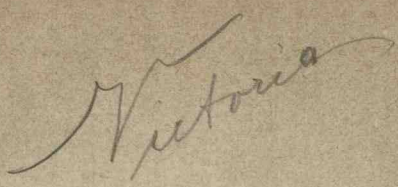

COLLECTION

OF

BRITISH AUTHORS

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

VOL. 1878.

MOTHS BY OUIDA.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

Le monde aime le vice et hait l'amour; le vice est un bon enfant, un viveur, un drôle, un gourmet; il tient bonne table, et vous invite souvent; l'amour, au contraire, est un pédant, un solitaire, un misanthrope, un va-nu-pieds; il ne vous amuse pas; vous criez vite, "à la lanterne!"—RIVAREZ.

MOTHS

A NOVEL

BY

OUIDA

"Like unto moths fretting a garment" (PSALM)

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LEIPZIG
BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ
1880.

Inscribed

TO

MY OLD FRIEND

ALGERNON BORTHWICK

IN MEMORY OF THE DAYS OF

"PUCK"

AND AS A SLIGHT TOKEN OF AN

UNCHANGED REGARD

AND ESTEEM

MOTHS.

CHAPTER I.

LADY DOLLY ought to have been perfectly happy. She had everything that can constitute the joys of a woman of her epoch.

She was at Trouville. She had won heaps of money at play. She had made a correct book on the races. She had seen her chief rival looking bilious in an unbecoming gown. She had had a letter from her husband to say he was going away to Java or Jupiter or somewhere indefinitely. She wore a costume which had cost a great tailor twenty hours of anxious and continuous reflection. Nothing but *baptiste* indeed! but *baptiste* sublimised and apotheosised by niello buttons, old lace, and genius. She had her adorers and slaves grouped about her. She had found her dearest friend out in cheating at cards. She had dined the night before at the Maison Persanne and would dine this night at the Maison Normande. She had been told a state secret by a minister which she knew it was shameful of him to have

been coaxed and chaffed into revealing. She had had a new comedy read to her in manuscript-form three months before it would be given in Paris, and had screamed at all its indecencies in the choice company of a Serene Princess and two ambassadresses as they all took their chocolate in their dressing-gowns. Above all, she was at Trouville, having left half a million of debts behind her strewn about in all directions, and standing free as air in gossamer garments on the planks in the summer sunshine. There was a charming blue sea beside her; a balmy fluttering breeze around her, a crowd of the most fashionable sunshades of Europe before her, like a bed of full-blown anemones. She had floated and bobbed and swum and splashed semi-nude, with all the other mermaids *à la mode*, and had shown that she must still be a pretty woman, pretty even in daylight, or the men would not have looked at her so: and yet with all this she was not enjoying herself.

It was very hard.

The yachts came and went, the sands glittered, the music sounded, men and women in bright-coloured stripes took headers into the tide or pulled themselves about in little canoes; the snowy canvas of the tent shone like a huge white mushroom, and the faces of all the houses were lively with green shutters and awnings brightly striped like the bathers; people, the gayest and best-born people in Europe, laughed and chattered,

and made love, and Lady Dolly with them, pacing the deal planks with her pretty high-heeled shoes; but for all that she was wretched.

She was thinking to herself, "*What on earth shall I do with her?*"

It ruined her morning. It clouded the sunshine. It spoiled her cigarette. It made the waltzes sound like dirges. It made her chief rival look almost good-looking to her. It made a gown combined of parrots' breasts and passion-flowers that she was going to wear in the afternoon feel green, and yellow, and bilious in her anticipation of it, though it was quite new and a wonder. It made her remember her debts. It made her feel that she had not digested those *écrevisses* at supper. It made her fancy that her husband might not really go to Java or Jupiter. It was so sudden, so appalling, so bewildering, so endless a question; and Lady Dolly only asked questions, she never answered them or waited for their answers.

After all, what could she do with her? She, a pretty woman and a wonderful flirt, who liked to dance to the very end of the cotillon, and had as many lovers as she had pairs of shoes. What could she do with a daughter just sixteen years old?

"It makes one look so old!" she had said to herself wretchedly, as she had bobbed and danced in the waves. Lady Dolly was not old; she was not quite thirty-four, and she was as pretty as if she were seventeen, perhaps prettier; even when she was not "done

up," and she did not need to do herself up very much just yet, really not much, considering,—well, considering so many things, that she never went to bed till daylight, that she never ate anything digestible, and never drank anything wholesome, that she made her waist fifteen inches round, and destroyed her nerves with gambling, chloral, and many other things; considering these, and so many other reasons, besides the one supreme reason that everybody does it, and that you always look a fright if you don't do it.

The thought of her daughter's impending arrival made Lady Dolly miserable. Telegrams were such horrible things. Before she had had time to realise the force of the impending catastrophe the electric wires had brought her tidings that the girl was actually on her way across the sea, not to be stayed by any kind of means, and would be there by nightfall. Nightfall at Trouville! When Lady Dolly in the deftest of summer-evening toilettes would be just opening her pretty mouth for her first morsel of salmon and drop of Chablis, with the windows open and the moon rising on the sea, and the card-tables ready set, and the band playing within earshot, and the courtiers all around and at her orders, whether she liked to go out and dance, or stay at home for poker or *chemin de fer*.

"What in the world shall I do with her, Jack?" she sighed to her chief counsellor.

The chief counsellor opened his lips, answered "Marry her!" then closed them on a big cigar.

"Of course! One always marries girls; how stupid you are," said Lady Dolly peevishly.

The counsellor smiled grimly, "And then you will be a grandmother," he said with a cruel relish: he had just paid a bill at a *bric-à-brac* shop for her and it had left him unamiable.

"I suppose you think that witty," said Lady Dolly with delicate contempt. "Well, Hélène there is a great-grandmother, and look at her!"

Hélène was a Prussian princess, married to a Russian minister: she was arrayed in white with a tender blending about it of all the blues in creation, from that of a summer sky to that of a *lapis lazuli* ring; she had a quantity of fair curls, a broad hat wreathed with white lilac and convolvulus, a complexion of cream, teeth of pearl, a luminous and innocent smile; she was talking at the top of her voice and munching chocolate; she had a circle of young men round her; she looked, perhaps, if you wished to be ill-natured, eight-and-twenty. Yet a great-grandmother she was, and the "Almanach de Gotha," said so, and alas! said her age.

"You won't wear so well as Hélène. You don't take care of yourself," the counsellor retorted, with a puff of smoke between each sentence.

"WHAT!" screamed Lady Dolly, so that her voice rose above the din of all the other voices, the sound

of the waves, the click-clack of the high heels, and the noise of the band. Not take care of herself!—she! who had every fashionable medicine that came out, and, except at Trouville, never would be awakened for any earthly thing till one o'clock in the day.

"You don't take care of yourself," said the counsellor. "No; you eat heaps of sweetmeats. You take too much tea, too much ice, too much soup, too much wine; too much everything. You——"

"Oh! if you mean to insult me and call me a drunkard——!" said Lady Dolly, very hotly flushing up a little.

"You smoke quite awfully too much," pursued her companion immovably. "It hurts *us*, and can't be good for you. Indeed, all you women would be dead if you smoked right; you don't smoke right; you send all your smoke out, chattering; it never gets into your mouth even, and so that saves you all; if you drew it in, as we do, you would be dead, all of you. Who was the first woman that smoked I often wonder?"

"The idea of my not wearing as well as Hélène," pursued Lady Dolly, unable to forget the insult. "Well, there are five-and-twenty years between us, thank goodness, and more!"

"I say you won't," said the counsellor, "not if you go on as you do, screaming all night over those cards and taking quarts of chloral because you can't sleep? Why can't you sleep? *I* can."

"All the lower animals sleep like tops," said Lady Dolly. "You seem to have been reading medical treatises, and they haven't agreed with you. Go and buy me a 'Petit Journal.'"

The counsellor went grumbling and obedient—a tall, good-looking, well-built, and very fair Englishman, who had shot everything that was shootable all over the known world. Lady Dolly smiled serenely on the person who glided to her elbow, and took the vacant place; a slender, pale, and graceful Frenchman, the Duc de Dinant of the *vieille souche.*

"Dear old Jack gets rather a proser," she thought, and she began to plan a fishing picnic with her little Duke; a picnic at which everybody was to go bare-footed, and dress like peasants—real common peasants, you know, of course,—and dredge, didn't they call it, and poke about, and hunt for oysters. Lady Dolly had lovely feet, and could afford to uncover them; very few of her rivals could do so, a fact of which she took cruel advantage, and from which she derived exquisite satisfaction in clear shallows and rock pools. "The donkeys! they've cramped themselves in tight boots!" she said to herself, with the scorn of a superior mind. She always gave her miniature feet and arched insteps their natural play, and therein displayed a wisdom of which it must be honestly confessed, the rest of her career gave no glimpse.

The counsellor bought the "Petit Journal" and a

"Figaro" for himself, and came back; but she did not notice him at all. A few years before the neglect would have made him miserable; now it made him comfortable—such is the ingratitude of man. He sat down and read the "Figaro" with complacency, while she, under her sunshade beamed on Gaston de Dinant, and on four or five others of his kind; youngsters without youth, but, as a compensation for the loss, with a perfect knowledge of Judic's last song, and Dumas' last piece, of the last new card-room scandal, and the last drawing-room adultery; of everything that was coming out at the theatres, and of all that was of promise in the stables. They were not in the least amusing in themselves, but the chatter of the world has almost always an element of the amusing in it, because it ruins so many characters, and gossips and chuckles so merrily and so lightly over infamy, incest, or anything else that it thinks only fun, and deals with such impudent personalities. At any rate they amused Lady Dolly, and her Duc de Dinant did more; they arranged the picnic,—without shoes, that was indispensable, without shoes, and in real peasant's things, else there would be no joke—they settled their picnic, divorced half-a-dozen of their friends, conjectured about another half-dozen all those enormities which modern society would blush at in the Bible but, out of it, whispers and chuckles over very happily; speculated about the few unhappy unknowns who had dared to enter the magic

precincts of these very dusty sands; wondered with whom the Prince of Wales would dine that night, and whose that new yawl was, that had been standing off since morning flying the R. Y. S. flag; and generally diverted one another so well, that beyond an occasional passing spasm of remembrance, Lady Dolly had forgotten her impending trial.

"I think I will go in to breakfast," she said at last, and got up. It was one o'clock, and the sun was getting hot; the anemone-bed began to heave and be dispersed; up and down the planks the throng was thick still, the last bathers, peignoir-enwrapped, were sauntering up from the edge of the sea. The counsellor folded his "Figaro," and shut up his cigar-case; his was the useful but humble task to go home before her and see that the Moselle was iced, the prawns just netted, the strawberries just culled, and the cutlets duly frothing in their silver dish. The Duc de Dinant sauntered by her with no weightier duty than to gaze gently down into her eyes, and buy a stephanotis or a knot of roses for her bosom when they passed the flower-baskets.

"What are they all looking at?" said Lady Dolly to her escort suddenly. Bodies of the picturesque parti-coloured crowd were all streaming the same way, inland towards the sunny white houses, whose closed green shutters were all so attractively suggestive of the shade and rest to be found within. But the heads of

the crowd were turning back seaward, and their eyes and eye-glasses all gazed in the same direction.

Was it at the Prince? Was it at the President? Was it the Channel fleet had hove in sight? or some swimmer drowning, or some porpoises, or what? No, it was a new arrival. A new arrival was no excitement at Trouville if it were somebody that everybody knew. Emperors were common-place; ministers were non-entities; marshals were monotonous; princes were more numerous than the porpoises; and great dramatists, great singers, great actors, great orators, were all there as the very sands of the sea. But an arrival of somebody that nobody knew had a certain interest, if only as food for laughter. It seemed so queer that there should be such people, or that existing, they should venture there.

"Who is it?" said Trouville, in one breath, and the women laughed, and the men stared, and both sexes turned round by common consent. Something lovelier than anything there was coming through them as a sunbeam comes through dust. Yet it wore nothing but brown holland! Brown holland at Trouville may be worn indeed, but it is brown holland transfigured, sublimated, canonised, borne, like Lady Dolly's *baptiste*, into an apotheosis of *écru* lace and floss silk embroideries, and old point cravats, and buttons of repoussé work, or ancient smalto; brown holland raised to the empyrean, and no more discoverable to the

ordinary naked eye than the original flesh, fish, or fowl lying at the root of a good cook's *mayonnaise* is discernible to the uneducated palate.

But this was brown holland naked and not ashamed, unadorned and barbaric, without any attempt at disguise of itself, and looking wet and wrinkled from sea-water, and very brown indeed beside the fresh and ethereal costumes of the ladies gathered there, that looked like bubbles just blown in a thousand hues to float upon the breeze.

"Brown holland! good gracious!" said Lady Dolly, putting up her eyeglass. She could not very well see the wearer of it; there were so many men between them; but she could see the wet, clinging, tumbled skirt which came in amongst the wonderful garments of the sacred place, and to make this worse there was an old Scotch plaid above the skirt, not worn, thrown on anyhow, as she said pathetically, long afterwards.

"What a guy!" said Lady Dolly.

"What a face!" said the courtiers; but they said it under their breath, being wise in their generation, and praising no woman before another.

But the brown holland came towards her, catching in the wind, and showing feet as perfect as her own. The brown holland stretched two hands out to her, and a voice cried aloud,

"Mother! don't you know me, mother?"

Lady Dolly gave a little sharp scream, then stood

still. Her pretty face was very blank, her rosy small mouth was parted in amaze and disgust.

"IN THAT DRESS!" she gasped, when the position became clear to her and her senses returned.

But the brown holland was clinging in a wild and joyous kind of horrible, barbarous way all about her, as it seemed, and the old Scotch plaid was pressing itself against her *baptiste* skirts.

"Oh, mother! how lovely you are! Not changed in the very least! Don't you know me. Oh dear! don't you know me? I am Vere."

Lady Dolly was a sweet-tempered woman by nature, and only made fretful occasionally by maids' contre-temps, debts, husbands, and other disagreeable accompaniments of life. But, at this moment, she had no other sense than that of rage. She could have struck her sunshade furiously at all creation; she could have fainted, only the situation would have been rendered more ridiculous still if she had, and that consciousness sustained her; the sands, and the planks, and the sea, and the sun, all went round her in a whirl of wrath. She could hear all her lovers, and friends, and rivals, and enemies tittering; and Princess Hélène Olgarouski, who was at her shoulder, said in the pleasantest way—

"Is that your little daughter, dear? Why she is quite a woman! A new beauty for Monseigneur."

Lady Dolly could have slain her hundreds in that

moment, had her sunshade but been of steel. To be made ridiculous! There is no more disastrous destiny under the sun.

The brown holland had ceased to cling about her, finding itself repulsed; the Scotch plaid had fallen down on the plank; there were two brilliant and wistful eyes regarding her from above, and one hand still stretched out shyly.

"I am Vere!" said a voice in which tears trembled and held a struggle with pride.

"I see you are!" said Lady Dolly with asperity. "What on earth made you come in this—this—indecent way for—without even dressing! I expected you at night. Is that Fräulein Schroder? She should be ashamed of herself."

"I see no shame, Miladi," retorted in guttural tones an injured German, "in that a long-absent and much-loving daughter should be breathless to flee to embrace the one to whom she owes her being——"

"Hold your tongue!" said Lady Dolly angrily. Fräulein Schroder wore a green veil and blue spectacles, and was not beautiful to the eye, and was grizzle-headed; and the friends and lovers, and courtiers, and enemies, were laughing uncontrollably.

"What an angel of loveliness! But a woman; quite a woman. She must be twenty at least, my dear?" said Princess Hélène, who always said the pleasantest thing she could think of at any time.

"Vere is sixteen," said Lady Dolly sharply, much ruffled, seeing angrily that the girl's head in its sunburnt sailor's hat, bound with a black ribbon, was nearly a foot higher than her own, hung down, though it now was, like a rose in the rain.

There was a person coming up from his mile swim in the sea, with the burnous-like folds cast about him more gracefully than other men were able ever to cast theirs.

"How do you manage to get so much grace out of a dozen yards of bath towelling, Corrèze?" asked an Englishman who was with him.

"*C'est mon métier à moi d'être poseur*," said the other, paraphrasing the famous saying of Joseph the Second.

"Ah, no," said the Englishman, "you never do *poser;* that is the secret of the charm of the thing. I feel like a fool in these *spadilles* and swathings; but you—you look as if you had just come up from a sacred river of the East, and are worthy to sing strophes to a Nourmahal."

"*Encore une fois—mon métier*," said the other, casting some of the linen folds over his head, which was exceedingly handsome, and almost line for line like the young Sebastian of Del Sarto. At that moment he saw the little scene going on between Lady Dolly and her daughter, and watched it from a distance with much amusement.

"What an exquisite face that child has,—that lovely tint like the wild white rose, there is nothing like it. It makes all the women with colour look vulgar," he said, after a prolonged gaze through a friend's field-glass. "Who is she do you say? Miladi Dolly's daughter? Is it possible? I thought Miladi was made herself yesterday in Giroux's shop, and was kept in a wadded box when her mechanism was not wound up. Surely, it is impossible Dolly can ever have stooped to such a homely unartificial thing as maternity. You must be mistaken."

"No. In remote ages she married a cousin. The white wild rose is the result."

"A charming result. A child only, but an exquisite child. It is a pity we are in this costume, or we would go and be presented; though Miladi would not be grateful, to judge by her face now. Poor little Dolly! It is hard to have a daughter—and a daughter that comes to Trouville in August."

Then he who was a figure of grace even in white towelling, and had a face like Saint Sebastian, handed the field-glass back to his friend, and went to his hotel to dress.

Meanwhile Lady Dolly was saying irritably: "Go home to my house, Vere,—the Châlet Ludoff. Of course you ought to have gone there first; why didn't you go there first and *dress?* None but an idiot

would ever have allowed you to do it. The idea! Walk on, pray—and as quickly as you can."

"We went to the house, but they said you were on the beach, and so, mother——"

"Pray don't call me mother in that way. It makes one feel like What's-her-name in the 'Trovatore,'" said Lady Dolly, with a little laugh, that was very fretful. "And be kind enough not to stand here and stare; everybody is listening."

"What for should they not listen?" said Fräulein Schroder stoutly. "Can there be in nature a sweeter, more soul-inspiring, and of-heaven-always-blessed-emotion than the out-coming of filial love and the spontaneous flow of——"

"Rubbish!" said Lady Dolly. "Vere, oblige me by walking in; I shall be with you in a moment at the house. You'll find Jack there. You remember Jack?"

"What an angel! anyone would give her twenty years at least," said Princess Hélène again. "But your German, in her blue glasses, she is a *drôlesse*——"

"A very clever woman; dreadfully blue and conscientious, and all that is intolerable; the old duchess found her for me," replied Lady Dolly, still half willing to faint, and half inclined to cry, and wholly in that state of irritation which Fuseli was wont to say made swearing delicious.

"I always fancied—so stupid of me!—that your

Vere was quite a little child, always at the Sacré Cœur," continued the Princess musingly, with her sweetest smile.

"I wish to heaven we had a Sacré Cœur," said Lady Dolly devoutly. "We wretched English people have nothing half so sensible; you know that, Hélène, as well as I do. Vere is tall and very like her poor father and the old Duke."

"But Vere — surely that is not the name of a girl?"

"It was her father's. *That* was the old Duchess's doing too. Of course one will call her Vera. Well, *au revoir ma très chère, à ce soir.*"

"With nods and becks and wreathed smiles," and many good-days and pretty words, poor Lady Dolly got away from her friends and acquaintances, and had the common luxury of hearing them all begin laughing again as soon as they imagined she had got out of earshot. Her young courtiers accompanied her, of course, but she dismissed them on the doorstep.

"I can't think of anything but my child to-day!" she said very charmingly. "So glad you think her nice-looking. When she is *dressed*, you know——" and she disappeared into her own house with the phrase unfinished, leaving all it suggested to her hearers.

"Where's Vere?" she said sharply to her counsellor, entering the breakfast-room, before the empty stove of

which, from the sheer fire-place club-room habit of his race, that person stood smoking.

"Gone to her room," he answered. "You've made her cry. You were nasty, weren't you?"

"I was furious! Who wouldn't have been? That vile dress! that abominable old woman! And kissing me too—me—on the beach!"

Her companion smiled grimly.

"She couldn't tell that one mustn't touch you when you're 'done up.' You didn't do up so much three years ago. She'll soon learn, never fear."

"You grow quite horribly rude, Jack."

He smoked serenely.

"And quite too odiously coarse."

He continued to smoke.

She often abused him, but she never could do without him; and he was aware of that.

"And what a height she is! and what her gowns will cost! and she must come out soon—and that horrid Hélène!" sobbed Lady Dolly, fairly bursting into tears. She had been so gay and comfortable at Trouville, and now it was all over. What comfort could there be with a girl nearly six feet high, that looked twenty years old when she was sixteen, and who called her "Mother!"

"Don't make a fuss," said the counsellor from the stove. "She's very handsome, awfully pretty, you'll marry her in no time, and be just as larky as you were

before. Don't cry, there's a dear little soul. Look here, the cutlets are getting cold, and there's all these mullets steaming away for nothing. Come and eat, and the thing won't seem so terrible."

Being versed in the ways of consolations, he opened a bottle of Moselle with an inviting rush of sound, and let the golden stream foam itself softly over a lump of ice in a glass. Lady Dolly looked up, dried her eyes, and sat down at the table.

"Vere must be hungry, surely," she said, with a sudden remembrance, twenty minutes later, eating her last morsel of a truffled *timbâle*.

The counsellor smiled grimly.

"It's rather late to think about that; I sent her her breakfast before you came in."

"Dear me! how very fatherly of you!"

The counsellor laughed. "I feel like her father, I assure you."

Lady Dolly coloured, and lit a cigarette. She felt that she would not digest her breakfast. Henceforth there would be two bills to pay—the interest of them at any rate—at all the great tailors' and milliners' houses in Paris and London; she had an uneasy sense that to whirl in and out the mazes of the cotillons, or smoke your cigarette on the smooth lawns of shooting-clubs, vis-à-vis with your own daughter, was a position, in the main, rather ridiculous; and she had still an uneasier conviction that the girl in the brown holland

would not be taught in a moment to comprehend the necessity for the existence of Jack—and the rest.

"That horrid old duchess!" she murmured, sinking to sleep with the last atom of her cigarette crumbling itself away on the open page of a French novel. For it was the duchess who had sent her Vere.

CHAPTER II.

LADY DOROTHY VANDERDECKEN, who was Lady Dolly to everybody, down to the very boys that ran after her carriage in the streets, was the seventh daughter of a very poor peer, the Earl of Caterham, who was a clever politician, but always in a chronic state of financial embarrassment. Lady Dolly had made a very silly love-match with her own cousin, Vere Herbert, a younger son of her uncle the Duke of Mull and Cantire, when she was only seventeen, and he had just left Oxford and entered the Church. But Vere Herbert had only lived long enough for her to begin to get very tired of his country parsonage in the wilds of the Devonshire moors, and to be left before she was twenty with a miserable pittance for her portion, and a little daughter twelve months old to plague her farther. Lady Dolly cried terribly for a fortnight, and thought she cried for love, when she only cried for worry. In another fortnight or so she had ceased to cry, had found out that crape brightened her pretty tea-rose skin, had discarded her baby to the care of her aunt and mother-in-law, the old and austere Duchess of Mull, and had gone for her health with her

own gay little mother, the Countess of Caterham, to the south of France. In the south of France Lady Dolly forgot that she had ever cried at all; and in a year's time from the loss of Vere Herbert had married herself again to a Mr. Vanderdecken, an Englishman of Dutch extraction, a rich man, of no remarkable lineage, a financier, a contractor, a politician, a very restless creature, always rushing about alone, and never asking any questions—which suited her. On the other hand it suited him to ally himself with a score of great families, and obtain a lovely and high-born wife; it was one of those marriages which everybody calls so sensible, so suitable, so very *nice!* Quite unlike the marriage with poor Vere Herbert, which everybody had screamed at, as they had not made up five hundred a year in income, or forty-five years in age, between them.

Lady Dolly and Mr. Vanderdecken did not perhaps find it so perfectly well assorted when they had had a little of it; she thought him stingy, he thought her frivolous, but they did not tell anybody else so, and so everybody always said that the marriage was very nice. They were always seen in the Bois and the Park together, and always kept house together three months every spring in London; they went to country houses together, and certainly dined out together at least a dozen times every season: nothing could be nicer, Lady Dolly took care of that.

She thought him a great bore, a great screw; she never had enough money by half, and he was sometimes very nasty about cheques. But he was not troublesome about anything else, and was generally head over ears in some wonderful loan, or contract, or subsidy, which entailed distant journeys, and absorbed him entirely; so that, on the whole, she was content and enjoyed herself.

This morning, however, she had gone down to the shore not indeed fully anticipating such a blow as had fallen upon her, but ruffled, disgusted, and nervous, conscious that her daughter was travelling towards her, and furious with the person she termed a "horrid old cat."

The old cat was the now dowager Duchess of Mull, who for fifteen years had kept safe in Northumbria the daughter of poor Vere, and now had hurled her like a cannon-ball at Lady Dolly's head in this hideous, abominable, unforeseen manner, straight on the sands of Trouville, in sight of that snake in angel's guise, the Princesse Hélène Olgarouski!

Lady Dolly, who never would allow that she gave up her maternal rights, though she would never be bored with maternal responsibilities, had quarrelled for the nine-hundredth time (by post) with the Duchess of Mull; quarrelled desperately, impudently, irrevocably, quarrelled once too often; and the result of the quarrel had been the instant despatch of her daughter to

Trouville, with the duchess's declaration that she could struggle for the soul of her poor son's child no longer, and that come what would, she consigned Vere to her mother then and for ever more.

"The horrid woman will be howling for the child again in a week's time," thought Lady Dolly, "but she has done it to spite me, and I'll keep the child to spite her. That's only fair."

The duchess had taken her at her word, that was all; but then, indeed, there are few things more spiteful that one can do to anybody than to take them at their word. Lady Dolly had been perplexed, irritated, and very angry with herself for having written all that rubbish about suffering from the unnatural deprivation of her only child's society; rubbish which had brought this stroke of retribution on her head.

She had pulled her blonde *perruque* all awry in her vexation; she did not want that *perruque* at all, for her own hair was thick and pretty, but she covered it up and wore the *perruque* because it was the fashion to do so.

Lady Dolly had always been, and was very pretty: she had lovely large eyes, and the tiniest mouth, and a complexion which did not want all the pains she bestowed on it; when she had not the *perruque* on, she had dark silky hair all tumbled about over her eyebrows in a disarray that cost her maid two hours to compose; and her eyebrows themselves were drawn

beautifully in two fine, dark, slender lines by a pencil that supplied the one defect of Nature. When she was seventeen, at the rectory, amongst the rosebuds on the lawn, she had been a rosebud herself; now she was a Dresden statuette; the statuette was the more finished and brilliant beauty of the two, and never seemed the worse for wear. This is the advantage of artificial over natural loveliness; the latter will alter with health or feeling, the former never; it is always the same, unless you come in on it at its toilette, or see it when it is very ill.

Lady Dolly this morning woke up prematurely from her sleep and fancied she was in the old parsonage gardens on the lawn, amongst the roses in Devonshire, with poor Vere's pale handsome face looking down so tenderly on hers. She felt a mist before her eyes, a tightness at her throat; a vague and worried pain all over her. "It is the prawns!" she said to herself, "I will never smoke after prawns again."

She was all alone; the counsellor had gone to his schooner, other counsellors were at their hotels, it was an hour when everything except Englishmen and dogs were indoors. She rose, shook her muslin breakfast-wrapper about her impatiently, and went to see her daughter.

"He used to be so fond of me, poor fellow!" she thought. Such a pure fond passion then amongst the roses by the sea. It had all been very silly, and he

had used to bore her dreadfully with Keble, and his namesake, George of holy memory, and that old proser Thomas a Kempis; but still it had been a different thing to all these other loves. He lay in his grave there by the Atlantic amongst the Devon roses, and she had had no memory of him for many a year, and when he had been alive, she had thought the church and the old women, and the saints, and the flannel, and the choral services, and the matins- and vesper-nonsense, all so tiresome; but still he had loved her. Of course they all adored her now, heaps of them—but his love had been a different thing to theirs. And somehow Lady Dolly felt a tinge and twinge of shame.

"Poor Vere," she murmured to herself tenderly; and so went to see his daughter, who had been called after him by that absurd old woman, the Duchess of Mull, with whom Lady Dolly in her dual relation of niece and daughter-in-law had always waged a fierce undying war: a war in which she had now got the worst of it.

"May I come in, dear?" she said at the bed-chamber door. She felt almost nervous. It was very absurd, but why would the girl have her dead father's eyes?

The girl opened the door and stood silent.

"A beautiful creature. They are quite right," thought Lady Dolly, now that her brain was no longer filled with the dreadful rumpled brown holland, and

the smiling face of Princess Hélène. The girl was in a white wrapper like her own, only without any lace, and any of the ribbons that adorned Lady Dolly at all points, as tassels a Roman horse at Carnival. Lady Dolly was too lovely herself, and also far too contented with herself to feel any jealousy; but she looked at her daughter critically, as she would have looked at a young untried actress on the boards of the Odéon. "Quite another style to me, that is fortunate," she thought as she looked. "Like Vere—very—quite extraordinarily like Vere—only handsomer still."

Then she kissed her daughter very prettily on both cheeks, and with effusion embraced her, much as she embraced Princess Hélène or anybody else that she hated.

"You took me by surprise to-day, love," she said with a little accent of apology, "and you know I do so detest scenes. Pray try and remember that."

"Scenes?" said Vere. "Please what are they?"

"Scenes?" said Lady Dolly, kissing her once more, and a little puzzled as everybody is, who is suddenly asked to define a familiar word. "Scenes? Well, dear me, scenes are—scenes. Anything, you know, that makes a fuss, that looks silly, that sets people laughing; don't you understand? Anything done before people, you know: it is vulgar."

"I think I understand," said Vere Herbert. She was a very lovely girl, and despite her height still

looked a child. Her small head was perfectly poised on a slender neck, and her face, quite colourless, with a complexion like the leaf of a white rose, had perfect features, straight, delicate, and noble; her fair hair was cut square over her brows, and loosely knotted behind; she had a beautiful serious mouth, not so small as her mother's, and serene eyes, grey as night, contemplative, yet wistful.

She was calm and still. She had cried as if her heart would break, but she would have died rather than let her mother guess it. She had been what the French call *refoulée sur elle-même;* and the process is chilling.

"Have you all you want?" said Lady Dolly, casting a hasty glance round the room. "You know I didn't expect you, dear; not in the least."

"Surely my grandmother wrote?"

"Your grandmother telegraphed that you had started; just like her! Of course I wished to have you here, and meant to do so, but not all in a moment."

"The horrid old woman will be howling for the child back again in three weeks' time," thought Lady Dolly once more. "But she has done it to spite me: the old cat!"

"Are you sorry to come to me, love?" she said sweetly meanwhile, drawing Vere down beside her on a couch.

"I *was* very glad," answered Vere.

Lady Dolly discreetly omitted to notice the past tense. "Ah, no doubt, very dear of you! It is three years since I saw you; for those few days at Bulmer hardly count. Bulmer is terribly dull, isn't it?"

"I suppose it is dull; I was not so. If grandmamma had not been so often——"

"Cross as two sticks, you mean," laughed Lady Dolly. "Oh, I know her, my dear: the *most* disagreeable person that *ever* lived. The dear old duke was so nice and so handsome; but you hardly remember him, of course. Your grandmamma is a cat, dear —a cat, positively a cat! We will not talk about her. And how she has dressed you! It is quite wicked to dress a girl like that, it does her taste so much harm. You are very handsome, Vere."

"Yes? I am like my father they say."

"Very."

Lady Dolly felt the mist over her eyes again, and this time knew it was not the prawns. She saw the sunny lawn in Devon, and the roses, and the little large-eyed child at her breast. Heavens! what a long way away all that time seemed.

She gazed intently at Vere with a musing pathetic tenderness that moved the girl, and made her tremble and glow, because at last this lovely mother of hers seemed to feel. Lady Dolly's gaze grew graver and graver, more and more introspective.

"She is thinking of the past and of my father," thought the girl tenderly, and her young heart swelled with reverent sympathy. She did not dare to break her mother's silence.

"Vere!" said Lady Dolly dreamily, at length, "I am trying to think what one can do to get you decent clothes. My maid must run up something for you to wear by to-morrow. It is a pity to keep you shut up all this beautiful weather, and a little life will do you good after that prison at Bulmer. I am sure those three days I was last there I thought I should have yawned till I broke my neck, I did indeed, dear. She would hardly let me have breakfast in my own room, and she *would* dine at six!—six! But she was never like anybody else; when even the duke was alive she was the most obstinate, humdrum, nasty old scratch-cat in the county. Such ideas too! She was a sort of Wesley in petticoats, and, by the way, her gowns were never long enough for her. But I was saying, dear, I will have Adrienne run up something for you directly. She is clever. I never let a maid *make* a dress. It is absurd. You might as well want Rubinstein to make the violin he plays on. If she is inferior, she will make you look a dowdy. If she is a really good maid she will not make, she will arrange, what your tailor has made, and perfect it—nothing more. But still, for you, Adrienne will go out of her way for once. She shall combine a few little things, and she can get a

girl to sew them for her. Something to go out in they really must manage for to-morrow. You shall have brown holland if you are so fond of it, dear, but you shall see what brown holland can look like with Adrienne."

Vere sat silent.

"By the bye," said her mother vivaciously, "didn't you bring a maid? Positively, not a maid?"

"Grandmamma sent Keziah: she has always done very well for me."

"Keziah!" echoed Lady Dolly with a shudder. "How exactly it is like your grandmother to give you a woman called Keziah! That horrible Fräulein one might dismiss too, don't you think? You are old enough to do without her, and you shall have a nice French maid; Adrienne will soon find one."

The girl's eyes dilated with fear.

"Oh! pray do not send away the Fräulein! We are now in the conic sections."

"The what?" said Lady Dolly.

"I mean I could not go on in science or mathematics without her, and besides, she is so good."

"Mathematics! science! why, what can you want to make yourself hateful for, like a Girton College guy?"

"I want to know things; pray do not send away the Fräulein."

Lady Dolly, who was at heart very good-natured

when her own comfort was not too much interfered with, patted her cheek and laughed.

"What should you want to know?—know how to dress, how to curtsey, how to look your best; that is all you want to know. Believe me, men will ask nothing more of you. As for your hideous Schroder, I think her the most odious person in existence, except your grandmother. But if her blue spectacles comfort you, keep her at present. Of course you will want somebody to be with you a good deal: I can't be; and I suppose you'll have to stay with me now. You may be seen here a little, and wherever I go in autumn; then you can come out in Paris in the winter, and be presented next spring. I shall do it to spite your grandmother, who has behaved disgracefully to me — disgracefully! I believe she'd be capable of coming up to London to present you herself, though she's never set foot there for fifteen years!"

Vere was silent.

"What do you like best?" said her mother suddenly. Something in the girl worried her: she could not have said what it was.

Vere lifted her great eyes dreamily.

"Greek," she answered.

"*Greek!* a horse? a pony? a dog?"

"A language," said Vere.

"Of course Greek is a language; I know that," said her mother irritably. "But of course I thought

you meant something natural, sensible; some pet of some kind. And what do you like best after that, pray?"

"Music—Greek is like music."

