a moment there was the suggestion of an awkward silence, during which they all glanced apprehensively at Piotrovski; but the latter took the remark lightly, exclaiming: "My experiences are decreed by Fate to be of little worth—so you see it must be from those of my friends that I draw my inspiration. Luck to yours, Antoine!" He drained his glass and arose.

A moment later, as he and his companions were leaving the café, a beautifully appointed carriage passed, in which were two ladies. The younger woman was facing the restaurant, leaning forward slightly, and, as she spoke to her companion, her smile was radiant. Suddenly, her attention was caught by Piotrovski—her sentence broke off, and for the space of a second her glance was leveled directly at him. With a slight start, as though of recognition, she in-

clined still farther forward. Then the carriage passed on.

Little Smith stared down the street, shrugged his shoulders and made a wry face. "That's how it is! To him that hath the gifts of the gods—to him is given the distinguished consideration of beautiful ladies. Who was that, Jan?"

"I don't know who she is." He shrugged his shoulders, with assumed indifference; but, to his friend's amazement, he seemed agitated. Then hailing a passing fiacre, he jumped in. "You will be there to-night?" he asked wistfully of those on the sidewalk.

"But surely!" was returned in enthusiastic chorus.

"Till to-night, then! To the Théâtre Français!" he called to the driver, and was trundled out of sight.

## CHAPTER II

THE curtain fell on the third act. In the auditorium the lights and applause blazed out together, then the lights were lowered, and the curtain lifted once more on the moonlit battle scene. Amid "Ahs!" "Bravos!" the din of clapping palms, and the rapping of canes, the curtain came down again, and the lights remained up.

The buzz of conversation spread quickly through the boxes and galleries, and the audience relaxed from its attitude of concentration. Down in the orchestra stalls, men with their tall hats on the backs of their heads stood staring through their opera glasses at the occupants of the boxes, while above the din of voices rose the Paris newsboy's familiar nasal cry that ends like the snapping of a whip: "*Le Soir! Le Soir! L'Entr'acte!*"

Out in the *promenoir*, a group of journalists

were discussing the play. "It is astonishing," said one, "that the public appreciates his work. He is much more a poet than a dramatist." "Yes, but he is an original!" said another. "His genius is undeniable." A third extolled the flexibility of his stanzas, in which thought succeeded striking thought with the effortless grace of pearls slipping along a string. Against these were raised occasional dissenting voices; those who wanted vivid images, glaring colours, the thrill of melodrama; who wanted an appeal to the senses rather than to the brain, who preferred action to ideas, expressed disappointment; just as those who subsist on meat and strong drink would fare badly on nuts and wild honey.

Behind the curtain, Piotrovski looked nervously through the bull's-eye at the brilliant audience. The women's dresses in the boxes and first galleries made a bright band as of flowers. Many of the men had their backs turned to the stage, but here and there he recognised well-known figures, first-nighters, critics, with the in-



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discriminates that make up that body known as the general public. He saw also various familiar and friendly faces, but the strain of a first performance affecting, as always, his every faculty, he made merely a restless survey of the house as a whole—until his gaze fell upon the left stage *baignoire*—where men's black coats made a yawning space, relieved only by the white blaze of shirt fronts. The great width of Verney's, precisely in the centre, was flanked by the crumpling, shiny white plaits covering the affectionate heart of Bluet, and the stiff, board-like achievement of Little Smith. Verney's leonine head was thrown into relief against the black shoulder of Charante, who stood behind him. Beside him again Piotrovski saw the arm of another figure, which he knew to be that of de Navins.

With a feeling of content that these good friends were with him, he let his glance follow more tranquilly around the house across the ring of faces,—suddenly, with an unaccountable

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quickenings of pulse, he recognised, in a box on the right, the lady who that afternoon had passed in the victoria.

For a moment his interest was submerged in the more dominant feeling of annoyance with himself. Then curiosity prevailed, and he began carefully to gather up the threads of impressions and memories.

He had seen her less than half a dozen times in his life, and only once before close enough to form an idea of her appearance. That once had been on the platform of a railway station. She had stopped close to him to ask a question of a guard, and she had smiled. It was the merest smile of kindness or thanks, but it held something golden in its swift brightness, something spontaneous and lovely. Her voice, too—his poet's ear was keenly sensitive to beauty of tone—had the same golden quality, and before he realised what he was doing he had followed her slim figure down the trainway and had watched her enter an outgoing express. He had

then walked past her carriage; but her maid, standing in the doorway to direct the arrangement of bags and boxes, shut off his further view. As she had preceded him down the trainway a delicious fragrance had been wafted through the air currents in her wake—a perfume that persisted in his memory of her and with as strange an appeal as he had felt for the woman herself, and this disconcerted him. Usually he hated perfume; usually, also, he hated women no less. Even now the reproach in a particular woman's plaintive face came to mind, obtruding disagreeably. Yet it certainly was not repulsion that had kept him standing on the platform long after the strange lady's train had gone any more than it was repulsion that had made him eagerly return her glance this afternoon.

A whiff of the perfume had seemed also to come back, as he caught sight of her; it was this, no doubt, that had made him confused when

Little Smith asked who she was. At the present moment, in order to observe her carefully, he was with difficulty, adjusting one chamber of his opera glasses to the bull's-eye of the curtain.

Slender, but not angular, she was what the French call *fause maigre*. She wore a white dress of thin, filmy material, cut out a little in the neck, with a string of pearls around her throat; her hat, neither large nor small, was of white straw, with some roses on it. Piotrovski know nothing of fashions, and yet he realised without the slightest question, that she was not only dressed according to fashion, but was the very essence of fashion in its best form.

She sat against the right-hand side of the box, so that her face was turned toward him, and she was indolently waving a fan of long, white ostrich feathers—ostrich-feather fans had long gone out of fashion, but in her hands they had come in again. Her head was small, and her waving hair was very dark brown, except

where, here and there, a high light revealed a coppery glint. Her brown eyes, deep set and with thick lashes, looked darker than they were, in contrast with a pale and beautifully moulded oval face; her mouth was rather wide, but quite lovely—especially in expression. He realised that hers was a personality which one might constantly pass by without notice, but which, if once it should claim attention, would never thereafter lose its hold.

The manager pounded with his stick on the stage, and Piotrovski made his way to the wings, thence into the *baignoire* where his friends were. As he entered, Bluet wanted to put him in front, but he stood up in the farthest corner, at the back of the box. Again his eyes were drawn to the unknown lady on the other side of the house. He wanted not so much to observe her, this time, as to study the effect of the play upon her. There was not much light, as it was the scene where they had carried the dying poet, stretched upon a cot, into the hospital tent. The princess,

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in the costume of a sister of mercy, was kneeling beside him, telling the beads of her rosary. Through the first part of the act, the poet, in his delirium, fitfully rehearsed scenes of battle, interspersed with the story of his love for the princess.

Piotrovski's unknown was leaning forward, utterly absorbed, and as the poet began the verses: "*Le plus suprême désir, ma princesse adorée,*" she held her fan tightly closed in her hand, which rested on the railing of the box. Her lips were slightly parted, and her expression so far interpreted the poet's words that she might herself have been reciting the poem. The whole house remained hushed and breathless during this scene and the one following, where the poet, in his last flicker of consciousness, becomes aware of his surroundings, and realises that it is the princess who is kneeling at his side.

All this time Piotrovski watched the woman in the box. She had shown the most ardent appreciation and sympathy, until the princess

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spoke. Then, abruptly, she sat up straight, and she looked cold and indifferent throughout the remainder of the act.

When the final curtain had descended, the applause was deafening. Canes, heels, palms, and throats resounded as the actors made their bows together and individually. The poet, healthily risen from the dead, and the princess, simpering and very unlike a sister of mercy, smiled their thanks. And then came the call "Piotrovski! Anteur Piotrovski!" until the curtain went up once more, disclosing the company in a line, with Piotrovski in the centre, between the poet and the princess.

Leading La Gioconde, who had played the poet, to the front of the stage, he bowed to her. He did it simply, as though he were saying: "Thank you so much, but why do you call for me? It is La Gioconde who creates the rôle."

The house thundered its call for a speech. But, with a helpless, naïve expression, he said "*Merci*" with his lips, bowed again to La Gio-

conde, and the curtain went down. Afterward, to his chagrin, he remembered that he had involuntarily looked up for the particular applause of two white-gloved hands. But in the box at the right, the only feminine hands that were clapping were sombrely encased in black.

"Why do I think of her?" he asked himself, and irritably thrust the thought out of mind.

He hurried back into the corridor of the dressing-rooms to say some words of thanks and appreciation to those who had taken part in the performance, after which he joined his friends, who were waiting in the lobby. All the audience had gone, so there was no one to witness the way he was patted, and applauded—even hugged by Charante, who then rushed off to get his "copy" into the office of his paper. At last, Verney, Bluet, Little Smith, and Piotrovski got into one fiacre. Verney gave an address. Piotrovski, unstrung after the long strain of rehearsals and performance, asked, in alarm: "Where are you going, my friends?"



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"Have you forgotten the Descharmes have a reception to-night? You promised the duke you would go."

"No, no, I am not going! I'm nervous—I'm all in the air."

Following an impulse to escape, he made a move to get out of the carriage, but Verney held him in his ponderous grasp, while Little Smith broke in: "Your lady of the victoria is going to be there! I found *that* out!"

Piotrovski had no mind to go to the reception, but ceased struggling in the giant's grip, because it was easier to yield beneath the hold of Verney than to combat it, and he waited for a chance to dodge and bolt. Nevertheless, Little Smith's information fell like drops of water down a parched throat; Piotrovski absorbed it eagerly.

"The lady in question was at the play to-night, with the Montmorencys," Little Smith was saying. "I don't know many of the old faubourgs—they don't like Americans, as a rule,

but de Navins knew them, so he went around in the second entr'acte, and was presented to—— Would you like to know her name? Oh, well, if you don't care!" He shrugged his shoulders, in excellent imitation of a Frenchman. "She is not a native of France, for one thing! I'll give you that information, just out of good friendship—also this: She is a *Madame la Duchesse*, anyway, so you cannot fall in love and marry her."

"Listen to the little American," said Bluet banteringly, "to whom romance always is spelled m-a-r-r-i-a-g-e."

"Well, and what if it is?" Little Smith retorted, "Jan is not like you, you old *boulevardier*, with a twirl of your mustache and smile of the eye for every *grisette*! It is well to tell him, therefore, that his duchesse is not marriageable."

Bluet laughed good-humouredly, and Piotrovski interposed with more seriousness than the occasion seemed to call for: "I don't want to

marry any one. Besides," he added abruptly, "I have a wife already."

This was received in awkward silence. Piotrovski's marriage was a subject tactily understood in the circle around him as a matter for silence. As usual, Verney sprang into the breach.

"I beseech you, Jan, come to the reception with us! The duke is an old friend of yours, and has a right to be offended that you never go to his house. Come just for a time, won't you? I ask it seriously as a favour."

Put that way, Piotrovski saw no help for it but to yield.

### CHAPTER III

BETWEEN the old bronze gates of the house of the Duke Descharme, many carriages were passing. The fiacre containing the four friends had to be emptied quickly—a circumstance which would have given Piotrovski little chance of escape. Even had he intended to protest further against coming, the arm of the giant linked in his own was a compelling force, and he soon found himself ascending the curved stairway, upon the broad steps of which so many generations of celebrities and personages of fashion had mounted and descended.

There was a great crowd, and Piotrovski's small, brown, inconspicuous appearance allowed him, after greeting his host and hostess, to escape unobserved and find a seat hidden by plants, from which vantage he could watch the kaleido-

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scope without the necessity of becoming an active part of it.

Although the company in which he found himself, judged by the standard of fashion, might by many persons have been thought dowdy, the assemblage had an air that was lacking in the so-called smarter society that filled the newer palaces on the other side of the Seine. Usually Piotrovski avoided social functions, and at that moment would gladly have been peacefully at home, yet as a spectacle, people interested him; and, little as he cared for women, it amused him to watch them, very much as it amused him to watch the grimaces of the monkeys in the Jardin des Plantes. There seemed a suggestive resemblance between them in that they both made faces and became agitated over nothing at all.

Piotrovski's aimless, yet restless, attention wandered from passing group to group. For the most part they were so many blanks to him—walking puppets without accompanying marks

by which to distinguish one from the other. Occasionally he hazarded a guess as to their station or condition, occasionally he recognised a face or was given a clue by the fragments of conversation that reached him. A famous minister, who in his youth had been a page at the court of the last empire, approached slowly with a placid little old lady in a black satin brocade gown of ancient cut. They were much engrossed in their own conversation, which was doubtless of the last days of the empire, when he was a gallant chasseur and she was maid of honour to the empress; for, as they passed, Piotrovski heard her saying, "Ah, those were the days, monsieur!" Behind came two diplomats, talking of the latest appointment, and following them a group of men whose names ranked high among the ancient nobility of France. A little while later, Herault passed with a star of the opera.

A momentary thinning of the crowd revealed Verney talking to the Comtesse de la Tour, a

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fragile and beautiful woman, whose elegance and grace were suggestive of his unknown. Verney's thumb was making outlines on the atmosphere, and his rugged face was full of enthusiasm. Little Smith, now here, now there, was beaming. And with good reason, since he was one of the very few Americans who had ever been admitted to this famous old house. Furthermore, no one laughed at his accent or at his still more unpardonable confusion of genders, and his contagiously happy disposition met a reflected good-humour on all sides.

But Piotrovski was not allowed to linger in his corner. People clamoured for the hero of the evening, and, the Duke Descharme ferreting him out, he was by singularly bad fortune dragged before a number of unclassified persons, the majority of whom—it was almost as though by deliberate intent—lauded his shortcomings and ignored his good qualities.

“So charming, your princess,” cooed one well-meaning lady.

“You must have loved very deeply,” said another—to which Piotrovski mentally ejaculated “Imbecile!” and struggled inwardly with the inevitable contempt that man of serious endeavour feels for the criticism of thoughtless, condescending stupidity.

With each successive expression of unintelligent praise his irritation increased, and he had no patience to wait for a word with those from whom he might expect reasonable criticism.

As he was about to make a dash for the stairway in order to escape, his impulse was checked by a sudden glimpse of the slender outline of his unknown. She was within a few paces of him, talking to a famous minister. Again, just as in the carriage this afternoon, a perceptible animation overspread her features, and for a hesitating moment she seemed on the verge of a friendly acknowledgment; then she quickly looked away.

In that instant Piotrovski abandoned all thought of escape, and went eagerly in search of



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the duke. "Tell me, my friend," he asked when at last he had found him, "who is that lady in white? There—you can see her through the doorway—the lovely one talking with his excellency."

The duke raised his eyebrows. "But surely you know the Duchesse de Marsin. No? She is one of the most charming women in all Paris—you must be presented at once!" And he led the poet into the adjoining room.

In striking contrast to the feeling of irritation which other people had that evening produced in him, Piotrovski felt at once the sympathetic quality of her personality—felt it far more in close proximity than he had at a distance, and her friendly smile seemed to bridge the restraint of an introduction's usual formality.

"Monsieur Piotrovski," she said, "I am so glad to be able to tell you how much of your play to-night pleased me. Many scenes in it were truly beautiful."

Her voice enchanted him, and her subtly expressed qualification interested him. He had a distinct sense of gratitude that fate had for once made a realisation fulfill the anticipation. "Tell me, I beg of you, the scenes you did not like!" he asked. He knew she had not liked the climax, but waited with some eagerness to hear if she would frankly say so.

She hesitated, as though deciding which of her thoughts she would give him, rather than as though she were gathering haphazard ones together hurriedly for the moment. "But it involves quite a discussion. It would not be fair to merely say, 'I like this' and 'I was disappointed in that,' without giving you the whole." Now came the radiant smile, and, under its influence, Piotrovski laughed joyously. His ill temper had fled at first sight of her, and each moment spent in her presence had but further increased the buoyancy of his mood.

"Then tell me 'the whole,'" he urged.

As though obeying a sudden impulse to re-

spond to his frame of mind, she answered: "Very well! But we must go and sit down. Yes, over here will do. No, I will take this chair, so that I shall not face the room. Now! I can think better."

For a few moments, she sat silent, in apparent contemplation of the feathers in her fan. Piotrovski was silently contemplating her. She had taken off her hat since the theatre, and he thought her more attractive without it. She wore her hair in an original way, that suited the contour of her small and well-shaped head. It was arranged with such finished simplicity as made the elaborate headdresses of other women look like upholstery—and casual hairdressing frumpy. The more Piotrovski observed her, the more she attracted him. He never wrote plays of modern times, and he had a habit in his imagination of transposing persons and events that came under his close observation into earlier periods. Because of this habit, perhaps, he had an impression at once that, under the fin-

ished Parisian poise, hers was a nature perfectly attuned to the primitive forces of the middle centuries. Yet she was in manner quite as much in harmony with to-day; she was, in fact, the quintessence of modernism.

"To begin with," she said finally, "your imagination is without boundaries. The mastery of diction is that of real genius." At the apparent fulsomeness, Piotrovski felt instantly a threatening disillusion, but he lost that impression soon as he heard her further. "But for your complete success there is, to my mind, one quality lacking. It is presumptuous of me to criticise, but you asked——"

"Yes, please!"

"Your characters are too often puppets or phantoms, particularly your women. Shall I say it—your great shortcomings? You can't draw a woman!"

She doubtless took Piotrovski's expression for disagreement, and stopped again, as though reconsidering her opinion. Then she went on

slowly but with conviction: "Yes, I am sure I am right. 'Le Fidèle' will be pronounced your best. And the reason will be because the chief character is a youth. Your 'Herod' was powerfully sustained because in that there was no woman's part. You failed in 'Laïs' because she was not a living, breathing woman, but a mere figure, just as the princess in the play to-night was merely an outline of wood upon which the poet hung the beauty of an ephemeral ideal. Those verses of his love, ah yes—they were perfect! The whole character of the poet was faultless; and as the play progressed from scene to scene, I felt my emotions growing, growing, and I asked myself over and over, breathlessly: 'Has he been given the living spark this time?'"

The duchesse paused, laying her closed fan against her cheek. Deep in her eyes Piotrovski recognised unmistakable sincerity. After a moment she continued, more lightly and rapidly:

"In one of the earlier scenes where the poet saw the princess through the grill of the garden;

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the impression of her was lovely—and his vow to serve her by serving her country was quite an emotional expression. Also in the consistent development of the poet's character; his conquest of himself through his never-faltering adoration of her, the audience's impression of her was kept upon the plane of the poet's own ideal. You achieved this by excluding the actual figure of the princess, by leaving her in the background, and allowing her to be seen only through the mind of the poet. I thought to myself: 'He knows his own weakness. He is clever enough to build within his limitations. He is going to carry through the whole drama and leave her in the background. Never in my life have I heard anything so beautiful as his dying confession in the tent. It brought thrills to my heart; the moment was tense, exalted, sublime. And then—there sat that wooden image of the princess who, with her first utterances of hollow, meaningless phrases ruthlessly brushed away every rainbow film of illusion! Oh, mon-

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sieur, why—*why* did you ever let her speak at all? Why did you not let him see her as in a vision only?"

Piotrovski was more impressed than he would have liked to admit. For some moments they both sat silent. Presently he asked: "Why do I fail in my women? Do you know?"

"Perhaps it is because you have no sympathy with them." She smiled—not brilliantly this time, but with a kind, sweet smile, and she spoke, looking, as was her way, directly at him; her voice rather softer, lower than before.

"They are dream figures, your women. That is, when they are seen from a distance. When you try to bring them close and put them in the centre of action, the dream film vanishes and exposes figures of clay instead. In neither case are they living. You write as a man who has dreamed vivid, beautiful visions; or at other times as a man who has studied every emotion, but who has neither loved nor desired to love. You write of women from the head, not from

the heart. You do not even observe them with sympathy. Their story is in a book whose pages you have never taken the trouble to read."

"Will you read it to me?"

There was a quick glimmer of displeasure in her eyes. "I was very serious."

"So am I."

'At the earnestness of his expression her resentment faded, and she answered, merely doubtfully: "Impossible, monsieur, that a stranger could show you."

"That may be, madame, but I know you could, just as you perceive what the general public apparently does not, how much more I fail than I succeed when——"

His sentence was interrupted by the Comte de la Tour, who had been sent in search of her by old Madame de Broc, to whom the duchesse had promised a lift home. The duchesse got up, therefore, but turned again to Piotrovski. As though there were no doubt of his coming, she said:



"I am in Paris for two or three months. You will find me always between two and four—or for *déjeuner*? I hope you will sometimes come in for that—by and by, when we shall be friends!"

As he faced the radiant kindness of her smile, it seemed to him as though the curtains of of her mind's real habitation were for a moment drawn aside, revealing to the passer-by, in the dark street, a sudden glimpse of a room beautiful in its proportions, and brilliantly lighted.

After she had gone, Piotrovski went in search of the Duke Descharme. Though they met but seldom, there had always been a pleasant sense of mutual understanding between them, and they now sat down together in a corner of the smoking-room. Without prelude, apology, or even self-consciousness, Piotrovski asked: "She is not French, is she? I mean, of course, the Duchesse de Marsin."

"No, she is Hungarian." The duke, observing Piotrovski's obviously eager curiosity, lit a

cigarette, and settled himself as though to begin a long narrative. "She was born a Countess Szapary, and married the Duc de Marsin—about as bad a painter as his name was good. No—she is a widow. Her husband died five years ago. She is a curious woman, unusually brilliant and charming, with an extraordinary exaggerated ideal of art, and an equal indifference to the pleasures and amusements of most beautiful women.

"I have always fancied—romantically, no doubt—that she had a mark of fatality about her, the shadow of something impending. Yet I don't think she has ever been awakened, as we say, to any very great emotion. Her husband's failure as an artist disappointed her bitterly, yet that can hardly be called an experience awakening to the heart. She was a mere child at the time of her marriage, a sensitive, half-wild, yet over-cultivated little being—can you understand what I mean? In her, the extreme finish of the world was blended with the wildness of the

woods. She was a daughter of both. Since her husband's death I have watched the change in her, the slow return to her true self. Every one wonders that she has not married again. Look where she will, she sees the light of admiration in men's faces, but she is indifferent to it all. Sometimes I have thought she would take the veil; there is the fanatical look of the religious in her. Yet she is of the type of a *grande amoureuse* whose love, should she ever care for a man, would cease only with her soul's extinction."

Suddenly the duke broke off. Piotrovski had been so quietly absorbed in Descharme's narrative that the latter had said far more than he had intended. "I think I have told you her whole history," he added.

"All except what she does with herself, whom she lives with, and where she lives."

The duke laughed. "You are insatiable! She spends most of her time on an estate of her own in Hungary. For two or three months every

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year she occupies a small wing of the great de Marsin house in Rue de l'Université. She is an accomplished musician, but seldom plays for any one. I can't think of any more, unless you want her age and genealogy, and those you can find in the 'Almanach de Gotha.' ”

Piotrovski laughed and thanked the duke with half-whimsical, half-genuine effusion. Shortly afterward he took his leave and started to walk home with Verney. They said nothing, and Piotrovski remained occupied with his own thoughts. He felt a distinct satisfaction in the news that the duchesse was a widow. He could not have explained why, for the merest suggestion of the possibility of a sentimental attachment would have been abhorrent to him. Ninety-nine men out of a hundred—especially Frenchmen—would have long since been speculating on a developing romance, but not Piotrovski. There was the suggestion of a link that in some subtle way bound his fate with hers, but if that were true, he felt it must be a link forged through

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neither her beauty nor her charm, nor any quality of her own attractiveness, but through his work, which was, after all, the vital part of him.

Finally Verney's voice broke in. "Jan," he said, "may I ask you a question?"

"But of course, Paul, my friend. Ask what you will."

"Have you ever applied for a divorce?"

Piotrovski's shoulders moved as though shaking off something disagreeable. "No!" Then a little later he added, with simple finality: "I am a Catholic."

## CHAPTER IV

ON the Avenue de Versailles, on the side toward the Seine, there stood a yellow-grey, inconspicuous, two-storied house. It had a front yard with a grass plot, divided precisely in half by a narrow pebble walk. There were evidences that the grass had been occasionally cut—the edge next to the walk was neatly trimmed; but no weeds or moss had ever been pulled, no grass or clover seed had been sown, no flowers or shrubs planted. One straggling rose vine, which seemed in sheer persistence to have flourished in spite of neglect, clung tenaciously to the portico, reached farther up, and held open a shutter of the second story. All of the other shutters were closed. The façade was perfectly plain, and was flanked on either side by a wall which was as high as the first story. The house and its surroundings gave the effect of a habita-

tion that has been tidied, just so far as is necessary to allow the inmates to go peacefully to sleep, rather than one that has been abandoned.

The door knobs were brightly polished, but the outer doors gave an impression of being sealed, instead of merely closed. A sparrow had built her nest between the left upper panels and the rose vine. If any one rang the bell, however, a little supplementary door, set within the wide frame of the big one, was opened in the shortest space of time imaginable, by an exceedingly neat and dignified servant, who informed the visitor that his master saw no one, absolutely without exception, before two, three, four, sometimes five o'clock in the afternoon. To take a message would be impossible, also, but it should be delivered when his master would be pleased to ring. And then the little door was very politely, but firmly, closed again.

At about two o'clock of an afternoon shortly following the production of "Le Fidèle," the huge strides of Verney swung through the gate,

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and at his ring, a double one, the big right-hand door was flung open and the servant made way, as though to a member of the house returning rather than to a visitor entering.

“Is he busy?”

The servant inclined in assent, and in a subdued tone answered: “In the garden, M’sieur Verney. He has not even breakfasted. It is nearly three o’clock, but he was in one of his moods, you know, m’sieur. He will be faint with hunger, but I dare not interrupt to offer him anything. Will m’sieur enter?”

“Yes. I will wait a while in the library,” Verney answered, in a voice almost as subdued as the servant’s.

He entered the hall, which was more spacious than one would have supposed from the exterior, and turned to the right into a large room filled with a conglomeration of things that had probably been collected as they were needed, without consideration of the company they were to keep, and yet the room, as a whole, had an air of



comfort that was not without distinction. A large triple window overlooked a garden scarcely more than twenty-five yards wide between the vine-covered walls that hedged it in, and perhaps a little over a hundred in length from house to river, but so laid out that it gave a deceptive effect of space. Carefully placed conifers and shrubs, with occasional Italian statues or benches, cleverly extended the foreground which was flanked with fruit trees against trellises and walls, while farther down, near the edge of the river, some fine old shade trees sheltered a low white summerhouse. A white-columned pergola, smothered in bloom, ran down to the water's edge. At one side, under an open circle in the pergola, midway between the little building and the river, was a sunken basin filled with lotus.

Verney, sitting on the balustrade of the little loggia upon which the windows opened, looked out at this charming spot, of which the street entrance of the house gave no promise save its

silence. He was about to go indoors again when a bell sounded and a man's voice called "Léon!"

At once there was a bustle. A woman's voice, high and strident, gave an order, doors were heard to open and shut, there was a sound of running water and of kitchen utensils briskly handled. The manservant hurried through the garden in the direction of the summerhouse, and Verney, too, swung himself over the balcony railing and followed after.

In the summerhouse, amid papers scattered ankle deep, he found Piotrovski stretched at full length upon a bench—a narrow stone seat with a fur rug over it.

At the sight of Verney the poet half sat up, and limply let the weight of his arm fall in the hand of his friend. His exhaustion was evident in his laboured breathing, in the strained, parched appearance of his lips, the blue shadows under his eyes. Presently he fell back again upon the bench, his head pillowed on his arm.

Verney sat down on the only other seat, a rush chair, and said nothing. He never interrupted Piotrovski's silences. He took his pipe out of his pocket, lit it, and sat smoking. The servant reappeared, bringing a little table set for breakfast.

"Put a place for Monsieur Verney," Piotrovski spoke for the first time.

But Verney put up his hand in protest. "No, thanks, I breakfasted hours ago."

"Is it so late?" Piotrovski asked, with listless indifference. Then, with sudden intensity: "I have been trying to get it, trying my utmost since five this morning. But the more I try to visualise Ysulinde at the moment when her husband announces his sale of her, the more she eludes me. Look at these pages! She acts like an automaton and talks like a tract!"

Verney glanced through the numerous freshly written sheets. Then sympathetically:

"You are too tired to judge of your own work, my friend. You are over-strained, that's

all. Come along, eat some breakfast, and then we'll go for a walk."

He crossed over to Piotrovski and raised him up, poured out a cup of coffee, spread a roll with butter, and then practically fed him. Piotrovski ate as though unconscious of what he was doing. Verney was never given to much speech and Piotrovski was in an uncommunicative mood. So for a while Piotrovski absently ate what was fed to him.

Finally he burst out vehemently: "It ought to be simple to understand the anguish that a woman of devoted, loyal nature would undergo at the moment she found her love had been bartered to dishonour! There is nothing intricate or difficult in the situation, yet when I come to put her feeling into words, when I try to catch and hold one single phrase, one single gesture, the whole image of her fades as a dream in the morning light."

He dropped his chin in his hands. "I am only a mediocrity, Paul! I am a rhymster—

nothing better." His mouth curled contemptuously. "I had better realise my *métier* and write jingles and verses for the poet's column of the daily newspapers."

Verney's expression was anxious enough, but he answered with brusque pretence of impatience: "You are talking like a child. Go away for a change and think of something else. You need new experiences and fresh scenes. Why not start for Asia or Africa? The farther off the better. If you'll wait until I have finished my group, I will go with you!"

Apparently the other did not even hear, for he continued, quite as though Verney had not spoken: "Lais, Tulia, Margorida, Arixéne were all unreal, and now—Ysulinde!"

This time Verney's thoughts could with safety be expressed, and he made the most of them:

"I am losing patience with you! Every one whose work is creative must run into periods of inefficiency, even unproductivity. In such phases you have all my sympathy, but you are getting

morbid on the subject of your women. No one else knows about the failures you are harpeneing on—they can't be very bad!"

"Some one else does."

Verney's eyes were raised in interrogation.

Piotrovski finished his coffee gloomily, then replied with conviction: "The Duchesse de Marsin is one, at least, who not only knows, but has spoken to me. Something she said set me to thinking—I wonder if the human element is lacking in me. I think that is what she meant. It is true I have none of the desire that other men have for love, for family, for home. I have been thinking a lot about this lack in me, or whatever you might call it, and I wonder if it is not a phase, or an example of our national weakness; if its origin is, perhaps, not in my own little being, but in our whole race; if my futile characterisation, my incapacity for passing a certain point is not all part of the *improductivité Slav* that Sienkiewicz has pointed out."

Verney tried to brace him. "Nonsense! You

are half sick and imagine flaws because an unproductive mood has disturbed the clay for a while, and you must wait until the potter begins a new shape."

Piotrovski jumped up. Unaccountable excitement overcoming his fatigue, he paced the small apartment a dozen times. At length, he exclaimed:

"The Duchesse de Marsin fills my mind. I wonder why." He came back again to Verney. "There is no need of your sceptical smile; you should know me better. The power of loving is left out of me." Then bitterly: "I would it were left out of women! Passion I know as a swinging of the pendulum in reaction from long mental effort—but don't let's speak of that; it is a thing loathsome and hideous—a profanation of love. That I feel an interest in the duchesse, I grant you, but it is an interest entirely of the brain. I feel no throbbing of the heart, I have no loss of sleep through thinking

of her, and——” he laughed—“no lack of appetite!”

“Humph!” grunted the giant. “Symptoms vary. Sometimes it begins with fever, sometimes with rash, again with buzzings in the head.”

“What are you saying?”

“Nothing—I must go to the Ecole. The prizes are to be given to my atelier to-morrow, and I have not yet decided upon the awards. Come with me, for the walk. It will do you good.”

In less than ten minutes Piotrovski—he always got into his clothes like a whirlwind—had shaved, tubbed, and dressed. His breakfasting and dressing had so far revived him that he had regained his normal buoyancy, and his sun-browned skin gave no testimony of pallor to the exhaustion of the previous hour. They strode across the Pont de Grenelles, through narrow streets, into the Place Duplex, on past the Ecole



Militaire and the Invalides. After a while they turned into the Rue de l'Université.

Piotrovski's glance strayed to the farther side of the street, toward an iron railing with a high gate surmounted by an ancient coat of arms; and as they approached, his steps lagged sufficiently to enable him to have a good look into a garden beyond. The old mansion was gloomy and forbidding enough, with wooden shutters all tightly barred. One corner, however, was occupied—the small left wing, only two stories high, which was quite out of keeping in its modern accessories with the austerity of the rest of the building. The ground floor had long windows leading directly out on a small garden, which was planted with box hedges and clipped chestnut trees, and where rose standards circled, like a dancing ring, around a little fountain. These windows had cool, green-lined awnings, and the windows of the second floor—a mansard only—were filled with flower boxes, whose trailing vines fell over the awnings below. The

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breeze was just now fluttering a fine batiste, lace-trimmed curtain, which, blowing, disclosed a glimpse of the brocaded arm of a chair, and a tall silver vase with roses. Piotrovski looked over at this window eagerly. Verney followed the direction of his eyes.

“Have you been to see her?” the latter asked.

“Not since the day after the reception, when we left our duty cards.”

“Then you have not talked with her again?”

“No.”

Nothing more was said until they reached the Ecole des Beaux Arts. Here Piotrovski decided that he would walk on farther, until it should be time to go to the Café Royal. He started briskly down the street, keeping up the gait for nearly fifty paces. Then he hesitated, stopped, and went back for a dozen steps or so, stopped, hesitated again, and finally strolled on, with the uncertainty of one who was at any time likely

to change his direction, into the Rue de l'Université.

At the first of the iron gates, he glanced again at the open window of the left wing. The curtain still waving aside, gave an inviting glimpse of the interior. It suggested to his imagination the figure of a siren beckoning, with himself a passing mariner. But his whimsical smile at the suggestion changed abruptly to the same expression of bitterness that had come into his face once before that day, and he passed on to the farther gate. Before he was aware of what he was doing, he was already through the archway and crossing the little garden before the windows of the left wing. As he drew nearer, he caught other outlines of furniture, flowers, and ornaments. Then, suddenly realising that he was no better than an eavesdropper, he returned quickly to the driveway and, walking to the main entrance of the central building, rang the concierge's bell.

The concierge, begging monsieur to have the

goodness to follow, led him across the dimly lighted hall. They passed beneath the open shaft, where the bronze railing of the grand stairway wound up into the silent darkness of the closed stories above, and the sound of their footsteps echoed over the bare marble floor, as the steps of the vergers echo in the silent nave of a church. Against the grey dimness of the side walls were marble statues, some blackened with the stain of centuries, others shrouded in ghastly dust sheets. Between two of the white-swathed figures, at a closed door in the left wall, the concierge pulled a bell. A flat tinkle rang jarringly out of harmony with the sombre dignity of the lofty hallway. Piotrovski by this time keenly regretted the impulse that had impelled him thus far, and had a violent desire to escape.

The door was opened by a smart-looking footman, who announced: "Not at home."

The automatic announcement and the rigid figure of the servant blocking the doorway suddenly changed Piotrovski's longing to escape

into a feeling of flatness and disappointment, as he felt in his pocket for a card. He had none.

“Does monsieur desire pencil and paper?”

He was about to accept the writing tablet which the servant proffered him, when the current of air through the opened door wafted out a faint but unmistakable fragrance. His mood swung instantly back again to the impulse of escape. Hurriedly declining the tablet, he turned to go.

“What name shall I say, monsieur?” the footman insisted.

Piotrovski mumbled his name as he made for the outer door. And once outside, he walked the streets of Paris briskly for at least an hour.

## CHAPTER V

THE next day Piotrovski received this note:

DEAR MONSIEUR: My aunt and I were sorry to miss you this afternoon. Will you breakfast with us to-morrow, at twelve o'clock? My aunt is anxious to make reparation for my criticisms, so I warn you—wear very large pockets to hold her praises.

Until to-morrow, I hope.

VERA DE MARSIN.

Piotrovski sat half dreamily contemplating the note in his hand. He liked the feminine slant of her handwriting, the original formation of some of the letters that was the result of an instinct for clearness and brevity, and not of the vanity that is the basis of nearly all unconventional handwritings. He liked the exactness of the sealing, he liked her choice of paper and her "V," with a microscopic crown above it. "Vera!" That was her Christian name. He

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pronounced it lingeringly and half aloud, as though those two syllables were loath, in their soft-vowelled cadence, to leave his tongue, and he lifted the paper to inhale more distinctly the barely perceptible fragrance.

Then suddenly, with a movement of impatience, he tossed the note upon his desk, and propping his chin in his hand, stared into space gloomily, as he put the question to himself: What was this link with her that he imagined he felt? Unconsciously he set her apart from the other women he had ever known—for nothing would he have her share their fate.

There was at least one thing of which he was certain; any tendency to drift on the sea of sentiment should drop anchor at the start; not so much to keep him out of the way of disagreeable flotsam himself—he had always escaped from entanglements, he coloured even as the recollections forced themselves upon his mind—as because he felt he ought to avoid any uncertain current for her.

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As though to put his resolve into practice, he drew his chair up to desk, wrote a note of regret, addressed and sealed it. No sooner had he done this than he was sorry. After all, was not his concern for her possible pain an act of presumption on his part? What right had he to suppose that his destroying impulses should ever have power to affect the fate of a woman such as she?

He thereupon tore up his first answer, and wrote a second, saying that he would breakfast with pleasure, and sent it off by messenger.

But the next morning there was a great stir at his door. A woman's voice clamoured loudly. Whether it was forbidden, made no matter! She insisted upon seeing monsieur!

Piotrovski, this morning at work in the library, could not but hear, and went out into the hall to see what the commotion meant. He recognised Sophie, a little grisette of the quarter, who looked after Verney's studio.

At the sight of him she burst into tears. Mon-



sieur Verney was sick. So very sick! She was sure he was dying! She threw her apron over her head and lamented stormily. Piotrovski asked questions, but her feelings were too tempestuous to allow of anything except her vociferous repetition that Verney was dying. Piotrovski called a fiacre, put Sophie in it, got in after her, and they galloped toward the bedside of the sick sculptor.

By the time they had skirted the Hôtel des Invalides, she had subsided sufficiently to give an account of what had happened. It seemed she had gone in as usual to take M'sieur Verney's coffee, and found his room still dark. She was about to wake him, but then, she thought, the poor man had been working too hard of late, and she would let him sleep. But after a little while, Lizette, his model, who had been engaged to sit at eight o'clock, came down to the kitchen. Lizette thought his sleeping so late was very strange, so together they went upstairs again. Lizette went first and pushed his shoul-

der gently. He did not move, she leaned over to look at him. *Mon Dieu!* Her screams brought Sophie running. Together they turned him over. They thought he was dead, but no, he breathed. While Lizette telephoned for the doctor, Sophie had run to fetch his friend.

The fiacre turned into the Rue des Saints-Pères, and then again through a first into a second courtyard, upon which Verney's studio opened. Piotrovski paid the cabman and sprang across the sill of the door, broad like that of a barn, which led directly into a huge barracks of a place, filled untidily with fragments and half finished pieces of sculpture. A crooked little staircase ascended to a couple of rooms above, where, out of the chalk and marble dust and wax, Verney lived.

Piotrovski hurried through the atelier, rubbing his coat white on various protruding objects of plaster, stumbled, in his haste up the crooked stairs, thereby chalking trousers to match his coat, and into the room, where, on a

cot that threatened to collapse under his contortions, lay the giant, moaning. The doctor was leaning over him on one side, while Lizette—still dressed for the figure of Ceres, in a couple of metres of crinkled cheesecloth, her hair beautifully banded with what had once been white cotton curtain cords—hovered anxiously on the other. It was a case of poisoning. He loved *marines-vertes*, and it was June. But he was better now. He must have nothing but camomile, the doctor said. Lizette, in her haste to be of use, started off down the stairs before it occurred to her that even the quarter was not exactly used to comely females wandering about the streets with only their hair beautifully dressed. She snatched a blue cotton covering off one of the plaster figures, wrapped herself in it, and, the conventions thus being observed, out she ran to the apothecary for camomile.

After a while the invalid grew better, and the excitement subsided, but Piotrovski remembered the Duchesse de Marsin's breakfast only after

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the hour was long past. Aside from his rudeness in having sent her no word, he felt unaccountably annoyed at the thought that she had perhaps seen him pass her house, and with Sophie. Then his instinct of apprehensiveness of the day before came back, and his mood changed. If the duchesse thought that he had deliberately chosen to go off with a grisette—it was, perhaps, just as well! The outlook was threatening, and fate was wise. Nevertheless, common civility demanded that he send a note. Inconsistently he wrote, therefore:

My friend, Paul Verney, is suddenly ill. A thousand regrets and half as many apologies. When he is better, I shall present myself at your house to pray your indulgence.

PIOTROVSKI.

And notwithstanding his recent welcoming of the all-wise fate that seemed ready to intervene, her answer, which was brought in a short time, made a feeling of warmth steal over his heart.

MONSIEUR: I saw you pass, and feared,

from your expression of anxiety, that the *bonne* of a friend had fetched you on a grave affair. I hope Monsieur Verney will be on the mend shortly. If there is anything I, or my cook, can prepare for him, tell me. I shall be anxious for your news, and glad to receive you at whatever hour you come.

V. DE MARSIN.

By the afternoon Verney, though still weak, was so far recovered that there was nothing further to fear, and Piotrovski betook himself to the de Marsin palace. He was received quite as a friend by the concierge, who said, with a confident manner, that Madame la Duchesse had left word to admit M'sieur Piotrovski when he should come. The little bell having tinkled, he was ushered by the automatic footman through a small antechamber of white, with very little furniture to crowd the limited space, into the room through the open window of which he had previously caught an alluring glimpse.

He sat down on a sofa and looked about. It

was distinctly a woman's room, full of feminine things, intimately associated with their owner. The grey walls were ornamented with very simple mouldings and pilasters. There was a gem of a marble mantel, and above it a Gainsborough landscape. The hangings were of cerise brocade, as was most of the furniture covering, though here and there were odd chairs, covered in old brocades. There was that indefinite number of bibelots, plants, flowers; also pillows, and table covers of oddly assorted embroidery and lace, that women of taste know how to collect and arrange about them.

On the sofa, close beside Piotrovski, just as she had left it, lay her violin. A cushion was indented as though it had but a moment before supported her head. A low table stood close at hand, an envelope thrust into a book to mark her place. The volume was "*Amiel's Journal*," and all through the margins there were pencilled notes, very small and neat. Under this a ponderous book. German! Schopenhauer's "*Welt*

*als Wille und Vorstellung.*" To mark her place, she had left a jewelled pencil, so incongruous with the text of the volume that he found himself smiling. And on the same page, evidently just written, he read: "*Der Reichthum hat Eine Bedeutung meistens für solche die Nichts anderes im Leben haben. Die Armen! Die Reichen sind öfters die wirklichen Armen.*" Then he realised he was eavesdropping, and closed the book abruptly. As he put it down, he caught sight of a volume of his own. He picked it up with just enough scepticism to notice whether the leaves were cut. Again he felt a pleasurable emotion as he saw that the pages fell open easily, as do those of a book much read. Her habit of making notes tempted him to read her thoughts, and he pushed the book aside with regret.

Presently she appeared. Her dress was, as usual, of white, its length of skirt clinging in folds around her feet; yet she walked easily and gracefully, without the threatening effect of

stumbling common to most of those who wear this barbarity of modern fashion. She held out her hand with the manner that one has with a friend whom one sees frequently, and Piotrovski kissed it as though he were unconsciously following an inclination rather than observing a formality that convention decreed.

“And Verney?” she asked.

“Better, thanks. Everything is going well now; but he gave me a fright; I think I scarcely realised before how much he is to me.”

“But now he has his little *femme de ménage* watching over him, so you may be tranquil if you hear no news.” Then she added, smiling: “She will take every care of him, for she is a good girl. Besides, she adores him—like a faithful, good dog, you understand!”

Piotrovski stared, and then he laughed. “One would think you had second sight, madame. I cannot help wondering how you know Sophie.”

She laughed delightedly, “Ah, see! I was



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right! Perhaps one day I will tell you how I know. It is, after all, very simple."

He did not care how she knew, but he felt a sense of gladness at the way she seemed to evolve things for herself. His greatest reason for dislike of women was that they all asked interminable questions and wanted explanations upon all subjects. And, furthermore, when one had taken the trouble to explain, they seemed to throw all the explanation away, like a child that wanted to have his pail filled with sand, only that he might the next instant empty it out again. But with the duchesse he almost felt as though he could see the orderly messengers of her brain putting every idea into its right place.

They talked for a while on a variety of subjects, and then he held out to her the violin. She took it without protest, quite as a matter of course, and placed it against her throat, but with her right arm hanging limply at her side. Then her eyes half closed, and after a moment she lifted the bow. She played a Hungarian lullaby,

a simple melody that Piotrovski knew well; but in her interpretation he felt a rhythm that suggested the swaying of tree branches by the wind blowing on a hillside. The pastoral feeling that she put into it was extraordinary. Then all at once she urged her melody into a rapid, vibrant air, as though the calm hillside had suddenly opened into the crater of a volcano.

Piotrovski felt the blood surge to his heart; he stared, amazed, at this exquisite, cool, fragrant, irreproachable woman of the world, who, from some hidden corner of her soul, could produce the most sensuous, pulse-disturbing music imaginable. Yet, still her face remained impenetrably calm, her eyes closed. He wondered if she even knew how she played. Or was the song the manifestation of some inexplicable force, merely singing through her, while she herself was unconscious of its effect? In the same instant the music ended with a sudden break, her eyes opened, and a flash of the music's madness gleamed between her lashes.

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But the next moment their glance met his so tranquilly that it seemed as though his overstrained imagination had been playing him tricks. He hardly knew which trait of her personality most excited his interest and admiration—her flexibility or her control, her fire or her coldness, her vivid, brilliant smile, or her sombre, fateful eyes. After this she played a song of Chopin's. But now it was the woman of the world who played, the pupil who had studied technique under the best masters. To her very finger tips she was the Parisian in whose adamantine polish there was no flaw, and who was deliberately, though graciously, turning the side toward her visitor which she chose that he should see.

## CHAPTER VI

THE Princess Mitzka, counting "eighty-nine, ninety!" set the worsted on her needle to begin a new afghan. Then she knitted the first row carefully, after which she paid no further attention to her work and her needles clicked on as mechanically and evenly as the clock.

There was a strong similarity between the princess and her knitting; warm and soft, and altogether comfortable, it exactly expressed her. In her youth, she had been extremely slender, and in age she was not fat; but she had acquired a becoming rotundity, just sufficient to smooth out threatening wrinkles and to keep her skin young and fresh. Her eyes, still deep blue, and with dark lashes, had retained a remarkably childlike expression. Her hair, although perfectly white, was luxuriantly thick, and ar-

ranged in a series of ringlets and puffs that had always the effect of being a powdered headdress rather than the cap of age. She still retained the receptive attitude of a child, as though her thoughts, busy as might be, were easily engaged and ready to receive anything that was offered.

When a young girl she had been betrothed to an Austrian officer, who died on the day they were to be married, and all her life she had remained faithful to his memory, living in a dream world of her own and enshrining therein her ideal of love and romance. She took the keenest interest in all young married people; especially in their babies, for whom she had unceasingly, during twenty years, knitted socks, jackets, and afghans. In fact, she had established herself as a sort of universal "aunt" to the entire country surrounding her home. Upon the death of the Duc de Marsin she had come by the first train to her niece, and except for short absences had been with her ever since.

She was at this moment sitting by the open

window of the salon in the Rue de l'Université. Every now and then, as the sound of a passing vehicle echoed on the wooden pavement, or as the voices of people walking past reached her, she looked out into the garden. Sometimes she hummed a part of a tune, but the placidity of her expression indicated clearly that time made very little difference; she seemed perfectly content to sit and think of nothing in particular.

At five o'clock a servant entered, and set a table directly before her with a large silver tray containing sweet drinks, tea, biscuits, and cakes. The princess laid aside her knitting and took a glass of orangeade and a sweet biscuit, exactly like a good little girl who has had her supper put before her. As she took a second mouthful, a carriage rolled into the driveway, and in a few moments the Duchesse de Marsin entered through the long window from the garden. She nodded, with a smile, to the princess, crossed over to the table, and drank a whole glass of sugared water down at one draught.

“That is good—I was so thirsty! Ah, but it is hot! You did right, dear aunt, to stay indoors; it feels quite cool here, which I assure you it is not in the streets.”

Then more leisurely she poured herself a small cup of tea, drew a chair close up to her aunt, and sat down. The princess let her knitting rest on her lap. It was evident that she listened with eager attention—not that she waited for any especial news, but her mind being almost always unencumbered with thoughts of its own, she delighted on hearing even the most trivial affairs of others.

The duchesse stirred her tea. “I went to the Salon,” she explained. “Daubs, for the most part, though, of course, there were some good things. A portrait by Sargeant was marvellous! And there was a picture by Bluet—I went back to it again and again!” She helped herself to a pastry and then said casually: “The first thing to-morrow morning you must go and buy it!”

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"I?" the princess exclaimed, in mild astonishment, but without a sign of protest.

Her niece paid no attention to the question. "It is the most noticeable canvas at the Salon—at least, I thought so. It is called 'The Poet.' It is the picture of a Breton peasant sitting on a bleak stretch of sand and looking out to sea. He wears a workman's blouse that the wind has blown a little open at the throat. The composition is not remarkable, but it is full of air and life and imagination. You can almost feel the sea wind on your face and smell the salt of the spray; you can almost share the dreams of the poet as he gazes far out over and beyond the unbroken horizon. The catalogue gives merely its title, but I am sure Piotrovski sat for it, although there is more suggestion of his spirit than of his actual features."

"And you want me to buy it. But what shall I do with it?"

The duchesse laughed. "Not *really*, my



aunt; but I do not want my name given. Do you see?"

The princess saw, best of all, that she was being let into a secret—one of those small strata-gems that so appeal to children—and Vera's needing her help so pleased her that for the moment it prevented even the forming of an opinion.

The duchesse suddenly noticed a tray full of visitors' cards.

"Who has been here?" She picked them up eagerly and looked through them as she spoke; then put them back listlessly. "Nobody," she said half absently. "Was there no one else?"

"But Vera, dear! How many visitors do you want? I had been thinking it was quite a reception day! And you say no one!"

The duchesse shrugged her shoulders. "Did you see them?"

"I saw only Madame de Broc and Madame de Pierrefonds. The others all came while I

was having my nap. Madame de Pierrefonds says you must take the flower booth at the bazaar. She won't take no for an answer. Madame de Broc was really chagrined that you were not at her ball last night—she came to see if you were ill. She entreated me to make you go out more. Every one wants to know what you do with yourself. You have hardly been to a ball this season.

“Am I to dance on and on, like the step-mother at Snow White's wedding? I am no longer a young girl—to live for the wearing out of dancing shoes—three pairs a week! Should you like me to be like poor old Baronne Blanc, struggling madly for the left-over crumbs of attention that the young and beautiful women let fall?”

The princess looked aghast. “Vera! How can you talk like that, you who are so beautiful, so wonderful, so accomplished?” The old lady was almost in tears.

The duchesse laughed merrily, then suddenly

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her expression softened to tenderness, "Dear aunt! Could I be but a small part of what your affection pictures me! But seriously, you know how little the general world of society interests me. Small dinners and parties among real friends are one thing, but a great crush such as the Pierrefonds' last night—oh, no!"

"You had a beautiful time at the Chalines', didn't you?"

"Yes—you dear, you!" The duchesse smiled. "But that was because I met Captain Lechborne, just back from the Soudan. I also had an enchanting evening in the same house a month ago. I like to go to the Chalines'."

For once the princess retorted, "Yes, I was at that party, and you wasted a whole evening with a most queer little being who talked about bugs. You told me so yourself."

Vera laughed outright. "Herr Schnapps! I had a rare evening. No one in the world knows so much of the habits of ants as he. For

days afterward I watched ant hills, trying to see something of their marvellous citadel, but my helpless, stupid eyes saw only scurrying insects in a sand heap. I wish I might spend days with Herr Schnapps and have him show me. The only people in the world worth knowing are those who have accomplished something! Ah, I worship accomplishment! I adore people who really know something, who can *do* something, *be* something, I don't care what! I would rather marry a cobbler, if he made the best shoes in the world, than an emperor, unless his own efforts had made him emperor! Like Napoleon! He was a little upstart Corsican! I probably should have despised him quite as much as did Marie Louise—yet I should have adored him. Oh, why was I not a man born with a talent? Or why was it denied me to be a mother of sons—that I might have had something *real* to live for?"

She got up, took off her hat, and picked up her violin and began, as though quite absent-

minded, to play a dirge. The corners of the princess's mouth went down in prompt sympathetic depression. Vera stopped playing and looked at the rug. After a while she said slowly:

“ You—not even you—can appreciate what I felt when I found out that Eugene had no talent. Had he appreciated the fact himself, my personal disappointment would have deepened into sympathy for him; but his self-complacency arrested my every kindly impulse. He was so satisfied with the effect he thought he was producing that there was no space left in his small capacity for anything else. I can't help contrasting him with Piotrovski, who flaunts none of the gaudy banners of self-satisfied mediocrity. He has not even a mannerism by which a stranger could distinguish him from the average well-bred man one sees anywhere.

“ By the way ”—there was the barest shade of evasion and of excitement as she added this —“ I saw Verney and Piotrovski for a moment

at the Salon and asked them to dine with us to-night. At first, they declined. They, it seems, were dining with Bluet and Charante, the editor of the *Revue du Monde*, and they said they did not suppose we would want them all. I said, of course, we did. Piotrovski was quite amusing, and remarked I was lucky to get only four, as their usual number was six. I replied I regretted that we were to see only four. Piotrovski thereupon accepted in the name of all six for the first evening I could name. Verney got quite embarrassed, but Piotrovski laughed aloud." She sounded a bell, and then came over and sat on the footstool at her aunt's knees. Her voice rang joyously. "At all events, four of the greatest celebrities in Paris are coming to dine with—just you and me. Why go out into a crush of nondescripts when we have the most splendid society imaginable all by ourselves here at home?"

She told the footman who answered the bell that there would be six at dinner. Then she

went back to the description of the Salon. "I did not tell you, did I? Verney's statue of Pan is of Piotrovski, too.