"Oh dear me!" sighed Lady Dolly.

"I can ride; I am fond of riding," added Vere; "and I can shoot, and row, and sail, and steer a boat. The keepers taught me."

"Well, that sort of thing goes down rather, now that they walk with the guns, though I'm quite sure men wish them anywhere all the while," said Lady Dolly, somewhat vaguely. "Only you must be masculine with it, and slangy, and you don't seem to me to be that in the least. Do you know, Vere—it is a horrible thing to say—but I am dreadfully afraid you will be just the old-fashioned, prudish, open-air, touch-me-not Englishwoman! I am indeed. Now you know that won't answer anywhere, nowadays.

"Answer—what?"

"Don't take my words up like that, it is rude. I mean, you know, that kind of style is gone out altogether, pleases nobody; men hate it. The only women that please nowadays are Russians and Americans. Why? Because in their totally different ways they neither of them care one fig what they do if only it please them to do it. They are all *chic* you know. Now you haven't a bit of *chic;* you look like a creature out of Burne Jones's things, don't you know, only

more—more—religious-looking. You really look as if you were studying your Bible every minute; it is most extraordinary!

"Her father *would* read me Keble and Kempis before she was born," thought Lady Dolly angrily, her wrath rising against the dead man for the psychological inconsistencies in her daughter; a daughter she would have been a million times better without at any time.

"Well, then, my love," she said suddenly; "you shall ride and you shall swim; that will certainly help you better than your Greek and your conic sessions, whatever they may be, they sound like something about magistrates, perhaps they have taught you law as well?"

"May I swim here?" asked Vere.

"Of course; it's the thing to do. Can you dive?"

"Oh yes! I am used to the water."

"Very well, then. But wait; you can't have any bathing-dress?"

"Yes. I brought it. Would you wish to see it? Keziah——"

Keziah was bidden to seek for and bring out the bathing-dress, and after a little delay did so.

Lady Dolly looked. Gradually an expression of horror, such as is depicted on the faces of those who are supposed to see ghosts, spread itself over her countenance and seemed to change it to stone.

"That thing!" she gasped.

What she saw was the long indigo-coloured linen gown—high to the throat and down to the feet—of the uneducated British bather, whose mind has not been opened by the sweetness and light of continental shores.

"That thing!" gasped Lady Dolly.

"What is the matter with it?" said Vere, timidly and perplexed.

"Matter? It is indecent!"

"Indecent?" Vere coloured all over the white rose-leaf beauty of her face.

"Indecent," reiterated Lady Dolly. "If it isn't worse! Good gracious! It must have been worn at the deluge. The very children would stone you! Of course I knew you couldn't have any decent dress. You shall have one like mine made to-morrow, and then you can kick about as you like. Blue and white or blue and pink. You shall see mine."

She rang, and sent one of her maids for one of her bathing costumes, which were many and of all hues.

Vere looked at the brilliant object when it arrived, puzzled and troubled by it. She could not understand it. It appeared to be cut off at the shoulders and the knees.

"It is like what the circus-riders wear," she said, with a deep breath.

"Well, it is, now you name it," said Lady Dolly amused. "You shall have one to-morrow."

Vere's face crimsoned.

"But what covers one's legs and arms?"

"Nothing! what a little silly you are. I suppose you have nothing the matter with them, have you? no mark, or twist, or anything? I don't remember any when you were little. You were thought an extraordinarily well-made baby."

Might one then go naked provided only one had no mark or twist? Vere wondered, and wondered at the world into which she had strayed.

"I would never wear a costume like that," she said quietly after a little pause.

"You will wear what I tell you," said her sweet little mother sharply; "and for goodness' sake, child, don't be a prude whatever you are. Prudes belong to Noah's Ark, like your bathing-gown."

Vere was silent.

"Is Mr. Vanderdecken here?" she asked at length, to change the theme, and, finding her mother did not speak again, who, indeed, was busy, thinking what her clothes were likely to cost, and also whether she would arrange a marriage for her with the young Duc de Tambour, son of the Prince de Chambrée. The best alliance she could think of at the minute—but then the poor child had no *dot*.

"Mr. Vanderdecken?" said Lady Dolly waking to

fact. "Oh, he is on the sea going somewhere. He is always going somewhere; it is Java or Japan, or Jupiter; something with a J. He makes his money in that sort of way, you know. I never understand it myself. Whenever people want money he goes, and he makes it because the people he goes to haven't got any; isn't it queer? Come here. Do you know, Vere, you are very pretty? You will be very handsome. Kiss me again, dear."

Vere did so, learning, by a kind of intuition, that she must touch her mother without injuring the artistic work of the maids and the "little secrets." Then she stood silent and passive.

"She is an uncomfortable girl," thought Lady Dolly once more. "And, dear me, so like poor Vere! What a tall creature you are getting," she said aloud. "You will be married in another year."

"Oh no!" said Vere with a glance of alarm.

"You unnatural child! How on earth would you like to live if you don't want to be married?"

"With the Fräulein in the country."

"All your life! And die an old maid?"

"I should not mind."

Lady Dolly laughed, but it was with a sort of shock and shudder, as an orthodox person laughs when they hear what is amusing but irreverent.

"Why do you say such things?" she said impatiently. "They are nonsense, and you don't mean them."

"I mean them—quite."

"Nonsense!" said Lady Dolly, who never discussed with anybody, finding asseveration answer all purposes very much better; as, indeed, it does in most cases. "Well, good-bye my love; you want to rest, and you can't go out till you have something to wear, and I have an immense deal to do. Good-bye; you are very pretty!"

"Who was that gentleman I saw?" asked Vere, as her mother rose and kissed her once more on her silky fair hair. "Is he any relation of papa's? He was very kind."

Lady Dolly coloured ever so little.

"Oh! that's Jack. Surely you remember seeing Jack three years ago at Homburg, when you came out to meet me there?"

"Is he a relation of ours?"

"No; not a relation exactly; only a friend."

"And has he no name but Jack?"

"Of course. Don't say silly things. He is Lord Jura, Lord Shetland's son. He is in the Guards. A very old acquaintance, dear—recollects you as a baby."

"A friend of my father's then?"

"Well, no dear, not quite. Not quite so far back as that. Certainly he may have fagged for poor Vere at Eton perhaps, but I doubt it. Good-bye, darling. I will send you Adrienne. You may put yourself in her hands *blindly*. She has perfect taste."

Then Lady Dolly opened the door, and escaped.

Vere Herbert was left to herself. She was not tired; she was strong and healthful, for all the white rose paleness of her fair skin; and a twelve hours' tossing on the sea, and a day or two's rumbling on the rail, had no power to fatigue her. Her grandmother, though a humdrum and a cat, according to Lady Dolly, had sundry old-fashioned notions from which the girl had benefited both in body and mind, and the fresh strong air of Bulmer Chase—a breezy old forest place on the Northumberland seashore, where the morose old duchess found a dower house to her taste—had braced her physically, as study and the absence of any sort of excitement had done mentally, and made her as unlike her mother as anything female could have been. The Duchess of Mull was miserly, cross-tempered, and old-fashioned in her ways and in her prejudices, but she was an upright woman, a gentlewoman, and no fool, as she would say herself. She had been harsh with the girl, but she had loved her and been just to her, and Vere had spent her life at Bulmer Chase not unhappily, varied only by an occasional visit to Lady Dolly, who had always seemed to the child something too bright and fair to be mortal, and to have an enchanted existence, where caramels and cosaques rained, and music was always heard, and the sun shone all day long.

She was all alone. The Fräulein was asleep in the next room. The maid did not come. The girl

kneeled down by the window-seat and looked out through one of the chinks of the blinds. It was late afternoon by the sun; the human butterflies were beginning to come out again. Looking up and down she saw the whole sunshiny coast, and the dancing water that was boisterous enough to be pretty and to swell the canvas of the yachts standing off the shore.

"How bright it all looks!" she thought, with a little sigh; the salt fresh smell did her good, and Bulmer, amidst its slowly budding woods and dreary moors, and long dark winters, had been anything but bright. Yet she felt very unhappy and lonely. Her mother seemed a great deal farther away than she had done when Vere had sat dreaming about her on the side of the rough heathered hills, with the herons calling across from one marshy pool to another.

She leaned against the green blind and ceased to see the sea and the sky, the beach and the butterflies, for a little while, her tears were so full under her lashes, and she did her best to keep them back. She was full of pain because her mother did not care for her; but, indeed, why should she care? said Vere to herself; they had been so little together.

She looked, almost without seeing it at first, at the picture underneath her; the stream, which gradually swelled and grew larger, of beautifully-dressed fairy-like women, whose laughter every now and then echoed up to her. It was one unbroken current of harmonious

colour, rolled out like a brilliant riband on the fawn-coloured sand against the azure sea.

"And have they all nothing to do but to enjoy themselves?" thought Vere. It seemed so. If Black Care were anywhere at Trouville, as it was everywhere else in the world, it took pains to wear a face like the rest and read its "Figaro."

She heard the door underneath unclose, and from underneath the green verandah she saw her mother saunter out. Three other ladies were with her and half a dozen men. They were talking and laughing all at once, no one waiting to be listened to or seeming to expect it; they walked across the beach and sat down. They put up gorgeous sunshades and outspread huge fans: they were all twitter, laughter, colour, mirth.

All this going to and fro of gay people, the patter of feet and flutter of petticoats, amused the girl to watch almost as much as if she had been amidst it. There were such a sparkle of sea, such a radiance of sunshine, such a rainbow of colour, that though it would have composed ill for a landscape, it made a pretty panorama.

Vere watched it, conjecturing in a youthful fanciful ignorant way all kinds of things about the persons who seemed so happy there. When she had gazed for about twenty minutes, making her eyes ache and getting tired, one of them especially attracted her atten-

tion by the way in which people all turned after him as he passed, and the delight that his greeting appeared to cause those with whom he lingered. He was a man of such remarkable personal beauty that this alone might have been reason enough for the eager welcome of the listless ladies; but there was even a greater charm in his perfect grace of movement and vivacity and airy ease: he stayed little time with any one; but wherever he loitered a moment appeared to be the centre of all smiles. She did not know that he was her admirer of the noonday, who had looked at her as he had sauntered along in his bathing shroud and his white shoes; but she watched the easy graceful attitudes of him with interest as he cast himself down on the sand, leaning on his elbow, by a group of fair women.

"Can you tell me who that gentleman is?" she asked of her mother's head-maid, the inimitable Adrienne.

Adrienne looked and smiled,

"Oh! that is M. de Corrèze."

"Corrèze!" Vere's eyes opened in a blaze of eager wonder, and the colour rose in her pale cheeks. "Corrèze! Are you sure?"

"But yes: I am quite sure," laughed Adrienne. "Does mademoiselle feel emotion at the sight of him? She is only like all others of her sex. Ah! *le beau Corrèze!*"

"I have never heard him sing," said Vere, very low, as if she spoke of some religious thing; "but I would give anything, anything, to do so. And the music he composes himself is beautiful. There is one 'Messe de Minuit——'"

"Mademoiselle will hear him often enough when she is once in the world," said Adrienne, good-naturedly. "Ah! when she shall see him in 'Faust' that will be an era in her life. But it is not his singing that makes the great ladies rave of him; it is his charm. Oh, *quel philtre d'amour!*"

And Adrienne quite sighed with despair, and then laughed.

Vere coloured a little; Keziah did not discourse about men being love-philtres.

"Measure me for my clothes; I am tired," she said with a childish coldness and dignity, turning away from the window.

"I am entirely at mademoiselle's service," said Adrienne with answering dignity. "Whoever has had the honour to clothe mademoiselle has been strangely neglectful of her highest interests."

"My clothes my highest interest! I never think about them!"

"That is very sad. They are really barbaric. If Mademoiselle could behold herself——"

"They are useful," said Vere coldly; "that is all that is necessary."

Adrienne was respectfully silent, but she shuddered as if she had heard a blasphemy. She could not comprehend how the young barbarian could have been brought up by a duchess. Adrienne had never been to Bulmer, and had never seen Her Grace of Mull, with her silver spectacles, her leather boots, her tweed clothes, her farm-ledgers, her studbooks, and her ever-open Bible.

"Measure me quickly," said Vere. She had lowered the green jalousies, and would not look out any more. Yet she felt happier. She missed dark, old, misty Bulmer with its oakwoods by the ocean; yet this little gay room, with its pretty cretonne, cream-coloured, with pale pink roses, its gilded mirrors, its rose china, its white muslin, was certainly brighter and sunnier, and who could tell but what her mother would grow to love her some day?

At nine o'clock Lady Dolly, considering herself a martyr to maternity, ran into the little room where Vere was at tea with her governess; Lady Dolly was arrayed for the evening *sauterie* at the Casino, and was in great haste to be gone.

"Have you everything you like, darling?" she asked, pulling on her pearl-hued *crispins*. "Did you have a nice little dinner? Yes? Quite sure? Has Adrienne been to you? An excellent creature; perfect taste. Dear me, what a pity!—you might have come

and jumped about to-night if you had had only something to wear. Of course you like dancing?"

"I dislike it very much."

"Dear me! Ah well! you won't say so after a cotillon or two. You shall have a cotillon that Zouroff leads: there is nobody better. Good night, my sweet Vera. Mind, I shall always call you Ver*a*. It sounds so Russian and nice, and is much prettier than Vere."

"I do not think so, mother, and I am not Russian."

"You are very contradictory and opinionated; much too opinionated for a girl. It is horrid in a girl to have opinions. Fräulein, how could you let her have opinions? Good night, dear. I shall hardly see you to-morrow, if at all. We shall be cruising about in Jack's yacht, and we shall start very early. The Grand Duchess will go out with us. She is great fun, only she does get in such a rage when she loses at play, that it is horrible to see. So sorry you must be shut up, my poor Ver*a*!"

"May I not go out just for a walk?"

"Well, I don't know—yes, really, I think you might; if it's very early mind, and you keep out of everybody's sight. Pray take care not a soul sees you."

"Is not this better, then?" murmured the offender, glancing down on a white serge frock, which she had put on in the hope that it might please. It was a

simple braided dress with a plain silver belt, and was really unobjectionable.

Lady Dolly scanned the garment with a critical air and a *parti pris*. Certainly it might have done for the morrow's yachting, but then she did not want the wearer of it on the yacht. The girl would have to be everywhere very soon, of course, but Lady Dolly put off the evil day as long as she could.

"It is the *cut*," she said, dropping her glass with a sigh. "It can't be Morgan's?"

"Who is Morgan?" asked the child, so benighted that she had not even heard of the great Worth of nautical costume.

"Morgan is the only creature possible for serge," sighed Lady Dolly. "You don't seem to understand darling. Material is nothing, Make is everything. Look at our *camelot* and *percale* gowns that Worth sends us; and look at the satins and velvets of a *bourgeoise* from Asnières or a wine-merchant's wife from Clapham! Oh, my dear child! cut your gown out of your dog's towel or your horses' cloths if you like, but mind Who cuts it: that is the one golden rule! But good-night, my sweetest. Sleep well."

Lady Dolly brushed her daughter's cheek with the diamond end of her earring, and took herself off in a maze of pale yellow and deep scarlet as mysteriously and perfectly blended as the sunset colours of an Italian night.

"She is really very pretty," she said to her counsellor as he put her cloak round her and pocketed her fan. "Really, very handsome, like Burne Jones's things and all that, don't you know."

"A long sight prettier and healthier than any of 'em," said the counsellor lighting his cigar; for he had small respect for the High Art of his period.

They went forth into the moonlit night to the Casino, and left Vere to the sleep into which she sobbed herself like a child as she still was, soothed at last by the sound of the incoming tide and the muttering of the good Fräulein's prayers.

CHAPTER III.

VERE was awoke at five o'clock by tumultuous laughter, gay shrill outcries, and a sudden smell of cigar smoke. It was her mother returning home. Doors banged; then all grew still. Vere got up, looked at the sea and remembered that permission to go out had been given her.

In another hour she was abroad in the soft cool sunshine of early morning, the channel before her, and behind her the stout form of Northumbrian Keziah.

Trouvilain, as somebody has wittily called it, is not lovely. Were it not so celebrated, undoubtedly it would be called commonplace; but, in the very first light of morning, every spot on earth, except a manufacturing city, has some loveliness, and Trouvilain at day break had some for Vere. There were yachts with slender trim lines beautiful against the clear sky. There were here and there provision boats pulling out with sailors in dark blue jerseys, and red capped. There were fleecy white clouds, and there were cool sands; cool now, if soon they would be no better than powder and dust. Along the poor planks that are the treadmill of fashion, Vere's buoyant young feet bore her with swift-

ness and pleasure till she reached the Corniche des Roches Noires and got out into the charming green country.

She glanced at the water and longed to run into the shallows and wade and spread her limbs out, and float and swim, beating the sea with her slender arms and rosy toes as she had done most mornings in the cold, wind-swept, steel-grey northern tides of her old home.

But her bathing-costume had been forbidden, had even been carried away in bitter contempt by one of the French maids, and never would she go into the sea in this public place in one of those sleeveless, legless, circus-rider's tunics: no, never, she said to herself; and her resolves were apt to be very resolute ones. Her old guardian at Bulmer Chase had always said to her: "Never say 'no' rashly, nor 'yes' either; but when you have said them, stand to them as a soldier to his guns."

She did not at all know her way, but she had thought if she kept along by the water she would some time or other surely get out of the sight of all those gay houses, which, shut as all their persiennes were, and invisible as were all their occupants, yet had fashion and frivolity so plainly written on their coquettish awnings, their balconies, their doorways, their red geraniums and golden calceolarias blazing before their blinds. At five o'clock there was nobody to trouble

her certainly; yet within sight of all those windows she had felt as if she were still before the staring eyes and eyeglasses of the cruel crowd of that terrible yesterday.

She went on quickly with the elastic step which had been used to cover so easily mile after mile of the heathered moors of Bulmer, and the firm yellow sands by the northern ocean. Before the cloudless sun of the August daybreak was much above the waters of the east with the smoke of the first steamer from Havre towering grey and dark against the radiant rose of the sky, Vere had left Trouville, and its sleeping beauties and yawning dandies in their beds, far behind her, and was nearly a third of the way to Villerville. She did not know anything at all about Lecamus *fils*, Jules David, Challamel, and Figaro with his cabin, who had made Villerville famous, but she went onward because the sea was blue, the sand was yellow, the air was sweet and wholesome, and the solitude was complete.

Her spirits rose; light, and air, and liberty of movement were necessary to her, for, in the old woods and on the rough moors of Bulmer, her grandmother had let her roam as she chose, on foot or on her pony. It had been a stern rule in other things, but as regarded air and exercise she had enjoyed the most perfect freedom.

"Are you tired, Keziah?" she cried at last, noticing that the patient waiting-woman lagged behind. The

stout Northumbrian admitted that she was. She had never been so in her life before; but that frightful sea journey from Southampton had left her stomach "orkard."

Vere was touched to compunction.

"You poor creature! and I brought you out without your breakfast, and we have walked—oh! ever so many miles," she said in poignant self-reproach. "Keziah, look here, there is a nice smooth stone. Sit down on it and rest, and I will run about. Yes; do not make any objection; sit down."

Keziah, who adored her very shadow as it fell on sward or sand, demurred faintly, but the flesh was weak, and the good woman dropped down on the stone with a heavy thud, as of a sack falling to earth, and sat there in plaid shawl and homespun gown, with her hands on her knees, the homely sober figure that had seemed to Lady Dolly to have come out of the ark like the indigo bathing-dress.

Vere left her on that madreporic throne, and strayed onward herself along by the edge of the sea.

On one side of her was a dark bastion of rock, above that, out of sight, were green pastures and golden corn fields; on the other was the Channel, placid, sunny, very unlike the surging turbulent gigantic waves of her old home.

"Can you ever be rough? Can you ever look like salt water?" she said with a little contempt to it, not

knowing anything about the appalling chopping seas and formidable swell of the Channel which the boldest mariners detest more than all the grand furies of Baltic or Atlantic. But it was bright blue water fretted with little curls of foam, and the low waves rolled up lazily, and lapped the sand at her feet; and she felt happy and playful, as was natural to her age; and that she was quite alone mattered nothing to her, for she had never had any young companions, and never played except with the dogs.

She wandered about, and ran here and there, and found some sandpipers' empty nests, and gathered some gorse and stuck it in the riband of her old sailor's hat, and was gay and careless, and sang little soft low songs to herself, as the swallows sing when they sit on the roof in mid-summer. She had taken off her hat, the wind lifted the weighty gold of her straight cut hair, and blew the old brown holland skirt away from her slender ankles. She began to look longingly at the water, spreading away from her so far and so far, and lying in delicious little cool shallows amongst the stones. She could not bathe, but she thought she might wade and paddle. She took off her shoes and stockings, and waded in. The rock pools were rather deep, and the water rose above her ankles; those pretty roses, and lilacs, and feathery hyacinths of the sea that science calls *actiniæ*, uncurled their tufts of feathers, and spread out their starry crowns, and

lifted their tiny bells around her; broad riband weeds floated, crabs waddled, little live shells sailed here and there, and all manner of *algæ*, brown and red, were curling about the big stones. She was in paradise.

She had been reared on the edge of the sea—the cold dark stern sea of the north, indeed, but still the sea. This was only a quiet sunny nook of the French coast of the Channel, but it was charming from the silence, the sunshine, and the sweet liberty of the waters. She thought she was miles away from everyone, and therefore was duly obeying her mother's sole command. There was not even a sail in sight: quite far off was a cloud of dark boats, which were the fishing cobles of Honfleur; there was nothing else near, nothing but a score of gulls, spreading their white wings, and diving to catch the fish as they rose.

She waded on and on: filling an old creel with seaweeds and seashells, for she was no more than a child in a great many things. The anemones she would not take, because she had no means of keeping them in comfort. She contented herself with standing nearly knee-deep, and gazing down on all their glories seen through the glass of the still, sparkling water. She sprang from stone to stone, from pool to pool, forgetting Keziah seated on her rock. Neither did she see a pretty little dingy that was fastened to a stake amongst the boulders.

The air was perfectly still; there was only one sound, that of the incoming tide running up and rippling over the pebbles.

Suddenly a voice from the waves, as it seemed, began to chaunt parts of the Requiem of Mozart. It was a voice pure as a lark's, rich as an organ's swell, tender as love's first embrace, marvellously melodious, in a word, that rarity which the earth is seldom blessed enough to hear from more than one mortal throat in any century: it was a perfectly beautiful tenor voice.

Vere was standing in the water, struck dumb and motionless; her eyes dilated, she scarcely breathed, every fibre of her being, everything in her, body and soul, seemed to listen. She did not once wonder whence it came; the surpassing beauty and melody of it held her too entranced.

Whether it were in the air, in the water, in the sky, she never asked—one would have seemed as natural to her as the other.

From the Requiem it passed with scarce a pause to the impassioned songs of Gounod's Romeo. Whatever the future may say of Gounod, this it will never be able to deny, that he is the supreme master of the utterances of Love. The passionate music rose into the air, bursting upon the silence and into the sunlight, and seeming to pierce the very heavens, then sinking low and sweet and soft as any lover's sigh of joy

breaking off at last abruptly and leaving nothing but the murmur of the sea.

The girl drew a great breathless cry, as if something beautiful were dead, and stood quite still, her figure mirrored in the shallows.

The singer came round from the projecting ledge of the brown cliffs, uncovered his head and bowed low, with apology for unwitting intrusion on her solitude.

It was he whom Adrienne had called *le philtre d'amour*.

Then the girl, who had been in heaven, dropped to earth; and remembered her wet and naked feet, and glanced down on them with shame, and coloured as rosy-red as the sea-flowers in the pool.

She threw an eager glance over the sands. Alas! she had forgotten her shoes and stockings, and the place where they had been knew them no more—the waves had rippled over them and were tossing them, heaven could tell how near or far away.

The "sad leaden humanity," which drags us all to earth, brought her from the trance of ecstasy to the very humblest prose of shame and need.

"I have lost them," she murmured; and then felt herself grow from rose to scarlet, as the singer stood on the other side of the pool gazing at her and seeing her dilemma with amusement.

"Your shoes and stockings, mademoiselle?"

He was so used to seeing pretty nude feet at Trouville that it was impossible for him to measure the awful character of the calamity in the eyes of Vere.

"Yes, I took them off; and I never dreamt that anyone was here."

"Perhaps you have only forgotten where you put them. Let me have the honour to look for your lost treasures."

Vere stood in her shallow, amongst the riband weed, with her head hung down, and the colour burning in her face. All her pride, of which she had much, could not avail her here. She was nervously ashamed and unhappy.

The new-comer searched ardently and indefatigably, leaving no nook of rock or little deposit of sea-water unexamined. He waded in many places, and turned over the weed in all, but it was in vain. The sea was many an inch deeper over the shore than when she had first come, and her shoes and hose were doubtless drifting loose upon the waves: there was no trace of them.

Unconscious of this tragedy enacting, Keziah sat in the calm distance, a grey and brown figure, facing the horizon.

Vere stood all the while motionless; the sweet singing seeming still to throb and thrill through the air around, and the sunny daylight seeming to go round

her in an amber mist, through which she only saw her own two naked feet, still covered in some sort with the water and the weeds.

"They are gone, mademoiselle!" said the singer, coming to her with eyes that he made most tender and persuasive. They were beautiful eyes, that lent themselves with willingness to this familiar office.

"They must have been washed away by the tide; it is coming higher each moment. Indeed, you must not remain where you are or you will be surrounded very soon, and carried off yourself. These channel tides are treacherous and uncertain."

"I will go to my maid," murmured Vere, with a fawn-like spring from her stones to others, forgetting in her shame to even thank him for his services.

"To that admirable person enthroned yonder?" said the singer of the songs. "But, mademoiselle, there is the deep sea between you and her already. Look!"

Indeed, so rapidly had the tide run in, and the waters swelled up, that she was divided from her attendant by a broad sheet of blue shallows. Keziah, tired and sleepy from her journeyings, was nodding unconsciously on her throne of rocks.

"And she will be drowned!" said Vere with a piercing cry, and she began wading knee-deep into the sea before her companion knew what she was about.

In a moment he had caught her and lifted her back on to the firm sand.

"Your good woman is in no danger, but you cannot reach her so, and you will only risk your own life, mademoiselle," he said gently. "There is nothing to be alarmed about. Shout to your attendant to take the path up the cliffs—perhaps she would not understand me—and we will take this road; so we shall meet on the top of this table-land that is now above our heads. That is all. Shout loudly to her."

Vere was trembling, but she obeyed — she had learned the too oft-forgotten art of obedience at Bulmer Chase, and she shouted loudly still she aroused Keziah, who awoke, rubbing her eyes, and dreaming, no doubt, that she was in the servants' hall at Bulmer.

When she understood what had happened and what she was bidden to do, the stout north country-woman tucked up her petticoats, and began to climb up the steep path with a will, once assured that her young mistress was out of all danger. The face of the cliff soon hid her figure from sight, and Vere felt her heart sink strangely.

But she had no time to reflect, for the stranger propelled her gently towards the worn ridge in the rocks near them, a path which the fisher-people had made in coming up and down.

"Let us mount quickly, mademoiselle. I did not notice myself that the tide was so high. Alas! I fear

the rocks will hurt your feet. When we reach the first ledge you must wind some grass round them. Come!"

Vere began to climb. The stones, and the sand, and the rough dry weeds cut her feet terribly, but these did not hurt her so much as the idea that he saw her without shoes and stockings. Reaching a ledge of stone he bade her sit down, and tore up some broad grasses and brought them to her.

"Bind these about your feet," he said kindly, and turned his back to her. "Ah! why will you mind so much? Madame, your lovely mother, dances about so for two or three hours in the water-carnival every noonday!"

"Do you know my mother?" said Vere, lifting her face, very hot and troubled from winding the grass about her soles and insteps.

"I have had that honour for many years in Paris. You will have heard of me, perhaps. I am a singer."

Vere, for the first time, looked in his face, and saw that it was the face whose beauty had attracted her in the sunlight on the shore, and whom Adrienne had called the *philtre d'amour*.

"It was you who were singing, then?" she said timidly, and thinking how beautiful and how wonderful he was, this great artist, who stood before her clothed in white, with the sun shining in his luminous eyes.

"Yes. I came here to bathe and to swim, and

then run over some of the scores of a new opera, that we shall have in Paris this winter, of Ambroise Thomas's. One cannot study in peace for ten minutes in Trouville. You love music, mademoiselle? Oh! you need not speak: one always knows."

"I never went to any opera," said Vere under her breath, resuming her climb up the rock.

"Never! May I sing to you then in the first opera you hear! Take care; this path is steep. Do not look back; and catch at the piles where the *guindeaux* hang. You need fear nothing. I am behind you."

Vere climbed on in silence; the thick bands of grass protected her feet in a measure, yet, it was hard and rough work. Young and strong though she was, she was glad when they reached the short grass on the head of the cliffs and sank down on it, field-fares and several birds of all kinds wheeling around her in the grey clear air.

"You are not faint?" he asked anxiously.

"Oh no! Only tired."

"Will you rest here ten minutes, and I will come back to you?"

"If you wish me."

He smiled at the childish docility of the answer and left her, whilst she leaned down on the turf of the table-land, and gazed at the sea far down below, and at the horizon where many a white sail shone, and

here and there streamed the dark trail of a steamer's smoke. She had forgotten Keziah for the moment; she was only hearing in memory those wonderful tones, clear as a lark's song, rich as an organ's swell, ringing over the waters in the silence.

In less than ten minutes he was back at her side with a pair of little new wooden shoes in his hand.

"I thought these might save you from the stones and dust a little, Mademoiselle Herbert," he said, "and it is impossible to procure any better kind in this village. Will you try them?"

She was grateful; the little shoes were a child's size and fitted as if they had been the glass slipper of Cinderella.

"You are very good," she said timidly. "And how can you tell what my name is?"

"I witnessed your arrival yesterday. Besides, who has not heard of lovely Madame Dolly's daughter?"

Vere was silent. She vaguely wondered why her mother was called Dolly by all men whatever.

Suddenly, with a pang of conscience, she remembered Keziah, and sprang up on her *sabots*. Corrèze divined her impulse and her thought.

"Your good woman is quite safe," he said; "the peasants have seen her on the top of the rocks, but she seems to have taken a wrong path, and so it may be half-an-hour before we overtake her. But do not be afraid or anxious. I will see you safely homeward."

Vere grew very pale.

"But mother made me promise to see no one."

"Why?"

"Because my dress is all wrong. And poor Keziah! —oh, how frightened she will be!"

"Not very. We shall soon overtake her. Or, better still, I will send a lad after her while we rest a little. Come and see my village, if you can walk in your *sabots*. It is a village that I have discovered, so I have the rights of Selkirk. Come, if you are not too tired. Brava!"

He cried "brava!" because she walked so well in her wooden shoes; and he saw that to please him she was overcoming the timidity which the solitude of her situation awoke in her.

"How can she be the daughter of that little impudent *fine mouche?*" he thought.

Vere was shy but brave. Lady Dolly and her sisterhood were audacious but cowardly.

He led her across the broad hard head of the cliffs, mottled black and gray where the rock broke through the grass, and thence across a sort of rambling down with low furze-bushes growing on it, further by a cart-track, where cart-wheels had cut deep into the soil, to a little cluster of houses, lying sheltered from the sea winds by the broad bluff of the cliffs which rose above them, and gathered under the shelter of

apple and cherry trees, with one great walnut growing in the midst.

It was a poor little village enough, with a smell of tar from the fishing-nets and sails spread out to dry, and shingle roofs held down with stones, and little dusky close-shut pigeon-holes for windows: but, in the memory of Vere for ever afterwards, that little village seemed even as Arcadia.

He had two wooden chairs brought out, and a wooden table, and set them under the cherry-trees, all reddened then with fruit. He had a wooden bowl of milk, and honey, and brown bread, and cherries, brought out too. There were lavender and a few homely stocks and wallflowers growing in the poor soil about the fences of the houses; bees hummed and swallows cleft the air.

"You are thirsty and hungry, I am sure," he said, and Vere, who had not learned to be ashamed of such things, said with a smile, "I am."

He had reassured her as to Keziah, after whom he had sent a fisher-boy. That the fisher-boy would ever find Keziah he did not in the least see any reason to believe; but he did not see any reason either why he should tell Vere so, to make her anxious and disturbed. The girl had such a lovely face, and her innocence and seriousness pleased him.

"Are you sure the boy will soon find my woman?" she asked him wistfully.

"Quite sure," he answered. "He saw her himself a little while ago on the top of the cliff yonder. Do not be dismayed about that, and find some appetite for this homely fare. I have made requisitions like any Prussian, but the result is poorer than I hoped it might be. Try some cherries."

The cherries were fine biggaroons, scarlet and white, and Vere was still a child. She drank her milk and ate them with keen relish. The morning was growing warm as the sun clomb higher in the heavens. She took off her hat, and the wind lifted the thick hair falling over her forehead; exertion and excitement had brought a flush of colour in her cheeks; the light and shade of the walnut leaves was above her head; little curly-headed children peeped behind the furze fence and the sweetbriar hedge; white-capped old women looked on, nodding and smiling; the sea was out of sight, but the sound and the scent of it came there.

"It is an idyl," thought her companion; idyls were not in his life, which was one of unending triumphs, passions, and festivals, dizzily mingled in a world which adored him. Meanwhile it pleased him, if only by force of novelty, and no incident on earth could ever have found him unready.

"You love music?" he cried to her. "Ah! now if we were but in Italy in that dark little cottage there would sure to be a *chitarra*, and I would give you a

serenade to your cherries; perhaps without one—why not, if you like it? But first, Mademoiselle Herbert, I ought to tell you who I am."

"Oh! I know," said Vere, and lifted her soft eyes to him with a cherry against her lips.

"Indeed?"

"Yes, I saw you on the *plage* yesterday, and Adrienne told me. You are Corrèze."

She said the name tenderly and reverently, for his fame had reached her in her childhood, and she had often thought to herself, "If only I could hear Corrèze once!"

He smiled caressingly.

"I am glad that you cared to ask. Yes, I am Corrèze, that is certain; and perhaps Corrèze would be the name of a greater artist if the world had not spoilt him—your mamma's world, mademoiselle. Well, my life is very happy, and very gay and glad, and after all the fame of the singer can never be but a breath, a sound through a reed. When our lips are once shut there is on us for ever eternal silence. Who can remember a summer-breeze when it has passed by, or tell in any aftertime how a laugh or a sigh sounded?"

His face grew for the moment sad and overcast—that beautiful face which had fascinated the eyes of the girl as it had done the gaze of multitudes in burn-

ing nights of enthusiasm from Neva to Tagus, from Danube to Seine.

Vere looked at him and did not speak. The gaze of Corrèze had a magic for all women, and she vaguely felt that magic as she met those eyes that were the eyes of Romeo and of Faust.

"What a lovely life it must be, your life," she said timidly. "It must be like a perpetual poem, I think."

Corrèze smiled.

"An artist's life is far off what you fancy it, I fear; but yet at the least it is full of colour and of change. I am in the snows of Russia one day, in the suns of Madrid another. I know the life of the palaces, I have known the life of the poor. When I forget the latter may heaven forget me! Some day when we are older friends, Mademoiselle Herbert, I will tell you my story."

"Tell me now," said Vere softly, with her gaze beginning to grow intent and eager under the halo of her hair, and letting her cherries lie unheeded on her lap.

Corrèze laughed.