"Pan is holding his pipes in his left hand as if about to play. The right hand is raised as though the fingers were shaping themselves for the position in which he will place them, and on his face there is the expression of elf-boy mischievousness, a hint of contraction of the laughter muscles, and yet over the whole countenance, like a veil of magic, he has cast imagination and poetry. It is only faintly suggestive of Bluet's picture, but it is evident that both he and Verney have taken an expression of Piotrovski's for their inspiration. In Bluet's picture there is a strong likeness, but in the statue the entire figure in his without disguise; the hands are his exactly. In fact, I have noticed that Verney models Piotrovski's hands for half of his things—whenever he wants to express art, activity, or beauty. The face has something of him, too. The mixture of keenness and dreaminess, wis-

dom and youth, and the childlike, heartless intolerance of the feelings of others that belong to it as well; in other words, that subtle and ingenuous, simple yet aloof mixture that makes up the personality of Piotrovski."

The princess looked suddenly troubled as she asked with gentle alarm: "Vera, isn't Monsieur Piotrovski married?"

"I believe he is. There is some mystery about his wife, but either I have never heard or else I have forgotten what it is. He has not told me. After all, why should he?"

The princess' troubled expression was tinged with an old-maid's sentiment. "The first thing you know, he will be in love with you, poor man! You should think of that, my dear!"

Unaccountably, Vera flushed. "There is very little danger—for him!" she added in a curiously subdued voice.

Piotrovski! Piotrovski! Her mind echoed the name; take up what subject she would, her thoughts circled around him! She hated her



evasions, yet she had been unable to take up her narrative in sequence. Three times she had tried to announce his coming to dinner before she had succeeded in pronouncing the words, and after describing Bluet's picture she was utterly unable to tell the princess about Verney's statue, although she was thinking of it all the time. She shut her thoughts in now, behind closed eyes, and played—until the princess was almost ready to cry out—exercises.

## CHAPTER VII

THE friendship between Piotrovski and the duchesse developed so rapidly that they soon drifted into the habit of seeing each other almost daily. Yet instead of the plunge into unreserved confidences usual to most people in their situation of mutual sympathy, they scarcely ever talked personalities. The duchesse, in particular, though quite candid in expressing her thoughts upon subjects in the abstract, really seemed to dislike talking about herself—and for that matter, she very seldom mentioned people. Her old nurse, Emma,—a close mouthed German—had brought her up with the maxim: “People we don’t like are not worth talking about, and the people we like we shouldn’t talk about,” and the duchesse lived up to the letter of this dictum.

Occasionally she said, "My brother Imre has written," and once she showed him a scrap of paper all covered with the generous scribbling of a pencil guided by a little child's hand. There was a light in her eyes that he had never seen before as she said: "It is from my baby—Tanya. She has learned to make X's, the darling!"

"Your baby!" A sense of loss suddenly caught Piotrovski, as though their friendship had been a pretence merely and she had kept from him the side of herself which was real.

"No." The regret in her tone was unmistakable. "Not my own baby—I never had any of my own."

Occasionally, like this, she gave some clue to her feelings, and out of an impression here and its confirmation there, Piotrovski gathered an estimate that accorded with his first impression of her. She had a great heart, a great faith, and the truth of her was as profound as the shadow look in her eyes.

As the friendship grew, Verney, too, began to go frequently to the charming apartment of the Rue de l'Université. That the enigmatical personality of the duchesse had produced its effect upon the sculptor as well as upon the poet was evident to the latter by the discovery, one day in his friend's studio, of a small study of her—her head merely.

As Piotrovski caught sight of it a flare of irritability came into his face, but it was as quickly put aside. After a time he said slowly:

“ I wonder, Paul, what gives the effect of mystery that clings about her? Has she, do you think, lived before in other centuries? Do those subtle shadows come from the memories of many lives and deaths? I thought it a trick of my own mind, but you see you have it too!” It had been the sudden consciousness of Verney's observation having been as accurate as his own that at first sight of the statue had irritated him. His sense of fairness made him now doubly frank in an effort of reparation, but his tone

had a ring of triumph in it as he said, "You have not defined the eyes distinctly—you see, you can't!"

Verney acknowledged simply, "I wish I could. She would make an amazing model for a modern sphinx. What is she really like, Jan? You know her well."

"Yes, I know her well and yet—I can't say that I read her thoughts—or know her real self any better than I did the evening I was presented to her."

Verney threw back his leonine head and laughed, "Nonsense! You see her for hours at a time!"

Piotrovski, being in a particularly amiable and expansive frame of mind, shrugged his shoulders and answered good naturedly: "You have spent hours looking at her every feature, yet—can you reproduce her even as she seems to be? It is the same with her friendship—it is not that she is aloof or secretive, yet her personality reminds me always of the sun's reflec-

tion on the surface of a pool. Perhaps her real self—like the pool, remains limpid and clear and unconscious of the sun's confusing aid! She is, I am sure, always true and sweet, but fate, taking the sun's place, confuses our sight."

To Verney, women were human things of the opposite sex—pools were small bodies of water. Being a perfectly simple soul—(his cosmos was one-celled according to his own description) he lit his pipe and went on chizzling, letting Piotrovski talk, which he did at length.

A day or two after this the Princess Mitzka, the duchesse, and Verney lunched with Piotrovski. It was the first time the duchesse had ever seen his house and garden, and after luncheon he showed her about with the evident joy of a child displaying his treasures to a playmate who is sure to appreciate them as much as himself. Verney, in the regulation rôle of friend, was trying his best to interest the Princess Mitzka. A collection of old firearms was his haphazard selection for a theme—a lecture, really, delivered

quite as though it were addressed to his pupils at the Beaux Arts. He explained how the powder was rammed down the barrel and lighted by the flint.

"Yes? And it goes right off? Ah, yes, how very interesting!" Then with a glimmer of inspiration, she asked: "The little stones make the fire, is that it?"

"That's it exactly," Verneys wide-apart eyes smiled encouragement.

The princess smiled in return. "I wonder," she observed confidingly, "why they did not use a match?"

Suddenly she asked Verney's advice—she was always asking advice, a habit which often led to confusion when she tried to follow simultaneously that of several contradictory counsellors. She now wondered whether she had better take a train earlier on Saturday so as not to have to travel on Sunday. And out of this meagre material they found that by a little turning and twisting they made conversation very well.

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To Piotrovski and the duchesse, on the other hand, the moments went skimming by as softly and as perfectly as a summer breeze. They had gone out into the garden, and sat down on the rim of the lotus pool. The little fountain splashed softly upon the ever-thirsty flowers, and filled the wide leaf rings to the brim. The sun shone through the vines of the pergola, and made golden patches over the duchesse's cream-coloured cloth dress, and displayed the exquisite whiteness of her skin—with not a bit of powder on it—and flecked with coppery glints the fine hairs about her temples.

For the first time she had let down the barriers of her habitual reticence and talked of herself. "I remember when I was a child," she was saying, "I used to think that when I grew up I would be famous. Above all, I wanted to be a great composer. I never told any one—because I cared really, and could not bear to have what was so serious to me ridiculed. But it was never out of my mind." Her smile was



half reminiscent, half amused, as one who with sympathy remembers past failures that no longer hurt. "I could not grasp, then, the difference between mechanical and creative work. It took years of failure to realise it fully. No, I understand my own ability thoroughly—my own limitations. I have a true musical ear and a good memory; I can play almost anything after having heard it once. But I have not a spark—not one—of the creative gift." She half shut her eyes. "I wonder if all people worship genius as I do? To me it is the one human attribute that is immortal—no, there are two, genius and love. But I put genius first—even though I am a woman."

Piotrovski's quick sympathy understood. "I don't believe," he said, "that there can be appreciation without experience. You understand the creative temperament too well to be without it yourself; for some reason you have not found a means of expression—that is all. Nothing is

given without reason; your ambition is not at all of the ordinary, a force like that can't be unproductive entirely; there would be no order in the world otherwise."

She shook her head, but, even as she did so, the wonted radiance came fully into her smile.

"My grandfather, who was a very silent man, used to say: 'What would eloquence avail if there were no listeners?' And in that maxim is my comfort. What would be the use of achievement in art, if there were none to appreciate it? Artists, of course, admire the creations of fellow artists, but I don't think a rival's enjoyment can ever be the same as that of one who is merely a lover, and not a creator, of the beautiful. I am sure if I could compose I should not have the same feeling of personal possession in another's music that I have now.

"I remember, when my husband was painting"—she hesitated, and then went on, with

some evidence of effort, as though she were suddenly determined, now that she had begun, to show Piotrovski the whole of her castle, to take him into the buried dungeons as well as the state apartments. "For a long time, at first, in my ignorance, I believed in his new school of art. I felt that purple women and pink cows were something I had to learn to appreciate. And when I found I couldn't, and began coolly to estimate not only his work but his attitude toward it, the disillusion I felt seemed to spread over every one. I imagined all artists to be shallow egotists, strutting about in queer clothes and trying to cultivate some eccentric pose, and for the most part wasting their time and canvas." Again the faintly hesitant quality came into her voice. "It has meant more to me than you probably imagine—just to know what such men as you, and Verney, and Bluet, are accomplishing. And now, to feel that I even have a place in your friendship—it is quite wonderful!"

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She sprang up lightly, as though to counteract the effect of her mood, verging too nearly on the emotional.

“Look at that lumbering bumblebee!” She pointed whimsically. “Buzzing noisily, making all the fuss, and close beside him the little honeybee. She has no time to stop and sing a tune. See, her little baskets are nearly full of gold!” She straightened up, took a deep breath, threw her small head back, and laughed a happy delicious laugh of pure joyousness. “Oh, what a beautiful day! A glorious day in a glorious world! I’m glad—just to be alive. Aren’t you?”

Piotrovski laughed like a boy. “It’s an adorable hour, of an adorable day, and I exult to be alive! I do!”

And then they walked up through the pergola to the little summerhouse. In their regard for each other there was a new feeling—of understanding, of intimacy; and as he led her into the summerhouse he was conscious of an

impelling desire not only to show her, but to share with her, his things; to put her in the centre of his household gods, to surround her with everything that, until that moment, had been exclusively, debarringly his.

“You see, when the weather is good I work here. Sit here in my chair, so you can get my view up the river. Don't you like my vista of flowers and this glimpse of the lotus pool? I very much like my lotus pool—colour, fragrance form; the drops of water falling, falling in even cadence, in ever-renewing freshness; it is all full of the imagery of the East. You would never suppose, would you, that the heart of Paris could be so near?”

He chattered on, drifting along the mood of the moment, just as a small boy drifts happily down a running stream on a summer holiday morning. He did not try to check his mood's most trivial turning, although he knew instinctively that his every impulse must be obvious to the duchesse.

"See what a good nib my pen has!" he said boyishly. "I write on this sort of paper."

Using his pen, she wrote a line at random. It was from Petrarch: "*Tu che in un sol giorno poi ristorar molt' anni.*"

He was quite right in his divination; she knew as well as though she had been told in words, that ordinarily he hated to have any one use these very things that he was urging upon her. And she looked at him as a woman is wont to look when the man who interests her most of all the world, unbars a little inner gate of his castle to let her enter a private apartment that is not opened to any one else. How does she know? How does a plant know when it is springtime?

On his desk was a miniature. Even in the soft painting of the face she thought a Spartan hardness was suggested; yet the features were like Piotrovski's. "It was my mother," he told her. "Painted by Leibnitz when she was a bride." He looked at it sadly. "What a cruel

thing it was that she who most loved me——” He broke off. “My poor mother, had she only understood me, might have guided—and yet, perhaps not!”

Piotrovski had become grave. He seated himself on the table, folded his arms, and for some moments sat silent, looking down steadily at the duchesse. The latter looked up without interrogation, but with her entire attention.

“For some time,” he said at last, “I have begun, in my own mind, if not aloud to you, to call you my friend. Therefore, I have determined to tell you certain things. You may know them, but I think you ought to hear them from me—not that I think my story will be a revelation; a woman of your worldly knowledge can certainly judge of the race of men well enough to estimate me—yet there are facts which we should be children to ignore. We are becoming friends, we are approaching nearer and nearer the inner gardens of each other’s lives, and in mine there are some dark pits that it would not

be honest of me to let you stumble upon un-awares. I must show them in all their ugliness. Then it shall be for you to decide whether you shall choose to come into the garden, knowing, yet ignoring them, or whether you shall go quickly away and leave it and me abandoned."

He spoke with unusual slowness—as a rule he talked rapidly—and he looked directly and sombrely at her. "I am going to make a clean breast of it to you—may I?"

Little thrills of excitement, even though she half feared and dreaded what he was going to say, made her heart beat like a trip hammer. But she met his gaze steadfastly, without revealing any emotion other than her entire readiness to listen. "Tell me all you like, my friend," she said.

"Without reserve?"

"Yes—if you will."

He gave her one further glance of scrutiny; then took the plunge. "I will tell you, as honestly as I can, the truth. Well then! I have



hurt every one who has ever liked me, I have crippled every one who has tried to lean upon me, I have broken the heart of every soul that has loved me."

The duchesse drew a short, quick breath, but her feelings were hidden behind a mask. She looked at him quietly, as one of those rare friends who care, and understand, but who have no curiosity.

Piotrovski continued, finding his words carefully: "Verney is the only intimate friend I have ever kept. The other four—although we are known as inseparables—are not inmates of my inner gardens, they do not know, even, that they exist; they see me only superficially and when I am in a sufficiently amiable mood. And between them and me stands Verney—to keep them from knowing me as I am. Yet though I can bar my garden gates and lock myself in indefinitely, I have hurt even their feelings time and time again. And I have hurt Verney infinitely more. That his and my friendship

stands unimpaired is an evidence of the greatness of his loyalty—not my deserts. Of course he knows I care for him as sincerely as I am capable of caring, he knows that ordinarily I would give him all that friendship could ask; but occasionally I get into a certain mood, and then I would refuse him a crust of bread, even though his life depended upon it. Even he, I am afraid, some day will demand something of me, and I will fail him in a way that will be impossible for him to forgive.” He broke off. “You don’t understand, do you? Nobody can.”

“You mean if any one *asks* you for something, then you cannot give it?”

“No, no, that is not it. Ordinarily I am amiable enough; I am only too glad to do anything desired of me. But occasionally when a piece of work is shaping itself in my mind, it is as though something took possession of me, and I cannot control my own actions. To those who know me slightly, it is not apparent; I am quite amiable with them, because they don’t try to

get through my barricade of manner, and don't try to know what is going on within me. It is *that* which makes me a fiend! There is no other word for it. Above all, I detest those who insist on trying to make me take a rest; or drink beef tea; or even dine on a certain day and at a fixed hour. I am really out of tune with my fellow men, and with women far more. Yet one or two of them have been ill-starred enough to love me, and many others have imagined they did."

Vera's instinct might have been to resent this last, had not his unconsciousness robbed it of all conceit, and in spite of the egotism that his confession revealed, a feeling of blissful elation enveloped her, because of his willingness to take her so intimately close to his inmost self. Obviously he was baring his very heart, without reserve, without extenuating pleas of any kind; he was turning the searchlight of self-examination into every corner without the least attempt to gloss over or to hide.

“The reason why certain women should fancy they love me is simple enough,” he continued gloomily. “They have too little to occupy their minds, and all of them want sympathy. I write something from my own soul, and it travels until it meets, and perhaps answers, the thoughts that have been struggling dumbly in the souls of others. That is natural. All human beings are affected more or less with the same hopes, doubts, longings, and despair. But those who read forget that a poet’s pen is merely the instrument by which things greater and deeper than the conscious productions of his own puny mind find expression. A poet is a seer, a medium, a clairvoyant, or he has no right to the name. Yet those who read my books and see my plays forget that I have given them all the best of which my heart, and brain, are capable, and that I, the man, am often mute and empty-hearted as they.

“Often I meet perfect strangers who tell me all the sorrows and secrets of their lives, because

in this or that stanza I have expressed such and such a feeling that seems in accord with their own. Sometimes I have yielded to the moment's impulse of sympathy, but that, especially in the case of women, is fatal; inevitably it runs to sentimental relations of one sort or another, and in any event, they regard me as their own undisputed property, and that is the one thing I cannot endure from any one. Leave me alone, free and unhampered, and I will wander around after a kind person like a good animal, but slip a chain on me, and something within me surges up in rebellion, breaking everything in sight and injuring me as well.

“My mother ought to have understood me, but she did no better than the rest, or she would never have urged my marriage. No—I want to tell you about that, too, and then I shall let it alone. In the next estate to ours in Poland, there was a pretty girl. Her father and mine were great friends, our land adjoined, my mother was fond of her. People have said in

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my defence that my mother brought about the match, but that is not true, although she did encourage it. Her timidity fearing that my irresponsibility might lead to wildness, she imagined no doubt, that marriage would steady me. But all this is far from the point. The girl was quite attractive, a blonde, with wide blue eyes, a weak but pretty mouth, a plumply rounded figure, and skin that looked fresh and sweet. I tell you this to lead up to what follows.

“I cared nothing at all about her. Although I danced with her sometimes, and she came often to our house, it would have ended there had I not discovered that a neighbour's son—a life-long friend of mine—was seriously in love with her, and that she was undoubtedly casting sheep's eyes, china doll's eyes, rather, in his direction. I saw him looking at her smooth, white throat, I saw him looking at her pretty mouth, and suddenly I was filled with a desire to make that throat and mouth my own. Not so much because I wanted to kiss them myself

as to prevent his kissing them, and to let him know that I had the right to kiss them. Therefore, while he, with the diffidence of the heart that cares, was making slow progress in his suit, shyly taking a faltering step, and then in fear and awe retreating again, I, with the sudden action of capricious passion and real heart's coldness, kissed her! She struggled a little, blushed a lot, and then kissed me back again.

“ I was very young, and the mysterious force of physical emotion deluded me, no less than it has millions of others, into a fancied love. So much so, that I even partially succeeded in excusing to myself the treachery to my friend by calling it the ‘decree of fate,’ and all that sort of thing. I considered it a return to primeval times. Might was right. He had been a dullard weakling, and I, as a reward of dashing prowess, had carried off the prize.

“ We were soon married, my unsuccessful rival left the country, and I thought no more

about him. Aside from the dastardly motive that made me take the first step, the prospect of my marriage did not promise so badly. I imagined myself quite in love, and my wife, I think, really cared for me, but that did not prevent her from soon finding me impossible, and trying to make me into the conventional type of husband. She became overdemonstrative one moment, exacting the next, and I became proportionately chilled and bad tempered. I cannot bear to be disturbed when I work. If people interrupt me, I am resentful, and not only for the moment—I never forgive them for it. I explained as often as I could, and as clearly, that when I was locked up in my room, no matter what happened, I would not be spoken to. So then she used to come to the door, tap softly, and *whisper!* As if it made any difference whether she scratched softly on the panel or beat the door down! Continually she cried and cast reproachful looks at me.”



Piotrovski sat perfectly still all this time, with his arms folded, speaking in a low, but distinct voice, and with very little emphasis.

“Of course, in the failure of our marriage, she was in no way to blame. She was created for domestic happiness, and she has been robbed of the right of wifehood, and the joy of motherhood. Fate, with blindness of justice, has allowed her to be the sufferer in every way, while I, the offender, have escaped free. Yet I was powerless to do differently; everything she needed, I lacked; everything I could not tolerate, she became. It was a case of utter incompatibility for both of us. Had she been married to a good man, fond of his home—best of all, a farmer—she and he would have been perfectly happy. They would have been interested together in every detail of house and farm; they would have minutely figured profit and expenditure, down to the smallest *polushka*, and read them over each time there was nothing to talk about!

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“But as for me, at the very mention of accounts I felt as though I had a fever. I hated all detail and regularity, but that was not the worst of it—most of all I hated repetition. I could stand almost anything the first time, the second time was hard to bear, and the third was impossible. In less than three months after my marriage, I hated my wife, my house, my life, everything, to such a degree that I was afraid of what violence I might do if I stayed any longer. So I left!

“Twice, after short periods of remorse and pity, I went back in a penitent and contrite frame of mind, with a full intention of making a model husband. The first time I stood it out with apparent amiability for over a month; the second time I stayed two days. That was six years ago. Had she cared less and let me alone, we might have got along passably, at least; but I am not a sturdy oak to bear the clinging of tender vines; I pulled that one up by the roots, and took all the air and sunshine for myself.”

Piotrovski's lips curled disdainfully; he at last unfolded his arms, shrugged his shoulders, and stuffed his hands into his pockets. His voice had a grating sound in its staccato tones, as though he bit off the syllables.

"That is a charming history for a man who writes from the pure and lofty heights of romantic ideals, isn't it? No—nor is that all! You have heard the story of Madame X. It was a vulgar scandal, and it was madness for her to have testified as she did. My family and my friends tried to hush it. Only half the world believes, I am told—but——" he looked sullenly at the carpet—"every word of what she said about me was true. Then there are the other sort; I have not known many, but I deserted them, too. One in particular cared, and gave up a lot for me; I was fond of her, I was really—but I behaved no better to her than to the rest."

Suddenly the sharpness went out of his voice, and he spoke only dejectedly—sadly—with that

quality of helpless appeal which catches the listener's sympathy and holds it, regardless of reason. He was as wistfully troubled as a child who has broken the toy he only wanted to play with.

“ There is something wrong with me. I don't myself know what it is. Except in the original intention toward my wife, I have not been a cad, I have not the instincts of a rake. My heart and mind are utterly absorbed in my work, until I am overtired, and then—well then, I go to pieces, emotionally. Impulses, not always of the best, get the better of me. Sometimes they hold me completely, but never for long. And each time I return to myself ashamed, and vowing more self-control in future. No, I am not a rake. I do not want entanglements; God knows I do not want to make conquests of good sort or bad; I want to go along peacefully without injuring any living thing, and yet—I have caused more hurt in comparison to my insignificant self than can be imagined. I have a qual-

ity—I don't know what it is—that makes people give me what I want. I have a quality of transient sympathy, a sympathy of instinct more than of reason, and therefore, like my character, undependable. I feel and care really for the time being, and then suddenly my mind grows restless and has to break away.

“I have told you I am not fit to associate with. And yet—it sounds trite; it is, I believe, what all men say—and yet, by the force of this confession, which I do not think is one that all men would make to the person whose opinion they are anxious to win, I ask you to believe me when I say that my friendship for you is not like anything that I have ever felt in my life before. Emotion and impulse had no part in its building, and, above all, I have wanted its foundation to be truth. That is why I have told you all this.” He held out his hands in his own characteristic way, as he asked wistfully: “And now—do you go away and leave me, or do you stay my friend?”

For a long time there was silence; behind the smooth mask of the Duchesse de Marsin's expression there was no hint of the varying emotion that she had been feeling. Through all his long confession she had not interrupted by a word. At last, and with some hesitation, as though she sought to convince him, but with little conviction herself, she said:

“Don't you think it might become possible for you to go back? You might find her a very different woman now. No one could go through what she has suffered and remain unchanged. You—you ought to go back!”

Piotrovski jerked up his chin. “Never! Besides, even if I would, and if she were willing to have me, it is too late. She has abandoned the world and gone into a retreat.” He paused and looked gloomily at the floor, then he added: “She was always very devout. I hope she may at least find peace in the life she has chosen.”

“Would you quite say that she had chosen it? Forgive me, that was not kind! Especially, as

I know you are telling me all this about yourself, not because you want to confide in some one, or any one, but—because we have come to that fork in the road where your road is also mine.”

He took her answer as a matter of course. “Yes, that is right.” Then, after a moment, he asked: “What sort of road do you suppose we are to follow?”

She spread her hands out, but did not answer, and he continued instead:

“I wonder how we came to the cross-road? In fact, I wonder how our paths happened to meet at all? How was it that you remembered a chance man standing at the door of a railway carriage? Did I stare at you so impertinently that you could not but feel it? I am sure that is not true, for if I had, you would never have received me so kindly when I was presented to you.”

She smiled and shook her head. “I can tell

you easily. You appealed to me like a child in distress. 'I wish I might help him,' was what I thought."

And then, again with all the irresponsibility of a child that does not measure what it asks, with a child's complete forgetfulness of a subject that has been closed, he leaned suddenly toward her, his eyes beseeching, his lips slightly apart.

"Will you really help me? Ah, will you? I *do* need you! I need you as I have needed no one, in all my life, and yet every word that I have told you is true, my crying need of you is true, but all the while—even now, in the presence of your dear personality—I feel an underlying instinct calling all that is honest in me to warn you to beware! To warn you that in me there is much of the vampire! To warn you that I take from every one I meet—and give nothing in return!"

But what woman that ever lived listened to



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warnings given by others against the one man in the world to her? And when those warnings are uttered by his own lips, has a woman ever been known to believe, or, believing, to heed? The Duchesse de Marsin was no exception to all the rest.

## CHAPTER VIII

THE old Princess Mitzka had gone from Budapest to Baden-Baden. Spring had long ago turned into summer, but still the Duchesse de Marsin lingered in Paris. Finally, however, the urging letters of her family induced her to join them in Baden. She was going in her motor car, and in order to cover the distance in a one-day run, she was obliged to start at six o'clock in the morning. Yet, even at this unreasonable hour, both Piotrovski and Verney came to see her off. They had helped put her belongings into her car, and just as all was ready, her maid in front with the chauffeur, her valises strapped on behind, Piotrovski exclaimed half whimsically:

“I don't want you to go—alone!”

“Here is plenty of room!” Smiling, she motioned to the wide, half-empty seat.

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"I will! *Parbleu*, yes!" And with that he sprang into the car and took his place beside her. Both he and the duchesse laughed, and he called back to Verney as the machine started: "Send Léon with my things to the—are you going to the Stéphanie?—send my things to the Europe!" And away they went.

No one could have been more surprised at the impulse he had followed than Piotrovski himself. Baden had no particular attraction for him, and in all probability he would be able to see very little of the duchesse. Her family were all to be there, and she would naturally be forced into an active social life in which he had little part. The idea of his folly occurred to him before they had passed the fortifications, but he shrugged his shoulders. After all, why worry about what might happen when they got there? In the meantime, he had a long, glad, joyous day that must run well into evening before they could even arrive.

They breakfasted on coffee they had brought

in a thermos bottle, crescent rolls, and honey. All the while the car was going, and the coffee threatened to spill, and the honey stuck to everything it could, and the crescents would crumb over the floor. But they lunched on chicken, cheese, and Bar-de-luc jelly, at a little village an hour beyond Châlons; they dined on trout, lettuce, and pâté de foie gras, at a chalet perched on the side of the Vosges Mountains, and they arrived finally amid the glory of a full moon, which to Piotrovski, in spite of his earlier optimism, seemed emblematical of dark hours to follow. He left her at the door of the Stéphanie, and betook himself dejectedly to the Hotel Europe.

The *portier* of the Stéphanie had welcomed the duchesse with that inimitable manner of obsequious dignity and that personal pride in being on conversational terms with "our" nobility characteristic of European servants. The "conversation" was chiefly to the effect that the illustrious Szapary family was occupying the

same apartment they were in the habit of having.

The duchesse crossed the hall, and, declining the lift, ascended the wide stairway. After walking a short distance along the corridor of the first floor, she entered, without waiting for an answer to her knock, a large apartment made homelike by many personal belongings. There were two persons in the room. The Countess Szapary was lying half asleep on a sofa; her husband was sitting by the lamp, reading. The count arose quickly. He was thin, quite tall, and very dark, a sombre likeness of the duchesse. There was a vivid suggestion of her in his smile, and in his tenderness of manner as he kissed her.

“I am so glad you have come, my dear. Let me see how you look! You look very pretty, but tired. Are you well?”

“Splendid—never better in my life!”

“I am glad. When did you leave Paris? Yesterday?”

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Instantly her eyes danced. "No, my brother! This morning!"

"This morning! It is impossible."

"That is just why I did it! Every one said it could not be done. We left at six this morning. It was not hard at all. I drove all the afternoon run myself. It was glorious!"

The countess, meanwhile, had risen sleepily from the sofa and had embraced her sister-in-law. She was fair-haired, short, and inclined to stoutness, with a compactness of outline that suggested a sawdust doll. She stood for a few moments with her head leaning up against Vera's, as though too sleepy to stand alone, and her sentence was divided by yawns.

"We have been waiting—up since Heaven knows how long. I wanted to go to—bed long ago. But Imre would sit up!"

Vera half led the countess back to the sofa, upon which she dropped down again. She yawned in the midst of everything she said, but seemed in no hurry to go to bed.

"And the children?" Vera asked. "Tell me the news."

"Léon is getting beyond my control," the countess answered. "Pali always was. But Todore is good. Pali cut his finger, but Imre says it is nothing; the rest are well. There is no news."

"And Tanya?" The duchesse's eyes looked suddenly soft as she asked after the youngest of the family.

"Exceedingly naughty," answered her sister-in-law. "People spoil her!" The last half of the sentence was an evident shaft at the duchesse. "However, your spoiling her falls back upon you. When she heard you were coming, the only way we could make her go to sleep at all was to put her crib in your room. Perhaps you can have it put out again to-morrow, but you will have to manage her first."

The duchesse's answer was muffled by the veil she was unwinding, but the word "darling" was distinctly audible.

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The countess seemed to care very little what the answer was, and showed the first evidence of waking up as she watched Vera finish taking off her wraps.

“Is that the new mode of doing the hair? My maid has been trying to arrange mine *à la corbeille*. Do you like it?”

She sat a little farther out on the edge of the sofa, and turned her head first this way and then that. Her hair was wound round a centre-piece of puffs, and resembled nothing so much as a dish of baked sausages, but she patted it quite delightedly with her plump white hands.

“Where did you get your dress, Vera? You always have lovely clothes! But then you live in Paris! I only get to Vienna once a year!”

She yawned only twice, under the stimulus of this vital topic. While she was speaking, a door on the farther side of the room opened, and the Princess Mitzka came in, wearing a pink woollen wrapper, and its colour seemed to be reflected in her skin, making her cheeks rosy. A



lace cap hid her hair, which was doubtless arranged for the night. Her face was beaming with pleasure, and, after kissing Vera, she kept her hands on her shoulders a moment, gently patting her once or twice, as though loath to let go.

The Princess Mitzka's entrance having interrupted the topic of fashion, the Countess Szapary, utterly overcome with sleep, and saying good night, went to bed.

The three that were left sat down again for a while. To her aunt and brother Vera described her trip, telling about the perfect roads and how well the motor went, relating a few incidents. She was very enthusiastic over the electrical indicator, without which they could never have made the time they did. But unaccountably she delayed mentioning that she had not come alone. She did not herself know why, but it took a great effort to say at last to her brother: "Jan Piotrovski—you know, the great Polish poet—came with me."

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The cheeks of the Princess Mitzka seemed to grow suddenly more pink than her wrapper. And something in either his aunt's or his sister's manner animated Szapary. "How did he happen to come with you?"

"I—don't know," she answered. Then she looked at her brother frankly. "I really don't know why he came; I doubt if he does himself. He followed an impulse, just as I was leaving. He is a great friend of mine—you will like him."

A while later, when she had made the move to go to bed, she put her arms about her brother's neck and pressed her cheek against his. "Ah, it is good to be here with you!"

"And it is good to have you! Sleep well, my dearest," he answered, and kissed her with a sincerity of affection that balanced her own.

Then the princess and she left the room together. Across the private hall a door was half open, and in the room beyond, her maid was quietly unpacking the valises. Only one shaded

light was lighted. On the threshold her aunt said good night again, in a whisper. Vera softly entered, with finger on lips, and crossed the room to a crib that was standing by the bed. For a long moment she looked down at a little child's face, framed in a nimbus of golden curls; then she came back to her maid.

"Just get out the things I need for to-night," she whispered. "That is it—unhook me. Is my bath ready? Very well. I don't want anything else." Then she smiled, and looked toward the crib. "I shall want my coffee very early, I suppose!"

The maid smiled in her turn, and nodded. "I am afraid Madame la Duchesse will be very tired. But she is sweet—the little one." She, too, looked toward the crib. "Good night, madame!" and she tiptoed out of the room.

In semi-darkness, Vera undressed, with a rapidity and ease that proved her wonderful finish of appearance to be one of nature's making, and not of artifice. In her nightdress, and

with her beautiful hair tied loosely with a bow below her shoulder, she looked like a young girl. She lighted the night lamp by the bed, shading the light from the child's face. Then she got up on her bed, lying across it, with her chin in her hands, and for a long time she looked at the little person in the crib—at the little person whom she loved better than any one else in the world. She adored all of the Szapary children; but Tanya, the youngest, was like her very own. A delicate baby from her birth, she had survived a long and serious illness only because of her own ceaseless and devoted nursing. Vera rejoiced now in the bright colour in the child's cheeks, in the rounded lines of the lovely little face. She longed to take her in her arms, to kiss even the little, pink palm, lying upturned on the counterpane; but she contented herself with kissing her in thought instead—through fear of waking her.

Then she said long prayers, and turned out the light.

Vera was very tired, and slept without a dream all through the night, but toward morning she dreamed of the forest around her home in Hungary. It was autumn, for leaves were beginning to fall. She felt them touch her face. Instinctively, she put her hand to brush them away, and caught something moving. Then she awoke to the fact of little fingers poking at her eyes. A soft little cooing voice laughed in delight.

“You wouldn't open you eyes!”

She had to blink once or twice before she could manage to wake.

“Well, my pussycat!” she smiled. “The sandman shut Aunt Vera's eyes very tight, didn't he? And last night Tanya's eyes were shut!” She sat up, reached out for the child's wrapper, and put it on her. “Now, where are the slippers?”

“Don't want slippers!”

“Oh, dear, what a bad farmer! Yes, a bad farmer!” Finding the slipper, and taking a little, bare ankle in one hand, she held the slip-

per in the other. "Just look at all the little pigs outside the barn, and you won't open the door, so they can run in—so!" She put the slipper on. "And here are some more little pigs that are all lost in the road!" This time she held the toe of the slipper pinched, so that there was no room for the toes to go in. "You see! The barn door is shut—they won't go in!" The child's big blue eyes were perfectly round as she looked up. At once, she said: "Yes, they *will* go in! *Go in! Pigs!*"

But her aunt held the slipper shut. After a moment, the pigs were all safely in the barn, and the duchesse gathered the baby in her arms, laughing. "Tanya is a very good farmer!" And from that the play went on to something else, to games and stories and the finding of a buried village beneath the avalanche of the bedspread. After a while, Tanya's nurse came to fetch her, and the duchesse rang for her coffee and her maid. It was only half-past seven, but she was wide awake for the day.

## CHAPTER IX

THE morning after his arrival in Baden found Piotrovski in anything but a contented or optimistic frame of mind. The long, enchanting drive of the day before; the subtle feeling of intimacy in travelling with the duchesse alone; the sympathy with which they had enjoyed the varying scenes and happenings by the way; in fact, the whole long day had been perfection. But its very perfection seemed to make sharper the contrast between the memory of yesterday and the picture he was mentally drawing of to-day, wherein he saw her hidden from him by a barricade of stiff-backed family shutting him off from all possibility of seeing her as he had in Paris—perhaps even shutting him off from seeing her at all!

Caste distinction (which in Eastern Europe is rather rigidly drawn) was a thing that Pio-

trovski had never thought very much about one way or another. In Poland, his family belonged to the respectable landowner class, mid-way in the social scale between the peasants and the nobles; in Paris Piotrovski was the artist, the poet merely, and he went where his ability and reputation made him welcome. His actual position therefore—or lack of it, came troublingly to mind for the first time in his life, as he shaved and dressed with more than usual attention to his appearance, that first morning in Baden. Then, with a certain grimness in the humour of the suggestion, he reminded himself of the school-master, prinking before the little glass in the village school-room on the day when the great and illustrious Prince B. was to stop in for his semi-annual manifestation of patriarchal interest in the methods of education. This thought did so much to restore Piotrovski's equanimity that he knotted his tie without looking at it, and with a shrug, ran down the stairs of the hotel.



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“After all—I am who I am! God alone could have changed that. And if the Illustrious Ones of the stiff-backs make their barricade, then—may they find health and happiness in the presence of one another!”

Half an hour later he had been presented to the entire family. He came upon them singly and in groups, until he wondered if any one ever before had so many relations. Down at the hotel entrance he met the Princess Mitzka with Imre Szapary. She, dear soul, gave him a welcome as sweet and honest as herself, but the look in Szapary's eyes was very much like that of Prince B. in Poland; an impression of barrier that made itself felt even while his lips said pleasant things. And as quickly the thought came into Piotrovski's mind, “I know I could interest that man!—but I could never make him like me, or make him think me his equal.”

While they were exchanging a few of those remarks of conventional courtesy that have

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about as much effect upon the page of events as writing with an inkless pen, the Planitzes cousins, three of them, joined the group. They too, upon hearing no prefix of nobility before Piotrovski's name, said their how do you do with rather distant politeness. They were of exactly the stiff-backed variety that he had expected, but to his great surprise he felt not at all the way the school-master had looked. On the contrary, he found himself not a little amused at their rather evident doubt of what their attitude toward him should be, and he had an overwhelming desire to laugh or make grimaces—to fulfil their expectations of shock and relieve the situation of uncertainty. This did not last long, however, for the Princess Mitzka insisted upon showing him the way to the salon where she knew Vera was waiting.

In the upper hall they met the Countess Szapary who, in direct contrast to her husband, welcomed Piotrovski upon a footing of perfect equality and gave him furthermore the instant

proffer of unreserved friendship, but which held little promise of depth or value. Close behind her followed three more relations, the Tarsoffs—father, mother and Olga, a pretty daughter about fifteen years old, of the pale Polish type, with calm frank eyes that looked directly into Piotrovski's. He knew her at once as one who liked or disliked fearlessly, as her heart and her instinct dictated. Prince Tarsoff, a man of modern cultivation as well as of much learning, gave Piotrovski his first real welcome; it was evident that to him the name Piotrovski was far more illustrious than half a dozen handles and no personal distinction to back it.

At last they reached the salon, where they found the duchesse surrounded by all five of the Szapary children, and all so busy over a cutout puzzle that the door was opened without their hearing. Doricha, the oldest—a girl of twelve, slender and pretty and dark—was sitting on the arm of her aunt's chair. Three boys leaned over the table. A tall lad of ten,

perhaps, with a sombre, dreamy face; a smiling blonde of eight, sweet and round and good-natured; and then an imp of mischief, a piece of mercury, about six, who even now was doing his best to confuse, instead of help, the picture. Out on the balcony leading from the room, a very little child was pushing a doll carriage up and down. At the sight of a stranger, she trundled it in. The older girl had said her "How do you do," the boys had made their bows, and the duchesse called: "Come, Tanya, say good morning, monsieur." But, childlike, she stared, with wide blue eyes, neither accepting nor rejecting Piotrovski's proffered hand.

It looked as though she were going to be naughty; she screwed her small body around, and held the toes of her right foot twisted behind her. "No," she said. "No, you not a gentleman!" And then, suddenly, with a bewitching smile, and dipping her best curtsey, she said gleefully: "Good morning—boy!"

For a moment, the duchesse kept a serious

face, but the next she laughed a laugh of pure joy and youth. "Ah, you see!" she said to Piotrovski. "What I have always told you! And now, by the secret signs of childhood's fraternity, you are found out!"

So, like one of the boys, he, too, hung over the puzzle, and fitted pieces with just as much eagerness as they. Todor, the youngest, evidently took him at the same valuation as did Tanya, and soon teased and bullied him, as though he were a companion of his own age.

During the first few days of his stay in Baden, Piotrovski became aware that Vera de Marsin, in the bosom of her family, was as different from the Duchesse de Marsin of Paris as a wild rose is from a hothouse one. In Paris, well as he had known her, there had been an intangible reserve, even in the generous friendship that she had frankly given. He realised that she had traits of character that he did not know. But he had looked for them on the side of complexity, not simplicity. Fine-

ness, polish, depth, and tragic capacity summed up the woman as he knew her. He thought of her as the typically charming woman of the world who moved through salon or ballroom with that easy grace—as unconscious as breathing—which comes only through familiarity with the world's usage since babyhood. The almost girlish naïveté of her, as she seemed in Baden, utterly astounded him. It was almost like Circe turning into Nausicaa. Circe was not the right example, for the duchesse was, above all, good—but the difference was quite as great.

Perhaps her clothes gave the most concrete evidence of the change. For instance, in Paris her trailing dresses and picture hats had been in effect simple; yet in comparison with the short linens and untrimmed shade hats that she wore in Baden, he realised that the former must have been elaborate.

To his surprise Baden proved not at all as he had gloomily imagined it. His instinct of withdrawal from unknown people proved to be

—he soon came to a realisation of that—a matter entirely of his own inclination. Even the caste barrier—that had from his earliest boyhood been to him a thing insurmountable, seemed to be gone. The first impressions of aloofness had disappeared, and the stiff-backed ones had gradually accepted him as belonging to themselves. Seeing them day after day, and growing to know them better, he found them to be the simplest people possible; as naïve really, in their singleness of outlook and in the pleasure they took in rural pursuits, as the very people who dipped them curtseys when their cumbersome carriages drove through the villages belonging to their estates. Compared with most of the duchesse's friends in Paris, the men, although rather narrow in their views, were well informed, and although the women were many of them frumpy as to clothes and careless as to speech and manner, they had that indefinable something that proclaims good birth and breeding.

The Countess Szapary rather patronised Piotrovski—evidently considering him an annexation to the family through her own dispensation and for her particular benefit, yet in no way did Piotrovski follow in the groove she had arranged for him. He followed his own inclinations entirely, and without ever a consideration of what others might think, yet he felt, he did not know why—and it was an entirely new sensation to him—as though he could make any one he chose like him, even Szapary, though not so easily nor so unreservedly as the others.

So Piotrovski stayed on from week to week, intending always, though vaguely, to leave the next. But the thought of Paris, with the duchesse absent, brought an appalling sense of flatness, and he did not go. Her quick understanding and appreciation sharpened and stimulated his mind, and her brilliant smile, seen even across a crowded room, had always the effect of making his blood run more quickly. The youth of her enthusiasm seemed to bring back



his own and make him a boy again, and each night, as he returned to his hotel after a day spent with her and her family, was crowded with suggestion. His notebook grew black with things jotted down, he scribbled incessantly on bits of envelope and margins of newspapers, yet he vaguely realised that he was not building anything as a whole; it was as though he were gathering a few flowers here, a plant there, but had formed no plans for the construction of a garden.

It was here in Baden that he spent a memorable day with her on the height of the mountain. They had climbed farther than the others of their party, to a great shelf of rock that projected against the mountain's side. From here they had a broad view of woodland and hills, and of fields patched vividly with golden grain or flowers, with occasional soft smudges of grey made by the peacefully smoking chimneys of the houses down in the valley. Directly below them a stream wound through

the wood, falling every now and then in masses of foam over the rock. The voices of the rest of the party came up to them occasionally through the sound of falling water, yet all were out of sight, save the young girls Doricha and Olga, who were sitting together by the edge of the stream. As the duchesse looked down at them Doricha put up her chin, making a kiss in the air. It was a pretty act, full of affection and of adoration as well. The duchesse waved back a kiss, and for a while she spoke of Doricha, the boys, and then of course, of Tanya. But gradually she and Piotrovski, through their interest in each other, became oblivious of all else, and no longer heard even the intermittent droning of distant voices.

For a time they sat silent, each content in being aware of the presence of the other, and in contemplation of the great peacefulness and beauty of the landscape before them. They sat so still, a little squirrel ventured quite close, inquisitively bent upon Vera's hat which she had

taken off and thrown upon the ground. An eagle circled overhead, the sun gilding the outer tip of his wings. The duchesse watched him circling, until he became a mere twinkling speck far up in the blue canopy. Piotrovski followed her gaze and noted her abstraction. "Do you know," she said at last—"that is exactly what you remind me of! Compared to us—who are so bound by convention! Look at him now! It must be wonderful to be as free as that!" Suddenly she turned to Piotrovski. "Isn't it?"

"I don't think I understand."

"I mean merely that most people are so hampered by tradition and convention that they not only have no liberty of action—few of us have that—but have not even liberty of thought." She clasped her knees with her hands, and stiffened her elbows: "The world is completely filled with sheep, who live by maxim. One can almost hear them repeating ceaselessly to themselves, 'My grandmother said I must

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ever do thus! The school-master taught me so and so! Great-aunt admonished me to sit with my hands folded, my eyes on the carpet!'" She shrugged her shoulders in impatience; "You were not brought up like that! Were you? No, I am sure you were not. You—I repeat it—are as free as the bird overhead, who takes no set path in his flight, but circles the whole wide heaven while the rest of us go creeping along the high roads that have been laid down for our going. We are chained to the earth, I suppose, because of our lack of imagination. Lucky you! To escape the world and its boundaries you have only to go to a world of your own creation."

She had spoken in an idle, whimsical way, that was half-bantering, and Piotrovski answered in the same spirit.

"No boundaries! Alas! Madame, I am not a journalist! I am a dramatist, worse yet a poet. No rules decreed by great-aunts and school-masters can be half so rigid as the rules laid down for makers of acts and scenes and

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climaxes!" The duchesse laughed long and joyfully. But soon after they both grew grave.

"We are none of us free I suppose," she said at length. "Our choice is free, of course, but the inevitable payment that is demanded of us for our choice makes us bound indeed. It is well for me that I was born a Catholic. There is a lawless element in me. I feel it often—I feel it here now. I always feel it as soon as I get away from the close proximity of houses. A paved street—even a polished door-knob for instance, would bring back the habit of convention."

"Or the picture of grandmother saying thus——?"

"—And great-aunt and school-master! Exactly. And a good thing it is so, for I could be capable of throwing public rules of conduct to the winds—what I mean by it I am not quite sure—but I think that life is something more than merely following maxims in the same way that we followed the school-master's copy in school. That rules are made for our benefit is

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trite, isn't it, but there are times when it seems that our lives are ours to lead as we will, to do as we please; times when our thoughts are free. I think all founders of new thought, and all the various cults that beset the day, have come to a place like this, and in the inspiration of such an hour have felt themselves empowered to give the world a new message of freedom."

"And if you had a message to give what would it be?"

She sprang up, and looking out over the whole sweep of the horizon took a deep, deep breath. There was something indescribably free in the elastic buoyancy of her poise, her linen dress fluttered like the draperies of the Nike Apteros. A strand of hair was blown across her face; she looked for the moment gypsy-like; as though she might in reality belong to the nomad tribe of her country; yet her profile against the sky was tenderly chizzled—the outline slightly luminous, leaving her eyes and mouth wistfully in the shadows. She looked far away to where the eagle's gold-dappled wing made a

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faint touch of life against the silent blue—then she turned to Piotrovski, who also had risen.

“I shall never have a message, my friend. As I told you long ago—I am one of the dumb ones, my thoughts are not original, and my beliefs go backward rather than forward. Like the pagan philosophers, I firmly believe that everything is for the best if we but try to be true to the highest good which is in us. I love those same pagans because they lived up to the best that was in them, without hope of further reward than truth to themselves. As I told you—I am more than half pagan, I can understand exactly the contempt that Epictetus felt for the law—the puny law in dull yellow, and dusty volumes. Because of my bringing up, and for the sake of convention, I follow it—but in my soul I despise it! Also I know I am absolutely capable of breaking it—and, like the Greek Stoics, I feel that no punishment inflicted by it could hinder or hamper the serenity of my will.”

"But dear friend,"—Piotrovski was for a moment almost aghast.

"No,—you must not mistake what I mean— I despise only the little law that is printed in books, the law that is borne through the world by mouth of public opinion! But above this is the other, the Great Law that is written by the hand of God in the golden glory of sunrise, in the purple shadows of twilight; that is pricked by the stars across the great dome of the heavens, that is whispered in the rushing water, in the rustling tree-branches, that is borne by the wind from the Throne on High and swept across the heart of man below! That is the Law which no mortal soul may break and live! And the Word of the law is Truth." Impetuously she stretched her arms out in a sweeping circle over the wide expanse, "How could there be anything but goodness and beauty in such a beautiful, beautiful world!"

Her hands came slowly together and clasped



on her breast, her chin bent down to them, her eyes half closed looking down into the valley. For a long moment she stood, deep in her own thoughts, then stooped and picked up her hat. With a quizzing note in her voice and manner, she said lightly, "Come, we must go down! and remember we are but worms of the musty law books, following the letter of the law as blindly and with just as much intelligence as they who eat it, fibre by fibre. And each of us, bound within the hard board covers of an ugly folio, is left in blindness to work out his own destiny!"

That evening Piotrovski returned to his hotel, and, still under the influence of the day, produced, within twenty-four hours—and almost in its present form—the "Ode to Destiny," which many critics think will live the longest of all his work. But the story of that comes later.

The next morning the Szapary party was starting out for a luncheon at Heidelberg. They waited nearly half an hour for Piotrovski, but

he did not appear. Upon their return in the late afternoon they found him with Tanya on his knee, composing jingles to explain a series of ink-blot pictures that he had made for her. The child, enchanted, had been repeating the jingling verses after him until she had them by heart. He offered no apology, but played on with the children until their bedtime. Then he left as though he were going to dress for dinner, and never came back. Some hours afterwards, in answer to an inquiry his hotel reported that he had left Baden.

A month later, Vera, instead of returning to Paris, went home to Hungary. Szapary had been greatly relieved at Piotrovski's sudden departure. He had learned to like the man himself, but all the more disliked the situation for his sister. Piotrovski's genius was as undeniable as was his personal magnetism, and Vera was the sort of woman who would become all the more headstrong—should Szapary openly try to interfere in her friendship with the poet.

Ever since she had been a child, what she had resolved to do she did, and no punishment or force could make her change. The only difference between the child and the woman was that then she displayed her impulses; now, after long years of effort, she had acquired the apparent passiveness that gave no warning of her will's activity until its purpose was accomplished.

Piotrovski, he believed, had been sent away by Vera—since she had shown none of the signs that would indicate surprise or chagrin. But Vera was by no means so tranquilly indifferent as she appeared. Piotrovski's sudden departure had hurt her unspeakably, and she brooded over it. When she was with the children, she managed fairly well to put him out of mind, but upon the long and solitary walks that were becoming her daily habit; in the early dawn, while the blinds were drawn and she was apparently asleep; in the dark nights, as she lay awake, she remembered over and over all that he had told her about himself. And things

that he had said, sentences of his that she had stored away quite carelessly, not realising that she was adding them to her hoard of memories, took fresh, haunting shapes that seemed to mock her stupidity. Every word that he had told her of his capriciousness came back to her. What was there for her to think except that his restless fancy had turned now from her, that he had been right in calling himself undeserving of her slightest regard?

He had written her on his arrival in Paris, a letter that was stilted and unnatural. Beautifully and easily as he composed verse, he wrote letters with difficulty, and the cold impersonality of the one from Paris put another barb into the already wounded feelings of the woman who scanned his small, rapid handwriting in vain for a consoling phrase. The experience was alarming, as well as painful, for she had not realised how much of her interest she had given him. Even her interest in the children and their affairs filled but partially the great emptiness

made by the withdrawal of Piotrovski's confidence and friendship.

At first, she had felt an overwhelming desire to rush back from Baden to Paris. Her pride alone held her. But she missed him every day, every hour, every moment, with an actual ache that time seemed in no degree to lessen. Curiously enough, she had received occasional letters from Verney—his every evenly spaced pen-stroke proclaiming kindly reliability. He wrote her friendly news and a good deal about Piotrovski, in evident unconsciousness of the latter's shortcomings, or of any change in his friend's attitude toward herself. "Jan looks badly, he is nervous and distraught. He misses you too much!" wrote the "blind giant," as Vera began to nickname him. In utter dejection of spirit, she thought merely how little even his best friend knew of him.

Unceasing activity seemed the best means of restoring her mind to the normal; it was out of reason to find one person—even though he be

a genius—of such absorbing interest that everything apart from him was saltless or bitter. So she strenuously tried to absorb herself in study. Music she could no longer bear; its every note sang of him. Books whispered of him, as she turned their pages. The children alluded constantly to stories he had told them. Flowers, fields, mountains—all the things she loved cried aloud of him, for she had shared with him the greater part of all she loved.

For the first time in her life, she was utterly contemptuous of her appearance. She let her maid dress her how, or in what, she would, and her hair was put up in the quickest and easiest fashion. That she should be clean and neat was all that she considered. She found her chief consolation in the church, and, being rich, she was able to bestow many benefits. She visited the people of the village, taught the children, and in her spare time embroidered assiduously upon a new stole for the parish priest. She also delighted in confession; but had, after

all, little to confess—except the centring of her thoughts upon a man whose gifts were surely worthy of her admiration.

In putting his genius first, she partially deceived herself as to her real feelings, imagining that it was merely the problem of his puzzling temperament, the uncertainty of his motives, that kept her in a constantly distracted frame of mind. Her reason insisted that the question of his feeling for her had nothing to do with her appreciation of him, but down in her heart was buried a protesting voice, which tried to convince her reason that it was quite wrong. And, between her heart and her reason, she had little peace. Finally, the many active interests that she had undertaken kept her too busy to think in the day, and left her too tired to lie awake in the night.

Usually she was in Paris for a time in the autumn, but this year she felt no inclination to go. December drew on, Christmas morning came, and with it a small, oblong package, directed

in a handwriting that made her heart stand still and then race wildly. With agitated fingers, she cut the string, and undid the paper, disclosing a little volume, "Poems of Destiny, by Jan Piotrovski." Opening it at the first page, she saw the dedication was to "Pauline." Each printed letter that formed the other woman's name pricked her heart like a spear thrust, so that she read, half insensibly, the pencilled words scribbled below. She read them once, and then again, before she realised their import. The name "Pauline" had quotation marks; after the name a dash, and then: "The pseudonym of her, who, from the mountain heights, revealed the vistas herein portrayed." And the signature was "Jan."

She turned the volume over to the initial and longest poem, and read the first canto. And as she read she knew that, in the heroine Pauline, he had drawn none other than herself. The theme of the poem was the thread of her own discussion that day on the mountain in Baden.



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He had reflected her very thoughts, used her very phrases, he had woven her own feelings as the warp under the woof of his own imagery, weaving the design with the skill and beauty of his master hand.