"Oh, you will be disappointed. I have not much of one, and it is no secret. I am Raphael de Corrèze; I am the Marquis de Corrèze if it were of any use to be so; but I prefer to be Corrèze the singer. It is much simpler, and yet much more uncommon. There are so many marquises, so few tenors. My race was

great amongst the old noblesse de Savoie, but it was beggared in the Terror, and their lands were confiscated and most of their lives were taken. I was born in a cabin; my grandfather had been born in a castle; it did not matter. He was a philosopher and a scholar, and he had taken to the mountains and loved them. My father married a peasant girl, and lived as simply as a shepherd. My mother died early. I ran about barefoot and saw to the goats. We were on the Valais side of the Pennine Alps. I used to drive the goats up higher, higher, higher, as the summer drew on, and the grass was eaten down. In the winter an old priest, who lived with us, and my father, when he had leisure, taught me. We were very poor and often hungry, but they were happy times. I think of them when I go across the Alps wrapped up in my black sables that the Empress of Russia has given me. I think I was warmer in the old days with the snow ten feet deep all around! Can you understand that snow may be warmer than sables? Yes? Well, there is little to tell. One day, when it was summer, and travellers were coming up into the Pennine valleys, some one heard me sing, and said my voice was a fortune. I was singing to myself and the goats among the gentian, the beautiful blue gentian—you know it? No, you do not know it, unless you have roamed the Alps in May. Other persons came after him and said the same thing, and wanted me to go with them; but I would not leave

my father. Who could stack wood for him, and cut paths through the snow, and rake up the chestnuts and store them? I did all that. I would not go. When I was fifteen he died. "Do not forget you are the last Marquis de Corrèze," he said to me with his last breath. He had never forgotten it, and he had lived and died in the shadow of the Alps an honest man and a gentleman in his mountain hut. I passed the winter in great pain and trouble: it had been in the autumn that he had died. I could not resolve whether it would displease him in his grave under the snow that a Corrèze should be a singer; yet a singer I longed to be. With the spring I said to myself that after all one could be as loyal a gentleman as a singer as a soldier; why not? I rose up and walked down to the bottom of our ravine, where twice a week the diligences for Paris run; I found one going on the road; I went by it, and went on and on until I entered Paris. Ah! that entry into Paris of the boy with an artist's ambition and a child's faith in destiny! Why have they never written a poem on it? Once in Paris my path was easy; my voice made me friends. I went to Italy, I studied, I was heard, I returned to my dear Paris and triumphed. Well, I have been happy ever since. It is very much to say; and yet sometimes I long for the old winter nights, roasting the chestnuts, with the wall of snow outside!"

Vere had listened with eloquent dim eyes, and a

fast beating heart; her cherries lying still uneaten on her lap. She gave a little quiet sigh as his voice ceased.

"You feel so about it because your father is dead," she said very low, and under her breath. "If he were here to know all your triumphs——"

Corrèze bent down and touched her hand, as it hung forward over her knee, with his lips. It was a mere habitual action of graceful courtesy with him, but it gave the child a strange thrill. She had never seen those tender easy ceremonies of the South. He saw that he had troubled her, and was sorry.

"Eat your cherries, Mademoiselle Herbert, and I will sing you a song," he said gaily, dropping a cherry into his own mouth, and he began to hum in his perfect melodious notes odds and ends of some of the greatest music of the world.

Then he sang with a voice only raised to one tenth of its power, the last song of Fernando, his lips scarcely parting as he sang, and his eyes looking away to the yellow gorse and the sheep-cropped grass, and the drifting clouds; giving to the air and sea what he often refused to princes.

For the great tenor Corrèze was a prince himself in his caprices.

The perfect melody that held multitudes enthralled, and moved whole cities to ecstasies, that dissolved queens in tears and made women weep like little children,

was heard on the still sunny silence of the cliffs with only a few babies tumbling in the sandy grass, and an old woman or two sitting spinning at her door. Down in gay Trouville all his worshippers could not woo from him a note; the entreaties that were commands found him obdurate and left him indifferent; and he sang here to the lark that was singing over his head, because a girl of sixteen had lost her shoes and stockings, and he wished to console her.

When once the voice left his lips he sang on, much as the lark did, softly and almost unconsciously; the old familiar melodies following one another unbidden, as in his childhood he had used to sing to the goats with the flush of the Alpine roses about his feet, and the snow above his head.

The lark dropped, as though owning itself vanquished, into the hollow, where its consort's lowly nest was made. Corrèze ceased suddenly to sing, and looked at his companion. Vere was crying.

"Ah! my beautiful angel!" said an old peasant woman to him, standing close against the furze fence to listen; "do you come out of paradise to tell us we are not quite forgot there?"

Vere said nothing; she only turned on him her great soft eyes whilst the tears were falling unchecked down her cheeks.

"Mademoiselle," said Corrèze, "I have had flattery in my time, and more than has been good for

me; but who ever gave me such sweet flattery as yours?"

"Flattery!" murmured Vere. "I did not mean—oh! how can you say that? The woman is right—it is as if it came from the angels!"

"By a servant of angels most unworthy, then," said Corrèze, with a smile and a sigh. "As for the woman—good mother, here is a gold piece that carries Paradise in it; or, at least men think so. But I am afraid, myself, that by the time we have found the gold pieces we have most of us forgotten the way to Paradise."

Vere was silent. She was still very pale; the tears stood on her lashes as the rain stands on the fringes of the dark passion-flower after a storm.

"Tell me your name, my angel," said the old woman, with her hand on the coin.

"Raphael."

"I will pray to St. Raphael for you; if indeed you be not he?"

"Nay; I am not he. Pray always, good soul; it is pleasant to think that some one prays for us. Those cries cannot all be lost."

"Have you none to love you?" said the old woman. "That is odd, for you are beautiful."

"I have many to love me—in a way. But none to pray that I know of—that is another affair. Mother,

did you see that lark that sang on against me, and dropped to its nest at last?"

"I saw it."

"Then have a heed that the boys do not stone, and the trappers net it."

"I will. What is your fancy?"

"It is a little brother."

The peasant woman did not understand, but she nodded three times. "The lark shall be safe as a king in his court. The plot he is in is mine. When you want a thing say to women you wish it—you do not want to say anything else."

Corrèze laughed, and pulled down a rose from behind the sweetbriar. He held it out to Vere.

"If there were only a single rose here and there upon earth, men and women would pass their years on their knees before its beauty. I wonder sometimes if human ingratitude for beauty ever hurts God? One might fancy even Deity wounded by neglected gifts. What do you say?"

He plucked a little lavender and some sea-pinks, and wound them together with the rose.

"When the fools throw me flowers they hurt me; it is barbarous," he said. "To throw laurel has more sense; there is a bitter smell in it, and it carries a sound allegory; but flowers!—flowers thrown in the dust, and dying in the gas-glare! The little live birds thrown at Carnival are only one shade worse. Ah!

here is the lad that I sent to find your waiting-woman."

The rose, the song, the magical charm seemed all dissolved before Vere as by the speaking of some disenchanter's spell: the hardness and fearfulness of prosaic fact faced her.

The fisher-lad explained that he had been miles in search of the good woman, but he had not found her. Men he had lately met had told him they had seen such a figure running hard back to the town.

"What shall I do?" she murmured aloud. "I have been forgetting all the trouble that I have been to you. Show me the way back—only that—I can find it—I can go alone. Indeed I can, M. de Corrèze."

"Indeed, you will do nothing of the kind," said Corrèze. "Your woman is quite safe, you see, so you need fear nothing for her. No doubt she thinks you have gone that way home. Mademoiselle Herbert, if you will listen to me, you will not distress yourself, but let me take you in my little boat that is down there to Trouville. It is impossible that you should walk in those wooden shoes, and carriage or even cart there is none here. Come, it is half-past nine only now. The sun is still temperate; the sea is smooth. Come, I will row you home in an hour."

"But I have been such a trouble to you."

"May I never have worse burdens!"

"And my mother will be so angry."

"Will she? Madame Dolly, a mother and angry! I cannot picture it; and I thought I knew her in every phase. My child, do not be so troubled about nothing. We will drift back slowly and pleasantly, and you shall be in your mother's house before noon strikes. And everyone knows me. That is one of the uses of notoriety; it has many drawbacks, so it need have some compensations. Come. I rowed myself out here. I studied music a year in Venice when I was a lad, and learned rowing on the Lido from the fruit-girls. Come."

She did not resist much more; she thought that he must know best. With the grey lavender and the rose at her throat, she went away from under the cherry trees; the old woman in her blue gown gave them her blessing; the lark left his nest and began to sing again; the sunny hour was over, the black steep head of the cliffs was soon between them and the little hamlet.

They walked down by an easier way to the shore. The little boat was rocking on a high tide.

"Can you steer?" said Corrèze.

"O, yes," said Vere, who was learned in all sailing and boating, after a childhood passed by the rough grey waters of an iron coast.

He took the oars, and she the ropes. The sea was smooth, and there was no wind, not even a ruffle in the air; the boat glided slowly and evenly along.

He talked and laughed, he amused and beguiled

her; he told her stories; now and then he sang low sweet snatches of Venetian boat-songs and rowing chaunts of the Lombard lakes and of the Riviera gulfs and bays; the sun was still cool; the sea looked blue to her eyes which had never beheld the Mediterranean. There were many craft in sight, pleasure and fishing vessels, and farther away large ships; but nothing drew near them save one old coble going in to Etretat from the night's dredging. It was an enchanted voyage to Vere, as the hamlet on the cliffs, and the homely lavender, and the cabbage rose, had been all enchanted things. She was in a dream. She wondered if she were really living. As she had never read but great and noble books, she thought vaguely of the Faerie Queen and of the Fata Morgana. And through the sunlight against the sea, she saw as in a golden halo the beautiful brillant dreamy face of Corrèze.

At last the voyage was done.

The little boat grated against the sands of Trouville, and against the side of a yacht's gig waiting there with smart sailors in white jerseys and scarlet caps, with "Ephemeris" in large blue letters woven on their shirts.

It was still early, earlier than it was usual for the fashionable idleness of the place to be upon the shore; and Corrèze had hoped to run his boat in on land unnoticed. But, as the crankiness of fate would have it, several people had been wakened before their usual

hour. The yachts of a great channel race, after having been all night out towards the open ocean, had hove in sight on their homeward tack, and were objects of interest, as heavy bets were on them. Corrèze, to his annoyance, saw several skiffs and canoes already out upon the water round him, and several poppy-coloured and turquoise-coloured stripes adorning the bodies of human beings, and moving to and fro, some on the sand, some in the surf, some in the deeper sea.

There was no help for it, he saw, but to run the boat in, and trust to chance to take his companion unnoticed across the few hundred yards that separated the shore from the little house of Lady Dolly.

But chance chose otherwise.

As he steered through the still shallow water, and ran the boat up on the sand, there were some human figures, like gaily painted pegtops, immediately swarming down towards him, and amongst them Lady Dolly herself; Lady Dolly with a penthouse-like erection of straw above her head to keep the sun off, and her body tightly encased in black and yellow stripes, till she looked like a wasp—if a wasp had ever possessed snowy arms quite bare and bare white legs.

Corrèze gave his hand to Vere to alight, and she set her little wooden shoes upon the dusty shore, and did not look up. The golden clouds seemed all about her still, and she was wondering what she could ever say to him to thank him enough for all his care.

A peal of shrill laughter pierced her ear and broke her musing.

"Corrèze, what nymph or naiad have you found? A mermaid in *sabots!* Oh! oh! oh!"

The laughter pealed and shrieked, as fashionable ladies' laughter will, more often than is pretty; and then, through the laughter she heard her mother's voice.

"Ah—ha! Corrèze! So this is why you steal away from supper when the daylight comes?"

Corrèze, surrounded by the swarming and parti-coloured pegtops, lifted his head, comprehended the situation, and bowed to the ground.

"I have had the honour and happiness, madame, to be of a slight service to Mademoiselle Herbert."

The group of pegtops was composed of Lady Dolly, the Princesse Hélène, a Princess Zephine, three other ladies, and several gentlemen, just come to the edge of the sea to bathe.

Vere gave one amazed glance at her mother and blushed scarlet. The glance and the blush were not for the shame of her own misdoing; they were for the shame of her mother's attire. Vere, who had been overwhelmed with confusion at the loss of her shoes, was very far from comprehending the state of feeling which adopts a fashionable swimming costume as perfect propriety, and skips about in the surf hand in hand with a male swimmer, the cynosure of five hundred eye-glasses and *lorgnons*.

She had seen the bathing-dress indeed, but though she had perceived that it was legless and armless, she had imagined that something must be worn with it to supplement those deficiencies, and she had not in any way reckoned the full enormity of it as it had hung limp over the back of a chair.

But on her mother!

As the group of living human pegtops swarmed before her on the edge of the sea, and she realised that it was actually her mother, actually her dead father's wife, who was before her, with those black and yellow stripes for all her covering, Vere felt her cheeks and brow burn all over as with fire. They thought she was blushing with shame at herself, but she was blushing for shame for them, and those tight-drawn rainbow-coloured stripes that showed every line of the form more than the kilted skirts and scant rags of the fisher-girls ever showed theirs. If it were right to come down to dance about in the water with half-a-dozen men around, how could that which she had done herself be so very wrong? The sea and the sands and the sky seemed to go round with her. She was only conscious of the anger sparkling from her mother's eyes; she did not heed the tittering and the teasing with which the other ladies surrounded her companion.

"Vere!"—Lady Dolly for the moment said nothing more. She stood blankly staring at her daughter, at

the sunburnt hat, the tumbled hair, the wooden shoes; and at the figure of Corrèze against the sun.

"You—with Corrèze!" she cried at length; and Corrèze, studying her pretty little face, thought how evil pretty women could sometimes look.

"Mademoiselle Herbert had lost her maid, and her road, and her shoes," he hastened to say with his most charming grace; "I have been happy enough to be of a little—too little—service to her. The fault was none of hers, but all of the tide; and, save the loss of the shoes, there is no mischief done."

"M. Corrèze has wasted his morning for me, and has been so very kind," said Vere. Her voice was very low, but it was steady. She did not think she had done any wrong, but she felt bewildered, and was not quite sure.

Her mother laughed very irritably.

"Corrèze is always too kind, and always a *preux chevalier*. What on earth have you been doing, darling? and where are your women? and however could you be so quite too dreadfully foolish. I suppose you think life is like Alice in Wonderland? Jack, see her home, will you? and join us at the yacht and lock her up in her room, and the German with her. How good of you, dear Corrèze, to bore yourself with a troublesome child. If it were anybody else except you who had come ashore like this with my Vera I should feel really too anxious and angry. But, with you——"

"Madame! I am too fortunate! If you deem me to be of any use, however, let me claim as a guerdon, permission to attend mademoiselle your daughter to her home."

"Jack, see her home, pray. Do you hear me," said Lady Dolly again, sharply. "No—not you, Corrèze—you are quite too charming to be trusted. Jack's like an old woman."

The Princesse Hélène smiled at the Princess Zephine.

If old women are thirty years old, handsome in a fair bold breezy fashion, and six feet three in height, then was Lord Jura like them. He had come ashore from the "Ephemeris," and was the only one of the party decently clad.

"Why should she go home?" muttered Jura, "why may she not come with us—eh?"

"Out of the question," said Lady Dolly, very sharply.

He was a silent man; he said nothing now; he strode off silently to Vere's side, lifting his straw hat a little, in sign of his acceptance of his devoir.

Vere made an inclination to her mother and the other ladies, with the somewhat stately deference that had been imposed on her at Bulmer Chase, and began to move toward the Châlet Ludoff, whose green blinds and gilded scroll balconies were visible in the distance. Corrèze bowed very low with his own matchless grace and ease, and began to follow them.

"No; not you Corrèze; I cannot permit it. You are too fascinating—infinitely too fascinating—to play chaperon," cried Lady Dolly once more. "Vera, when you get home go to your room, and stay there till I come. You have had enough liberty to-day, and have abused it shamefully."

Having screamed that admonition on the air, Lady Dolly turned to her friends the feminine pegtops, and entreated them not to think too badly of her naughty little puss—she was so young!

In a few moments all the pegtops had jumped into the water, and the young Duc de Dinant was teaching Lady Dolly to execute in the waves a new dance just introduced in an operetta of Messieurs Meilhac and Hervé; a dance that required prodigious leaps and produced boisterous laughter. Vere did not look back once; she felt very ashamed still, but not of herself.

Jura did not address a word to her, except when they had approached the steps of the Châlet Ludoff; then he said, somewhat sheepishly,—"I say—if she's nasty don't you mind. She can be; but it soon blows over——"

Vere was silent.

"Won't you come out to-day," he pursued. "I do so wish you would. It's my tub, you know, and you would like it. Do come?"

"Where?"

"On my yacht. We are going to picnic at Villiers. The Grand Duchess is coming, and she is great fun, when she aren't too drunk. Why shouldn't you come? It seems to me you are shut up like a nun. It's not fair."

"My mother does not wish me to come anywhere," said Vere dreamily, heeding him very little. "There is the house. Go back to them, Lord Jura. Thanks."

Jura went back; but not until he had sent her up a pretty little breakfast, and the most innocent of his many French novels.

"It is a beastly shame," he said, as he walked towards the swimmers over the sands.

Corrèze, meanwhile, who had resisted all entreaties to bathe, and all invitations to pass the day on the "Ephemeris," wended his way slowly towards his hotel.

"She has claws, that pretty cat," he said to himself, thinking of Lady Dolly. He had never very much liked her, and he detested her now in a petulant impetuous way that now and then broke up the sunny softness of his temper.

"How sweet she is now; sweet as the sweetbriar, and as healthy," he thought to himself. "How clear the soul, how clear the eyes! If only that would last! But one little year in the world, and it will be all altered. She will have gained some *chic*, no doubt, and some talent and tact; she will wear high-heeled shoes, and she will have drawn in her waist, and

learned how to *porter le sein en offrande*, and learned how to make those grand grey eyes look languid, and lustrous, and terrible. Oh, yes, she will have learned all that. But then, alas! alas! she will have learned so much too. She will have learned what the sickly sarcasms mean, and the wrapt-up pruriencies intend, and what women and men are worth, and how politics are knavish tricks, and the value of a thing is just as much as it will bring, and all the rest of the dreary gospel of self. What a pity! what a pity! But it is always so. I dare say she will never stoop to folly as her pretty mother does; but the bloom will go. She will be surprised, shocked, pained; then, little by little, she will get used to it all—they all do—and then the world will have her, body and soul, and perhaps will put a bit of ice where that tender heart now beats. She will be a great lady, I dare say—a very great lady—nothing worse, very likely; but, all the same, my sweetbriar will be withered, and my white wild rose will be dead—and what will it matter to me? I dare say I shall be a musical box with a broken spring, lying in a dust of dried myrtle and musty laurels!"

Lady Dolly danced, floated, bobbed like a cork, drifted languidly with her arms above her head, dived, and disappeared with only the rosy soles of her feet visible—did everything that a pretty woman and a good swimmer can do in shallow smooth water, with

no breeze to mar her comfort. But she was in a very bad temper all the time.

Jura did not improve it, when she came out of the water, by asking her, again, to let her daughter go with them in the "Ephemeris."

"*Au grand jamais!*" said Lady Dolly, quite furiously. "After such an exhibition of herself with a singer! Are you mad?"

She went home furious; changed her wet stripes for a yachting dress in sullen silence; refused to see the German governess, or to allow Vere's door to be opened till she should return in the evening, and went down to the yacht in a state of great irritation, with a charming costume, all white serge and navy blue satin, with anchor buttons in silver, and a Norwegian belt hung with everything that the mind of man could imagine as going on to a girdle.

The "Ephemeris" was one of the best yachts on the high seas; had a good cook, wonderful wines, a piano, a library, a cabin of rosewood and azure, and deck hammocks of silk. Nevertheless everything seemed to go wrong on board of her that day—at least to Lady Dolly. They got becalmed, and stuck stupidly still, while the steam yachts were tearing ahead in a cruel and jeering manner; then the sea got rough all in a moment; the lobster salad disagreed with her, or something did; a spiteful stiff wind rose; and the Grand Duchess borrowed her cigarette case

and never returned it, and of course could not be asked for it, and it contained the only verbena-scented *papelitos* that there were on board. Then Jura was too attentive to the comfort of another woman, or she fancied, at any rate, that he was; and none of her especial pets were there, so she could not make reprisals as she wished; and Corrèze had obstinately and obdurately refused to come at all. Not that she cared a straw about Corrèze, but she hated being refused.

"What a wax you're in, Dolly!" said Lord Jura, bringing her some iced drinks and peaches.

"When I've had three mad people sent to me!" she cried in a rage. "And I'll be obliged to you, Jack, not to use slang to *me*."

Lord Jura whistled and went aft.

"What a boor he grows!" thought Lady Dolly; and the "Ephemeris" was pitching, and she hated pitching, and the little Duc de Dinant was not on board because Jack wouldn't have him; and she felt ill-used, furious, wretched, and hated the cook for making the lobster salad, and Vere for having been born.

"A boy wouldn't have been half so bad," she thought. "He'd have been always away, and they'd have put him in the army. But a girl! It's all very easy to say *marry* her, but she hasn't any money, and the Mull people won't give her any, and my own

people can't, and as for Mr. Vanderdecken, one might as well try to get blood out of a flint; and they may say what they like, but all men want money when they marry nowadays, even when they've got heaps more than they know what to do with themselves. What a horrid woman the Grand Duchess is. She's drunk already, and it isn't three o'clock!"

"She's going splendidly now," said Jura, meaning the "Ephemeris," that plunged and reared as if she were a mare instead of a schooner; and the fresh sou'easter that had risen sent her farther and farther westward towards the haze of distant seas.

"I believe we're going straight to America! what idiocy is yachting!" said Lady Dolly savagely, as the wind tore at her tiny multitudinous curls.

Meanwhile, Vere, in religious obedience, had gone to the little chamber that was called by courtesy at the Châlet Ludoff a study, and submitting to be locked in, remained happy in the morning's golden dream of sunshine, of song, of the sea, of the summer. She had found her lost Northumbrian safe, but in agonies of terror and self-reproach, and the amiable German for once very seriously angry. But Vere was not to be ruffled or troubled; she smiled at all reproof, scarcely hearing it, and put her cabbage rose and her sprigs of lavender in water. Then she fell fast asleep on a couch, from fatigue and the warmth of the Norman sun, and dreamed of the blue gentian of the Alps that

she had never seen, and of the music of the voice of Corrèze.

When she awoke some hours had passed — the clock told her it was two. She never thought of moving from her prison. The ricketty white and gold door would have given way at a push, but to her it was inviolate. She had been reared to give obedience in the spirit as well as the letter.

She thought no one had ever had so beautiful a day as this morning of hers. She would have believed it a dream, only there were her rose and the homely heads of the lavender.

The German brought Euclid and Sophocles into the prison-chamber, but Vere put them gently away.

"I cannot study to-day," she said. It was the first time in her life that she had ever said so.

The Fräulein went away weeping, and believing that the heavens would fall. Vere, with her hands clasped behind her head, leaned back and watched the white clouds come and go above the sea, and fancied the air was still full of that marvellous and matchless voice which had told her at last all that music could be.

"He is the angel Raphael?" she said to herself. It seemed to her that he could not be mere mortal man.

Her couch was close to the glass doors of the room, and they opened into one of the scroll-work

balconies which embroidered the fantastic front of the Châlet Ludoff. The room was nominally upstairs, but literally it was scarcely eight feet above the ground without.

It was in the full hot sunshine of early afternoon when the voice she dreamed of said softly, "Mademoiselle Herbert!"

Vere roused herself with a start, and saw the arm of Corrèze leaning on the balcony and his eyes looking at her; he was standing on the stone *perron* below.

"I came to bid you farewell," he said softly. "I go to Germany to-night. You are a captive, I know, so I dared to speak to you thus."

"You go away!"

To the girl it seemed as if darkness fell over the sea and shore.

"Ah! we princes of art are but slaves of the ring after all. Yes, my engagements have been made many months ago: to Baden, to Vienna, to Moscow, to Petersburgh; then Paris and London once more. It may be long ere we meet, if ever we do, and I dare to call myself your friend, though you never saw my face until this morning."

"You have been so good to me," murmured Vere; and then stopped, not knowing what ailed her in the sudden sense of sorrow, loss, and pain, which came over her as she listened.

"Oh, *altro!*" laughed Corrèze, lifting himself a little higher, and leaning more easily on the iron of the balcony. "I found you a pair of wooden shoes, a cup of milk, and a cabbage rose. Sorry things to offer to an enchanted princess who had missed her road! My dear, few men will not be willing to be as good to you as you will let them be. You are a child. You do not know your power. I wonder what teachers you will have? I wish you could go untaught, but there is no hope of that."

Vere was silent. She did not understand what he meant. She understood only that he was going far away—this brilliant and beautiful stranger who had come to her with the morning sun.

"Mademoiselle Herbert," continued Corrèze, "I shall sound like a preacher, and I am but a graceless singer, but try and keep yourself 'unspotted from the world.' Those are holy words, and I am not a holy speaker, but try and remember them. This world you will be launched in does no woman good. It is a world of moths. Half the moths are burning themselves in feverish frailty, the other half are corroding and consuming all that they touch. Do not become of either kind. You are made for something better than a moth. You will be tempted; you will be laughed at; you will be surrounded with the most insidious sort of evil example, namely, that which does not look like evil one whit more than the belladonna

berry looks like death. The women of your time are not, perhaps, the worst the world has seen, but they are certainly the most contemptible. They have dethroned grace; they have driven out honour; they have succeeded in making men ashamed of the sex of their mothers; and they have set up nothing in the stead of all they have destroyed except a feverish frenzy for amusement and an idiotic imitation of vice. You cannot understand now, but you will see it—too soon. They will try to make you like them. Do not let them succeed. You have truth, innocence, and serenity—treasure them. The women of your day will ridicule you, and tell you it is an old-fashioned triad, out of date like the Graces; but do not listen. It is a triad without which no woman is truly beautiful, and without which no man's love for her can be pure. I would fain say more to you, but I am afraid to tell you what you do not know; and woe to those by whom such knowledge first comes! *Mon enfant*, adieu."

He had laid a bouquet of stephanotis and orchids on the sill of the window at her feet, and had dropped out of sight before she had realised his farewell.

When she strained her eyes to look for him, he had already disappeared. Tears blinded her sight, and fell on the rare blossoms of his gift.

"I will try—I will try to be what he wishes," she murmured to the flowers. "If only I knew better what he meant."

The time soon came when she knew too well what he meant.

Now she sat with the flowers in her lap and wondered wearily, and sobbed silently, as if her heart would break.

Corrèze was gone.

CHAPTER IV.

At sunset Lady Dolly returned, out of temper. They had been becalmed again for two hours, the sea all of sudden becoming like oil, just to spite her, and they had played to wile away the time, and the Grand Duchess had won a great deal of her money, besides smoking every one of her cigarettes and letting the case fall through the hatchway.

"I will never go out with that odious Russian again—never! the manners of a *cantinière* and the claws of a *croupier!*" she said in immeasurable disgust of the august lady whom she had idolised in the morning; and she looked in at the little study, when she reached home, to allay her rage with making some one uncomfortable.

"Are you sufficiently ashamed of yourself, Vera?" she said as she entered.

Vere rose, rather uneasily, and with soft sad dewy eyes.

"Why should I be ashamed, mother?" she said simply.

"Why? *why?* you ask why? after compromising yourself, as you did this morning?"

"Compromise?"

Vere had never heard the word. Women who were compromised were things that had never been heard of at Bulmer.

"Do not repeat what I say. It is the rudest thing you can do," said her mother sharply. "Yes, compromised, hideously compromised—and with Corrèze, of all persons in the world! You must have been mad!"

Vere looked at her stephanotis and orchids, and her young face grew almost stern.

"If you mean I did anything wrong, I did no wrong. It was all accident, and no one could have been so kind as—he—was."

The ear of Lady Dolly, quick at such signs, caught the little pause before the pronoun.

"The world never believes in accidents," she said chillily. "You had better understand that for the future. To be seen coming home in a boat early in the morning all alone with such a man as Corrèze would be enough to ruin any girl at the outset of her life—to *ruin* her!"

Vere's eyes opened in bewildered surprise. She could not follow her mother's thoughts at all, nor could she see where she had been in any error.

"Corrèze, of all men upon earth!" echoed her mother. "Good heavens! do you know he is a singer?"

"Yes," said Vere softly; hearing all around her as she spoke the sweet liquid melody of that perfect voice which had called the skylark "a little brother."

"A great singer, I grant; the greatest, if you like, but still a singer, and a man with a hundred love affairs in every capital he enters! And to come home *alone* with such a man after hours *spent alone* with him. It was madness, Vera; and it was worse, it was forward, impudent, unmaidenly!"

The girl's pale face flushed; she lifted her head with a certain indignant pride.

"You must say what you will, mother," she said quietly. "But that is very untrue."

"Don't dare to answer *me*," said Lady Dolly, "I tell you it was disgraceful, disgraceful, and goodness knows how ever I shall explain it away. Hélène has been telling the story to everybody, and given it seven-leagued boots already. True! who cares what is true or what is not true—it is what a thing *looks!* I believe everybody says you had come from Havre with Corrèze!"

Vere stood silent and passive, her eyes on her stephanotis and orchids.

"Where did you get those extravagant flowers? Surely Jack never——" said Lady Dolly suspiciously.

"He brought them," answered Vere.

"Corrèze? Whilst I was away?"

"Yes. He spoke to me at the balcony."

"Well, my dear, you do Bulmer credit! No Spanish

or Italian heroine out of his own operas could conduct herself more audaciously on the first day of her liberty. It is certainly what I always thought would come of your grandmother's mode of education. Well, go upstairs in your bedroom and do not leave it until I send for you. No, you can't take flowers upstairs; they are very unwholesome—as unwholesome as the kindness of Corrèze."

Vere went, wistfully regarding her treasures; but she had kept the faded rose and the lavender in her hand unnoticed.

"After all, I care most for these," she thought; the homely seaborn things that had been gathered after the songs.

When the door had closed on her Lady Dolly rang for her *maître d'hôtel.*

"Pay the Fräulein Schroder three months' salary, and send her away by the first steamer; and pay the English servant whatever she wants and send her by the first steamer. Mind they are both gone when I wake. And I shall go to Deauville the day after to-morrow; probably I shall never come back here."

The official bowed, obedient.

As she passed through her drawing-rooms Lady Dolly took up the bouquet of Corrèze and went to her own chamber.

"Pick me out the best of those flowers," she said

to her maid, "and stick them about all over me; here and there, you know."

She was going to dine with the Duchesse de Sonnaz at Deauville.

As she went to her carriage the hapless German, quivering and sobbing, threw herself in her path.

"Oh, miladi! miladi!" she moaned. "It cannot be true? You send me not away thus from the child of my heart? Ten years have I striven to write the will of God, and the learning that is better than gold, on that crystal pure mind, and my life, and my brain, and my soul I do give——"

"You should have done your duty," said Lady Dolly, wrapping herself up and hastening on. "And you can't complain, my good Schroder; you have got three months' in excess of your wages," and she drew her swan's-down about her and got into her carriage.

"Now, on my soul, that was downright vulgar," muttered John Jura. "Hang it all! it was vulgar!"

But he sighed as he said it to himself, for his experience had taught him that highborn ladies could be very vulgar when they were moved to be ill-natured.

Corrèze was at the villa.

She saw him a moment before dinner, and gave him her prettiest smile.

"Oh, Corrèze! what flowers! I stole some of them, you see. You would turn my child's head. I am glad you are going to Baden!"

He laughed, and said something graceful and novel, turned on the old *mater pulchra, filia pulchrior.*

The dinner was not too long, and was very gay. After it everybody wandered out into the gardens, which were hung with coloured lamps and had musicians hidden in shrubberies, discoursing sweet sounds to rival the nightingales. The light was subdued, the air delicious, the sea glimmered phosphorescent and starlit at the end of dusky alleys and rose-hung walks. Lady Dolly wandered about with Sergius Zouroff and others, and felt quite romantic, whilst John Jura yawned and sulked; she never allowed him to do anything else while she was amusing herself.

Corrèze joined her and her Russians in a little path between walls of the quatre-saison rose and a carpet of velvety turf. The stars sparkled through the rose-leaves, the sound of the sea stole up the silent little alley. Lady Dolly looked very pretty in a dress of dead white, with the red roses above her and their dropped leaves at her feet. She was smoking, which was a pity—the cigarette did not agree with the roses.

"Madame," cried Corrèze, as he sauntered on and disengaged her a little from the others, "I have never seen anything so exquisite as your young daughter. Will you believe that I mean no compliment when I say so?"

"My dear Corrèze! She is only a child!"

"She is not a child. What would you say, madame,

if I told you that for full five minutes I had the madness to think to-day that I would pay my forfeit to Baden and Vienna for the sake of staying here?"

"Heaven forbid you should do any such thing! You would turn her head in a week!"

"What would you say, madame," he continued with a little laugh, disregarding her interruption, "what would you say if I told you that I, Corrèze, had actually had the folly to fancy for five minutes that a vagabond nightingale might make his nest for good in one virgin heart? What would you say, miladi?"

"My dear Corrèze, if you were by any kind of possibility talking seriously"—

"I am talking quite seriously—or let us suppose that I am. What would you say, miladi?"

"I should say, my dear Corrèze, that you are too entirely captivating to be allowed to say such things even in an idle jest, and that you would be always most perfectly charming in every capacity but one."

"And that one is?"

"As a husband for anybody!"

"I suppose you are right," said Corrèze with a little sigh. "Will you let me light my cigarette at yours?"

An hour later he was on his way to Baden in the middle hours of the starry fragrant summer night.

CHAPTER V.

RAPHAEL DE CORRÈZE had said no more than the truth of himself that morning by the sweetbriar hedge on the edge of the Norman cliffs.

All the papers and old documents that were needful to prove him the lineal descendant of the great Savoy family of Corrèze were safe in his bureau in Paris, but he spoke no more of them than he spoke of the many love-letters and imprudent avowals that were also locked away in caskets and cabinets in the only place that in a way could be called his home, his apartment in the Avenue Marigny. What was the use? All Marquis and Peer of Savoy though he was by descent he was none the less only a tenor singer, and in his heart of hearts he was too keenly proud to drag his old descent into the notice of men merely that he might look like a frivolous boaster, an impudent teller of empty tales. *Noblesse oblige*, he had often said to himself, resisting temptation in his oft-tempted career, but no one ever heard him say aloud that paternoster of princes. His remembrance of his race had been always with him like a talisman, but he wore it like a

talisman, secretly, and shy even of having his faith in it known.

Corrèze, with all his negligence and gaiety, and spoilt child of the world though he was, appraised very justly the worth of the world and his place in it.

He knew very well that if a rain-storm on a windy night were to quench his voice in his throat for ever, all his troops of lovers and friends would fall away from him, and his name drop down into darkness like any shooting star on an August night. He never deceived himself.

"I am only the world's favourite plaything," he would say to himself. "If I lost my voice, I should be served like the nightingale in Hans Andersen's story. Oh! I do not blame the world—things are always so; only it is well to remember it. It serves, like Yorick's skull, or Philip's slave, to remind one that one is mortal."

The remembrance gave him force, but it also gave him a tinge of bitterness, so far as any bitterness is ever possible to a sunny, generous, and careless nature, and it made him before everything an artist.

When he was very insolent to grand people—which he often was in the caprice of celebrity—those people said to one another "Ah! that is because he thinks himself Marquis de Corrèze." But they were wrong. It was because he knew himself a great artist.