Christmas afternoon ushered in a blizzard; but joy sang in Vera's heart, and to her the country seemed the apotheosis of spring. Reading and dreaming, dreaming and reading, she sat in the deep embrasure of a window, and as the falling flakes covered the landscape under its soft tent of white, just so contentment covered every feeling of past hurt in her heart. There was not an ode, not a sonnet, not a lyric, in the whole volume that was not traceable to some association with herself. Her only regret was that there was more charm than depth, more subtlety than purpose, more sentiment than strength—yet she had been hardly a woman had she rebelled at this last. And twilight found her still sitting in the window, her eyes gazing dreamily into the dusk, until a stampede of

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small feet coming down the corridor aroused her from her reverie, and she ran joyously to meet the children.

During the holidays the call of Paris sounded ceaselessly in her ears, and before she was conscious of her intention she was on her way. Arrived there, she wrote Piotrovski a note. He left a card the next day; but at an hour when, as he must have known, it was her custom to drive. She asked him to lunch; he made an excuse. And the pain, the perplexity, came creeping back into her heart. Then, by accident, she saw him.

She had stopped in front of the Madeleine to buy some flowers, and he passed by. He looked thin, and not at all well; and, though his expression changed quickly, there was no mistaking the gladness that came into his face at first sight of her. It was evident that he was trying to put up a barrier between them; but she ignored it, and insisted upon taking him home with her. The Princess Mitzka had also

returned to Paris, but had that day succumbed to a headache, and was lying down. So Piotrovski found himself again in the sitting-room of the Rue de l'Université, alone with the duchesse. The room was even more charming than usual, for it was raw and chill out of doors, a light flurry of snow had begun to blow just as they entered, and the bright fire and flowers were, therefore, doubly attractive.

Unlike most French rooms, this had a deep, comfortable sofa, close to the fire, facing it, and here Vera and Piotrovski sat down. She had taken off her hat and furs and gloves. Piotrovski looked at her hands, held out before the fire. She had just such fragile hands as Murillo loved to paint, and they were weighted with heavily jewelled rings. Yet they suggested capability, and the gems suited them. He picked up her furs, the soft pelt still warm and fragrant from her throat; he smoothed out her gloves, still fresh and sweet like everything about her. The faint perfume which always

enveloped her stirred his emotions, and by degrees the warm, intimate atmosphere, the cheerful logs, the dim flower-scented room, made him conscious only of the sense of companionship long missed; his power of resistance weakened completely and the last vestige of aloofness melted away.

There was a long pause. Not one of those awkward stops, as though the conversational machinery had broken down, but one of those quiet silences replete with contentment. Her hands now warmed, she turned half toward him, with one arm resting on the low back of the sofa, and her cheek in her palm.

“You are thinner, my friend,” she said, at last. “You have worked hard. It has gone well, I hope.”

“Yes. I have worked hard, but not as well as I should have liked. I have tried ‘Ysul’—a play that I hope very much to finish, but it does not go. I could do nothing but your little songs. You knew that they were yours?”

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She was quite close to him, and, as she let her hand drop, he bent slightly toward her. Their faces were not very far apart. But she did not draw away. "Yes, I know," she said softly. Again there was a long pause.

Then gradually her nearness, her beauty, her sympathy, overcame his restraint of the impulse that throbbed within him. His eyes, half closed and dreamy, had the appeal of unguided power, and in them she read all that he was offering to her—offering because he could not help it—all his heart, and mind, and soul—all his Heaven-given talent! And she knew, too, that in the depth of the dreamy eyes, close to her own, searching them, lay her whole world, whether for joy or for misery. Near this one being, now at her side, her heart beat full and strong. Away from him, it was a machine that kept the forces of her life from disintegrating into their original elements—no more.

She felt him take her hand in his, and even in the contact she recognised the beauty of its

form, the dry, warm pressure of the thin brown fingers that seemed to hold a sixth sense, an electric power of sympathy. Her own fingers thrilled to his touch, and then—blind, as far as sight went, asleep as far as mind went; with all their sensibilities caught in one great tide, gropingly and short of breath—they kissed.

And the great currents of emotion swept over and engulfed them.

## CHAPTER X

It was a Hindu poet who said that, when a human being has attained the moment of perfect felicity, since no experience can ever more than equal it, and therefore every other living one must be the same or less—it were best that life should end at that supreme point. But for Vera and Jan the perfect moment seemed to be succeeded by others as perfect; in the revelation of their love for each other, it seemed they might remain indefinitely upon the supreme height, while all else drifted off into nothingness. The force of love had at first swept her so completely off her feet that she was unable for the moment to analyse the situation.

Jan's confession that day in his summerhouse had indelibly fixed an impression in her mind that love was utterly outside the circle of possibility for him. The right or the wrong of a

serious attachment therefore never entered into her thoughts in connection with the friendship that had come so wonderfully into her life.

But Vera's glowing joy was soon overcast by the shadows of doubt and despair.

She knew, of course, that her absorbing interest in him, and her dependence upon his sympathy verged upon tenderness; but, believing him quite ascetic, inhuman so far as love was concerned, the possibility of the present state of affairs had never occurred to her. The revelation of this more than human side of him so carried her out on the emotional tide that she lost all sense of direction, and for a time drifted buoyantly, peacefully, ecstatically, until she gradually realised that it was necessary to decide which port their little vessel must ultimately steer for. All wharfs and docks seemed to have been washed away. There was certain destruction in the prospect of making a landing anywhere.

She was a strict Roman Catholic. Marriage



was out of the question; he was married, and the church forbade divorce. And yet her agony in the mere thought that she had found him only to give him up, endured for days. Nevertheless, her will was strong enough even for that, if, added to the abstract right, she could be convinced it would be best for him whom she loved. The question whether she would hinder or help the highest and best side of him became the vital point. Ought she to go away, or stay? Did he need her—need her so that, with her, his genius would find its truest expression—or could he reach higher perfection alone? She did not tell him of her struggle; his influence would too easily swing the scales before she had herself carefully determined the balance. When she was with him, she lived in the moments as they were, taking nothing from their perfectness, taking each second of happiness eagerly, and storing it as though the future must be built of memories. But as soon as he went away, she took up again the inward

struggle of heart, mind, and conscience—thinking, thinking.

Piotrovski, on the other hand, thought not at all. Love, having taken actual possession of his heart, had turned him apparently into another being. He was childlike in his insatiability, in his demand for her entire attention. One day he sat a long time at her feet—he sat often on the floor, his arms hugging his knees—his eyes taking their fill of her. She had been embroidering; but in answer to the wistfulness of his expression, she put her needle down. “What is it, dear? What can I do for you?” she asked.

“Nothing,” he answered, “only don’t make me leave you—not for an hour, a minute, a second.” He dropped his knees to the rug, turning his heels under him, which brought him close to her. “Ah, Vera, marry me! When I do so want you to marry me, why do you refuse?” He took her hand and laid it against his cheek, but her face grew sad.

“Dear, I have told you so often.” The

shadowy depths of her eyes were curiously, tenderly sombre. "There is no way. While your wife lives, you may not marry. In our church there is no divorce."

"But, Vera, things can't go on like this!"

"No—I know they can't—not for very long."

"And then?" He put the question gently.

She seemed to be holding her decision in abeyance; there was a lack of finality in her tone. "Let us take the days as they come, for a little while—only for a little. Try to be glad with things as they are. And then—I don't know——"

Piotrovski, seeing her distress, kissed her hands—the tips of them—reverently; and soon spoke of other things.

He did not bring up the subject again. But a day soon after that, as he entered her salon, she met him with a new light in her eyes, a new buoyancy of carriage. There was exaltation in her manner.

"Jan, I have made my resolve! I shall

give up my present life, and link it with yours."

"You will marry me?"

She shook her head.

"Vera! What do you mean?"

"This!" She laid her lips upon his, and then buried her eyes against his throat. "This merely; I have known it long, but I wanted to be sure beyond all doubt. There is only one thing worth living for—you!"

"But the world——"

"Dear, what is the world? My world is you!"

"You would be banished!"

"What is banishment? A word beginning with 'b'! Nothing more. Unless it is banishment from you; in which case, it is the yawning chasm of inferno."

Piotrovski held her close, his heart leaping a race with hers, but through the emotion of the moment he tried to arouse himself to grasp at facts. "But, Vera, listen. Your position——"

She knew what he would say, and put her finger over his lips. "No—it is you who must listen! What I am, or was, or am likely to be, is of no more moment than what became of the particular skylark of Shelley's ode. When the poem had been written, the skylark had lived its life more perfectly than had any bird before or since. If through my living heart you may learn to read, and know, and write, of women who shall endure through the ages—is not that an end to have lived for?"

"And your family—your brother—Tanya?"  
For the first time he felt a quiver go through her, and her breath draw sharply.

"I love you better than all."

He saw the pain in her eyes, yet he knew that what she said was true. He found it hard to understand her scruples and asked gently:

"But why, darling, do you make such needless sacrifice, why such opposition to our marriage? It can easily be arranged. What does the woman who bears my name"—he could

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not bring himself to say wife—"what does she care? She has given up the world, and has become practically a nun; one cannot be married to a nun!"

Vera freed herself from him. "No! That I will not do. I have told you, dear, I would not."

She crossed to the fireplace, and stood leaning her elbow on the mantel, looking down into the flames. After a while, she spoke slowly, but without faltering:

"Listen, Jan. This is not a sudden resolve I have made, but one that I have thought over, prayerfully, in the long, dark hours; a resolve that has been slowly and deliberately formed. Don't you see—since there can be no true divorce, since we should still not be really married, that to have a false sacrament would be heaping upon our transgression the added sin of blasphemy? What can the code of the little world we live in signify to me, compared with your taking vows which are unholy? You understand

me, dear? I do not mean to speak slightly of marriage. But for us there would still be no marriage; we should merely be saving ourselves some personal distress by a formality that would be a mortal offence. No, Jan, *that* has not been my problem. Whether or not I had the right to come to you at all—was the only question—but now I am sure.

“As for the price—is not every benefit obtained always balanced by a penalty incurred? We need only determine that the thing we do is worth the price we shall have to pay.” She turned to him now, her eyes glowing, the radiance of her smile upon her lips. “Ah, my beloved, you need have no doubts! I am a miser, I have hoarded the coin of my life, and now comes the time for me to spend it for the thing I want! To spend it—gladly!”

Piotrovski, standing close beside her, looked directly into her eyes. “I love you,” he said simply. “In my heart and mind you are, have been, and always will be, the one woman. That

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means more to me than anything else I can say, for the word 'wife' means little. I have seen too many men and women bound together like prisoners, too few that were bound by the one tie that, in my eyes, holds—that of a deep, enduring passion. We are all half spheres—we humans; somewhere in the world is the other half of us. And now the half which is I, is crying aloud to my other half, which is you—I am helpless utterly.”

Then suddenly, he broke out violently: “Ah, Vera! The temptation is more than I can endure. To stand here close to you, to know what you are offering, and yet to keep down the fire in my brain and heart. I am only human. Furthermore, I am a man in love; yet with the last atom of reason that I can muster, I implore you to let me get a divorce and marry you! But, if you must refuse, if you really and fully understand what your refusal means, then, dear, let it be the other way.”

His very nerves trembled as he looked into



her steadfast eyes, and he grew pale to the lips. His arms ached all down the length of them in their longing to enfold her, but he put his hands behind him, and walked to the other end of the room. When he came back, his voice was under better control. He did not look at her as he spoke; he could not.

“To make up your mind to such a step, here, with me, is not fair to yourself. Even my beliefs are an unfair influence; you know, without my telling you, that all the ceremonies of St. Peter's in Rome could not make you more my honoured wife than you would be without a word said. For me, a future with you is a straight, light path, but for you it is a leap in the dark—doubly dark, standing here with me now. Here, beside you, I am the whole world to you; nothing away from me seems to matter, because the focus of your vision is so close that you cannot see at any distance. If you were to go back to your own home, and among your own people, don't you think you would be surer?

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Wouldn't it be safer for you? And yet," he added, with a note of exultation that would not be silenced, "I feel you will not leave me for ever; I feel you love me too deeply for that."

Tears came to the brink of her eyes, for a second her throat contracted, yet her soft-breathed tones were wonderful in their sweetness: "Love you enough! Without you, though I might live, though my body might go on breathing, moving, that is what I mean—how should I even know? I should have ceased to exist."

Before the truth of her his soul bowed down in worship. He bent over her hands, and kissed them reverently. "Go," he said, "then come back and be mine."

## CHAPTER XI

HER home was up in the mountains, to the northeast of Budapest, and she arrived, as she left, in a deep snow. Her brother Imre came down to the station, in a three-span Russian sleigh, to meet her. He knew she had come on some serious matter, and he had more than a vague idea of what it might be. There was such a change in her that he could not but marvel at the transformation. Her beauty struck him as forcibly as though he had never before beheld it; he could hardly keep his eyes from her. She said very little on the drive home, further than to ask for the usual home news, such as about his, and his wife's, and the children's health. But he could not fail to perceive that she was glowing with life and joy. Even her silence was steeped in it. She radiated

it. Her news could not be bad, her brother thought, since it made her look like that!

The Countess Szapary and the children were waiting for her in the big hall, all of them overjoyed to see her, and each in his or her way showing how much Vera had been missed. Through luncheon, the Countess Szapary complained of the dulness of the country, and told the news of her few happy weeks in Vienna. The children disagreed, without reserve; Vienna was a city of punishment, and all the time they spent in it there had been skating and coasting in the country. They were so glad Aunt Vera had come! She would go skiing with them, wouldn't she? Only, that afternoon they had dancing lessons.

It was not until after luncheon that Vera saw her brother alone, and told him her news. The scene was much worse than she had expected.

She answered his incredulity, his anger, and his vehement protests, using the same arguments that she had used to Piotrovski. What

did she gain? Everything. What did she lose? That was not the way to look at the situation. It was not alone a question of gain and loss, but a choice between two opposing demands and responsibilities. Like all persons deeply in love, she could not believe that love had been sent except by divine decree; that her life might be of some real service. Her mind looked obliquely at things, and distorted her vision. She even went so far as to feel and think, and believe, that her excommunication from the church was to be taken in the spirit of a test of her love's genuineness. The thought of being cut off from her family, from her brother and his children, seemed alone to touch her, but even to that her love for Piotrovski found an answer. What was there ever worth having for which one had not to make a sacrifice? The more valuable the object, the greater the price one had to pay for it.

Szapary found that he might as well pour out his wrath before a stained-glass figure.

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Upon the armour of her love and her determination his fury and his sarcasm seemed to make no mark. In fact, the curious impression she gave of an inner radiance seemed, if anything, rather to increase. Furthermore, he was really nonplussed. In spite of his anger, her fanatical attitude compelled a certain sympathy. Their natures were much alike, and they had always looked at things from the same point of view. Like her, he was too strict a Romanist to countenance divorce. He shared her feelings against letting the man she loved swear falsely. He had also enough of the strain of wild blood to understand—as only such natures are said to understand—an all-absorbing passion.

That his sister should have given her love to such a man as Piotrovski was also intelligible. The longer they talked together, the more his censure of her and Piotrovski faded. Yet the very sympathy and pity that he felt added fuel to his anger that she whom he adored should blindly make herself, notwithstanding all her

high motives, a woman scorned. He tried to make her see that no matter how great their love for each other might be, remorse was inevitable for her in the end. Yet by all his opposition he gained nothing.

She summed up her argument: "It is not only a question of love, but a question of need. Who needs me most? Aunt Anna? Imre? The children? Or Jan? The children love me, but do not need me. I am not their mother. Tanya is strong, and does not need a nurse—and trained nurses know so much more than I. She is older now, and would be good with any one. And without me, Jan? He needs care and love. His is not an independent, self-reliant nature, but one that should be given encouragement and protection and love; he wants these, and will accept these only from me. He loves me and me alone. He needs me and me alone!"

Szapary could make her no further answer. In baffled fury, he stood at his full height, with

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his arms crossed on his chest. His sister stood quite as straight as he, with her fingers interlocked.

“Since you will not give him up,” he said at last, “there is nothing for me to say. The openness with which you intend to do this thing makes it more dignified, but also irrevocable. It is suicide—no less. I can only hope and pray that the inevitable remorse and regret may not be too soon your portion.” Suddenly, his voice became husky, but his jaw squared. “Good-bye,” he said abruptly.

She looked at him a moment, wistfully, tenderly, she made a little movement with her outstretched hands; but he stared unseeingly. “Imre——” came faltering to her lips. Then she went to the door and opened it. On the threshold, she paused, and looked back.

“Good-bye,” she said steadily. Then she passed out, and shut the door after her. For a while, she stood—just propped against its frame; she ran her fingers, half consciously,



lovingly, over its well-known carving. At last, she stooped, and gently pressed her lips to the knob, where Imre's hands would touch each day; then, softly, slowly, she went up to her room. There she quickly changed her long dress for a short one, put on fur wraps, took her skis, and went downstairs. In the big hall, she met the children going to dancing school. They clustered about her, and she seemed to be taking a mental photograph, so intently she looked at them.

Doricha, the eldest, had grown to slim girlhood, with rich promises of the beautiful woman soon to be. The boys, sturdy, straight in mind and soul as well as bodies—young saplings of good forest growth. And then—Tanya. Vera imprinted in her heart an indelible picture of straight little legs, sturdy and brown, between the short socks and attenuated fluff of a dress; golden hair in neat and even curls, and a bow crisply fresh, like a butterfly just alighted upon a flower's gold. Through a veil of dull pain,

the duchesse heard their usual salutations, their usual chatter.

"Auntie, this is the dress you sent me! See, it fits perfectly, doesn't it? I think it is too lovely." Doricha turned herself around, and, laughing, made a formal dancing-school curtsey.

The duchesse had hard work to keep the huskiness out of her voice, as she said: "You are lovely in it, dear." Probably she would never again say anything to this young flower of a girl. Then the boys.

"I hate dancing school!" Pali, the oldest, complained. "I wish I might go out with you, Aunt Vera."

"Look at Todor!" exclaimed Léon. "Did you ever see any one always so untidy!"

Todor looked at his brother defiantly, but then turned meekly to his aunt. Mechanically, as though from force of habit, she knotted the child's tie, pulled down his jacket in the back, and, stooping, kissed his upturned face.

The piano sounded, and Tanya skipped over

the carpet like a bit of thistledown, then reached up her dimpled arms, while the other children trooped into the dancing room. Vera lifted her up. The soft little arms clung tightly around her throat, the soft-breathed baby kisses rained on her cheeks. She held the precious armful tight, tight—for the last time. “Tan’a loves you! Auntie Vera——Oh, you eyes all wetted!” She put the child down quickly, and, with pain that almost smothered her, went out of the house.

The country was buried under many feet of snow. Smooth, hard stretches of it spread in every direction. She zigzagged slowly, poling the upgrades, and then, like a gull skimming over the surface of the water, she sped down the steep slopes with leaps from occasional hillocks. For a while her thoughts were held in abeyance, and she felt, gradually, something of the exhilaration of this greatest of winter sports. Finally, she came swiftly down a long incline, and shot up a hillside of the forest. The woods

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were completely still; not even an animal's footprint was to be seen upon the unbroken snow; the tall pine branches were bent under their white weight, and smaller trees and shrubs stooped their overburdened branches to the ground. Vera took off her skis, and climbed slowly up the steep ascent to a wide knoll beneath the lofty pine trees.

At the summit, she stood a long, long time, leaning against one of the pine trees. The land she knew so well—and much of it her own—was spread in silence beneath her; nothing but forest lay about her; there might have been no habitation for miles. In the intense stillness, she seemed to stand face to face with things fundamental, far above and removed from the world's limited judgments. She seemed nearer the bigger laws of existence. And it would be true to the best in her—this she deeply felt—to accept her part in this fulfilling of a Heaven-given genius which she revered. How could there be ethical wrong in this self-immolation

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for a great love? It came down, then, merely to the world's approval. What was the approval of a small group of atoms called countess this and baroness that? What were the streets of Paris, filled with their streams of trundling victorias, the streaks of shooting motor cars? What were the little groups of people meeting in terraces or in rooms all more or less identical? They seemed a child's nursery of toys! Life in its seriousness meant sacrifice, giving, and love. For to love was to suffer, to love was to give, to love was to live.

And as for the price to pay—it was the great proof of love's worth. She would not forego the price if she could, so long as it could be paid without sacrifice of truth and honesty, which must be at the base of love. According to the world's verdict of honesty, she would be living in sin. The church, at the other end of her old life's measure, would refuse her absolution and communion. Even so—since it must! She could still live her life fearlessly; she could

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still say her prayers to God. The other way, if she acceded to Jan's wish to get a divorce, the little people, loyal to the world's conventions, would bow to her and visit her, but fear would be in her soul—she could no longer pray to her Maker.

She held her cap in her hand, as it were, carefully balanced—and threw it over the windmill!

## CHAPTER XII

Two days later, Vera was again in Paris. She broke the news to her aunt, the princess, whose first outburst of tears was followed by pleadings, admonitions, and, finally, by prayers and a sick headache. Then she called in the priest, and together they argued, admonished, and prayed. But, although Vera listened deferentially, and with a semblance of attention, to all they said, they needed little astuteness to perceive that they were knocking needlessly at a barred door, that her heart was closed to them. After a while, the priest left, the princess took to her bed, and Vera sat down to write a series of notes, that were, if not unique, at least unusual, in the experience of a society wherein surprises are something of a rarity.

To those whom she counted her closest friends she wrote that she wished personally to

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announce to them her intention of linking her life with that of Jan Piotrovski. Unfortunate circumstances made legal marriage impossible, and she would therefore dispense with any pretence of it. Upon the same day that they received her letter she would go away with him, and afterward return to his house in the Avenue de Versailles. To avoid unnecessary complications, she intended to call herself Madame Piotrovski, although she would, of course, have no legal right to the name. She realised fully that henceforward she must pass as an unknown figure in the world where she had held a place, and, much as the loss of friendship might distress her, she could in no way censure those who from that date should no longer care to know her. The wording of all the letters was much the same. In some she went into more details of explanation than in others, but all were frank statements of the step she was taking, and farewells to friendships that she considered at an end.



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As there was nothing further to arrange and no reason for delay, Jan and she decided to go at once. That afternoon he went to make the few necessary arrangements for their departure, while she drove out to the Bois, joining for the last time the parade of the Avenue des Acacias. All Paris seemed to be driving that afternoon, and the slowly moving carriages formed literally a procession of her friends and acquaintances. She had a curious sensation, as though she were two persons; as though she were for this afternoon masquerading as her old self, while her new self sat looking on. The passing throng could not read her thoughts; the letters were safely unposted in her desk. She was now, this afternoon, one of the most distinguished, one of the most beautiful, one of the most sought-after women of the great European world—all this was to-day. To-morrow she would be quite as brilliant a woman, and far more beautiful—since love is the greatest adorer of woman's beauty—but she would be

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one of those figures beyond the circle of recognition, one whom the ladies of the great world are prone to stare at, but whom they do not know. In answer to each salutation, she said to herself: "This is for the last time!" And yet, though the thought interested her, the interest was impersonal; it gave her no unhappiness.

When she reached home, Verney was waiting in the salon. She had sent him his letter by messenger—Piotrovski was to tell the other inseparables also that afternoon. To her surprise, Verney was opposed to her carrying out her resolve. His disapproval disconcerted her more than any one's, for he who knew the whole situation as well as she and Jan did was the one person upon whose sympathy she had, without question, counted. Looking into his honest eyes her own became troubled. And it was with real distress that she asked for his reasons. Instead of making statements, he asked her questions. Did she believe that the love of a man as un-

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dependable as Jan could possibly pay her for so enormous a sacrifice? Did she really stop to realise the manner of man Jan was? Could nothing show her clearly what she was doing before it was too late?

He clasped his knees with his big hands, till their joints knobbed white. His eyes opened wide, like blue china discs; his shaggy brows drew together.

“You are committing suicide!” he exclaimed. “I implore you not to take the step—at least, not in the irrevocable way that you intend. You are leaving no chance of doubt, no possibility of defence.” It may be recorded to his credit that he did at the last of this sentence colour with shame. “At least, stop and consider. You are a woman who has lived all her life according to convention. You have no idea what it will be to go against it. Believe me, that I speak the truth.” He seemed searching for an example, and then urged further: “Look at the case of the Baroness Tellier.”

For the first time, Vera grew angry, and in her anger her doubt vanished. "Would you compare a mountebank like that fiddler, Meyer, with Jan?"

Verney had never before felt her scorn. He shifted hands and feet uncomfortably, but his blue eyes never wavered, and he held to his argument:

"The man matters very little. The case of the woman of position who gave herself for love is parallel. Do you suppose any of your own archduchesses have found compensation for their loss of rank and friends?"

His steadfast sincerity conquered her resentment, and she met him halfway and candidly: "Answer me one thing—how about Jan himself? That is the only question that counts. In filling his need, in bringing him a woman's care and encouragement in rounding out his life, will the half-complete flower of his mind reach a full perfection? Yes? Or no?"

Verney seemed engrossed with the pattern of

the rug; then slowly, he admitted: "Jan loves you. I have no doubt there, though I grant you I did not think he had the capacity. If love does not dominate and so destroy the other gifts, all will go well with him. If the other gifts dominate, how about you? You must not forget that you cannot gauge Jan by the measures of other men. In a nature like his there are two distinct individualities. You know that. The mere human man, the man who loves you, is but one side of him. The other side of him, his genius, is an immeasurable force that, instead of being in his control, controls him, while he becomes the medium merely of its expression. Under its influence he is an utterly irresponsible person, whose actions can no more be said to be his own than can those of a somnambulist. And yet, as well as I understand this, I assure you it has many times been a severe strain to remain his friend. And if it has been hard for *me* to keep faith with him, who have nothing at stake

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but friendship's affection, what will it be for *you*, who are staking everything?"

"Yes, I know," she said. "I know he has two sides; but they are not as you say—not quite. You make his genius a lurking monster, that may at any moment destroy both him and me. I should put it that his genius has eagle's wings, whereby he soars to heights where I, sitting on the hillside, waiting, cannot even see. Should I want to put shackles on an eagle's foot? Should I want to put him in a cage, just because I have no wings myself? Would you call it love that would seek to bind and cripple? I am not a young girl, in love with love—I am not a woman hysterically heart hungry. But I love Jan with every fibre of my being; and by that I hope to help in the perfecting of all that is best in him. I believe that, through my care and love, he will go farther and higher—even though it may be away from me—than he will alone. Jan is not as independent as he seems.

He is like a child that plays hard all day, but at twilight, when the lamps are lighted wants to be taken on its mother's knee, to be rocked or read to. A lonely, motherless child does not play with the same freedom and vim."

"And what of you?" asked Verney again. "What are you to get——"

There was a hurt look in her eyes that stopped his sentence short. "To love is to give," she said.

It was just as well that Piotrovski at that moment entered, for Verney could think of nothing more to say.

Because of the gloom he saw in the face of his friend, Jan's glance questioned Vera anxiously, but her tranquillity reassured him. He had long ago, for Vera's sake, made all the objections to her resolve that he could think of—and was now perfectly satisfied. He knew, as well as though he had been present, that Verney had urgently protested against her taking the contemplated step; he saw also that Ver-

ney's arguments had not prevailed. He had no intention of carrying the argument farther, but he went behind Vera's chair, and putting his hands protectingly on her shoulders, looked wistfully at his friend.