The scorn of genius is the most boundless and the most arrogant of all scorn, and he had it in him very strongly. The world said he was extravagantly vain; the world was wrong; yet if he had been, it would have been excusable. Women had thrown themselves into his arms from his earliest youth for sake of his beautiful face, before his voice had been heard; and when his voice had captured Europe there was scarcely any folly, any madness, any delirium, any shame that women had not been ready to rush into for his sake, or for the mere sight of him and mere echo of his song.

There is no fame on earth so intoxicating, so universal, so enervating, as the fame of a great singer; as it is the most uncertain and unstable of all, the most evanescent and most fugitive, so by compensation is it the most delightful and the most gorgeous; rouses the multitude to a height of rapture as no other art can do, and makes the dull and vapid crowds of modern life hang breathless on one voice, as in Greece, under the violet skies, men hearkened to the voice of Pindar or of Sappho.

The world has grown apathetic and purblind. Critics still rave and quarrel before a canvas, but the nations do not care; quarries of marble are hewn into various shapes, and the throngs gape before them and are indifferent; writers are so many that their writings blend in the public mind in a confused phantasmago-

ria where the colours have run into one another and the lines are all waved and indistinct; the singer alone still keeps the old magic power, "the beauty that was Athens' and the glory that was Rome's," still holds the divine caduceus, still sways the vast thronged auditorium, till the myriads hold their breath like little children in delight and awe. The great singer alone has the old magic sway of fame; and if he close his lips "the gaiety of nations is eclipsed," and the world seems empty and silent like a wood in which the birds are all dead.

It is a supreme power, and may well intoxicate a man.

Corrèze had been as little delirious as any who have drunk of the philtre of a universal fame, although at times it had been too strong for him, and had made him audacious, capricious, inconstant, and guilty of some follies; but his life was pure from any dark reproach.

"*Soyez gentilhomme*," his father had said to him in the little hut on the Pennine Alps, with the snow-fields severing them from all other life than their own, and had said it never thinking that his boy would be more than at best a village priest or teacher; the bidding had sunk into the mind of the child, and the man had not forgotten it now that Europe was at his feet, and its princes but servants who had to wait his time; and he liked to make them wait. "Perhaps that is not

gentilhomme," he would say in reproach to himself, but it diverted him and he did it very often; most often when he thought angrily that he was but like Hans Andersen's nightingale, the jewelled one, that was thrown aside and despised when once its spring was snapped and broken. If he were only that, he was now at the moment when emperor and court thought nothing in heaven or on earth worth hearing but the jewelled nightingale, and "the crowds in the streets hummed his song." Yet as the night train bore him through the level meadows, and cornfields glistening in the moonlight, and the hush of a sleeping world, his eyes were dim and his heart was heavy, and on the soft cushions of the travelling bed they had given him he could not find rest.

"The moths will corrupt her," he thought, sadly and wistfully. "The moths will eat all that fine delicate feeling away, little by little; the moths of the world will eat the unselfishness first, and then the innocence, and then the honesty, and then the decency; no one will see them eating, no one will see the havoc being wrought; but little by little the fine fabric will go, and in its place will be dust. Ah, the pity of it! The pity of it! The webs come out of the great weaver's loom lovely enough, but the moths of the world eat them all. One weeps for the death of children, but perhaps the change of them into callous men and worldly women is a sadder thing to see after all."

His heart was heavy.

Was it love? No; he fancied not; it could not be. Love with him—an Almaviva as much off the stage as on it—had been a charming, tumultuous, victorious thing; a concession rather to the weakness of the women who sought him than to his own; the chief, indeed, but only one amongst many other distractions and triumphs.

It was not love that made his heart go out to that fair-haired child, with the thoughtful questioning eyes. It was rather pity, tenderness, reverence for innocence, rage against the world which would so soon change her;—poor little moth, dreaming of flying up to heaven's light, and born to sink into earth's commonest fires!

Corrèze did not esteem women highly. They had caressed him into satiety, and wooed him till his gratitude was more than half contempt; but in his innermost heart, where his old faiths dwelt unseen by even his best friends, there was the fancy of what a woman should be, might be, unspotted by the world, and innocent in thought, as well as deed.

Such a woman had seemed to him to be in the girl whom he had found by the sea, as the grand glory of the full white rose lies folded in the blush-rose bud.

It was too absurd!

Her mother had been right, quite right.

The little frivolous, artificial woman, with her *perruque* and her *papelitos*, had said all that society would say. She had been wise, and he, in a passing moment of sentiment, a fool. He had scarcely really considered the full meaning of his own words, and where they would have led him had they been taken seriously.

He thought now of all the letters lying in those cabinets and caskets at Paris.

"What a burnt-sacrifice of notepaper I should have had to make!" he said to himself, and smoked a little, and tried to ridicule himself.

Was he, Corrèze, the lover of great rulers of society, the hero of a hundred and a thousand intrigues and romances, in love with a mere child, because she had serious eyes and no shoes and stockings? bewitched by a young girl who had sat half an hour beside him by a sweetbriar hedge on a cliff by the sea? It was too absurd.

From Baden there had come an impatient summons from a dark-haired duchess of the Second Empire, who fancied that she reigned over his life because he reigned over hers like a fatality, an imperious and proud woman whom the lamps in the Avenue Marigny had shone on as she stole on foot, muffled and veiled, to hide her burning face on his breast; he thought of her where she was waiting for him, and a little shudder of disgust went over him.

He threw open the window of his bed carriage, and leaned his head out, to meet the midnight wind.

The train was passing a little village, a few cottages, a pond, a mill, a group of willows silvery in the starlight. From the little green gardens there came a scent of sweetbriar and hedge roses.

"Shall I smell that smell all my life?" he thought impatiently.

CHAPTER VI.

LADY DOLLY had a very dear friend. Of course she had five hundred dear friends, but this one she was really fond of; that is to say, she never said anything bad of her, and only laughed at her goodnaturedly when she had left a room; and this abstinence is as strong a mark of sincerity nowadays, as dying for another used to be in the old days of strong feelings and the foolish expression of them.

This friend was her dear Adine, otherwise Lady Stoat of Stitchley, who had just won the honour of the past year's season by marrying her daughter (a beauty) to a young marquis, who, with the small exceptions of being a drunkard, a fool, and a brute, was everything that a mother's soul could desire; and all the mothers' souls in the great world had accordingly burned for him passionately, and Lady Stoat had won him.

Lady Stoat was as much revered as a maternal model of excellence in her time as the mother of the Gracchi in hers. She was a gentle-looking woman, with a very soft voice, which she never raised under any provocation. She had a will of steel, but she made it look like a blossoming and pliant reed; she was very religious and strongly ritualistic.

When Lady Dolly awoke the next morning, with the vague remembrance of something very unpleasant having happened to her, it was to this friend that she fled for advice as soon as she was dressed; having for that purpose to drive over to Deauville, where Lady Stoat, who thought Trouville vulgar, had a charming little place, castellated, coquettish, Gothic, Chinese, Moorish, all kinds of things, in a pretty pellmell of bonbon-box architecture, set in a frame of green turf and laurel hedges and round-headed acacias, and with blazing geranium beds underneath its gilded balconies and marqueterie doors. Lady Dolly had herself driven over in the Duc de Dinant's *panier* with his four ponies, and while he went to find out some friends and arrange the coming races, she took her own road to the Maison Perle.

"Adine always knows," she thought. She was really fond of her Adine, who was many years older than herself. But for her Adine, certain little bits of nonsense and imprudence in Lady Dolly's feverish little life might have made people talk, and given trouble to Mr. Vanderdecken, absorbed as he might be in Java, Japan, or Jupiter.

Lady Stoat of Stitchley was one of those invaluable characters who love to do good for good's own sake, and to set things straight for the mere pleasure of being occupied. As some persons of an old-maidish or old-bachelor turn of mind will go far out of their way to

smoothe a crease or remove a crumb, though neither be marring their own property, so would Lady Stoat go far out of her way to prevent a scandal, reconcile two enemies, or clear a tangled path. It was her way of amusing herself. She had a genius for management. She was a clever tactician, and her tactics interested her, and employed her time agreeably. If anyone in her world wanted a marriage arranged, a folly prevented, a disgrace concealed, or a refractory child brought to reason, Lady Stoat of Stitchley would do it in the very best possible manner.

"It is only my duty," she would say in her hushed melodious monotonous voice, and nearly everybody thought Lady Stoat the modern substitute of a saint on earth.

To this saint now went Lady Dolly with her troubles and her tale.

"What *can* I do with her, dearest?" she cried plaintively, in the pretty little morning room, whose windows looked over the geranium beds to the grey sea.

Lady Stoat was doing crewel work; a pale, slight, gracefully made woman with small straight features, and the very sweetest and saddest of smiles.

"What young men are there?" said Lady Stoat, now in response, still intent on her crewel work. "I have not thought about them at all since the happiness of my own treasure was secured. By the bye, I heard

from Gwen this morning; she tells me she has hopes—Our Mother in heaven has heard my prayers. Imagine, love, my becoming a grandmama! It is what I long so for!—just a silly old grandmama spoiling all her pets! I feel I was born to be a grandmama!"

"I am so glad, how very charming!" murmured Lady Dolly, vaguely and quite indifferent. "I am so terribly afraid Vere won't please, and I am so afraid of this affair with Corrèze."

"What affair? with whom?" asked Lady Stoat of Stitchley, waking from her dreams of being a grandmama.

Whereon she told it, making it look very odd and very bad indeed, in the unconscious exaggeration which accompanied Lady Dolly's talk, as inevitably as a great streak of foam precedes and follows the track of a steamer.

Lady Stoat was rather amused than shocked.

"It is very like Corrèze, and he is the most dangerous man in the world; everybody is in love with him; Gwendolen was, but all that is nothing; it is not as if he were one of us."

"He is one of us! He goes everywhere!"

"Oh! goes!—well; that is because people like to ask him—society is a pigstye—but all that does not alter his being a singer."

"He is a marquis, you know, they say!"

"All singers are marquises, if you like to believe

them. My dear Dolly, you cannot be serious in being afraid of Corrèze? If you are, all the more reason to marry her at once."

"She is not the style that anybody likes at all nowadays," replied Lady Dolly, in a sort of despair. "She is not the style of the day at all, you know. She has great natural distinction, but I don't think people care for that, and they like *chien*. She will always look like a gentlewoman, and they like us best when we don't. I have a conviction that men will be afraid of her. Is there any thing more fatal? Vere will never look like a *belle petite*, in a tea-gown, and smoke, never! She has gone a hundred years back, being brought up by that horrid old woman. You could fancy her going to be guillotined in old lace like Marie-Antoinette. What can I do?"

"Keep her with you six months, dear," said the friend, who was a woman of some humour. "And I don't think poor Marie-Antoinette had any lace left to wear."

"Of course I must keep her with me," said Lady Dolly with exasperation, who was not a woman of humour, and who did not see the jest.

Lady Stoat reflected a moment. She liked arranging things, whether they closely concerned her or not.

"There is the Chambrée's son?" she said hesitatingly.

"I know! But they will want such a dower, and Vere has nothing—nothing!"

"But if she be a beauty?"

"She will be beautiful; she won't be a beauty; not in the way men like now. She will always look cold."

"Do they dislike that? Not in their wives I think; my Gwen looks very cold," said her friend; then added with an innocent impassiveness, "You might marry her to Jura."

Lady Dolly laughed and coloured.

"Poor Jack! He hates the very idea of marriage; I don't think he will ever——"

"They all hate it," said Lady Stoat tranquilly. "But they do it when they are men of position; Jura will do it like the rest. What do you think of Serge Zouroff?"

Lady Dolly this time did not laugh; she turned white underneath Piver's bloom; her pretty sparkling eyes glanced uneasily.

"Zouroff!" she repeated vaguely, "Zouroff!"

"I think I should try," answered Lady Stoat calmly. "Yes; I do think I should try. By the way, take her to Félicité; you are going there, are you not? It would be a great thing for you, dear, to marry her this year; you would find it such a bore in the season; don't *I* know what it is! And for you, so young as you are, to go to balls with a *demoiselle à marier!*—my poor little puss, you would die of it."

"I am sure I shall as it is!" said Lady Dolly; and her nerves gave way, and she cried.

"Make Zouroff marry her," said Lady Stoat soothingly, as if she were pouring out drops of chloral for a fretful child.

"Make Zouroff!" echoed Lady Dolly, with a certain intonation that led Lady Stoat to look at her quickly.

"Has she done naughty things that she has not told me," thought her confidante. "No, I do not fancy so. Poor little pussy! she is too silly not to be transparent."

Aloud, she said merely:

"Zouroff is middle-aged now; Nadine would be glad to see him take any one; she would not oppose it. He must marry some time, and I don't know anybody else so good as he."

"Good!" ejaculated Lady Dolly faintly. She was still startled and agitated, and strove to hide that she was so. "Vere would never," she murmured; "you don't know her; she is the most dreadful child——"

"You must bring her to me," said Lady Stoat.

She was very successful with girls. She never scolded them; she never ridiculed them; she only influenced them in a gentle, imperceptible, sure way that, little by little, made them feel that love and honour were silly things, and that all that really mattered was to have rank and to be rich, and to be envied by others.

Lady Stoat never said this; never said, indeed, anything approaching it, but all girls that she took any pains with learned it by heart, nevertheless, as the gospel of their generation.

It was her own religion; she only taught what she honestly believed.

A little comforted, Lady Dolly left her calming presence; met her little duke and breakfasted with him merrily at an hotel, and drove back to her own *châlet* to dress for a dinner at the Maison Normande.

The doors of Félicité would not open until the first day of September, and there were still some dozen days of August yet to pass, and on those days Vere was to be seen occasionally by her mother's side on the beach, and in the villas, and at the races at Deauville, and was clad by the clever directions of Adrienne in charming, youthful dresses as simple as they were elegant. She was taken to the Casino, where the high-born young girls of her own age read, or worked, or played with the *petits chevaux;* she was made to walk up and down the planks, where her innocence brushed the shoulders of Casse-une-croûte, the last new villany out in woman, and her fair cheeks felt the same sunbeams and breeze that fell on all the faded *pêches à quinze sous.* She was taken to the *bal des bébés,* and felt a pang that was older than her years at seeing those little frizzed and furbelowed flirts of five, and those vain little simpering dandies of three.

"Oh, the poor, poor little children!" she thought, "they will never know what it is to be young!"

She, even in monastic old Bulmer, had been left a free, open-air, natural, honest child's life. Her own heart here was oppressed and lonely. She missed her faithful old friends; she took no pleasure in the romp and racket that was round her; she understood very little of all that she saw, but the mere sight of it hurt her. Society, to this untutored child of the Northumbrian moors, looked so grotesque and so vulgar. This Trouville mob of fine ladies and adventuresses, princes and blacklegs, ministers and dentists, reigning sovereigns and queens of the theatres, seemed to her a Saturnalia of Folly, and its laugh hurt her more than a blow would have done.

Her mother took her out but little, and the less that she went the less troubled she was. That great mass of varicoloured, noisy life, so pretty as a spectacle, but so deplorable as humanity, dismayed and offended her. She heard that these ladies of Deauville, with their painted brows, their high voices, their shrill laughter, their rickety heels, were some of the greatest ladies of Europe; but, to the proud temper and the delicate taste of the child, they seemed loathsome.

"You are utterly unsympathetic!" said her mother, disgusted, "frightfully unsympathetic! You are *guin-*

dée, positive, puritan! You have not a grain of adaptability. I read the other day somewhere that Madame Recamier, who was always called the greatest beauty of our great-grandmothers' times, was really nothing at all to look at—quite ordinary; but she did smile so in everybody's face, and listen so to all the bores, that the world pronounced her a second Helen. As for you—handsome though you are, and you really are quite beautiful they say—you look so scornful of everything, and so indignant at any little nonsense, that I should not wonder in the least if you never even got called a beauty at all."

Lady Dolly paused to see the effect of the most terrible prediction that it was in female power to utter. Vere was quite unmoved; she scarcely heard.

She was thinking of that voice, clear as the ring of gold, which had said to her:

"Keep yourself unspotted from the world."

"If the world is nothing better than this, it must be very easy to resist it," she thought in her ignorance.

She did not know that from these swamps of flattery, intrigue, envy, rivalry, and emulation there rises a miasma which scarcely the healthiest lungs can withstand. She did not know that though many may be indifferent to the tempting of men, few indeed are impenetrable to the sneer and the smile of women; that to live your own life in the midst of the world is

a harder thing than it was of old to withdraw to the Thebaid; that to risk "looking strange" requires a courage perhaps cooler and higher than the soldier's or the saint's; and that to stand away from the contact and the custom of your "set" is a harder and a sterner work than it was of old to go into the sanctuary of La Trappe or Port Royal.

Autres temps, autres mœurs—but we too have our martyrs.

Félicité was a seaside château of the Princes Zouroff, which they had bought from an old decayed French family, and had transformed into a veritable castle of fairy-land. They came to it for about three months in as many years; but for beauty and loveliness it had no equal, even amongst the many summer holiday-houses scattered up and down the green coast, from Etretat to the Rochers de Calvados. This year it was full of people: the Princess Nadine Nelaguine was keeping open house there for her brother Sergius Zouroff. White-sailed yachts anchored in its bay; chasseurs in green and gold beat its woods; riding parties and driving parties made its avenues bright with colour and movement; groups like Watteau pictures wandered in its gardens; there was a little troupe of actors from Paris for its theatre; life went like a song; and Serge Zouroff would have infinitely preferred to be alone with some handsome Tschigan women and many flagons of brandy.

Madame Nelaguine was a little woman, who wore a wig that had little pretence about it; and smoked all day long, and read *saletés* with zest, and often talked them; yet Madame Nelaguine could be a power in politics when she chose, could cover herself with diamonds and old laces, and put such dignity into her tiny person that she once crushed into utter nervousness a new-made empress, whom she considered varnish. She was wonderfully clever, wonderfully learned; she was cunning, and she could be cruel, yet she had in her own way a kind heart; she was a great musician and a great mathematician; she had been an ambassadress, and had distinguished herself at great courts. She had had many intrigues of all kinds, but had never been compromised by any one of them. She was considerably older than her brother, and seldom approved of him.

"*On peut se débaucher, mais on doit se débaucher avec de l'esprit,*" she would say: and the modern ways of vice seemed to her void of wit. "You are not even amused," she would add. "If you were amused one could comprehend, but you are not. You spend your fortunes on creatures that you do not even like; you spend your nights in gambling that does not even excite you; you commit vulgarities that do not even divert you, only because everybody else does the same; you caricature monstrous vices so that you make even those no longer terrible, but ridiculous; and if you

fight a duel you manage to make it look absurd, you take a surgeon with you! You have no passions. It is passion that dignifies life, and you do not know anything about it, any of you; you know only infamy. And infamy is always so dull; it is never educated. Why do you copy Vitellius? Because you have not the wit to be either Horace or Cæsar."

But Sergius Zouroff did not pay any heed to his cleverer sister. His Uraline mines, his vast plains of wheat, his forests and farms, his salt and his copper, and all that he owned, were treasures well-nigh inexhaustible, and although prodigal he was shrewd. He was not a man to be easily ruined, and, as long as his great wealth and his great position gave him a place that was almost royal in the society of Europe, he knew very well that he could copy Vitellius as he chose without drawing any chastisement on him. In a cold and heavy way he had talent, and with that talent he contrived to indulge all excesses in any vice that tempted him, yet remain without that social stigma that has marked before now princes wholly royal.

"Everywhere they are glad to see me, and everybody would marry me to-morrow," he would say, with a shrug of his shoulders, when his sister rebuked him.

To Félicité drove Lady Dolly with Vere by her side. Vere had been given a white dress and a broad hat with white drooping feathers; she looked very pale, her mother supposed it was with excitement.

She thought it the moment to offer a little maternal advice. "Now, dear, this will be quite going into the world for you. Do remember one or two things. Do try to look less grave; men hate a serious woman. And if you want to ask anything, don't come to me, because I'm always busy; ask Adrienne or Lady Stoat. You have seen what a sweet dear motherly creature she is. She won't mind telling you anything. There is a charming girl there, too, an American heiress, Fuschia Leach; a horrible name, but a lovely creature, and *very* clever. Watch her and learn all you can from her. *Tout Paris* lost its head after her utterly this last winter. She'll marry anybody she chooses. Pray don't make me ashamed of you. Don't be sensational, don't be stupid, don't be pedantic; and, for mercy's sake, don't make any scenes. Never look surprised; never show a dislike to anybody; never seem shocked, if you feel so. Be civil all round, it's the safest way in society; and pray don't talk about mathematics and the Bible. I don't know that there's anything more I can tell you: you must find it all out for yourself. The world is like whist, reading can't teach it. Try not to blunder, that's all, and—do watch Fuschia Leach."

"Is she so very beautiful and good?"

"Good?" echoed Lady Dolly, *désorientée* and impatient. "I don't know, I am sure. No, I shouldn't think she was, by any means. She doesn't go in for

that. She is a wonderful social success, and men rave about her. That is what I meant. If you watch her she will do you more good than I could if I had patience to talk to you for ever. You will see what the girl of your time must be if she want to please."

Vere's beautiful mouth curled contemptuously.

"I do not want to please."

"That is an insane remark," said Lady Dolly coldly. "If you don't, what do you live for?"

Vere was silent. At dark old Bulmer she had been taught that there were many other things to live for, but she was afraid to say so, lest she should be "pedantic" again.

"That is just the sort of silly thing I *hate* to hear a girl say, or a woman either. Americans never say such things," said Lady Dolly with vivacious scorn. "It's just like your father, who always would go out in the rain when dinner was ready, or read to somebody who had the scarlet fever, or give the best claret to a ploughboy with a sore throat. It is silly; it is unnatural. You *should* want to please. Why were we put in this world?"

"To make others happier," Vere suggested timidly, her eyes growing dim at her father's name.

"Did it make *me* happier to have the scarlet fever brought home to me?" said Lady Dolly, irrelevantly and angrily. "That is just like poor Vere's sort of illogical reasonings; I remember them so well. You are

exactly like him. I despair of you, I quite despair of you, unless Fuschia Leach can convert you."

"Is she my age?"

"A year or two older, I think; she is perfect now; at five-and-twenty she will be hideous, but she will dress so well it won't matter. I know for a fact, that she refused your cousin, Mull, last month. She was very right; he is awfully poor. Still, she'd have been a duchess, and her father kept a bar; so it shows you what she can do."

"What is a bar?"

"Oh! pray don't keep asking me questions like that. You make my head whirl. A bar is where they sell things to drink, and her brothers have a great pig-killing place 'down west,' wherever that is."

"And she refused my cousin!"

"Dear, yes! This is the charming topsy-turvy world we live in—you will get used to it, my dear. They made a fuss because a tailor got to court last year. I am sure I don't know why they did; if he'd been an American tailor nobody'd have said anything; they wouldn't even have thought it odd. All the world over you meet them; they get in the swim somehow; they have such heaps of money, and their women know how to wear things. They always look like —what they shouldn't look like—to be sure; but so most of us do, and men prefer it."

Vere understood not at all; but she did not venture again to ask for an explanation.

Her mother yawned and brushed the flies away pettishly, and called to Lord Jura, who was riding beside their carriage, and had lagged a trifle behind in the narrow sandy road that ran level between green hedges. The high metal roof and gilded vanes of Félicité were already shining above the low rounded masses of distant woods. It stood on the sea-coast, a little way from Villers-sur-Mer.

Vere did not understand why Lord Jura always went with them as naturally as the maids did and the dressing-boxes; but he was kind, if a little rough. She liked him. Only why did her mother call him Jack, and quarrel with him so, and yet want him always with her?

Vere thought about it dimly, vaguely, perplexedly, especially when she saw the frank, blue eyes of Jura looking at herself, hard, and long, with a certain sadness and impatience in the gaze, as if he pitied her.

The reception at Félicité seemed to Vere to be a whirl of bright hues, pretty faces, and amiable words. The Princess Nadine Nelaguine was out on the terrace with her guests, and the Princess kissed her with effusion, and told her she was like a Gainsborough picture. The Princess herself was a fairy-like little woman, with a bright odd Calmuck face and two little brown eyes as bright as a marmoset's. Vere was

presented to so many people that she could not tell one from another, and she was glad to be left in her room while her mother, having got into a wonderful gold-embroidered Watteau sacque that she called a tea-gown, went to rejoin the other ladies amongst the roses and the perfumes, and the late afternoon light.

When Vere herself, three hours later, was dressed for dinner, and told to tap at her mother's door, she did not feel nervous, because it was not in her nature to be easily made so, but she felt oppressed and yet curious.

She was going into the world.

And the counsels of Corrèze haunted her.

Lady Dolly said sharply, "Come in!" and Vere entering, beheld her mother for the first time in full war-paint and panoply.

Lady Dolly looked sixteen herself. She was exquisitely painted; she had a gown cut *en cœur* which was as indecent as the heart of woman could desire; jewels sparkled all over her; she was a triumph of art, and looked as exactly like Colifichet of the Bouffes in her last new piece, as even her own soul could aspire to do.

"What are you staring at, child?" she asked of Vere, who had turned rather pale. "Don't you think I look well? What is the matter?"

"Nothing," said Vere, who could not answer that

it hurt her to see so much of her mother's anatomy unveiled.

"You look as if you saw a ghost," said Lady Dolly impatiently; "you have such a horrid way of staring. Come!"

Vere went silently by her side down the wide staircase, lighted by black marble negroes holding golden torches. After the silence, the stillness, the gloom, of her Northumbrian home, with the old servants moving slowly through the dim oak-pannelled passages, the brilliance, the luxury, the glittering lustre, the *va-et-vient* of Félicité seemed like a gorgeous spectacle. She would have liked to have stood on that grand staircase, amongst the hothouse flowers, and looked on it all as on a pageant. But her mother swept on into the drawing-rooms, and Vere heard a little murmur of admiration, which she did not dream was for herself.

Lady Dolly in her way was an artist, and she had known the right thing to do when she had had Vere clad in white cachemire, with an old silver girdle of German work, and in the coils of her hair a single silver arrow.

Vere was perfect in her stately, serious, yet child-like grace; and the women watching her enter felt a pang of envy.

Sergius Zouroff, her host, advancing, murmured a "*divinement belle!*" and Lady Stoat, watching from a

distant sofa, thought to herself "What a lovely creature! really it is trying for poor little pussy."

Vere went in to her first great dinner. She said little or nothing. She listened and wondered. Where she sat she could not see her mother nor anyone she knew. The young French diplomatist who took her in tried to make himself agreeable to her, but she replied by monosyllables. He thought how stupid these lovely *ingénues* always were. He had not the open sesame of Corrèze to the young mute soul.

Dinner over, Lady Stoat took possession of her in the charming motherly affectionate way for which she was celebrated with young girls. But even Lady Stoat did not make much way with her; Vere's large serious eyes were calmly watching everything.

"Will you show me which is Miss Leach?" she said suddenly. Lady Stoat laughed and pointed discreetly with a fan.

"Who has told you about Fuschia Leach?" she said amusedly. "I will make you known to her presently; she may be of use to you."

Vere's eyes, grave as a child's awakened out of sleep into the glare of gas, fastened where her fan had pointed, and studied Miss Leach. She saw a very lovely person of transparent colouring, of very small features, of very slight form, with a skin like delicate porcelain, an artistic tangle of artistically coloured red gold hair, a tiny impertinent nose, and a wonderful

expression of mingled impudence, shrewdness, audacity and resolution. This person had her feet on an ottoman, her hands behind her head, a rosebud in her mouth, and a male group around her.

"I shall not like her; I do not wish to know her," said Vere slowly.

"My dear, do not say so," said Lady Stoat. "It will sound like jealousy, you know—one pretty girl of another——"

"She is not a lady," said Vere once more.

"There you are right," said Lady Stoat. "Very few people are, my love, nowadays. But that is just the sort of thing you must *not* say. It will get quoted against you, and make you, make you — oh! such enemies, my love!"

"Does it matter?" said Vere dreamily. She was wondering what Corrèze would have thought or did think of Miss Fuschia Leach.

"Does it matter to have enemies!" echoed Lady Stoat. "Oh, my sweet Vere! does it matter whether there is a pin sticking into one all day? A pin is a very little thing, no doubt, but it makes all the difference between comfort and discomfort."

"She is not a lady," said Vere again with a passing frown on her pretty brows.

"Oh, my dear! if you wait for that!" Lady Stoat's smile expressed that if she did wait for that she would be more exacting than society. "As for not knowing

her—nonsense—you must not object to anybody who is in the same house-party with yourself."

"She is extremely pretty," added Lady Stoat. "Those American girls so very often are; but they are all like the *poupées de modiste*. The very best of them are only very perfect likenesses of the young ladies that try the confections on for us at Pingat's or Worth's, and the dress has always a sort of look of being the first toilette they ever had. I don't know why, for I hear they dress extremely well over there, and should be used to it, but it *has* that look, and they never get rid of it. No, my dear, no; you are right. Those new people are not gentlewomen any more than men's modern manners are like the *Broad Stone of Honour*. But do not say so. They will repeat it, and it will not sound kind, and unless you can say what is kind, never say anything."

"I would rather have anyone I did not respect for an enemy than for a friend," said Vere with a child's obstinacy. Lady Stoat smiled.

"Phrases my love!—phrases! you have so much to learn, my child, as yet."

"I will not learn of Miss Leach."

"Well, I do not admire her very much myself. But then I belong to an old school, you know. I am an old woman, and have prejudices," said Lady Stoat sweetly. "Miss Leach has the world at her foot, and it amuses her to kick it about like a tennis ball, and

show her ankles. I daresay you will do the same, love, in another six months, only you will not show your ankles. All the difference will be there."

And then Lady Stoat, who though she called herself an old woman would have been extremely angry if anybody else had called her so, thought she had done enough for once for poor little pussy's daughter, and turned to her own little mild flirtations with a bald and beribboned ambassador.

Vere was left alone, to look and muse.

Men glanced at her and said what a lovely child she was; but they kept aloof from her. They were afraid of an *ingénue*, and there was Fuschia Leach, whose laughter was ringing up to the chandeliers and out to the conservatories—Fuschia Leach, who had never been an *ingénue*, but a coquette at three years old, and a woman of the world at six.

Jura alone came up and seated himself by Vere.

"How do you like it?" he said with an odd little smile.

"It is very pretty to look at," answered Vere.

"Ah, to be sure. As good as a play when you're new to it, and awfully like a treadmill when you're not. What do you think of Fuschia Leach?"

Vere remembered Lady Stoat's warning, and answered merely:

"I think she is handsome."

"I believe you; she threw over your cousin Mull,

as if he were dirty boots; so she does heaps of them. I don't know what it is myself; I think it is her cheek. I always tell Dolly so—I beg your pardon—I mean your mother."

Vere had heard him say "Dolly" very often, and did not know why he apologised.

"My mother admires her?" she said with a little interrogation in her voice. Jura laughed.

"Or says she does. Women always say they admire a reigning beauty. It looks well, you know. They all swear Mrs. Dawtry is divine, and I'm sure in their hearts they think her rather ugly than otherwise."

"Who is Mrs. Dawtry?"

"Don't you know? Good heavens! But, of course, you don't know anything of our world. It's a pity you ever should. Touch pitch—what is it the old saw says?"

It was the regret of Corrèze, differently worded.

"But the world, as you call it, means men and women? It must be what they make it. They might make it good if they wished," said Vere with the seriousness that her mother detested.

"But they don't wish, you see. That is it," said Jura with a sigh. "I don't know how it is, when once you are in the swim you can't alter things; you must just go along with the rest. One does heaps of things one hates only because others do them."

"That is very contemptible," said Vere, with the

disdain that became her very well coming on her pretty proud mouth.

"I think we are contemptible," said Jura moodily; and to so frank a confession there was no reply or retort possible, Vere thought.

"It is strange; he said much the same," she murmured, half aloud. "Only he said it like a poet, and you—speak in such an odd way."

"How do I speak?" asked Jura amused.

"You speak as if words cost too much, and you were obliged to use as few and choose as bald ones as you could find; English is such a beautiful language, if you read Milton or Jeremy Taylor, or Beaumont and Fletcher, or any of the old divines and dramatists——"

She stopped, because Jura laughed.

"Divines and dramatists! My dear child, we know nothing about such things; we have St. Albans and French adaptations; they're our reading of divinity and the drama. Who was 'he' that talked like a poet while I talk like a sweep?"

"I did not say you talked like a sweep—and I meant the marquis de Corrèze."

"Oh! your singer? Don't call him a Marquis. He is the prince of tenors, that's all."

"He is a Marquis," said Vere, with a certain coldness. "They were a very great race. You can see all about it in the 'Livre d'Or' of Savoy; they were like

the Marquises Costa de Beauregard, who lost every thing in 'ninety-two. You must have read M. de Beauregard's beautiful book, *Un homme d'autrefois?*"

"Never heard of it. Did the tenor tell you all that rubbish?"

"Where is mamma, Lord Jura?" said Vere. "I am tired of sitting here."

"That's a facer," thought Jura. "And, by Jove, very well given for such a baby. I beg your pardon," he said aloud. "Corrèze shall be a prince of the blood, if you wish. Your mother is over there; but I doubt if she'll thank you to go to her; she's in the thick of it with them; look."

He meant that Lady Dolly was flirting very desperately, and enjoying herself very thoroughly, having nearly as many men about her as Miss Fuschia Leach.

Vere looked, and her eyes clouded.

"Then I think I may go to bed. She will not miss me. Good-night."

"No, she won't miss you. Perhaps other people will."

"There is no one I know, so how can they?" said Vere innocently, and rose to go; but Sergius Zouroff, who had approached in the last moment, barred her passage with a smiling deference.

"Your host will, Mademoiselle Herbert. Does my poor house weary you, that you think of your own room at ten o'clock."

"I always go to bed at ten, monsieur," said Vere. "It is nothing new for me."

"Let me show you my flowers first," at last said Prince Zouroff. "You know we Russians, born amidst snow and ice, have a passion for tropical houses; will you not come?"

He held out his arm as he spoke. Would it be rude to refuse? Vere did not know. She was afraid it would, as he was her host.

She laid her fingers hesitatingly on his offered arm, and was led through the rooms by Prince Zouroff.

Fuschia Leach took her hands from behind her head, and stared; Lady Dolly would have turned pale, if she had not been so well painted; Lady Stoat put her eye-glass up, and smiled.

Prince Zouroff had a horror of unmarried women, and never had been known to pay any sort of attention to one, not even to his sister's guest, Fuschia Leach the irresistible.

Prince Zouroff was a tall large man of seven and thirty; loosely built, and plain of feature. He had all the vices, and had them all in excess, but he was a very polished gentleman when he chose; and he was one of the richest men in Europe, and his family, of which he was the head, was very near the throne, in rank and influence; for twenty years, ever since he had left the imperial Corps de Pages, and shown himself in Paris, driving his team of black Orlofs, he had been

the idolatry, the aspiration, and the despair of all the mothers of maidens.

Vere's passage through his drawing-rooms on his arm was a spectacle so astonishing, that there was a general lull for a moment in the conversation of all his guests. It was a triumph, but Vere was wholly unconscious of it; which made her charming in the eyes of the giver of it.