"Shall you honour her one whit the less?" he asked.

"More, if anything."

And Vera, turning, looked upward. "We are answered," she said, and the radiance of her smile broke out like the sun over a grey landscape.

The next day, the Princess Mitzka, after having wept over, kissed, scolded, and forgiven Vera, took the nine o'clock train to Vienna. At ten o'clock, Vera posted her letters. At twelve o'clock, her best woman friend, the Duchesse Descharme, Verney, Bluet, Little Smith, Charante, and de Navins arrived. The Duchesse Descharme had come because she thought it best to lend what dignity and regularity she might to an irregularity that she could not otherwise



modify. The Princess Mitzka would have been present, but something in Vera rebelled. She could not allow her aunt to have any responsibility in the matter, any more than she could allow Jan to go through what her church considered a false marriage ceremony.

It was a curious party gathered in Vera's salon. No one said much. There was a strange solemnity in the atmosphere that no one seemed able to ignore. Every one had a little the attitude of chief mourner at a funeral, and yet a curious emotional exhilaration animated them all.

And then, when they were all there—to describe it is almost impossible; it was the spirit in which it was done that counted. Vera had taken off her wedding ring; in fact, she had buried it that morning under the hedge of the garden, and with its burial she had said to Jan that she relinquished the name of de Marsin. Piotrovski had had made a little ring of two

strands of twisted gold. Now, while their friends watched, he put it on her finger, and, turning to the little company, said simply: "That is all!" Then he kissed the ring upon her finger.

No further protestations were made, but in the presence of these, their nearest friends, they thus openly and honestly chose and declared the way of their life henceforth. The feelings of affectionate hearts are easily stirred, but there was not one who was not touched to the very depths. Perhaps to say that all those in the little group were awed, would best describe it. They were not glad, they could not be; nor, in the face of such sure faith, could they be sad, either.

At luncheon, a wavering conversation struggled fitfully in subdued tones. Vera was the only person there who seemed to have even a normal amount of cheerfulness. Even Little Smith, the irrepressible, was, for once in his life,

quiet. But at last, as though his pent-up feelings would no longer be restrained, he stammered:

“ I want to tell you, it is the finest and pluckiest thing I've ever heard of. You don't know how much I want it all to come out happy——” Then he faltered, and sat down.

“ Not 'it,' but 'shè,'” answered Piotrovski, his eyes gleaming. “ Only one wish”—he raised his glass—“ may she never live to regret!”

To this they all said “ Amen,” and the curious meal was ended.

While they were still at table, a telegram had come, which Vera opened with a tremor of hope that it might be from her brother; but it was from the Comtesse de la Tour.

As though I should ever change to you! You shall find me now, as always, your friend, Jeanne.

A note of the same import arrived also from Madame Arno, and Vera was touched pro-

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foundly. Not a word, not a sign, came from her brother. She had not expected it, but his silence brought her first realisation of the irretrievable step she had taken; whether the road ahead of her led to heaven or hell, there was no longer any going back.

At about one o'clock, Vera and Jan got into the automobile and drove away.

## CHAPTER XIII

VERA and Jan travelled by short runs southward, through France to the Riviera and gradually into Italy. Two days of rain housed them in San Remo; not so much because of the downpour, one may travel quite well in a closed-in touring car, as because of a cough that Vera had. She said it was nothing to pay attention to. Since a winter spent in St. Moritz she never had bad coughs any more. She said it to reassure him, but the news had quite the opposite effect and made him doubly afraid to risk going on in bad weather. But the storm had been followed by four days of such golden perfection as can be found only in Italy. Scene had followed upon scene in kaleidoscopic variety, made beautiful no less by the garnishing touch of spring than by each other's presence. At dusk on the evening of the fourth day they skirted

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the mountain and came into view of Assisi, just as the vine-trellised hills were turning gold, and purple, and rose, under the last sun rays. A light mist was forming in the valley of the Tiber, and against the eastern sky, the moon, grown full, hung like a luminous rose-leaf.

“It is so beautiful!” she said, “the softness of colour, the quiet, the peace—there should be no sadness and yet the end of every day has a touch of pity—and it seems to be inseparable with all nature.”

“The end of our day must be beautiful! Now that we are together, dear, don't talk about the sadness of day's endings.”

Vera laughed softly. “What a child it is! The pity may be merely the song of joy, in a minor, softer key.”

“My thoughts are not at all in tune with pity. I should like to have it this time of day always—driving here with you, your hand in mine, your heart in my keeping, your eyes seeing it all as mine see it. Oh, love of my soul—

Vera, my wife, it must go on so always, mustn't it?"

She nestled her hand more securely in his clasp. "There will be no change in—me." A queer little accentuation fell upon the final word, a little ring of wistfulness. Vera could not have explained why. She had no apprehension. Jan's love for her was no less than hers for him. Yet the slight accent made them both start, his eyes to look in hers searchingly, hers to answer his in denial of the meaning the sound conveyed.

"Dear, dear love!" he said tenderly, and the automobile turned into the gates of their stopping place for the night. So far the 'bbloquy of Vera's position had not been brought home to her through humiliating incidents. She called herself Madame Piotrovski, and, as it happened, had run across no one whom she knew. To be sure, they had frequented the little out-of-the-way places; not to avoid humiliation, for that would in itself have been humiliating,

but merely because they liked the little out-of-the-way places best. But in Naples they went to "Bertolini's," and on the evening of their arrival dined downstairs in the restaurant. They sat at right angles instead of opposite, and as their little table faced the terrace overlooking the bay, neither of them directly confronted the other tables in the dining-room. Gradually Vera became annoyed by some one's persistent stare. But they were nearly through dinner before the annoyance became determinate and she said to Jan:

"There is a rather horrid-looking man over there with a woman. They keep turning to look at us all the time. Oh, here he is coming over!"

It was Herault. Jan's first instinct was one of welcome, but following Vera's expression he looked past the figure of the approaching editor, to the woman—one of those bedizened creatures who temporarily rent themselves for such benefits as dining in public in the full regalia of their ingloriousness. A wave of scarlet flashed in



Jan's brain. That a man with such a companion, should dare to approach the table where Vera was sitting. There is no saying what folly his anger might have led him to commit had not Vera quickly put out a restraining hand. It was a rather foolish scene that terminated, not because of Piotrovski's glowering look, but because above the mere woman in Vera there was the unobliterable domination of the duchesse, who was by birth a Szapary. Herault with an embarrassed laugh stammered "A thousand pardons, Jan!" and he waddled away as he had come.

"How dared he!" Piotrovski was for following him.

"You had no right to resent his coming from her to us, Jan—that is my position you know——"

"The same as hers? Vera, how can you say such a thing!"

"Ethically, no dear, I think not, but actually, yes. You see it is as we said the other after-

noon, into the evening comes sadness, we can't have it always daylight! Come, let us go out of this window and have our coffee on the terrace and under the stars."

This meeting with Herculat was the only disagreeable experience on their southward journey. The midwinter months found them far down on the green and flowering shores of that lovers' haven, Vencata, Sicily, a sea coast spot of beauty where Vera had been in the habit of going ever since she was a child. They stayed on for some days at the hotel and then found the place so enchanting that they took a little villa down on the edge of the Mediterranean—a two-storied, white plaster house, smothered in vines. They also chartered a sailboat, captained by a young Sicilian boatman who had a glorious voice. On still, moonlight nights they sailed along the coast, Vera playing accompaniments to Teobaldo's song, while Jan, sitting on the cushions at her feet, smoked his pipe, entirely content. For several months they lingered,

through long, successive days of such perfection as only those who truly love find in the company of the beloved. And, beyond the fact that they were utterly happy, there is nothing to record.

Only one thing gave the slightest feeling of disappointment to Vera. It was the first time that she had ever been in Vencata without going often to see the old Archbishop, whom she dearly loved. He was a child-like soul, guileless in his simple faith, and in his belief in the goodness of everyone—but he would not have been able to countenance her relationship with Jan—nor could she under any circumstances—easy as deception would have been—deceive him. She hoped, as she was no longer called the Duchesse de Marsin, that her presence would not be made known to him. Once his carriage passed her and she caught sight of his gentle face under the broad brim of his hat and his thin white hand with its violet ring on the door of the landeau. She pulled her veil over her

face quickly and in the moment a sharp pain seemed to enter her heart—she so longed to hear him call her his daughter with the familiar Sicilian accent and to feel his hand upon her head in blessing. But the next moment she put the pain from her. Small bravery that! To wince at slight payment for great joy.

During this time in Sicily, Jan put off writing seriously—put it off until they should return home. Under the spell of these enchanting surroundings, he had written, in sheer joyous outburst, the two lyrics, one “On Love,” the other “To Her.” He wrote also at this time “The Nocturne.” Yet, these three poems, so full of charm, have been thought by many too languorous, too lacking in brilliancy, to be classed with the best of his work.

Toward the end of May the weather grew very hot, and they made their way to Paris. They had built an addition to the little house in the Rue de Versailles. Vera had relinquished her right to occupy the apartment in the Hôtel

de Marsin. The main part of Jan's house had been left as it was, for his own use, while the addition was for her. On the ground floor she had a large sitting-room, a duplicate of the one in the Avenue de l'Université, filled with her things. A door on each floor connected the old and new parts of the house; a staircase hidden behind the wainscot of her salon ascended to her bedroom, with its adjoining bath. There were also a number of extra servants' rooms—as she had always lived on a rather elaborate scale—but Piotrovski's personal servant, Léon, was retained as chief of the household. The others had nearly all been with Vera for years.

With far less difficulty than she had anticipated, Vera adjusted herself to her anomalous position. She was very seldom seen in the streets of Paris; and never during the crowded hours or in the afternoon parade along the Avenue des Acacias. When she went out, Jan was always with her, and her whole interest was so centred in him that she went through the busy

streets of Paris as though she were upon a deserted road. Perhaps Verney discovered the secret of her tranquillity at this period, when he said that she did not avoid people—she did not see them.

The unflinching friendship of the Duchesse Descharme and the Comtesse de la Tour gave the virtuous ladies of the high world much to whisper about over their five o'clock syrups or their noon chocolate. But for the general public's discussion of her, or of her friends, Vera cared not a whit. She was grateful for the loyalty and affection of these two, appreciative of it, and that they were women of unspotted reputation meant something—more than she could herself have quite explained—but their worldly position was to her of no importance. To be born a countess had brought little happiness, and she had found the name of duchesse not worth the breath needed to pronounce the syllables.

To have been able to be Vera Piotrovski—

the best wife of a man born in the middle class—to have been really his wife, and privileged to bear his children. ah, yes, that would have been the highest estate attainable. The one and only unsurmountable sorrow caused by the irregularity of their union was the desire for children yet the dread of having them. And ardently as she longed, she prayed fervently that little nameless ones should never be her lot to bear. His great gifts might never honourably through her be transmitted to a younger generation. Above all else she would have longed for children, gifted with her vitality and with Jan's genius. For fear of distressing him, she never let him suspect her deep yearning. It seemed almost impossible to her that he should not feel as she did, but she was glad if he did not. In men of creative genius, the paternal instinct, she knew, is seldom strong; their mental children take the place of the physical ones; and she thought this was true with Jan.

She did not dwell on the thought, either, but

took what happiness she might out of life as it was. And, after all, life at the moment held happiness beyond measure; she wanted nothing in all the world save Jan. All three kinds of love of which her heart was capable she gave to him. Passion, adoration, tenderness, her love, her life, her thoughts, her whole world, were centred in his sleek little brown head. Often, as she smoothed the lines out of his forehead, the very feeling of the smallness of his skull, the satin fineness of his hair, suggestive of a little child's, appealed strongly to her protective instinct. In fact, her attitude toward him was in many ways like that of a mother, not alone in her protectiveness, but in her ambition and her anxiety for him, without thought or consideration of herself.

The "inseparables" and a very few of her oldest friends remained loyal to her. Every Sunday she and Jan were at home to these few, who gradually made it a habit to spend that afternoon in the Piotrovskis' garden. Finally,



quite without any such intention on their part, their house became the rendezvous for a circle that, small as it was, included the most eminent personages in art and letters in Paris. There were seldom any women present. The great world to which the Duchesse de Marsin had belonged stayed away; and between Vera and the women in the indiscriminate circles of Bohemia, there was a wide disparity.

But, gradually, one or two former women friends, following the example of the Duchesse Descharme, the Comtesse de la Tour, and Madame Arno, came occasionally to see her. Those who came prompted by curiosity—which she was very quick to recognise—seldom cared to face the cold resentment of her steadfast eyes a second time. But those who came because of their old affection for her found her more charming—more lovable, is perhaps the better word—than ever; she was softer, sweeter, less a goddess and more human. Yet, gracious and hospitable as she always was, gratefully apprecia-

tive of any kind intention, it made little difference to her whether any one came or not. Her world was Jan.

The inseparables gave up going to the restaurant where they used to meet, and went instead to "the Piotrovskis'." Sometimes they all motored out into the country, and had a tea-basket luncheon or supper. Quite often Jan and Vera went by themselves and spent the day. At this period Jan had a fancy for writing under the trees of Fontainebleau, and Vera sewed. She sewed a great deal, as it was an occupation that kept her busy, without distracting her attention from him. When he did not feel like writing, she read to him while he, lying at full length in the grass, contemplated clouds or insects impartially, according to whether he happened to be looking up or down.

He had a faculty of mind—perplexing to most people—of paying attention to two things at once. He interrupted constantly to tell her some fantastic idea, suggested by almost any-

thing—a tree branch, a cloud, a distant person, a shadow. Occasionally he interrupted the reading indefinitely and made her observe with him the activities of an ant or a bee—in their own garden they had a few hives, which were a never-failing source of interest to him—then, as quickly as he had interrupted, he again returned to the narrative, as little children do, saying “Go on!” And she, who was so used to him, “went on” again—in the middle of a sentence, perhaps.

One thing alone troubled her. He had done no work of serious importance. She began to fear that it might be as Verney had suggested—that, in the perfection of their intercourse, the other side of him, his genius, was lulled into dormancy. Yet such doubts as these did not prevent her being unutterably happy. In spite of entire willingness to sacrifice her own inclinations to his achievement, after all, she was merely a woman—much in love; and her lover was completely hers. In falling in love with

her, his every attribute had swung to her, as a pendulum swings in its entirety. The constant, inseparable companionship of half a year had taken not the least edge off the poignant thrill that each felt in the other's presence.

"The rain has stopped—it is going to clear. Do you want to motor to Versailles?" she asked one afternoon.

He looked into her eyes to see how much she wanted to. "I'd rather not," he said. "Do you mind?"

She would have liked the drive, but what she really wanted was merely to be with him. It mattered very little where. "Of course not," she smiled. She opened the windows overlooking the wet brilliancy of the garden's bloom, and let in the warm, fresh, wet earth smell. To her great joy, he had been writing from dawn until afternoon.

He dropped into a big low chair, both mind and body in a state of complete relaxation. He observed the outline of her figure silhouetted in

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the window opening. That the lines were perfect, and that the soft grey mull dress she wore fitted in with day, and place, and his mood, was only natural in the general fitness of things. He was so used to her perfectness—like a view, or a scene, or a piece of music, its perfection was always there; the only difference from time to time was in the observer's own mood and power to appreciate.

She turned from looking at the wet, green things to the eyes that were making an unconscious appeal. He seemed tired, and looked a little drawn about the mouth. She came back and sat on the arm of his chair, putting her palms on either temple, and drawing her thumbs gently over his eyelids. His chin went up, with a little, satisfied movement. She stroked his forehead again and again, yet scarcely twice alike. There was not a sound except the soft, occasional rustle of her sleeves, with every now and then the barely perceptible click made by the hitting together of heavy rings upon her slen-

der fingers—until all the tired lines about his eyes and mouth were gone, and his expression had changed from dragged-out fatigue to indolent content.

With a smile, she let her hands drop into her lap. He smiled in answer, and again his chin went out; but his lips this time made their demand, and were answered by the giving of hers. He drew her down to him, and held her close. She let herself fall limply into the security of his arms.

He looked down tenderly at the dear face. He kissed her eyes, her cheeks, her lips, with feathery-light, but tender, kisses; as though he almost felt his touch might break, his very heart-beats hurt, her who was so precious.

All through the month of July, Piotrovski was gay as a child. He talked incessantly, laughed all the time, and was demonstratively affectionate. In answer to Vera's uneasiness about his not writing, he told her that his thoughts were simmering way, way back; he was not ready to

put the pot on to boil. She was well content to forget her anxiety, which had evidently been groundless. He took his materials to her room, and wrote there. "I am going to do a light comedy—oh, an adorable play," he said. It seemed to amuse him. It was a fantastic idea that he had begun to block in while they were still in Sicily. He sat tailor-fashion at her feet, asking every now and then, like a small child, what rhymed with such and such a word. She had not known he could be so gay. He was Pan, playing his lightest pipes, Pan wholly elflike, and of the woods in springtime.

But far, far, back in his brain, behind the laughter lightness of the tune he was piping out, there was gathering, like an increasing storm cloud, the onward rolling, invincible force of "The Great Tragedy, Ysulinde."

## CHAPTER XIV

GRADUALLY, insidiously, a change came over Piotrovski. He spent longer and longer times in his study, apparently working hard. Yet despair seemed brooding in his face; he became silent, aloof, moody, but Vera's presence, instead of soothing, aggravated his symptoms. Sometimes for as long as a whole week, he looked at her, constantly, intently, and yet vaguely, unseeingly, as though there were no connection between his sight and his brain. She felt quite as though he were not in the world with her, as though his very soul had left his body, and gone wandering off into the uttermost spaces by itself. When she spoke to him he answered mere words, as a parrot might, words that she felt had not the slightest meaning to him. Then days went by in which she scarcely saw him. He got up at sunrise, and shut himself



in his study. Food was put on a tray at the door in chafing dishes and thermos pitchers. He took it in when he felt like it. In the afternoon, refusing to drive with her, he went off for long walks alone; he forgot to kiss her; he seemed to forget her entirely. Yet to others, who occasionally found him at home, he talked as though he were wound up.

In the meantime, she had the rare intelligence and the still rarer self-control never to ask questions, never to break in upon his moods. What this self-control cost her probably no man could understand, but since he did not care to speak of whatever it was that troubled him, she tried not to let herself think of it. "What he wants me to know he will tell me," was her attitude.

The walls of her part of the house were thick and had double doors, so that she could safely practise without danger of his hearing. Her only fear was that she might disturb, or "break in," as he put it. Her every thought and prayer was that whatever was on his mind would

develop into something to his own credit, and so, in her own sitting-room, busy over occupations deliberately sought, she waited for him. She missed him always—every hour, every moment—but she thought she understood his almost cataleptic state of preoccupation; he had told her once that when he was “in a mood,” he was like a chip carried on the flood of a great tide, that when he was absorbed in a piece of work those who were nearest to him most interrupted. It was one ray of comfort that to Verney he was as irritable and aloof as to her.

She saw that Verney was much troubled, and she therefore tried to reassure him by pretending that she noticed no change in Jan. She was also hiding, so far as she was able—even from herself—her first realisation of loneliness. Loneliness was a factor that had not entered into her calculations; it was a feeling that she had never in her life before experienced, a feeling therefore that she had never before been able to appreciate. She had time and time again

stayed in the country—on her own, not her brother's, estate—seeing no one for half a year. She had not realised that solitude through voluntary choice was a very different thing from her present enforced solitude. At any moment she could have packed up and gone a few miles away, to her brother's, or to Vienna, or to Paris, where scores of houses stood wide open to receive her.

But now, in Paris, filled with people who had been lifelong friends, driving past houses gay and full of life, yet closed and dead to her, she felt loneliness in its most poignant form. Even in the friendship of her few good friends, there was a barrier, a constraint in their intercourse that made sympathy difficult. Her life and theirs differed too widely. Every piece of news they had to tell was of the world from which she was ostracised. The salon, the races, even the opera—to all of these she no longer went; she couldn't go where every box was filled with eyes to be avoided. Once or twice she had gone

with Jan to the première of some play. His life was connected with the theatre, and in a stage *baignoire* she was able to sit so turned that she did not have to face the house. But there was inevitable humiliation at every point of contact with people; humiliation to which she in no way grew callous. And above all there was increasing, day by day, the appalling, unconquerable loneliness that must be confessed to no one.

The Princess Mitzka wrote her often, and affectionately as always, but in the poor lady's efforts to avoid painful subjects her letters were strained, and it was just as impossible for Vera to write her aunt with any degree of naturalness. She wrote occasionally in her journal, which she had always kept, at great length, but she had little inclination now for self-expression, her moods were above and below the journal strata of conscious outpouring. The sight of children playing—especially very little ones with bobbing yellow curls—caught her

heart with sudden twinges. Also certain flower odours, certain nursery tunes, certain dishes cooked in a certain way, all brought distress that every outcast feels in facing vivid reminders of home. But these were not feelings to harp on and elaborate in the pages of a journal; they were feelings to slip away from as quickly as possible.

And these were not all: Far down in her inner consciousness there was yet another source of unhappiness, and it was the deepest of all. This, too, was something for which she was not prepared, since she had never imagined its possibility. The separation from her brother was a sacrifice that she had since the beginning accustomed herself to face, but so far as relationship to the church was concerned, she had felt herself able to say her prayers without the medium of a priest; ritual was a thing that she thought she could do without—even peacefully.

And yet, now there was growing in her soul, growing, growing—a great and deepening sense

of loss—a longing that would not be stilled, a pain that gnawed incessantly. Once, in passing the Cathedral of Notre Dame, she had obeyed the impulse to enter. The beggars at the doors accepted her alms with the same blessings showered for all benefactions, and she passed from the sunlight into the incense-laden sombreness of the church. Quietly she moved down the aisle and knelt on one of the innumerable little praying benches. But no sooner had her lips formed her first “Ave” than, with a sense of suffocation, like a guilty thing, she started to her feet. Why this ominous sensation, as though an actual presence had bade her go! Assuredly she might kneel and say her prayers; no one would interfere. Startled, she saw the old vergger coming down the aisle, but he did not cast her a look.

Realising her emotions to be the result of mere nerves, she went slowly up the aisle again and approached the font. Was not the holy water for all who craved its balm? Would any

withhold from her its privilege? Her fingers from habit made the motion forward—and then drew back. The first realisation in its fullness of what excommunication meant swept over her, blighting her very soul. In an agony of desolation, she seemed incapable of moving, thinking, breathing. The confessionals, with their little open doorways, were barred to her with rods of flame; the font of holy water into which each passing beggar might dip his hand might not be polluted by the touch of such as she. She fled from the sanctuary an outcast, and the deep wound of this experience was one that could never heal.

All this, too, was not to be written in a journal, nor spoken of, nor even thought of, if heart and mind could be controlled by will.

Meanwhile, there was some one who was anxiously watching Vera, apprehensively watching Piotrovski—Verney. The poor good giant! He thought himself far too dull to cope with the intricacies of Vera's feelings; he realised

that he had no knowledge of women—women, that is, of the great world. The little grisettes he fancied that he knew well enough, but he had an idea that women of fashion had a different set of emotions from their sisters of the studios and the streets. He had wondered from the first whether it were possible for a woman of her tastes not to feel too much the opprobrium of the position into which she had put herself to be happy in any event. What must her suffering be now that Jan was “in a mood,” It did not seem possible to him that any woman—the more in love she was, the harder it would be—could understand and tranquilly accept his apparent indifference.

One thing was certain—she ought not to be left so much alone. In that matter, at least, he could help. For, although he knew that no one in any way made up for Jan's absence, he knew, too, her enthusiasm for achievement and her unfailing readiness to help. So Verney had clay carted into the garden behind the summerhouse,



and after persuading her that she was exactly the model he at that moment needed, he began the statue of her which was exhibited at the Salon in 1906—the one of her sitting on a low bench, her head raised a little, as though she were just for a moment looking up from her sewing.

It was at this time also that Bluet—upon being encouraged by Verney to join them—painted his portrait of her. In fact, her garden became, gradually, quite an atelier. Rchette made two etchings of her. And Little Smith began every day a fresh portrait, destroying each attempt almost as soon as it was begun; but daubing without distress over his failure, quite frankly and with glee, like a small boy who begs a piece of dough from the cook and joyfully mixes and bakes.

And Verney found his stratagem successful, for in spite of Piotrovski's frequent absence, these days in the garden were not unhappy to Vera. Eugene de Marsin's shortcomings—the

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little false school he founded which had caused her so much chagrin—were quite forgotten. To have Verney, the greatest living sculptor, stand before her, pushing his thumbs into a lump of meaningless wax that was miraculously becoming the likeness of her own throat; to have Bluet painting, and Rchette making a dry point at the same time, all made a wonderful reality—to which Little Smith's failures contributed only a delightful comedy touch, and left her free to weave day dreams of ambition for Jan.

In the meantime, in his own breast, Jan's two natures were lining up for combat. For months the tragedy of "Ysulinde" had seemed to fade out of his mind, or to recede far into the background, while the foreground was occupied by Vera and love. Then, gradually, irrepressibly, as the tide comes in louder and nearer, with ever rising force came the demand of the unfinished creation for its completion.

The horrible phase of it was that he knew exactly how the tragedy could be completed.

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The likeness between Ysulinde and Vera was so vivid as to seem fatality. In Ysulinde he had drawn the character of Vera. Under the same circumstances—not even allowing for a difference in centuries, for from the first Vera had seemed as much a person of the Middle Ages as of to-day—the two women, Ysulinde of his brain, Vera of his heart, were the same. Vera's selfless devotion to him was identical with Ysulinde's devotion to the gambler. Should Vera, therefore, be made to undergo the same suffering——!

He sprang up, his forehead cold and moist at the thought, but determinedly as he put it from him, it came back. He had many times tried to bring himself to talk it over with Vera, to tell her the plot and get her to advise him, but, strangely, he could not. At the very point where she could have helped, his tongue faltered and he could not go on. She thought he had not yet developed the theme in his mind.

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She had no idea that it was crowding his faculties so that there was room for nothing else.

Things went about the same for a while, then one day he locked himself in his study and began the tragedy at the beginning. Reading it over carefully and slowly, the mastery of it gained upon him. The first scenes were better than he had thought. As far as his own judgment went, it seemed a real and worthy performance. The spirit of the Middle Ages he had caught perfectly. The despicable weakness of the husband, the gambling knight, was vividly drawn, the wife, like a second Griselda in her faithfulness, was very convincing in the early scenes. There was a splendid opportunity for La Gioconde, should she play the rôle of Ysulinde.

Piotrovski went over the development of this character carefully. In the first act, Ysulinde, in answer to her husband's entreaty, and because of his solemn oath that he would never

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throw dice again, had donned the costume of a page and gone on the Crusade with him. She had passed as a boy without question until, on an embassy to Saladin, in the second act, the Eastern monarch divined, by her shrinking from his sudden glance, that she was a woman. At first his curiosity was aroused, then his interest, and, finally, on being sure of her sex, his passion. There were strong and well-sustained scenes in the third act vital with her indignant repulsion of his advances, her fear of being discovered by the whole camp, her anxiety lest the honour of her lord should be endangered through her; but, above all, her horror at the touch of any man save her husband, whom, in spite of all, she adored with a devotion that was fanatical. All through the play it was made evident that in her eyes he was the chivalrous Christian knight, Saladin the heathen pursuer of her honour.

As far as the fourth act, the play was finished; but the last and culminating act was but roughly

blocked. The principal scene is that in which the husband tells Ysulinde that he has again been gambling with Saladin; then gradually the climax is reached in his confession that, having lost more than he could pay, he has, at Saladin's instigation, staked and lost herself, his wife—to square his debt of honour!

To draw Ysulinde under those circumstances was beyond Piotrovski, and on this one imperfection the whole play fell—this play which was to be the one true crowning glory of a succession of achievements that had, in his own valuation, been baubles of little worth. One way lay open to him, fiendish and unthinkable. He went out of his study and locked the door, went in search of Vera, and for three days never left her side.

She, knowing nothing of the rack upon which his soul was stretched, at first took the moments of his return as they came, and was happy. But her happiness was not long; her sympathy with him was such that she felt his inward struggling without knowing what it was or why, until one

day in a mood less brave than usual she clung to him. He was alarmed at her vehemence; it was unlike her in any way to yield to an hysterical impulse or to be nervous.

“Darling, what is it?”

“I don't know, myself.” She tried to speak lightly; but there was unsteadiness in her voice. “It is stupid to listen to what people say, and usually I don't mind. But I wish every one would cease talking to me of shadows. Continually, as he models, Paul keeps saying to Bluet: ‘Where does that foreboding, shadowing of her eyes begin? Is it colour or modelling?’ Bluet said to me yesterday: ‘I should like to paint you laughing’; and Paul answered: ‘Humph! Do you think you could any better paint her smile? Neither marble nor canvas will take the life that is in her smile, or the—mystery of her eyes.’ He paused before he said ‘mystery’ as though it were an evasion of the thought that had first come to mind. Perhaps I imagined it—the effect on me is cumulative, I suppose—it's

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making me nervous, quite as though there were really something impending."

The foreboding in his own heart made him doubly tender, and in his tenderness her own apprehension vanished.

For a week he was attentive; then he grew more moody and detached than ever. Then he threw himself with a kind of furious zeal into the discussion of topics of interest; but something was all out of balance. He grew perceptibly thinner, and the strain under which he laboured was evident—though Verney alone divined what it was.

Again and again the diabolical suggestion entered his mind: Should Vera be hurt as Ysulinde was hurt, he would behold the tragedy not in the vague picturing of his fancy, but in the life before him. There was only one way to hurt her mortally—that was through himself. He knew that she loved him every whit as much as Ysulinde had loved her husband. "Without you, though my body might go on breathing,



moving—how should I even know? I should have ceased to exist.” And these were not mere words that a woman in a moment of ardour had uttered, and in imagination had felt; she had proved their truth. For love of him she had given up her greatest possession, her honour, her reputation. Beautiful and pure as her own soul might still be, in the eyes of the world she was lost. With an oath he clapped his hands over his ears as though to shut out the thoughts that tempted him. But, even so, they hammered away upon the inside of his skull. In a frenzy of horror of himself, he rushed, a seeming madman, into the room where she sat sewing, and threw himself upon his knees beside her, burying his face upon her breast.

“But, dear, what is it?” he heard her say; he felt her heart beating rapidly in its alarm, reiterating to him the depth and strength of her devotion.

The thought but tormented him further. “My good, my sweet,” he burst out, “I—I don’t know what is the matter with me. I get this

way sometimes—don't mind, it is always like this when I can't get an idea that I want. Then some day it comes, and I am all right again. Don't notice it—please. Don't mind!"

"There is only one thing that I could ever mind—you know that."

She held him in her arms as though to soothe him. In spite of his will he shook. She thought he had a chill.

"You are not well, dear—that is it."

"No, I am not well—that is it." He repeated the words after her meaninglessly. Then: "Vera!"

"Yes?"

"Read to me. Read to me the dullest, driest, hardest book to understand that you can find. And *make* me explain, as you go along, what it means. Don't"—he shivered again—"don't read me anything with emotions."

She thought she understood. She did in part—but not the part which, had she but known it, was like an explosive ready to ignite beneath her feet.

## CHAPTER XV

PIOTROVSKI tried his utmost to still that horrible inner prompting to turn Vera's love into material for his uncompleted tragedy. But the impulse would come upon him unawares, obtruding in the very middle of a sentence, and so bewildering his mind that he was unable to finish what he was saying. It seized him as the craving for drugs seizes a victim addicted to their use; until he felt that he must obey the craving or go mad.

One day, when the impulse had been more than ever insistent, when he was almost at the end of his power to resist, he left his desk suddenly and stood before the portrait of Vera, which Bluet had just finished. He studied it, searched it, and a realisation of the living woman's rare quality swept over his tortured mind. And his love for her pushed the demon

of his genius—not into the background, but to a place where for a moment the two forces, as it were, stood side by side. If only she might show him the way without herself suffering, if only the suffering might fall on him alone! Why couldn't he, who understood her every thought and shade of feeling, go farther, and know how she would act and look and feel in Ysulinde's place? He stretched his arms above his head, then passionately covered his face with his hands.

“Ah, God!” he prayed. “Is all the little mind that Thou hast given me to lead to this? To feel what might be in my power to do, yet never to accomplish it!” The cold sweat stood out on his forehead, and he threw himself on his knees before the portrait with his hands clasped, and cried aloud: “Vera, Vera! Oh, God, let me not be tempted!”

Vera, though she could not realise the true situation, knew, of course, that he was not himself. He did all sorts of unaccountable things—forgot to go to bed, forgot to eat, or asked

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again for the meal he had just finished. Several times she saw him wandering hatless, coatless, and in thin pumps, out in the garden in the snow. At last, thoroughly alarmed, she insisted upon taking him south. A week later, they were in Nice. The warmth and sunshine seemed to do him good, he was much more calm, much nearer normal, and the unacknowledged apprehension, which had crept upon her in spite of her faith in him, that he might be growing tired of her, was quiet. Never had he been more tender to her, more appreciative of her, or seemed more dependent upon her.

At the hotel where they stopped was a group of fashionable people whom she had known intimately. It gave Piotrovski poignant pain to see her walk by them with her small head held proudly, as though she were unconscious of them. And the contemptuous curiosity of their glances brought home to him more vividly than anything had yet done, the sacrifice she had made for him. He never let her know that he had

noticed this group, or that he thought them other than total strangers. But he managed, under the lash of regret he felt for her, to banish all other thoughts from his mind and to devote himself wholly to her.

Vera was seemingly unconscious of her anomalous position, but, unknown to any one, there were innumerable times when she felt it painfully. Long generations of fineness meant a sensitiveness that made it exceedingly difficult to face these people who no longer knew her. She had no feeling of resentment against them, and so far as they were concerned, she felt no regret for what she had done. This part of the price she was paying was no harder in actuality than it had been in theory. Yet it gave her a feeling of distress—a curious feeling in which pride and shame were so intermingled that she could not distinguish between them. But the one cause of real unhappiness to her—now that Jan was himself again—was his lack of productiveness. The season was drawing on, his manager

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wanted a new play, and the play was not forthcoming.

Vera had given up her name, her honour, not for love alone, but because through her, and through their love for each other, she had hoped his work might acquire new vitality. He had been a poet of the moon shadows, a poet of ideas, not of the blazing noonday sun, and not of feeling. She had realised the great lack in his work, and had believed her love might help to supply it. In some ways her hopes for him had been fulfilled. The poems that he had written under her influence were filled with sunshine, but all that he had gained in emotional feeling he had lost in energy. His mind seemed like a softly running stream that shows scarcely a ripple. It needed steeper descents and jagged rocks in the course to quicken the currents and give brilliancy to its force.

Vera began to realise that great effort was never the result of contentment, and needed too often the incentive of stern necessity or of pain.

Had she gone away in the beginning—as soon as he had declared his love for her—it might have been the best incentive he could have had; and the torturing thought came, and persisted, that the intimacy of their life had perhaps hindered the development of those very qualities in him which she had wanted to inspire. He never really told her of “Ysulinde,” from the little she knew, she thought it a play that he had not found worth finishing. He had many such.

They returned to Paris about the middle of February. No sooner were they at home than he became more moody than ever, and insidiously the suspicion grew in Vera's mind that he must be tired of her. Again, as in all moments of such doubt, his confession in the summer-house echoed in her memory. Vividly his words came to mind: “I feel and care, for the time being—and then suddenly my mind grows restless and has to break away. I have crippled every one that has depended upon me, I have broken the heart of every one that has loved



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me!" And again doubt haunted her that it might all have been best had they never been more than friends. Jan was very sensitive—must he not feel a loss of bloom in a relationship that was condemned by the world, forbidden by the church? Could wrong, therefore, ever be right? No matter how pure her motive had been, there was a tarnish.

Had it been real, or had she imagined the hardness of expression in his eyes and on his lips that several times lately had so hurt? Could it be that Jan felt a lack of respect for her, that, to spare her feelings, he was not willing she should ever know, but that she had surprised in his unconsciously telltale face? Could it be that she had dragged his eagle wings down; that, unhampered by her, he would have soared higher? These thoughts tormented her ceaselessly, relentlessly.

Besides, she felt gradually more and more keenly the inexorable loneliness of the outcast. She never went out Sunday mornings—it hurt

too much to pass the churches, to see the communicants going to mass. She tried never to think of the Szapary children, yet she found constant and harassing reminders of them. Driving one day through the Rue St. Honoré, she saw a lovely dress for a young girl. She stopped the carriage to buy it for Doricha, before she remembered. For a moment, even then, she pondered upon a way to get it for her. The idea occurred to her of sending it through her aunt, the Princess Mitzka, but her aunt had not been in Paris, and they would all know from whom it came.

This small circumstance was only one among many that hurt unexpectedly and continually. So long as she had felt no doubt that Jan needed her, her devotion to him, her happiness with him, had counteracted the yearning for her brother and the children. But with Jan's aloofness, the loss of her family was hard to bear. Worst of all was the doubt—had she been wrong? Wrong not alone in the step itself,

but in her judgment? The payment for something real, something that counted for good, would have been little; but the payment for a false step was a misery too great for endurance. As she drove away from the shop and its dress that had tempted her buying it for Doricha, the inevitable helplessness of her situation brought the actual sound of a sob to her lips.

To distract her thoughts, she drove to the Louvre. She went through the hall of the Greek marbles, but they did not appeal to her. They were all too human, too voluptuous; even the Winged Victory, floating down over the wide stairway, jarred on her feelings, with the flaunting triumph in each flying swirl of drapery. She was not in the humour for the exultant pulsing spirit of the Greeks. The paintings might be better suited to her mood. But when she stood before them, they soothed her even less. There was no answer for her doubt; there was not a story in all the canvases that was parallel with her own. A number of them

represented saints or sinners. The sinners, most of them, becoming saintly through renunciation. She had through renunciation become a sinner. Those who mourned children were mothers. She mourned children who were not even her own.

She turned from the galleries and was going toward the stairway when suddenly Olga Tars-off, her niece Doricha's greatest friend, ran gladly toward her. In her own eagerness she almost forgot; then her position came crushingly to mind, and she turned abruptly away, but not until she had caught the look of surprise and hurt in the young girl's face at what must have seemed a rebuff direct. With the blood beating in her temples, Vera hurried to lose herself in the crowd and so escape.

This encounter was by far the most painful she had experienced. It was easy enough to avoid people who wanted themselves to avoid her, but this was the first case where the avoidance had been all on her side. The fact that Olga had not been told about her seemed for a

moment to give back to Vera the position she had once held, and the realisation which immediately followed of things as they were, was extremely painful. So much so that the incident made her feel farther beyond the pale than anything ever had done—except once when the Szaparys were in Paris, and she could not see them. At that time only her anxiety that Jan should not know what the separation from her brother and the children cost her, kept her from giving way to illness. The meeting with Olga now, coming after her distress at not daring to send Doricha the dress, made the day cruelly hard, and she returned home as though physically bruised.

On the hall table was a letter from the Princess Mitzka. Even ordinarily she read her aunt's letters with an eagerness not unalloyed by pain; but to-day she dreaded doubly to break the seal. So much so that she put the letter in her muff and went toward the door of Jan's study. It was closed. Half absently, she moved

nearer until she stood close to it, laying her head against the panel. Silently, though, so that she might not be heard.

In her doubt and loneliness she felt such a need of a look, of a word that would show *his* need of her, that the impulse to open the door was almost uncontrollable. Through the paneling she heard no sound. Then at last a sheet of paper turned. He was working—she could not break in. She left the door quietly, with little steps, that her skirts might make no sound, and sat down upon the staircase to read her letter. She tried to feel some small comfort in the fact that Jan was not actually far away—even though the door was shut. And for a while she sat there quite still; her letter in her hands, her hands in her muff. She looked at the closed door, and in imagination through it, where he, doubtless, was bending over his desk. Finally she roused herself and took the letter out of her muff.

Thinking of the Szapary children and then

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meeting Doricha's friend had unnerved her so that she could scarcely face reading the simple details that the princess was wont to write of the children. She half shivered as she broke the seal. Her heart beat irregularly as she bent back the fold of the first page. Suddenly her face grew ashen. Her fingers trembled as the words she read gripped and tore at her heart. The letters blurred and jumped, as the lines started, seemingly, from the paper:

Tanya is very ill. Last night she was unconscious. That has passed, but she is delirious and cries all the time for Auntie Vera. You took care of her when she was ill before and she remembers.

Vera's head went down into her hands, the crumpled paper crushed against her eyes. "My little Tanya—my precious—my little lamb—and I can't go to her! I can't go to her!"

How long she sat on the stairs she never knew—a minute, an hour. Her first consciousness

was that she was again standing at the door of Jan's study. She had never interrupted him before, but this time, into the haven of his love and sympathy she must go or lose her reason. She turned the handle of the door quickly and entered almost running—her hands stretched out to him, the appeal of her heart's agony in her eyes, in her face—its every line and feature drawn in an overwhelming grief. "Oh, Jan!"

The short syllables froze on her lips. He was craning forward looking at her as though fascinated, but as though he had never before seen her. Then suddenly, as though stricken with insanity, his eyes glittering and steely cold, his face exultantly cruel, his lips almost smiling, breathlessly, ecstatically, he whispered four syllables: "Ysulinde!"

For hours and hours Piotrovski had been struggling in the grip of his awful temptation, fighting that strange force within himself which



threatened to overpower him. At the end of a day's exhausting endeavour he began to reread in an agony of despair his latest failure to write the culminating scene of the tragedy. He was revising his futile manuscript at the point of the climax in Ysulinde's betrayal, and so deeply immersed in his tragedy that he did not hear Vera enter. Her long dress brushed the carpet as she hurried toward him, and Piotrovski suddenly looked up.

In his obsession he did not see the living woman. The tension of his mind was so great that the ordinary workings of sense and reason were suspended. Vera did not exist for him. He, Jan the man, was dominated and put aside by Piotrovski, the genius. In the moment of fresh failure, he, the genius, had heard a sound, and turning, had been confronted with—not Vera, but Ysulinde! There, living, breathing, before him, his eyes beheld the tortured look of Ysulinde wounded to the depths of heart and

soul. Fiendishly the genius in control demanded the full value of the moment, he must keep the torture on the face before him that it might be watched and noted and seized. He was not Jan Piotrovski; she was not Vera, the woman he loved; he was merely an instrument through which a creative force demanded fulfilment; she was—Ysulinde.

He had no more consciousness of self than has a hypnotic subject. Without a sign of agitation he told her—watching the effect upon her, with that glitter of madness in his eyes—he told her coolly, distinctly, each word cutting with staccato sharpness, that he was tired of her; that he did not really love her, that, in fact, she had been but a fleeting fancy, and their relationship a degradation that had grown abhorrent. He wanted to end it all then and there. Would she please have the goodness to pack up and go?

In the silence that followed, not a vestige of

consciousness either of himself or of her returned. Like some one dying of a thirst, he drank in each inarticulate syllable of her utterance, each slightly varying shade of her expression; each movement of her very eyelashes was stylographed with minute exactness upon the tablets of his brain; even the seconds between her faltering breaths were mechanically counted.

All this time he himself felt nothing personal. He saw no one. She was no one. He saw only Ysulinde—wronged, outraged, betrayed, wounded to the core of her great soul, living, breathing before him, while, like instruments of uncanny mechanism, his eyes, his ears, telegraphed every minute detail to his parched brain. As though she were Ysulinde making her exit in the last line of his drama, he saw Vera disappearing through the door.

Just at that point, something that belonged to the feelings of a man whose name was Jan faintly cried out that there was taking place, between this small human portion of himself and

the being most dear to him on earth, a separation that meant for ever. But the faint voice was unheeded. "For ever" was a group of seven letters; otherwise it had no meaning. His every faculty was obsessed by the climax of the tragedy which had been enacted before him; the curtain of the living drama had descended, and Piotrovski, the genius, the dramatist, swung around to his desk, grasped his pen like a madman. And like a madman he wrote.

Dusk turned to darkness, early evening to black night. The fire burned gradually lower. A storm came up, the rain fell in torrents; the wind tore at the trees in the garden and rattled the frames of the windows. A vivid colour patched Piotrovski's cheekbones, while the impatient black characters covered the paper before him.

Finally the storm ceased, the hectic flush turned gradually to pallor, the swift pen strokes grew more slow, more laboured, but without once ceasing their continuous march across the

paper. The fire burned so low that the last embers struggled weakly against the enveloping ash. Dawn broke faintly purple. The first pale gold shaft of morning came in through the window and illumined the written page.

The tragedy was finished. Its purpose accomplished, the genius side of the man subsided, and Jan fell into a transition stage of partial return to himself. Only partial—tears of anxiety and fear, the result of the long, intense, nervous strain, came into his eyes as he took up the pages he scarcely dared to read. His strength was so far spent that he could hardly translate his hieroglyphics into meaning words, but as he read, gradually the wonder grew.

So marvellously had he succeeded that a new vitality swept through his exhausted body. He could have shouted in exultant joy. Never in his highest flight of imagination had he hoped for such a result. The words, the metre, the construction, and dramatic climax were nearly faultless, and every line was breathing, pulsing

with life. Ysulinde was living! Ysulinde was living at last! He gathered the pages up in his arms in a transport of ecstasy, the blood coursed to his finger tips and tingled back again. His heart throbbed, his head swam, he almost sobbed. It was done, the tragedy, even as he had prayed it might be—it was done!

Clutching the manuscript to his heart, he staggered to his feet, took a few steps unsteadily, and then rushed upstairs, shouting: "Vera!"

"Vera!" He burst open the door of her room. And then crushingly, in the midst of his triumph, dawned the memory—the hideous memory of the price at which he had bought it.

"No, no, no, it isn't true! It isn't true! Vera! Vera!"

As though, in his frenzy, it were the one word he knew, he rushed through her rooms calling: "Vera! Vera!"

But there was no sign of her. Her bed had not been slept in, but her things, all in order, gave no evidence of packing. Terror-stricken,

still distractedly calling her name, he searched for her as though she might be hidden; through her rooms and through his, out into the garden and back again; until his increasing agony of voice brought the servants undressed and running. They found him in a state indescribable.

“Find her! Find her!” had now become his cry. “Search Paris; drag the Seine! Find her! She has gone! Find her!”

Force of habit took him unconsciously back into his study. His left hand still gripped the manuscript. As though to taste the last grain of bitterness, he turned the leaves again. A moment's strangely vivid clearness of mind revealed, even in the few lines he reread, that there was no mistake; this could without doubt be ranked as a really great piece or work. With a sob that broke from the depths of his soul, he stirred up the last embers, and threw the tragedy upon them.

Then he fell prostrate before the hearth.

## CHAPTER XVI

THE sun was so low that down the avenues running to the east, the great gold shafts, gleaming like mighty search-lights, powdered gold-dust upon the sleeping grey houses of Paris. The hush was broken only by the quick patter of the goats' hoofs, the tinkle of their throat bells, and the plaintive pipe of the goat boy's milk call. An occasional shutter was heard to open, followed by the swish of an industriously handled broom—familiar sounds of every early morning, through all of which Verney slept serene, until violent knocking on the studio door below, roused him, and looking out of the window he beheld Piotrovski's servant, Léon, half-dressed, wholly out of breath, and entirely distracted. The lower classes among the Latin races are easily excited, and the giant's alarm,



therefore, was not great enough to thoroughly wake him. He rather sleepily stumbled into his clothes and into the fiacre which conveyed him to the house of Piotrovski.

Here, however, his faculties sharply awoke. The front door stood wide as Léon had left it. In the hall two maids, half-dressed, huddled against the wall; two other dim figures peered over the banister; whispered exclamations seemed to echo in sombre corners, as whispered sounds echo in the great stillness of a house of mourning. A man servant, shirtless under the neck of his great-coat, made way for Verney to pass into the study, the door of which was shut. Apparently no one dared to go into this room, but, as Verney entered, the servants crowded timorously and silently behind him.

Through the eastern window the sunlight streamed upon the scattered papers on the desk. A tray, evidently Piotrovski's supper, remained untouched exactly as it had been brought to him the evening before. These things being in full

light, Verney saw them at first glance, but the next moment he was kneeling in the shadowed end of the room on the hearth-rug beside the crumpled figure of the poet. The face was deathlike, but under the giant's hand thrust beneath the waistcoat, the heart beat. Verney's first question was naturally, "Where is madame?"

"Madame can not be found—madame is not in the house!" The servants made these responses as though they were parts in an anthem, but further than the fact of madame's absence nothing but bewildered ignorance answered him.

As though the fainting poet might have been a little child, he was gathered up in Verney's great arms and carried upstairs. Presently the doctor came. His diagnosis was "suffering from overwork and shock."

"Obviously!" muttered Verney, "but shock about what?"

The doctor shook his head. "He has evi-

dently had a shock," he repeated, "or perhaps he had a fall. Did you not say he fell?"

"He was lying on the hearth. That is all I know. It is also true that he has been working very nervously of late—but then he has done that for years." The doctor made a thorough examination. A nurse arrived and Piotrovski had long ago been put to bed. Finally after several hours he opened his eyes. "Vera!" he sighed.

Verney turned eagerly. "It is I, Paul," he said. Piotrovski looked directly at him, his hand moved searching over the counterpane.

"Vera! Don't go out, Vera—it is dinner-time."

The doctor came back to the bed and looked into Jan's eyes. "He knows nothing," he said. The rest of the day was much the same. Every now and then he looked at the doctor, or nurse, or Verney, exactly as though he were conscious. "I must go out!" he said once. "Vera is sitting by the Lotus pool and the bees——"

the end of the sentence died out and he shut his eyes. He talked quite often—usually in disconnected or unfinished phrases, but nothing that he said had the least bearing upon his own condition or Vera's absence. Meanwhile, Verney went through every room in search of some clue to her disappearance.

Her rooms had no sign of packing or disorder, her night clothes were laid out, and her bed was turned down. She had evidently been expected home the evening before—yet, if an accident had happened, why had he, Verney, not been sent for sooner? Why had they waited until morning? Also what had Vera's absence to do with Piotrovski's fainting before the fire? He went down and catechised the servants, who were by now dressed and attending to their usual occupations. "Madame," they said, "had returned home in the afternoon late and had gone out again before dinner. To be sure madame had never done such a thing before, but it was not for them to question. Monsieur was writ-

ing furiously when Léon took in his supper." That was all they knew until they had been awakened by monsieur in a panic crying for madame, who was gone! "God alone knew whither!"

Verney returned to the study. The fire was out and the room seemed raw and cold, although the sun was high and the birds were twittering at their nest-building in the garden. Quite inadvertently—to uncover a spark perhaps—Verney kicked at the ashes piled between the andirons. A charred lump of black hit against his shoe, he turned it with his foot and finding it a hard ball of paper, stooped and picked it up. It had been crushed so tight that although the outer sheets had been burned, the centre ones were scarcely charred. Verney smoothed them out half absently until with sudden interest he recognised the complete manuscript of "Ysulinde." A fragment here and there was about all that was left of the first two

acts, but the last two had been in the centre and were practically uninjured.

“Poor boy! Again that accursed thing!” he muttered. Yet ‘the accursed thing,’ it seemed, held Verney too. For as he put the pages in sequence he read from line to paragraph, from paragraph to page. Its vitality was gripping—Ysulinde was indeed of flesh and blood. A seeming memory haunted the sculptor, he felt as though he must, somewhere—some time, have known the living woman.

“Ah, the genius of the boy!” he exclaimed and exulted in the accomplishment, even though the mystery of it all bewildered and troubled him. Then carefully he went over the manuscript again. There could be no doubt of its having been Jan’s intention to destroy it. Why such an impulse should have followed his almost impossible achievement was a riddle beyond Verney’s power to solve, but he soon began to wonder if he could himself piece the missing

portions together. He had an extraordinary and accurate memory, and he had read the first half of it often enough to know it by heart. He began, then and there, to write down line by line the opening scene.

From this time on Verney employed all spare moments in gradually putting scenes together. They came to him in fragments, divided by unremembered sections; but little by little he got them all and handed the manuscript over to Donay, the manager, for production. The greater part of his energy, however, was spent in looking for Vera, who had disappeared without leaving a clue.

Meanwhie Piotrovski might be said to have regained consciousness. But he was a mental wreck. His memory was quite gone, and he seemed scarcely aware of anything about him. He had no inclination to leave his bed, and lay for hours at a time looking at nothing. At times he asked in a bewildered way for Vera, but even then—which perhaps was fortunate—his mem-

ory did not last, and any answer satisfied him. One night he was unusually fretful and insistent, and Verney, at the end of his resources, at last tried the expedient of telling him that Vera was very tired and asleep; that she had been with him all day. Piotrovski answered in a whisper, "Poor Vera, yes, she is tired! Don't wake her." Verney, choking down the lump in his throat, pulled the blanket over his friend's shoulder with a touch of tenderness that might have belonged to a woman.

Some weeks later Verney took him away to the seacoast, where he improved rapidly—yet blanks in his memory remained. It was hard to see exactly where these blanks were, because he talked about nothing of importance. In fact he was almost silent. He knew Verney was with him, and he often asked for his nurse or Léon, but most persistently he asked for Vera—he seemed to miss her all the time. Happily his mind was easily distracted. Verney always told him that she was coming presently and he was content. As a test of recognition, the other



four inseparables came down. Jan knew them perfectly, called them by name, and was glad to see them. But the day after they were gone he had no remembrance of their having been down. His memory was like that of an old person, it existed only in the immediate present. Later on Verney took him to various places. He recognised familiar scenes and recalled associations with them, but was listless and indifferent to everything. Finally he became less apathetic and more himself, but as he grew better, he also grew proportionately restless and nervous. "Where could Vera be?" he asked continually, and it kept Verney's ingenuity busy, inventing means of distracting him. By degrees it came to him that he had been a writer of plays, and vaguely he began to remember the tragedy, but only as it used to be. He said one day, "She was a stupid wooden puppet, that Ysulinde. I am glad she is dead."

Verney asked quickly, "So she is dead, is she Jan?"

"Yes. She was drowned."

"Was she, where?"

"In the bottom of the ink pot." And then he looked listless and bored again. Another time he said, "I used to write, write, write. Sounds very dull! Doesn't it?"

"Oh, I don't know," Verney answered, "making imaginary persons real is a wonderful joy."