"I think that's a case!" said Miss Fuschia Leach to her admirers. She did not care herself. She did not want Zouroff, high, and mighty, and rich, and of great fashion though he was; she meant to die an English duchess, and she had only thrown over the unhappy Mull because she had found out he was poor. "And what's the use of being a duchess, if you don't make a splash?" she said very sensibly to his mother, when they talked it over. She had flirted with Mull shamelessly, but so she did with scores of them; it was her way. She had brought the way from America. She had young men about her as naturally as a rat-catcher has ferrets and terriers; but she meant to take her time before choosing one of them for good and all.

"What a beautiful child she is," thought Prince Zouroff, "and so indifferent! Can she possibly be naughty Dolly's daughter?"

He was interested, and he, being skilled in such ways, easily learned the little there was to know about her, whilst he took her through his conservatories, and

showed her Japan lilies, Chinese blossoms that changed colour thrice a day, and orchids of all climes and colours.

The conservatories were really rare, and pleased her; but Prince Zouroff did not. His eyes were bold and cold, at once; they were red too, and there was an odour of brandy on his breath that came to her through all the scent of the flowers. She did not like him. She was grave and silent. She answered what he asked, but she did not care to stay there, and looked round for a chance of escape. It charmed Zouroff, who was so used to see women throw themselves in his path that he found no pleasure in their pursuit.

"Decidedly she has been not at all with naughty Dolly!" he said to himself, and looked at her with so much undisguised admiration in his gaze, that Vere, looking up from the golden blossoms of an Odontoglossum, blushed to the eyes, and felt angry, she could not very well have told why.

"Your flowers are magnificent, and I thank you, monsieur; but I am tired, and I will say good night," she said quickly, with a little haughtiness of accent and glance which pleased Zouroff more than anything had done for years.

"I would not detain you unwillingly, mademoiselle, one moment," he said, with a low bow—a bow which had some real respect in it. "Pardon me, this is your

nearest way. I will say to miladi that you were tired. To-morrow, if there be anything you wish, only tell me, it shall be yours."

He opened a door that led out of the last conservatory on to the foot of the great staircase; and Vere, not knowing whether she were not breaking all the rules of politeness and etiquette, bent her head to him and darted like a swallow up the stairs.

Sergius Zouroff smiled, and strolled back alone through his drawing-rooms, and went up to Lady Dolly, and cast himself into a long, low chair by her side.

"*Ma chère*, your lovely daughter did not appreciate my flowers or myself. She told me to tell you she was tired, and has gone to her room. She is beautiful, very beautiful; but I cannot say that she is complimentary."

"She is only a child," said Lady Dolly hurriedly; she was half relieved, half frightened. "She *is* rude!" she added regretfully. "It is the way she has been brought up. You must forgive her, she is so young."

"Forgive her! *Mais de bon cœur!* Anything feminine that runs away is only too delightful in these times," said the Prince coolly. "Do not change her. Do not tease her. Do not try to make her like yourself. I prefer her as she is."

Lady Dolly looked at him quickly. Was it possible that already——?

Sergius Zouroff was lying back in his chair with

his eyes closed. He was laughing a little silently, in an unpleasant way that he had; he had spoken insolently, and Lady Dolly could not resent his insolence.

"You are very kind, Prince," she said as negligently as she could behind her fan. "Very kind, to treat a child's *boutades* as a girl's charm. She has really seen nothing, you know, shut up in that old northern house by the sea; and she is as eccentric as if she were eighty years old. Quite odd in her notions, quite!"

"Shall we play?" said Zouroff.

They began to play, most of them, at a little roulette table. Musicians were interpreting, divinely, themes of Beethoven's and Schumann's; the great glass halls and marble courts of the flowers were open with all their array of bloom; the green gardens and gay terraces were without in the brilliancy of moonlight; the sea was not a score of yards away, sparkling with phosphorus and star-rays; but they were indifferent to all these things. They began to play, and heeded nothing else. The music sounded on deaf ears; the flowers breathed out odours on closed nostrils; the summer night spread its loveliness in vain; and the waters of salt wave and fresh fountain murmured on unheeded. Play held them.

Sergius Zouroff lost plenty of money to Lady Dolly, who went to bed at two o'clock, worried and yet pleased, anxious and yet exultant.

Vere's room was placed next to hers.

She looked in before passing on to her own. The girl lay sound asleep in the sweet dreamless sleep of her lingering childhood, her hair scattered like gold on the pillows, her limbs in the lovely grace of a serene and unconscious repose.

Lady Dolly looked at her as she slept, and an uneasy pang shot through her.

"If he do mean that," she thought, "I suppose it would be horrible. And how much too pretty and too innocent she would be for him—the beast!"

Then she turned away, and went to her own chamber, and began the toilsome martyrdom of having her *perruque* unfastened, and her night's preparations for the morning's enamel begun.

To women like Lady Dolly life is a comedy, no doubt, played on great stages and to brilliant audiences, and very amusing and charming, and all that; but alas! it has two dread passages in each short twenty-four hours; they are, the bore of being "done up," and the bore of being "undone!"

It is a martyrdom, but they bear it heroically, knowing that without it they would be nowhere; would be yellow, pallid, wrinkled, even perhaps would be flirtationless, unenvied, unregarded, worse than dead!

If Lady Dolly had said any prayers she would have said, "Thank God for Piver!"

CHAPTER VII.

It was a very pretty life at Félicité.

The riding parties meeting under the old avenue of Spanish chestnuts and dispersing down the flowering lanes; the shooting parties, which were not serious and engrossing as in England, but animated and picturesque in the deep old Norman woods; the stately dinner at nine o'clock every night, like a royal banquet; the music which was so worthy of more attentive hearers than it ever got; the theatre, pretty and *pimpant* as a coquette of the last century; the laughter; the brilliancy; the personal beauty of the women assembled there; all made the life at Félicité charming to the eye and the ear. Yet amidst it all Vere felt very lonely, and the only friends she made were in the Irish horse that they gave her to ride, and in the big Russian hound that belonged to Prince Zouroff.

The men thought her lovely, but they could not get on with her; the women disliked her as much as they adored, or professed to adore, Fuschia Leach.

To Vere, who at Bulmer had been accustomed to see life held a serious, and even solemn thing—who had been accustomed to the gravity of age and the

melancholy of a seafaring poor, and the northern tillers of a thankless soil—nothing seemed so wonderful as the perpetual gaiety and levity around her. Was there any sorrow in the world? Was life only one long laugh? Was it right to forget the woes of others as utterly as they were forgotten here? She was always wondering, and there was no one to ask.

"You are horribly in earnest, Vere," said her mother pettishly. "You should go and live with Mr. Gladstone."

But to Vere it seemed more horrible to be always laughing—and laughing at nothing. "When there are all the poor," she thought, "and all the animals that suffer so." She did not understand that, when these pretty women had sold china and flowers at a fancy fair for a hospital, or subscribed to the Society for Prevention of Cruelty, they had really done all that they thought was required of them, and could dismiss all human and animal pain from their mind, and bring their riding-horses home saddle-galled and spur-torn without any compunction.

To the complete innocence and honesty of the girl's nature the discovery of what store the world set on all things which she had been taught to hold sacred, left a sickening sense of solitude and depression behind it. Those who are little children now will have little left to learn when they reach womanhood. The little children that are about us at afternoon tea

and at lawn tennis, that are petted by house-parties and romped with at pigeon-shooting, will have little left to discover. They are miniature women already; they know the meaning of many a dubious phrase; they know the relative value of social positions; they know much of the science of flirtation which society has substituted for passion; they understand very thoroughly the shades of intimacy, the suggestions of a smile, the degrees of hot and cold, that may be marked by a bow or emphasised with a good-day. All the subtle science of society is learned by them instinctively and unconsciously, as they learn French and German from their maids. When they are women they will at least never have Eve's excuse for sin; they will know everything that any tempter could tell them. Perhaps their knowledge may prove their safeguard, perhaps not; perhaps without its bloom the fruit to men's taste may seem prematurely withered. Another ten years will tell. At any rate those we pet to-day will be spared the pang of disillusion when they shall be fairly out in a world that they already know with cynical thoroughness — baby La Bruyères and girl-Rochefoucaulds in frills and sashes.

To Vere Herbert, on the contrary, reared as she had been upon grave studies and in country loneliness, the shocks her faiths and her fancies received was very cruel. Sometimes she thought bitterly she would have minded nothing if only her mother had

been a thing she could have reverenced, a creature she could have gone to for support and sympathy.

But her mother was the most frivolous of the whole sea of froth around her—of the whole frivolous womanhood about her the very emptiest bubble.

Vere, who herself had been cast by nature in the mould to be a noble mother of children, had antique sacred fancies that went with the name of mother. The mother of the Gracchi, the mother of Bonaparte, the mother of Garibaldi, the many noble maternal figures of history and romance, were for ever in her thoughts; the time-honoured word embodied to her all sacrifice, all nobility, all holiness. And her mother was this pretty foolish painted toy, with false curls in a sunny circlet, above her kohl-washed eyes, with her heart set on a cotillon, and her name in the mouths of the clubs; whose god was her tailor, and whose gospel was Zola; whose life was an opera-bouffe, and who, when she costumed for her part in it, took "*la moindre excuse pour paraître nue!*" The thought of her mother, thus, hurt her, as in revolutions it hurts those who believe in Mary to see a Madonna spat upon by a mob.

Lady Stoat saw this, and tried, in her fashion, to console her for it.

"My dear, your mother is young still. She must divert herself. It would be very hard on her not to

be allowed. You must not think she is not fond of you because she still likes to waltz."

Vere's eyes were very sombre as she heard.

"I do not like to waltz. I never do."

"No, love? Well, temperaments differ. But surely you wouldn't be so cruel as to condemn your mother only to have your inclinations, would you? Dolly was always full of fun. I think you have not fun enough in you, perhaps."

"But my father is dead."

"My dear, Queen Anne is dead! *Henri Quatre est sur le Pont-Neuf.* What other news will you tell us? I am not saying, dear, that you should think less of your father's memory. It is too sweet of you to feel so much, and very, very rare, alas! for nowadays our children are so forgetful, and we are so little to them. But still you know your mama is young, and so pretty as she is, too, no one can expect her to shut herself up as a recluse. Perhaps, had you been always with her, things would have been different, but she has always been so much admired and so petted by everyone that it was only natural—only natural that——"

"She should not want me," said Vere, as Lady Stoat paused for a word that should adequately express Lady Dolly's excuses whilst preserving Lady Dolly's dignity before her daughter.

"Oh, my dear, I never meant that," she said hastily, whilst thinking, "*Quel enfant terrible!*"

The brilliant Fuschia was inclined to be very amiable and cordial to the young daughter of Lady Dorothy Vanderdecken, but Vere repelled her overtures with a chilling courtesy that made the bright American "feel foolish."

But Pick-me-up, as she was usually called in the great world, was not a person to be deterred by one slight, or by fifty. To never risk a rebuff is a golden rule for self-respect; but it is not the rule by which new people achieve success.

Fuschia Leach was delighted with her social success, but she never deceived herself about it.

In America her people were "new people"—that is to say, her father had made his pile selling cigars and drugs in a wild country, and her brothers were making a bigger pile killing pigs on a gigantic scale down west. In New York she and hers were deemed "shoddy"—the very shoddiest of shoddy—and were looked coldly on, and were left unvisited. But boldly springing over to less sensitive Europe, they found themselves without effort received at courts and in embassies, and had become fashionable people almost as soon as they had had time to buy high-stepping horses and ask great tailors to clothe them. It seemed very funny; it seemed quite unaccountable, and it bewildered them a little; but Fushia Leach did not lose her head.

"I surmise I'd best eat the curds while they're

sweet," she said to herself, and she did eat them. She dressed, she danced, she made all her young men fetch and carry for her, she flirted, she caught up the ways and words and habits and graces of the great world, and adapted herself to her new sphere with versatile cleverness, but all the same she "prospected" with a keen eye all the land that lay around her, and never deceived herself.

"I look cunning, and I'm spry, and I cheek him, and say outrageous things, and he likes it, and so they all go mad on me after him," she said to herself; meaning by her pronoun the great personage who had first made her the fashion. But she knew very well that whenever anything prettier, odder, or more "outrageous" than herself should appear she would lose her prestige in a day, and fall back into the ranks of the ten thousand American girls who overrun Europe.

"I like you," she said to Vere unasked one day, when she found her alone on the lawn.

"You are very good," said Vere, with the coldness of an empress of sixty years old.

"I like you," reiterated Miss Leach. "I like you because you treat 'em like dirt under your feet. That's our way; but these Europeans go after men as the squir'ls jump after cobs. You are the only one I have seen that don't."

"You are very amiable to praise me," said Vere coldly.

The lovely Fuschia continued her reflections aloud.

"We're just as bad when the Englishmen go over to us; that's a fact. But with our own men we ain't; we just make shoeblacks and scallyrags of them; they fetch and carry, and do as they're told. What a sharp woman your mother is, and as lively as a katy-did. Now on our side, you know, the old folks never get at play like that; they've given over."

"My mother is young," said Vere, more coldly still.

Miss Leach tilted her chair on end.

"That's just what's so queer. They are young on into any age over here. Your mother's over thirty, I suppose? Don't you call that old? It's Methuselah with us. But here your grandmothers look as cunning as can be, and they're as skittish as spring-lambs; it's the climate I surmise?"

Vere did not reply, and Miss Fuschia Leach, undaunted, continued her meditations aloud.

"You haven't had many affairs, I think? You're not really out are you?"

"No—affairs?"

"Heart affairs, you know. Dear me! why before I was your age, I was engaged to James Fluke Dyson, down Boston way."

"Are you to marry him then?"

"*Me?* No—thanks! I never meant to marry him. He did to go about with, and it made Victoria Boker

right mad. Then mother came to Europe: he and I vowed constancy and exchanged rings and hair and all that, and we did write to each other each mail, till I got to Paris; then I got more slack, and I disremembered to ask when the mails went out; soon after we heard he had burst up; wasn't it a piece of luck?"

"I do not understand."

"Piece of luck we came to Europe. I might have taken him over there. He was a fine young man, only he hadn't the way your men have; not their cheek either. His father'd always been thought one of the biggest note-shavers in N'York City. They say it was the fall in silver broke him; any way, poor James he's a clerk in a tea-store now."

Vere looked at her in speechless surprise, Pick-me-up laughed all the more.

"Oh they are always at seesaw like that in our country. He'll make another pile I daresay by next year, and they'll all get on their legs again. Your people, when they are bowled over lie down; ours jump up; I surmise it's the climate. I like your men best, though; they look such swells, even when they're in blanket coats and battered old hats, such as your cousin Mull wears."

"Is it true that Frank wished to succeed Mr. James Fluke Dyson?" Vere asked after a sore struggle with her disgust.

"Who's Frank?"

"My cousin, Mull?"

"Is he Frank? Dear life! I always thought dukes were dukes, even in the bosom of their families. Yes; he was that soft on me—there, they all are, but he's the worst I ever saw. I said no, but I could whistle him back. I'm most sorry I did say no. Dukes don't grow on every apple-bough; only, he's poor they say—"

"He is poor," said Vere coldly, her disgust conquering all amusement.

"When I came across the Pond," said Miss Leach, continuing her own reflections, "I said to mother 'I'll take nothing but a duke.' I always had a kind o' fancy for a duke. There's such a few of them. I saw an old print once in the Broadway, of a Duchess of Northumberland, holding her coronet out in both hands. I said to myself then, that was how I'd be taken someday—"

"Do you think duchesses hold their coronets in their hands, then?"

"Well, no; I see they don't; but I suppose one would in a picture?"

"I think it would look very odd, even in a picture."

"What's the use of having one, then? There aren't coronations every day. They tell me your cousin might be rolling if he liked. Is it true he'd have five hundred pounds sterling a day if he bored for coal? One could live on that."

"He would never permit the forest to be touched to save his life!" said Vere, indignantly with a frown and a flush. "The forests are as old as the days of Hengist and Horsa; the wild bulls are in them and the red deer; men crept there to die after Otterbourne; under one of the oaks, King James saw Johnie Armstrong."

Fuschia Leach showed all her pretty teeth. "Very touchin', but the coal was under them before that, I guess! That's much more to the point. I come from a business-country. If he'll hear reason about that coal, I'm not sure I won't think twice about your cousin."

Vere, without ceremony, turned away. She felt angry tears swell her throat and rise into her eyes.

"Oh! you turn up your nose!" said Fuschia Leach vivaciously. "You think it atrocious that new folks should carry off your brothers, and cousins, and friends. Well, I'd like to know where's it worse than all your big nobility going down at our feet for our dollars? I don't say your English do it so much, but they do do it, your younger sons, and all that small fry; and abroad we can buy the biggest and best titles in all Europe for a few hundred thousand dollars a year. *That's* real mean! *That's* blacking boots, if you please. Men with a whole row of crusaders at their backs, men as count their forefathers right away into Julius Cæsar's times, men that had uncles in the Ark

with Noah, they're at a Yankee pile like flies around molasses. Wal, now," said the pretty American, with her eyes lighting fiercely and with sparks of scorn flashing out from them, "Wal, now, you're all of you that proud that you beat Lucifer, but as far as I see there aren't much to be proud of. We're shoddy over there. If we went to Boston we wouldn't get a drink, outside an hotel, for our lives. N'York, neither, don't think because a man's struck ile he'll go to heaven with Paris thrown in; but look at all your big folk! Pray what do *they* do the minute shoddy comes their way over the pickle-field? Why they just eat it! Kiss it and eat it! Do you guess we're such fools we don't see that? Why your Norman blood and Domesday Book and all the rest of it—pray hasn't it married Lily Peart, whose father kept the steamboat hotel in Jersey City, and made his pile selling soothers to the heathen Chinee? Who was your Marchioness of Snowdon if she weren't the daughter of old Sam Salmon the note-shaver? Who was your Duchesse de Dagobert, if she weren't Aurelia Twine, with seventy million dollars made in two years out of oil? Who was your Princess Buondelmare, if not Lotty Miller, who was born in Nevada, and baptized with gin in a miner's pannikin? *We* know 'em all? And Blue Blood's taken 'em because they had cash. That's about it! Wal, to my fancy, there aren't much to be proud of anyhow, and it aren't only us that need be laughed at."

"It is not," said Vere, who had listened in bewilderment. "There is very much to be ashamed of on both sides."

"Shame's a big thing—a four-horse concern," said the other with some demur. "But if any child need be ashamed it is not this child. There's a woman in Rome, Anastasia W. Crash; her father's a coloured person. After the war he turned note-shaver and made a pile; Anastasia aren't coloured to signify; she looks like a Creole, and she's handsome. It got wind in Rome that she was going there, and had six million dollars a year safe; and she has that; it's no lie. Well, in a week she could pick and choose amongst the Roman princes as if they were bilberries in a hedge, and she's taken one that's got a name a thousand years old; a name that every school-girl reads out in her history-books when she reads about the popes! There! And Anastasia W. Crash is a coloured person with us; with us we would not go in the same car with her, nor eat at the same table with her. What do you think of that?"

"I think your country is very liberal; and that your 'coloured person' has revenged all the crimes of the Borgias."

The pretty American looked at her suspiciously.

"I guess I don't understand you," she said a little sulkily. "I guess you're very deep, aren't you?"

"Pardon me," said Vere, weary of the conversa-

tion; "if you will excuse me I will leave you now, we are going to ride——"

"Ride? Ah! That's a thing I don't cotton to anyhow," said Miss Fuschia Leach, who had found that her talent did not lie that way, and could never bring herself to comprehend how princesses and duchesses could find any pleasure in tearing over bleak fields and jumping scratching hedges. A *calorifère* at eighty degrees always, a *sacque* from Sirandin's, an easy chair, and a dozen young men in various stages of admiration around her, that was her idea of comfort. Every thing out of doors made her chilly.

She watched Vere pass away, and laughed, and yet felt sorry. She herself was the rage because she was a great beauty and a great flirt; because she had been signalled for honour by a prince whose word was law; because she was made for the age she lived in, with a vulgarity that was *chic*, and an audacity that was unrivalled, and a delightful mingling of utter ignorance and intense shrewdness, of slavish submission to fashion and daring eccentricity in expression, that made her to the jaded palate of the world a social caviare, a moral absinthe. Exquisitely pretty, perfectly dressed, as dainty to look at as porcelain, and as common to talk to as a camp follower, she, like many of her nation, had found herself, to her own surprise, an object of adoration to that great world of which she had known nothing, except from the imagina-

tive columns of "own correspondents." But Fuschia Leach was no fool, as she said often herself, and she felt, as her eyes followed Vere, that this calm cold child with her great contemptuous eyes and her tranquil voice, had something she had not; something that not all the art of Mr. Worth could send with his confections to herself.

"My word! I think I'll take Mull just to rile her!" she thought to herself; and thought, too, for she was good natured and less vain than she looked: "Perhaps she'd like me a little bit then—and then, again, perhaps she wouldn't."

"That girl's worth five hundred of me, and yet they don't see it!" she mused now, as she pursued Vere's shadow with her eyes across the lawn. She knew very well that with some combination of scarlet and orange, or sage and maize upon her, in some miracle of velvet and silk, with a cigarette in her mouth, a thousand little curls on her forehead, the last slang on her lips, and the last news on her ear, her own generation would find her adorable while it would leave Vere Herbert in the shade. And yet she would sooner have been Vere Herbert; yet she would sooner have had that subtle, nameless, unattainable "something" which no combination of scarlet and orange, of sage and of maize, was able to give, no imitation or effort for half a lifetime would teach.

"We don't raise that sort somehow our way," she reflected wistfully.

She let the riding party go out with a sigh of envy —the slender figure of Vere foremost on a mare that few cared to mount—and went herself to drive in a little basket-carriage with the Princess Nelaguine, accompanied by an escort of her own more intimate adorers, to call at two or three of the *maisonettes* scattered along the line of the shore between Félicité and Villers.

"Strikes me I'll have to take that duke after all," she thought to herself; he would come to her sign she knew, as a hawk to the lure.

That day Prince Zouroff rode by Vere's side, and paid her many compliments on her riding and other things; but she scarcely heard them. She knew she could ride anything, as she told him; and she thought everyone could who loved horses; and then she barely heard the rest of his pretty speeches. She was thinking, with a bewildered disgust, of the woman whom Francis Herbert, Duke of Mull and Cantire, was willing to make her cousin.

She had not comprehended one tithe of Pick-me-up's jargon, but she had understood the menace to the grand, old, sombre border forests about Castle Herbert, which she loved with a love only second to that she felt for the moors and woods of Bulmer.

"I would sooner see Francis dead than see him

touch those trees!" she thought, with what her mother called her terrible earnestness. And she was so absorbed in thinking of the shame of such a wife for a Herbert of Mull, that she never noticed the glances Zouroff gave her, or dreamed that the ladies who rode with her were saying to each other, "Is it possible? Can he be serious?"

Vere had been accustomed to rise at six and go to bed at ten, to spend her time in serious studies or open-air exercise. She was bewildered by a day which began at one or two o'clock in the afternoon, and ended at cockcrow or later. She was harassed by the sense of being perpetually exhibited and unceasingly criticised. Speaking little herself, she listened, and observed, and began to understand all that Corrèze had vaguely warned her against; to see the rancour underlying the honeyed words; the enmity concealed by the cordial smile; the hate expressed in praise; the effort masked in ease; the endless strife and calumny, and cruelty, and small conspiracies which make up the daily life of men and women in society. Most of it was still a mystery to her; but much she saw, and grew heart-sick at it. Light and vain temperaments find their congenial atmosphere in the world of fashion, but hers was neither light nor vain, and the falseness of it all oppressed her.

"You are a little Puritan, my dear!" said Lady Stoat, smiling at her.

"Pray be anything else rather than that!" said Lady Dolly pettishly. "Everybody hates it. It makes you look priggish and conceited, and nobody believes in it even. That ever a child of mine should have such ideas!"

"Yes. It *is* very funny!" said her dear Adine quietly. "You neglected her education, pussy. She is certainly a little Puritan. But we should not laugh at her. In these days it is really very interesting to see a girl who can blush, and who does not understand the French of the *Petits Journaux*, though she knows the French of Marmontel and of Massillon."

"Who cares for Marmontel and Massillon?" said Lady Dolly in disgust.

She was flattered by the success of Vere as a beauty, and irritated by her failure as a companionable creature. She was triumphant to see the impression made by the girl's blending of sculptural calm and childlike loveliness. She was infuriated a hundred times a day by Vere's obduracy, coldness, and unwise directness of speech.

"It is almost imbecility," thought Lady Dolly, obliged to apologise continually for some misplaced sincerity or obtuse negligence with which her daughter had offended people.

"You should never *froisser* other people; never, never!" said Lady Dolly. "If Nero, and what-was-her-name that began with an M, were to come in your

world, you should be civil to them; you should be charming to them, so long as they were people that were received. Nobody is to judge for themselves, never. If society is with you, then you are all right. Besides, it looks so much prettier to be nice and charitable and all that; and besides, what do you know, you chit?"

Vere was always silent under these instructions; they were but little understood by her. When she did *froisser* people it was generally because their consciences gave a sting to her simple frank words of which the young speaker herself was quite unconscious.

"Am I a Puritan?" Vere thought, with anxious self-examination. In history she detested the Puritans; all her sympathies were with the other side. Yet she began now to think that, if the Stuart court ever resembled Félicité, the Puritans had not perhaps been so very far wrong.

Félicité was nothing more or worse than a very fashionable house of the period; but it was the world in little, and it hurt her, bewildered her, and in many ways disgusted her.

If she had been stupid, as her mother thought her, she would have been amused or indifferent; but she was not stupid, and she was oppressed and saddened. At Bulmer she had been reared to think truth the first law of life, modesty as natural to a gentlewoman as

cleanliness, delicacy and reserve the attributes of all good breeding, and sincerity indispensable to self-respect. At Félicité, who seemed to care for any one of these things?

Lady Stoat gave them lip-service indeed, but, with that exception, no one took the trouble even to render them that questionable homage which hypocrisy pays to virtue.

In a world that was the really great world, so far as fashion went and rank (for the house-party at Félicité was composed of people of the purest blood and highest station, people very exclusive, very prominent and very illustrious), Vere found things that seemed passing strange to her. When she heard of professional beauties, whose portraits were sold for a shilling, and whose names were as cheap as red herrings, yet who were received at court and envied by princesses; when she saw that men were the wooed, not the wooers, and that the art of flirtation was reduced to a tournament of effrontery; when she saw a great duchess go out with the guns, carrying her own chokebore by Purdy and showing her slender limbs in gaiters; when she saw married women not much older than herself spending hour after hour in the fever of *chemin de fer;* when she learned that they were very greedy for their winnings to be paid, but never dreamt of being asked to pay their losses; when she saw these women with babies in their nurseries, making unblush-

ing love to other women's husbands, and saw everyone looking on the pastime as a matter of course quite goodnaturedly; when she saw one of these ladies take a flea from her person and cry, *Qui m'aime l'avale*, and a prince of semi-royal blood swallow the flea in a glass of water, when to these things, and a hundred others like them, the young student from the Northumbrian moors was the silent and amazed listener and spectator, she felt indeed lost in a strange and terrible world; and something that was very like disgust shone from her clear eyes and closed her proud mouth.

Society as it was filled her with a very weariness of disgust, a cold and dreary disenchantment, like the track of grey mire that in the mountains is left by the descent of the glacier. But her mother was more terrible to her than all. At the thought of her mother Vere, even in solitude, felt her cheek burn with an intolerable shame. When she came to know something of the meaning of those friendships that society condones—of those jests which society whispers between a cup of tea and a cigarette—of those hints which are enjoyed like a bonbon, yet contain all the enormities that appalled Juvenal,—then the heart of Vere grew sick, and she began slowly to realise what manner of woman this was that had given her birth.

"My dear, your pretty daughter seems to sit in judgment on us all! I am sadly afraid she finds us

wanting," said the great lady who had signalised herself with utilising a flea.

"Oh, she has a dreadful look, I know," said Lady Dolly distractedly. "But you see she has been always with that odious old woman. She has seen nothing. She is a baby."

The other smiled:

"When she has been married a year, all that will change. She will leave it behind her with her maiden sashes and shoes. But I am not sure that she will marry quickly, lovely as she is. She frightens people, and, if you don't mind my saying so, she is rude. The other night when we had that little bit of fun about the flea she rose and walked away, turned her back positively, as if she were a scandalised dowager. Now, you know, that doesn't do nowadays. The age of saints is gone by——"

"If there ever were one," said Lady Dolly, who occasionally forgot that she was very high church in her doctrines.

"Vera would make a beautiful St. Ursula," said Lady Stoat, joining them. "There is war as well as patience in her countenance; she will resist actively as well as endure passively."

"What a dreadful thing to say!" sighed Lady Dolly.

The heroine of the flea erotic laughed at her.

"Marry her, my dear. That is what she wants."

She herself was only one and twenty, and had been married four years, had some little flaxen bundles in nurses' arms that she seldom saw, was deeply in debt, had as many adorers as she had pearls and diamonds, and was a very popular and admired personage.

"Why can't you get on with people?" Lady Dolly said to Vere irritably, that day.

"I do not think they like me," said Vere very humbly; and her mother answered very sharply and sensibly:

"Everybody is liked as much as they wish to be. If you show people you like them, they like you. It is perfectly simple. You get what you give my dear in this world. But the sad truth is, Vere, that you are unamiable."

Was she in truth unamiable?

She felt the tears gather in her eyes. She put her hand on the hound Loris's collar, and went away with him into the gardens; the exquisite gardens with the gleam of the sea between the festoons of their roses that no one hardly ever noticed except herself. In a deserted spot where a marble Antinous reigned over a world of bigonias, she sat down on a rustic chair and put her arm round the dog's neck, and cried like the child that she was.

She thought of the sweetbriar bush on the edge of the white cliff—oh! if only Corrèze had been here to tell her what to do!

The dog kissed her in his own way, and was sorrowful for her sorrow; the sea wind stirred the flowers; the waves were near enough at hand for their murmuring to reach her; the quietness and sweetness of the place soothed her.

She would surely see Corrèze again, she thought; perhaps in Paris, this very winter, if her mother took her there. He would tell her if she were right or wrong in having no sympathy with all these people; and the tears still fell down her cheeks as she sat there and fancied she heard that wondrous voice rise once more above the sound of the sea.

"Mademoiselle Vera, are you unhappy? and in Félicité!" said a voice that was very unlike that unforgotten music—the voice of Sergius Zouroff.

Vere looked up startled, with her tears still wet, like dew.

Zouroff had been kindness itself to her, but her first disgust for him had never changed. She was alarmed and vexed to be found by him, so, alone.

"What frets you?" he said, with more gentleness than often came into his tones. "It is a regret to me as your host that you should know any regret in Félicité. If there be anything I can do, command me."

"You are very good, monsieur," said Vere hesitatingly. "It is nothing—very little, at least; my mother is vexed with me."

"Indeed! Your charming mother, then, for once, must be in the wrong. What is it?"

"Because people do not like me."

"Who is barbarian enough not to like you? I am a barbarian but—"

His cold eyes grew eloquent, but she did not see their gaze, for she was looking dreamily at the far-off sea.

"No one likes me," said Vere wearily, "and my mother thinks it is my fault. No doubt it is. I do not care for what they care for; but then they do not care for what I love—the gardens, the woods, the sea, the dogs."

She drew Loris close as she spoke, and rose to go. She did not wish to be with her host. But Zouroff paced by her side.

"Loris pleases you? Will you give him the happiness of being called yours?"

Vere for once raised a bright and grateful face to him, a flush of pleasure drying her tears.

"Mine? Loris? Oh that would be delightful!—if mamma will let me."

"Your mother will let you," said Zouroff, with an odd smile. "Loris is a fortunate beast, to have power to win your fancy."

"But I like all dogs—"

"And no men?"

"I do not think about them."

It was the simple truth.

"I wish I were a dog!" said Serge Zouroff.

Vere laughed for a moment—a child's sudden laugh at a droll idea; then her brows contracted a little.

"Dogs do not flatter me," she said curtly.

"Nor do I—*foi d'honneur!* But tell me, is it really the fact that cruel Lady Dolly made you weep? In my house too!—I am very angry. I wish to make it Félicité to you, beyond any other of my guests."

"Mamma was no doubt right, monsieur," said Vere coldly. "She said that I do not like people, and I do not."

"*Dame!* you have very excellent taste then," said Zouroff with a laugh. "I will not quarrel with your coldness, Mademoiselle Vera, if you will only make an exception for me?"

Vere was silent.

Zouroff's eyes grew impatient and fiery.

"Will you not even like me a little for Loris's sake?"

Vere stood still in the rose-path, and looked at him with serious serene eyes.

"It was kind of you to give me Loris, that I know, and I am grateful for that; but I will not tell you what is false, monsieur; it would be a very bad return."

"Is she the wiliest coquette by instinct, or only the

strangest child that ever breathed?" thought Zouroff as he said aloud, "Why do you not like me, *mon enfant?*"

Vere hesitated a moment.

"I do not think you are a good man."

"And why am I so unfortunate as to give you that opinion of me?"

"It is the way you talk; and you kicked Loris one day last week."

Serge Zouroff laughed aloud, but he swore a heavy oath under his breath.

"Your name in Russian means Faith. You are well named, Mademoiselle Vera," he said carelessly, as he continued to walk by her side. "But I shall hope to make you think better things of me yet, and I can never kick Loris again, as he is now yours, without your permission."

"You will never have that," said Vere, with a little smile, as she thought, with a pang of compunction, that she had been very rude to a host who was courteous and generous.

Zouroff moved on beside her, gloomy and silent.

"Take my arm, mademoiselle," he said suddenly, as they were approaching the château. Vere put her hand on his arm in timid compliance; she felt that she must have seemed rude and thankless. They crossed the smooth lawns that stretched underneath the terraces of Félicité.

It was near sunset, about seven o'clock; some ladies were out on the terrace, amidst them Lady Dolly and the heroine of the flea. They saw Zouroff cross the turf, with the girl in her white Gainsborough dress beside him, and the hound beside her.

Lady Dolly's heart gave a sudden leap, then stopped its beats in suspense.

"Positively—I do—think——" murmured the lady of the flea; and then fell back in her chair in a fit of uncontrollable laughter.

Vere loosened her hand from her host's arm as they ascended the terrace steps, and came straight to her mother.

"Monsieur Zouroff has given me Loris!" she cried breathlessly, for the dog was to her an exceeding joy. "You will let me have Loris, mamma?"

"Let her have Loris," said Zouroff, with a smile that Lady Dolly understood.

"Certainly, since you are so kind, Prince," she said charmingly. "But a dog! It is such a disagreeable thing; when one travels especially. Still, since you are so good to that naughty child, who gives all her heart to the brutes——"

"I am happy that she thinks me a brute too," said Zouroff, with a grim smile.

The ladies laughed.

Vere did not hear or heed. She was caressing her new treasure.

"I shall not feel alone now with Loris," she was saying to herself. The dull fierce eyes of Serge Zouroff were fastened on her, but she did not think of him, nor of why the women laughed.

Lady Dolly was vaguely perplexed.

"The girl was crying half an hour ago," she thought. "Perhaps she is deeper than one thinks. Perhaps she means to draw him on that way. Anyhow, her way appears to answer—but it hardly seems possible—when one thinks what he has had thrown at his head and never looked at! And Vere! such a rude creature, and such a simpleton!"

Yet a sullen respect began to enter into her for her daughter: the respect that women of the world only give to a shrewd talent for *finesse*. If she were capable at sixteen of "drawing on" the master of Félicité thus ably, Lady Dolly felt that her daughter might yet prove worthy of her; might still become a being with whom she could have sympathy and community of sentiment. And yet Lady Dolly felt a sort of sickness steal over her as she saw the look in his eyes which Vere did not see.

"It will be horrible! horrible!" she said to herself. "Why did Adine ever tell me to come here?"

For Lady Dolly was never in her own eyes the victim of her own follies, but always that of someone else's bad counsels.

Lady Dolly was frightened when she thought that

it was possible that this scorner of unmarried women would be won by her own child. But she was yet more terrified when the probable hopelessness of any such project flashed on her.

The gift of the dog might mean everything, and might mean nothing.

"What a constant misery she is!" she mused. "Oh, why wasn't she a boy? They go to Eton, and if they get into trouble men manage it all; and they are useful to go about with if you want stalls at a theatre, or an escort that don't compromise you. But a daughter! . . . ."

She could have cried, dressed though she was for dinner, in a combination of orange and deadleaf, that would have consoled any woman under any affliction.

"Do you think he means it," she whispered to Lady Stoat, who answered cautiously,—

"I think he might be made to mean it."

Lady Dolly sighed, and looked nervous.

Two days later Loris had a silver collar on his neck that had just come from Paris. It had the inscription on it of the Troubadour's motto for his mistress's falcon:

"*Quiconque me trouvera, qu'il me mène à ma maîtresse: pour récompense il la verra.*"

Vere looked doubtfully at the collar; she preferred Loris without it.

"He does mean it," said Lady Dolly to herself, and her pulses fluttered strangely.

"I'd have given you a dog if I'd known you wished for one," said John Jura moodily that evening to Vere. She smiled and thanked him.

"I had so many dogs about me at Bulmer I feel lost without one, and Loris is very beautiful——"

Jura looked at her with close scrutiny.

"How do you like the giver of Loris?"

Vere met his gaze unmoved.

"I do not like him at all," she said in a low tone. "But perhaps it is not sincere to say so. He is very kind, and we are in his house."

"My dear! That we are in his house or that he is in ours is the very reason to abuse a man like a thief! You don't seem to understand modern ethics," said the heroine of the flea epic, as she passed near with a little laugh, on her way to play *chemin de fer* in the next drawing-room.

"Don't listen to them," said Jura hastily. "They will do you no good; they are all a bad lot here."

"But they are all gentle-people?" said Vere in some astonishment. "They are all gentlemen and gentlewomen born."

"Oh, *born!*" said Jura, with immeasurable contempt. "Oh yes! they're all in the swim for that matter; but they are about as bad a set as there is in Europe; not but what it is much the same everywhere.

They say the Second Empire did it. I don't know if it's that, but I do know that 'gentlewomen,' as you call it, are things one never sees nowadays anywhere in Paris or London. You have got the old grace, but how long will you keep it? They will corrupt you; and if they can't, they'll ruin you."

"Is it so easy to be corrupted or to be ruined?"

"Easy as blacking your glove," said Jura moodily.

Vere gave a little sigh. Life seemed to her very difficult.

"I do not think they will change me," she said, after a few moments' thought.

"I don't think they will; but they will make you pay for it. If they say nothing worse of you than that you are 'odd,' you will be lucky. How did you become what you were? You, Dolly's daughter!"

Vere coloured at the unconscious contempt with which he spoke the two last words.

"I try to be what my father would have wished," she said under her breath.

Jura was touched. His blue eyes grew dim and reverential.

"I wish to heaven your father may watch over you!" he said in a husky voice. "In *our* world, my dear, you will want some good angel—bitterly. Perhaps you will be your own, though. I hope so."

His hand sought hers and caught it closely for an instant, and he grew very pale. Vere looked up in a little surprise.

"You are very kind to think of me," she said with a certain emotion.

"Who would not think of you?" muttered Jura, with a darkness on his frank, fair, bold face. "Don't be so astonished that I do," he said, with a little laugh, whose irony she did not understand. "You know I am such a friend of your mother's."

"Yes," said Vere gravely.

She was perplexed. He took up her fan and unfurled it.

"Who gave you this thing? It is an old one of Dolly's, I bought it in the Passage Choiseul myself; it's not half good enough for you now. I bought one at Christie's last winter, that belonged to Maria Theresa; it has her monogram in opals; it was painted by Fragonard, or one of those beggars; I will send for it for you if you will please me by taking it."

"You are very kind," said Vere.

"That is what you say of Serge Zouroff!"

She laughed a little.

"I like you better than Monsieur Zouroff."

Jura's face flushed to the roots of his fair crisp curls.

"And as well as your favoured singer?"

"Ah no!"—Vere spoke quickly, and with a frown

on her pretty brows. She was annoyed at the mention of Corrèze.

Lady Dolly approached at that moment—an apparition of white lace and *nénuphars*, with some wonderful old cameos as ornaments.

"Take me to the tea-room, Jack," she said sharply. "Clementine de Vrille is winning everything again; it is sickening; I believe she marks the aces!"

Jura gave her his arm.

Vere, left alone, sat lost in thought. It was a strange world. No one seemed happy in it, or sincere. Lord Jura, whom her mother treated like a brother, seemed to despise her more than anyone; and her mother seemed to say that another friend, who was a French Duchess, descended from a Valois, was guilty of cheating at cards!

Jura took the white lace and *nénuphars* into the tea-room. He was silent and preoccupied. Lady Dolly wanted pretty attentions, but their day was over with him.

"Is it true," he said abruptly to her, "that Zouroff wants your daughter?"

Lady Dolly smiled vaguely.

"Oh! I don't know; they say many things, you know. No; I shouldn't suppose he means anything, should you?"

"I can't say," he answered curtly. "You wish it."

"Of course I wish anything for her happiness."

He laughed aloud.

"What damned hypocrites all you women are!"

"My dear Jura, *pray:* you are not in a guard-room or a club-room!" said Lady Dolly very seriously shocked indeed.

Lord Jura got her off his hands at length, and bestowed her on a young dandy, who had become famous by winning the Grand Prix in that summer. Then he walked away by himself into the smoking-room, which at that hour was quite deserted. He threw himself down on one of the couches, and thought—moodily, impatiently, bitterly.

"What cursed fools we are!" he mused. What a fool he had been ever to fancy that he loved the bloom of Piver's powders, the slim shape of a white satin corset, the falsehoods of a dozen seasons, the debts of a little gamester, the smiles of a calculating coquette, and the five hundred things of like value, that made up the human entity, known as Lady Dolly.

He could see her, as he had seen her first; a little gossamer figure under the old elms, down by the waterside at Hurlingham, when Hurlingham had been in its earliest natal days of glory. There had been a dinner-party for a Sunday evening; he remembered carrying her tea, and picking her out the big strawberries under the cedar. They had met a thousand times before that, but had never spoken. He thought her the prettiest

creature he had ever seen. She had told him to call on her at Chesham place; she was always at home at four. He remembered their coming upon a dead pigeon amongst the gardenias, and how she had laughed, and told him to write its elegy, and he had said that he would if he could only spell, but he had never been able to spell in his life. All the nonsense, all the trifles, came back to his memory in a hateful clearness. That was five years ago, and she was as pretty as ever: Piver is the true *fontaine de jouvence.* She was not changed, but he—he wished that he had been dead like the blue-rock amongst the gardenias.

He thought of a serious sweet face, a noble mouth, a low broad brow, with the fair hair lying thickly above it.

"Good God!" he thought, "who would ever have dreamt that *she* could have had such a daughter!"

And his heart was sick, and his meditation was bitter. He was of a loyal, faithful, dog-like temper; yet in that moment he turned in revolt against the captivity that had once seemed sweet, and he hated the mother of Vere.

A little later Lord Jura told his host that he was very sorry, regretted infinitely, and all that, but he was obliged to go up to Scotland. His father had a great house-party there, and would have no denial.

Alone, Lady Dolly said to him, "What does this mean? what is this for? You know you *never* go to

Camelot; you know that you go to every other house in the kingdom sooner. What did you say it for? And how dare you say it without seeing if it suit me? It doesn't suit me."

"I put it on Camelot because it sounds more decent; and I mean to go," said Lord Jura, plunging his hands in his pockets. "The truth is, Dolly, I don't care to be in this blackguard's house. He is a blackguard, and you're wanting to get him."

Lady Dolly turned pale and sick.

"What language! How is he any more a—what you say—than you are, or anybody else? And pray for what do I want him?"

The broad frank brows of Lord Jura grew stormy as he frowned.

"The man is a blackguard. There are things one can't say to women. Everybody knows it. You don't care; you want to get him for the child."

"Vera? Good gracious! What is Vera to you if it be what you fancy?"

"Nothing!" said Lord Jura, and his lips were pressed close together, and he did not look at his companion.

"Then why—I should think she isn't, indeed!—but why, in the name of goodness——"

"Look here, Dolly," said the young man sternly. "Look here. I'm death on sport, and I've killed most things, from stripes in the jungle to the red rover in the furrows; I don't affect to be a feeling fellow, or to

go in for that sort of sentiment, but there was one thing I never could stand seeing, and that was a little innocent wild rabbit caught in a gin-trap. My keepers daren't set one for their lives. I can't catch you by the throat, or trottle Zouroff as I should a keeper if I caught him at it, so I go to Camelot. That's all. Don't make a fuss. You're going to do a wicked thing, if you can do it, and I won't look on; that's all."

Lady Dolly was very frightened.

"What do you know about Zouroff?" she murmured hurriedly.

"Only what all Paris knows; that is quite enough."

Lady Dolly was relieved, and instantly allowed herself to grow angry.

"All Paris! Such stuff! As if men were not all alike. Really one would fancy you were in love with Vera yourself!"

"Stop that!" said Lord Jura sternly; and she was subdued, and said no more. "I shall go to-morrow," he added carelessly; "and you may as well give me a book or a note or something for the women at Camelot; it will stay their tongues here."

"I have a tapestry pattern to send to your sisters," said Lady Dolly, submissive but infuriated. "What do you know about Sergius Zouroff, Jack? I wish you would tell me."

"I think you know it all very well," said Lord Jura. "I think you women know all about all the vices under

the sun, only you don't mind. There are always bookcases locked in every library; I don't know why we lock 'em; women know everything. But if the man's rich it don't matter. If the fellows we used to read about in Suetonius were alive now, you'd marry your girls to them and never ask any questions—except about settlements. It's no use my saying anything; you don't care. But I tell you all the same that if you give your daughter when she's scarce sixteen to that brute, you might just as well strip her naked and set her up to auction like the girl in *La Coupe ou La Femme!*"

"You grow very coarse," said Lady Dolly, coldly.

Lord Jura left the room, and, in the morning, left the house.

As the "Ephemeris" went slowly, in a languid wind, across the channel in the grey twilight, he sat on deck and smoked, and grew heavy-hearted. He was not a book-learned man, and seldom read anything beyond the sporting papers, or a French romance; but some old verse, about the Fates making out of our pleasant vices whips to scourge us crossed his mind, as the woods and towers of Félicité receded from his sight.

He was young; he was his own master; he was Earl of Jura, and would be Marquis of Shetland. He could have looked into those grand grey eyes of Vere Herbert's with a frank and honest love; he could have been happy, only—only—only!

The Maria Theresa fan came from Camelot, but Jura never returned.

That night there was a performance in the little theatre; there was usually one every other night. The actors enjoyed themselves much more than the guests at Félicité. They all lived in a little *maisonette* in the park, idled through their days as they liked, and played when they were told. When his house-party bored him beyond endurance, Sergius Zouroff wandered away to that *maisonette* in his park at midnight.

That evening the piece on the programme was one that was very light. Zouroff stooped his head to Lady Dolly as they were about to move to the theatre.

"Send your daughter to her bed; that piece is not fit for her ears."

Lady Dolly stared and bit her lip. But she obeyed. She went back and touched Vere's cheek with her fan and caressed her.

"My sweet one, you look pale. Go to your room; you do not care much for acting, and your health is so precious——"

"He must mean it," she thought, as they went into the pretty theatre, and the lights went round with her. The jests fell on deaf ears so far as she was concerned; the dazzling little scenes danced before her sight; she could only see the heavy form of Zouroff cast down in his velvet chair, with his eyes half shut, and his thick eyebrows drawn together in a frown that did not relax.

"He must mean it," she thought. "But how odd! Good heavens! that he should care—that he should think—of what is fit or unfit!"

And it made her laugh convulsively, in a sort of spasm of mirth, for which the gestures and jokes of the scene gave excuse.

Yet she had never felt so nearly wretched, never so nearly understood, what shame and repentance meant.

In the *entr'acte* Zouroff changed his place, and took a vacant chair by Lady Dolly, and took up her fan and played with it.

"Miladi, we have always been friends, good friends, have we not?" he said with the smile that she hated. "You know me well, and can judge me without flattery. What will you say if I tell you that I seek the honour of your daughter's hand?"

He folded and unfolded the fan as he spoke. The orchestra played at that moment loudly. Lady Dolly was silent. There was a contraction at the corners of her pretty rosebud-like mouth.

"Any mother could have but one answer to you," she replied with an effort. "You are too good and I am too happy!"

"I may speak to her, then, to-morrow, with your consent?" he added.

"Let me speak to her first," she said hurriedly; "she is so young."

"As you will, madame! Place myself and all I have at her feet."

"What can you have seen in her! Good heavens!" she cried in an impulse of amaze.

"She has avoided me!" said Serge Zouroff, and spoke the truth: then added in his best manner, "And is she not your child?"

The violins chirped softly as waking birds at dawn; the satin curtain drew up; the little glittering scene shone again in the wax-light. Lady Dolly gasped a little for breath.

"It is very warm here," she murmured. "Don't you think if a window were opened. And then you have astonished me so——"

She shook double her usual drops of chloral out into her glass that night, but they did not give her sleep.

"I shall never persuade her!" she thought; gazing with dry, hot eyes at the light swinging before her mirror. The eyes of Vere seemed to look at her in their innocent, scornful serenity, and the eyes of Vere's father too.

"Do the dead ever come back?" she thought; "some people say they do."

And Lady Dolly, between her soft sheets, shivered, and felt frightened and old.

She was on the edge of a crime, and she had a conscience, though it was a very small and feeble one, and seldom spoke.

CHAPTER VIII.

VERE had been up with the sunrise, and out with Loris. She had had the pretty green park and the dewy gardens to herself; she had filled her hands with more flowers than she could carry; her hair and her clothes were fragrant with the smell of mown grass and pressed thyme; she stole back on tiptoe through the long corridors, through the still house, for it was only nine o'clock, and she knew that all the guests of Félicité were still sleeping.

To her surprise her mother's door opened, and her mother's voice called her.

Vere went in, fresh and bright as was the summer morning itself, with the dew upon her hair and the smell of the blossoms entering with her, into the warm oppressive air that was laden with the smells of anodynes and perfumes.

Her mother had already been made pretty for the day, and a lovely turquoise-blue dressing-robe enveloped her. She opened her arms, and folded the child in them, and touched her forehead with a kiss.

"My darling, my sweet child," she murmured, "I have some wonderful news for you; news that makes me very happy, Vera ——"

"Yes?" said Vere, standing with wide-opened expectant eyes, the flowers falling about her, the dew sparkling on her hair.

"Yes, too happy, my Vera, since it secures your happiness," murmured her mother. "But perhaps you can guess, dear, though you are so very young, and you do not even know what love means. Vera, my sweetest, my old friend Prince Zouroff has sought you from me in marriage!"

Mother!" Vere stepped backward, then stood still again; a speechless amaze, an utter incredulity, an unutterable disgust, all speaking in her face.

"Are you startled, darling," said Lady Dolly, in her blandest voice. "Of course you are, you are such a child. But if you think a moment, Vera, you will see the extreme compliment it is to you; the greatness it offers you; the security that the devotion of a ——"

"Mother!" she cried again; and this time the word was a cry of horror—a protest of indignation and outrage.

"Don't call me 'mother' like that. You know I hate it!" said Lady Dolly, lapsing into the tone most natural to her. "'Mother! mother!' as if I were beating you with a poker, like the people in the police

reports. You are so silly, my dear; I cannot think what he can have seen in you, but seen something he has, enough to make him wish to marry you. You are a baby, but I suppose you can understand that. It is a very great and good marriage, Vera; no one could desire anything better. You are exceedingly young, indeed, according to English notions, but they never were my notions, and I think a girl cannot anyhow be safer than properly married to a person desirable in every way ——"

Lady Dolly paused a moment to take breath; she felt a little excited, a little exhausted, and there was that in the colourless face of her daughter which frightened her, as she had been frightened in her bed, wondering if the dead came back on earth.

She made a little forward caressing movement, and would have kissed her again, but Vere moved away, her eyes were darkened with anger, and her lips were tremulous.

"Prince Zouroff is a coward," said the girl, very low, but very bitterly. "He knows that I loathe him, and that I think him a bad man. How dare he—how dare he—insult me so!"

"Insult you!" echoed Lady Dolly, with almost a scream. "Are you mad? Insult you! A man that all Europe has been wild to marry these fifteen years past! Insult you! A man who offers you an alliance that will send you out of a room before everybody

except actually princesses of the blood? Insult you! When was ever an offer of marriage thought an insult in society?"

"I think it can be the greatest one," said Vere, still under her breath.

"You think! Who are you to think? Pray have no thoughts at all unless they are wiser than that. You are startled, my dear; that is perhaps natural. You did not see he was in love with you, though everyone else did."

"Oh, do not say such horrible words!"

The blood rushed to the child's face, and she covered her eyes with her hands. She was hurt, deeply, passionately—hurt and humiliated, in a way that her mother could no more have understood than she could have understood the paths travelled by the invisible stars.

"Really you are too ridiculous," she said impatiently. "Even you, I should think, must know what love means. I believe even at Bulmer you read 'Waverley.' You have charmed Sergius Zouroff, and it is a very great victory, and if all this surprise and disgust at it is not a mere piece of acting, you must be absolutely brainless, absolutely idiotic! You cannot seriously mean that a man insults you when he offers you a position that has been coveted by half Europe."

"When he knows that I cannot endure him," said Vere with flashing eyes; "it is an insult; tell him so

from me. Oh mother! mother! that you could even call me to hear such a thing. . . . I do not want to marry anyone; I do not wish ever to marry. Let me go back to Bulmer. I am not made for the world, nor it for me."

"You are not, indeed!" said her mother in exasperation and disgust, feeling her own rage and anxiety like two strangling hands at her throat. "Nevertheless, into the world you will go as Princess Zouroff. The alliance suits me, and I am not easily dissuaded from what I wish. Your heroics count for nothing. All girls of sixteen are gushing and silly. I was too. It is an immense thing that you have such a stroke of good fortune. I quite despaired of you. You are very lovely, but you are old-fashioned, pedantic, unpleasant. You have no *chic*. You have no malleability. You are handsome, and that is all. It is a wonderful thing that you should have made such a *coup* as this before you are even out. You are quite penniless; quite, did you understand that? You have no claim on Mr. Vanderdecken, and I am not at all sure that he will not make a great piece of work when I leave him to pay for your *trousseau*, as I must do, for I can't pay for it, and none of the Herberts will; they are all poor and proud as church mice and though Zouroff will of course send you a *corbeille*, all the rest must come from me, and must be perfect and abundant, and from all the best houses."

Vere struck her foot on the floor. It was the first gesture of passion that she had ever given way to since her birth.

"That is enough, mother!" she said aloud and very firmly. "Put it in what words you like to Prince Zouroff, but tell him from me that I will not marry him. I will not. That is enough."

Then, before her mother could speak again, she gathered up the dew-wet flowers in her hand and left the room.

Lady Dolly shrugged her shoulders, and swore a little naughty oath, as if she had lost fifty pounds at bezique.

She was pale and excited, offended and very angry, but she was not afraid. Girls were always like that, she thought. Only, for the immediate moment it was difficult.

She sat and meditated awhile, then made up her mind. She had nerved herself in the night that was just past to put her child in the brazen hands of Moloch because it suited her, because it served her, because she had let her little weak conscience sink utterly, and down in the deeps; and having once made up her mind she resolved to have her will. Like all weak people, she could be cruel, and she was cruel now.

When the midday chimes rang with music from the clock-tower, Lady Dolly went out of her own room

downstairs. It was the habit at Félicité for the guests to meet at one o'clock breakfast—being in the country they thought it well to rise early. Serge Zouroff, as he met her, smiled.

"*Eh bien?*" he asked.

The smile made Lady Dolly feel sick and cold, but she looked softly into his eyes.

"Dear friend, do not be in haste. My child is *such* a child—she is flattered—deeply moved—but startled. She has no thought of any such ideas, you know; she can scarcely understand. Leave her to me for a day or two. Do not hurry her. This morning, if you will lend me a pony carriage, I will drive over with her to Le Caprice and stay a night or so. I shall talk to her, and then——"

Zouroff laughed grimly.

"*Ma belle*, your daughter detests me; but I do not mind that. You may say it out; it will make no difference—to us."

"You are wrong there," said Lady Dolly so blandly and serenely that even he was deceived, and believed her for once to be speaking the truth. "She neither likes you nor dislikes you, because her mind is in its chrysalis state—isn't it a chrysalis, the thing that is rolled up in a shell asleep?—and of love and marriage my Vera is as unconscious as those china children yonder holding up the breakfast bouquets. She is cold, you know; that you see for yourself——"

"*Un beau défaut!*"

"*Un beau défaut* in a girl," assented Lady Dolly. "Yes. I would not have her otherwise, my poor fatherless darling, nor would you, I know. But it makes it difficult to bring her to say 'yes,' you see; not because she has any feeling *against* you, but simply because she has no feeling at all as yet. Unless girls are precocious it is always so—hush—don't let them overhear us. We don't want it talked about at present, do we?"

"As you like," said Zouroff moodily.

He was offended, and yet he was pleased; offended because he was used to instantaneous victory, pleased because this grey-eyed maiden proved of the stuff that he had fancied her. For a moment he thought he would take the task of persuasion out of her mother's hands and into his own, but he was an indolent man, and effort was disagreeable to him, and he was worried at that moment by the pretensions of one of the actresses at the *maisonette* a mile off across the park.

"My Vera is not very well this morning. She has got a little chill," volunteered Lady Dolly to Madame Nelaguine, and the table generally.

"I saw Miss Herbert in the gardens as I went to bed at sunrise," said Fuschia Leach in her high far-reaching voice. "I surmise morning dew is bad for the health."

People laughed. It was felt there was "something"

about Vere and her absence, and the women were inclined to think that, despite Loris and the silver collar, their host had not come to the point, and Lady Dolly was about to retreat.

"After all, it would be preposterous," they argued. "A child, not even out, and one of those Mull Herberts without a penny."

"Won't you come down?" said Lady Dolly sharply to Vere a little later.

"I will come down if I may say the truth to Prince Zouroff."

"Until you accept him you will say nothing to him. It is impossible to keep you here *boudant* like this. It becomes ridiculous. What will all those women say! ...I will drive you over to Laure's. We will stay there a few days, and you will hear reason."

"I will not marry Prince Zouroff," said Vere.

After her first disgust and anger that subject scarcely troubled her. They could not marry her against her will. She had only to be firm, she thought; and her nature was firm almost to stubbornness.

"We will see," said her mother, drily. "Get ready to go with me in an hour."

Vere, left to herself, undid the collar of Loris, made it in a packet, and wrote a little note, which said:—

"I thank you very much, Monsieur, for the honour that I hear from my mother you do me, in your wish

that I should marry you. Yet I wonder that you do wish it, because you know well that I have not that feeling for you which could make me care for or respect you. Please to take back this beautiful collar, which is too heavy for Loris. Loris I will always keep, and I am very fond of him. I should be glad if you would tell my mother that you have had this letter and I beg you to believe me, Monsieur, yours gratefully,

"VERE HERBERT."

She read the note several times, and thought that it would do. She did not like to write more coldly, lest she should seem heartless, and though her first impulse had been to look on the offer as an insult, perhaps he did not mean it so, she reflected; perhaps he did not understand how she disliked him. She directed her packet, and sealed it, and called her maid.

"Will you take that to Monsieur Zouroff at once," she said. "Give it to him into his own hands."

The maid took the packet to her superior, Adrienne; Adrienne the wise took it to her mistress; Lady Dolly glanced at it and put it carelessly aside.

"Ah! the dog's collar to go to Paris to be enlarged? very well; leave it there; it is of no consequence just now."

Adrienne the wise understood very well.

"If Mademoiselle ask you," she instructed her un-

derling, "you will say that Monsieur le Prince had the packet quite safe."

But Vere did not even ask, because she had not lived long enough in the world to doubt the good faith even of a waiting-maid. At Bulmer the servants were old-fashioned, like the place, and the Waverley novels. They told the truth, as they wore boots that wanted blacking.

If the little note had found its way to Serge Zouroff it might have touched his heart; it would have touched his pride, and Vere would have been left free. As it was, the packet reposed amidst Lady Dolly's pocket-handkerchiefs and perfumes till it was burnt with a pastille in the body of a Japanese dragon.

Vere, quite tranquil, went to Le Caprice in the sunny afternoon with her mother, never doubting that Prince Zouroff had had it.

She did not see him, and thought that it was because he had read her message and resented it. In point of fact she did not see him because he was at the maisonette in the park, where the feminine portion of the troop had grown so quarrelsome and so exacting that they were threatening to make him a scene up at the château.

"What are your great ladies better than we?" they cried in revolt. He granted that they were no better; nevertheless, the prejudices of society were so constituted that château and maisonette could not meet,

and he bade their director bundle them all back to Paris, like a cage of dangerous animals that might at any moment escape.

"You will be here for the ball for the Prince de Galles?" said Princess Nelaguine to Lady Dolly; who nodded and laughed.

"To be sure; thanks; I only go for a few days, love."

"Are we coming back?" said Vere, aghast.

"Certainly," said her mother sharply, striking her ponies; and the child's heart sank.

"But he will have had my letter," she thought, "and then he will let me alone."

Le Caprice was a charming house, with a charming *châtelaine*, and charming people were gathered in it for the sea and the shooting; but Vere began to hate the pretty picturesque women, the sound of the laughter, the babble of society, the elegance and the luxury, and all the graceful nothings that make up the habits and pleasures of a grand house. She felt very lonely in it all, and when, for sake of her beauty, men gathered about her, she seemed stupid because she was filled with a shy terror of them; perhaps they would want to marry her too, she thought; and her fair low brow got a little frown on it that made her look sullen.

"Your daughter is lovely, *ma chère*, but she is not sweet-tempered like you," said the hostess to Lady Dolly, who sighed.

"Ah no!" she answered, "she is cross, poor pet, sometimes, and hard to please. Now, I am never out of temper, and any little thing amuses me that my friends are kind enough to do. I don't know where Vera got her character; from some dead and gone Herbert, I suppose, who must have been very disagreeable in his generation."

And that night and every night she said the same thing to Vere: "You must marry Serge Zouroff;" and Vere every night replied, "I have told him I will not. I will not."

Lady Dolly never let her know that her letter had been burned.

"Your letter?" she had said when Vere spoke of it. "No; he never told me anything of it. But whatever you might say, he wouldn't mind it, my dear. You take his fancy, and he means to marry you."

"Then he is no gentleman," said the girl.

"Oh, about that, I don't know," said Lady Dolly. "Your idea of a gentleman, I believe, is a man who makes himself up as Faust or Romeo, and screams for so many guineas a night. We won't discuss that."

Vere's face burned, but she was mute. It seemed to her that her mother had grown coarse as well as cruel. There was a hardness in her mother that she had never felt before. That her letter should have been read by Serge Zouroff, yet make no impression on him, seemed to her so dastardly that it left her no

hope to move him; no hope anywhere except in her own resistance.

Three days later, Prince Zouroff drove over to Le Caprice, and saw Lady Dolly alone.

Vere was not asked for, and was thankful. Her eyes wistfully questioned her mother's when they met, but Lady Dolly's were unrevealing and did not meet her gaze.

The house was full of movement and of mirth; there were *sauteries* every evening, and distractions of all kinds. Lady Dolly was always flirting, laughing, dancing, amusing herself; Vere was silent, grave, and cold.

"You are much younger than your daughter, Madame Dolly," said an old admirer; and Lady Dolly ruffled those pretty curls which had cost her fifty francs a lock.

"Ah! Youth is a thing of temperament more than of years. That I *do* think. My Vera is so hard to please, and I—everything amuses *me*, and everyone to *me* seems charming."

But this sunny, smiling little visage changed when, every evening before dinner, she came to her daughter's room, and urged, and argued, and abused, and railed, and entreated, and sobbed, and said her sermon again, and again, and again; all in vain.

Vere said but few words, but they were always of the same meaning.

"I will not marry Prince Zouroff," she said always. "It is of no use to ask me. I will not."

And the little frown deepened between her eyes, and the smile that Corrèze had seen upon her classic mouth now never came there. She grew harassed and anxious.

Since her letter had made no impression on him how could she escape this weariness?

One evening she heard some people in the drawing-rooms talking of Corrèze.

They said that he had been singing in the "Fidelio," and surpassing himself, and that a young and beautiful Grand Duchess had made herself conspicuous by her idolatry of him; so conspicuous that he had been requested to leave Germany, and had refused, placing the authorities in the difficult position of either receding ridiculously or being obliged to use illegal force; there would be terrible scandal in high places, but Corrèze was always *accapareur des femmes!*

Vere moved away with a beating heart and a burning cheek; through the murmur of the conversation around her she seemed to hear the exquisite notes of that one divine voice which had dropped and deepened to so simple and tender a solemnity as it had bidden her keep herself unspotted from the world.

"What would he say if he knew what they want me to do!" she thought. "If he knew that my mother even—my mother——!"

For, not even though her mother was Lady Dolly, could Vere quite abandon the fancy that motherhood was a sweet and sacred altar on which the young could seek shelter and safety from all evils and ills.

The week at Le Caprice came to an end, and the four days at Abbaye aux Bois also, and, in the last hours of their two days at the Abbaye, Lady Dolly said to her daughter:

"To-morrow is the Princes' ball at Félicité, I suppose you remember?"

Vere gave a sign of assent.

"That is the loveliest frock La Ferrière has sent you for it; if you had any heart you would kiss me for such a gown, but you have none, you never will have any."

Vere was silent.

"I must speak to you seriously and for the last time here," said her mother. "We go back to Félicité, and Sergius will want his answer. I can put him off no longer."

"He has had it."

"How?" said Lady Dolly, forgetting for the moment the letter she had burned. "Oh, your letter? Of course he regarded it as a baby's *boutade;* I am sure it was badly worded enough."

"He showed it you then?"

"Yes; he showed it me. It hurt him, of course; but it did not change him," said her mother, a little

hurriedly. "Men of his age are not so easily changed. I tell you once for all, Vere, that I shall come to you to-night for the last time for your final word, and I tell you that you must be seen at that ball to-morrow night as the *fiancée* of Zouroff. I am quite resolute, and I will have no more shillyshallying or hesitation."

Vere's face grew warm, and she threw back her head with an eager gesture.

"Hesitation! I have never hesitated for an instant. I tell you, mother, and I have told you a hundred times, I will *not* marry Prince Zouroff."

"You will wear the new gown and you shall have my pearls," pursued her mother, as though she had not heard; "and I shall take care that when you are presented to his Royal Highness he shall know that you are already betrothed to Zouroff; it will be the best way to announce it *nettement* to the world. You will not wear my pearls again, for Zouroff has already ordered yours."

Vere started to her feet.

"And I will stamp them to pieces if he give them to me; and if you tell the Prince of Wales such a thing of me I will tell him the truth and ask his help; he is always kind and good."

"The pearls are ordered," said her mother unmoved: "and you are really too silly for anything. The idea of making the poor Prince a scene!—you have such a passion for scenes, and there is nothing such

bad form. I shall come to you to-night after dinner, and let me find you more reasonable."

With that Lady Dolly went out of the room, and out of the house, and went on the sea with her adorers, laughing lightly and singing naughty little chansons not ill. But her heart was not as light as her laugh, and, bold little woman as she was when she had nerved herself to do wrong, her nerves troubled her as she thought the morrow was the last, the very last, day on which she could any longer procrastinate and dally with Serge Zouroff.

"I will go and talk to her," said Lady Stoat, who had driven over from Félicité, when she had been wearied by her dear Dolly's lamentations, until she felt that even her friendship could not bear them much longer.

"But she hates him," cried Lady Dolly, for the twentieth time.

"They always *say* that, dear," answered Lady Stoat tranquilly. "They mean it, too, poor little things. It is just as they hated their lessons, yet they did their lessons, dear, and are all the better for having done them. You seem to me to attach sadly too much importance to a child's *boutades*."

"If it were only *boutades!* But you do not know Vere."

"I cannot think, dear, that your child can be so very extraordinarily unlike the rest of the human spe-

cies," said her friend with her pleasant smile. "Well, I will go and see this young monster. She has always seemed to me a little Puritan, nothing worse, and that you should have been prepared for, leaving her all her life at Bulmer Chase."

Lady Stoat then went upstairs and knocked at the door of Vere's chamber, and entered with the soft, silent charm of movement which was one of the especial graces of that graceful gentlewoman. She kissed the girl tenderly, regardless that Vere drew herself away somewhat rudely, and then sank down in a chair.

"My child, do you know I am come to talk to you quite frankly and affectionately," she said in her gentle, slow voice. "You know what friendship has always existed between your dear mother and myself, and you will believe that your welfare is dear to me for her sake—very dear."

Vere looked at her, but did not speak.

"An uncomfortable girl," thought Lady Stoat, a little discomfited, but she resumed blandly, "Your mamma has brought me some news that it is very pleasant to hear, and gives me sincere happiness, because, by it your happiness, and through yours hers, is secured. My own dear daughter is only two years older than you are, Vere, and she is married, as you know, and ah! so happy!"

"Happy with the Duke of Birkenhead?" said Vere abruptly.

Lady Stoat was, for the moment, a little staggered.

"What a *very* unpleasant child," she thought; "and who would think she knew anything about poor Birk!"

"Very happy," she continued aloud, "and I am charmed to think, my dear, that you have the chance of being equally so. Your mamma tells me, love, that you are a little—a little—bewildered at so brilliant a proposal of marriage as Prince Zouroff's. That is a very natural feeling; of course you had never thought about any such thing."

"I had not thought about it," said Vere bluntly. "I have thought now; but I do not understand why he can want such a thing. He knows very well that I do not like him. If you will tell him for me that I do not I shall be glad; my mother will never tell him plainly enough."

"My sweet Vere!" said Lady Stoat smilingly. "Pray do not give me the mission of breaking my host's heart; I would as soon break his china! Of course your mamma will not tell him anything of the kind. She is charmed, my dear girl, charmed! What better future could she hope for, for you? The Zouroffs are one of the greatest families in Europe, and I am quite

sure your sentiments, your jewels, your everything, will be worthy of the exalted place you will fill."

Vere's face grew very cold.

"My mother has sent you?" she said, more rudely than her companion had ever been addressed in all her serene existence. "Then will you kindly go back to her, Lady Stoat, and tell her it is of no use; I will not marry Prince Zouroff."

"That is not very prettily said, my dear. If I am come to talk to you it is certainly in your own interests only. I have seen young girls like you throw all their lives away for mere want of a little reflection."

"I have reflected."

"Reflected as much as sixteen can!—oh yes. But that is not quite what I mean. I want you to reflect, looking through the glasses of my experience and affection, and your mother's. You are very young, Vere."

"Charlotte Corday was almost as young as I am, and Jeanne d'Arc."

Lady Stoat stared, then laughed.