"They never were real, my women—a lovely lady in white said that." But when Verney tried gently to make him explain who the lovely lady was, Jan talked about waffles that he would like for supper.

They journeyed southward gradually, and by chance Verney selected as a stopping place the hotel at Assisi where Piotrovski and Vera had been together.

The place produced a marked effect upon Piotrovski, he grew very uneasy and the usual assurance that Vera would come soon failed to satisfy him. He wandered about the grounds in great distress. His excitement and effort to remember were painful. He clung to Verney's

arm as though in terror that the actual personality of his friend should desert him also. Then suddenly his first real symptom of returning consciousness came in his cry of "Paul! What has happened to me? Vera was here!—My head hurts so and I can't think—I can't remember!" But quickly as the excitement and distress had come, it went again leaving him apathetic, amiable, and indifferent. They went to Perugia. Piotrovski seemed contented and had no return of distressing symptoms.

Meanwhile the time for the production of "Ysulinde" drew near. A few days before the play was to begin Verney left the invalid in the care of the faithful Léon—there had for some time been no further need of a nurse—and went to Paris for the last rehearsal and to be present at the opening night.

There is, of course, no need to write about the success of "Ysulinde." There is scarcely an actress of note, to-day, who has not played its leading rôle, and few lovers of poetry who

have not read it many times—even in the translations which necessarily restrict its beauty. On the night of its production—on the night to which Piotrovski had always looked forward when Paris should be given the “something worthy of her”—Verney witnessed the acclaim of his friend’s genius with a great knot in his throat; the blight of that genius lying like a pall over his feelings. The other four inseparables were also in their accustomed stage box, but to them this great, culminating, deserved success was as tragic as it was to Verney. The latter, not able longer to bear it, hurried away from the creation that through its existence had undoubtedly destroyed the mind no less than the very soul of his friend.

He took the midnight express from Paris and returned to Piotrovski. The latter seemed about the same as usual. He was delighted to see Verney and interested in hearing about the play, although he did not at all understand it was his own production nor did he remember

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longer than while he was being told, anything about it. Two days later, however, Verney was suddenly aroused by the banging open of his door, and Jan like a maniac rushed into the room. Throwing himself on his knees beside Verney he clutched him wildly and shaking all over cried, "Paul! It is not true! Say it is not true!"

Verney sat up and held Piotrovski by arm and shoulder. The look in Jan's eyes was wild. And then terror greater than ever seized him—"Paul," he screamed, "where is she? Oh, Paul—say she is not dead! Tell me she is not dead. Is that what is the matter with me? For God's sake tell me the truth; I cannot remember anything! Is Vera dead? What did I do that night?" His face blanched as he asked, his lips grew dry.

"Jan—my friend—I don't know. No one knows—you alone hold that secret. Something terrible must have happened between you."

"How long have I been—ill?"

“Six months.”

Piotrovski covered his face with his hands and sat quite still. So still that Verney believed his memory had again lapsed. But when he took his hands down the agony in his countenance belied his silence. “It hurts my head so—to think, and when I try hard—it throbs worse. I can’t separate my imagination from fact. My writing and my life are all mixed.”

To soothe him as well as to control him Verney took his friend’s hand and held it very tight. “Listen, Jan, don’t try to force your thoughts. But can you remember a play—a tragedy—that you tried and tried to write? The heroine was the wife of a gambler who sold her to Saladin——”

Piotrovski’s eyes almost started from their sockets, his hands twitched spasmodically—“Ysulinde!—Vera! What did I do!” There was no doubt of his returning memory, his face was agonised and his voice came huskily in

gu!ps. "I was writing—writing and then I saw Ysulinde—Vera—Oh, God, what did I do! It was a lie! It was a lie! Oh, Paul! Help me to find her. Help me to crawl to her feet that I may tell her it was all a lie. A lie prompted by Satan himself." He broke down completely, sobbing like a child.

A little later—he pulled himself together, although his face had set into lines grey and old. "Paul, answer me truthfully. Do you know she is not——" he whispered the words as though they strangled him; "Do you *know* of her—death?"

Verney answered almost with joy. "No, Jan. On the contrary I have every reason to believe she lives, though I cannot find her!"

"It can't be possible that she still lives——" Piotrovski's voice was barely audible.

"People are not so easily dead. For weeks I went to the morgue not only of Paris but everywhere that the police had news of an unknown woman. Then I stopped that most

gruesome search when I was notified by her bankers that a draft on them had been presented. The amount that she has drawn is sufficiently large to keep her long without need of further money. The payment was made in Vienna. I went on at once. The cashier of the bank knew her well. He said she was so ill-looking that at first he scarcely recognised her—but he was sure enough of her identity to give her the money without question. I stayed in Vienna for a week, and with the help of the police we searched everywhere. I think she must have merely passed through. I went to every place that seemed possible for her to be. From Vienna I went to Hungary. I saw her brother.”

“ Yes? ”

“ He told me that his sister the Duchesse de Marsin had long been dead, so far as he was concerned, and it was of no interest to him whether she were actually so, or not. Whereupon he had the door closed in my face. Charm-



ing manners her brother had. I have of course seen the Princess Mitzka—she, poor soul, had grown quite thin with grief. She knows nothing. No more than I, of that I am very sure.”

From that time cog by cog the wheels of sequent events slipped into place in Jan's mind. But facing the truth was no respite from the miserable situation. Also Jan's knowledge of his play's overwhelming success added to, rather than took away from, his guilt and remorse.

Another cruel barb of fate was the news of his wife's death. He was free to marry, now that it was too late to save Vera from the terrible price that she had paid for their brief happiness.

From the moment of his coming to himself Piotrovski had only one thought in mind. Just as in former times the tragedy obsessed him, so now remorse and love for Vera filled every nook and craving of his consciousness. He went at once to Vienna, where she had last

been seen, he haunted the places where he thought there could be the slightest chance of finding her; he questioned every one—but he was only repeating what Verney had done long before, and since the day upon which the payment had been made at the bank, there was no trace of her. Verney, meanwhile, had been obliged to return to his own work in Paris. Little Smith and Bluet had both offered to go to Piotrovski, but he was not in the humour for even the kindest of friends. His heart was too full of anguish and longing.

Gradually he travelled southward, each familiar scene bringing more vividly the loss of her with whom he had seen and felt it all before. Florence, Perugia, Aquila, Benevento, Naples; together they had delighted in each new beauty, but most of all they had both loved Sicily.

Sicily! That land of life and colour, where they had known their most perfect hours of happiness, had never been out of his mind in all the weeks of his search, but he could scarcely

bring himself to go again to the places that had meant so much to them in the early days of their life together. He had by now given up all hope of finding her, for he felt convinced by every evidence that she was dead. Her personality was not one that could be blotted out entirely—someone would have seen her, there would be some clue. Yet he was now on his way to the scene of his greatest happiness, impelled to the step very much as a criminal is impelled to return to the scene of his crime.

It had been a dreary day in Naples, with rain and heavy mist and a complete shrouding of its beauty, and the heaviness in his heart and the utter depression of his whole being were almost beyond endurance as the train clanged through the dirty outskirts of the city. Slowly his eyes began to take in the passing ugliness of dilapidated houses that had once been wealthy homes and were now turned over to the worst that Naples harboured in the shape of man and woman, and the material ruin of the

buildings added to his profound gloom. A gate flashed by, with a glimpse of green and colour—and then another and another, until flashes of things beyond these gates, with the wet vivid green of orange and lemon, masses of flowers, reds, pinks and golds slowly compelled his attention. As the train neared Castellamare he got a view of the bay, a bit of the beach and the ruined castle on the gold-brown rock out in the blue water, his depression lifted and he had gleams of his past perfect happiness with her—gleams as vivid and beautiful as the breaks in the western sky, through which the rosy rays of the setting sun, made even the mud hovels of the fisher folk, things of beauty, and turned the bay into a great liquid opal, and Capri, a blue wonder in the distance. Slowly the train skirted the wide bay, now bathed completely in sunlight, while the cliffs of Capo Sorrentino, capped with clouds and still holding mist in the hollows, were lighted with the orange glow of the end of day. The grey of olive, the green

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of almond and the solemn dark green of carub tree softened to a mere shimmer of greens and browns as the train wound its way back from the sea and among the hills, through groves and patches of woods, the wet leaves glistening in the fading light and the valleys rapidly filling with a sense of mystery and unreality.

The hours of twilight went by while Piotrovski sat back lost in a state of suspended thought. As the train emerged from the hills and the sea opened out again before him, the full moon rose over the hills beyond Salerno. The lights of the town and about the port twinkled in the haze below and a quiet seemed spread over the whole scene, touching Piotrovski's tired spirit with a peace it had not known for many weeks and slowly led his thoughts to the happy past. Memories of the other time he had journeyed this way with her, came to him without bidding, and he lived over that time when the treasures of love and companionship had been his, lived again without restraint the moments of intense

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feeling when their very souls had been lost in waves of overwhelming and indescribable joy. The wondrous night was casting its spell over him, his poet's soul was stirred to its very depths by the beauty of the mysterious landscape under the full moon,—and he fell into a peaceful dreamless sleep, the first he had known since memory had returned to him.

In the first grey of dawn he wakened with a start, the rain beating in his face, through the unclosed window of the railway carriage, and his eyes opened on a chill view of rock and cactus against the dull squall-swept sea. The train jolted over the rough road-bed, passing deserted villas, and peasant houses, some in partial ruin, others rent to the foundations, by the earthquake, all speaking of a misery and desolation beyond words. Whole rows of orange trees were swept down and buried under fallen terrace wall or landslide. In sheer tenacity of life, some trees, though half buried under masses of masonry, were blossoming and bear-

ing fruit, and once-cared-for hedges of cactus and geranium were growing out of bounds and spreading to the trees. The similarity between the ruin of his own life and that of his once perfect paradise forced itself bitterly upon his consciousness. Last night's memories of joy that had been were gone, and now in garish daylight he had nothing but the sickening realisation of present pain.

Finally he arrived at his journey's inevitable end, Vencata. Remorseful memory had haunted every stage and stopping place of his journey, but in Vencata the suggestions of her were overwhelming in their vividness. There, around the bend of the quay, was the house in which they had lived. His eyes filled and he turned his glance away quickly and out to sea. But the sea too was full of memory: there were the same delicate blues, greens and mauves—the green where the sun struck in patches. Vera had called it the wettest colour she had ever seen—and there was the white sanded curve of harbour.

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It was all exactly as it used to be; there were the boats they had so often watched; the colours of the weather-beaten hulls were altogether lovely, and the men taking the bags of sulphur aboard were all pale gold; the masts swung lazily to and fro against the blue and white of sky and clouds, and the blocks creaked and knocked against the rigging. On the other side of the dock was a tramp ship taking on coal—all the men black, the hull black, a haze of black dust rising in the air, and just one brilliant streak of scarlet on the strake, cutting through the picture almost painfully.

Not far away he could see the windows of the hotel where they had stayed, and farther above on the terraced hill the white columns of the archbishop's garden. Look where he would, he saw Vera's eyes, heard her voice, felt her presence; every vista and rock, and grain of sand, vivified in his memory her smile, her touch.

It was too harrowing—he could not bear it. No matter how blank the world's distances



might be he must leave this haunted place at once. Putting the thought into action he started for the railway station, when directly in front of him—but a short distance away—he caught sight of Teobaldo, the young boatman they had employed. With a feeling of suffocation Piotrovski tried to evade him, but the boy ran to him with joy, crying:

“Ah, God be praised, the signora has come! The poor signora—it cannot be long—it is good the signora has come at last!”

## CHAPTER XVII

“THE signora!” To an ear more keen than a Sicilian peasant’s, the blurted exclamation would have revealed Piotrovski’s agitation. But Jan had wit enough to realise that any evidence of surprise might make the boy aware that he was betraying a secret all too faithfully guarded by the authorities, and he said, with what calmness he could muster, “I am going to her at once! How do you get to her rooms, Teobaldo? I did not read the directions aright!”

“The last door to the left, Signore, on the second floor. She no longer goes out, Signore. The end is very near. Sister Maria Annunziata keeps me always ready to go for his Grace the Archbishop, though Padre Fillippo comes every day to see her. And his Grace comes often, as well.”

Teobaldo had looked toward the hotel where they had once stayed, and Jan had no doubt of its being the right one. It was strange, he thought, that she should have chosen as her haven the one spot where, because of its association with her, he could scarcely bring himself to come, and where he had already found it impossible to stay. Then he remembered that she had stopped at this little hotel ever since her childhood, and realised that to her its associations were not wholly of him. These thoughts ran through his mind as he hurried on with what self-possession he might. At the hotel entrance the old *portiere*, who had known Vera since a child, and who recognised him as her husband, showed his resentment by almost barring his ingress. But Jan's drawn face somewhat softened the man's anger; he opened the door wide and motioned to the staircase.

"The last door on the left?" Piotrovski asked unsteadily.

The *portiere* nodded, and Piotrovski went

up. At the door he paused, his heart beating so that the door frame seemed made of waving rings. There could be no doubt of her refusal to see him, should she be told it was he, his only hope lay in taking her by surprise. He knocked, therefore, but at the same time turned the handle—and entered!

It was a big room with white walls and white curtained windows, but he saw only a great flood of sunlight, and in its midst—Vera! Was that really Vera? She was propped in a deep wicker chair surrounded by pillows, so fragile, so changed! Had he come upon her unknowingly he might not have recognised her. In all the weeks during which he had pictured her broken, and ill, he had pictured no such change as this. He halted, awe-struck, incapable of moving,—while one thought filled his brain—it was he who had brought all this to pass. This wreckage at which he stood aghast was entirely of his own doing. She whose courage had been without limit, whose loving and giving had been

without measure, was despoiled of all by him! And for what! That some puppets on a stage might strut and mew before a soulless collection of animates known as the general public. Suffocated with horror of himself, overwhelmed with remorse, the blood ebbed from his heart, then with a rush surged back again, as choking he threw himself at her feet.

He expected no better than to have her shrink from him, he cringed waiting to hear hatred in her dear voice as she ordered him from the room. But nothing of all this that he dreaded happened, although his coming had startled her violently and she pressed back even further into the pillows, her hands held against her heart, her breath coming with great effort. She was very weak, very ill. He saw the black-robed form of the nursing sister, moving forward to interfere; but Vera must have given an order, for the figure moved away, and he heard a door gently close. Then he felt Vera's hand upon his bent head.

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“Vera! Vera!” He cried from a throat strangling with pain. With great effort he looked up into eyes deep shadowed between the bones of cheek and brow and strangely brilliant. But the look of hurt that he had last seen in them, the look that had followed his every conscious moment since his memory of their terrible parting, was gone. In her expression there was no trace of hate, or anger, or even of pain. She looked at him kindly and compassionately, although with an utter impersonality—that made the distance as unbridgable as though they were separated by the width of the world.

After his first exclamation of her name, he had found it impossible to utter a word of all that was struggling within him, so that it was she who spoke first with great sweetness of tone:

“I know—you have suffered.”

Her forbearance unmanned him. “Vera, oh, Vera!” he stammered huskily. “It was not true—something horrible and fiendish got hold

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of me—I know you can never understand—you can never, never forgive!”

She smiled a wan, shadowy smile, as though the old brilliance had been caught and reflected in a moonbeam. There was a long pause; then she said slowly: “Yes. I have read ‘Ysulinde’—and I forgive!”

With an indrawn breath of wonder Jan tremulously, slowly held out his arms—afraid yet longing to take her into them. The abject humbleness in his face brought the tears to her eyes, she made no perceptible motion to check his impulse, but his hands fell limply to his sides.

“Also I understand—I understood—long ago—I even wanted to go to you—much of me did—but something in me *died* that night. It is not that I resent—it is not that I want to deny you, or to be cruel, but——” she put her hand against her heart—“it is as though I were all empty, here! I just can’t give—that is all.”

“Vera,” he cried, “is there no way I can

make matters right—I implore you to listen to me, I cannot tell you half—I cannot find the words, but I want you to know that I understand that in our life together I reaped the benefit; you all the payment—to wipe out that dreadful night, is impossible, but let me make what reparation I can. Ah, Vera, let me make you my wife—it will not be a false sacrament now. The one who had my name is dead. You will marry me, dear, won't you? Let me show you what care and tenderness can be. Give me the right to cherish you now so long as we both shall live?"

She did not answer, and, even in looking at him, she seemed to be looking through and beyond him.

At last she shook her head.

"You won't? No—no, you can never forgive, I have done too great wrong——"

"Hush! I have told you, I do forgive—but it is too late. I have only days—to live. Perhaps only hours—no, dear, don't grieve—I am



ready! I have made my peace. But even if I had a long life before me—I could—not. Our life was wrong—Jan, we took it together, took it in defiance of law and said the while: ‘See what we are doing!’ Can we now go back to holy church and say: ‘Had we but waited thou wouldst have given us the gift we took—so here it is back; forget our theft and give it to us honourably!’”

She looked at him, her face tender with pity, but a pity that made desolate his hope as anger could not have done, for in her very sweetness he felt the finality of one who had passed through the crucible of earthly fire.

“Don’t you see?” she said in her soft, half-breathed tone. “To love as we did is ended; to love less would be punishment worse, far worse, than this. Love such as we had was possible only through its perfectness. I do not say it was the fault of you—or of me, but it is gone. Gone like the perfume of a flower, like the sound of music.”

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She had coughed quite a little, but now a paroxysm racked her, and he realised what her malady was. Presently she lay back in her pillows very weak and short of breath. In a few minutes, she began, with effort, but she evidently wanted to say what was on her heart: "Love is not the greater part of you—your genius is first. It was your genius that I worshipped first of all, and it was your genius that demanded payment of you, as well as of me. I want you to know that I understand. It is something to realise that 'Ysulinde' was created——"

"Don't speak of it! I would to God I had never written a line—I never shall again!"

"You are wrong, very wrong. We committed sin. You must not resent the instrument of just punishment. Out of the wreckage of our lives—upon the greatness of our love you must build—it is the only way you can repay the sacrifice of mine!" Her sentence ended in another violent attack of coughing. The sud-

den shock and excitement of seeing Jan again, and the effort to give her thoughts and feelings, clear expression, proved too great for her exhausted vitality; this second attack of coughing ended in hemorrhage and collapse.

With complete quiet such as she had been surrounded with, she would in all probability have grown gradually weaker, but Jan's coming fanning the faint spark of life into flame, it flickered, flared with apparent renewal of strength and in reality ravaged the little vitality that was left. He jumped to his feet and called Sister Maria Annunziata from the next room.

"I am her husband," he said.

The sister looked at him calmly, impersonally, neither accepting nor rejecting his statement, but allowed him to lift Vera and lay her on the bed. When she came to herself a while later, the sister had left the room, and Jan was sitting close by her. She put out her hand and touched his cheek. It was wet.

"Don't!" she said. "To those who have served some purpose in life—it is not sad to die. Do you remember—I have thought of it so often—what I said to you of the skylark, that lived as no other skylark ever had? I, too, shall live for centuries; though in reality I shall live only a very little while. No, dear; don't grieve. Life has been far too good to us. We must have pain, in order to know fully that which has been sweet. I have had less pain than I deserve, and many and many memories have been left that are sweet. All my life I wanted to help, to be an incentive to greatness. And I have been. You must remember that and let it make you glad. Through my suffering was created one of the greatest tragedies ever written, and I know also, now—it was not true what you said—for always, always, I had your love."

"You had—you have——"

Again the merest shadow of her brilliant smile came back, but she was growing perceptibly

weaker; her eyes closed; her breath seemed a mere flutter. Piotrovski sat beside her, holding her hand—he scarcely dared breathe for fear of waking her. He thought she was asleep—but soon she opened her eyes again, and their glance resting on him grew soft and wistful.

“Jan!”

“Yes, dear one.”

“I loved—you—much.”

With an added pang he heard the past tense. “From now on, my every moment shall be devoted to you—my wife! We will go to St. Moritz. You will soon be yourself again. Love *must* make you well!” It was a cry of despair wrung from the depth of the fear in his heart, for he knew she was dying.

“I am quite—quite well now! Jan, dear, remember—you must write on, and on, and on! Beautiful—wonderful—poems, and—if it seems hard—no living thing—was ever—born—except through—pain.”

"Vera, oh, Vera!" He broke down completely. "I can't bear it!"

In answer to his distress, the protective tenderness came back momentarily into her eyes. It was as though her faithful spirit answered to the voice that had ruled her heart; and yet it was as though but a small part of herself were present, and the greater part were far beyond his reach. Her soul was as far away as his mind had ever been in its most aloof mood. She was as sweet, as patient, as lovingly forgiving as it was possible for woman to be—but he realised that his loss of her was absolute, he who had possessed every fibre of her being, could seize and hold only the outer surface of her consciousness. Her lips parted twice, she whispered half unconsciously. He bent to catch the broken syllables, but they were not meant for him; they were fragments of the prayers of the rosary. She opened her eyes again—but she looked at him unseeingly.

Then, as though to rob him even of these last moments, the door opened and Sister Maria Annunziata came in, followed by the venerable Archbishop of Vencata and a priest. They lighted the blessed candles on a table by the bed. The archbishop put a crucifix in her hands. The priest and sister knelt at one side of the bed, Jan dropped on his knees at the other. Dipping his thumb in the holy oil, the archbishop administered extrémé unction to her eyes—her eyes, that seemed to Jan always to have been gazing into the infinite—wiping away with the holy oil all her sins of vision; to her ears, which had hearkened to no evil; to her nostrils; to her lips, which in all her life had uttered only truth and kindness; to her hands, which had been raised against no man, but ever held out to help; and to her heart—Jan felt his own shattering.

Through the administration of the solemn rites, her fingers touched the crucifix, and, as though the very contact gave her renewed

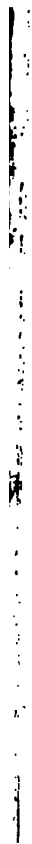
strength, she spoke her devout "Amen" almost clearly. Prayers not said for years came to Jan's lips, and were his soul's acknowledgment that a stronger force even than love had taken her from him at the last. Before him like a grey plain stretched long years of life, of work, of giving himself to that force which had made, and wrecked, him and her.

He looked up dry-eyed, dry-throated, racked in every nerve and muscle. And as he looked, softly there came into her face an unforgettable peace and sweetness, an expression almost of rapture—and for the last time her lips opened to speak. Jan strained in every fibre to hear. Scarcely articulate were breathed her dying words: "Father Who art in Heaven—hallowed be Thy name——"

Like the faint hushing of wings, her breath stopped.

THE END





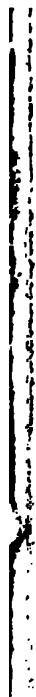
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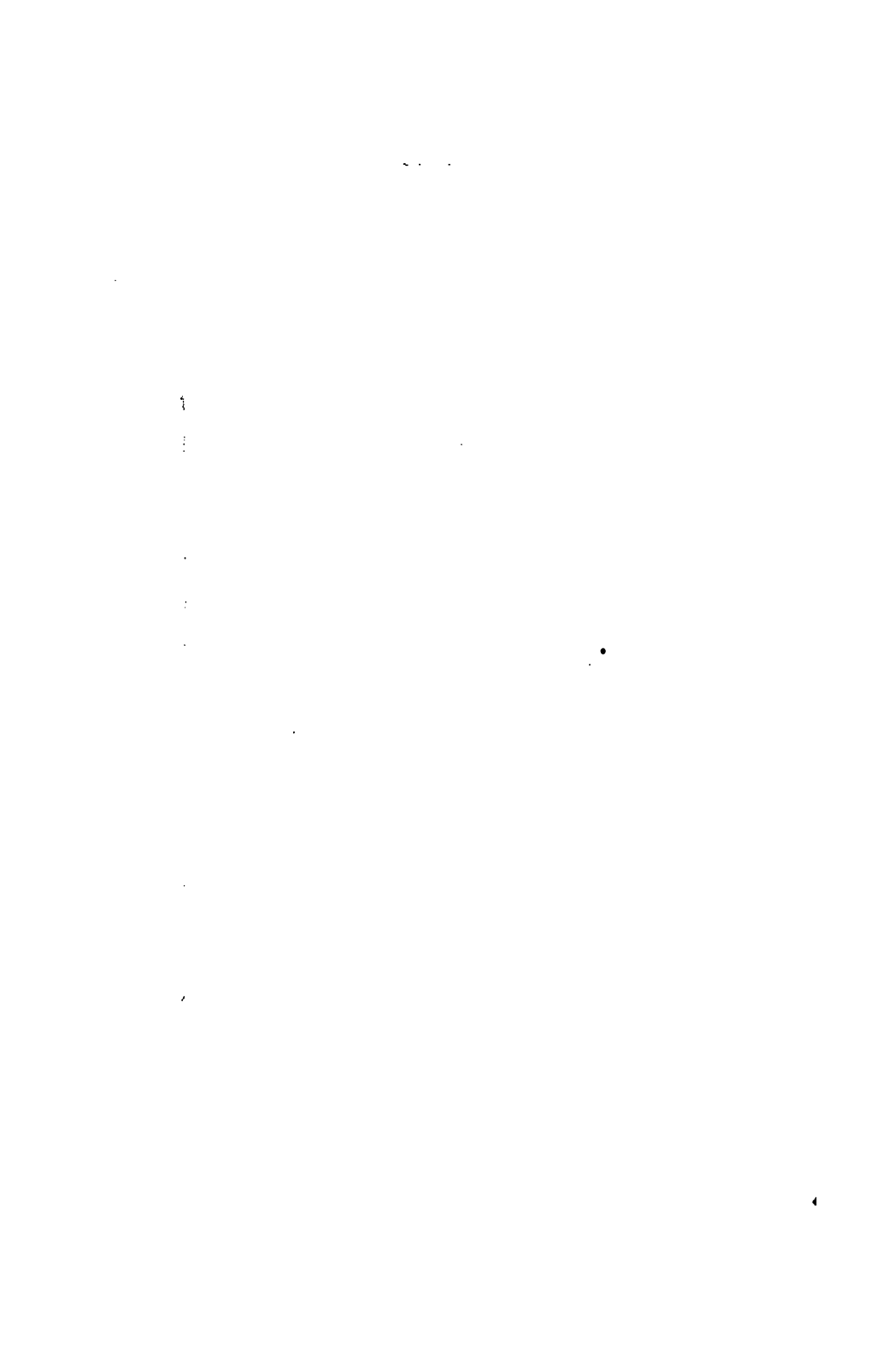
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the 1990s, the number of people in the UK who are aged 65 and over has increased from 10.5 million to 13.5 million (1990-2000).

There are a number of reasons for the increase in the number of people aged 65 and over. One of the main reasons is the increase in life expectancy. In 1990, the average life expectancy at birth was 75 years for men and 79 years for women. By 2000, this had increased to 77 years for men and 81 years for women.

Another reason for the increase in the number of people aged 65 and over is the increase in the number of people who are surviving into old age. In 1990, 10.5 million people were aged 65 and over. By 2000, this number had increased to 13.5 million.

The increase in the number of people aged 65 and over has a number of implications for society. One of the main implications is the increase in the number of people who are dependent on others for care and support.

In 1990, there were 10.5 million people aged 65 and over. By 2000, this number had increased to 13.5 million. This means that there are now 3 million more people aged 65 and over than there were in 1990.

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