"I don't know where they come, either of them, in our argument, but if they had been married at sixteen it would have been a very good thing for both of them! You are a little girl now, my child, though you are nearly six feet high! You are a *demoiselle à marier*. You can only wear pearls, and you are not even presented. You are no one; nothing. Society

has hundreds like you. If you do not marry, people will fancy you are old whilst you are still twenty; people will say of you 'She is getting *passée;* she was out years and years ago.' Yes, they will say it even if you are handsomer than ever, and, what will be worse, you will *begin to feel it.*"

Vere was silent, and Lady Stoat thought that she had made some impression.

"You will begin to feel it; then you will be glad to marry anybody, and there is nothing more terrible than that. You will take a younger son of a baronet, or a secretary of legation that is going to Hong Kong or Chili—anything, anybody, to get out of yourself, and not to see your own face in the ball-room mirrors. Now, if you marry early, and marry brilliantly—and this marriage is most brilliant—no such terrors will await you; you can wear diamonds, and, oh Vere! till you wear diamonds you do not know what life is!—you can go where you like, as you like, your own mistress; you are *posée;* you have made yourself a power while your contemporaries are still *débutantes* in white frocks; you will have your children, and find all serious interests in them, if you like; you will have all that is best in life, in fact, and have it before you are twenty; you will be painted by Millais and clothed by Worth; you will be a politician if you like, or a fashionable beauty if you like, or only a great lady—perhaps the simplest and best thing of all; and you will be this,

and have all this, merely because you married early and married well. My dear, such a marriage is to a girl like being sent on the battle-field to a boy in the army; it is the baptism of fire with every decoration as its rewards!"

"The Cross too?" said Vere.

Lady Stoat, who had spoken eloquently, and, in her own light, sincerely, was taken aback by the irony of the accent and the enigma of the smile. "A most strange child," she thought; "no wonder she worries poor flighty little pussie!"

"The Cross? Oh, yes," she said. "What answers to the boy's Iron Cross, I suppose, is to dance in the Quadrille d'Honneur at Court. Princesse Zouroff would always be in the Quadrille d'Honneur."

"Princesse Zouroff may be so. I shall not. And it was of the Cross you wear, and profess to worship, that I thought."

Lady Stoat felt a little embarrassed. She bowed her head, and touched the Iona cross in jewels that hung at her throat.

"Darling, those are serious and solemn words. A great marriage may be made subservient, like any other action of our lives, to God's service."

"But surely one ought to love to marry?"

"My dear child, that is an idea; love is an idea; it doesn't last, you know; it is fancy; what is needful is solid esteem——"

Lady Stoat paused; even to her it was difficult to speak of solid esteem for Sergius Zouroff. She took up another and safer line of argument.

"You must learn to understand, my sweet Vere, that life is prose, not poetry; Heaven forbid that I should be one to urge you to any sort of worldliness; but still, truth is everything; truth compels me to point out to you that, in the age we live in, a great position means vast power and ability of doing good, and that is not a thing to be slighted by any wise woman who would make her life beautiful and useful. Prince Zouroff adores you; he can give you one of the first positions in Europe; your mother, who loves you tenderly, though she may seem negligent, desires such a marriage for you beyond all others. Opposition on your part is foolishness, my child, foolishness, blindness, and rebellion."

The face of Vere as she listened lost its childish softness, and grew very cold.

"I understand; my mother does not want me, Mr. Vanderdecken does not want me; this Russian prince is the first who asks for me,—so I am to be sold because he is rich. I will not be sold!"

"What exaggerated language, my love. Pray do not exaggerate; no one uses inflated language now; even on the stage they don't, it has gone out. Who speaks of your being sold, as if you were a slave? *Quelle idée!* A brilliant, a magnificent, alliance is open

to you, that is all; every unmarried woman in society will envy you. I assure you if Prince Zouroff had solicited the hand of my own daughter, I would have given it to him with content and joy."

"I have no doubt you would," said the girl curtly.

Lady Stoat's sweet temper rose a little under the words.

"You are very beautiful, my dear, but your manners leave very much to be desired," she said almost sharply. "If you were not poor little Dolly's child I should not trouble myself to reason with you, but let you destroy yourself like an obstinate baby as you are. What can be your objection to Prince Sergius? Now be reasonable for once; tell me.

"I am sure he is a bad man."

"My love! What should you know about bad men, or good ones either?"

"I am sure he is bad—and cruel."

"What nonsense! I am sure he has been charming to you, and you are very ungrateful. What can have given you such an impression of your devoted adorer?"

Vere shuddered a little with disgust.

"*I hate him!*" she said under her breath.

Lady Stoat for a moment was startled.

"Where could she get her melodrama from?" she wondered. "Dolly was never melodramatic; nor any of the Herbert people; it really makes one fancy poor pussy must have had a *petite faute* with a tragic actor!"

Aloud she answered gently:

"You have a sad habit, my Vere, of using very strong words; it is not nice; and you do not mean one-tenth that you say in your haste. No Christian ever hates, and in a girl such a feeling would be horrible—if you meant it—but you do not mean it."

Vere shut her proud lips closer, but there was a meaning upon them that made her companion hesitate, and feel uncomfortable, and at a loss for words.

"How wonderful that pussy should ever have had a daughter like this!" she thought, and then smiled in a sweet, mild way.

"Poor Serge! That he should have been the desired of all Europe, only to be rejected by a child of sixteen! Really it is like—who was it?—winning a hundred battles and then dying of a cherry-stone! There is nothing he couldn't give you, nothing he wouldn't give you, you thankless little creature!"

Vere, standing very slender and tall, with her face averted and her fair head in the glow of the sunset light, made no reply; but her attitude and her silence were all eloquent.

Lady Stoat thought to herself, "Dear, dear! what a charming Iphigenia she would look in a theatre; but there is no use for all that in real life. How to convince her?"

Even Lady Stoat was perplexed.

She began to talk vaguely and gorgeously of the

great place of the Zouroff family in the world; of their enormous estates, of their Uraline mines, of their Imperial favour, of their right to sit covered at certain courts, of their magnificence in Paris, their munificence in Petersburg, their power, their fashion, and their pomp.

Vere waited, till the long discursive descriptions ended of themselves, exhausted by their own oratory. Then she said very simply and very coldly:

"Do you believe in God, Lady Stoat?"

"In God?" echoed Lady Stoat, shocked and amazed.

"Do you or not?"

"My dear! Goodness! Pray do not say such things to me. As if I were an infidel!—*I!*"

"Then how can you bid me take His name in vain, and marry Prince Zouroff?"

"I do not see the connection," began Lady Stoat vaguely, and very wearily.

"I have read the marriage service," said Vere, with a passing heat upon her pale cheeks for a moment.

Lady Stoat for once was silent.

She was very nearly going to reply that the marriage service was of old date and of an exaggerated style; that it was not in good taste, and in no degree to be interpreted literally; but such an avowal was im-

possible to a woman who revered the ritual of her Church, and was bound to accept it unquestioned. So she was silent and vanquished—so far.

"May I go now?" said Vere.

"Certainly, love, if you wish, but you must let me talk to you again. I am sure you will change and please your mother—your lovely little mother!—whom you ought to *live* for, you naughty child, so sweet and so dear as she is."

"She has never lived for me," thought Vere, but she did not say so; she merely made the deep curtsey she had learned at Bulmer Chase, which had the serene and stately grace in it of another century than her own, and, without another word, passed out of the room.

"*Quel enfant terrible!*" murmured Lady Stoat, with a shiver and a sigh.

Lady Stoat was quite in earnest, and meant well. She knew perfectly that Sergius Zouroff was a man whose vices were such as the world does not care even to name, and that his temper was that of a savage bull-dog allied to the petulant exactions of a spoilt child. She knew that perfectly, but she had known as bad things of her own son-in-law, and had not stayed her own daughter's marriage on that account.

Position was everything, Lady Stoat thought, the man himself nothing. Men were all sadly much alike,

she believed. Being a woman of refined taste and pure life, she did not even think about such ugly things as male vices.

Lady Stoat was one of those happy people who only see just so much as they wish to see. It is the most comfortable of all myopisms. She had had, herself, a husband far from virtuous, but she had always turned a deaf ear to all who would have told her of his failings. "I do my own duty; that is enough for me," she would answer sweetly; and, naturally, she wondered why other women could not be similarly content with doing theirs—when they had a Position. Without a position she could imagine, good woman though she was, that things were very trying; and that people worried more. As for herself, she had never worried, and she had no sympathy with worry in any shape. So that when Lady Dolly came to her weeping, excited, furious, hopeless, over her daughter's wicked obstinacy, Lady Stoat only laughed at her in a gentle rallying way.

"You little goose! As if girls were not always like that! She has got Corrèze in her head still, and she is a difficult sort of nature, I grant. What does it matter after all? You have only to be firm. She will come to reason."

"But I never, never could be firm," sobbed Lady Dolly. "The Herberts are, I am not. And Vere is just like her father; when I asked him to have a stole

and a rochet and look nice, nothing would induce him, because he said something about his bishop——"

Lady Stoat, in her superior wisdom, smiled once more.

"Was poor Vere so very *low* in the matter of vestments? How curious; the Herberts were Catholic until James the First's time. But why do you fret so? The child is a beauty, really a beauty. Even if she persist in her hatred of Zouroff she will marry well, I am sure; and she must not persist in it. You must have common sense."

"But what can one do?" said Lady Dolly in desperation. "It is all very easy to talk, but it is not such a little thing to force a girl's will in these days; she can make a fuss, and then society abuses you, and I think the police even can interfere, and the Lord Chancellor if she have no father."

And Lady Dolly sobbed afresh.

"Dear little goose!" said Lady Stoat consolingly, but rather wearied. "Of course nobody uses *force;* there are a thousand pleasant ways—children never know what is best for them. We, who are their nearest and dearest, must take care of their tender, foolish, ignorant, young lives, committed to us for guidance. Gwendolen even was reluctant—but now in every letter she sends me she says, 'Oh, mamma, how right you were!' That is what your Vera will say to you, darling, a year hence, when she will have

been Princess Zouroff long enough to have got used to him."

Lady Dolly shivered a little at all that the words implied.

Her friend glanced at her.

"If Zouroff cause you apprehension for any reason I am unaware of," she said softly; "there are others; though, to be sure, as your pretty child is portionless, it may be difficult ——"

"No, it must be Zouroff," said Lady Dolly, nervously and quickly. "She has no money, as you say; and everyone wants money nowadays."

"Except a Russian," said Lady Stoat, with a smile. "Then, since you wish for him, take him now he is to be had. But I would advise you not to dawdle, love. Men like him, if they are denied one fancy soon change to another; and he has all the world to console him for Vere's loss."

"I have told him he should have her answer in a day or two. I said she was shy, timid, too surprised; he seems to like that."

"Of course he likes it. Men always like it in women they mean to make their wives. Then, in a day or two, you must convince her; that is all. I do not say it will be easy with her very obstinate and peculiar temperament. But it will be possible."

Lady Dolly was mute.

She envied her dear Adine that hand of steel

under the glove of velvet. She herself had it not. Lady Dolly was of that pliant temper, which, according to the temperature it dwells in, becomes either harmless or worthless. She had nothing of the *maîtresse femme* about her. She was always doing things that she wished were undone, and knotting entanglements that she could not unravel. She was no ruler of others, except in a coquettish, petulant fashion, of "Jack—and the rest."

And she had that terrible drawback to comfort and impediment to success—a conscience, that was sluggish and fitful, and sleepy and feeble, but not wholly dead. Only this conscience, unhappily, was like a very tiny, weak, swimmer stemming a very strong opposing tide.

In a moment or two the swimmer gave over, and the opposing tide had all its own way.

After dinner that evening, whilst the rest were dancing, Vere slipped away unnoticed to her own room, a little tiny turret-room, of which the window almost overhung the sea. She opened the lattice, and leaned out into the cool fragrant night. The sky was cloudless, the sea silvery in the moonlight; from the gardens below there arose the scent of datura and tube-rose. It was all so peaceful and so sweet, the girl could not understand why, amidst it all, she must be so unhappy.

Since Zouroff had had her letter there was no

longer any hope of changing his resolve by telling him the truth, and a sombre hatred began to grow up in her against this man, who seemed to her her tormentor and her tyrant.

What hurt her most was that her own mother should urge this horror upon her.

She could see no key to the mystery of such a wish except in the fact that her mother cruelly desired to be rid of her at all cost; and she had written a letter to her grandmother at Bulmer Chase—a letter that lay by her on the table ready to go down to the post-bag in the morning.

"Grandmama loves me in her own harsh way," the child thought. "She will take me back for a little time at least, and then, if she do not like to keep me, perhaps I could keep myself in some way; I think I could if they would let me. I might go to the Fräulein in her own country and study music at Baireuth, and make a career of it. There would be no shame in that."

And the thought of Corrèze came softly over her as the memory of fair music will come in a day dream.

Not as any thought of love. She had read no romances save dear Sir Walter's, which alone, of all the erring tribe of fiction, held a place on the dark oak-shelves of the library at Bulmer.

Corrèze was to her like a beautiful fancy rather

than a living being,—a star that shot across a summer sky and passed unseen to brighter worlds than ours.

He was a saint to the child—he who to himself was a sad sinner—and his words dwelt in her heart like a talisman against all evil.

She sat all alone, and dreamt innocently of going into the mystic German land and learning music in all its heights and depths, and living nobly, and being never wedded ("Oh, never, never!" she said to herself with a burning face and a shrinking heart); and some day meeting Corrèze, the wonder of the world, and looking at him without shame and saying, "I have done as you told me; I have never been burnt in the flame as you feared. Are you glad?"

It did not, as yet, seem hard to her to do so. The world was to her personified in the great vague horror of Serge Zouroff's name, and it cost her no more to repulse it than it costs a child to flee from some painted monster that gapes at it from a wall.

This night, after Lady Stoat's ineffectual efforts at conversion, Lady Dolly herself once more sought her daughter, and renewed the argument with more asperity and more callousness than she had previously shown.

Vere was still sitting in her own chamber, trying to read, but, in truth, always thinking of the bidding

of Corrèze, "Keep yourself unspotted from the world."

Dreaming so, with her hands buried in the golden clustering hair, and her lids drooped over her eyes, she started at the voice of her mother; and, with pain and impatience, listened with unwilling ear to the string of reproaches, entreaties, and censure that had lately become as much the burden of her day as the morning-prayer at Bulmer had been, droned by the duchess's dull voice to the sleepy household.

Vere raised herself and listened, with that dutifulness of the old fashion which contrasted so strangely in her, her mother thought, with her rebellion and self-willed character. But she grew very weary.

Lady Dolly, less delicate in her diplomacy than her friend had been, did not use euphuisms at all, nor attempt to take any high moral point. Broadly and unhesitatingly she painted all that Sergius Zouroff had it in his power to bestow, and the text of her endless sermon was, that to reject such gifts was wickedness.

At the close she grew passionate.

"You think of love," she said. "Oh, it is of no use your saying you don't; you do. All girls do. I did. I married your father. We were as much in love as any creatures in a poem. When I had lived a month in that wretched parsonage by the sea, I knew what a little fool I had been. I had had such

wedding presents!—*such* presents! The queen had sent me a cachemire for poor papa's sake; yet, down in that horrid place, we had to eat pork, and there was only a metal teapot! Oh, you smile! it is nothing to smile at. Vere used to smile just as you do. He would have taken the cachemire to wrap an old woman up in, very probably; and he wouldn't have known whether he ate a peach or a pig. I knew; and whenever they put that tea in the metal teapot, I knew the cost of young love. Respect your father's memory? Stuff! I am not saying anything against him, poor dear fellow; he was very good—in his way, excellent; but he had made a mistake, and I too. I told him so twenty times a day, and he only sighed and went out to his old women. I tell you this only to show you I know what I am talking about. Love and marriage are two totally different things; they ought never to be named together; they are cat and dog; one kills the other. Pray do not stare so; you make me nervous."

"It is not wicked to love?" said Vere slowly.

"Wicked? no; what nonsense! It amuses one; it doesn't last."

"A great love must last, till death, and after it," said the child, with solemn eyes.

"After it?" echoed Lady Dolly with a little laugh. "I'm afraid that would make a very naughty sort of place of Heaven. Don't look so shocked, child. You

know nothing about it. Believe me, dear, where two lovers go on year after year, it is only for Pont de Veyle's reason to Madame de Deffand: "Nous sommes si mortellement ennuyés l'un de l'autre que nous ne pouvons plus nous quitter!"

Vere was silent. Her world of dreams was turned upside down, and shaken rudely.

"You have no heart, Vere; positively none," said her mother bitterly, resuming all the old argument. "I can scarcely think you are my child. You see me wearing myself to a shadow for your sake, and yet you have no pity. What in heaven's name can you want? You are only sixteen, and one of the first marriages in Europe opens to you. You ought to go on your knees in thankfulness, and yet you hesitate?"

"I do not hesitate at all," said Vere quickly. "I refuse!"

She rose as she spoke, and looked older by ten years. There was a haughty resolve in her attitude that cowed her mother for an instant.

"I refuse," she said again. "And, if you will not tell Monsieur Zouroff so yourself, I will tell him to-morrow. Listen, mother, I have written to Bulmer, and I will go back there. Grandmama will not refuse to take me in. I shall be a trouble and care to you no longer. I am not made for your world nor it for me. I will go. I have some talent, they have always said, and at least I have perseverance. I will find

some way of maintaining myself. I want so little, and I know enough of music to teach it; and so at least I shall be free and no burden upon anyone."

She paused, startled by her mother's laughter; such laughter as she, in a later day, heard from Croizette when Croizette was acting her own deathbed on the stage of the Français.

Lady Dolly's shrill, unnatural, ghastly laughter echoed through the room.

"Is that your scheme? To teach music? And Corrèze to teach you, I suppose? *O la belle idée!* You little fool! you little idiot! how dare you? Because you are mad, do you think we are mad too? Go to Bulmer *now?* Never! I am your mother, and you shall do what I choose. What I choose is that you shall marry Zouroff."

"I will not."

"Will not? will not? I say you shall!"

"And I say that I will not."

They confronted one another; the girl's face pale, clear and cold in its fresh and perfect beauty, the woman's grown haggard, fevered, and fierce in its artificial prettiness.

"I will not," repeated Vere with her teeth closed. "And my dead father would say I was right; and I will tell this man to-morrow that I loathe him; and, since surely he must have some pride to be stung, he will ask for me no more then."

"Vere! you kill me!" screamed her mother; and, in truth, she fainted, her pretty curly perruque twisting off her head, her face deathly pallid save for the unchanging bloom of cheek and mouth.

It was but a passing swoon, and her maid soon restored her to semi-consciousness and then bore her to her room.

"What a cold creature is that child," thought Adrienne, of Vere. "She sees miladi insensible, and stands there with never a tear, or a kiss, or a cry. What it is to have been brought up in England!"

Vere left alone, sat awhile lost in thought, leaning her head on her hands. Then she rang and bade them post the letter to Bulmer; the dark and drearsome, but safe and familiar home of her lost childhood.

The letter gone, she undressed and went to bed. It was midnight. She soon was asleep.

Innocent unhappiness soon finds this rest; it is the sinful sorrow of later years that stares, with eyes that will not close, into the hateful emptiness of night.

She slept deeply and dreamlessly, the moonbeams through the high window finding her out where she lay, her slender limbs, supple as willow wands, in calm repose, and her long lashes lying on her cheeks.

Suddenly she woke, startled and alarmed. A light fell on her eyes; a hand touched her; she was no longer alone.

She raised herself in her bed, and gazed with a dazzled sight and vague terror into the yellow rays of the lamp.

"Vere! It is I! it is I!" cried her mother with a sob in her voice. And Lady Dolly dropped on her knees beside the bed; her real hair dishevelled on her shoulders, her face without false bloom and haggard as the face of a woman of twice her own years.

"Vere, Vere! you can save me," she muttered with her hands clasped tight on the girl's. "Oh, my dear, I never thought to tell you; but, since you will hear no reason, what can I do? Vere, wake up—listen. I am a guilty, silly woman; guiltier, sillier, than you can dream. You are my child after all, and owe me some obedience; and you can save me. Vere, Vere! do not be cruel; do not misjudge me, but listen. You *must* marry Sergius Zouroff."

It was dawn when Lady Dolly crept away from her daughter's chamber; shivering, ashamed, contrite, in so far as humiliation and regret make up contrition; hiding her blanched face with the hood of her wrapper as though the faint, white rays of daybreak were spectators and witnesses against her.

Vere lay quite still, as she had fallen, upon her bed, her face upturned, her hands clenched, her shut lips blue as with great cold. She had promised what her mother had asked.

CHAPTER IX.

On the morrow it was known to all the guests of the house at which they were staying that the head of the Princes Zouroff was to marry the daughter of the Lady Dorothy Vanderdecken.

On the morrow Lady Dolly drove back to Félicité, with her daughter beside her.

She was victorious.

The sun was strong, and the east wind cold; she was glad they were so. The eyes of her daughter were heavy with dark circles beneath them, and her face was blanched to a deadly pallor, which changed to a cruel crimson flush as the turrets and belfries of the château of the Zouroffs came in sight above the woods of its park.

They had driven the eight miles from Le Caprice in unbroken silence.

"If she would only speak!" thought Lady Dolly; and yet she felt that she could not have borne it if her companion had spoken.

They drove round to a *petit entré* at the back of the house, and were met by no one but some bowing servants. She had begged in a little note that it

might be so, making some pretty plea for Vere of maiden shyness. They were shown straight to their rooms. It was early; noonday. The château was quite still. At night the great ball was to be given to the English princes, but the household was too well trained to make any disturbance with their preparations. Down the steps of the great terrace there was stretched scarlet cloth, and all the face of the building was hung with globes and cressets of oil, to be lit at dark. These were the only outward signs that anything more brilliant than usual was about to take place.

"You will come to breakfast?" said Lady Dolly, pausing at the threshold of her room.

It was the first word she had said to Vere since the dawn, when they had parted, and her own voice sounded strange to her.

Vere shuddered as with cold.

"I cannot. Make some excuse."

"What is the use of putting off?" said her mother fretfully. "You will be ill; you are ill. If you should be ill to-night, what will everyone say? what will he think? what shall I do?"

Vere went into her chamber and locked her door. She locked out even her maid; flung her hat aside, and threw herself forward on the bed, face downward, and there lay.

Lady Dolly went into her chamber, and glanced

at her own face with horror. Though made up, as well as usual for the day, she looked yellow, worn, old.

"*I* must go down!" she thought—how selfish youth was, and how hard a thing was motherhood! She had herself dressed beautifully and took some ether.

She had sunk her drowned conscience fathoms deep, and begun once more to pity herself for the obstinacy and oddness of the child to whom she had given birth. Why could not the girl be like any others?

The ether began to move in her veins and swim in her head; her eyes grew brighter. She went out of her room and along the corridor to the staircase, fastening an autumn rose or two in her breast, taken from the bouquet of her dressing-table. As she glanced down the staircase into the hall where the servants in the canary-coloured liveries of the house were going to and fro, she thought of all the rank and riches of which Félicité was only one trifling portion and symbol, and thought to herself that—after all—any mother would have done as she had done; and no maiden surely could need a higher reward for the gift of her innocence to the minotaur of a loveless marriage.

"If I had been married like that!" she thought; and felt that she had been cruelly wronged by destiny; if she had been married like that, how easy it would

have been to have become a good woman! What could Vere complain of?—the marriage was perfect in a worldly sense, and in any other sense—did it matter what it was?

So the ether whispered to her.

She began to taste the sweets of her victory and to forget the bitter, as the ether brought its consoling haze over all painful memories, and lent its stimulating brightness to all personal vanities.

After all it was very delightful to go down those stairs, knowing that when she met all those dear female friends whom she detested, and who detested her, no one could pity her and everyone must envy her. She had betrothed her daughter to one of the richest and best born men in all Europe. Was it not the crown of maternity, as maternity is understood in society?

So down she went, and crossed the great vestibule, looking young, fair, and bewitching with the roses in her bosom, and an admirably chosen expression on her face, half glad and half plaintive, and with a flush under her paint that made her look prettier than ever; her eyes sparkled, her smile was all sunshine and sweetness, she pressed the hands of her most intimate friends with an eloquent tenderness, she was exquisitely arrayed with cascades of old Mechlin falling from her throat to her feet.

"A mother only lives to be young again in her

child!" she said softly—and knew that she looked herself no more than twenty years old as she said it.

Sergius Zouroff, profuse in delicate compliment to her aloud, said to himself:

"*Brava*, naughty Dolly! *Bis-bis!* Will she ever be like you, I wonder? Perhaps. The world makes you all alike after a little while."

He was ready to pay a high price for innocence, because it was a new toy that pleased him. But he never thought that it would last, any more than the bloom lasts on the peach. He had no illusions. Since it would be agreeable to brush it off himself, he was ready to purchase it.

There was a sense of excitement and of disappointment in the whole house party; and Princesse Nélaguine ran from one to another, with her little bright Tartar eyes all aglow, murmuring "*Charmée, charmée, charmée!*" to impatient ears.

"Such a beast as he is!" said the men who smoked his cigars and rode his horses.

"And she who looked all ice and innocence!" said the women, already in arms against her.

Vere did not come down to taste the first-fruits of her triumph.

At the great midday breakfast, where most people assembled, she was absent. Zouroff himself laid another bouquet of orchids by her plate, but she was not there to receive the delicate homage.

"Mademoiselle Vera has not risen?" he asked now, with an angry contraction of his low brows, as no one came where the orchids were lying.

"Vera had a headache," said Lady Dolly serenely aloud. "Or said so," she murmured to his ear alone. "Don't be annoyed. She was shy. She is a little *farouche*, you know, my poor darling."

Zouroff nodded, and took his caviare.

"What did I predict, love!" murmured Lady Stoat, of Stichley, taking her friend aside after breakfast. "But how quickly you succeeded! Last evening only you were in despair! Was the resistance only a feint? Or what persuasions did you bring to bear?"

"I threatened to send her to Bulmer Chase!" said Lady Dolly with a little gay laugh. Lady Stoat laughed also.

"I wonder what you did do," she reflected, however, as she laughed. "Oh, naughty little pussy—foolish, foolish little pussy!—to have any secrets from *me!*"

The day wore away and Vere Herbert remained unseen in Félicité.

The guests grew surprised, and the host angered.

Princesse Nélaguine herself had ascended to the girl's room, and had been denied.

People began to murmur that it was odd.

"Go and fetch her," said Zouroff in a fierce whis-

per. "It is time that I at least should see her—unless you have told me a lie."

"Unless she be really ill, I suppose you mean, you cruel creature!" said her mother reproachingly; but she obeyed him and went.

"Girls are so fond of tragedy!" reflected Lady Stoat, recalling episodes in the betrothal of her own daughter, and passages that had preceded it.

It was now five o'clock. The day had been chilly, as it is at times along the channel shores, even in summer. Several persons were in the blue-room, so called because of its turquoise silk walls and its quantities of Delf, Nankin, Savona, and other blue china ranged there. It was the room for afternoon tea. Several of the ladies were there in tea-gowns of the quaintest and prettiest, that allowed them to lie about in the most gracefully tired attitudes. The strong summer sun found its way only dimly there, and the sweet smells of the flowers and of the sea were overborne by the scent of the pastilles burning in the bodies of blue china monsters.

Zouroff, who at times was very negligent of his guests, was pacing up and down the long dim chamber impatiently, and every now and then he glanced at the door. He did not look once at the pretty groups, like eighteenth century pictures tinged with the languor of odalisques, that were sipping tea out of tiny cups in an alcove lined with celadon and crackling. The

tinkle of the tea-cups and the ripple of the talk ceased as the door at the farther end opened, and Vere entered, led by her mother.

She was white, and cold, and still; she did not raise her eyelids.

Zouroff approached with eager steps, and bowed before her with the dignity that he could very well assume when he chose.

"Mademoiselle," he said softly, "is it true that you consent to make the most unworthy of men the most happy?"

He saw a slight shudder pass over her as if some cold wind had smitten her.

She did not lift her eyes.

"Since you wish, monsieur ——" she answered very low, and then paused.

"The adoration of a life shall repay you," he murmured in the conventional phrase, and kissed her hand.

In his own thoughts he said: "Your mother has made you do this, and you hate me. Never mind."

Then he drew her hand on his arm, and led her to the Princess Nelaguine.

"My sister, embrace your sister. I shall have two angels henceforth instead of one, to watch and pray for my erring soul!"

Princess Nelaguine did not smile. She kissed the

cold cheek of the girl with a glisten of tears in her eyes.

"What a sacrifice! what a martyrdom!" she thought. "Ah, the poor child!—but perhaps he will *ranger*—let us hope."

All the while Vera might have been made of marble, she was so calm and so irresponsive, and she never once lifted her eyes.

"Will you not look at me once?" he entreated. She raised her lids and gave him one fleeting hunted glance. Cruel though he was and hardened, Sergius Zouroff felt that look go to his soul.

"Bah! how she loathes me!" he said in his teeth. But the compassion in him died out almost as it was born, and the base appetites in him were only whetted and made keener by this knowledge.

Lady Stoat glided towards them and lifted her lips to Vera's cheek.

"My sweet child! so charmed, so delighted," she whispered. "Did I not say how it would be when your first shyness had time to fold its tents, as the poem says, and steal away?"

"You are always a prophetess of good—and my mother's friend," said Vere. They were almost the first words she had spoken, and they chilled even the worldly breast of her mother's friend.

There was an accent in them which told of a childhood perished in a night; of an innocence and

a faith stabbed, and stricken, and buried for ever more.

"You are only sixteen, and you will never be young any more!" thought Princess Nelaguine, hearing the cold and bitter accent of those pregnant words.

But the ladies that made the eighteenth century picture had broken up and issued from the alcove, and were offering congratulations and compliments in honeyed phrases; and no one heeded or had time for serious thought.

Only Lady Dolly, in a passionate murmur, cried, unheeded by any, to her daughter's ear:

"For heaven's sake smile, blush, seem happy! What will they say of you to look at you like this?—they will say that I coerce you!"

"I do my best," answered Vere coldly.

"My lovely mother-in-law," muttered Prince Zouroff, bending to Lady Dolly, as he brought her a cup of tea, "certainly you did not lie to me this morning when you told me that your Vera would marry me; but did you not lie—just a little lie, a little white one —when you said she would love me?"

"Love comes in time," murmured Lady Dolly hurriedly.

Serge Zouroff laughed grimly.

"Does it? I fear that experience tells one rather that with time—it goes."

"Yours may; hers will come—the woman's always comes last."

"*Ma chère!* your new theories are astounding. Nevertheless, as your son-in-law, I will give in my adhesion to them. Henceforth all the sex of your Vera —and yourself—is purity and perfection in my sight!"

Lady Dolly smiled sweetly in his face.

"It is never too late to be converted to the truth," she said playfully, whilst she thought, "Oh you beast! If I could strangle you!"

Meanwhile Princess Nelaguine was saying with kindness in her tone and gaze:

"My sweet child, you look chilly and pale. Were you wise to leave your room out of goodness to us?"

"I am cold," murmured Vere faintly. "I should be glad if I might go away—for a little."

"Impossible," said the Princess; and added. "Dear, reflect; it will look so strange to people. My brother ——"

"I will stay then," said Vere wearily, and she sat down and received the homage of one and the felicitations of another, still with her eyes always cast downward, still with her young face passionless, and chill as a mask of marble.

"An hour's martyrdom more or less—did it matter?" she said to herself. All her life would be a martyrdom, a long mute martyrdom, now.

A few hours later her maid dressed her for the

The Prince bowed, and said some pleasant gracious words; but his conviction remained unchanged by Lady Dolly's assurance of her daughter's peace and joy.

Vere was led out by Prince Zouroff to join the Quadrille d'Honneur.

"This is the Iron Cross!" she thought, and a faint bitter smile parted her lips.

She never once lifted her eyes to meet his.

"Cannot you tell me you are happy, *mon enfant*," he murmured once. She did not look at him, and her lips scarcely moved as she answered him.

"I obey my mother, monsieur. Do not ask more."

Zouroff was silent. The dusky red of his face grew paler; he felt a momentary instinct to tear his pearls off her, and bid her be free; then the personal loveliness of her awoke too fiercely that mere appetite which s all that most men and many women know of love; nd his hands clenched close on hers in the slow figure of the dance.

A stronger admiration than he had ever felt for her rose in him, too. He knew the bitterness and the revolt that were in her, yet he saw her serene, cold, mistress of herself. It was not the childlike simplicity that he had once fancied that he loved her for, but it was a courage he respected, a quality he understood. "One might send her to Siberia and she would change to ice; she would not bend," he thought, and the

thought whetted his passion to new fierceness and tenacity.

The ball was gorgeous; the surprises were brilliant and novel; the gardens were illumined to the edge of the sea till the fishers out in the starry night thought the shore was all on fire. The great persons in whose honour it was, were gratified and amused—the grace and grandeur of the scene were like old days of Versailles or of Venice.

The child moved amidst it, with the great pearls lying on her throat and encircling her arms, and her eyes had a blind unconscious look in them like those of eyes that have recently lost their sight, and are not yet used to the eternal darkness.

But she spoke simply and well, if seldom; she moved with correct grace in the square dance; she made her perfect courtesy with the eighteenth century stateliness in it; all men looked, and wondered, and praised her, and women said with a sigh of envy, "Only sixteen!"

Only sixteen; and she might have said as the young emperor * said, when he took his crown, "O my youth, O my youth! farewell!"

Once her mother had the imprudence to speak to her; she whispered in her ear:

"Are you not rewarded, love? Are you not content?"

* Franz Josef.

Vere looked at her.

"I have paid your debt. Be satisfied."

A great terror passed like a cold wind, over the little selfish, cruel, foolish woman, and she trembled.

The next morning a message came to her from her old Northumbrian home.

"My house must always be open for my dead son's child, and my protection, such as it is, will always be hers."

It was signed Sarah Mull and Cantire.

Vere read it, sitting before her glass in the light of the full day, whilst her woman undid the long ropes of pearls that were twisted about her fair hair. Two slow tears ran down her cheeks and fell on the rough paper of the telegram.

"She loves me!" she thought, "and what a foolish, fickle, sinning creature I shall for ever seem to her!"

Then, lest with a moment's longer thought her firmness should fail her, she wrote back in answer: "You are so good, and I am grateful. But I see that it is best that I should marry as my mother wished. Pray for me."

The message winged its way fleeter than a bird, over the grey sea to where the northern ocean beat the black Northumbrian rocks; and an old woman's heart was broken with the last pang of a sad old age.

A day or two later the house-party of Félicité broke

up, and the château by the Norman sea was left to its usual solitude. Lady Stoat went to stay with her daughter, the Lady Birkenhead, who was at Biarritz, and would go thence to half-a-dozen great French and English houses. Prince Zouroff and his sister went to Tsarsko Selo, as it was necessary for him to see his emperor, and Lady Dolly took her daughter straight to Paris.

Paris in the commencement of autumn was a desert, but she had a pretty apartment in the Avenue Joséphine. The marriage was fixed to take place in November, and two months was not too much for all the preparations which she needed to make. Besides, Lady Dolly preferred that her daughter should see as few persons as possible. What was she afraid of?—she scarcely knew. She was vaguely afraid of everything. She was so used to breaking her words that a child's promise seemed to her a thing as slight as a spider's gossamer shining in the dew.

It was safest, she fancied, for Vere to see no one, and to a member of the great world there is no solitude so complete as a city out of its season. So she shut Vere in her gilded, and silvered, and over-decorated, and over-filled, rooms in the Avenue Joséphine, and kept her there stifled and weary, like a woodland bird hung in a cage in a boudoir; and never let the girl take a breath of air save by her side in her victoria out in the Bois in the still, close evenings. Vere

made no opposition to anything. When St. Agnes gave her young body and her fair soul up to torment, did she think of the shape of the executioner's sword?

Lady Dolly was at this time much worried too about her own immediate affairs. Jura was gone to India on a hunting and shooting tour with two officers of his old regiment, and he had written very briefly to say so to her, not mentioning any period for his return. He meant to break it all off, thought Lady Dolly, with an irritated humiliation rankling in her. Two years before she would have been *Didone infuriata;* but time tempers everything, and there were always consolations. The young dandy who had won the Grand Prix was devoted and amusing; it could not be said that Jura had been either of late. She had got used to him, and she had not felt it necessary to be always *en beauté* for him, which was convenient. Besides, there were heaps of things he had got into the way of doing for her, and he knew all her habits and tastes; losing him was like losing a careful and familiar servant. Still she was not inconsolable. He had grown boorish and stupid in the last few months; and, though he knew thousands of her secrets, he was a gentleman —they were safe with him, as safe as the letters she had written him.

But her vanity was wounded.

"Just because of that child's great grey eyes!—" she thought angrily.

Classic Clytemnestra, when murdered by her son, makes a grander figure certainly, but she is not perhaps more deeply wounded than fashionable Faustina, when eclipsed by her daughter.

"You look quite worn, poor pussy!" said Lady Stoat tenderly, as she met her one day in Paris. "When you ought to be so pleased and so proud!"

Lady Stoat, who was very ingenious and very penetrating, left no means untried by which to fathom the reasons of the sudden change of Vere. Lady Stoat read characters too well not to know that neither caprice nor malleability were the cause of it.

"She has been coerced; but how?" she thought; and brought her microscope of delicate investigation and shrewd observation to bear upon the subject. But she could make nothing of it.

"I do what my mother wishes," Vere answered her, and answered her nothing more.

"If you keep your secrets as well when you are married," thought Lady Stoat, "you will be no little trouble to your husband, my dear."

Aloud, of course she said only:

"*So* right, darling, so very right. Your dear little mother has had a great deal of worry in her life; it is only just that she should find full compensation in you. And I am quite sure you will be happy, Vere. You are so clever and serious; you will have a *salon*, I dare say, and get all the politicians about you. That

will suit you better than frivolity, and give you an aim in society. Without an aim, love, society is sadly like playing cards for counters. One wants a lover to meet, a daughter to chaperone, a cause to advance, a something beside the mere pleasure of showing oneself. You will never have the lover I am sure, and you cannot have the daughter just yet; so, if I were you, I would take the cause—it does not matter what cause in the least—say England against Russia or Russia against England; but throw yourself into it, and it will amuse you, and it will be a safeguard to you from the dangers that beset every beautiful young wife in the world. It is a melancholy thing to confess, and a humiliating one, but all human beings are so made that they never can go on playing only for counters!"

And Lady Stoat, smiling her sweetest, went away from Vere with more respect than she had ever felt before for feather-headed little pussy, since pussy had been able to do a clever thing unaided, and had a secret that her friend did not know.

"Foolish pussy!" thought her friend Adine. "Oh, foolish pussy, to have a secret from *me*. And it takes such a wise head and such a long head to have a secret! It is as dangerous as a packet of dynamite to most persons."

Aloud to Lady Dolly she said only:

"So glad, dear love, oh, *so* glad! I was quite sure with a little reflection the dear child would see the

wisdom of the step we wished her to take. It is such an anxiety off your mind; a girl with you in the season would have harassed you terribly. Really I do not know which is the more wearing: an heiress that one is afraid every moment will be got at by some spendthrift, or a dear little penniless creature that one is afraid will never marry at all; and, with Vere's peculiar manners and notions, it might have been very difficult. Happily, Zouroff has only admired her lovely classic head, and has never troubled himself about what is inside it. I think she will be an astonishment to him —rather. But, to be sure, after six months in the world, she will change as they all do."

"Vere will never change," said Lady Dolly irritably, and with a confused guilty little glance at her friend. "Vere will be always half an angel and half an imbecile as long as ever she lives."

"Imbeciles are popular people," said Lady Stoat with a smile. "As for angels, no one cares for them much about modern houses, except in terra cotta."

"It is not *you* who should say so," returned Lady Dolly tenderly.

"Oh, my dear!" answered her friend with a modest sigh of deprecation. "I have no pretensions—I am only a poor, weak, and very imperfect creature. But one thing I may really say of myself, and that is, that I honestly love young girls and do my best for them;

and I think not a few have owed their life's happiness to me. May your Vere be of the number!"

"I don't think she will ever be happy," said Lady Dolly impatiently, with a little confused look of guilt. "She doesn't care a bit about dress."

"That is a terrible *lacune* certainly," assented Lady Stoat with a smile. "Perhaps, instead, she will take to politics—those serious girls often do—or perhaps she will care about her children."

Lady Dolly gave a little shudder. What was her daughter but a child? It seemed only the other day that the little fair baby had tumbled about among the daisies on the vicarage lawn, and poor dead Vere in his mellow gentle voice had recited, as he looked at her, the glorious lines to his child of Coleridge. How wretched she had been then!—how impatient of the straitened means, the narrow purse, the country home, the calm religious life! How wretched she would have been now could she have gone back to it! Yet, with the contradiction of her sex and character, Lady Dolly for a moment wished with all her soul that she had never left that narrow home, and that the child were now among the daisies.

One day, when they were driving down the Avenue Marigny, her mother pointed out to Vere a row of lofty windows *au premier*, with their shutters shut, but with gorgeous autumn flowers hanging over their gilded

balconies; the liveried *suisse* was yawning in the doorway.

"That is where your Faust-Romeo lives," said Lady Dolly, who could never bring herself to remember the proverb, let sleeping dogs lie. "It is full of all kinds of beautiful things, and queer ancient things too; he is a connoisseur in his way, and everybody gives him such wonderful presents. He is making terrible scandal just now with the young Grand-Duchess. Only to think of what you risked that day boating with him makes one shudder! You might have been compromised for life!"

Vere's proud mouth grew very scornful, but she made no reply.

Her mother looked at her and saw the scorn.

"Oh, you don't believe me?" she said irritably; "ask anybody! an hour or two alone with a man like that ruins a girl's name for ever. Of course it was morning, and open air, but still Corrèze is one of those persons a woman *can't* be *seen* with, even!"

Vere turned her head and looked back at the bright balconies with their hanging flowers; then she said with her teeth shut and her lips turning white:

"I do not speak to you of Prince Zouroff's character. Will you be so good as not to speak to me of that of M. de Corrèze."

Her mother was startled and subdued. She wished she had not woke the sleeping dog.

"If she be like that at sixteen what will she be at six-and-twenty?" she thought. "She puts them in opposition already!"

Nevertheless, she never again felt safe, and whenever she drove along the Avenue Marigny she looked up at the house with the gilded balconies and hanging flowers to make sure that it gave no sign of life.

It did not occur to her that whatever Vere might be at six-and-twenty would be the result of her own teaching, actions, and example. Lady Dolly had reasoned with herself that she had done right after all; she had secured a magnificent position for her daughter, was it not the first duty of a mother?

If Vere could not be content with that position, and all its compensations, if she offended heaven and the world by any obstinate passions or imprudent guilt, if she, in a word, with virtue made so easy and so gilded, should not after all be virtuous, it would be the fault of Bulmer, the fault of society, the fault of Zouroff, the fault of Corrèze, or of some other man, perhaps,—never the fault of her mother.

When gardeners plant and graft, they know very well what will be the issue of their work; they do not expect the rose from a bulb of garlic, or look for the fragrant olive from a slip of briar; but the culturers of human nature are less wise, and they sow poison, yet rave in reproaches when it breeds and brings forth its like. "The rosebud garden of girls" is a favourite

theme for poets, and the maiden, in her likeness to a half-opened blossom, is as near purity and sweetness as a human creature can be, yet what does the world do with its opening buds?—it thrusts them in the forcing house amidst the ordure, and then, if they perish prematurely, never blames itself. The streets absorb the girls of the poor; society absorbs the daughters of the rich; and not seldom one form of prostitution, like the other, keeps its captives "bound in the dungeon of their own corruption."

CHAPTER X.

It was snowing in Vienna. Snow lay heavy on all the plains and roads around, and the Danube was freezing fast.

"It will be barely colder in Moscow," said Corrèze, with a shiver, as he threw his furs about him and left the opera-house amidst the frantic cheers and adoring outcries of the crowd without, after his last appearance in *Romeo e Giulietta*. In the bitter glittering frosty night a rain of hothouse flowers fell about him; he hated to see them fall; but his worshippers did not know that, and would not have heeded it if they had. Roses and violets, hyacinth and white lilac, dropped at his feet, lined his path and carpeted his carriage as if it were April in the south, instead of November in Austria.

His hand had just been pressed by an emperor's, a ring of brilliants beyond price had just been slid on his finger by an empress; the haughtiest aristocracy of the world had caressed him and flattered him and courted him; he was at the supreme height of fame, and influence, and fashion, and genius; yet, as he felt

the roses and the lilies fall about him he said restlessly to himself:

"When I am old and nobody heeds me, I shall look back to this night, and such nights as this, as to a lost heaven; why, in heaven's name, cannot I enjoy it now?"

But enjoyment is not to be gained by reflecting that to enjoy is our duty, and neither the diamonds nor the roses did he care for, nor did he care for the cheers of the multitude that stood out under the chill brilliant skies for the chance of seeing him pass down the streets. It is a rare and splendid royalty, too, that of a great singer; but he did not care for its crowns. The roses made him think of a little hedge-rose gathered by a sweetbriar bush on a cliff by a grey quiet sea.

With such odd caprices does Fate often smite genius.

He drove to the supper-table of a very great lady, beautiful as the morning; and he was the idol of the festivity which was in his honour; and the sweet eyes of its mistress told him that no audacity on his part would be deemed presumption—yet it all left him careless and almost cold. She had learned Juliet's part by heart, but he had forgotten Romeo's—had left it behind him in the opera-house with his old Venetian velvets and lace.

From that great lady's, whom he left alone with a

chill heart, empty and aching, he went with his comrades to the ball of the Elysium down in the subterranean vaults of the city, where again and again in many winters he had found contagion in the elastic mirth and the buoyant spirit of the clean-limbed, bright-eyed children of the populace, dancing and whirling and leaping far down under the streets to the Styrian music. But it did not amuse him this night; nor did the dancers tempt him; the whirl and the glow and the noise and the mirth seemed to him tedious and stupid.

"Decidedly that opera tires me," he said to himself, and thought that his weariness came from slaying Tybalt and himself on the boards of the great theatre. He told his friends and adorers with petulance to let him be still, he wanted to sleep, and the dawn was very cold. He went home to his gorgeous rooms in a gorgeous hotel, and lit his cigar and felt tired. The chambers were strewn with bouquets, wreaths, presents, notes; and amidst the litter was a great gold vase, a fresh gift from the emperor, with its two *rilievi*, telling the two stories of Orpheus and of Amphion.

But Corrèze did not look twice at it. He looked instead at a French journal, which he had thrown on his chair when his servant had roused him at seven that evening, saying that it was the hour to drive to the theatre. He had crushed the paper in his hand then and thrown it down; he took it up now, and

looked again in a corner of it in which there was announced the approaching marriage of Prince Zouroff.

"To give her to that brute!" he murmured as he read it over once more. "Mothers were better and kinder in the days of Moloch!"

Then he crushed the journal up again, and flung it into the wood-fire burning in the gilded tower of the stove.

It was not slaying Tybalt that had tired him that night.

"What is the child to me?" he said to himself as he threw himself on his bed. "She never could have been anything, and yet——"

Yet the scent of the hothouse bouquets and the forced flowers seemed sickly to him; he remembered the smell of the little rose plucked from the sweetbriar hedge on the cliff above the sea.

The following noon he left Vienna for Moscow, where he had an engagement for twenty nights previous to his engagement at St. Petersburg for the first weeks of the Russian New Year.

From Moscow he wrote to Lady Dolly. When that letter reached Lady Dolly it made her cry; it gave her a *crise des nerfs*. When she read what he wrote she turned pale and shuddered a little; but she burnt what he wrote; that was all.

She shivered a little whenever she thought of the letter for days and weeks afterwards; but it changed

her purpose in no way, and she never for one moment thought of acting upon it.

"I shall not answer him," she said to herself. "He will think I have never had it, and I shall send him a *faire part* like anybody else. He will say nothing when the marriage is over. Absurd as it is, Corrèze is a gentleman; I suppose that comes from his living so much amongst us."

Amongst the many gifts that were sent to swell the magnificence of the Zouroff bridal, there was one that came anonymously, and of which none knew the donor. It gave rise to many conjectures and much comment, for there was not even the name of the jeweller that had made it. It was an opal necklace of exquisite workmanship and great value, and, as its medallion, there hung a single rose diamond cut as a star; beneath the star was a moth of sapphire and pearls, and beneath the moth was a flame of rubies. They were so hung that the moth now touched the star, now sank to the flame. It needed no words with it for Vere to know whence it came.

But she kept silence.

"A strange jewel," said Prince Zouroff, and his face grew dark: he thought some meaning or some memory came with it.

It was the only gift amidst them all that felt the kisses and tears of Vere.

"I must sink to the flame!" she thought, "and he

will never know that the fault is not mine; he will never know that I have not forgotten the star!"

But she only wept in secret.

All her life henceforth was to be one of silence and repression. They are the *sepolte vive* in which society immures its martyrs.

Some grow to like their prison walls, and to prefer them to light and freedom: others loathe them in anguish till death come.

The gift of that strange medallion annoyed Zouroff, because it perplexed him. He never spoke to Vere concerning it, for he believed that no woman ever told the truth; but he tried to discover the donor by means of his many servants and agents. He failed, not because Corrèze had taken any especial means to ensure secresy, but from simple accident.

Corrèze had bought the stones himself of a Persian merchant many years before, had drawn the design himself, and had given it to a young worker in gems of Galicia whom he had once befriended at the fair of Novgorod; and the work was only complete in all its beauty and sent to him when the Galician died of that terrible form of typhus which is like a plague in Russia. Therefore Zouroff's inquiries in Paris were all futile, and he gradually ceased to think about the jewel.

Another thing came to her at that time that hurt her, as the knife hurt Iphigenia. It was when the

crabbed clear handwriting she knew so well brought her from Bulmer Chase a bitter letter.

"You are your mother's child, I see," wrote the harsh old woman, who had yet loved her so tenderly. "You are foolish, and fickle, and vain, and won over to the world, like her. You have nothing of my dead boy in you, or you would not sell yourself to the first rich man that asks. Do not write to me; do not expect to hear from me; you are for me as if you had never lived, and if, in your miserable marriage, you ever come to lose name and fame—as you may do, for loveless marriages are an affront to heaven, and mostly end in further sin—remember that you ask nothing at my hands. At your cry I was ready to open my hand to you and my heart, but I will never do so now, let you want it as you may. I pity you, and I despise you; for when you give yourself to a man whom you cannot honour or love, you are no better than the shameless women that a few weeks ago I would no more have named to you than I would have struck you a buffet on your cheek."

Vere read the letter with the hot brazen glow of the Paris sun streaming through the rose silk of the blinds upon her, and each word stood out before her as if it were on fire, and her cheek grew scarlet as if a blow were struck on it.

"She is right! Oh, how right!" she thought, in a

sort of agony. "And I cannot tell her the truth! I must never tell her the truth!"

Sin and shame, and all the horror of base passions had been things as unintelligible to her, as unknown, as the vile, miserable, frail women that a few roods off her in this city were raving and yelling in the wards of Ste. Pélagie. And now, all in a moment, they seemed to have entered her life, to swarm about her, to become part and parcel of her—and from no fault of hers.

"O mother, spare me! Let me take back my word!" she cried, unconsciously, as she started to her feet with a stab of awful pain in her heart that frightened her; it felt like death.

But in the rose-bright room all around her was silence.

Her grandmother's letter lay at her feet, and a ray of the sun shone on the words that compared her to the hapless creatures whose very shame she even yet did not comprehend.

The door unclosed and Lady Dolly came in; very voluble, indifferent to suffering or humiliation, not believing, indeed, that she ever caused either.

Living with her daughter, and finding that no reproach or recrimination escaped Vere against her, Lady Dolly had begun to grow herself again. She was at times very nervous with Vere, and never, if she could help it, met her eyes, but she was successful, she

was contented, she was triumphant, and the sense of shame that haunted her was thrust far into the background. All the vulgar triumphs of the alliance were sweet to her, and she did her best to forget its heavy cost. Women of her calibre soon forget; the only effort they have ever to make is, on the contrary, to remember. Lady Dolly had earnestly tried to forget, and had almost thoroughly succeeded.

She came now into the room, a pretty pearl grey figure; fresh from lengthened and close council with famous tailors.

"Vera, my sweet Vera, your sables are come; such sables! Nobody's except the grand-duchesses' will equal them. And he has sent bags of turquoises with them, literally *sacks*, as if they were oats or green peas! You will have all your toilette things set with them, and your inkstands, and all that, won't you? And they are very pretty, you know, set flat, very thick, in broad bands; *very* broad bands for the waist and the throat; but myself, I prefer—— Who's been writing to you? Oh, the old woman from Bulmer. I suppose she is very angry, and writes a great deal of nonsense. She was always horrid. The only thing she gave me when I married poor Vere was a black Bible. I wonder what she will send to you? Another black Bible, perhaps. I believe she gets Bibles cheap because she subscribes to the men that go out to read Leviticus and Deuteronomy to the negro babies!"

Vere bent and raised the letter in silence. The burning colour had gone from her cheeks; she tore the letter up into many small pieces and let them float out into the golden dust of the sunlight of Paris. Her word had been given, and she was its slave.

She looked at her mother, whom she had never called mother since that last night at the château of Abbaye aux Bois.

"Will you, if you please, spare me all those details?" she said, simply. "Arrange everything as you like best, it will satisfy me. But let me hear nothing about it. That is all."

"You strange, dear creature! Any other girl——," began Lady Dolly, with a smile that was distorted, and eyes that looked away.

"I am not as other girls are. I hope there is no other girl in all the world like me."

Her mother made no answer.

Through the stillness of the chambers there came the sounds of Paris, the vague, confused, loud murmur of traffic and music, and pleasure and pain; the sounds of the world, the world to which Vere was sold.

The words of the old recluse of Bulmer were very severe, but they were very true, and it was because of their truth that they seared the delicate nerves of the girl like a hot iron. She did not well know what shame was, but she felt that her own marriage was shame; and as she rolled home from the Bois de Bou-

logne that night through the bright streets of Paris, past the Hotel Zouroff that was to be her prison-house, she looked at the girls of the populace who were hurrying homeward from their workshops—flower-makers, glove-makers, clear-starchers, teachers of children, workers in factories—and she envied them, and followed them in fancy to their humble homes, and thought to herself: "How happy I would be to work, if only I had a mother that loved me, a mother that was honest and good!"

The very touch of her mother's hand, the very sound of her laugh, and sight of her smile, hurt her; she had known nothing about the follies and vices of the world, until suddenly, in one moment, she had seen them all incarnated in her mother, whose pretty graces and gaieties became terrible to her for ever, as the pink and white loveliness of a woman becomes to the eyes that have seen in its veiled breast a cancer.

Vere had seen the moral cancer. And she could not forget it, never could she forget it.

"When she was once beloved by my father——!" she thought; and she let her Bible lie unopened, lest, turning its leaves, she should see the old divine imprecations, the old bitter laws that were in it against such women as this woman, her mother, was.

One day in November her betrothed husband arrived from Russia. The magnificence of his gifts to

her was the theme of Paris. The girl was passive and silent always.

When he kissed her hands only she trembled from head to foot.

"Are you afraid of me?" he murmured.

"No; I am not afraid."

She could not tell him that she felt disgust—disgust so great, so terrible, that she could have sprung from the balcony and dashed herself to death upon the stones.

"Cannot you say that you like me ever so little now?" he persisted, thinking that all his generosity might have borne some fruit.

"No—I cannot."

He laughed grimly and bitterly.

"And yet I dare take you, even as you are, you beautiful cold child!"

"I cannot tell you a falsehood."

"Will you never tell me one?"

"No; never."

"I do not believe you; every woman lies."

Vere did not answer in words, but her eyes shone for a moment with a scorn so noble that Sergius Zouroff bent his head before her.

"I beg your pardon," he said; "I think you will not lie. But then, you are not a maiden only; you are a young saint."

Vere stood aloof from him. The sunshine shone on her fair head and the long, straight folds of her white dress; her hands were clasped in front of her, and the sadness in her face gave it greater gravity and beauty.

"I am a beast to hold her to her word!" he thought; but the beast in him was stronger than aught else and conquered him, and made him ruthless to her.

She was looking away from him into the blue sky. She was thinking of the words, "keep yourself unspotted from the world." She was thinking that she would be always true to this man whom she loathed; always true; that was his right.

"And perhaps God will let me die soon," she thought, with her childish fancy that God was near and Death an angel.

Serge Zouroff looked at her, hesitated, bowed low, and left the room.

"I am not fit for her; no fitter than the sewer of the street for a pearl!" he thought, and he felt ashamed.

Yet he went to his usual companions and spent the night in drink and play, and saw the sun rise with hot red eyes; he could not change because she was a saint.

Only a generation or two back his forefathers had

bought beautiful Persian women by heaping up the scales of barter with strings of pearls and sequins, and had borne off Circassian slaves in forays with simple payment of a lance left in the lifeless breasts of the men who had owned them: his wooing was of the same rude sort. Only being a man of the world, and his ravishing being legalised by society, he went to the great shops of Paris for his gems, and employed great notaries to write down the terms of barter.

The shrinking coldness, the undisguised aversion of his betrothed only whetted his passion to quicker ardour, as the shrieks of the Circassian captives, or the quivering limbs of the Persian slaves, had done that of his forefathers in Ukraine; and besides, after all, he thought, she had chosen to give herself, hating him, for sake of what he was and of all he could give. After all, her mother could not have driven her so far unless ambition had made her in a manner malleable.

Zouroff, in whose mind all women were alike, had almost been brought to believe in the honesty and steadfastness of the girl to whom he had given Loris, and he was at times disposed to be bitterly enraged against her because she had fallen in his sight by her abrupt submission; she seemed at heart no better than the rest. She abhorred him; yet she accepted him. No mere obedience could account for that acceptance

without some weakness or some cupidity of nature. It hardened him against her; it spoilt her lovely, pure childhood in his eyes; it made her shudder from him seem half hypocrisy. After all, he said to himself, where was she so very much higher than Casse-une-Croûte? It was only the price that was altered.

When she came to know what Casse-une-Croûte was, she said the same thing to herself.

"Do you believe in wicked people, miladi?" he said the next evening to Lady Dolly, as they sat together in a box at the Bouffes.

"Wicked people? Oh dear no—at least—yes," said Lady Dolly vaguely. "Yes, I suppose I do. I am afraid one must. One sees dreadful things in the papers; in society everybody is very much like everybody else—no?"

Zouroff laughed; the little, short, hard laugh that was characteristic of him.

"I think one need not go to the papers. I think you and I are both doing evil enough to satisfy the devil—if a devil there be. But, if you do not mind it, I need not."

Lady Dolly was startled, then smiled.

"What droll things you say! And do not talk so of the——. It doesn't sound well. It's an old-fashioned belief, I know, and not probable they say now, but still—one never can tell——"

And Lady Dolly, quite satisfied with herself, laughed

her last laugh at the fun of the *Belle Hélène*, and had her cloak folded round her, and went out on the arm of her future son-in-law.

Such few great ladies as were already in Paris, passing through from the channel coast to the Riviera, or from one château to another, all envied her, she knew; and if anybody had ever said anything that was —that was not quite nice—nobody could say anything now when in another fortnight her daughter would be Princess Zouroff.

"Really, I never fancied at all I was clever, but I begin to think that I am," she said in her self-complacency to herself.

The idea that she could be wicked seemed quite preposterous to her when she thought it over. "Harmless little me!" she said to herself. True, she had felt wicked when she had met her daughter's eye, but that was nonsense; the qualm had always gone away when she had taken her champagne at dinner or her ether in her bedroom.

A fortnight later the marriage of the head of the house of Zouroff was solemnised at the chapel of the English Embassy and the Russian church in Paris.

Nothing was forgotten that could add to the splendour and pomp of the long ceremonies and sacraments; all that was greatest in the great world was assembled in honour of the event. The gifts were magnificent, and the extravagance unbridled. The story of the

corbeille read like a milliner's dream of heaven; the jewels given by the bridegroom were estimated at a money value of millions of roubles, and with them were given the title-deeds of a French estate called Félicité, a free gift of love above and outside all the superb donations contained in the settlements. All these things and many more were set forth at length in all the journals of society, and the marriage was one of the great events of the closing year. The only details that the papers did not chronicle were that when the mother, with her tender eyes moist with tears, kissed her daughter, the daughter put her aside without an answering caress, and that when the last words of the sacrament were spoken, she, who had now become the Princess Zouroff, fell forward on the altar in a dead swoon, from which for some time she could not be awakened.

"So they have thrown an English maiden to our Tartar minotaur! Oh, what chaste people they are, those English!" said a Russian Colonel of the Guard to Corrèze, as their sledge flew over the snow on the Newski Prospect.

Corrèze gave a shudder of disgust; he said nothing.

Critics in music at the opera-house that night declared then, and long after, that for the first time in all his career he was guilty of more than one artistic error as he sang in the great part of John of Leyden.

When the opera was over, and he sat at a supper, in a room filled with hothouse flowers and lovely ladies,

while the breath froze on the beards of the sentinels on guard in the white still night without, Corrèze heard little of the laughter, saw little of the beauty round him. He was thinking all the while:

"The heaviest sorrow of my life will always be, not to have saved that child from her mother."

CHAPTER XI.

BETWEEN the Gulf of Villafranca and that of Eza there was a white shining sunlit house, with gardens that were in the dreariest month of the year rich and red with roses, golden with orange fruit, and made stately by palms of long growth, through whose stems the blue sea shone. To these gardens there was a long terrace of white marble stretching along the edge of the cliff, with the waves beating far down below; to the terrace there were marble seats and marble steps, and copies of the Loves and Fauns of the Vatican and of the Capitol, with the glow of geraniums flamelike about their feet.

Up and down the length of this stately place a woman moved with a step that was slow and weary, and yet very restless; the step of a thing that is chained. The woman was very young, and very pale; her skirts of olive velvet swept the white stone; her fair hair was coiled loosely with a golden arrow run through it; round her throat there were strings of pearls, the jewels of morning. All women envied her the riches of which those pearls were emblem. She was Vera, Princess Zouroff.

Vera always, now.

She moved up and down, up and down, fatiguing herself, and unconscious of fatigue; the sunny world was quiet about her; the greyhound paced beside her, keeping step with hers. She was alone, and there was no one to look upon her face and see its pain, its weariness, its disgust.

Only a week ago, she thought; only a week since she had fallen in a swoon at the altar of the Russian church; only a week since she had been the girl Vere Herbert. Only a week!—and it seemed to her that thousands of years had come and gone, parting her by ages from that old sweet season of ignorance, of innocence, of peace, of youth.

She was only sixteen still, but she was no more young. Her girlhood had been killed in her as a spring blossom is crushed by a rough hot hand that, meaning to caress it, kills it.

A great disgust filled her, and seemed to suffocate her with its loathing and its shame. Everything else in her seemed dead, except that one bitter sense of intolerable revulsion. All the revolted pride in her was like a living thing buried under a weight of sand, and speechless, but aghast and burning.

"How could she? how could she?" she thought every hour of the day; and the crime of her mother against her seemed the vilest the earth could hold.

She herself had not known what she had done when

she had consented to give herself in marriage, but her mother had known.

She did not reason now. She only felt.

An unutterable depression and repugnance weighed on her always; she felt ashamed of the sun when it rose, of her own eyes when they looked at her from the mirror. To herself she seemed fallen so low, sunk to such deep degradation, that the basest of creatures would have had full right to strike her cheek, and spit in her face, and call her sister.

Poets in all time have poured out their pity on the woman who wakes to a loveless dishonour: what can the few words of a priest, or the envy of a world, do to lighten that shame to sacrificed innocence?—nothing.

Her life had changed as suddenly as a flower changes when the hot sirocco blows over it, and fills it with sand instead of dew. Nothing could help her. Nothing could undo what had been done. Nothing could make her ever more the clear-eyed, fair-souled child that had not even known the meaning of any shame.

"God himself could not help me!" she thought with a bitterness of resignation that was more hopeless than that of the martyrs of old; and she paced up and down the marble road of the terrace, wondering how long her life would last like this.

All the magnificence that surrounded her was hateful; all the gifts that were heaped on her were like

insult; all the congratulations that were poured out on her were like the mockeries of apes, like the crackling of dead leaves. In her own sight, and without sin of her own, she had become vile.

And it was only a week ago!

Society would have laughed.

Society had set its seal of approval upon this union, and upon all such unions, and so deemed them sanctified. Year after year, one on another, the pretty, rosy, golden-curled daughters of fair mothers were carefully tended and cultured and reared up to grace the proud races from which they sprang, and were brought out into the great world in their first bloom like half-opened roses, with no other end or aim set before them as the one ambition of their lives than to make such a marriage as this. Whosoever achieved such was blessed.

Pollution? Prostitution? Society would have closed its ears to such words, knowing nothing of such things, not choosing to know anything.

Shame? What shame could there be when he was her husband? Strange fanciful exaggeration!—society would have stared and smiled.

The grim old woman who studied her Bible on the iron-bound Northumbrian shores; the frivolous, dreamy, fantastic singer, who had played the part of Romeo till all life seemed to him a rose-garden, moonlit and made for serenades; these two might perhaps think

with her, and understand this intense revolt, this passionate repugnance, this ceaseless sense of unendurable, indelible reproach. But those were all. Society would have given her no sympathy. Society would have simpered and sneered. To marry well; that was the first duty of a woman.

She had fulfilled it; she had been fortunate; how could she fail to be content?

A heavy step trod the marble terrace, and a heavy shadow fell across the sunlight; her husband approached her.

"You are out without any shade; you will spoil your skin," he said, as his eyes fell gloomily on her, for he noticed the shudder that passed over her as he drew near.

She moved without speaking, where no sun fell, where the armless Cupid of the Vatican, copied in marble, stood amongst the rose of a hundred leaves.

"How pale you are. That gown is too heavy for you. Do you like this place?"

"I?"

She said the word with an unconscious sound in it, that had the wonder of despair; despair which asked what was there left in all the world to like or love?

"Do you like it, I say," he repeated. "Most women rave about it. You seem as if it were a prison-house. Will you be always like that?"

"The place is beautiful," she said in a low tone. "Have I complained?"

"No; you never complain. That is what annoys me. If you ever fretted like other women—but you are as mute as that marble armless thing. Sometimes you make me afraid—afraid—that I shall forget myself, and strike you."

She was silent.

"Would that you did strike sooner than embrace me!" she thought; and he read the unuttered thought in her eyes.

"I do love you," he said sullenly, with some emotion. "You must know that; I have left no means untried to show it you."

"You have been very generous, monsieur!"

"Monsieur! always monsieur!—it is ridiculous. I am your husband, and you must give me some tenderer word than that. After all, why cannot you be happy? You have all you want or wish for, and if you have a wish still unfulfilled, be it the maddest or most impossible, it shall be gratified if gold can do it, for I love you—you frozen child!"

He bent his lips to hers; she shuddered, and was still.

He kept his hand about her throat, and gathered one of the roses of a hundred leaves, and set it against the pearls and her white skin; then he flung it away into the sea roughly.

"Roses do not become you; you are not a *belle jardinière;* you are a statue. This place is dull, one tires of it; we will go to Russia."

"As you please."

"As I please! Will you say nothing else all your life? There is no pleasure in doing what one pleases unless there is some opposition to the doing it. If you would say you hated snow and ice, now, I would swear to you that snow and ice were paradise beside these sickly palms and tawdry flowers. Is there nothing you like? Who sent you that strange necklace of the moth?"

"I do not know."

"But you imagine?"

She was silent.

"What is the meaning of it?"

"I think the meaning is that one may rise to great ends, or sink to base ones."

"Has it no love-token, then; no message?"

"No."

The red colour rose over her pale face, but she looked at him with unflinching gaze. He was but half satisfied.

"And do you mean to rise or sink?" he said, in a tone of banter. "Pray tell me."

"I have sunk."

The words stung him, and his pride, which was arrogant and vain, smarted under them.

"By God!" he said with his short hard laugh. "Did it never occur to you, my beautiful Vera, that you would do wiser not to insult me if you want to enjoy your life? I am your master, and I can be a bad master."

She looked at him without flinching, very coldly, very wearily.

"Why will you ask me questions? The truth displeases you, and I will not tell you other than the truth. I meant no insult—unless it were to insult myself."

He was silent. He walked to and fro awhile, pulling the roses from their stems and flinging them into the gulf below. Then he spoke abruptly, changing the subject.

"We will go to Russia. You shall see a ball in the Salle des Palmiers. The world is best. Solitude is sweet for lovers, but not when one of them is a statue—or an angel. Besides, that sort of thing never lasts a week. The world is best. You would make me hate you—or adore you—if we stayed on alone, and I wish to do neither. If you were not my wife it might be worth while; but as it is——"

He threw another rose into the sea, as if in a metaphor of indifference.

"Come to breakfast," he said carelessly. "We will leave for Russia to-night."

As they passed down the terrace and entered the

house, she moved wearily beside him with her face averted and her lips very pale.

The Salle des Palmiers had no charm for her. She was thinking of the nightingale that was then singing in the Russian snows.

If she saw Corrèze what could she say? The truth she could not tell him, and he must be left to think the moth had dropped into the earthly fires of venal ambitions and of base desires.

"Could you not leave me here?" she said wistfully and a little timidly as she sat at the breakfast-table.

He answered with his curt and caustic laugh.

"I thank you for the compliment! No, my dear, one does not go through all the weariness and folly of marriage ceremonies to leave the loveliness one has purchased so hardly in a week! Have patience! I shall be tired of you soon, maybe. But not until you have shown your diamonds at an Imperial ball. Do not get too pale. The court will rally me upon my tyranny. You *are* too pale. A touch of your mother's rouge will be advisable unless you get some colour of your own."

Vere was silent.

Her throat seemed to contract and choke her. She set her glass down untouched.

This was her master!—this man who would tire of her soon, and bade her rouge whilst she was yet sixteen years old!

Yet his tyranny was less horrible to her than his tenderness.

That night they left for Russia.

A few days later the gossip of St. Petersburg, in court and café, talked only of two things—the approaching arrival of the new beauty, Princess Zouroff, with the opening of the long closed Zouroff Palace on the Newski Prospect; and of the immense penalty paid in forfeit by the great tenor, Corrèze, to escape the last twenty nights of his engagement in that city.

"I had better forfeit half my engagement than lose my voice altogether," said Corrèze impatiently, in explanation. "The thousands of francs I can soon make again; but if the mechanical nightingale in my throat give way—I must go and break stones for my bread. No! in this atmosphere I can breathe no longer. I pay—and I go to the south."

He paid and went; and St. Petersburg was half consoled for his departure by the entry on the following day of Prince Zouroff, and of her whom all the world called now, and would call henceforward, Princess Vera.

END OF VOL. I.

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